

Modern Greek Seminar #703
March 28, 2012

PRESENTATION: Highland Crete as anti-Germany: Questions of Epistemology and Imagination 'in Crisis'

PRESENTER: Konstantinos Kalantzis, Mary Seeger Post-Doctoral Fellow in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University

CHAIR: Vangelis Calotychos, Associate Professor of Modern Greek Literature & Culture, Classics

RAPPORTEUR: Annette Fay, CU SIPA

SEMINAR ATTENDEES:	Alvaro Garcia Marin	Hens Radisoglou
	Pete Seeley	Heiner Schroeder
	Uzhizei Azy	Vangelis Calotychos
	Karen Van Dyck	Annette Fay

IMAGES

Close-up view of Acropolis & Cretan man
Entanglement of the personal in the national: Syntagma Square
Offering to Daskaloyiannis
Signed card by member of Greek government
'Tsolia' photography by Nelly, 1930, Benaki Museum archive
2 public iconographies of nativism against state coercion
Back to Syntagma square, now *rizitiko*
II. Sphakia's amateur war museum
Franz Peter Weixler's photographs
Katsoulogiorgis: convergence of aesthetic self-image with his role against the Germans
2 forms of repudiation employing a sexual trope
Cairns as forms of undesirable intervention in-place
Coffee house pictures
Picture of man with big mustache
Baud-Bovy's picture of a Sphakian man
George Meis' Sphakian man (Manolis Nikoludhis)

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION:

Mr. Kalantzis' presentation draws on ethnographic fieldwork in Athens (during 2011) and highland Crete (2006 to 2011) and seeks to explore Greek social imagination and

political praxis through a focus on Crete as a topos of social engagements and a figure of national imagination.

He divided his presentation into two parts. The first examines people's semantic and bodily investment in Crete during various practices of protesting and dissent, within the context of the "crisis". The second part turns more closely to the Sphakia region of western Crete and examines locals' responses to their signification within the "crisis" as well as their engagements with Germans and Germany as an "imaginary entity".

The talk gives centrality to the visual as a method and an object of study, arguing that it is in various visual practices that one may uncover social dynamics that would be eluded from a logo-centric focus on the discursive field.

The first part of the presentation traverses different ethnographic realms and explores what the concept of "resistance" means and what it engenders for Greeks in various positions at present. Further, the author unpacks the significations and subjectifications that Crete, as an imaginary figure, triggers and unravels for people engaging with different political self-images. In turning to the responses of Sphakians as regards their national usability in the "crisis" context the talk brings to the fore the question of native epistemology. How do local sensibilities become shaped and how do they relate to the level of national demands? These are some of the questions addressed in the latter part of the talk.

The talk's second part features ethnographic observations of various exchanges between Sphakians and German tourists, particularly focusing on visual and material culture. These exchanges are related and compared to other domains of signification and experience emerging on broader national levels. The talk examines the lure of notions of "resistance" for European tourists and explores the cultural productivity of various neo-Romantic tenets as well as how they shape the encounter between visitors and locals. Drawing on specific photographic practices the essay finally articulates a model to account for the question of native epistemology and proposes the possibility of recovering a realm of experience through visual practice that complicates the commonplace national assumptions about Greeks' relationship to Germans and Germany.

DISCUSSION

Q: From the mainland looking to Crete, one gets a sense of an exhaustion with a particular type of Cretan reactivity, perhaps a reactivity in general? I am not sure that Cretan-ness as a discourse plays much of a role in the current crisis, even if resistance *per se* is very much in the air. When one listens to people's reactions to the types of 'resistance' at Zoniana, I sense a weariness with them, a critique. That resistance will not chart a course for the country. I am wondering the degree to which this is true.

A: A reaction is part of the same imaginary complex that I have been describing. In my argument even the seeming negativity is, in fact, part of the ambivalent approach to Crete, which may very easily shift from disdain to appreciation of 'resistance' and nativism.

Q: Rejection and fascination. In your talk you came back to that polarity time and again and you seemed to play on that kind of duality.

A: My use of those analytical categories is meant in the direction of doing away with the duality or polarity and rather stressing the constantly mutable and shifting character of cultural investments and approaches to Crete.

Q: Is that propelled by a type of defensiveness that local resistance might have?

Q2: I have two comments together. In the Greek *Vima* newspaper today, the current foreign minister affirmed that Greece has never put aside demands that Germany pay its wartime debt. Of course this is a statement that comes from someone who will soon be out of office, as Greece faces an upcoming election in just more than a month. It seems an empty rhetorical gesture. Interestingly enough, it appears in an article that is largely critical of this gesture, saying that the Greek foreign ministry has never really set out the argument for reparations in a historically informed and formal fashion. This is precisely the kind of hollow resistance that stops short of any pragmatic strategy of fulfillment.

A: This is an interesting remark as it points to one dominant Greek perception of 'resistance' to Germany as a hollow verbalism not supported by 'real' action. In fact, the widespread Greek sense of 'real' subjugation vis-à-vis a rhetorical opposition may be seen as instrumental in the, at times, violent disavowal of Germany or the EU in various Greek public contexts.

Q: Can you explain more the position of the (language-school) poster that you showed in your talk?

