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A Journey of Echoes and Modernities: A Reflective Journal of a Modern Sojourner

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Abstract: The echo of a cosmopolitan Hellenic era as described by the Alexandrine poet expresses that “fluidity” is a vital point of departure in the modern world. Goals and journeys are ends in themselves; an endless process of self-determination and the pursuit of completion. This article is a personal testimony of a transformative learning journey. It is an attempt to track and document important moments, incidents, and thoughts in a “self-reflexive” project illustrating the changeability and mutability of self-identification process.

Keywords: Late Modernity, Reflexive Modernization, Reflexivity, Individuality, Disembedding, Sojourner, Dual Territoriality, Symbolic Ethnicity

The Reflexive Project in Late Modernity

Modernity in contemporary society has transformed into a self-referring and radicalized late modernity. Traditional traits and modern social practices are constantly subject to interrogation and transformation. Late (Liquid) modernity or *reflexive modernization* (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Bauman 2000) is characterized by liquidity, discontinuity, uncertainty, and ambivalence as new areas of unpredictability have been created through the liberation and differentiation from past traditions, the possibility of social destructions and “self-made risks.” In this context, the individual can shift from one social position to another in a fluid manner assuming responsibility for its self-chosen patterns. Self-reflexivity and self-construction characterize the contemporary individual who may build a reflexive and multiple self in a fragmented world of competing and contrasting social conditions, identities and life-style cultures utilizing new knowledge. By being reflexive individuals are more conscious to changes and also make choices in an open way enjoying diversified experiences in separated time and space locales (Giddens 1991).

The *Dynamism* of late modernity has been mainly felt through *reflexivity, individuality, the separation of time and space and disembedding*. More specifically, the nature of our contemporary world is characterized by incessant reflexivity, namely the responsiveness of most aspects of social activity and selfhood to constant revision and transformation in the light of new knowledge or/and learning. Reflexivity and reflexive monitoring of behavior (Giddens, 1991) is an integral part of the self and social relations (Adams 2003, 222) as modern subjects “face the burden and the liberation of constructing their own identities” (Adams 2003, 222). Reflexive self-development is culturally embedded and takes into account the cultural determination of self-identity as past codes of practice coincide with newly adopted ones in a competing and contradictory way. Cultural boundaries, past habits, and new intercultural learning resides in a complex and reciprocal intersection creating a new spatial understanding. Reflexive control and self-awareness of selfhood however, transcends cultural origins liberating the agency (self). The agency engages in a chronic rethinking of personal beliefs, traditional traits and contrasts them with new intercultural learning.

In addition, the power of agency (*individuality*) is central in the process of self-formation and identity building in the late modernity (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Castells 1997). Individuals are more and more released from rigid traditional forms and deterministic constrains and they are in a position to build up their own biographies in a self-reflexive way (biographies have become self-reflexive and self-produced) (Beck 1992). Individual reflexivity liberates subjects into a world of diversified choices where they have to negotiate their lifestyles and

assume greater responsibility for them. However, along this emancipatory dimension of reflexivity, the radicalization of modernity also brings existential insecurity, uncertainty, a diversity of crisis situations, anomie and objective personal or global risks. According to Beck (1992), we live in a *risk society* of multiple dangers/risks, opportunities and contradictions.

Thus, self-identification process is fabricated through a complex diversity of choices and an increased role of individuals in decision making about their lives. It has become an ongoing self-conscious and consistent narrative of the self that has to be routinely created through reflexive activities and continually be rearranged based on diversified experiences and the fragmentation of everyday life. In this reflexive process of the selfhood (*reflexive project*, Giddens 1991), the narrative of self-identity is fragile due to social and personal transformation and *disembedding*. Disembedding refers among others to “the detachment of culture and society from local circumstances” (Arvanitis and Sakellariou 2014, 142) and the deterritorialization of ethnicity. It also means that prior supports and traditional ties that the self-identity was based upon are removed. Thus, familiarity and identity stability disappear resulting in anxieties and identity crisis.

Finally, in late modernity *time and space* became disconnected from the “situatedness” of place due to disembedding and acceleration process (Eriksen 2007, 35) creating a new *spatialities* or *heterotopias* (Tsolidis 2011). In these new spaces, self-identity is no longer bounded by a single place and it is produced by cultural boundary breaking, “perpetual transformation” of diverse lifeworld experiences and negotiation of cultural differences (Tsolidis 2011, 2). Overall, modern individuals operate within dynamic local, global and diasporic settings where contrasted images of identification (illusory/symbolic/real) are present.

