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Boomerang Kids in Contemporary Greece: Young People's Experience of Coming Home Again

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Charalambos Tsekeris*, Evdokia Ntali†, Apostolos Koutrias‡ and Athena Chatzoulis§

ABSTRACT

Under the burden of the severe and protracted Greek crisis, it seems that Greek youngsters face an increasingly precarious situation of suffering and transition. This affects them in multiple ways, concerning both the external socio-economic conditions and their internalised sense of self-biographical continuity. The present qualitative study aims to demonstrate and examine the core dimensions of the crisis-ridden self-structure of young adults, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Taking into consideration the growing "boomerang phenomenon" of Greek young people returning to their parental home (after losing their job or finishing their studies), we investigate the disruption caused in their life trajectories and the need for re-orientation, as it is expressed within subjective living-with-parents experiences. The sample consists of 15 Greek young inhabitants, aged between 24 and 32 years old, who are either unemployed or precariats, and live with their parents. The experienced collapse of linear self-imaginaries and the subsequent frustration along with the reaction to the present reality, as well as the **recuperating strategies emerged from the participants' narratives, are carefully examined according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and through relational and self-oriented pathways. The present study concludes by highlighting the reflexive deficit depicted on our participants' psychic investment in obsolete or even unrealistic mentalities, despite their pronounced repudiation.

Keywords: Greek Crisis, Generation Boomerang, Suffering, Uncertainty, Middle Class

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1. Impact of Greek crisis on conditions of employment

Since 2010, Greece has experienced a severe economic crisis that derives from a combination of negative factors, such as neoliberal globalisation, unbalanced trade between the European North and South, and a deeply clientelistic political system (see e.g. Lyrintzis 2011). The imposed adjustment measures have intensified the Greek economy recession and deepened a large-scale social and humanitarian crisis. Various forms of austerity policies had, and continue to have, adverse consequences for the welfare state. This, in turn, has led to increasing unemployment (particularly among the young population), lower salaries, and cuts in the social security system (see Tsoukalis 2013).

Moreover, Eurobarometer studies suggest that among young people in Europe there is a dominant feeling of exclusion from social mechanisms and public structures (Eurobarometer 2014). It seems that the current generation of young Europeans faces a fragmented and uncertain reality much worse than the reality their parents experienced (Antonucci, Hamilton & Roberts 2014). This fact is reflected especially in the Greek case, as young people constitute the age group coping with the most deleterious impacts of austerity measures (Tsekeris, Pinguli & Georga 2015; Kretsos 2014).

Confused feelings of frustration, sadness, resignation and helplessness are variously expressed by both younger and older generations of Greeks: "But while the older ones know they will not be around to live the post-crisis future, exhausted young people are full of distrust, contempt and apathy" (Knight 2017). More specifically, youth unemployment (under the age of 25) in Greece remains the highest in the entire EU, along with Spain, at almost 49% (Eurostat 2015). In addition to the dramatic rise of unemployment, working conditions are getting worse, placing an expanding group of young employees in the status of "working poor", where employees work either in part-time work, or in temporary and badly paid jobs (Kesisoglou, Figgou & Dikaiou 2016).

These groups of employees, alternately labelled as the "missing middle" (Roberts 2011), the "squeezed middle" (Whittaker & Bailey 2012), or the "forgotten working poor" (O'Reilly 2008), are facing an increasingly precarious situation. "Precarity" is a term used to imply the irregular conditions of work, like part-time employment, getting paid by the hour, temporary or short-term contracts, or shadow labour. Arne Kalleberg (2009) rightly points out the distress induced by precarious work, defining it as uncertain, unpredictable and risky for the worker. In Greece, statistics from the Insurance Inspectorate Force confirm that 40% of people work in precarious labour or bad jobs, without having a right to social health insurance (Mouriki 2010).

Under the above working conditions, young adults in Greece are obliged to cope with various limitations (induced by crisis), which affect them at multiple levels, indicating different aspects of social and psychological

complexities. Within such conditions, the youth feel unable to create future plans for their lives at a personal or professional level. This is especially reflected in young peoples' narratives, where participants expressed feelings of disappointment, uncertainty, pessimism, fear, anger, negativism, anxiety and depression (Chalari 2014). The main concern expressed (aged 20-30) is the possibility of unemployment (Chalari 2015). Our project, then, was designed to investigate the biographical disruption caused in Greek youngsters' life trajectories and their existential need for re-orientation, as it is expressed within subjective living-with-parents experiences.

2. Co-residence as predominant alternative for young adults

The above described difficulties signify that the crisis-ridden self of Greek youngsters is engaged in an everyday, painful fight for survival and satisfaction of basic needs. An alarming phenomenon here, which has emerged under crisis conditions, pertains to the growing rates of young people returning to their parental home, after losing their job, or after finishing their studies, with the support of their parents' financial assistance (Cairns 2011). In general, this group of young adults has been described by the term "generation boomerang", especially in the British and American media (Bingham 2009; Koslow & Booth 2012), though this is a worldwide phenomenon under conditions of economic austerity, with equivalents such as "parasaito singuru" in Japanese (Takahashi & Voss 2000) and "mammoni" (mama's boys) in Italian (Newman 2012).

Under such conditions, the transition to a more autonomous, independent and "adult-like" way of living appears to be a prolonged,

diverse and sometimes reversible process (Mitchell 2006), resulting in a less linear notion of what was once defined as adulthood. Terms like "adultescents" (Mitchell 2006) and "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2004) attempt to caputre the state of flux that young adults need to deal with, concerning both the external socio-economic conditions and their internalised perception of "being an adult". In this context, co-residence reflects how contemporary labour market factors strongly affect family dynamics. Such reality is further reinforced by the fact that traditional benchmarks like marriage, becoming a parent, establishing a separate household, and obtaining employment are no longer perceived as prerequisites of an adult identity, but as personal preferences and choices (Furstenberg, Kennedy, McLoyd, Rumbeau & Settersten 2004).

Relevant empirical studies highlighted several key issues which contribute to the decision of co-residence. In other cases, it has been found that events like losing a job or finishing full-time education reduce one's welfare and underpin residential independence, encouraging the return to the parental home (Stone, Berrington & Falkingham 2014). Other studies have also demonstrated that there is a positive association between parental income and the propensity of returning home (Mulder & Clark 2002), as well as between personal income and the likelihood of moving out the parental home (Iacovou 2010).

