

DIASPORIC LITERATURE

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Craving

Sep 1, 2010 01:00AM

by **Angela Costi**

I'm being violated by smelly armpits, aftershave and perfume. The queue has turned into a mess of shirt sleeves, wailing children, hot faces, luggage and more luggage. A male voice yells out in Greek, "What the hell is going on!"

No answer from the green uniforms behind the high counter. No answer but there's a rumour that's been swelling among the ears and mouths and clenched fists - "It's a bomb scare ... the Turks are at it again ... they're checking the plane ... they've caught a Turk with no passport."

I scan the faces bobbing around me. All of them coloured from birth by the Mediterranean with dark eyes and curly hair. Faces that look as Turkish as they do Greek. How can they tell among each other which one has the Turkish blood? But I bet they can. There are those give away signs that only they can pick up.

Even though I've got the basic ingredients - dark skin, eyes, hair and the curls - they can tell I'm not one of them. I'm not a true Cypriot-Greek. It could be my *Dangerfield* shirt ... something about my manner ... anyway they know I'm not one of them without speaking one word to me.

A few of the younger guys check me out. None of them approach me. A woman with peroxide blonde hair looks at me as if to speak but turns to another stranger. "I always get stuffed around at the departures," she says to her. The stranger is a younger woman who's using her man-friend as a wall to lean on, she mumbles something back using the same Cypriot lingo. I watch them become friends. It's as if they can smell that part of my blood that's been corrupted by the Australians. If I had Turkish blood they would've had the green uniforms on to me.

When I first arrived in Cyprus, Uncle Takis laughed at my attempts to speak the dialect - "Eisai kangaroutha." Calling me a kangaroo somehow legitimised my presence. My cousins apologised for my poor communication skills and casual clothing by saying, "She's a kangaroutha." And the new acquaintances would give that knowing nod. I was distanced by my difference.

But initially I couldn't get over the sameness, it was like I had entered a large hall of mirrors; cousins, uncles, aunties, all of them wearing my face. The same outspoken nose. Even the overdose of moles, or if you like, beauty spots mingled on our faces and bodies. Then like my relatives I became aware of the difference of distance. I grew up reading John & Betty, Snugglepote & Cuddlepote, singing Waltzing Matilda while they were brought up on Ancient Myths, and political propaganda generated by a small country with a dividing wall.

"Bou einai to thiatirio sou?" A hand opens and stretches in front of my face. It's connected to a tall green uniform and a Cypriot man's face. These uniforms are everywhere in Cyprus.

Police, customs officers, airport officials, who needs them when there's the army. I unzip my backpack and rummage through for my passport. I can feel the crowd's eyes, their hushed grumbling. I place my passport on this Uniform's waiting hand. He opens it, "Christine Andoniou." He raises his eyes and gives me a snaky smile, "Afstralia." "Yes," I reply. It's the same sort of reaction I've gotten from other Cypriot men. The sort of look and sizing up a prostitute would probably get from a prospective client in Australia.

"Cum whiff me," he turns and walks through the parting crowd. I hoist my backpack onto my shoulders. The crowd makes room for me to follow him. I'm given the attention of a criminal. Eyes weighing me down with their presumed knowledge, shame on you, what have you done this time, you'll get what you deserve ... I wish I was a snail. I'd slide my vulnerability into my backpack. Cocoon myself from the outside hurt. In my backpack would be the strength of my own home. Nobody would know how to get to me without asking for my permission. And nobody would have the guts to drag me out.

"You stay," Uniform points to an invisible spot behind an old man. I stand where he indicates. He opens a door and walks through it with my passport. He shuts the door behind him, leaving me and the old man standing before this shut door in a room without seats. The old man turns around. He looks like my dead Pappou. Just like Pappou he wears a fedora hat which sits at the back of his head. Although it's sweat-temperature, his woollen waistcoat is buttoned. He stares at me not bothering to return my forced smile. Standing next to him is a podgy blue suitcase. The blue handle is broken and a chain has been fastened to either side of the handle.

I search for the right Greek lingo to ask him whether he knows what's going on, instead I scratch out broken phrases, "Xereis yiati eimaste ..." He waltzes in with, "I too, am not sure why we have been detained." His English is more than fluent, it's proper. But there's nothing that gives him away. Everything about him reeks Cypriot.

"You're not from Cyprus?"

"I was born here. A long time ago. England's my home, been my home since I was fifteen. It's probably a routine check. They do this to all foreigners."

"I was born in Australia. This is my first visit, and my last."

"That's absolute. I suppose being on the other side of the world."

"How many times have you returned?"

"More times than I have fingers, mind you I'm missing a thumb." The old man wiggles his nine fingers and stumps like he's about to show me a party trick.

Uniform enters the room, "Uneixe tes valitses sus."

The old man replies in Greek with an English accent. He points to the bulges in his suitcase and says if he opens it the contents

will explode all over the place. Uniform raises his voice, "Uneixe!" I unzip my backpack while the old man strains at the buckles on either side of his suitcase. Uniform plunges his hands into my skirts, socks and undies. He finds a brown package and shakes it. "It's perfume," I say. He insists on opening it. He takes out the small bottle inside. *Isle of Love - Aphrodite's Potion*, says the label. He continues to look at it suspiciously and twists the top off. He takes a whiff and splutters a cough. The old man laughs, "Strong stuff ay." Uniform shoves the bottle at me and turns to the old man who has managed to open his suitcase.

