Bloodlines: Performing the Body of the “Demos,” Reckoning the Time of the “Ethnos”

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Abstract

Organized around fantasies of endangered national sovereignty, discourses of population decline bespeak a highly politicized cultural anxiety that has come to haunt individual and collective imaginaries in the public life of Greece in the 1990s. The rhetoric of biopolitics about the precarious future presents the nation as a bleeding body and an object of mournful nostalgia and affective idealization. Prompted through normative renderings of time and life, anxiety over population decrease emerges as an idiom of gendered subjectivity, a technology of governmentality, and symbolic capital of national narratives. Despite its volatility, this “truth regime,” in a Foucauldian sense, is crucially implicated in the constitution of intimate subjectivities according to the cultural intelligibility of reproductive heterosexuality, familial generationality, and national continuity; it represents, however, a code of intelligibility that is not invariably shared and is widely contested. Since the national-cultural preoccupation with the future has taken on a marked salience as a politics of the present, “time” has emerged as a flexible signifying practice, a strategic force that social actors work as much with as against, while dealing with the spectral limits of the lived temporality of the nation and their own.

Because the only thing the nation form is able to assure for itself is its past, its archive of official memory, it must develop in the present ways of establishing its dominion over the future. This is one reason reproductive heterosexuality and the family always present such sensitive political issues. Reproduction and generationality are the main vehicles by which the national future can be figured, made visible, and made personal to citizens otherwise oblivious to the claims of a history that does not seem to be about them individually. The anxieties surrounding the process of making
people into national subjects confirm that the hegemonic form of national culture is fragile and always in the process of being defined.

Lauren Berlant (1998)

Allegories of loss

Anxiety over the declining birthrate in Greece in recent years impinges on the cultural construction of biological reproduction as “a potent symbol of the future” (Franklin and Ragoné 1998:11). In this paper I explore the effects of truth, power, and self that are produced through (and seen to be at stake in) the discursive universe of a putatively future-endangering national population decline that is described in Greece today as “a demographic problem” and “undenatality” (“ipoyeniíkóítita”).

If discourses of demographic crisis serve as technologies of reproducing the future of the body politic through constituting intelligible and appropriately gendered selves, are all futures, then, regarded as equally tenable, valuable, and worth reproducing? My argument draws on Faye Ginsburg’s and Rayna Rapp’s analysis of “the arrangements by which some reproductive futures are valued while others are despised” (1995:3). How are stratified demographic imaginaries brought into sharp focus in the context of an unevenly integrated Europe? How is the valence of “continuity” animated through the biopolitical technologies of undernatality? How do biopolitical discourses manage gendered and racialized subjects whose physical bodies perform the national body politic?

In the last two decades, the terror of demographic implosion has become the crux of a considerable infusion of media scrutiny, parliamentary proceedings, church preaching, and demographic knowledge (Paxson 2004). Newspaper headlines such as “Greeks: An extinct species?” (Eleftherotípia, 19 August 2000) condense the reigning sense of anxiety that has become, in the demographic alarmists’ imagination, a master narrative of national predicament. If Greek people do not respond to the historical challenge of the “demographic problem,” this journalist warns, then “the deep wound will continue hemorrhaging more and more; and eventually the blood dries up.” Demographic discourses deploy images of an impending doom—a demographic hemorrhage afflicting the body of Greece. Indeed, in an ironic re-fashioning of the binary “life/death,” the effort at evading national death has the paradoxical effect of tacitly making death more and more present—in the sense of irreducible otherness.1

I draw the case in point from fieldwork that I conducted between 1997 and 1999 in Athens, the administrative capital from which popu-
lation policies disseminate, among many different—albeit often overlapping—constituencies: not only among “childless women” (some of whom, either as women’s health activists and practitioners, public intellectuals, or otherwise, have been involved in public debates surrounding demographic concerns), but also among public and private health professionals, counselors, and officials (some of whom have chosen not to have children) who have been involved in the construction of demographic regimes of knowledge. Moving through crosscutting networks of power/knowledge, I talked with bureaucrats, scientists, state officials, policy-makers, pressure-group agents, practitioners of public health knowledge, and political activists. A multi-sited discursive community was thus formed by deeply imbricated constituencies. Drawing from an ethnographic corpus of different actors and texts, institutional sites and discourses, authors and audiences, I consider the delicate entanglements among them in both the epistemic formation of “demography” itself and the exercise of pertinent biopolitics.

*How to do things with biopolitics*

Demography is never demography as such, despite the facticity of demographic numbers that seem to naturalize the reality of what they describe. Although they purport to be sublimely unmarred by power interests, pronouncements of demographic anxiety bear a particular performative force (Austin 1962; Derrida 1972); they bring about not only nostalgic sentiments of temporal continuity, but also the dystopian affect of ephemerality and loss. I argue that demographic anxiety over the imperiled national future works to stabilize discourses of national and (hetero-) sexual normalcy as timeless structures of cultural intelligibility at a variety of levels of social life, such as those of embodied self, kinship affiliation, and national belonging. The exposition of the nation as vulnerable to “loss” becomes a scene for establishing the nation as an object of desire and social actors as subjects of, and subjects to, a hypostatized and idealized nation-state (see also Aretxaga 2000). Within the framework of the culturally privileged metaphysics of enduring national self-presence, discourses of ending time emerge as technologies through which the nation is infused with its subjects’ embodied temporalities.

Speaking of “Greek biopolitics,” however, is, to a certain extent, a catachresis. The nation-state is by no means the only discursive field in which the metaphysics of affiliation is fomented in contemporary Greece; nor is its bureaucratic apparatus the only locus on which demographic anxieties are being constructed. Networks of social engagement, such as circuits of kinship and political activism, but also rapidly growing
transnational nodes, come into play as fields for fashioning demographic exigencies. Within the context of a hegemonic neoliberal discourse, the state delegates its authority downward to the realm of social and cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997). In post-Maastricht Europe, the integrated European order withdraws from the national state’s much-exalted attributes of sovereignty, such as the control of the national borders and the currency. In light of such reallocation of institutional jurisdiction, the state reworks its increasingly precarious sovereignty according to newly emerging transnational standards of place-ness. Besides, in light of such new circuits for devising affinity and estrangement, various critical forces, whether social actors or movements and non-governmental organizations, “de-elect” the state (Berlant 1998:194) by undermining its status of omnipresent and omnipotent authority vis-à-vis national demographic culture. The “nation-state” can no longer be taken as the sole locus for the intrigues of biopolitical technoscience. Recent anthropological work has both shown an appreciation of the porosity and situationality of border zones and diasporic networks, and importantly de-centered the dominance of the “nation-state” (qua a localized and essentialized cultural whole) in ethnographic treatments of socio-cultural and geopolitical “fields,” “sites,” “places,” and “topoi” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1995; Cheah and Robbins 1998). The paradigm of power that characterizes the current world order is profoundly biopolitical. It transforms and singularizes sovereignty into a network of national and supranational agencies of unaccountable demographico-economic control, whereby issues of population, immigration, asylum, and refugee status are central.