Factors like the quality of the parent-child relationship, the relative health status and potential care needed (Berrington, Stone & Falkingham 2013), as well as the parents' and child's attitude towards independence and privacy (Ermisch 2003) have a significant impact on this "returning back home" option. Along with these, a number of more

contextual variables, such as local unemployment rates, local house prices, the urbanicity of the parental home area (Billette, Le Bourdais & Laplante 2011), the size of the parental home and the number of other siblings remaining in the parental home (Smits, van Gaalen & Mulder 2010) play a crucial role. In addition, demographic studies reveal that returning home is observed to a greater extent among younger adults, mainly men and those with low personal income (Smits et al. 2010).

Regarding Greece, young adults' reliance on parental assistance seems to be higher compared to other European countries. According to Eurofound (2014), young Greeks leave the parental home at 29, whereas in southern and eastern European countries young people leave their home at earlier ages. This seems to set aside or to postpone the hope for independence (Marvakis et al. 2013). In a survey conducted by Tsekeris, Pinguli and Georga (2015), it was found that severe economic difficulties are the top-ranked factors mentioned by young respondents to explain their decision to co-habit. However, returning to the parental home in Greece can be better understood when we take into consideration the strong relational family ties that characterise Greek family dynamics and strongly affect young adults' choices and decisions (Ioannou 2014). In this context, young adults in Greece need to resolve the dilemma that they face between a prolonged stay at the parental home and residential autonomy.

As a result, we find that the current crisis in Greece encompasses the strong dimension of ontological crisis in addition to its economic, social and political dimensions. In such an ontological crisis, the subject copes with the challenges to their sense of self-continuity, the threat of a

ruptured biography, and the need to find out an effective response to this threat. Importantly, unemployment and return to the parental home appear as a "biographical disruption" (Bury 1982) that disrupts the life trajectory of youth, causing a caesura (break) in their biographical life course and a need for re-orientation at multiple levels. In situations of biographical disruption, the person often loses their direction in life or the energy needed to perform even daily tasks (Bury 1982; Honkasalo 2009; Ketokivi 2008), while expectations and taken-for-granted beliefs begin collapsing.

Hence, the concept of biographical disruption refers to an event that occurs in life against one's will, as well as to the subjective interpretation of this situation (Williams 2000). The disruption induces changes in the configuration of life (at both the personal and relational level), requiring that the person cope with the situation and reconstitute their life. Consequently, due to frustrated professional expectations and the return to parental homes, we form the hypothesis that young adults, who are either unemployed or underpaid (working poor) and return to the parental home, face a salient biographical disruption, which may provoke intra- and inter-personal difficulties to arise. We suggest that this biographical disruption is a process of *splitting of subjectivity*, which is very painful and involves an impairment of self-image and self-presentation. In this sense, this biographical disruption may become an *identity trauma.*

3. Methodology

This paper concentrates its analytic attention upon the itinerary of the self, as it is painfully experienced through the current Greek crisis by youngsters who are either unemployed or precariats. Specifically, our main purpose is to critically understand how the young subject in Greece experiences:

(a) the frustration caused by the emergent collapse of linear imaginaries (narratives) underpinning the self (and self-formation),

(b) biographical disruption and its related dismantling effects,

(c) the reaction to this reality and the biographical attempt to re-fabricate the self.

Other studies have examined such experiences from a relational or psychosocial perspective (Mason 2004; Roseneil 2009) in an attempt to escape from the individualistic and positivistic trap of reductionism and reification, as well as of the over-simplifying "psychologisation" of human behaviour in the midst of crisis. The relational approach mostly focuses on the non-linear dynamical interweaving between the social and the personal (Tsekeris 2015). A basic analytical prerequisite in this approach is that social imaginary meanings and representations constitute the necessary conditions not only for social and symbolic cohesion, but also for self-formation, self-cohesion and self-identity. The self is thus approached on the basis of its relational constitution, while the social experience is considered to be formed and experienced as a relational communicative process (De Villiers & Cilliers 2004). The imaginary of the future ideal self, the frustration of the biographical

rupture and the emergent reconstruction of the self are experienced through nonlinear relational pathways. This is a holistic approach in which human suffering is understood as both a sociopolitical phenomenon and a psychic or mental reality located in complex processes of symbolic interaction and interdependence at the individual and societal levels.

The present study uses a qualitative method, with semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore subjective living-with-parents experiences. The participants are young adults living in their parental home, after completing their education, and being unemployed or working as precariats under temporary contracts and with very low salaries. The sample consists of 15 young adults, 10 women and 5 men. They are single and their ages ranged between 24 and 32 years old. All of them belong to middle-class social strata. Four of them live in Athens, 3 in Volos, 2 in Larissa, 2 in Thessaloniki, 1 in Crete, and 3 in Katerini. They all have higher education qualifications, either from universities or from technological institutes.

The sampling procedure was based on snowball technique (Van Meter 1990; Oppenheim 1992; Atkinson & Flint 2001), with some of the participants introducing the researcher to others. The choice of this technique pertained to the purpose of the study; it was not to ensure either a random or a representative sampling, but to actively listen to the pulse of emergent subjective experiences of young adults confronted with difficult dimensions of the current crisis, so that we can conceptualise the research as an exploratory investigation (Hoaglin, Mosteller & Tukey 1983).

The interviews took place during the period from April to August 2016. In-depth interviews were conducted to investigate the subjective experiences of young adults and to give the participants the chance of reflecting upon themselves, the role of significant others, and the societal links of their struggle. A semi-structured interview guide was administered to each participant, making small, appropriate adaptations according to the flow of each discussion. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, starting from more general questions about the participant's life and attitudes on the contemporary situation in Greece so as to establish rapport with the respondents, and escalating to more personal questions about the experience of living again with parents.

The interview guide was informed by the research literature and was based on a temporal life course perspective, following an approach of describing the experiences in three parts: (a) life alone before returning, (b) the experience of returning and (c) a projection into the future. Each interview lasted 40-50 minutes approximately. In line with the general research ethics guidelines, researchers ensured that various factors, such as voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and data storage were fully respected during the research process. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded, and translated into English.