This article is a reflexive narrative of selfhood based on my migrant and repatriation experience over a span of the past twenty years. As a researcher I have utilized *reflexivity* as a method to introspect (Finlay 2003). My reflexive journey of selfhood has become a source of personal insights and research observations. Following Giddens’ theorization (1991) I found that *personal reflexivity* undertook a prime position in self-identification process influenced by the dynamism of late modernity. Greece and Australia have become my personal *heterotopias*, where the various attachments to both *here* and *there* were felt.

The following two sections summarize the main assumptions and preconceptions prevailed in two different phases of my biography, namely during my migrant and repatriation journeys. This introspective narrative is an ongoing story about myself integrating insights of a modern *sojourner* (Cohen 1997).

Migrating to Australia

As you set out on the way to Ithaca hope that the road is a long one, filled with adventures, filled with understanding. The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes, Poseidon in his anger: do not fear them, you’ll never come across them on your way as long as your mind stays aloft, and a choice emotion touches your spirit and your body. The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes, savage Poseidon; you’ll not encounter them unless you carry them within your soul, unless your soul sets them up before you. (Translated by Daniel Mendelsohn, <http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=259&cat=1>)

The echo of the cosmopolitan traveler, as described by the Alexandrine poet Cavafy, expressed my self-chosen migration to Australia some twenty years ago. At that time goals and routes were ends in themselves; an endless process of self-determination and completion. When I decided to emigrate to Australia my first concern was to live and share experiences with the other half of my extended family. My assumption was that I am about to enter in a similar cultural experience as the one lived in Greece as I had never thought about what it would be like to be a Greek living in Diaspora. I embarked in a new journey of learning without recognizing that fluidity and

changeability are vital departure points in the modern world. My hellenocentric perception, though, was about to be challenged as I had to come to profound realizations about my personal identity and especially the juxtaposition of combining and bridging the distance between *here* and *there* (national/global and local/ethnic cultures).

My migrant experience had a profound impact on my realization of my ethnicity and the various stages I have gone through. During my early years of migration I had to come to terms with a progression from *Cultural Encapsulation* to *Cultural Identity Clarification* (stages 2 and 3 in Banks' typology) (Banks 2004). Namely, I had to rediscover my cultural consciousness remaining attached to the security of my own cultural group (especially my Australian family) although ambivalent feelings were present. Gradually, I identified my cultural assumptions and personal attitudes and challenged them maintaining at the same time a genuine cultural pride. Intercultural contact with my own Greek-Australian and other cultural groups enabled me to positively engulf diverse cultural experiences.

A summary of these assumptions is given below.

Ethnicity and Language Reflections

The vital link between ethnicity and language was a critical element in understanding the Greek cultural maintenance process, as well as self-identity. I believed that only the Greek language could fully express and reflect authentic Greekness and that the Greek language and culture were inseparable components of the Greek self-identification process even in diaspora. It was extremely difficult to accept that the Greek-Australian identity does not presuppose the use of the Greek language. This was partly because of an ethnocentric stance, based on the urge for language and cultural maintenance. In Greek tradition, language is the "quintessential symbol of ethnicity" (Fishman 1985). However, through my doctoral studies I came across some early research findings (Ross 1979) which have shown that there is no one to one relationship between language and ethnicity due to a variant language use in ethnic group development. For instance, some groups have experienced language revival (e.g., Hebrew) or symbolic valuing of a language, which they do not all speak (e.g., Welsh) or other groups maintained their languages, which lead to language separatism (Belgium). At the same time, it was through my personal intercultural learning and the acquisition of another language as well as the Greek language and cultural attrition of my second generation relatives, which forced me to acknowledge the prevailing importance of a person's self-definition in identity formation and I began to understand the new reality.

