



Whose crisis is this crisis?

written by Letizia Bonanno
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This post is part of our [Encountering Precarities](#) series. The thematic thread engages with the multiple and asymmetrical forms of precarisation and vulnerabilisation involving both ethnographers and their interlocutors in and beyond the field.

Whose crisis is this crisis? is a short ethno-graphic reflection on how conflicting, shifting imaginaries of the Greek crisis have shaped the ethnography fieldwork I carried out in Athens between 2015 and 2017. Throughout the seven pages comprising my contribution, I tease out how anthropological theories informing my research questions eventually stood at odds with the actual lived experience of my fieldwork. Following Couroucli (2007), I reckon with the reality of fieldwork where the autobiographical and the ethnographic overlap, often creating uncanny epistemological counter-circuits. Yet, at the same, they can open up unexpected margins for solidarity which often thrives on a shared sense of heightened



precarity and vulnerability.

Benefitting from the affordances that the so-called *graphic ethnography turn* in anthropology allows in terms of self-reflexivity (Bonanno 2019), auto-ethnographic interventions (Theodossopulos 2020) and novel modes of representation sensitive to the subjective dimensions of the ethnographic encounters, my contribution wants to push further such affordances and activate the potential that the graphic medium retains to move critiques that at times are theoretical and political too. In this sense, my work aligns with the broader tradition of political cartooning (Theodossopoulos 2021) and, more specifically, with the Italian comic tradition where pop-culture elements and figures, characters and stereotypes are saturated in order to make them explode in the attempt to unsettle common-sensical, ordinary perceptions of reality (academic, ethnographic or else).

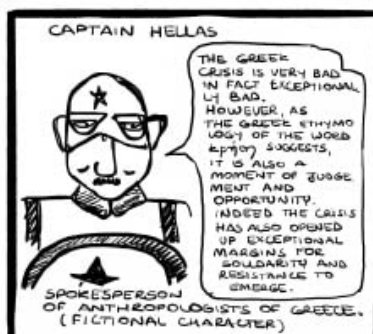
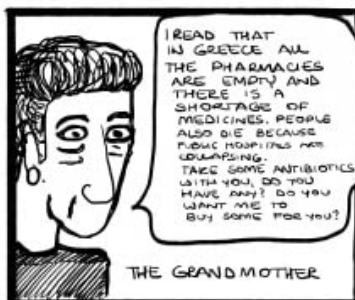
The anthropological debate on the so-called Greek crisis, its supposed exceptionality and the social, collective and grassroots responses it triggered has resulted in a burgeoning wealth of academic articles that, although not explicitly cited, have informed the pages I have drawn.



LUKE GREECE // REFRACTIONS



DESPITE MONTI AND THE AUSTERITY, THE CRISIS KEPT HITTING ITALY HARD: USUAL STUFF, HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, CUTS TO PENSIONS AND WELFARE SERVICES, PRIVATISATION OF ANYTHING THAT COULD BE PRIVATISED. TIRED AND HUMILIATED (AS MANY OTHERS) TO ASK MY PARENTS €50 TO GET BY, AS MANY OTHERS I LEFT ITALY. IN 2012 I MOVED TO LONDON, IN 2014 TO MANCHESTER AND STARTED MY PHD. IN JULY 2015 I MOVED TO ATHENS TO START MY FIELDWORK.



και καλὸ ταξίδι.



REVERBERATIONS// SHIFTING IMAGINARIES





EXPLANATIONS // ENCOUNTERS

THE ENTHUSIAST



THE NATIONALIST



THE LEFT INTERNATIONALIST
INTERLUDE INTO
TRANSPARANING (IN THE SHAPE
OF PROBABLY)