When the interviews were completed, the authors read and re-read interview transcripts carefully in order to get an overall feeling of participants' accounts. The interviews were interpreted according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Harré & Van

Langenhove 1995). This approach facilitates the understanding of participants' lived experiences, so as to present what a topic is like for them within a specific context (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton 2008; Smith 2004). In this attempt, IPA extends simple description and makes sense of participants' lived experiences by developing an interpretative analysis of the description in relation to social, cultural, and theoretical contexts. Thus, the analyst offers "an interpretative account of what it means for the participant to have such concerns within their particular context" (Larkin et al. 2008, p. 113). IPA's theoretical underpinnings stem from the phenomenological tradition, mostly originated with the Husserlian attempt to construct a philosophical science of consciousness, with hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation), and with symbolic-interactionism, which emphasises the importance of the intersubjective meaning an individual ascribes to events (so, the path to access knowledge is through an interpretative process). Consequently, IPA elaborates on the interpretative dimension of the researcher's engagement with the participant's text/account.

Based on the above approach, the data were categorised into four superordinate phenomenological themes. These themes are the following: (a) socially embedded personal imaginaries, (b) experiences of biographical disruption, (c) behaviours of coping, and (d) future projection. The detailed analysis of transcriptions also discerned a number of emergent sub-themes, which contributed to a better organised analysis of the data's content.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Collapse of linear imaginaries

The first theme – the imaginaries – emerged from participants' descriptions, responding to the question about "how they imagined their self, before returning to their parental home". Concerning this theme, we singled out four interlinked sub-themes that record and re-produce the existing social imaginaries about a linear, stable and growing life, under state protection. They include expectations about the progression of the self at a personal (professional and relational) level, which are not informed by the limitations generated from the current crisis. As a result, the frustration of these imaginaries contributes to the experience of a perceived rupture that young adults seem to confront.

The first identified sub-theme is the *imaginary* of a *linear course of life, including a sense of professional, financial, interpersonal stability and residential autonomy*. These accounts are expressed by some participants, such as Domna, a 27-year-old-primary school teacher from Katerini, and Rena, a 28-year-old lawyer from Volos.

> *"Just when we entered the university, it was supposed that whenever we graduate, we would work from the very beginning and have an apartment, a boyfriend and friends around us... We didn't have in our minds that we will return back home. For example, talking to my friends… who would go back, I used to say 'oh how will I get back now', and I had denial about it. I was thinking 'I won't go back, every year I'll be somewhere else,*

working as a teacher'… Hmmm, I generally imagined a nomadic life in the following years, a relative freedom" (Domna)

"Yes, my expectations were that after completing the internship (after about a year and a half), I would be economically self-sufficient, everything would be much easier, and I could rent a house... And then, of course, I wanted to go on, to be a post-graduate student… In the end, among all these, the only thing I did was the master degree" (Rena)

Such narratives seem to expand the imaginary of economic growth described by Tsekeris, Kaberis and Pinguli (2015), who refer to the narrative of a successful transition to adulthood, characterized by a linear, progressive and cumulative economic and social development and prosperity. The imaginaries described are also in line with the fundamental criteria of transition to adulthood and to a differentiated identity, described by Arnett (2004), which are (a) a sense of personal responsibility, (b) independent decision-making and (c) financial autonomy of the young adult. The inability to achieve the above criteria is expected to trigger feelings of frustration and difficulties with a transition to adulthood.

The second symbolic imaginary described is the imaginary of the civil servant. This is clearly observed in the following descriptions:

"Okay, the truth is that I definitely expected better wages as a civil servant… When we started studying at university, we were thinking of graduating, and then of having a good job, a good salary, but we found nothing of it... That is, we imagined ourselves,

me and my friends to be more independent, especially at this age" (Manos, 30 years old, accountant from Larisa)

"I started a master program in special education, in order to increase the possibility of finding a job in the public sector... My dad is very anxious about that. He was always trying to convince me to enter this program... My parents generally push me toward a job in the public sector" (Xanthi, 29 years old, nursery school teacher from Thessaloniki)

This description is closely related to the imaginary of occupational stability, proposed by Tsekeris et al. (2015), which refers to individuals working in the private sector, or as a civil servant. Such professional status is linked to a sense of permanency, safety, economic success and social recognition (symbolic capital). In Greece, these imaginaries are mainly linked to the public sector, which seems to be a key career choice for most of the young adults entering the labor market. This preference begins to be observable from students' choices about university studies, along with a clear preference for a job in the public sector. In a relevant survey conducted by Karamessini (2010), only one out of ten students questioned replied that they would prefer a job in the private sector. This preference is better explained, taking into consideration that the public sector offers wages well above the average wage in the private sector, even at lower levels of wage dispersion (Papapetrou 2006).

In addition to the above context, the imaginary of the civil servant is also interlinked with the central role of the Greek family as an integral part of a political system, which has been traditionally accompanied by elements of rent-seeking, clientelism and patronage. It used to function

through networks of political-party and public-sector institutions, so as to ensure beneficial behaviours towards its members, using a plethora of tactics and strategies in order to exploit available public resources (Petmesidou 1991). Finally, this steady preference of young adults for public job positions is also linked with particular perceptions about the role of the state in Greece. Since the postwar years, there was a high "demand for protection", in parallel with the dominance of the state either as a regulatory mechanism, or as a direct employer (Tsoukalas 1986). Such reality is captured in the findings of the Eurobarometer (2009), according to which 87% believe that the state is responsible to provide or to create job positions for the unemployed.