"As you can see nothing dangerous," the old man glides his hand over bottles and boxes of food and drink. Uniform picks up a bottle of pickled capers and opens it. He sticks one long finger in and swishes it around then sticks the finger in his mouth. Then he tears open a box with no label. Lying in neat rows are smoked fish. He chucks them back in the bag and picks up a bottle of Cypriot brandy, twists open the top and takes a swig. He continues to conquer a few more bottles and boxes. The place smells of Cypriot pantries, delis and bars. He takes the bottle of expensive looking *Goumandareia* and walks back through the door.

Through the semi-opened door I see more green uniforms with exposed luggage. Uniform re-enters with our passports and hands them back, "Brohora." We're free to go. I open my passport and see the old man's face. "Nicholas Elliseou." I go to hand the passport to the old man but he's grabbed Uniform's shirt sleeve, "Ei *Goumandareia* mou, bou einai?" Uniform shakes him off like a fly, takes the old man's wrist, warning him that it wouldn't take much to break it. The old man lowers his head and Uniform lets go. Uniform laughs at him and tells him to pack away his brandy before he decides to take that too. Then Uniform slides out the room.

"Bastard. Who do they think they are."

Nicholas continues to stare at the floor, saying nothing. I open Nicholas's passport to show him I've got his. "I hope they've given you mine." Nicholas looks up and gives me the passport he's got in his hand, taking back his. I check the passport. My photo face beams back, full of promise and excitement. The photo was taken five months ago with the expectation of simple peasant existence, billy goats for pets and donkey rides for taxis. These were my parents and grandparents's stories preserved like Nicholas's pickled capers. These same stories were a source of embarrassment for my cousins who drove European cars, wore *Calvin Klein* t-shirts and had studied in England.

"If he took my brandy, I would've reported him to the English consulate."

I look at the torn boxes of fish, dried carob, the spilt containers of goat's cheese, glazed walnuts, pork sausages on top of sesame biscuits ... "I'll help you. I've got some plastic bags somewhere."

"These are my supplies. I'm saved from the meat and three-veg, and the chips n' egg. No pride in variety in London."

"You don't have a Cypriot wife."

"No. Married an English woman. Beautiful dancing legs, horrible cook."

I think of my Mum, warm billowing breasts wrapped in her *Birds of Paradise* apron, a tourist momento from the Queensland Coast.

Her legs barely peep out from under her hem. Her face red with the intensity of effort. She's beating eggs with a fork, and listening to me slowly read out in English the instructions for Apple and Rhubarb Tea Cake. I'm fourteen. It's ten years ago. And every Sunday for a year I'd read her a recipe from Margaret Fulton's *Australian Family Cookbook*. It took her a year to get sick of it and revert back to her *baclavas*, *yalatoboureka* and *melamakarouna*. Dad and Pappou were rapt when she stopped with the *pavlovas* and *cheesecakes*. My sister and I were spewing she was making syrupy cakes again.

Seat H 76. Another seat with a great view of the plane's wing. Four times I've travelled on a plane and every time I've been blessed with the experience of watching the wing, while we cross over the Pacific Ocean, the Himalayas, Europe ... What is it about my luck?

The wanna-be business exec. sitting next to me doesn't seem to care. He's set up office with his calculator, ruler and *Filofax*. He glances at his gold wrist-watch. It looks like the gold *Citizen* in the plane's shopping catalogue. I look at my rainbow berserk *Swatch* and resume watching the wing.

"Madam, breakfast?" I turn and look up at a male steward. Polished perfection. He raises one of his plucked eyebrows. "Ok," I say. The steward plonks a cling-wrapped plastic tray in front of me. Sitting neatly on the tray are one square and two circle containers covered in al-foil and cling-wrap. My appetite wanes. But I'm curious. There's no give-away smell. The al-foiled container is warm. I begin tearing off the foil and knock one of my elbows against the young exec. still hammering on his computer. "Sorry," I say. He doesn't reply. There's an art to eating plane food. I continue taking the foil off, tenderly, like I'd take a bandaid off my skin.

A pink fleshed sausage, the shape of a fat thumb sits on a lump of vibrant yellow which gives off a vague eggy smell. In the corner of the same container lies a brown square fried object. I place the foil back over the container. The diced pear and peach fruit salad doesn't grab me either. I push the tray as far away from me as possible, which isn't far enough, and turn to the wing.

My Aunt Niki, Uncle Taki's wife, is taking slow steady steps towards me balancing herself on the wing. She's carrying her breakfast tray. I can see the flask which holds her strong coffee. I'd have two full cups every morning. There's a plate of her almond biscuits covered in icing sugar and a plate of her goat's cheese and olive loaf. My stomach yawns. It's awake. My Aunt smiles the way she did when she placed the tray on the kitchen bench. "Kalie orexie," she would say. Welcoming my appetite like warm sunshine on the tip of a plane's wing.

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love to play

Aug 7, 2010 04:26AM

by *Iakovos Garivaldis*

we all love to play;
with little things that life may bring,
to stir the hours and our dreams
and make them bland on growing old
but even so, more real.

we all tap keys
and look at screens
but when we finish all these things
we wonder what's accomplished.

some day we stop
and promptly turn
and ask ourselves
what else is left
for our explore
apart from living in this realm?

but like the kids
we toss and turn
within our fantasies and in our thoughts
we never cease
to always play.

cause after all
amid this fray
we all are kids
who love to play
a tacit, thrilling, trendy game.

