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**Final Written Assignment
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Fascinating Racism¹ in the age of the Greek crisis.

Stories of Resistance.

The present paper describes a project undertaken by a part of the Antiracist Group of the University of Crete. Given that the onset of the Greek Financial Crisis has been accompanied by an increasing prevalence of racist and nationalistic discourse, our project intended to address the problem of racism and its multiple effects in our local community, the city of Rethymno. In this effort we applied narrative practice, which assisted us in conducting group discussions and offered a communicative context of sharing, understanding and dealing with the issues in question. Moreover, it helped us make sense of our own experiences, especially those experiences that were intense and frustrating. We focused on the effects of individualism and contemporary power practices which we believe play an important role in creating and maintaining racist attitudes. When people experience a prevailing sense of fear, such factors mediate to transform fear into hatred, which is subsequently redirected onto an imaginary Other, perceived as the incarnation of Threat. Since racism is a sensitive matter, destined to raise high tensions among disagreeing individuals and groups, we found the use of empathic listening² helpful in achieving constructive communication. We also made use of specific narrative tools, such as narrative documents, externalising conversations, conversations that highlight unique outcomes etc. This paper is a presentation of our work so far.

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The title was inspired by Susan Sontag's essay *Fascinating Fascism* (1975, The New York Review of Books)

² We use the term *empathy* as defined within the discursive tradition of thought and “postmodern therapies”. Sinclair and Monk (2005) differentiate the term from the liberal-humanistic accounts of mainstream counseling by associating it to the concepts of *deconstruction*, *positioning* and *discourse*. They suggest that these post-structural tools lead to a 'reconceptualization of empathy that fully appreciates the extent to which our clients' experiences are necessarily a sociocultural production' (Sinclair & Monk, 2005, p. 2005). Moreover, they recommend the adoption of 'a reflective, respectful and socially just' empathetic stance (Sinclair & Monk, 2005, p. 2005). During our group meetings and discussions, whenever a frustrating feeling or experience (e.g. disappointment, anger, passivity etc.) would emerge, we tried to enlighten and deconstruct its underlying social factors while avoiding the use of individualistic interpretation. Narrative practice (e.g. the use of externalizing conversations) offered us many opportunities to apply this type of discursive empathy.

Introduction: A short tale of the Greek crisis³

Spring 2010. The Greek government resorts to the International Monetary Fund in order to solve the government debt crisis. The harsh austerity measures, which followed the government's decisions and the lending agreements' conditions, led to income and pension reductions, a tremendous rise in unemployment, aggressive plans of privatisation, authoritarian fiscal regulations and eventually to the increase of sovereign debt. These years of recession resulted in diminished health and education services, over-indebted households, one in three Greeks living on or below the poverty line, an increase in suicide rates, over 20.000 homeless people in Athens, unemployment of one in two young people, increased emigration rates and thousands of people living on 500 euros per month. The government responded to the public reaction with repressive measures against massive protest demonstrations, violation of workers' rights and unconstitutional limitation of democratic freedoms.

During those extreme and disastrous political and social transformations, the government adopted a harsher immigration policy and the formal political and media discourse became infused with racist stands. We witnessed inhumane living conditions in refugee reception centers⁴, the current prime minister referring to the 'takeover of our cities by illegal immigrants' in his campaign election speech, the public humiliation of female HIV-positive sex workers⁵ who were treated as a threat against public health and had their photographs and personal data published by the media under the public prosecutor's order. This being the tip of the iceberg, the far-right Golden Dawn party, whose members have been linked to violent attacks against immigrants, entered the parliament for the first time coming fifth in the 2012 elections with 6.92 per cent.

In the meantime

In the aftermath of the elections, some of the members of our antiracist group started discussing about our next moves. We were genuinely confused and deeply disappointed. In what ways could we react to this wave of racism? How could we respond to the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment we were facing daily? Had all our actions –the actions of the left-wing world in general– against any sort of discrimination before the crisis been in vain? Many argued that the crisis acted merely as a pretense that allowed the Greek society to show its real face, a deeply racist face. Various historical, political and cultural explanations were offered in order to justify this assumption. This way of reasoning inevitably led to the conclusion that racism was deeply rooted and interwoven in our culture and thus unchangeable⁶, which meant that there was nothing we could do except choose

³ Various sources were used for the *Introduction*. A selective list of references is provided at the end of the paper.

⁴ Not surprisingly, the refugee and immigrant reception centers are informally called 'concentration camps'.

⁵ It was implied at first that these women were illegal immigrants.

⁶ These assumptions, even if they do not bear explicit naturalistic meanings, perhaps leave space for naturalistic and

sides.