My usage of the term “population” is guided by Michel Foucault’s ideas on biopower (1990:140 [1978]). Foucault addressed biopower, this apparently benign—albeit characteristically invasive—form of regulating both individual bodies and populations at large, as being synthesized by two intertwined forces: on the one hand, the disciplinary power over the individual body, which is sustained by inciting desires and inculcating norms, and, on the other hand, the “biopolitics of population,” which is focused on the rational monitoring of processes such as birth, death, family planning, and public health. Biopolitics, then, refers to “technologies of power centered on life” (Foucault 1990 [1978]). Through such capillary conduits of power that rely less on exerting coercive force than on producing domains of truth regarding the management of life, the individual body becomes not only an object of governmental regulation, but also a subject of preoccupation with her/his own self and the community s/he lives in. Foucault theorized the contact zone between the “technologies of power” (which objectify individuals by submitting them
to matrices of domination) and the “technologies of self” (which permit individuals to act upon themselves and constitute themselves as subjects) as what he called “governmentality” (gouvernementalité), a term that encompasses the ways in which Western people make themselves the reflexive object and the effective force of both care and power (1988).^{2}

“Soon, there will be no Greeks left at all”: such discursive practices of demographic alarmism conscript the nation in a state of biopolitical emergency. Giorgio Agamben has delineated how the power modality of biopolitics is connected with both the state of nature and the state of exception, arguing that the state of exception “is not external to the nomos but rather, even in its clear delimitation, included in the nomos as a moment that is in every sense fundamental” (1998:37). Similarly, the contemporary Greek moment of biopolitical emergency confronts its subjects with an articulation of indistinguishable nomos and emergency, and, ultimately, discipline and affectivity.

Volatile temporalities of embodiment

The national ideology that underpins the Greek discourse of demographic anxiety relies on an ontology of life (Cheah 1999); what is at stake for a nation’s biopolitical sovereignty is not only its subjects’ willingness to die for it (Anderson 1983), but also their commitment to living and physically reproducing “for it.” Biological metaphorization is central to this vitalist ontology of the nation: the human body is figured as synecdochal for the body politic, women’s bodies are figured as naturally life-giving, and the national body is figured as a human organism susceptible to the debilities that attend aging. Such metaphoric enactments performatively constitute embodied and gendered modes of national citizenship according to specific bio-temporal ideals of cultural intelligibility.

While the gendered subject crafts the future by making certain reproductive decisions, time comes to be materialized as an embodiment of structured linear array of biological events. The anthropologist Vassos Argyrou captured the liminality of a Greek Cypriot adult who “delays” marriage and parenthood among his own “cultural intimates,” citing an incident that had himself experienced at a familial gathering in Paphos, when his relative inquired whether he was planning to get married now that his studies were nearing completion:

“You are no longer moro (a baby), my son,” she reminded me, “En tjerou sou (it’s time for you [to get married]).” Before I had time to reply, her husband, apparently quite inebriated by this time, interjected and said vehemently: “A man who doesn’t get married and doesn’t have children en san to khtino (is like a beast).” (1996:61)
The unmerited acrimony that Argyrou was subjected to brings into relief not only that time is bound up with the sacraments of heterosexual marriage and procreation, but also that it is through the timely embodiment of bio-temporal codes of cultural recognition that ontological distinctions of “human” versus “nonhuman” or “subhuman,” as well as “adult” versus “infantile” are articulated; such bio-temporal “passages” are the founding moments in which the ideal definition of *anthropos* emerges. Within a frame that understands sex in terms of the opposition “sex for pleasure” versus “sex for procreation,” timely conjugality and procreation are constitutive of an adulthood and maturity proper to human subjectivity itself. In my ethnographic work, recurring human dis-identification with animals occupied a crucial part, as in discourses where non-reproduction is devaluated through the enactment of animal metaphors. Failing to effectively overcome the age of playfulness (and pleasure) in a timely fashion represents a symptom of becoming an animal (i.e., the human’s organic “other”), a condition that can only characterize someone who has failed to attain full humanness.3

Bio-temporal tropes play a crucial role in the social signification of the nation’s humanness as well. The nation is (not merely by virtue of etymological affinity) ineluctably linked with birth: “The fiction that is implicit here is that birth [*nascita*] comes into being immediately as nation, so that there may not be any difference between the two moments” (Agamben 2000:21). Drawn from a vitalistic conceptualization of the body as pure materiality preceding any signification, demographic discourses of anxiety are apt to dramatize falling birthrate in terms of metaphors of bodily transformations, such as “aging,” “decomposing,” “dying,” and, most significantly, “depletion of blood.” In the context of biopolitical exigencies, “the body” comes into being through a hegemonic cultural discourse of bodily physicality drawn from the Western metaphysics of a body/mind polarity. The biopolitical poetics that I explore here help us see how, despite the long and powerful tradition of the Cartesian paradigm, the way in which the body comes into being within contemporary contexts of biopower is not merely instrumental. It is rather complex, in the sense that it entails a dialectics of bodily physicality and “immaterial” volitional and psychic attributes such as decision, signification, and affect (see also Das 1996).4

The biopolitical and biopoetical performatives that concern me here enact a mutuality between an essentialized “national body” and the bodies of the social actors, a mutuality, indeed, which is sensual and political at once (see also Seremetakis 1997). At the core of a thick constellation of idioms of corporeal physicality is placed the idiom of
“blood,” as in images of the nation’s blood that is drying up. As Eleni Papagaroufali reminds us:

“Blood” is a central “natural symbol” (Douglas 1973) or a central metaphor and metonymy in Greek society, that is used by citizens, the state and the Church, both in order to identify and value positively their relations with certain categories of people (“real” blood relatives, of the same nation and religion) and in order to differentiate and perhaps to exclude their relations with other categories—i.e., relatives by affinity or “spiritual” relatives, menstruating women, national and religious “strangers.” (2002:175)

The nation’s subjects are expected to infuse “new blood” (that is, procreative agency) into the nation, both parties being enrolled in a circuit of co-implicated “birthrights.” Thus the blood of physical reproduction, long-standing signifier of genealogical affinity, is transmuted into “vital substance” for the national (re)birth and perpetuation. Consider the auto-affective economy of the transmission of “vital substances” here: the singularities of “the people” give birth to the eternal being of the nation, thus affirming an immutable syngénia eks ématos (relatedness through blood). The politico-familial “economy” of embodied procreative agency that organizes the cultural logic of the viability and vitality of the ethnos as a matter of its subjects’ rationally calculable physical reproduction is, I think, a significant aspect of what Herzfeld calls “cultural intimacy” (1997).

