Food as a means to manage situations of crisis:

Recollections of an old Salonican Jewess during and after the War

Dr. Vasiliki Kravva

Department of History & Ethnology

Democritus University of Thrace

Abstract

Life histories enable the passage from a homogeneous, hegemonic history to multiple and subjective histories and as such they can be treated as a lived past, the lived everyday past experiences brought into the present. What follows uses as a starting point the life history of a woman who lived and died at the Jewish old People's Home in the city Thessaloniki[1] in northern Greece. Mrs. Evgenia Abravanel was born in 1910 in Egypt and in 1928 settled in Thessaloniki. There, she fell in love with Leo Abravanel, a young Jewish neighbour and during the Second World War risked her life to save him. Officially she became a Jew after the War when she converted to Judaism to get married at the synagogue. This woman was born as an Orthodox Christian but experienced a constant transition from Christianhood to Jewishhood. In her narration we encounter two critical loci; food plays a key role in both of them since food becomes most 'visible' in situations of personal or social crisis. Both phases in her life could be seen as moments of crisis, as liminal episodes, where personally and socially she was found at a crossroad: in the first case she confronted the spectrum of hunger and death, both situations of generalized crisis, and in the second case she experienced the shift from not being to becoming a Jew. Throughout the analysis the issues of embodiment and emotional management uncover preoccupations of boundary maintenance but also issues of transitionality and ambiguity. In this woman's narration belonging is never given but it is materialized and managed through the medium of food. All in all the present chapter deals with the issue of "comfort food" meaning food that is treated as a means to deal with critical situations and a mechanism providing comfort, security and stability during personal crises and transitional phases in a lifehood.

Food as a symbol, a metaphor and a source of comfort

Food and eating have received in the last years great attention by social anthropologists, sociologists and social historians. The power of food to signalize important social events, to mark special occasions, to serve as a repository of past memories and present identifications, the ability of food sharing to link people to a specific or imagined place are some of the themes[2] that have been highlighted through ethnographic accounts and have been subjected to social, symbolic, linguistic or historic analyses.

The social significance of incorporation in the process of creating a collective belonging is a recurrent issue. It is argued that the act of incorporation helps a group to define itself, its boundaries, diversity, hierarchy and organisation. Eating often implies the hope of being or becoming more than we are. Incorporation helps us to be what we wish to be. Thus "the food makes the eater" (Fischler 1988: 282) means that food allows us to realise who we are, who we are not, and who we would like to be or not to be.

The act of eating expresses and at the same time reaffirms the collective experience of individuals and reinforces belonging to a specific place or a collectivity. Goddard, in an ethnographic study in Naples, Italy notes that preparing, serving and eating food enhances family bonds and sustains feelings of belonging to a Neapolitan community. Emotional attachments are perpetuated through the power of food to evoke memories, in this case of family and community. The family is the main locus where such experiences are realised and motherhood the basic channel for their transmission. Food and eating are sensory channels for the transmission of sentiments, memories and wishes, for example being a person with particular values, belonging to a family or being a member of Neapolitan society. Thus "eating" becomes synonymous with "being" through the enactment of sentiments and memories and as such it has the power to permit participation in a selected, treasured past. So in addition she suggests that: "Food can mark history and create a sense of history" (Goddard, 1996: 207).

In an ethnographic exploration of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki (Kravva, 2008 and 2010) food and eating are used as channels to explore "being" and "belonging", past and present experiences of Jewishness in this city and attempt to trace possible connections between "feeling Jewish" and eating "Jewish food". Drawing on an anthropological perspective what is analysed is the relationship between food and identity and consequently problematise and de-naturalise notions like "authenticity", "tradition", "memory" and "nostalgia" in relation to food. In the popular imagination, food mainly belongs to the domestic realm and as such it is often viewed as a gendered and trivial enterprise which is not highly valued. Yet food and eating contribute to the creation of families and the construction of group boundaries through the act of commensality. Food exchanges become a metaphor for shared familiarity because they strengthen the personal bonds between individuals

and groups. Households and, to an even greater degree, ethnic or (and) religious communities, are not natural entities but are created and transformed through cultural practices which take place in them, among which eating is certainly one of the most important. Food crosses the boundaries between nature and culture and through its consumption people "taste" and "consume" their culture, their past and present; they also create images of cultural continuity. The social value of food consists in its ability to attach emotions and recollections to taste while its transferable quality and its ability to resist socio-historical changes prove that food is indeed an important channel of communication.

A second aspect of food's capacity for sociality discussed is that it can be considered as a language, a set of meaningful patterns. It is not argued (Kravva, 2010) that food can be equated with language: the latter is performative and can be used and controlled as a source of political power. Nevertheless there is a form of power attached to food as well: it generates emotions and recollections and thus it often becomes a vehicle for expressing past and present histories. If we take the argument further, in certain cases food both marks and creates histories and thus serves as a central mnemonic device. Thessalonikian Jews, especially the older and middle-aged generations, employ food as a metaphor for belonging. For them it is a way to "taste" their past and present (Kravva, 2008) and create images of belonging, continuity and cultural distinctiveness.