Many of us maintained such assumptions. After all, a local extreme nationalistic group had been active in the city of Rethymno long before the crisis. But we also realised that we were speaking of a society we knew little about. Even though we wandered the same streets for years, we had been living within a different social reality than the majority of the local population. Most of us were university students, actively involved in various contexts, but our activities were confined to specific environments: academia, left-wing parties and groups, activists etc. So our first decision was to try to communicate with a world very different from ours, the world that existed beyond our known contexts. We wanted to come in touch with and understand a local community which we had preconceived as potentially racist.

In order to do that, we decided that our weekly meetings should also function as a time to reflect on our first attempts to communicate with people from other contexts. At the same time, we started having externalising conversations about our understandings of the rise of racism in Greece (including its history and effects, its tactics and appeal), and the ways of resistance that we encountered in our lives. We thought that this way of talking could function as a 'counter- practice to those that objectify the identities of people' (White, 2007, p. 26) and might prove helpful in our everyday discussions. During those conversations, we tried to write a document (we kept a small record) in order to gather some thoughts that were helpful to us. The following is a small part of that document.

Racism: What are we talking about?

Using externalising conversations in our hazardous⁷ attempt to position racism in its current social, economic and political context.

What is racism today, anyway?

The formation of racist opinions and attitudes is one way of making sense and attributing meaning to the current economic and political situation in Greece. It is being used as a means to construct a

generalising connotations to emerge. Under the 'racist' cultural and historical characteristics that are attributed to Greek society, lies a 'truth' about the 'core' of this society and the people it consists of. Under this scope, those characteristics might lead to generalised ideas about an unchangeable nature of the larger part of this society. Additionally, as Zizek suggests, criticism towards 'common' people's racist opinions is an arrogant stance and bears 'negative class connotations. It's as if we, the upper middle class liberals, underestimate ordinary people' (Zizek, cited in AmetReloads, 2013).

⁷ We would like to emphasise that this attempt was not an easy task. During this process, different and contradictory opinions about the 'nature' and the 'history' of racism came forth. Finally, we decided to narrow our focus on Greece's current situation, even though we understood that an analysis of Racism decontextualised from its broader historical and political background might be problematic. Focusing on the rise of racism in present Greece –and not on the phenomenon of racism generally– offered an opportunity to understand how extremely rapid economic and political transformations can lead to the adoption of anti-immigrant ideas even by people who did not express them previously.

'national identity' at risk during the crisis period. Its history is connected to one aspect of reality that is socially constructed by the mass media and by the formal conservative political system.

Racist intolerance can be seen as the next step that naturally followed the moderate, 'reasonable' anti-immigrant discourse, practices and beliefs that existed before the crisis. Its history is connected to the institutionalised racism that dictated the insufficient immigration policies, policies that had dividing results. One more aspect of its history is the inadequate prosecution and penalisation of racial attacks. Furthermore, our educational system, where the Orthodox Christian dogma dominates against other religions and history is taught in an ethnocentric way, is deeply related to this intolerance.

Racism as a product of indifference and individualism. When you feel threatened and unable to fulfill your basic needs, you don't care about other people's lives, especially the lives of the immigrants. Its history is connected to the individualistic, consumerist culture imposed by the neoliberal model of life and also to the tradition of political clientelism which replaced the democratic principles and confined political imperatives to the pursuit of individual privileges as a reward for our vote.

Anti-immigrant discourse's appeal

The far-right fascist party produces intentionally confusing discourse that resembles left-wing political ideology (e.g. exploitation of the people by politicians, bankers etc.). The main difference is that their discourse is positioned in a nationalistic context. By relating the 'power of protest' to nationalistic ideology, Golden Dawn is establishing itself as the only authentic voice of effective protest against austerity, thus popularising nationalism and promoting stricter anti-immigrant policies. Additionally, where 'the corrupted political system' fails, the members of Golden Dawn undertake the role of 'setting things straight' through actions like slapping a female parliamentarian publicly and destroying foreigners' market stands.

Nationalistic discourse and extreme right ideas managed to permeate the public opinion by providing a counterweight to the widespread European assumption that the Greek people are inherently corrupted. The celebration of Greek pride and the distortion of our history in order to present us as a blessed and charismatic nation are offered as an antidote to our national humiliation.

Effects

Increasing sense of fear and insecurity.

Increase in racist attacks (beatings and murders)

Entrance of the Golden Dawn into the parliament and legitimisation of a party ideologically related to neo-Nazism and nationalistic beliefs.

Legitimisation of racist attitudes and practices in our everyday reality. Opinions that used to be unacceptable before the crisis, are now acceptable.

Social construction of a Dangerous Other in order to define our national identity in terms of differentiation from her/him. His/her attributed characteristics are: foreigner, illegal, thief, dirty, uncivilized, carrier of various infectious diseases etc.