In parallel with the above imaginaries, a third imaginary captured through participants' narratives is the imaginary of the consumer. Such visions are clearly presented in descriptions, such as those expressed in the following accounts:

> *"I used to dream of a home, a car, a good job. Pfff... I was thinking that we would live a few years just like the "Friends" [the TV serial] did and after that... who knows... everyone would stay with her boyfriend or alone or that we would grow old together, alone with our cats... But I didn't even think about returning. I had thought about it but it seemed so scary that I repressed it"* (Elina, 24 years old, journalist from Athens)

> *"I imagined that I would have my own job that I would have a lot of money… that I could travel a lot, have my own car and a modern apartment. Finally, I haven't achieved anything of these*

and I still try to find a job" (Haris, 27 years old, graduate of plant production from Thessaloniki)

This account, expressed by Elina, can be explained by taking into account the *abundance of events*, characterising the current social environment, or under the concept of "hypermodernity", introduced by the French anthropologist Marc Augé (1992). The hypermodern subject lives in a permanent state of abundance (of consumption, stimuli, pressure, stress, and so on) in an unstable society, which demands the best possible performance, and builds its identity through individual decisions and narcissistic desires that convert it to an independent person of the upper class (Charles & Lipovetsky 2004). However, in our case, young people face the *reality principle*, by being exposed to multiple crisis-driven frustrations, while in the meantime they have to deal with the risk or reality of unemployment and the need to return back to the parental home.

The imaginaries presented above need to be examined by taking into consideration some significant parameters. First of all, these expectations of young adults seem to follow general ideological schemes inherited from previous generations, concerning an ideal personal and professional progression. However, the economic, political, social and historical changes call for lower-level, more realistic expectations, which have to integrate the multitude of limitations met in everyday life. In the present study, Greek youngsters seem to maintain an old (traditional) pattern of thinking and behaving, which could be multiply explained. On a first level, it could be attributed to an attempt to avoid risks, or to lower self-efficacy beliefs, as posed by Bandura (1997). From a more

general perspective, additional time might be necessary, so as individuals can alter their reactions, following the concurrent institutional reforms. As Silbereisen, Best and Haase (2007) have claimed, this is an ongoing process, which needs a relentless dissemination of social action.

Overall, the above descriptions demonstrate how hitherto Greek youth expected their future to progress. However, these taken-for-granted expectations meet a state of emergency, in which "the state is virtually bankrupt, sovereignty on fiscal policy has been lost, pensions and salaries have been severely reduced primarily in the public and also in the private sector resulting in a drastic deterioration of the economic conditions for the majority of the population" (Lyrintzis 2011, p. 16). Thus, the young adult who had once formed and invested in particular life plans, symbolic narratives and ambitions, creating an ideal future self, is now facing a breaking caesura of self-continuity and experiences a rupture in biography.

4.2 Biographical disruption and the related dismantling effects

The second super-ordinate theme extracted from participants' narratives concerns the material, emotional and relational consequences of their experiences as "boomerang adults". Their narratives express a sense of suffering, caused by breaking up the expected course of life, wounding the self and creating the need to re-define, cope and refigure their life. These experiences reveal a subjective reality described as biographical disruption, a term coined by Michael Bury (1982) for understanding the deep processes of chronic illness and then broadened to involve any events that destroy the taken-for-granted assumptions

about life, break the linear flow of life in a subtle way and cannot be incorporated into the life that the individual has previously imagined. As a result, it forces people to redefine their biography and self-concept and respond to the altered situation by mobilising resources, such as the support of others (Bury 1982).

The effects expressed by participants of the present study can be described through the following sub-themes: (a) feelings of disruption, (b) intrapersonal conflicts confronted, and (c) relationship with parents.

To begin with the emotional consequences of their experience, there was homogeneity in terms of a negative emotional valence described by the interviewees. The feelings expressed involved distress, depressive disposition, pessimism, helplessness, resignation, anger, self-devaluation, feelings of injustice, inability to make plans and feelings of stagnation:

> *"I've been highly affected, sometimes I feel I am in a state of paralysis and this feeds me with pessimism, a huge sense of vanity… This makes me feel that nothing will occur among those things that used to be obvious some years before, namely, to have a job, a house and just to maintain myself, nothing more... Now, I regard these things as utopic and this is very disappointing, as this is not the normal progress of a human individual"* (Dina, 27-year-old social worker from Volos)

> *"I can say disappointment... I am not even searching for a job at present. I often feel irritated. I'm yelling, there are many things that bother me; things which didn't bother me, when I used to visit*

my city during holidays or in the summer... Now I blame everything... I feel a permanent anger... Now I feel I am stagnant... I complain about everything, about my relationship, my parents, about everything" (Giota, 24 years old, mass media graduate from Crete)

"In fact, I did nothing, I sunk in despair… I mean that when you're already in a period when you feel helpless, you observe that this fits with the rest things around you and you see that prospects are lost" (Iro, 28 years old, actor from Athens)

These narratives depict how dramatic social changes affect personal wellbeing and self-attitudes (Sablonniere, Auger, Sadykova & Taylor 2010). Under such crisis circumstances, people struggle to cope with the emergent difficulties and feel helpless and unable to make plans for the future. Empirical studies have demonstrated the negative consequences of crisis in terms of physical (Catalano et al. 2011; Economou, Nikolaou & Theodossiou 2008) and mental health, with particular emphasis on the increase of depressive symptomatology (Cifuentes, Sembajwe, Tak, Gore, Kriebel & Punnett 2008; Madianos, Economou, Alexiou & Stefanis 2011). According to Chalari (2014), the narratives of the younger generations in Greece reveal experiences of uncertainty, disappointment, pessimism, insecurity, anger, negativism, anxiety and depression. This is thoroughly reflected in the findings of the present study, where a remarkable loss of life satisfaction, wellbeing, and hope, as well as to feelings of insecurity, and suffering are expressed.

Participants' descriptions indicate that the ambivalences and struggle for contemporary personal life requires the theorisation of the complex intertwining of the social and the psychic. This implies that we need to transcend the persistent dualism between the individual and the social, as well as to examine the sphere of the intra-psychic, "the power of feelings" (Chodorow 1999), and the dynamical unconscious processes, without being trapped in either psychological or sociological reductionism (Roseneil 2006).