The figure of “blood” is not the only metaphor mobilized in the Greek epistemes of biopolitical affiliation. Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis have importantly addressed the moral and cultural stigma attached to the careless, nonfertile spending of semen qua life-giving substance (1991:227). As a powerful signifier of male procreative heterosexuality, the male body’s spermatic economy is particularly marked within the framework of both medico-scientific and popular discourses surrounding infertility and technologies of assisted reproduction. There are, of course, differences of propriety, abjection, pollution, and idealization governing different body fluids and their cultural recognizability. While menstrual blood is constructed as unclean substance associated with excrementality and mortality, semen is constructed as a nonpolluting sign of sexuality and condition of fertilization and life. But despite the unalignable forces that are in play even within these categories, what such “bodily by-products” have in common is that they condense sexual difference in ways that make them remain discursively attached to the imagined solidity of the gendered body despite their flowing detachability (see also Douglas 1966; Kristeva 1982).
Foucault has importantly shown how in the context of modern biopolitical rationalization of sex the “symbolics of blood” intertwines with an “analytics of sexuality” (1990:148). Through bio-temporal technologies of affectivity and responsibility the biopolitical subject is constituted in gender and sexual normativity. Time is marching on, the trope has it, in women’s course of life: the onset of menstruation is constructed as a potential for reproduction, motherhood as the peak of a woman’s biological potential, and menopause as loss of reproductive capacity.

In her life history, Anna, a working-class public school teacher in her mid-thirties, mentioned this ritual of menarche: When she told her mother that she had had her period, her mother, a fervently religious (Orthodox-Christian) woman, gave her a slap in the face and immediately accompanied this symbolic gesture with the solemn utterance: “you are a woman now.” Another nonverbal gesture further complicated the performance and puzzled my friend: an ambiguously affectionate and acquiescent smile seemed to undercut what had felt to the daughter-narrator like an intensely thrusting gesture on her mother’s part. The stereotypical explanation explicitly offered for this (not exclusively Greek) custom of slapping a girl at menarche is that in this way her cheeks would be always rosy. As a rite of passage, menarche, and more importantly, the performative events surrounding it, are arch-frames in which to envision individual and social transformations over time, manipulate perceptions of sex and gender, stage identities, and vigilantly demarcate social categories. In Anna’s story, the dramatic performance of a trauma, which is ironically effected by the maternal hand (a body part stereotypically associated with comforting caregiving), emerged as the constitutive moment of womanhood. No wonder that the mother’s gesture was accompanied by the categorical pronouncement “you are a woman now.” As a disciplinary “technology of the self,” the maternal nonverbal gesture bespoke the arduous correlation between a verbalized disclosure of the self and the constitution of a new self, a new embodied physicality. Violence (doubly symbolized here by the maternal slap and the surprising advent of menstrual blood), not only operated as the formative precondition of identity constitution, but also marked the profound complicity between time and power, between beginning and authority—as the duplicitous meaning of arche implies (see also Gourgouris 2003). The figure of blood, literally (menstrual fluid as a bodily “substance” that allows for procreation) and symbolically (long-standing metaphor of biological kinship) central to the temporality of menarche and all its concomitant ritual restrictions, animated both the disciplinary and apotropaic force of the bodily performance. A violent gesture, typically employed to discipline disobedience or insult, was deployed here
(not fully consciously, of course) as a prophylactic preemptive strike, in order to redeem the domestic order from the polluting substance and to discipline the female body’s liminal state of impregnability. Ultimately, the maternal slap was deployed in order to authoritatively stress the responsibility that such moment of becoming-a-woman entails: not only a rupture with the past and breaking away from a certain self, but also a symbolic transformation of the embodied self, a passage from purity to pollution that is to be purified anew by the conversion of the wasted menstrual substance into the propitious blood of birth in due course. Hence the anxiety which is generated by the sexual difference written on the daughter’s body. The maternal slap served as a constitutive prophylaxis for sexual impropriety; a disciplinary reminder that until the blood of menstruation is transmuted into blood of childbirth the daughter will be in a state of liminality, thereby susceptible to dangerous (potentially promiscuous or infectious) uses of her own “sex.”

This is not to obscure the taboos attached to the blood of childbirth. One should not, however, conflate blood taboos associated with menstruation and childbirth, which remain, I think, two distinct (albeit interrelated) realms of cultural construction of gendered bodily liminality. Nor should one sidestep the profound ambiguity that permeates such construction. It is not insignificant, for instance, that although the blood of childbirth is finally redeemed by means of practices of purification, the blood of menstruation remains a periodic marker of the contingencies and ambiguities of the dangerous world of flesh within the life cycle. Above all, the blood of birthing is redeemed by the very momentous event of procreation, an event not only divinely ordained, but also culturally and politically idealized as the proper use of human sexuality, an event that insures safe entry into the categories of “woman” and “human.”

It is well established in the ethnography of Greece that in Greek-Orthodox contexts, the shedding of women’s blood in menstruation is taken as reminiscent evidence of the Fall (du Boulay 1991). My informant’s mother, a fervently religious woman, rehearsed the cultural-religious theme of blood pollution; by pursuing the gesture of the slap, she marked her daughter’s entry into a new state, and at the same time, she meant to protect the household, herself, other members of the family including her daughter (newly emerged, in her perception, as “daughter of Eve”) from the danger involved in the spilling of polluting menstrual blood. It is a woman’s authority to redeem the home from another woman’s profanity; the mother’s gesture, therefore, is to be interpreted as a performative assertion of her own domestic power.7

As Judith Butler writes, “‘sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time” (1993:1). Timely concession to idealized
norms of heterosexual and procreative conjugality is constructed as the only “safe” space for women’s coming to maturity. As Loizos and Papatxaiarchis have pointed out, “fertility is a test point of womanhood. . . . [A] woman’s place in society ultimately rests on her ability to biologically reproduce, and the proof of that is pregnancy” (1991:225, n.13). The onset of menstruation, with its resonances of newly acquired reproductive capacities, is culturally constructed as a bio-temporal indication of coming womanhood. Only when blood materializes its normative definition as a life-giving force will the categorical propriety of gender identity be safely achieved. On yet another level of the performative event, the mother’s enigmatic smile represented an ambiguity that deformed the sudden outburst of physical violence, like a conspiratorial wink that tacitly conscripts the agents into a shared idiom (a synégia of sorts) even despite appearances of outward alienation. The daughter’s menstrual blood furnished the basis of a new intimacy between the women of the house. In the context of her daughter’s passing into a new state of womanhood, the mother was also performing her own identities by creating ties of gender alliance—however hierarchized this alliance might be—with her daughter.