Social division and various types of discrimination. When racist views are openly expressed, it creates the opportunity for other forms of discrimination to emerge in turn, and construct an Other who allegedly offends the traditional Greek way of life (i.e. left-wing and anti-authoritarian people who follow a different way of living and who defend immigrants and minority groups, homosexuals, women, unemployed, rebellious youth etc.).

Revival of the culture of masculinity. The 'savior' who will relieve us of our affliction is a white Greek man who will use all the necessary means, even brutality, to meet his goals.

Existing ways of resistance in our everyday lives and in the lives of others

Various organised contexts in which the fight against the rise of racism is an everyday reality:

Left-wing political parties, groups and anarchist/antiauthoritarian collectives which initiate or participate in a broad spectrum of actions (antifascist networks, formulation and diffusion of ideas that stand against the dominant racist discourse, interventions within towns and small communities, even within places where antifascist movements did not exist before the crisis, protests against the abuse of immigrants and against fascism etc.).

Citizen journalism as an alternative to conventional journalism. Open web communities, web radios, bloggers and independent columnists share their work freely and inform the public rapidly via the social media, creating a wave of alternative information against the discourse of the mass media and the politicians. The dissemination of this kind of information recently led to the boycott of the 'bloody strawberries'⁸

Artistic world: Artists, art and cultural collectives and associations respond against racist stands (theatrical plays, exhibitions, festivals, and film screenings in collaboration with ANTIFA networks). Established artists take a stand against racist incidents, cartoonists publish corresponding drawings etc. An emerging movement of young artists who address our social and

⁸ It was a reaction to shootings against 29 foreign workers by three strawberry plantation foremen in the area of Manolada.

political concerns through their creations.

Various reactions of state institutions and labor unions against Golden Dawn's parliamentary demands. For example, many municipalities denied providing school data concerning the attendance of immigrants' children in kindergartens; health professionals and hospital administrations rejected Golden Dawn's demand to establish a blood bank exclusive to Greek citizens.

Educational World: University and high school students' associations responses, like the occupation of schools after the beating of students. Associations of university and high school professors conduct open lectures on the prevalence of racist violence in schools. Academic conferences explore the history of fascism. Educational networks organize interventions within schools in order to minimise racist attitudes.

Athletic unions' responses against neo-Nazi acts of athletes and football players (e.g. the Hellenic Football Federation decided a player's lifelong exclusion from all national football teams).

Public space and antiracism:

Posters and broadsheets, demonstrations and gatherings in public spaces in order to protest against violent attacks, concerts, antiracist graffiti and the erasure of racist graffiti.

Antiracism is not a 'privilege' of left-wing and antiauthoritarian people. 'Small' acts of resistance against the dominant discourse:

Many people adopt an antiracist position based on their humanistic principles and values, on their religious beliefs or on values of solidarity stemming from historical and collective hardships. We witness informal personal and collective antiracist choices made within an increasingly difficult and hostile social environment and everyday small acts of solidarity from 'ordinary' people.

We witness 'small' acts of resistance when...

'When we encounter people who insist on believing that racism is not the answer to their problems, even though they live in a ghetto where danger of being attacked or robbed is an everyday reality'.

'When a small restaurant owner distributes food to 'foreign' children because he cannot bear to watch children starve in our country'.

'When people offer help to immigrants who are in a depleted state after having passed the borders; when older people cry upon seeing impoverished immigrants because they perceive them as fellow human beings and not as a possible threat; when individuals who live on the Greek borders do not follow the dominant discourse of border control'.

'When young and older individuals protest against racist opinions being spoken out loud in public

spaces. When people explicitly declare their antiracist stands. This is a way to resist being silenced'.

'When we read statements like the following:

We are the great-grandmothers who lived through the WWII German Occupation and said 'never again fascism'. We are the grandmothers who witnessed the Greek Civil War and said 'never again war'. We are the mothers who lost our children to immigration and said 'never again racism'. We are the daughters who lived under the junta (military dictatorship of 1967-1974) and said 'never again an authoritarian regime'. We are the granddaughters who never witnessed the occupation, the civil war, the immigration era and the junta but now experience all of them at once. We are the great-granddaughters who dream of, hope for and demand a better future'.⁹

These externalising conversations had multiple effects on the way we understood our reality. They helped us take a distance from the preconceived ideas we had about Greek society as a historically racist society. They transformed our relationship to the problem, redefining it as a product of culture, history and politics instead of the fault of individuals (Carey & Russell, 2002), making a more socially- and culturally-informed understanding of the rise of racism¹⁰ and antiracism possible. They enabled us to follow the narrative path –'the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem'– which allowed us to stop searching for responsibilities amongst us and start focusing on racism's impact on our lives and the possible paths of resistance. This created a sense of unity –with no disregard to our differences– between us and the local community, which replaced the oversimplified categories of racist versus antiracist, categories that have been used to divide the Greek population into opposing polarities¹¹. We refocused the problem further when we realized that the rise of racism was accompanied by another aspect, that of social division.