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From cold war to flower power

Aug 5, 2010 10:43PM

by **Angela Costi**

Her name is Aggeliki. She's a woman of the 1950s. Even though she was born way before then and she's still alive today, it was the 50s when the big choice was made. Her family or her country? If she was a politician it would have been her country. But she had become a mother.

Some say it began with a *loyiasmo*, a promise of betrothal. He was the most beautiful man in the village, other girls would have jumped; "how could you refuse?" "No", I say to them, "it began before I grew breasts". My *Nouna*, Godmother, took me by the

hand, behind her curtains, all hushed and silent, away from the frowns of the Church; she brewed me a strong black. "Made of Cypriot soil", she laughed. And I drank, something inside me awoke, as if for the first time I too could look into my cup and consider the black stewed up world.

Nouna cradled and turned the cup, sniffing and sighing until she was ready to tell. She saw me in another place. She called it the cold land, not because of no sun, there was plenty of that, because politics and religion were fought with pens and paper. Ink was the only thing that bled. She said, "This will be your new home", among the pile of black grains, she called houses. "*Tha kleestees mesa steen monaxia sou*. (You will fall inside yourself, in this new land.)"

I said, "I will not go". She pointed to a little space in the cup - a huddle of black curled worms - she named my future family. It was then she told me of my sons and how they would die with the Cyprus we knew, if we stayed, and would live but with an ache in their soul, if we left. Breeding death or unhappiness, what choice was that! I decided then, because I could at that early age, to never fall in love, to never hope for marriage. My *Nouna's* words soon became an awkward bruise that wouldn't completely fade away but could easily be ignored.

There were the bigger bruises of never enough money, never enough food, one too many daughters and who could afford their dowries. So I worked for my keep harvesting carob and apricots. And visiting once a week that special tree laden with fruit we couldn't eat. On every branch were tied white hankies, towels, scarves, pillow cases even babies' christening gowns - prayer flags or flags of surrender, it didn't matter they were all the white wishes for something better than was. I would look up into the tree and catch the sun kissing those wishes, take my scarf from my neck and hold it ready to place on the nearest naked branch but always stopped - what was it I wanted above all else ... money? ... I wasn't starving ... freedom? What would I do with it ... love? Didn't I have family and friends? ... The scarf always returned to my neck.

There was no urge for me to be married; my older sister was the concern. She worshipped a man she would never meet but would easily die for. Archbishop *Makarios*, the political prophet, gazing down on her, from a large frame in our small bedroom, he was all sepia and solemn, she was quivery, fighting back tears, kneeling and praying for him, his invisible bride. I wanted her to be happy, so I decided to visit the tree with my scarf and wish for a Strong, Safe, Independent Cyprus.

I took off my scarf (for the final time, I thought) and looked up into the tree to find a free branch. There was something up there, it looked ... I screamed. It jumped down, laughing. It was a ... a man and if I had a broom, his head would have gone toppling. But then he smiled, teased me for a kiss and when I refused he ran, leaving me with the memory of his beauty which I folded into my scarf and placed around my neck.

This beautiful man and his mother soon came knocking on my door. And my "Yes" turned into a bed of surprise and agony. We were married fast because I was too fertile. Before my fourth was due, my beautiful man became restless with ambition. He was told there was work that made you wealthy on the other side of the world, where no heavy politics and guns lived. Soon enough he boarded the ship for Australia, leaving me pregnant with my

fifth. That's when my dark years came. The awkward bruise found a comfortable resting spot in my bed. Each couple of years I would lose a child to Australia. First my husband sent for my eldest, then the second, until I was left with my youngest girl and an entire field to harvest. I longed for Australia, not for the milk and honey - I had my *haloumi* and the sweetness of carob - but for my family, without them I had no life.

It was fourteen years later when I saw his beautiful face. His hair was now stiff, all the curls had been somehow straightened with sticky cream, and he smelt of foreign water, on his chin, around his neck. He wore singlets under his shirts. Sometimes he wore a hat which he would tilt over one eyebrow. It made him look unreachable like those silent men, moving across those large white screens. We lived in a flat in Richmond. It was cold. I wore *Nouna's* black cardigan, it became my second skin. The flat had no valley of grass, no community of elders sat on the front porch, no Church bell swung its melody through its brick walls and I was so very happy, we were together for the first time. My eldest son showed me how to open a can of meat, it came out square, and I would slice it thinly and fry it with cardboard eggs. I got used to cow's milk, and bee's honey, to lighting gas for cooking, waiting for my sons to hear the news and then tell me, toasting bread the pop-up-way, cleaning an empty house. They would all leave in the morning but they always returned that night, without blood stains but some machine dirt, I always washed away.

In the 1960s Lena's teenage heart swelled when she saw Marcello Mastroianni in Fellini's *La Dolca Vita*. She bought her first mini skirt and wore it without stockings. In the 70s, her hemline dropped with her spirits; Fellini would never make her a movie star and Whitlam was crushed by the Queen.