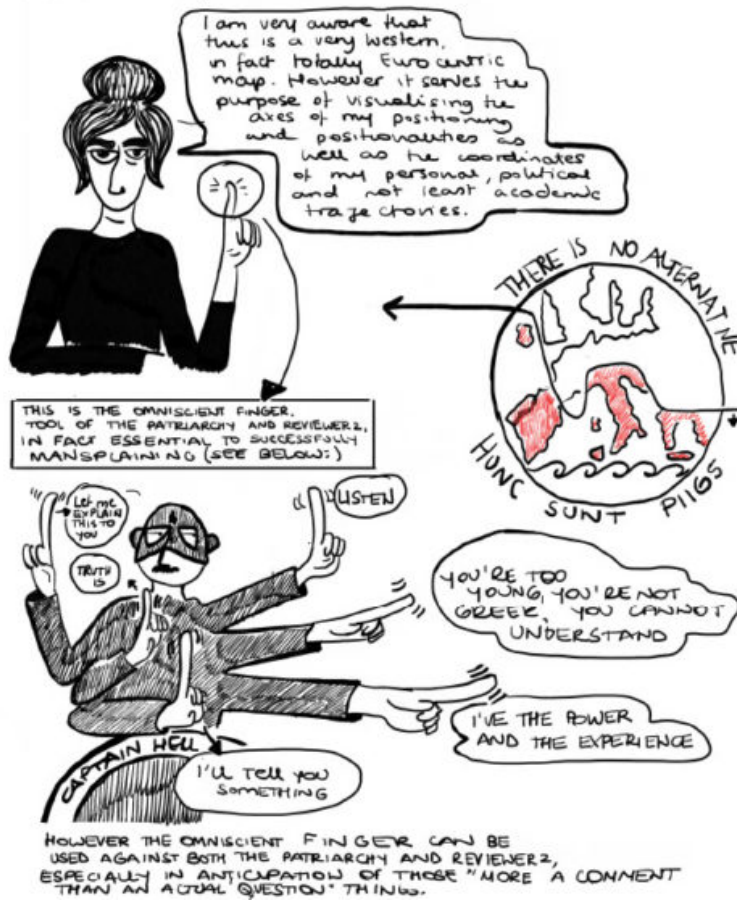
CULTURAL INTIMACY
ADVOCATE IN ANTI-GERMAN FUNCTION
(IN THE SHAPE OF MARIA CALAIS)



③



MANSPLAINATIONS// THE IMMORAL ECONOMY OF THE SOUTH



PIIGS IS A VERY UNFORTUNATE ACRONYM USED TO DESIGNATE THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (NAMELY PORTUGAL, IRELAND, ITALY, GREECE AND SPAIN) THAT HAD BEEN IMPACTED BY THE 1990S CRISIS MORE VIOLENTLY. SUCH CRISIS - AS ANY OTHER CRISIS - HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS ORGANIC TO CAPITALISM, IN FACT ESSENTIAL TO THE PROCESS OF CAPITALIST ACCUMULATION. EVEN THOUGH THE CRISIS WAS ECONOMIC, CONSIDERATIONS OF MORAL ORDERS WERE OFTEN MOBILISED TO EITHER JUSTIFY SOME POLITICAL DECISION MADE AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL OR TO EXPLAIN WHY THE CRISIS UNFOLDED WITH SUCH EXCEPTIONAL VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH. SOME SAY THAT EUROPEAN MICS IS A MORAL SCIENCE, INDEED DISCOURSES ON "WHO ACTUALLY DESERVES TO BEING TO EUROPE" STARTED CIRCULATING MORE & MORE.





INTERPRETATIONS // THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DEVIL (IN DETAIL)



5



IMAGINATIONS// REPRESENTATIONS

(GREXIT WAS THE
SPECTRE THAT HAUNTED
EUROPE (THEN BREXIT
HAPPENED))

WHAT I AM TRYING TO SAY
IS AS OBVIOUS AS HARD
TO ADMIT...

BEHIND AND BEYOND
THE DIFFERENT POLITICS
OF REPRESENTATIONS,
THERE ARE POLITICS
SHAPING REPRESENTATIONS

SOMETIMES THESE POLITICS
MIRROR AND AT THE SAME
TIME INFORM THESE
LATITUDES...