A second sub-theme that emerged from the narratives concerns the experience of being a "boomerang adult" in terms of intrapersonal conflicts. The aspirations and desires of the participants are in congruence with the (actual) reality they live in, and this triggers a state of conflicting intrapsychic dynamics that induces difficulties at various levels:

> "I used to go out very often and wherever I could, I was drinking cheaply; I was drinking a lot... I realised that I had no longing for anything, and in conjunction with the fact that I was drinking a lot, I realised that I had no life motivation... There were many days when I was sitting and did not want to get out of bed... And then I said 'Wow', I really got sad with myself... I remember myself lying 16 hours in bed and saying to myself 'wake up-no, sleep again'" (Iro, 28- year-old -actor from Athens)

> "When I came here, I was thinking that... 'ok, Myrto, you'll soon come back and you'll do something else'. And as time was passing by and I realised that I didn't have my house... that I had left my friends... and I was alone... I felt that I was stagnant... And every

day I feel that I am more trapped. The circle is completed and you reconcile with it; that your dreams are reduced, your standards are falling" (Myrto, 24 years old, geography graduate from Katerini)

These distressing dimensions of participants' experiences are in line with older research findings demonstrating that the unemployed lose self-respect and feel devalued and disparaged (Jahoda 1981; Schob 2013). The aforementioned narratives imply a state that has been described as "loss of self" (Charmaz 1983), a biographical state where individuals confront adverse conditions that push them to the (existential) margins. This loss of self, where the locus of control is perceived as totally external, seems to express in various ways an intense desire of "flight" from the present situation. This is indicated in the aforementioned examples: impulsive ways of relief through alcohol abuse, denial of the current state, and loss of motivation.

Similar intrapersonal conflicts are described in relation to the present self-image, as reflected in the following descriptions:

"These conditions lead me to evaluate myself negatively and as insufficient. As requirements constantly increase... this thing makes me doubt a lot about my skills, whether in the end I am able to work on what I've studied... I consider myself as a human confused, trapped, without the will to be active and activated... and with a very negative self-perception concerning my skills" (Dina, 27-year-old social worker from Volos)

"Because you say to yourself 'I am 28 years old and what can I do now? Will I be a burden for my parents? For how long? This has

nothing to do with my parents, as my parents want the best for me... Anyway... you want to find your own job, become independent and open your wings" (Themis, 28 years old, civil engineer from Athens)

These descriptions reveal that young adults in contemporary Greece are deprived of two important psychological markers of transition to adulthood: (a) residential independence and (b) employment (Furstenberg, Kennedy, McLoyd, Rumbaut & Settersten 2004). When young adults return home, dynamic changes occur, as such processes have serious implications for the wellbeing of both parents and their children (Aquilino & Supple 1991; Mitchell 2006). Empirical evidence suggests that returning home can affect the negotiation of adult roles and identities, mostly the schemes of relating with their parents from a position of an adult role, which calls for equality rather than dependence (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway 2008).

Furthermore, these young adults seem to suffer through longing for work (Layard, Nickell & Jackman 2005). A selfhood conceived within an absence-of-work state implies a loss of meaning and self-fulfillment, compatible with a lower self-worth (McFadyen 1995; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki 2005). This negative self–image is not caused by material hardship alone. According to Jahoda (1981, 1982) the angst of unemployment is caused by the deprivation of five primary benefits of employment, namely: (a) time structure; (b) social contacts beyond the family; (c) the experience of social purpose; (d) status and identity; and (e) regular activities. The unemployed "do not enjoy their 'leisure'; they

become disheartened, lose their self-respect and their sense of time, and feel on the scrap heap" (Jahoda 1981, p. 181).

The third sub-theme that seemed to define biographical disruption is depicted in the relations among family members. The extended presence at a parental home seems to challenge the formerly established relational stability, as expressed in the following narratives:

> *"My parents used to say 'come back home, we're going to take care of you… don't stay in Athens'. Especially my mum used psychological pressure to affect my decision... With my mother I have many fights, not for serious reasons, it really pisses me off... I had a big fight with my mother, especially when I refused to empty my personal stuff after moving in for a long time…"* (Giota, 24 years old, mass media graduate from Crete).

> *"I burst my nerve over them, I mean every discussion we begin ends with nerves, while I tell them 'you cannot understand me, as you both have your job... You say that I have everything I need, that you offer me everything... but the reality is that you cannot feel the way I feel'... I am 27 years old and I live with my parents and I am not able to make plans about anything"* (Vivi, 28 years old, psychologist from Larisa).

In many cases, it seems that parents are those who reinforce the co-habitation (as otherwise, they will pay more to provide a residential autonomy for their child) and try to control the time of their children's leaving (Cohen & Casper 2002). Under these terms, the young adults attempt to negotiate their status as adult children, trying to change

more primitive modes of relating with parents. This may lead to conflicts such as those described by participants of the present study.

From an overall point of view, the disruptive experiences described by the interviewees call for a personal response and do not only change the intrinsic configuration of life, but also the relationships and the notions of the self implicitly involved here. As Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) state, it is necessary to study both the subjective experiences and configurations of relationships ("networks") in order to figure out the multifaceted ways in which people are bound to each other. These networks play a crucial role in how the "boomerang" adults will negotiate the challenges they confront and how they will cope with them.

4.3 Reactions to crisis and the biographical attempt to re-fabricate the self and Data

4.3.1 Facing the current reality

Attempting to conceive the adjustment mechanisms mobilised as a reaction to the nonlinear, fragmented notion of their self, the participants were asked about the ways through which they manage to re-cohabitate with their parents. In addition, we focused on any other surrounding networks available that enhance their capacities and blunt or alleviate the sense of instability and stagnation.