When Marcello was about to kiss Anita Ekberg, I closed my eyes and placed his lips on mine. I left the cinema with the strange hope I would bump into him. I abandoned the coffee shop in Lonsdale Street for *Ti Amos* in Lygon. My two cousins and I painted our nails on the tram away from our mothers' savage tongues. The Italian honey-boys offered us cigarettes and a good time. We only took the cigarettes. I puffed but never inhaled. They said; "You are the roses among the weeds, you are prettier than the Australian girls." But their eyes always trailed the skirts of the blondes. One of my cousins they said looked like Sophia Loren, the other like Elizabeth Taylor but with brown eyes. They said I resembled the Queen, I cried. They tried to appease me; "When she was a young woman not now." But all I could see was her button nose, her hair that never moved, her forced smiles ...

I wanted so much to go to training school to become a nurse. But my mother said there was no money to send me and my father said no daughter of his was going to wipe the shit off men's arses, anyway my English was still broken back then. I got a job in a clothing factory, owned by two Italians. I wasn't a dressmaker so I escaped the machines that never stopped making noise and sewed up women's hands by mistake. They gave me the Quality Inspector's job which at first I was proud of until my neck got twisted and they complained when I didn't reach the daily quota of 2,500 garments. It was too much, too fast; I had to scan the clothes for flaws and staple labels on them at the same time. I got \$10.00 a day if I met the quota, if I didn't, money was always deducted.

The factory was in Broadmeadows, next to the Ford factory where all the men worked. Nearly every day, I had to wait for my Sophia Loren cousin to return from a dark corner behind the locker rooms. She'd come back with her lipstick smudged and bra straps showing. I'd tidy her up while her man-friend emerged pushing back his James Dean fringe. James Dean always had some friends he was trying to push onto me. Two or three often circled me while Sophia and Jimmy were doing the dark deeds. I flashed the factory's sharpest scissors when the vultures got too close.

One day, Sophia came running out crying. I thought they had gone too far, she was no longer a virgin. Jimmy was dragged out by a man I had never seen before. This man was holding hard onto Jimmy's arm, "Tell her. Go, tell her," he was yelling, "say sorry, you good for nothing ..." But Jimmy was looking at the ground. Sophia was sobbing into my shoulder. The angry man's eyes softened as he looked at me and Sophia, "I say sorry for this man," he pushed Jimmy's shoulder, "he is married to my sister and sometimes forgets his place."

Poor Sophia thought she was going to be Jimmy's bride.

Now that I didn't have to wait for my cousin, I got home early enough to go to English classes. They were free and the class was made up of all sorts of colours and races. By chance or fate, the angry man with the soft eyes was also a student. We began reading the newspaper to each other. His name, believe-it-or-not was Marcello, but he didn't look like the movie star. It didn't matter.

Marcello also worked at the Ford factory. He hated the conditions there. They got penalised for lateness and were not allowed a tea or toilet break if they couldn't find a relief worker. A strike was being organised. He was one of the organisers. I started going to my union meetings at the factory, dragging along my cousin. We deserved better conditions, better pay, a nurse on the floor for all our injuries ... Marcello and I shared many of the stronger cigarettes, as he talked I would inhale deeply and dream of walking up to my boss with my staplegun demanding he give me back all the money he had deducted from my pay. This dream would be the second revolution; the first was the strike at the Ford plant.

Whitlam was trying to shake multinational control of the factory but Ford would not answer to Australian laws, something had to be done to show them we were not sheep anymore, we had been shorn enough, it was our say now, this was our time ... this became our chant on the day of the strike, "It's our time, not your time, our pay not your pay. It's our time, not your time, our pay not your pay" but the suits in the high offices got their guards to close the gates, Marcello and the others rushed them, the gates did not budge, the rubbish dump was wheeled over, it had plenty of hard steel car parts in it, they were thrown at the top floor windows where the suits lived, every window on the top floor was smashed then the blue pigs on horses came and things got worse ... two pigs grabbing a leg each, took Marcello away.

A week later, his face still carried the bruises and pain.

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The Voice

Aug 5, 2010 11:13AM

by *Dimitris Tsaloumas*

How am I to go out into the fields
where night's chill glints
like the tooth of the wolf.

How am I to leave my bed
to face the joylessness of the wind
and the murky eye of the river -

and suppose the voice is inhuman
suppose it is the Evil One abroad in the wilderness
tell me how

how do I stoop from such a height
into my head to shout
silence

D.T.

© **Dimitris Tsaloumas**

translated by **Philip Grundy**

"The Observatory", p. 41

University of Queensland Press, 1983

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The song of ordinary life

Aug 5, 2010 11:00AM

by **Nicos Nicolaides**

Cypriot of the Diaspora

Translated by *Margaret Deyes*

Muse of poetry! Grant me to shape beautifully this song
about the pot in which people cook their beans over the fire
about the shallow dish of salad
made of sweet peppers mixed with whatever else
the fecundity of the orchard affords. And the season of the year...

The bowls with wooden spoons
the plate, full of ripe olives,
the wheaten bread and the bottle of wine,
all arranged in orderly fashion on the clean tablecloth.

The 'good evening' on the lips of the husbandman coming in
with his tools in his hand, and a watermelon under his arm...

The 'welcome home' from the woman of the house,
spoken softly so as not to wake the demanding infant
which has fallen asleep pressed against her breast.

Muse of poetry! Grant me to shape beautifully this song.