In addition, my personal understanding of the Greek language status had undergone a significant transformation in the context of Australian simplistic multiculturalism (celebration of diversity in mainstream society and reproduction of folk culture within the community). The latter disassociated language from everyday political, economic, and structural practices. Thus, Greek was a minority language only for private use, clearly defined by the dominant culture and unnecessary for survival. Ethnic language in Australia acted and continues to act as a domestic, private or leisure time code for the second and subsequent generations of children. I also came across the "linguistic market place" notion (Bourdieu 1991) as a contrast to the symbolic or communicative function of language. This notion refers to language persistence as long as its socioeconomic value is high for mainstream society. The Greek language had no great socioeconomic importance in Australia due to commensal emphasis on Asian languages. This realization had a detrimental impact on my sentiments and pride.

Personal Acculturation

My preconceptions on language-ethnicity nexus had their own impact on my effort to acquire and perform in another language due to my initial difficulty in using 'their' language with the same ease and comfort. In fact I could not picture myself speaking in another language. My

personal acculturation was at stake. For the first time ever, I was experiencing a minority status combined with feelings of extremely low self-esteem due to major obstacles such as restricted English language use, the Greek language minority status, as well as the unknown social structure (mainstream). The binary of *otherness* (*self* versus *others*) prevailed. I felt as an *exotic other*; a *stranger*. I sought to return to the Greek community life in order to feel engaged and part of a collectivity (with which I was more familiar, even though it was not a lifestyle I followed in Greece). I was extremely proud of being Greek and for first time this seemed to be of great importance to my life. I felt that I had to safeguard the Greek language and cultural core values (family ties/descent, shared peoplehood, national consciousness). As a young researcher I believed that loss of these significant pillars deprives a group of its ability to perpetuate itself as an authentic entity across generations, signaling the emergence of a “residualized culture (folklore).” During the early years of my migration I resisted the modern flux of diversity choosing to create boundaries and to stay within the narrow limits of my family environment discovering the Greek culture as experienced in Australia, from afar.

Engaging with the Familiar Others

After five years of settlement my self-identification reached stages 4 and 5 in Banks’ taxonomy (2004), namely the stages of *Bi-Ethnicity* and *Multi-Ethnicity and Reflective Nationalism*. Gradually, I developed positive personal, ethnic, and national identifications as well as positive attitudes towards other cultural groups. I acknowledged that the importance given to the Greek language is beyond the strictly utilitarian (communication) purpose and that it plays a more symbolic/emotional role. Language maintenance was more than a moral imperative; a self-defense mechanism toward assimilation. In addition, my strong bilingual skills made me capable to function within several ethnic cultural settings mainly through interacting with the *familiar others* and participating in mainstream activities. From a passive observer I became an active participant although the mainstream *others*’ perception about me still created barriers in my efforts for equitable participation in a multicultural society.

Furthermore, the closer contact with many Greek-Australians helped me understand that these Greeks (the *familiar others*) were somewhat different (e.g. due to their bilingualism, bicultural orientation and attachment with the traditional values, adaptability, commitment to the Australian nation). Slowly I have started to contextualize my thoughts, making a distinction between attitudes towards *Greekness* and behavioral patterns in expressing ethnicity. The intergenerational differences model was a useful tool in interpreting my family environment, and this for me became a very interesting case study. More specifically, the multi-dimensional manifestations of ethnicity into second and subsequent generations made me think that ethnicity is partly expressed through identity and symbols and not via practiced ethnic culture or participation in ethnic institutions. To that end ethnic affiliation is “with an abstract collectivity,” with no demand for members to engage themselves in arduous or time-consuming commitments. For that reason, the so called *symbolic ethnicity* (Ozolins 1993, 11) is likely to persist into subsequent generations.

I further elaborated on intergenerational differentiation as far identification concerns. It became apparent that ethnic identification in the second and third generations was a kind of *latent identity*, in Gillian Bottomley’s terms (1992), in which ethnicity and “the we-feeling” (the feeling of belonging to a specific ethnic community), were determined under new social and generational changes. There is a different sense of belonging and membership of an ethnic community. These new generations are Greeks because of their descent and symbolic ethnicity and not because of their Greek mainstream values, attitudes and behavior. I noted that “automatic enculturation in the Greek-Australian family or other public domains no longer can be counted upon to ensure ethnic continuity” (Arvanitis 2014, 61). In the case of the first generation migrants there is a natural and viable social setting of cultural values, attitudes, and behavior (or

an *experienced ethnicity* in Lidio Bertelli's words, 1968). For the second and third generations (because of the multicultural environments of their socialization and their own patterns of realization toward ethnicity), this natural attachment to the homeland becomes more abstract and symbolic and for the third generation and beyond probably a matter of cognition. A fundamentally new context emerges for these new generations in which the old ways are not an operative reality. According to Bertelli, "the subsequent generations reflect the society to the point that if they had to return to their grandparents' or parents' homeland they will be strangers" (Bertelli, 1968, 22). As my journey continues it became evident that the ethnic youth of Australia had different experiences, attitudes, values and behaviors. "They are simply the products of a different generation and different personal history," according to Cahill (1987, 84).