I'M FROM A PIGS
COUNTRY!

AND BY LATITUDES I MEAN
POSITIONINGS AND POSITIO-
NALITIES ALONG THE
SOUTH-NORTH AXIS,

I MEAN HOW UP WE ARE
ON THE ACADEMIC LADDER
OF PRESTIGE, POWER AND
REPUTATION

HOW MUCH DEEPLY WE ARE
ENTANGLED (OR ENTRAPPED)
IN NETWORKS OF POWER

CRISIS IS
JUST ANOTHER
WORD, EMPTY
WORD FOR ME.
THE REFUGEE
CRISIS, THE ECONO-
MIC CRISIS...
ALL THIS HAS
BEEN GOING
ON FOR THE PAST
THIRTY YEARS,
IN GREECE AS
WELL IN ITALY

IF YOU ASK ME
HOW THE GREEK
CRISIS LOOKED
TO ME, I'D SAY
IT WAS A SHITTY
ONE, AS SHITTY
AS ANY OTHER
CRISIS: IT HAS
MADE THE RICH
RICHER, THE POOR
POORER.

AND THIS IS NOT
TO UNDERMINE OF
OTHER SCHOLARS
OR TO UNDERSTI-
MATE AND TRIVIALIZE
PEOPLE'S SUFFERING
AND HARDSHIP.
I KNOW WHAT IT
FEELS LIKE

SEE PAGE 5

ALL THESE ASPECTS ADD
TO SOME BASIC DEMOGRA-
PHICS

THIS IS JUST
TO SAY THAT
MY EXPERIENCE
OF THE SO-CAL-
LED GREEK
CRISIS, MY
FIELDWORK IN
ATHENS AND
MY ETHNOGRA-
PHY HAVE BEEN
SHAPED BY
MY BEING ITALIAN,
WHATEVER IT
MIGHT MEAN...

WHICH ALTOGETHER CHANGE
HOW WE THINK WITH AND
THROUGH ETHNOGRAPHIC
MATERIAL

I DON'T KNOW IF
IT WAS ABOUT
CULTURAL INTIMACY
OR CULTURAL
PROXIMITY OR
NEITHER OF
THEM, OR THEIR
ACTUAL
NEGATION,

BUT ALSO HOW WE DO
ETHNOGRAPHY AND WHAT
WE WANT ETHNOGRAPHY
TO DO FOR US

THE FACT IS THAT
IT WAS HARD FOR
ME TO MAKE SENSE
(ethnographically
speaking) OF
THE MANY
IMAGINATIONS,
REPRESENTATIONS
AND INTERPRE-
TATIONS ABOUT
GREECE...