Concerning the first part, the majority of the Greek interviewees seem to rationalise their "boomerang" decision, by recognizing the positive elements gained during their return to the parental home. More specifically, the interviewees recognise the provision of financial,

residential and, mostly, household support as the top-ranked factor that explains and, in some way, justifies their choice:

> "I find the food cooked, I rarely do housework, it's not like as it was when I lived in Athens and I had to do the housework all by myself… Apart from that, I don't have to pay bills etc... Besides, this was a prerequisite, me not contributing financially to the household expenses" (Giota, 24 years old, media studies graduate from Crete)

> "I find clean clothes, food, money, and the warmth of home that appeals to me, I'm that type of character. These... I think… these are the most positive sides" (Xanthi, 29 years old, nursery school teacher from Thessaloniki)

> "When someone is living with their parents, they feel much more financially secure, they eat at home, they don't have to spend time on cooking and doing some housework, because some of this stuff is already done by their parents" (Akis, 26 years old, economist from Katerini)

Apart from the full provision of residential and household services which is also reported consistently in relevant research papers worldwide (Mitchell 2006; Newman 2012; Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008; Settersten & Ray 2010), in the present case family is also recognised as a significant source of emotional and psychological support for the Greek young adults. A noteworthy proportion of the latter emphasised the companionship provided within their family system in times of economic or emotional difficulties, while simultaneously they refer to a re-

enforcement or improvement of the family ties and dynamics respectively:

> *"Of course, there are [positive issues]... First of all, the fact that... I don't like being on my own for a long time... I've got company, for example I wanna come home and share some stuff of what happened at work or, when I'm not in a good mood, I wanna have someone to share it with"* (Rena, 28 years old, lawyer from Volos)

> *"Besides, for the first time in my life I feel like... I started liking my father and understanding my mother, at the age of 27... We are close as a family, you bet! I strongly believe that"* (Iro, 28 years old, actor from Athens)

> *"I definitely like the way I feel seeing my little sister growing up and having me help her, because of course she communicates with me in a different way than she does with my mom, so I really like advising her and giving her a hand in everything... Since I'm growing too, I understand what it is like raising a kid, I understand more of how it must have been for my mom to raise us"* (Domna, 27 years old, primary school teacher from Katerini)

Thus, it can be easily implied that the contemporary Greek family still remains the basic support system, from both a practical and emotional aspect. Consistent with former research results concerning Greek youngsters, the previous narratives are indicative of the strong reliance that the latter show upon parental assistance, in comparison to other European countries (Tsekeris, Pinguli & Georga, 2015). The fortified family ties seem to act as a protective mechanism against residential,

financial and emotional uncertainty and instability caused in times of social and subsequently personal crisis (Dendrinos 2014).

Apart from the above, it can be suggested that family in contemporary Greece, despite being strongly affected by the severe socio-economic crisis of the last eight years, seems to play the fundamental role of "social shock absorber" (Karamessini 2007, p. 2). This directly refers to

(a) The preservation of the Greek family's traditional responsibility to protect its members from exposure to severe social, financial or professional risks and pitfalls (Papadopoulos & Roumpakis 2013),

(b) The familistic welfare capitalism that characterises the Greek civil state reality of low social protection measures (Adam & Papatheodorou 2015), limited coordination capacities and resilient institutional constellations (Papadopoulos 2016).

As for the contribution of the surrounding networks to the boomerang experience, the young interviewees, within their narratives, seem to recognise the inadequate government response to the urgent need for a radically different socio-economic policy, thus leading them to economic dependency on their families and consequently, to an expressed sense of collective suffering or shared destiny among their coevals:

> *"More or less, the same holds good for my friends... As you can imagine, we often discuss it [the Greek crisis] because it's a basic topic in our society and for us personally. We try to encourage or advise one another, especially those who are unemployed"* (Gerasimos, 32 years old, computer engineer from Athens)

"Many friends of mine were in the same place, they had returned back to Volos, so it would be easier for me as well to come back to a familiar environment, where I could have my friends standing by me... Faced with the whole situation that would be difficult anyway, I would have company or some guys facing the same experience" (Dina, 27 years old, social worker from Volos)

"Almost all of my friends live this way, so we all pull the same plow" (Akis, 26 years old, economist from Katerini)

"The youngsters of our age are experiencing a huge crisis, which we all have to face more or less in our everyday life... From the silliest thing, like someone being deprived of his coffee in town, to the more complex one, like someone who returns back from his student studies and can't do what supposedly would have done in the 1980s or 1990s or 2000s, that is finding a home and being independent; on the contrary, he has to return back to the family hearth" (Themis, 28 years old, civil engineer from Athens)

Taking into account, as Ketokivi and Meskus (2015, p. 43) point out, that "any action accomplished, such as simply continuing to live, is a relational rather than individual accomplishment", it seems that this shared sense of hardship revealed from the participants' narratives functions as a strong coping mechanism against institutional or socio-political failure. This is achieved by providing a stable basis upon which the younger generation can perceive and interpret the position of its self in the contemporary world and, at the same time, form an elementary collective identity and action (Narotzky 2011). In this analytical setting, the self appears to be in a continuous and reciprocal relationship with

other selves, and thus structurally shaped by the blend of autonomy and interdependence (Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli 2015).

On the other hand, referring to the decision of re-cohabitation, many young Greek participants of the sample find themselves involved in an attempt to re-demarcate their personal boundaries against their parents' "imperialistic" tendencies and thus to maintain a core sense of independence and an adult-like status. At the same time, most of the interviewees accent the force of habit in their effort to surpass the revived earlier forms of communication, along with the need for mutual understanding and for a stable relational basis:

> "I knew it would be very difficult for me... My father, as I said before, is a bit edgy and pushy, he wants things to be done as he wishes... Eventually, I set my limits... fought for them" (Maritina, 29 years old, nursery school teacher from Volos)

> "Apart from that, I believe that it does matter how a family is bound, how much mutual understanding and communication there is on everyday issues so as to avoid everyday frictions... Because it is common and usual, the more you grow up, the more you've got you own needs and you can't co-reside as easily as before... Fortunately, there was the habit that balanced [the situation]" (Gerasimos, 32 years old, computer engineer from Athens)

> "Yeah, ok . . . it was all about getting used to it again, catching the same pace. Thank God, I have a very good relationship with my parents, we don't have any issues. I mean, they don't bother me

neither do I, but no matter what, you live with your parents. Ok, you can't change this... But ok, it was just the first shock... [It took me] a couple of months, until I fully adjusted" (Manos, 30 years old, accountant from Larisa).

Sharing the same thesis with Sassler, Ciambrone and Benway (2008), who refer, within their research, to the interaction and reciprocal process through which parents as well as their returnee children tend to re-establish earlier communication and relational patterns but on a more adult basis, in the present study the Greek participants seem to delineate a sense of regression to an adolescent state of self, where they have to re-set their limits and reconquer their adult sense of independence and privacy.