But if “sex” is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal,” the attempted rationalization of regulatory practices of “sexing” through time is always provisional. As my friend explained to me, her mother never achieved the effect of her daughter’s gender normativity that she had apparently sought; nor did she achieve the effect of gender division and alliance at home. Such is the ever-present possibility of incompleteness and contestation to which the biopolitical technologies, at once individualizing and totalizing, are endlessly susceptible. The nexus of disciplinary technologies by which gendered subjectivities, physical bodies, and body politics are performed in time is hardly an inalienable master script; in Herzfeld’s words, “the struggle over time concerns the legitimacy of claims to power and humanity” (1992:166).

The section that follows shows that the disposition of “blood” and other “vital substances” is of great concern not only to individual mothers but also to society as a whole, as bodies become grounds not only for staging regulatory fictions of gender identification, but also for displacing power relations.

Stratified population, fractured humanness: whose future is it, anyway?

The ideology of consanguinity that underpins the discursive regime of demographic anxiety does not tolerate much ambiguity and fluidity. From the horizon of the nation’s vitalist ontology of flowing bloodline,
another threatening specter emerges: that of contamination ensuing from the dangerous intermixing of categories (Douglas 1966).

In the face of dwindling population, the self-interest of individual bodies joins forces with the social good of the body politic in ways that tacitly bracket the internal differentiation of the national body as such; at the same time, certain marked bodies (i.e., ethnic, racial, or sexual others) are excluded from the definition of the category of “the people.” Evincing a sense of bounded human home, the discourse of population anxiety covers over the asymmetrical power dynamic involved in the relations between the “infinite” nation and its subjects’ human finitude, between the transcendent body politic and its people’s transient bodies, but also between the normative authority of the nation form and its various foreign bodies. The different subject positions that the totalizing national We subsumes (to be sure, subject positions hierarchized along the lines of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnic identification) are typically suppressed in the name of an undivided national agency. As the promise of eternal national life is governed by an organicist logic of bodily exchange, wherein not all dividends are vested with the same symbolic capital, questions of how the boundaries of cultural recognizability of “the human” are drawn, what constitutes viable forms of human relationality, what the transmissibility of the ethnos consists in, and what makes for an intelligible national and gendered subject—all occupy crucial positions in the politics of truth related to population anxieties.

Inasmuch as this discourse impels subjects to account for, and eventually heal, the injured self of national population, the phantoms of injurious “others” which are lurking to “incapacitate” the nation, come drastically into play. Intrinsic in the metaphorization of the nation as a “body,” which is buttressed but also porous and vulnerable to contamination, is a certain dynamic of scale: demographic anxiety is intimately associated with a cultural fear of absorption by neighboring nation-states of larger scale and/or by threateningly growing enclaves of resident aliens. The nation-state is thus portrayed as a victim of either disloyal non-procreating Greek citizens or swamping over-procreating “others” (such as immigrants, strangers, or hostile outsiders) who threaten to insidiously dilute the autochthonous national community.

Constructions of class privilege, gender privilege, and sexual propriety intersect with national standards of normalization in processes of determining who counts, gets counted, and for what purposes, in reckoning the vitality and viability of the nation. Relevant to this question of who qualifies as national subject are the growing caveats against liberalization of immigration regulations: “We are doomed to turn into a state of foreigners unless every [Greek] couple has at least four children”
Although he conceded that the largest part of the “real” population increase in the decade of the 1990s was due to the influx of non-Greek immigrants and the repatriation of diasporic Greeks, M. Drettakis, who was a prime mover of the parliamentary report on the so-called “demographic problem” (1993), cautioned that the population increase during the first decade of the twenty-first century should not be based on this “source.” He further submitted that the appropriate source of population increase should be the population’s “natural increase,” which can be attained only if autochthonous births gain ascendancy over deaths (1999). Critics of this discourse object that a liberal immigration policy should render interested immigrants equal citizens rather than “foreigners.” By contrast with Drettakis’s reluctance to subscribe to the idea of immigration as a safety net for an aging population, M. Matsaganis, the counselor to the Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis on matters of social welfare, in an interview with me, proposed (having first abundantly underscored that his personal opinions did not necessarily reflect the overall perspective of the PASOK government): “Although the decrease in ‘natural’ reproduction of population is not necessarily a mischievous occurrence, those who deem it a problem should bear in mind that Greece, as an open democratic society, can confront it by receiving an injection of young population through immigration.”

Stereotypical representations of the criminal makeup of the immigrant population, but also, at a more materially experienced level, police sweeps of neighborhoods populated by immigrants, and right-wing racist violence, all hinge on enduring castings of immigrants as a handy scapegoat for collective frustration. Undernatality, however, presents those who are both skeptical of permissive immigration legislation and concerned about Greek population decline with a taxing conundrum. While struggling against demographic demise, Greece may have to allow itself to “resort” to the “life-giving” contribution of those who have been stereotypically constructed as parasitically living on its very body. My own observations and interviews confirmed that, among liberal democratic political circles, the trope of blood is conscripted also into non-xenophobic purposes, as immigration is pragmatically presented as a welcome and necessary “transfusion of new blood” (metángisi néou ématos) in the hemorrhaging body of Greek population.