The second part of the externalising conversations, considering the ways of resistance, made a more detailed description of the other voices possible; voices that were normally absent within the formal political and the mass media discourse but also within our own conversations. After these discussions, we realized that we do not usually listen to this kind of descriptions, because we constantly live under the multiple effects of racism which results in our stories being entirely

⁹ Excerpt from an open letter written by the women of Halkidiki who fight against the expansion of gold mining activities which threaten to destroy the whole area.

¹⁰ As a system that is constructed and has specific consequences on a population that is subjected to hard austerity measures.

¹¹ At this point, the work of the CARE counselors and Yvonne Sliep (1998) was helpful in many ways. It worked as an example of a successful application of the externalising process to a wider level, to a community. Especially the conclusion 'Space is created for the community to join together against the problem of AIDS. Issues that may have been dividing the village begin to be seen as a consequence of AIDS, rather than the fault of individuals, and this increases the possibility of collective action' (p. 146) was very inspiring and consistent with our purposes.

infused with the problem and, thus, incomplete. As a result, we stood frozen, dazed, shocked and finally inert toward a social situation against which (we believed) there was nothing we could do. Focusing on the existing ways of response and action, without devaluing their political and social consequences and effectiveness and without underestimating the severity of the problem, designated a more complex reality. We believe that acknowledging this complex inclusive reality enabled us to surpass our disappointment and motivated us to become more active political and social agents.

Furthermore, this work created a space of exploring and enriching the unique outcomes of daily informal reactions against the anti-immigrant discourse. Those unique outcomes emerged from a more careful observation of our reality and from our everyday contact to other people. Additionally, it offered the opportunity to re-author our ways of resistance. We could detect multiple and diverse cracks¹² within the dominant discourse, cracks that went unnoticed or seemed trivial when our narrative was too superficial or confined within a strictly political frame of understanding. This re-authoring led to fruitful conversations that broadened the meaning of political action, since we included various daily individual and local responses and initiatives which are not traditionally considered as acts of resistance because they are not part of political activism. Our externalising conversations concerning the effects of the various acts of resistance together with an expanded understanding of political action, allowed us to refocus our own group actions. We decided that one of our goals would be the enrichment and empowerment of these daily informal responses. This decision was based on the belief that social change can come about through the expansion and proliferation of the 'cracks' that exist in the dominant racist discourse. This path of action may additionally address the problem of social division.

Dismantling social division:

Conducting informal everyday conversations in various social contexts in order to address the issue of the crisis and its relation to the rise of racism.

This process offered our group the opportunity to discuss about and suggest some informal ways of participating in the local community. Events, speeches and seminars had been very constructive until now, but, as aforementioned, they only attracted people from specific social networks. We wanted to establish communication with people from different contexts, who –like us– faced the crisis and its consequences on a daily basis. During a six month period, we came in touch and exchanged opinions with people who were close to us but did not share our ideology; people we met at work, in our practicum, our neighborhood etc. Additionally, we visited the local *kafenía*¹³ and

¹² We are using the term 'crack' as referred in Holloway's book, *Crack Capitalism* (2010). The term connotes ordinary moments and spaces of resistance and rebellion in which we assert a different form of doing and living.

¹³ Kafenio (plural Kafenia) is a traditional greek coffee place that often functions as a social center, especially within

participated in the political and social discussions that took place there. We were thus exposed to a series of diverse attitudes towards racism; some of which were interesting, while others infuriated us.

This journey was very interesting but also a difficult task. A lot of stories came across; stories of stereotyping our interlocutor when we failed to leave behind our ideology, and vice versa. Stories of despair and anger when the Reality of Crisis reached our group members and we felt that we did not have the time and the energy to struggle in order to find a common ground with people who don't share our beliefs. Stories of Fear and Insecurity when we were faced with frustrating and dangerous events in our everyday life (beatings of friends, conflicts between members of Golden Dawn and left-wing people etc). Stories of hope when, against all odds, we stuck to the values that engaged us in this path of communicating and we finally created a context of understanding each other. During this process we consulted with various people in an attempt to share our concerns. For example we had a meeting with Vasilis –a man who has engaged in many conversations about racism in the kafenia– and we invited him to function informally as an outsider-witness¹⁴. His constructive feedback helped us keep on going even during times when we feared that our efforts to communicate with a different world were futile, and encouraged us to continue exploring these different social contexts even when we met with criticism.