However, their financial, residential and, to an extent, emotional reliance on their parents apparently triggers some dysfunctional side effects in a dual manner. On the first place, as Aquilino (2006) states, due to the aforementioned provided support, returnees lack the opportunity of becoming self-reliant and thus being trapped in a state of permanent immaturity that hinders or delays their expected and desirable autonomy. Secondly and from a socio-economic point of view, the postponed transition of the young workers to an economically independent life (Chtouris, Zissi, Papanis, & Rontos, 2006) is often due to a long-term strategy of waiting for the "appropriate job" to be found (Karamessini, 2010), including a career in the public sector. This "strategy" acts negatively by maintaining and, in some cases, re-enforcing doubtful employment attitudes as well as by aggravating the

youth employment perspectives instead of enhancing productivity (Dendrinos 2014).

4.3.2 Attempting to re-fabricate the self: the "redefining pendulum"

Trying to understand the process of re-fabricating the contemporary Greek youth self, the present part of the study focuses on examining the relational capacity of the participants to adapt to this new "modus vivendi" (Chalari, Sealey & Webb 2016), by reorganizing their social and economic lives and, mostly, by recomposing their moral principles and obligations in an effort to find a future life worth living (Narotzky & Besnier 2014).

On a first reading and according to the participants' reports, there seems to be a re-prioritisation of values and an altered state of mind, reflected both in enhanced social relationships and in changed consumption habits:

> "People have redefined what substantial is... I mean, we got rid of all this narcissism and selfishness and the cognisance that with little or no effort, we earn money... We have redefined little by little the more essential, the more humanitarian, the more collective, the more solidary way of life" (Dina, 27 years old, social worker from Volos)

> "I think that one of the positive things is that we can realise we can live by spending less... I mean with less assets, like expensive cars, expensive clothes, anything that can be an aftereffect of money. We can focus more on interpersonal relationships and realise that the core of life is having good friends, a loving family and that we

don't have to dine in a pricey, swank restaurant to have fun"
(Domna, 27 years old, primary school teacher from Katerini)

"At first, it made me realise that... 'where are you heading to?', that's what I was saying to myself... I don't know if you can come to grips with that, but until now I had some delusions, like 'I just get on and we'll see where to'... Now I say 'I don't just get on and think later where to', because in this case I won't ever see it. It needs work in advance" (Iro, 28 years old, actor from Athens)

It can be deduced from these extracts that Greek interviewees today accentuate the reinforced virtues of compassion, solidarity and collectivity. They also emphasise the emerging necessity to overcome the hyperconsumerism and maximisation of resources dating from the so-called "modernisation era" of the mid 90s (Papadopoulos & Roumpakis 2013), along with harmful and dysfunctional aspects of the Greek mentality established by former generations. Referring to the latter, Chalari (2012) focuses on the concepts of "volema" (to remain in a situation or position that benefits oneself without concerning others) and "ochaderfismos" (to "get by" without caring about tomorrow) as ineffective and socially disadvantageous attitudes, that might hinder, as Tsekeris et al. (2014) maintain, a socially beneficial and responsible behaviour as well:

"We ended up here, and of course it is the former inadequate governments' fault. Everyone is to blame for all this, and I mean everyone since my coevals and I weren't even born. Unfortunately, each one of us as citizens is to blame for what is going on today... Citizens have been part of the corruption... that is, everyone fought

for his profit... And I believe that they don't want change either, they rest on their laurels" (Akis, 26 years old, economist from Katerini).

"I believe that the sooner we get rid of mentalities that brought us here, and I mean mentalities like volema, mentalities like choosing to vote for someone not according to what he is willing to do for a better day, but only because he promises the moon, the sooner we'll get out of the crisis" (Themis, 28 years old, civil engineer from Athens).

Nevertheless, what remains as a key issue here is the extent to which participants' reported recognitions and realisations of the present inform and define their projections about the future, within the Greek socioeconomic context. Analysis of the relevant data reveals that a majority of interviewees express pessimism regarding the future, resulting in prolonged feelings of disappointment, uncertainty and anxiety both on a personal and a more collective level:

"Things will be getting even worse, until wages get too low and jobs being reduced to the minimum... Public property will be privatised, money will be transferred immediately to the Troika and the state will be impoverished, while public provisions will be even less than they are today" (Dina, 27 years old, social worker from Volos)

"I don't know what can really change now. The wound has gone too deep already and I don't know – for the time being- if it can be

cured and to what extent… We 'll see" (Gerasimos, 32 years old, computer engineer from Athens)

"In Greece, things suck! You will retire at your 100s, no personal life since you'll have to work 25 hours a day. And generally speaking, it all sucks, since the planet is going down the drain" (Elina, 24 years old, journalist from Athens)

"Since I'm clueless about politics or economic issues, I just hope that we won't reach that point of asking for... not having something to eat... I don't know. My only hope is not getting that far worse, so that we can live at least decently" (Domna, 27 years old, primary school teacher from Katerini)

Similar narratives are recorded both in previous relevant studies which revealed the subjective experience of a generalised emotional destabilisation and a fragile reality that afflict Greek and other European youngsters (Chalari, 2014, 2015; Chalari, Sealey & Webb, 2016), as well as in the last Eurobarometer data. According to these, Greek citizens come last concerning their sense of security towards the future, while 70% of the respondents feel pessimistic about the course of the Greek economy (Eurobarometer 2016). The centre of gravity, though, here lies in the limited or reduced political sensitisation displayed by the Greek participants, which could be easily compared to the limited as well collective social action shown on recent relevant studies (Karyotis & Rüdig 2015; Tsekeris, Pinguli & Georga 2015):

"The truth is I'm not so well informed, only scrappily. I wouldn't say I'm really in touch with these issues, mostly because I 'm not

familiar with them and because there's not much that I can do. Most of the time it's what I hear from my father" (Xanthi, 29 years old, nursery school teacher from Thessaloniki)

"I remain passive. I used to take part in demonstrations, protest marches and all this stuff. And what have I earned? I don't feel anything but disappointment. We are going nowhere" (Elina, 24 years old, journalist from Athens)

"I'm anything but politically sensitized. . . . The only thing that matters to me at the moment is to find a job. . . . Politically speaking, I'm not being active at all" (Vivi, 28 years old, psychologist from Larisa).