Such anxieties over “who counts” play out not only in the realm of the nation, but also in the transnational spaces emerging in the context of Europeanization and globalization. In Greece as well as in the rest of Europe, within the rapidly changing contexts of both national and transnational politics, variable contested boundaries between differently marked bodies and futures are constituted in accordance with
the embattled legacies of class hegemony, (post-)colonial domination, as well as gender and sexual normativity. As European nation-states struggle to control immigration from the developing world as well as from other (supposedly, less free-market) European nation-states, not all demographic presents inspire the same urgent sensibilities among those worried about “the demographic future” of the “Aged Continent” (Gíreá Ipiros). In such contexts of transition, the reproduction of migrant laborers (generically constructed as unregulated and redundant) and the reproduction of heterosexual educated urbanites (generically constructed as rationally managed) are endowed with sharply divergent political meanings and thereby are hardly positioned evenly in the social terrain of population anxieties.9

Despite the neoliberal rhetoric about a globalized open market (i.e., the project of “borderless” postindustrial European capitalism), the future emerges as anything but common and all-inclusive. In the wake of new forms of racialized biopolitical anxiety over the threatened white European demographic sovereignty, questions of who counts as a benign “us” as opposed to a dangerous “them” assume a crucial political relevance.10

From the horizon of contentious contemporary biopolitics, the “illegal immigrant” (emblematized in Greece by the figure of the backward, delinquent, and over-reproducing Albanian) has emerged as a “limit-concept” of exclusionary discourses of recognition, along with a fragmentary multitude of other limit-representations of the human—the homosexual, the transgendered, the HIV-positive, the poor, the elderly, the mentally ill, the displaced, the dispossessed, as well as the populations of the so-called Third World that the current capitalist biopolitical sovereignty turns into “bare life.”11 Such limit-representations of the human stand as disquieting figures that haunt the taxonomic logic of demographic bureaucracy: consider, for instance, the symbolic and institutional construction of the “illegal immigrant” as someone who has no permanent abode and fixed address (Revenue officers announced in January 2003 that the Revenue Department was in a state of chaos as a result of the postal services’ failure to locate a great segment of the “foreign” population residing in the country—primarily immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers); or, consider the endless exile and forced anonymity imposed upon those classified as lying beyond the limits of intelligible kinship, but also strategically employed by them as a defensive (but not less defiant) response to the repudiations of a homophobic bureaucracy that insists on not recognizing modes of domestic intimate alliance that are not sanctified by the rules of orthodox conjugality, and are thereby conceived as standing in sharp opposition to conjugal models of “kinship”
and “household”—the quintessential analytic units of population statistics. Hence, the “apartment buzzers without names” (Yiannakopoulos 1999) become mute markers of the constitutive alienation to which gay couples are condemned for not complying with the reigning standards of familial normalcy (see also Weston 1991). This is, indeed, a socially instituted melancholy of public sphere, whereby unintelligible life and relatedness are not permitted into the recognized realm of human being (Butler 2000:81). This marking off is also about a socially instituted deprivation of rights and recognition (political, social, symbolic, legal, or medical). This marking off not only remains unrecognized as such in life, but also (publicly) unmournable in the face of death.

In light of such violence on which any concept of “the human” is premised, the realm of assisted reproduction (*ipovoithoiúmeni anaparagogí*, or, as it is more widely known, “extracorporeal” [*eksosomatíki*] insemination) provides a point from which to rethink the foreclosures of the cultural intelligibility of humanness. The sexual orientation of those who seek the assistance of technoscience in order to have children “of their own” makes the difference (in language, imagery, as well as ethical and legal codes) between imagining reproductive technology as an *enabling* advance and imagining reproductive technology as an *eschatological* monstrosity. In the area of reproductive technoscience, as in many other instances of embodied subjectivity, the “heterosexual” and the “homosexual” are constructed as irreducibly different and mutually exclusive, real categories rather than nominal artifacts with social-discursive history and political implications. Driven by a naturally anticipated desire, straight married couples implement nature’s perennial design; driven by an abnormal eccentricity, however, gay couples insert a teratological graft into the body of natural procreation. In the context of Greek biopolitical temporality, such techno-cultural configurations of procreative future are valorized very differently.

It is precisely such constructions of *eu*functional vs. *dys*functional futures that should keep us alert to the limits of human intelligibility as they are played out on biopolitical fields of humanity’s embodied temporality (Athanasiou 2003). Rather than a neutral ontological process, then, the future emerges as a stratified political *project* (Rapp 1999:311). It is in this sense that Ginsburg and Rapp urged us to consider the questions that underwrite the global politics of reproducing national futures: “who defines the body of the nation into which the next generation is recruited? Who is considered to be in that national body, who is out of it?” (1995:3).
Biomedical knowledge is a long-established resource of tropes that play a central part in affecting demographic anxieties. In rhetorical accounts of medical care, whereby Greek women are called upon to transform epistemic truth into practices of taking care of themselves by making timely reproductive decisions, persuasion emerges as master strategy of entrusting gendered individuals with certain biopolitical responsibilities. Anxiety-ridden and anxiety-inducing discursive practices of population crisis emerge as what one could call (extending Foucault) “technologies of the free-willed self,” which permit individuals to constitute themselves as fully intelligible and properly gendered modern subjects in a neoliberal context.

Modern biopower, an ensemble of discursive practices, rhetorical idioms, and imaginative investment wherein “national culture meets intimacy forms like sex” (Berlant 1998), seeks not to force so-called “private” matters into the so-called “public” realm of national vigilance, but rather to produce particular modes of intimacy on which the ethnos can rely for its continuous transmission. As Heather Paxson remarks: “Liberal family policy measures are implemented with the aim of enabling women to fully achieve their ‘biological mission’ as women and to reproduce for the nation” (2004:211). At this particular historical moment in Greece, modern biopower operates preeminently in the intimate registers of the sovereign subjects’ “self-governing” ways of living and dying, their gendered practices of care, as well as their embodied ways of reckoning their time vis-à-vis the national, “monumental” reifications of time (Herzfeld 1991).

The 1986 parliamentary debate about the decriminalization of abortion (Georges 1996; Halkias 2004) brought to the forefront the performative politics of persuasion, when the deputies diagnosed that the “demographic problem” dictated the urgent need of women’s education. A deputy from the centrist DHANA suggested that national civic and religious institutions should work together to awaken Greek women to responsible decisions: “The Greek society, all the social institutions, and the Church, ought to persuade [people] about the sacred duty of the pregnant woman to accomplish her mission.” A deputy from right-wing New Democracy linked non-procreation to “sexual permissiveness,” which ought to be combated through educational campaigns: “There has been no educational program whatsoever,” the parliamentarian complained, “about the harmful consequences of excessive sexual activities. It has not been explained to Greek men and women, that it [excessive sexual activity] is deleterious to both the man and the woman.” Another New
Democracy deputy and former cabinet minister underscored the value of moderate political interventions, such as providing women with education and incentives: “Victor Hugo said: ‘Educate people’s head so that you don’t end up cutting it off!’ Educate properly the Greek woman, and give her appropriate incentives, to keep her from having an abortion” (Parliament of Greece 1986).