© **Nicos Nicolaides**

"Nicos Nicolaides The Cypriot",

p. 115

Diaspora Books, London 1998

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Philosophising about identity

Aug 5, 2010 12:22AM

by *Dr Christos Galiotos*

What does it feel to be marginalised in a country that I call home? I have asked myself the question infinite times at the wake of consciousness. How can it be that I feel as a foreigner in the land that I was born? Is locality of birth a defining feature in the construction of my identity? Does my birth place mean that I have immediate bonds with Australia? Musing about my cultural identity I discovered from long ago that my ancestry, roots and soul are definitely Greek. I feel Greek, I speak Greek, I think in Greek. I have often wondered what about if I was born in another country, perhaps a neighbouring Asian country, would I still be Greek? Would I still *feel* Greek? I feel that no matter where else I would have been born and bred, I still would be Greek. Being Greek is a way of life, a lifestyle.

My cultural identity is the most valuable treasure that I own. A treasure chest that has been nurtured from fables and stories about my parents' youth and adolescence, prior to their departure in the mid-1960s, for the land of opportunity, Australia. These stories are a library of video clips embedded deep within the inlets of my eternal soul. I recall that what it was like when my parents went to school and the hardships of daily life. Life was a struggle but with a purity of intent that I still admire. A society built on moral and religious values. Above all, the family was perceived as something sacred. My mind and soul were baptised in traditional Greek values that rest on the triptych: the Christian Orthodox faith, the homeland and the family. My family forged a strong notion of Hellenism that imprinted itself upon my entire being. The inner urban city life of Richmond, Victoria, the place where I was born, is always sacred to my mind. Richmond is like my parents village that I use to conjugate in my mind's eye. I feel that my roots emerged from its fertile soil. When I return to Richmond, I feel that the town welcomes me in its maternal embrace, an unconditional embrace

that creates an authentic sense of belonging. It feels like home though the symphony of my emotions are coloured with a latent sense of impermanence.

Being born in Australia and more precisely in Melbourne, has been a great blessing in my life. Not that I have been unscathed by the scars of bitter racism, school bullying and a sense of being uniquely different.

Speaking the English language is a great advantage but not always a joy. The truth is I love languages. Language requires a special kind of sensitivity towards its intrinsic logic and rhythmical patterns of expression. I was born into a Greek-speaking household. From a young child I perceived the learning of the Greek language as a source of joy and perpetual growth. Greek school was the place where I could be me. It was the place where I could turn on all of my lights and 'swim' in the sea of cultural bliss. My teachers left an indelible mark on my mind of what it truly means to be Greek. I treasure my memories and experience of my Greek school years...

Speaking both Greek and English equally fluently is a defining feature of my cultural identity: bi-lingualism defines who I am. I feel that I function with a conscious bi-lingualism. My cultural bi-lingualism is the source of my pride. Having access to both Greek and English languages allowed me to explore my identity through two prisms. As time passes by, I have found that my affinity resonates closer with the Greek language and with Greece. I do not deny the fact that I was born in Australia nor my admiration for the English language. Australia has taught me to fight for what I believed. Its more tranquil rhythms have enabled me to explore the spirituality of its indigenous peoples, the Aborigines. I have always been fascinated with their 'dreamtime'. When I want to create something artistic, I like to experience my own dreamtime as a vivid source of inspiration; a luminous pillar of creative energy that wants to be expressed in my world and works.

Art is an important aspect of my identity. I love the exhilarating sense of freedom that art releases from the depths of my immortal soul. Artistic expressions of my identity are like an externalisation from the studio of my interior world. The creative and mental faculties of my imagination are brought into play in my engagement with art, particularly through my creative and critical writing. I find a higher cultural expression of my identity in the creative invention of poetry and melody. I feel that my poems are a snap shot of unique moments from my everyday life, a poetic autobiography seen through my luminous eyes.

I do not perceive life as boring even if at times, it does become tedious. For me, life reveals itself as a continuous journey of self-exploration. My cultural identity is not severed from my spiritual identity. I see the one flowing into the other. I feel that my Hellenic identity embraces archaic, classical, Byzantine and contemporary Greek culture along a continuum of cultural goldmines that invite me towards further exploration and the attainment of self-realisation.

My cultural identity is essentially double-sided, integrated into what I would call my Greek-Australian identity; two sides or aspects of the one integrated person. It took me many years of soul-searching to reconcile the Greek and English aspects of my cultural identity. My cultural identity nourishes what it means to be me, to live and dance with the swirly winds of existence.

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- The curse of being a hero

The Terracotta Woman

Jul 7, 2010 12:23PM

My journey is that of photography,
hers that of the baked earth, of terracotta.
She makes earthenware pots and sells them
to live off them
craft and history she sells
the clay is alive,
the day is alive as it goes to set
as the road to Trapezounta fills with light from lanterns
hanging like bracelets from her thin hands
her needs up to her elbows, she was beautiful, she is beautiful
she'll always be...
the return gasps, we both return from the loneliness of the day
the car by the shore with the engine open
she by the shore with her heart open
she is alone
as the last cicada that delays to fill up on the daylight...
she's left with only two
two pots with patterns
she tatters at the sun
at the squares that sway and become rhombuses
sometimes they become melancholic and disappear inside the
baked earth

a Turkish woman with fake bracelets and no teeth
selling earthenware pots
red like blood
strong like bone
I didn't buy any,
with the engine waiting to save it from its ordeal
I didn't buy any
even so within just two moments I left
everything I held in my hands
in her hands
she passed her fingers along my eyes
I am not buying earthenware pots from Trapezounta
how can I tell her?

she gave me her sweetest look

she pulled something out of the secret place in her chest
something that looked like a fylahito*
-“a fylahito from illness, a fylahito from Charon”-
a fylahito to protect from something called poetry
and blinds you
and you don't hear because the calendar pages are so mixed up
in your mind...
but earthenware pots I didn't buy

I kissed her on the forehead
like she was a mother that threaded a blue bead on a string
like the thread of the road with dust on the hand
she tied it around my wrist like a blessing,
like a march...