SEE PAGE 3

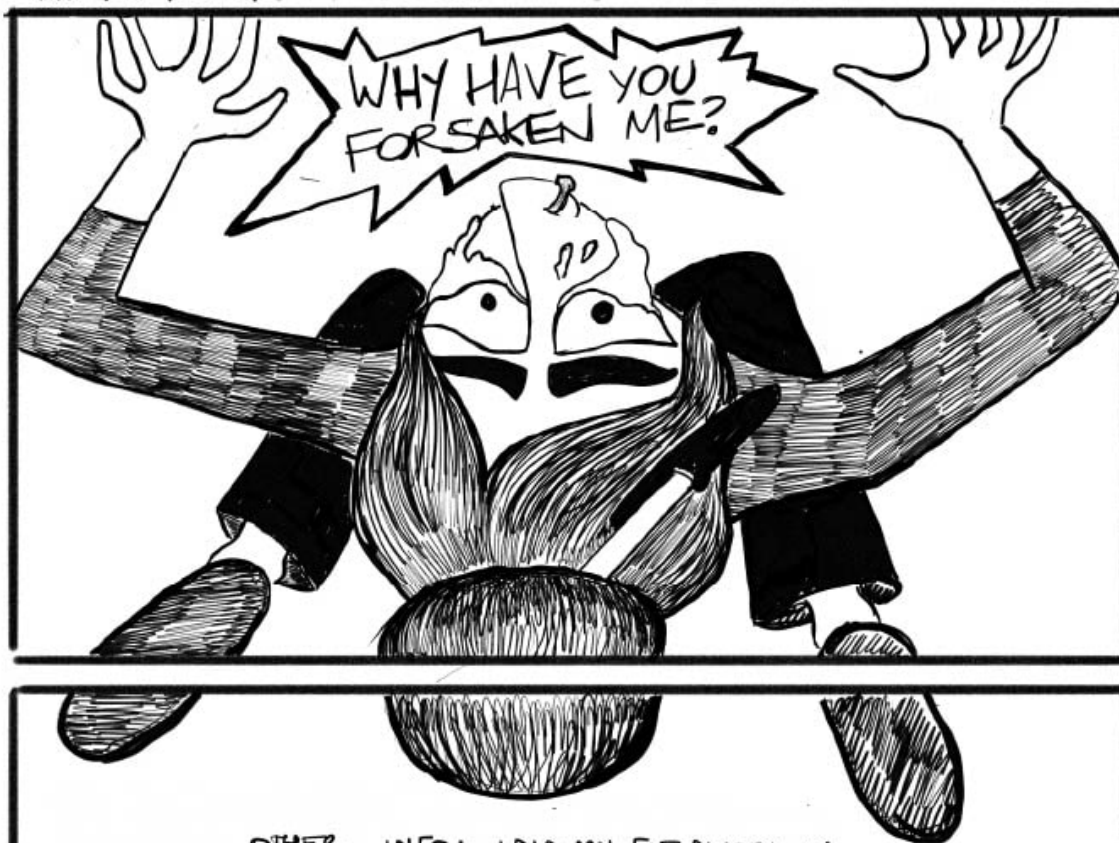


...MORE A COMMENT THAN A CONCLUSION.

I KNOW THAT SOMETIMES I CAN BE A BIT DRAMATIC; IT IS NOT BY CHANCE THAT I EARNED THE TITLE OF DRA(CH)MA QUEEN (SEE BELOW). JOKES ASIDE, IT TOOK ME SOME TIME TO RECONCILE ALL THE EXPECTATIONS THAT COME WITH DOING AND WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY.

I'VE FOUND VERY INSPIRING, USEFUL IN FACT ENLIGHTENING WHAT GREEK ANTHROPOLOGIST MARIA COUROULI SAYS ABOUT THE OFTEN UNFAVOURABLE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR FIELDWORK. SHE SAYS THAT TENSIONS ALWAYS ARISE WHEN ETHNOGRAPHY ENTERS THE REALM OF POLITICS, NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY POLITICS. THESE TOPICS, SHE CONTINUES, SHOULD PROMPT A THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER AS AN OUTSIDER AND THE COMMUNITY.

THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S IDENTITY AND POSITIONALITY PREDETERMINE THE CONTEXT (AND TO AN EXTENT THE CONTENT) OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTER AND EXCHANGE. 'ALL THIS MIGHT SOUND OBVIOUS TO MANY OF YOU. I FOUND THESE WORDS SOOTHING AND EMPOWERING TOO.



OTHER INFO: I DID MY FIELDWORK IN ATHENS BETWEEN 2015 AND 2017, AT THE HEIGHTS OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. I CARRIED OUT MY RESEARCH ACROSS SOME GRASSROOTS MEDICAL FACILITIES AND I'VE ENDED UP WRITING ABOUT PHARMACEUTICALS. HOWEVER MY DECISION TO GO TO GREECE WAS MOTIVATED BY THE FACT THAT THE PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEM WAS INSPIRED BY BASAGLIA AND I WANTED TO LOOK AT COMMUNITY CARE. BUT THEN I LET THE ETHNOGRAPHY SPEAK...

(7)



[Download \(PDF, 16.76MB\)](#)

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