The call for women to reproduce is typically situated as a matter of rational care for their own health. As in the discourse of my informant’s gynecologist, who tried to convince her that childbearing would “correct” her hormonal imbalance, childbearing is quite often reiterated as a natural guarantee not only of proper womanliness, but also of fine health. Central position in the discursive construction of childlessness as pernicious to women’s health is occupied by medical narratives that typically register a high incidence of cervical cancer among childless women. According to the figures announced at the scientific convention on “Carcinogenesis in the female reproductive system,” multiple childbearing (i apóktisi polón pedhión) was declared to be one of the most considerable “protective factors,” with childlessness being one of the risk factors, among early menarche, late menopause, and obesity (Thessaloniki, February 1997). My interlocutor, however, a fertility specialist who works for a private fertility clinic, put under dispute accounts that etiologically associate non-reproduction with cancer; she went on to state confidently that it is cultural pressure to reproduce that plays a crucial role in the decision of those who are involuntarily childless to resort to biomedical assistance.

In her “Comment on the ‘demographic problem’” (1994), the feminist linguist Marianna Kondyli criticized the Parliamentary Report’s strategies of propaganda and persuasion. These measures of persuasion (métro pithoús), Kondyli noted, seek to elicit women’s complicity with authoritative pronatalism by reducing women into a homogeneous category of potential biological mothers, by evoking Greek-Christian ideals, and by systematically inculcating the cultural value of childbearing.

The above examples illustrate that the making of an embodied and gendered self through the powers of persuasion emerges as a fundamental technique tailored to disseminate normative discourses of pronatalism. Through processes of educating and informing, demographic decline is constructed as a national-social problem, a problem of the social body, but also a medical problem—a problem of the individual female body. Reproductive and non-reproductive subjects alike are constructed through the rhetoric of informing and educating. In ways that concur with the argument that I unravel here, Eugenia Georges and Lisa Mitchell (2000) have shown how rhetorical constructions of pregnant women’s
experiences are inflected by a reigning exhortation to “take responsibility” for their own positionality as scientifically literate subjects of Greek modernity. Women’s appropriate care for their own body determines their place in the context of gender and kinship propriety. Indeed, the figure of the woman who decides not to have children implies the “autonomization of the female body from the context of ‘home’ and the community” (Bakalaki 1989:45).^12

The neoliberal emphasis on “care” for the corporeal subject proves to be ironic, if not hubristic, in light of the wounds imposed on all the uncared-for bodies of the multiple “others” that remain excluded by the cultural intelligibility of class, race, gender, and sexuality. In her critique of Foucault’s account of the subtle tactics of disciplinary power, Emily Martin has pointed out: “dismemberment is with us still, and the ‘hold on the body’ has not so much slackened as it has moved from the law to science” (1987:21). She is right to remind us that coercive power surely is with us still, but one should concede, I think, that this form of embodiment is no longer (if, in fact, it ever was) the only modality of power being with us today. If technologies of biopolitical normalization are violent not in the sense that physical torture is, this does not render them necessarily less “real” or less “embodied.” But, is there such a thing as strictly “biologically” or strictly “ideologically” lived violence, as the Western metaphysical assumption of sharp dichotomy between psyche and soma would cursorily justify?

The difference between unabashed dismemberment and normative embodiment, as encapsulated by Martin’s disclaimer, is particularly relevant not only to different regimes of Neohellenic biopolitics, but also, more widely, to the different historically specific forms of embodied participation of subjects in modern Greek history. An interesting perspective on this tension was offered by the contemporary Greek writer Rhea Galanaki, in an interview she gave apropos of the publication of her novel The Century of Labyrinths. She said:

In my opinion, and following the opinion of very serious historians, that period of Greek history during which our somatic participation in the common realm (i somatikí mas simetohí sta kinâ) was direct and painful, is over. I am referring to the Civil War, the other wars and expeditions, and even the involvement of the human body in the political and historical process. I would say that with the dominance of democracy in our country for the past three decades, we have been participating from a greater distance. This is a very important gain in the country’s history. This participation of the body and blood in the political history seems like an “anachronism.” (Kathimerini 29 September 2002, p. 6)
The question that lurks behind Galanaki’s observation is: how can we account for the “participation of the body and blood in the political history” in apparently less tumultuous moments in history, in these emergencies of enfleshed subjectivity structured in biopolitical imperatives, global capitalism, recurrent nationalisms and racisms, feminization of poverty, exclusionary application of techno-embodiments, and a persistent, relentless devaluation of the other?

Pervasively diffused as it is throughout the cultural fabric, demographic discipline is (like Foucault’s “technologies of the self”) often invisible; entangled as it is with the ordinariness of people’s everyday self-authoring, it often escapes notice for it typically involves no act of explicit prohibition. Instead of power acting on pre-given subjects, biopolitical discursive practices that construct non-reproduction as a “harmful choice” work as unobtrusive power-knowledge technologies of ethno-heteronormativity that rely on a resilient ontology of life and death.

**Economies of belonging, fictions of descent**

What is at stake in this ideological commitment to what Pheng Cheah calls “the peculiar living-in-dying of the nation” (1999:188), is the gift of continuous communality (the collective immortality that Benedict Anderson [1983] has written about). As manifested in a plethora of biopolitical manifestations, the performative effect of demographic anxiety is to transform, indeed, to elevate, “debt” into “gift” and selfless duty into self-authored desire. Ultimately, the national community’s collective immortality is ritualistically generated (or, better yet, promised) by the gift of an ever-continuing succession of its subjects’ timely and calculable births and deaths. What is imagined as a point of concentric confluence between the individual and the collective body is, indeed, their very condition of mortality instantiated in what is thought of as a downward flow of time (Strathern 1992).