I gave her everything I had around my neck
yet I didn't buy her earthenware pots
and they were cheap
and they were dear in memory
I didn't buy...
she put her palm high on the chest, just touching, with straight
fingers
touching the vein that breathes and leaves no one to hear the
thoughts
asking

saying her name with bad Greek accent

Avgerinu

as if the word had lost its colours like faded clothes

I put my palm high on her chest

asking

saying my name clearly

Anatolia

Anadolu, Anadolu

she started crying loudly

thinking that I knew her language

not knowing that it was my mother tongue she was answering
with, kissing me

kissing my fingers

telling her caresses with her eyes

but I didn't buy anything

all would be left by the shore

by the road that joins in the companionship,

the companionship of two women

that gave each other something that belonged to them

I don't know how long she'd stay there to wait

to wait for a customer

a relative

a bus

another sun

another face on the road

I don't know.

I only know why I didn't buy

and after I left the crying of the setting sun would have been

envious of the stillness,

I know...

but perhaps the earthenware pots would remain by the road
unsold

perhaps broken or abandoned

and Avgerinoula

that Turkish woman, a woman of my family

of my road

of my world
would wear my jewels next to her vein
and I would wear her fylahito next to my vein
and the earthenware pots would remain there
red and hard like blood
to remind of a bond...

To my employer later I wrote
and gave a title to the photograph
The terracotta woman
and in my soul Trapezounta would speak
differently
another story
free for me
and maybe, who knows, for Avgerini too.

Original poem by Erma Vasiliou, translated by Dina Gerolymou © 2010

* a protection from evil usually containing holy relics

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Do you think humans have a death drive? What is it? Does Freud give a clear account of it?

Jun 20, 2010 12:03PM

Arguably, the Freudian notion of the 'death drive' has attracted scholarly attention throughout psychoanalytic literature. Scholars have predominantly viewed the death drive as either a misguided biological claim or as a contentious psychological or metaphorical claim.[1] Albeit, psychoanalyst and critical theorist, Slavoj Žižek, has defined the death drive not as a biological fact but rather a 'notion indicating that the human psychic apparatus is subordinated to a blind automatism of repetition beyond pleasure'.[2]

Further, Sigmund Freud argues that man is "an animal sick unto death", an animal extorted by an insatiable parasite such as reason, logos and language'.[3] This dimension of radical negativity cannot be reduced to an expression of alienated social conditions. It defines *la condition humaine* as such that there is no solution and no escape from it.[4] This therefore leads psychoanalysts to the biological claim which Freud centred his theoretical argument on, stating in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "the aim of life is death" and looking backwards, that "inanimate things existed before living ones".[5]

This statement has provided considerable speculation concerning Freud's fundamental motivation for postulating the death drive, ranging from the combined influence of the First World War and his terminal illness to the need to clarify certain neurophysiological points.**[6]** Conversely, when the death drive is reviewed as a psychological claim, there are an equal number of different interpretations which range from the manifestation of the unconscious guilt.**[7]** This concept though, removes the death drive away from its original formulation and restricts its meaning to denote the destructive forces within human nature.**[8]** Furthermore, Freud initially emphasised the biological nature of the death drive, which gradually gave way to placing more theoretical emphasis on the psychological nature of the drive together with its concomitant clinical manifestations.**[9]** These clinical manifestations were the 'compulsion to repeat' supported by an 'unconscious sense of guilt'.**[10]** According to academic Robyn Holden, Freud realised that both masochism and sadism played a crucial role in the operations of the death drive but the genesis of these influences remained obscure.**[11]**

The contemporary psychoanalytic community has understood the death drive in terms of it being either a biological, psychological or metaphorical claim. Therefore, in order to provide an analysis of what the death drive is and the purpose of its existence in psychoanalytic theory, this essay shall explore and examine the biological and psychological claims of the drive. It will first provide a critical elaboration on the opinion that the death drive was originally intended to subsume all of these parameters, though in Freud's last writings, the psychological interpretation took precedence over the metaphorical and biological meaning he also ascribed it. This essay shall then provide an analysis on the death drive and death anxiety. In doing so, it will finally bring forth an examination of the unconscious guilt as an instrument in the development of the moral masochism and sadism within personality.