Self-consciousness

Ithaca has given you the beautiful journey.
Without her you would never have set upon the road.
But she has nothing left to give you any more.

Cavafy's words stand out as most prophetic, stressing the responsibility for the journey and the ultimate illusionary goal. I realized that the "treasures," are not found at the end of the journey, but they are experienced in the trials and tribulations of the travel (Kalantzis, Cope, and Slade 1990). I became more decisive to experience cultural diversity acknowledging the importance of *individuality* in self-determination through a different kind of self-consciousness. According to Patterson (1983), consciousness is the most important element of ethnic identity, responsible for its changeability and mobilization. A renewed sense of *spatiality* has evolved together with a different perspective of place. It was during my brief visit to my home country, after two and a half years abroad, where I was able to compare and conceptualize the sense of dual locality (*here* and *there*). On a similar note, *time* seemed entrapped in the past as I tried to identify and isolate familiar moments and echoes. I noticed that while my family members had moved on in their lives and everyday practices, I was left with remnants of my past experiences. I experienced the "dislocation" and "isolation" I had heard time and time again from Greek-Australians who had returned to the homeland only to feel again the double irony of being a *stranger*. Trapped in the "echoes" of past experiences emigrants were often disillusioned yet empowered on their return to try to find meaning in a mainstream Anglo-Celtic existence.

Finally, the *diaspora consciousness* and *global interconnectness* shaped my worldview, containing a multiple prism under which language, ethnic boundaries, place/locality and affiliation have been fragmented and transformed into a multiple identity. In one instance, I had emphatically stated that "we in Greece and we here" raising an attachment to local and the familiar ("the paradox of particularism" according to Cohen 1997, 169). As Cohen (1996, 516) noted, "in the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through a shared imagination". In my case dual locality and the desire to connect with others *here* and *there* who share the same *roots* and *routes* shaped a new collective global/national/ethnic identity (viewed as vibrant and constantly changing sets of cultural interactions). In the midst of globalization, where international trends penetrate national and cultural boundaries, the very ideas of "home" and "host" became ambivalent.

Epilogue: The Reverse Route

My personal routes of migration transformed me into a modern *sojourner* (Cohen 1997). I eventually returned to my home country experiencing again a sense of *dual territoriality* (*here* and *there*) in Cohen's terms. Both Australia and Greece had been transformed into *liminal* spaces of *otherness* and *belongingness*, being simultaneously real, physical, and mental. Both locales

were present as parallel and supplementary spaces in my self-identification process revealing multiple layers of meaning and relationships. My bicultural attachment to both locales altered the sense of space through “heterogeneous sets of social relations” rather than “a set of boundaries that capture place” (Tsolidis 2011, 4). Reflections of spatiality became both real and illusory discovering my absence from the place where I think I was. Through the notion of *heterotopia* (Foucault 1998) I was able to juxtapose these two, often incompatible, spaces in the same real place. Being in Greece, Australia had become an idealized place linked to nostalgia.

Moreover, cosmopolitan identification had become a major component of selfhood. I considered myself as a cosmopolitan member of a broader transnational community able to associate with both heterotopias *here* and *there* through a *triadic relationship* (belongingness to the home and host country as well as the Greek *paroikia* context). But, I also felt capable to function within cultures in other parts of the world through balancing cultural, national and global identifications (stage 6 in Banks’ typology: *Globalism and Global Competency*). Universalistic ethical values and principles have been internalized together with the acquisition of new portable and diverse (cultural) competences and a critical framing towards new intercultural experiences and actions. I regarded myself a *citizen of the world* ready to work on a broader intercultural agenda that could benefit global learners through respecting diversity, reflexivity, collaboration, inclusivity, and reciprocal learning.