During our group meetings, we also posed a question about how our social position in the local community affects our attempts to communicate with other people¹⁵. To which extent does our social position lead to positive or negative effects, and under what conditions? This question offered us an opportunity to explore and reflect on our ways of communicating with socially diverse individuals. We started pinpointing some of our most self-evident attributes, toward which other people responded in a certain way, depending on the context and the individuals' attitudes. For example, when trying to engage in discussions with people at the local kafenia (which tend to be male-dominated), being Greek, Cretan, white, heterosexual and male was a favorable condition and was met with greater receptiveness. At the same time, being young and highly educated sometimes

small communities. In the past, the kafenio was thought of as the main gathering place of a community where people conducted political discussions. Traditionally, it was a gathering place mostly for men. This tradition still survives to an extent. It is rare to meet young people or women in a kafenio. People of older generations usually gather there to play cards and talk casually about political and social issues that concern them.

¹⁴ The outsider-witness practice proved to be effective, even though it was inaccurately applied. The consultation with Vasilis gave us the opportunity to share our concerns and insecurities with a like-minded person whose reflections were valuable to us. We believe that this process thickened our story of determination and mitigated our feelings of isolation (Carey & Russell, 2006). That's why we will attempt to get in touch with other people and initiatives. For those purposes we are trying to shoot a video which will function as a collective document and will be used whenever we invite people or groups in our meetings as outsider-witnesses.

¹⁵ This line of questioning was based on an essay by Raheim et al. (n. d.) *An invitation to narrative practitioners to address privilege and dominance*. Additionally, throughout our group conversations we constantly had in mind that: 'When it comes to privilege, it doesn't matter who we really are. What matters is who other people think we are, which is to say, the social categories they put us in' (Johnson, 2001, p. 35).

acted as an obstacle in that specific context. Whereas, the least favored condition consisted of being a non-Cretan female university student.

So, we discussed about certain practical skills that have been proven helpful in such attempts. The goal behind our efforts was to create a shared emotion of unity between very different people, an emotion that would help us explore and search for common solutions. A second document was written in regard to our ways of conducting everyday constructive conversations about the crisis and the rise of racism:

Defining our ways of listening and discussing with others

We noticed the emergence of hierarchical positions among the conversation participants on account of the possession or lacking of certain privileges. We attempted to balance those inequalities by using basic conversational and listening skills that we found helpful:

'I now try to avoid patronising and using too much jargon. I realized that I tended to act condescendingly toward people who I thought were uneducated and politically inactive. When talking to them, I would 'politely' discard their views, saying they 'lack the knowledge' and then proceed to explain the problem in question in my own terms. After reflecting on the issue of privileges, I realised that I had acted as an 'expert' who provided interpretations and solutions in an incomprehensible and strictly political language; a language that was for the most part inconsistent with my interlocutor's life experience. This created a distance between us during our conversations. It was not until we started discussing our common experiences and practical dilemmas, that we managed to construct a communication context characterised by a shared language. We were able then to reach common conclusions, which –although not formulated in political terms– where deeply political in their essence...'

'When I truly disagree with someone's opinion, I express my disagreement openly. I explain why I disagree, providing examples from my life, my choices and the values that lie behind those choices. I associate this kind of honesty with a desire to show my real face and at the same time I try to listen carefully to what the other person has to say. Honesty and attentive listening opens a shared space of communication on equal terms'.

'I try to limit my own dogmatism. Unless you give space to the person you are discussing with, he/she won't care about your arguments. That takes time. When I first started discussing about racism with people who didn't share my beliefs, I would lose my temper. In time, I realised that many things we take for granted, are not in fact –they are only valid within a particular local and political context. The group conversations about our position in the local community helped me realise that there is a whole different world outside my world of which I know little about. So, my

first step was to approach that world and to listen to what it had to say, in an open manner. The effects of this way of communicating are multiple. It creates a habit of seeing reality through various lenses and of being open to different opinions, for both sides; it allows us to at least understand each other, even if we disagree in the end. In this way, you spend less time trying to refute an opinion, and more time trying to understand it'.

'I try to use double listening when I hear a contradicting opinion. In the past, when someone told me 'I am not a racist, but...' I would interpret it as an excuse and I would argue that the use of the word 'but' in the same sentence was contradicting. After our group started discussing about the unique outcomes that had emerged against the dominant anti-immigrant discourse, my focus started to shift. Instead of fixating on the contradicting content of statements such as the above, I started paying more attention to the first part of the sentence (I am not a racist) and asking questions about my interlocutor's antiracist thoughts. Many times, I would end up being pleasantly surprised in agreeing with what he/she had to say. I found that this shift in focus allowed people to avoid adopting a potentially defensive stance and encouraged them to come in touch with their values and commitments, which tend to be overlooked when one lives under harsh conditions'.