Critically, Freud drew a distinction between the instincts of animals and those of human beings, for the instincts of the latter incorporate elements of affect and cognition neither of which Freud would wish to attribute to animals.**[12]** According to Freud, an instinct (*Trieb*) is an impulse which is biologically based, such as 'hunger, thirst and sexuality'.**[13]** While hunger may represent an impulse 'governed by the self-preservative drives', sexuality represents the reproductive drive directed towards the preservation of the species.**[14]**

Since aggression lacked any obvious biological base, Freud considered it was under the influence of the ego-drives, which implies the employment of cognition governing its expression.**[15]** Psychoanalyst Mortimer Ostow argues that Freud initially advocated the existence of the death drive as an explanation for man's basic readiness to aggress against man and tendency for aggression to become an element of deviant sexual behaviour.**[16]** Albeit, this may be justifiable, psychiatrist Allan Compton conversely contends that it was Freud's recognition of the compulsion to repeat, 'operating in the clinical setting, that initially stimulated advancement of the death drive hypothesis.'**[17]** Compton goes on to state that Freud developed an argument in terms of speculative biology, 'to arrive at life and death forces existing at a cellular level'.**[18]** Therefore an association exists between the life drive, and sexuality or Eros, while the 'compulsion to repeat' is associated with the death

drive.**[19]**

Further, Ostow goes on to identify regression as the visible manifestation of the death drive which may be stimulated by either 'frustration, attack, or guilt'.**[20]** According to Ostow, frustration of a thwarted desire incites an aggressive reaction which, in most cases is in direct proportion to the degree of frustration experienced.**[21]** However, once the aggressive reaction surpasses expectable limits, the 'unconscious factors are at play'.**[22]** Equally, attack provokes 'defensive retaliation' within acceptable limits but when such limits are exceeded, then the unconscious motivation of the retaliator can be called into question. Similarly, guilt may act as a motivation to unleash excessive aggression either against the self or, when the guilt is projected, against the perceived victim both of which imply the liberation of unconscious forces.**[23]** It may therefore be argued that these considerations support the direct analogy between animal and human instincts, and in this light, death instinct is nothing more than the human version of the predatory instinct.

In view of the psychological claim about the death drive, academic D. E. Greenberg asserts that sex and aggression are manifestations of 'cosmic' forces inherent in every living thing and that these forces are striving to recapture the 'unity of inorganic matter' that was 'split apart' when life began.**[24]** Arguably, Greenberg's interpretation of Freud's initial articulation of both the life and death drives, which he refers to as an "overly radical biologism", is in terms of Eros, symbolising the drive to unite organisms, being opposed by Thanatos, symbolising the drive to split such unities apart.**[25]** Though, as Viennese psychoanalyst Kurt Eissler contends, "if the concept of a death drive is to be accepted at all, then the supposed link between the death drive and aggression would fall within the orbit of psychology".**[26]**

According to Holden though, it is this theoretical link which exists between the death drive and aggression which has largely contributed to the psychoanalytical community's rejection of this central psychoanalytical tenet, as a result of the perceived irreconcilability of masochism with the pleasure principle.**[27]** For Holden, the explanation that masochism is actually sadism turned against the self is unsatisfactory since such an occurrence must be motivated by "something" in the individual which directs this turn against the self'.**[28]** This 'something' can only be masochistic impulses and therefore the explanation is embedded in circularity.

Moreover, psychoanalytic theorist, Jean Laplanche, argues that "the death drive is not a discovery but a reaffirmation, a deepening of the original and fundamental affirmation of psychoanalysis: sexuality; it is nothing other than the extreme of sexuality".**[29]** In stating this, he hopes to draw a distinction between the sexual drive and the sexual life-drive with the id being the seat of the former and the ego being the seat of the latter.**[30]** This speculation though, is, according to Holden, the opposite way around from that proposed by Freud who maintained the 'Eros resided within the realms of the id while the death drive remained a constituent of the ego'.**[31]** Further, Laplanche, in sympathy with Greenberg, considers *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* "the most fascinating and baffling text of the entire Freudian corpus".**[32]** This is as a result of Freud's lapse into biologism and partly due to the problems presented by the "paradox of masochism".**[33]** However, according to Holden, the

form of masochism most securely tied to the death drive is that of moral masochism, or otherwise referred to as an unconscious sense of guilt, which does not concurrently imply taking pleasure in suffering. [34]

Holden states that even though the patient exhibits a 'need for punishment or the suffering, but rather, in order to appease the unconscious sense of guilt emanating from the superego'. [35] In stating this, one may accept that it is this unconscious sense of guilt that gives rise to the repetition compulsion which was originally introduced by Freud. [36] This, in turn, produces the Negative Therapeutic Reaction. One may therefore argue that understanding the concept of the death drive in its entirety, therefore warrants understanding Freud's concept of moral masochism or unconscious guilt. However, this has also generated heated controversy and psychoanalytic discourse.

Certain psychoanalysts such as Eissler and Ostow have interpreted Freud's statement "the aim of life is death", as meaning the motivation of life is death. [37] This however, may be considered as only partly true. For although Freud did retain this biological meaning of the death drive throughout his corpus, as witnessed in the *Outline* when he reiterated that "the final aim [of the death drive] is to lead what is living into an inorganic state", the death drive assumes both a psychological and metaphorical meaning as well. [38] Therefore, while some analysts have viewed the death drive in a purely biological context and rejected the theory accordingly, 'others have rejected it on the grounds that there can be no unconscious representation of death'. [39] Holden therefore asserts that in the absence of an unconscious representation of death, there can be no death related drive in the unconscious, which consequently renders the death drive theoretically untenable. [40] However, Holden goes on to state that certain flaws lie in this interpretation since it was, in part, due to man's cognitive apprehension of the meaning of death and the 'death drive was assigned to the realm of the ego where concepts such as hatred, death and destruction' can be consciously understood. [41] This therefore leads one to state that the perceived relationship between the 'fear of death and castration anxiety is like the fear of conscience', as a development of the fear of castration. [42]