In this context, adaptation into my homeland was yet again a new intercultural challenge. The returning to a county of more or less traditional cultural attributes was associated with new risks and agonies. Once again I had to reflect on the universal and the particular and counteract emerging cultural differences in the Greek mainstream society. I came across to different dimensions of such differences, which hindered communication and adaptation into the new context. A new reverse process of self-determination had begun. In this process I was once again the *familiar-other*. Starting to understand the new context, I dealt with universal cultural differences (*etic*) such as *space*, *time* and *context* (Hall 1989a; 1989b). For instance, different cultural perceptions on *time* were recorded affecting the degree of successful adaptation in social and professional contexts. The Greek culture could be characterised as a *polychronic* one (in Hall’s terms 1989b). This, marked a considerable contradiction between mainstream and personal time conception. In Greece, interaction was valued over time leading to a lesser concern for “getting things done.” On the contrary, I was trained to operate through careful planning and scheduling valuing time management. In addition, the cultural contextualization was another important cultural difference. The inner logic of the modern Greek culture (*emic* perspective) was a profound contrast to the Australian one. The Greek society had largely remained a *high* context culture (Hall 1989a) meaning that messages were covert, implicit or left unsaid. Much was taken for granted whereas there were many unwritten rules. This contradicted my verbal communication patterns, which were overt and explicit, creating barriers and misunderstandings.

Overall, repositioning myself into my home country became a whole new journey of learning, engagement and transformation. Summarizing this new acculturation process I could say that the most profound issue I had to deal with was my sense of *citizenry* as influenced by other cultural differences as described in Hofstede’s typology. *Power distance*, *collectivism* versus *individualism*, *masculinity* versus *femininity*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *long-term* versus *short-term orientation* and *indulgence* versus *self-restraint* (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010) were significant dimensions, which formed a contrasting frame of self-reflection. However, Hofstede typology provides only a generic framework of the contradictions I have experienced as a citizen comparing the two localities where I had lived.

The figure below compares the two countries as per Hofstede typology.

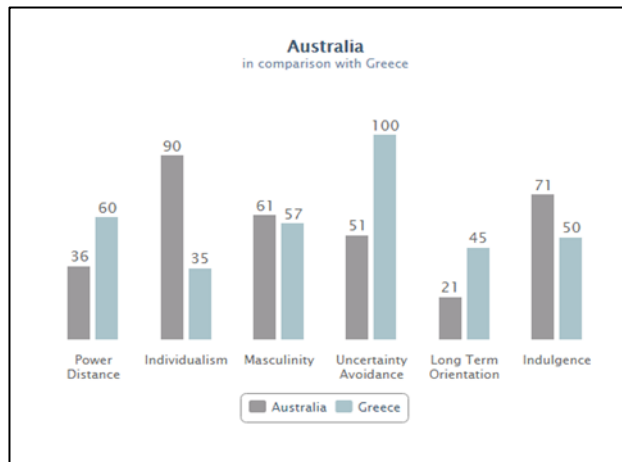


Figure 1: Comparing Australian and Greek Cultures
 Source: <http://geert-hofstede.com/australia.html>

Thus, upon my return, I found particularly difficult to come to terms with power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. More specifically, it impressed me the large degree to which ordinary Greek citizens accepted a hierarchical order and expected that power is distributed unequally with no further justification. Also it impressed me the degree to which Greeks felt uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity of the modern world seeking to find security through rigid and past oriented codes of practice and ethnocentricity. Finally, I was surprised with the suspicion on which the Greek society viewed societal change. The real national preference was to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms and not to adopt a more pragmatic, flexible, innovative, and long-term orientation to deal with emerging challenges in the fields of multicultural social building and citizenry. A romantic ethnocentrism seemed to prevail making Greek society resisting to cosmopolitan realism (or cosmopolitanization in Beck's terms, 2009) and a highly interconnected world. These profound realizations took the most dramatic form in the continuing Greek crisis, which started in 2009.

As I end my inner ramblings and introspection I return to the last verse of Cavafy's inspirational poem for it was with the assistance of this poet that I creatively wove a reflective tapestry of my experiences.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca hid not deceived you.
 As wise as you will have become, with so much experience,
 you will have understood, by then, what these Ithacas mean.

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