An instance of this perception of the encompassing context as a living (and thus potentially dying) body is the very common cultural formulation that casts younger individuals as the “heirs” of society. The Greek vocabulary is suggestive in that respect: the word *klironomiá* is used to designate both the family “inheritance” and the national cultural “heritage.” *Kliro-* implies “lot,” “share of fortune,” whereas *-nomia* belongs in a line of derivatives of the verb *némein*, to distribute, to divide. The word *klironómos* (heir) serves to denote *apógonos* (descendant, offspring) as well, a conflation evinced in the well-known pity-arousing phrase
pēthane ákliros/ákliri or pēthane horís klironómous—i.e., s/he died without heirs. In the context of Greek biopolitical imagination, this phrase stands for the ultimate human futility: to die without leaving any “body,” any “bequest” behind, any heir to pass one’s own name and property down to. A justification for the particular connotation of regret borne by this phrase lies in the adjective used to denote the one who “dies without offspring,” namely, ákliros/ákliri (heirless, childless, “portionless”), conventionally used as a pejorative term—a synecdoche for “miserable” and “wretched.” In what appears to be a tropological interplay between biological kinship (génos) and legal succession (klironomiá), individuals now “give life to” and “bequeath” the society. One way or another, the individual and the society are mutually engendered in a circuit of life and death instantiated by the fraught arithmetic of giving and receiving, bequeathing and inheriting. Loizos and Papataxiarchis (1991) have made the significant point that kinship emblematizes personhood in Greece. Furthermore, socially intelligible participation in this lineage of syngénia and klironomiá is a precondition of the human (see also Butler 2000). In the contemporary Greek biopolitical imaginary, syngénia and klironomiá emerge as culturally intelligible signs of unconditional—albeit calculative—giving and belonging.

The near-obligatory, yet purposive and free, transaction of gifting (Derrida 1992; Mauss 1954) is, as I have emphasized, contingent upon multiple differentiations, as in the contemporary European context of exclusionary neoliberal social welfarism not all loyalties are equally trusted as abiding bases of social solidarity and not all “gifts of life” are equally accepted and valorized. Forces and routes of gifting are notoriously inchoate. Papagaroufali extends the problematic of gift transaction to the domain of the donation of human organs and bodies after death, which she sees as a niche of multi-sensual relations with the self and others—relatives, friends, and “strangers.” As she notes, “in gift transactions, everything—motives and outcome—remain open, possible, and […] no transaction begins from zero and evenly, but rather through relations of possibly mutual and most possibly unequal dependence” (2002:201). In other words, “gifting,” the political economy upon which the nation’s ontology of life relies, is a field open for multiple resignifications.

**Discipline revisited, pronatalism misfired**

Modern Greek biopolitical technologies emerge as technologies for making meaning, embodying frontiers, and effecting actions surrounding the “facts of life”: materialization of sex and biological reproduction,
life and death, individual body and body politic, human and nonhuman, morality and technology. Nevertheless, the formation of embodied subjects-in-time, ineluctably articulated with the cultural intelligibility of heterosexual generationality and national continuity, is characterized by profound ambivalence, as the subject emerges as being both subject to an authoritative agency and being able to assume the agency to act.

Indeed, “the life of the law exceeds the teleology of the law” (Butler 1993:140). Disciplinary modes of power-knowledge that work to install subjects within fixed positions of modern national and gendered citizenship are coextensive with structural failures as well as possibilities opened up by the poetics and politics of self-fashioning. As exemplified by my friend’s disclaimer “I am not childless, I am childfree,” social actors occasionally disavow disciplinary forces that seek to incite them into scripted subject positions. The particular agent refused to fall into the seemingly impervious category of “childless;” instead she refashioned that category (in particular, its implicit normativity, condensed as it is in connotations of socially insufficient and miserable) into the different category of “childfree” (connoting socially defiant) into which she placed herself strategically. Such discursive maneuvering to de-authorize an authoritative demand for self-identity evocatively bespeaks Ann Anagnost’s notion of “the mimicry of the power to name” (1997:58). To mime the power to name is not to simply replicate, but rather to performatively expose the limits of this monologic power whose temporality precedes and exceeds the poetics of self-making; it is, in effect, to de-authorize the conventions of the normative demand to tell the truth about oneself.

In their article in the feminist journal Dhíni (1986), Marianna Kondyli and Anghelika Psarra, two lone early voices that drew public attention to the disciplinary aspects of pronatalist discourses, proposed that women should refuse to engage in any discussion about the so-called “demographic problem,” on the grounds that demographic anxiety constitutes a patriarchal ideological attempt to control women’s bodies. By pointing out that when it comes to discussions about undernatalinity, “all the consensual statements about ‘equality before the law and self-determination of women’ [perí isonomías ke atoprosdhiouσmou] . . . and other such high-sounding [pretensions], . . . are forgotten,” they strategically portrayed pronatalism as nothing short of an anomaly in the present-day Greek moment of modernity. The authors problematized the transcendental self-evidence of “equality” by way of revealing its selectively pliant and contradictory force under conditions of liberal democratic modernity. The ironic title of that article, “Give birth . . . or we will perish” (Genáte yiatí hanómaste), mocked a declaration of the then president of the Greek Republic on the necessity of increased birthrate
for the nation to be able to defend itself effectively in fighting against its enemies (i.e., *to aksiómachon tou éthnous*).

Biopolitics is a turbulent site of cultural signification where critical displacements can be fostered. The following story carries special weight in that respect, as it is an example of radical reiteration that lays bare the idioms of bio-temporal corporeality widely used to signal the nation in light of demographic alarmism. In its 26 June 1994 edition, “Iós,” the heretical supplement of the popular daily *Eleftherotipía*’s Sunday edition, criticized vehemently the masculinist sexual idioms to which nationalist narratives about the engendering of the nation so commonly resort.

Tellingly entitled “The Phallus of the Nation: Patriotic Misogyny,” the newspaper’s portrayal mocked the heroic script of sexualized nationalism which draws heavily on the discursive reservoir of idealized heterosexual reproduction, and specifically on phallic tropes. The authors only entered the lexicon of the ethnocentric myth in order to destabilize its phallicized terms: “To the hot-headed [nationalists], our nation is of male sex. The other nations have female characteristics and deserve the fate that the tough wiry lads (*oi dhavrantisménoi*) reserve for women.” As the vehement commentary of “Iós” implied, in the discourses of nationalism, national heroic pluck and male sexual prowess are inextricably bound. The nation—as always already *our* nation—is conceived as a virile fraternity, a collective inclusion that alienates inappropriate/d bodies. The “hard” values of “our” nation (i.e., toughness, virility, masculinity) are typically presented to contrast sharply with the “soft” values of the “other” (i.e., laxity, indulgence, feminization). The authors cited the lyrics of a song which was a hit during the years of the 1967–1974 dictatorship (“To fight at castles with my burning sword during the day / and to hold at night under the stars a Turkish girl in my lap”) reminding their readers that the word “Tourkopoúla” (i.e., Turkish young woman) changed to “omorfoúla” (i.e., pretty woman) after an official Turkish protest. Using this once popular song as an epigraph to their story, they commented upon the way in which the use of “woman” had been lyrically staged as an objectified catalyst to the intrigues of male militancy.