Critically, the main significance which the sense of guilt has in neuroses makes it conceivable that common neurotic anxiety is reinforced in severe cases by the generating of anxiety between the ego and the super-ego (fear of castration, of conscience, or death). [43] This dimension was reiterated in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, where Freud further pursued the notion of death anxiety, stating that he was "inclined to adhere to the view that the fear of death should be regarded as analogous to the fear of castration and that the situation to which the ego is reacting is one of being abandoned by the protecting super-ego - the powers of destiny - so that it has no longer any safeguard against all the dangers that surround it". [44]

Freud eventually extended his conceptual framework concerning the manifestation and nature of anxiety to incorporate the notion of 'object-loss where he contends that since castration represents an object-loss *par excellence*', one would believe it is reasonable to subsume other object-losses under the rubric of anxiety provoking conditions. [45] Arguably, this reinforces the cognitive nature of anxiety which, of necessity, must arise in the conscious ego. Further, Freud goes on to state that in order to be anxious

in response to something other than a direct danger, there must be some awareness of the actual, impeding, or threatened loss. It therefore seems that the "fear of death" or "death anxiety" features prominently in the formation of clinical psychopathology, and to that extent the death drive also features prominently in the formation of clinical psychopathology. [46]

Freud's writing *The economic problem of masochism*, provides the opinion that Freud was much less convinced with the pleasure principle serving the death instinct, and instead argued that the Nirvana principle expressed the trend of the death instinct; [47] 'the pleasure principle represents the demands of the libido, and modification of the latter principle, the reality principle, represents the influence of the external world.' [48] Freud goes on to identify three forms of masochism; the first being erotogenic which refers to the erotic experience of deriving pleasure from pain, made possible from the fusion of the life and death drives. [49]

This phenomenon represents the 'bed-rock of the other two forms of masochism, feminine and moral masochism'. [50] By feminine masochism, Freud refers to masochistic phantasies of males in which the standard feminine sexual position is adopted, while oral masochism refers to a sense of unconscious guilt that underlines much psychopathology. [51] However, one element common to erotogenic and moral masochism is that of "self-caused suffering" both of which operate in conjunction with sadism. [52] Therefore, it is not that the masochist is motivated by self-caused suffering though instead, that self-caused suffering is the result of his sadistic drive exemplified in either 'explicit sexual behaviour or through a sadistic, guilt inducing superego'. [53]

On this account, sadism mediates between masochism and the forces of the death drive. The libido is then set the task of "taming" the death drive which is achieved by externalising a portion of the drive outwards 'towards objects in the external world'. [54] Once the death drive has shifted its ground from an internal to an external orientation, Freud then refers to it as "a destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power". [55] In such circumstances, the movement of the death drive outwards to the external world forms the basis of wilful aggression, while the portion of the death drive directed inwards forms the basis of erotogenic and moral masochism. Evidently, it is on the basis of these observations that Freud came to realise that dealing with the life or death drives in their pure and unadulterated form was relatively rare. Freud then asserted that the death drive corresponds to or is identical with masochism which takes the self as an object. [56]

Concluding, it is evident that the concept of the death drive is present in the humanistic conscious. However, it's interpretation is vague and elusive, and psychoanalysts have differing views in a variety of dimensions, such as the biological, psychology and metaphorical dimension. Critically, when the death drive is considered in terms of the ideas advanced by Freud, 'Thanatos' assumes greater clinical and theoretical relevance. As a result, an expanded concept of the death drive has been defended as an indispensable theoretical construct that makes sense of what is otherwise unintelligible clinical material, and most particularly, that of self-caused suffering.

Freud identified the phenomenon of self-caused suffering as

masochism, a term refined to moral masochism, and as demonstrated in this essay, this idea became the pivot around which the death drive was constructed. Further, Freud attributed the phenomenon of self-caused suffering to an unconscious sense of guilt, which gave rise to the compulsion to repeat the negative therapeutic reaction. Arguably, this essay has provided psychoanalytic and theoretical precedence of the meaning of the death drive and its presence in contemporary psychoanalytic literature. One may therefore come to the conclusion that even though interpretations of the death drive are vague, it may be said that “the conflict in our soul between Eros and Thanatos can bring forth the worst and the very best in our thoughts and actions...As long as there is life we can keep Eros victorious over Thanatos”. [57]

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Jun 7, 2010 11:59AM

As writers we draw on many facets of ourselves for the telling of a story, the creation of a poem. We utilise knowledge, experience, feelings, sensory perceptions, memories, et al. As mentioned previously, you have a SITUATION and a STORY; to bring this alive the feelings that belong to it must be acknowledged and then realized as being the actual experience paramount to the story. Without the feeling there is no story.

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On the discipline within writing, and imagination... ("The Write Approach" col. 5)

May 5, 2010 09:27AM

The last column focussed on the discipline required *within* writing and I intended to devote two columns to this subject due to both the importance of it and the confusion that can enter a writer's mind in relation to utilising emotion, imagination and discipline. Hence this column continues the discussion.

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