'Invitation to take responsibility. Establishing a context of shared concerns and dilemmas offers the opportunity to invite people to take responsibility for their views and actions. In response to the arguments that were in favor of Golden Dawn's tactics because of their alleged effectiveness, we posed questions such as: Where does this road of social division –imposed by Golden Dawn– lead us? Are we all willing to live under civil war conditions? In those instances where we failed to surpass certain generational gaps with older people, we tried to limit the distance between us, by stressing the importance of making the right decisions in the present, so that we and their children won't have to witness a future of conflict and social division'.

Issues for further exploration. Some initial observations:

This path has been difficult to follow but we try to treat each challenge as a new opportunity. We are determined to carry on with our fundamental objectives; to enrich our current understandings, to seek for unique outcomes in our social environment, to expand and multiply the existing 'cracks' in the dominant discourse, and to continue reflecting upon our ways of communicating. We believe that this effort constitutes an additional way of resistance and hope to expand it further by bringing forth new ideas, actions and considerations. Our initial observations have led us to respective issues that require further exploration.

During our conversational encounters with the local community, we often came across racist

opinions that seemed to be rather malleable and negotiable – instead of solid and explicit– when examined under certain conditions. On addressing the issue of racism, we met with more confusion than certainty. We would like to believe that, at the end of our conversations, some of the participants –including ourselves– gained a wider understanding of the rise of racism, even if they did not change their stands entirely. Each time we met again, we would notice an increasing enrichment of thoughts and concerns among us. This observation taught us that constructive communication requires patience and continual effort. Since these discussions exert only a minor effect on the lives and the social networks of people involved, our goal is to search for ways to expand their effects and include as many people as possible. We believe that the use of definitional ceremonies may prove helpful in this endeavour, which is why we include it in our future plans.

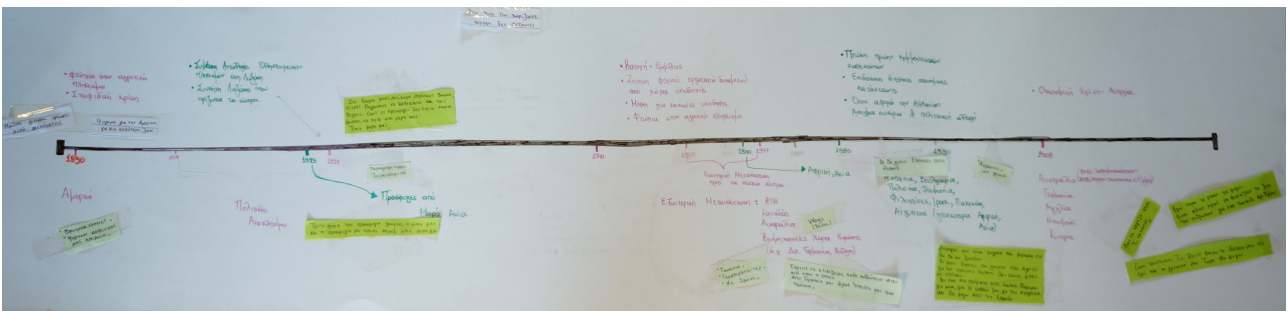
Furthermore, in the course of our group activities, we came across suggested solutions to the economic crisis and the rise of racism that we hadn't thought about previously. When we stopped raising political arguments about the problem of immigration and racism, and paid more attention to local practices, a new space was opened that allowed the emergence of local solutions¹⁶. We were informed about the practices that had established a local barter economy in the villages of Rethymno, as a response to the economic crisis. When asked about the role of immigrants in this context, some of the respondents replied that the immigrants, who prefer to stay here rather than return to their homelands, should be accepted regardless of their nationality¹⁷. This experience has taught us a lot, and we wish to keep a collective record that will document the richness and wisdom of local practices and knowledges in order to detect and highlight those 'psychosocial strategies built into our traditions' (Arulampalam et al., 2006, p. 88).

Among the narratives that emerged during our conversations, were the stories of immigration, collective hardships and solidarity that have taken place during the last century of our history. This observation made us wonder whether those parts of our collective memory could stand

¹⁶ The emergence of local solutions and practices focused our attention on the importance of *meaning* and how cultural and social processes participate in its construction. We were reminded of Bruner's statement: 'the very shape of our lives- the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds – is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretation'. (Bruner, 1990, p. 33). In connecting narrative practice to Bruner's ideas concerning folk psychology, Michael White mentions the following: 'It casts people as active mediators, negotiators and as representatives of their own lives, doing so separately and in unison to others. It is a psychology that is about people living their lives out according to certain intentions and purposes, in the pursuit of what matters to them' (White, 2004, p. 67). In the course of our group discussions, we became more aware of the meaning making process which accompanies local practices and, subsequently, that awareness prompted us to learn more about it in order to enlighten and foreground its underlying values. Additionally, as participants talked more and more about these ideas and practices, we noticed a gradual enrichment of 'grammars of experience' (Denborough, 2008, p. 180) (with the addition of 'We'), an emergence of collective speech and action which functioned as a counterweight to the language promoted by the individualistic culture.