A: I showed a photograph depicting the advertisement of a private language school that someone had intervened on, erasing the word 'German' (language) and adding the phrase 'Fuck Germany'. The photograph itself is a complex object however as it circulates in an array of spheres, (including the current seminar). This same image was featured in websites (such as the *Lifo* free-press website) that mocked the erasure as a sign of ridiculous intransigence (opposing the kind of bourgeois sensibility that the websites seek to represent) and was also circulated among individual internet users, mostly within the

idiom of parody. At the same time, the practice depicted in the photograph registers a form of disavowal, negation and erasure against Germany as an ‘imaginary entity’. It also speaks about certain tendencies regarding the Greek putative subjugation. In my analysis such aggressive response tends to poignantly reflect the limitations of an indigenous critique that doesn’t have the access to the cultural capital necessary to efficaciously counter the resented phenomenon (e.g. of what is seen as submission to a hierarchy of languages).

Q: In Athens, there’s been a wave of trendy Cretan restaurants, why do you think that is?

A: There has been in the last, at least, decade, a trend of this kind. I am seeing this as reflecting a certain re-organization of the rural hinterland for a particular kind of consumption that emerges in Greece particularly in the 1990’s. One could see this as the Greek equivalent of ‘off-the-beaten track’ tourism although it bears particularly Greek characteristics and it is also not necessarily as homogeneous as I am making it sound here, within Greece itself. What is most important is the fact that notions of an unexplored, rural hinterland surface anew (the 90’s are of course not in any way the first time when such notions become desirable) and feed a series of practices, among which the trendy Cretan restaurants you asked about.

Q: As an addendum to that question, do you know in which Cretan village Michael Herzfeld did research in?

A: I know that the author decided not to disclose the name of the village in his Greek translation of the book (forthcoming) and thus I would like to respect this decision by not saying anything further as to the name of the location. The question of anonymity in ethnography is quite complex and has various legal and other parameters. Locals themselves are most often ambivalent as to whether their own names or place names should be revealed to a wider audience, especially if their area is entangled in wider mythologies on the national and international level.

Q: Crete remains a major destination for German tourists. People are supposed to accommodate persons who might express satisfaction concerning Germany’s attitude towards Greece. Should we really say that the words ‘Fuck Germany’ have a sexual element to them?

A: I didn’t have time to discuss this in detail but I disagree that there’s no sexual meaning to the words used – if there’s not, then those words wouldn’t have been chosen. Someone sent me a message recently, as a joke, whether Greeks or Germans have larger penises. There’s a lot to discuss there about the ways in which the clash against Germany is played on sexualized terrain, I just haven’t taken it up tonight.

Q: The other part of the poster is much more potent for me. In fact, “Germany” gets crossed out from a long list of languages in the language school offerings. That’s a much stronger statement, in the graffiti around the same. To me it’s more stunning that German is rubbed out from a list of languages, singling it out amongst other foreign languages and cultures, this makes the spite more potent.

Q2: I also wanted to talk about the use of naked epistemology. Talk a bit more about the epistemology that you're referring to.

A: I am using the term to designate the bundle of local ways of seeing and doing, yet I am subverting this same idea by claiming that what we call "local" has been always conditioned by the presence of others (commercial producers, urbanite elites, etc.). At the same time, as an ethnographer, I have to pay attention to the fact that Sphakians have a very certain idea of what is local and what is not and thus account for that too.

Q: It's interesting because this pits you against the idea of the enclave that recurs time and again in your description of prominent perceptions in these local settings.

A: The notion of the enclave is perhaps the most evocative in both official mechanisms of representation and local self-images. I am not trying necessarily (as a certain tradition of historians and archaeologists often do) to undo or challenge the 'reality' of the enclave but point to its usability and meaning for people in different positions, while showing that it is itself an idea that emerged within the complex encounter between locals and outsiders.

Q: I like the hiking. Nowadays, a lot of special hikes are offered for sale on Greek islands as well as on the mainland -- often these are written by Germans. The Germans often manage to print and sell guides for these routes, in effect achieving something the locals have not managed to do all these years.

A: There are many possible responses to this. Simply put, a recreational hiker may perhaps be in a more privileged position as regards the marketing of hiking in the White Mountains. At the same time, Sphakians were 'pricked' by the presence of hikers in the mountains as this partly challenges their own exclusionary claims to that realm. Sphakians have and continue to be very hospitable to passing hikers but there is significant ambivalence and a desire to claim the mountains as their own.

Q: Is there any kind of German perception of this kind of thing?

A: Most of the Germans that go to that part of Crete are readers of the 'Rough Guide,' or have been going to Sphakia since the 1970's. I often found that they enthusiastically read about the 'culture' of the area (e.g. Karystiani's novel about a blood feud). A question that I pursue in my work is to what extent their engagement differs from the Greek imagination economy as regards the rural hinterland.

Q: I'm wondering about those restaurants in Athens and whether they have any future in the current economic crisis?

A: They were going well and some of these were owned by people who performed their Cretan descent in other public spheres too. In light of the 'crisis' context however it is hard to say what kind of future they will have.

Q: I wonder how Xylouris is viewed across Crete? As a local or at the same time a national phenomenon. Does this compromise his authenticity?

A: It depends on which part of Crete we are talking about. In western Crete (Chania Prefecture and particularly the highlands) Xylouris is seen as an appreciable musician who nevertheless publicized a western Cretan idiom (*rizitiko*) without being a fully legitimate bearer (due to his Central Cretan descent). There is hence a strong desire to claim back *rizitiko* from its (putative) Xylouris/commercial version to its roots (literally and metaphorically), i.e. the White Mountains of western Crete. This attitude is related to the intra-local clashes regarding any cultural idiom.

Q: How do you situate yourself in ethnography for those in a different discipline?

A: I am interested in visual ethnography. This is to a great extent an approach to the sensory elements of cultural practice and a means of complicating what we think we have access to through the logo-centric study of discourse, rhetoric, etc.