As this event of ironic poetics illustrates, the discourse of undernatality, premised on the ontology of time and the politics of life that I unraveled in this paper, establishes a code of intelligibility through which selves are formed and made humanly recognizable to themselves and to others. However, it cannot be reduced to an invariably efficacious regime of truth populated by disciplined subjects eager to *em-body* it. Whatever their claims to rest on natural cosmology, rational truth, or national necessity, biopolitical technologies are susceptible to the reflexive actions of various social actors on the horizon of a cultural intelligibility
that precedes and exceeds them. This is about a necessary possibility of devising performative dissonance in moments when this seems like a venture out of place and time.

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NOTES

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1 See Neni Panourgia’s discussion of Jean-Pierre Vernant’s argument that bereavement renders the dead one present. “The presence of the dead,” Panourgia notes, “is always their irrefutable absence” (1995:123). In the context of Greek Orthodox funerary rites, especially that of ektaphé, Panourgia eloquently discusses the appropriation of the ultimate otherness of death in organizing the emotional, rational, spiritual, and social cosmos of the living.

2 For an interesting anthropological treatment of Foucault’s theory, see the work of David Scott, who has addressed the institutional and epistemic rationality of population as a distinctive and constitutive feature of “government,” this modern form of power which is premised upon liberal political reason (1999:37–38). The emergence of “population” took place as a crucial moment of displacement, which inaugurated the regime of governmental power and signaled a critical reorganization of the relation between politics and epistemology.

3 Similarly, Marina Iossifides notes: “Couples who have sex without intending to marry are considered to be ‘like animals,’ unable to judge or control their passions” (1991:138). For an insightful critical approach to the anthropocentric biologism underlying naturalized normative procreation, see Bakalaki 1994.

4 Drawn from the same Cartesian tradition, the term “embodiment” (see, for example, Csordas 1994, who extensively builds on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology), by and large presupposes—however critically—an ontological disjunction between immaterial forces (such as will, consciousness, psyche, etc.) and bodily materiality. In her attempt to overcome this central (terminological but also epistemological) difficulty, Papagaroufali endorses the term “somatization” (somatópoíisi), which she regards akin to Nadia Seremetakis’s (1997:42) “poetry” (poíisi), as well as Michael Herzfeld’s “poetics.” For an insightful analysis of the performative materialization of the regulatory ideal of gender, see Butler 1993: instead of taking for granted the materiality of the body, Butler proposes for analysis the processes that perform the domain of materiality as the very basis of gender and sexual identity.

5 In the “circulation” that I am describing here, the cultural permutations of the word
Bloodlines

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economy seem to be highly relevant: oikos [house, settlement] + nomia [sharing, distribution] signify the management of resources; the avoidance of waste by careful rational planning. An interesting fold of this etymological multiplicity can be illuminated by taking into consideration Panourgia’s reading of oikos as family grave, the “last home of the family”—a sēma (sign, marker) that ensures the perpetuation of a family’s “distinct individuality” and asserts “eternal companionship, unity, and everlasting remembrance” (1995:179).

For treatments of blood symbolism in the context of Greek ethnography, see also Marina Iossifides (1991) and Juliet du Boulay (1984). For the workings of blood symbolism in the context of Greek declining birthrates, see Paxson 2004.

On the theme of women as polluters, see also Dubisch 1983, 1986.

The centrality of conceptions of “time” in terms of “purpose of life” in the context of Orthodox Christian religious imagination in rural Greece, see Laurie Kain Hart 1992.

The fear pertaining to the inassimilable “other” within has been registered in similar Eastern and Western European experiences: the widespread cultural prejudice in Romania (as well as throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans) against the birthrate among the Roma which is stereotypically presented to be “dangerously” higher than that of the Romanians (Kligman 1998:300, n. 42) betrays this same cultural anxiety.

Such exigencies are conjured brazenly by Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of France’s nationalist extreme-right Front National, who foresees looming violent outbursts provoked by current demographic transformations: “There is a contradictory evolution of demographic forces between the North and the South: the North is becoming poorer and older, the evolution of the South explodes with a young population. Without a radical reversal of this evolution the nations of the North will disappear within fifty years. Demographic colonization is much closer to war than economic or cultural colonization as we knew it in past centuries” (Cited in Holmes 2000:65).

With the term “bare life” (vita nuda) Agamben refers to the irreducible limit of humanity, the marked Other. In the realm of biopower, the naked body is left bare of any subjective content, standing before the sovereign power that constitutes and obliterates it as such (1998).

Alexandra Bakalaki’s essay (1989) discusses the cultural meanings of women’s preoccupation with their own bodily cleanliness as sign of moral faultiness and sexual impropriety; the excessive cleanliness of the “clean” woman (pastrikiá) may be stigmatized as a violation of the priority a proper woman must attribute to the care of her home and family. The appropriate use of the body becomes a criterion through which a woman’s position in the conjugal context, the family, and the community is culturally valued. By the same token, women’s care for the cleanliness of their own body is accepted and necessary in so far as it takes place within the proper bounds of “home” and serves its ideology.

This instantiation of dissenting journalism is authored regularly by a team of four left-wing public intellectuals (Tasos Kostopoulos, Anghelika Psarra, Dimitris Psarras, and Dimitris Trimis), who provocatively call themselves “Foreis tou Ioú” (i.e., “Carriers of the Virus”), an appellation, indeed, that bears strong connotations of bodily contamination, but also of embodied fear of the Other qua potentially pollutant. It is certainly not insignificant that during the recent proliferation of discourses on “terrorism” in light of a deluge of arrests of members of the organization November 17, there have been allegations regarding the politics of “Iós” as purportedly “filotromokratiki” (i.e., pro-terrorist), deriving from conservative journalist circles; in such aggressive rhetorical practices, the four journalists of “Iós” are pejoratively referred to as “the viruses” (i.e., oi ioí). The political charge of such appellation resonates with Rosi Braidotti’s term “viral politics,” a form of micro-politics that begins with “our desires to enact positive transformations on the environment we happen to inhabit” (2002:266). In constituting a provocative intervention in the very embodied
habitus that by virtue of a chronic anxiety of contamination pathologizes the Other, “Iós” re/presents a new embodiment in the domain of journalist language. Indeed, as performance artist Laurie Anderson has put it with admirable clarity, “language is a virus.”

14 The intertwined tropes of violated homeland and violated women have been central to Greek Cypriot representations of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 (Layoun 1994:65). Within the context of symbolic confluence between the gendered body and the body politic, reproduction plays out in the discursive site of woman’s body (Calotychos 1998; Karakasidou 1996; Layoun 2001; Tsibiridou 1995–96).

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