¹⁷ We were particularly struck by a young man who, when asked about the role of immigrants in the local community, replied, '*I do not know and I think you don't know either; I would ask them firstly what they want to do; I would ask them if they want to stay here*'. This response reminded us of the answer that Freire gave to Denborough: 'He said that this was a question that was impossible for him to answer- that I was, in fact, looking in the wrong place for the answer to that question. He said the answer to that question could only be found in conversation and in connection with those who are homeless'. (Denborough, 2008, p. x)

against the emerging racist discourse. During the 20th century, Greece witnessed at least 2 massive immigration waves. Within those stories, Greeks and the immigrants that live in Greece, can identify the common concerns and experiences that we share. We believe that these stories of immigration invite people to see behind the veil of nationality and constructed boundaries. Our group started researching the immigration waves from and to Greece during the 20th century, and designed a map and a timeline of the history of immigration (inspired by the work of Denborough, 2008), in order to use it in our future discussion groups. This is intended to be a 'project in process' that will be open to whoever wants to add his/her personal testimony. It could also function as a good starting point for conversations about immigration experiences.



Timeline of the history of immigration: personal and collective stories



Map of the history of immigration (project in process)

'When the crisis knocks on your door': Stories of despair and double listening

In the course of this project, we encountered various and increasing difficulties that discouraged us

from continuing our antiracist actions and led us to passivity. When the crisis reaches your personal life, its effects render you unable to take action and willing to surrender your power of decision-making to others. As a result of facing cruel working conditions (i.e. precarious, unpaid, poorly paid or insecure work) and unemployment, we tend to prioritise our own survival and search for more individually-oriented solutions. In the past months, we have observed an increase in the attacks made against antifascist individuals in our community, attacks which make us feel insecure in places where we previously felt safe. We also experience various kinds of social discrimination given that the dominant discourse treats every person who fights for social change as dangerous. Through the gradual limitation of democratic freedoms, we –the “dangerous others”– have lost our voices and our tools of reaction. At the same time, we are called to respond on various fronts of social injustice; the need to be active within different contexts simultaneously leads to exhaustion. Furthermore, we experience the political fragmentation of left-wing and antiauthoritarian groups, which disappoints us and forces us to confront criticism. Finally, we have to deal with our frustration and shock, when anti-immigrant stands manifest within our own families and social networks.

In order to deal with the difficult and frustrating parts of our work, we used double listening, unique outcomes and the idea of absent but implicit. We also conducted conversations in order to gather stories of strength that sustain us through difficult times.¹⁸ The effects of this process were very empowering and liberating for us, so, we would like to include here a part of a collective narrative document concerning our stories, as an epilogue to this journey.

Behind the frustration, the fear and the anger, lies the path of solidarity.

Stories of strength.

Providing an answer to injustice:

Providing an answer to injustice is a commitment to myself, my generation and the future generations –a commitment to all the repressed people of this country. At some point in our lives, we realised that this world has been divided into the Privileged and the Oppressed; a division that is not natural or biological, but constructed. From then on, we understood that we have a duty to

¹⁸ In the course of our group discussions, we tried to follow the principles of direct democracy in order to minimise any intrinsic power privileges among participants so as to allow the seamless exchange and co-authoring of opinions. On applying narrative practice, and particularly during our discussions about stories of strength, I (Georgia) tried to reformulate my questions according to the vocabulary that was used by the group members. When a term or an expression felt inconsistent with their experiences, they were free to reformulate the questions in their own words, using a more politically- oriented language. As a result, the terms *hopes* and *dreams* were replaced by *political* and *social imperatives* or *goals*, while *beliefs* and *values* were often *ideological* or were replaced by *ideology* or *political principles*. In accordance with the theory of social constructionism which permeates narrative practice, I tried to respect the language spoken by the group members, keeping in mind that the language in which we express ourselves plays an active role in the construction of our reality and in the way we perceive ourselves and others.

restore this injustice against us and especially against those who have suffered greater oppression. Racism is one of the most powerful weapons that the ruling class uses to control us. When immigrants -who have been forced to leave their homelands because of speculative wars- enter our countries, they are represented by the media not as workers, as people like us, but as heathens, thieves, dirty and uncivilized subhumans. That is why I continue to be antiracist. I am antiracist because this seems utterly unfair.