The aforementioned abstracts show clearly the two basic components of the current situation. On a first level, the debilitation of the social self seems to act inversely to the amplification of the self-within-the-family, thus empowering the "traditional" or "hierarchical" dependency that members cultivate among themselves and leading to a relatively strong social conservatism (Marvakis et al., 2013). The limited collective social action seems to originate from what Davou and Armenakis (2000) describe as a "learned helplessness" state when it comes to political behaviour. More specifically, the lack of hope in combination with a perceived political inefficacy appear to have a strong effect on the assumed political action (Davou & Demertzis 2013), leaving minimal or no perspectives for a deeper and substantial political or cultural change of the "weak civil society and the strong partocracy" (Mouzelis 2009, p.44) that characterises the Greek civil-state reality. Under this reasoning, it can be suggested that any form of citizenship developed

among youngsters remains in a micro- rather than macro-scopic level and, as Tsekoura (2011) rightly observes, seems to be restricted to culturally legitimised social norms instead of aiming at a resonant social change.

On a second level, the Greek participants seem to focus mostly on individual development goals in order to cope with the uncertain and unstable new order of reality:

> *"I mainly try to do whatever I can to overcome the current difficult circumstances, be competitive in my labor sector, so as to survive and carry on doing my job"* (Rena, 28 years old, lawyer from Volos)

> *"I hope, on a range of three to five years or even more, I have a stable job with a respectable salary that lets me do some other things, like having a family... That's the only thing I want to try for"* (Akis, 26 years old, economist from Katerini)

> *"Anyway, when you succeed in finding a job in the Greece of 2015-2016 it's something very important and it is a good fortune as well. After that the only thing you have to do is work hard like a dog, you name it... in order to move up and progress, earn more money and be happier, too"* (Themis, 28 years old, civil engineer from Athens)

The underlying notion beneath these statements seems closely associated to what Tsoukalas (1991) defines as the mentality of the "free rider", or to what Voulgaris (2006) describes as a core characteristic of the Greek mentality, that is, the Greek tendency to act based on egoistic individualism, without taking responsibility towards shared value

production, collaborative creativity, and collective intelligence and wisdom. Therefore, despite their alleged urge and desire to be free from obsolete and dysfunctional practices, youngsters often continue acting on the basis of profit-driven individual (or familial) interests instead of civic-minded ones (Tsekeris et al. 2014), thus reproducing the so called (traditionalist) "underdog culture" (Diamandouros 1983, 1994). This pertains to what Helbing (2013) perceptively observes as the difference between homo socialis (the social or relational decision maker) and homo economicus (an individual strictly driven by their own egoistic self-interest), with the first one leading to long-term beneficial individual and social outcomes (Grund, Waloszek & Helbing 2013; Helbing 2013).

5. Conclusion and Outlook

In the present study, a "profound ambivalence" (Theodossopoulos 2013) is revealed within the Greek young adults' narratives concerning their self-perception and their imaginary way of life. The participants, despite their critical declarations regarding harmful mentalities of the past, still seem trapped in old patterns of thought without being reflective enough to recognise or acknowledge it as such. This fact, along with many of the above observations, shows that Greek youth's system of values and expectations does not pertain to what might be called a "generation gap", that is, a sharp caesura between younger and older generations. In other words, young adults seem to still live under the protection of the family (which almost substitutes for state protection) and view things through old-fashioned lenses put in their supposedly "high modern"

reality sunglasses. Given that these adults are experiencing a critical developmental phase, their psychic investment in fantasies that do not have a realistic basis probably functions as an aggravating factor in the process of transition to independence. From a meta-analytic perspective, the above findings coincide with what Stelios Ramfos (2011), in his famous book Yearning for the one: chapters in the inner life of Greeks, describes as an idiosyncratic reflexive deficit of the Greek self, that is, an "entrenched" self that lacks modern individuality (including the capacity to rationally conceive of itself as itself) and hovers between the pro-Western/pro-capitalist ideals and the anti-Western, pre-modern and pre-democratic culture, which is strongly influenced by the Orthodox Church.

At the same time, increasing problems of access to the labour market seriously limit young people's ability to pursue significant socially-sanctioned roles, such as such those of parent, wife/husband, mother/father, etc. In addition, the protracted economic crisis deprives the young individual of the social identity of "being employed", a social category expected to define an adult who is of "working age". This is arguably related to a remarkable loss of life satisfaction, wellbeing, and hope, as well as to feelings of insecurity, political dysfunction, and existential suffering. Subsequently, the Greek youth is missing the appropriate context that could facilitate a state of self-actualisation; most of them are currently bound to confront the threat of unemployment and poverty, as well as of absence of life goals and meaning.

Under these adverse conditions, cohabitation with parents is perceived to be a multi-dimensionally defined option with its pros and cons and a state that reflects the double-edged nature of dependence. On the one hand, young adults prefer staying at their parental home (instead of leaving Greece or any other option), claiming that they have more to gain by staying and sharing the parental resources. On the other hand, the postponed transition to an economically independent adult life functions as a "narcissistic wound", since the subject of high expectations finally experiences the need to redefine expectations, to postpone the satisfaction of needs and to experience limitations imposed by sources of external control. Therefore, as Ian Craib (1994) suggests, the contemporary world fails to offer security and "containment". This highlights the overall processes of social change leading to losses which negatively affect us. Hence, the losses remind us not just of every other loss, but of the existential human inevitability of loss. According to Craib (1994, p. 1), "there is much about our modern world that increases disappointment and, at the same time, encourages us to hide from it". As a consequence, young adults who cannot fulfill things they desired, expected and longed for, are likely to follow a forceful human tendency for regression to a closed self which, through its more primitive reactions, may manage to realise intimate desires and visions.

These concluding remarks signify the relational nature of social change, which deeply influences and is influenced by the reality and feelings of personal life (see Roseneil & Ketokivi 2015). Further empirical research is necessary in order to explore experiences lived by other categories of young adults, such as those who followed the massive waves of

emigration of qualified and over-qualified young people with the desire to find a job (brain drainers). Such research attempts could also function as a motivating mechanism for an effective social and labour policy that would be more protective and would create the conditions to allow young adults to make plans and dream about their future.

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