Justice as an antidote to the prevalence of constructed social divisions:

So, one of our fundamental principles is justice. We share this principle with many people and it has a long history in our lives. Many have inspired us to this direction: Our families who encouraged us to engage in humanistic practices, certain teachers and professors who provided a political frame to our humanistic ideas, the groups we have joined where we learned how to fight collectively for social justice. If I had to capture all that I've learned in just a few words, I would describe it like this:

There is a sketch drawing that depicts three people –one short, one of average height and one tall– standing behind a wall. Each of them is standing on top of three boxes. The tall one can see over the wall, the average one can only glimpse over, while the short one cannot see at all. On the bottom is written Equality. Then, there is a subsequent drawing that depicts the same three people differently: the short one stands on five of the boxes, the average one stands on two, and the tall one stands on no box. In this way they can all see over the wall. On the bottom is written Justice. This, in my opinion, is true justice.

The solidarity of the repressed:

Most of us no longer belong to the privileged upper class, while many of us did not belong to it even before the crisis. We have been living under difficult circumstances and we experience a sense of solidarity which stems from an emotional connection that cannot be explained merely in political terms. During my discussions with economic immigrants, I was amazed by their ability to endure life's hardships –I have had similar experiences in my family in the past and it has taught me a lot. Even though my life difficulties cannot be compared to theirs, I found a common ground with them that motivates me to carry on fighting for their and my own rights.

'Taking charge of our lives' or 'Another world is possible'.

Expectations stemming from our own ideological beliefs and the ideas, values and lives that we share with our friends and close ones:

Our primary goal is to stop the expansion of fascism in our country and elsewhere. Furthermore,

we hope and wish to be part of a strong local network, developed by the people and for the people, consisting of individuals who are willing to participate in a shared vision of political imperatives and goals; a network that will offer an alternative to neoliberalism and will adhere to principles such as social justice and respect for nature; a network based on the concept of social self-organization, which allows people to take charge of their lives by making direct decisions within the frame of a bottom-up governance; that will engage us in active partaking and will reshape the mentality of political passivity, and of letting others represent our interests. In other words, we aspire to participate in a self-organizing system that will provide alternative tools to influence our political and social reality, beyond voting.

All these ideas stem from our interaction with a variety of different people and contexts. For example, I fondly remember a course I took on the works of Cornelius Castoriadis, whose teachings were eagerly conveyed to us by a passionate instructor. I remember being deeply impressed by Castoriadis' thought because of its liberating effect. I was particularly struck by his critical thinking and the fact that he stressed the importance of maintaining an active role towards political institutions; given that institutions are created by the people, only the people retain the power to reshape them.

Furthermore, some of our ideas originated from our involvement in the university cultural centre. Our experiences there taught us a lot and influenced our current ideological and political commitments. The cultural centre is not a vague concept, but a dynamic system comprised of its individual components and their interactions. Participating in such a system is an experience that shapes your whole reality, your life. Personally, it gave me the opportunity to engage in cooperative practices, to open myself up and be active instead of withdrawn from social reality, to test my ability of being tolerant and to become resilient in the face of adversities. We experienced the importance of engaging in collective struggles, instead of being passive observers, and maintaining solidarity between us regardless of the challenges we meet. The knowledge I gained from these experiences has been very important to me; because of it, I am no longer confined to my personal world, to a box.

Being left-wing means taking action:

Being left-wing is not something that can be merely declared and taken at face value; it is something that is demonstrated by our actions. Unless my actions follow my beliefs, I will be distanced from my own values, my political decisions, and my social environment. Either way, I can't avoid being stigmatised for my beliefs. The possibility of being harassed or abused scares me, but what scares me the most is remaining passive. What scares me the most is the possibility that my town will be filled with fascists and that I won't be able to leave my own house. That scares me

the most.

I can't just sidestep the path whenever it becomes too rocky:

Adopting an antiracist position is a matter of personal and collective values and it requires a serious commitment on all levels. In this light, it is a blessing and a curse. It requires taking into account the risk of being targeted by certain political groups and the danger of being harassed. It can take the form of a personal struggle when you are confronted with the reality of increasing social impoverishment. Witnessing homeless people sleeping on the street and searching the garbage for food is no longer part of a movie scene but an everyday reality. We are constantly confronted with the responsibility to take a stand on these matters. An antiracist position is essentially a political position that has to be a product of constant reflection and continuous re-evaluation. An example that comes to mind is the following: I used to drive my car leaving the doors unlocked. At some point, I realized that I would lock my doors when stopping at a red light for fear of the immigrant beggars that stood by. This event posed a political dilemma that still concerns me. I can't just sidestep the path I chose to follow every time it becomes too rocky. This is an important part of what defines me, an important part of who I am.

'They are children of many men, our words'

Giorgos Seferis, *On Stage*, 1966

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Korre Georgia

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