The selection of personal experiences throughout a lifetime contribute in the construction our personal narratives and as such an idiosyncratic version of history. In a sense we are dealing with a process of appropriation of our trajectory. The topic of comfort foods seems to acquire a pivotal role in this complex process; it is argued (Locher, Yoels, Maurer & van Ells, 2005) that such foods are in a way "nostalgic foods" and enable exclusions and inclusions to be made and boundaries to be constructed and maintained. By this token identifications with a particular time and place in our histories can be effectively achieved. At the same time comfort foods often evoke special or memorable events and events to be remembered. Nostalgic foods are often linked to memories of being cared for by another and are often associated with the moments of sharing with significant others during special events or activities. Thus comfort foods can be treated as a powerful bonding apparatuses where acceptance of a food offering is also an acceptance of the other in one's life.

Nostalgic foods are often identified with a particular time and place in a lifehood recreating the feelings experienced earlier in our lives. During these moments consuming food items intimately linked with one's past may repair such ruptures by maintaining a continuity of the self in unfamiliar and un-domesticated contexts. It is noted that:

> The nostalgic longing and consumption of particular food items sustain one's sense of cultural, familial, and self-identity. When we are physically disconnected from a community, a family or a primary group that defines who we are, our sense of self may become fractured (Locher, Yoels, Maurer & van Ells, 2005: 280)

Food, eating and experiencing multisensoriality

The publication of *The Taste of Ethnographic Things* (Stoller, 1989) brought forward important issues that the social researcher is confronted with: the issue of sensual openness, the conscious play of personalities, the presentation of self and the presence and filtering of senses and sentiments. Stoller suggested a kind of immersion into the Songhay world which resulted through tasteful writing to a tasteful ethnography. For the anthropologists the senses are really important in the process of research and in the case of these African people taste, smell or sounds are equally important in order to understand indigenous conceptualizations of time and space.

A few years later Seremetakis (1994) elaborated "neglected" areas of social research such as commensality, sensory memory and mnemonic sensory experience. By using personal vignettes (photos, recollections, poems, songs, Cretan mandinadhes) she attempted to expand the notion of commensality and emphasise the reflexivity involved in this process:

> Commensality here *is not* just the social organization of food and drink consumption and the rules that enforce social institutions at the level of consumption. Nor it can be reduced to the food-related senses of taste and odor. *Commensality can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling.* Historical consciousness and other forms of social knowledge are created and then replicated in time and space through commensal ethics and exchange. Here

each sense witnesses and records the commensal history of the others" (1994: 37)

For the anthropologist the notion of memory is not just an intellectual property, a state of mind and a purely subjective reality. It can be seen as a materialist praxis which is always mediated by others and internalized and expressed via the body and bodily practices. Thus objects but also bodily practices act as storages of memories. Seremetakis (1994) points that such a material approach to memory. This material approach to memory brings up the historicity of the sensual worlds and suggests that memory can be treated both as a meta-sensory capacity and as a sense organ in-it-self".

The relationship between food and memory on the island of Kalymnos Greece was ethnographically documented but also theoretically analysed by David Sutton (2001). In this ethnographic work a "Proustian" anthropology is attempted, meaning an anthropology that leaves room to issues like sensory memory, evocative senses and the construction of "worlds", personal routes and passages. The concept of synesthesia[3] is also recalled in an attempt to argue on the multiplicity and co-existence of different sensory registers. This way according to Sutton the past is "felt" thus it is being evoked, remembered and recaptured.

In a well thought article on the topic of food and the senses Sutton (2010) highlights the multisensory dimensions of food experience: the culturally shaped sensory worlds and experience are invested with meaning emotion, memory and value. The anthropologist uses the example of alienated Greek migrants returning to the whole[4] through the powerful experiences of taste and smell. In his work the term gustemology is coined in order to understand the wide range of cultural issues regarding taste and other sensory dimensions of food.[5]

Re-living lived histories: following personal routes and paths

By now it is a common place among social scientists[6] that there is a reciprocal and dialectic relationship between the past and the present and life histories provide a useful source in order to explore this reciprocality. In the case of Europe the supposed unity of history has resulted in a strong Eurocentric vision that has largely excluded the historic diversities and differentiations to emerge. Balkan history or to be more precise Balkan histories uncover the complex puzzle of life experiences in the area

which stem out of diverse economic, political and social situations. Thus as Hastrup notes (1992) the complexity of multi-layered European societies if dismantled opens the possibility of different versions of local histories, and also coexisting histories experienced and lived in a number of different ways. By dismantling history historical anthropologists enable a serious reflexion on the notions of time and space, social categories that structure and organise social but also personal experience. Humans are thus treated as both subjects and objects of history, creating their worlds and often encountering or even resisting the limitations of the worlds of others.

According to Sutton (1998) the islanders of Kalymnos, a small Greek island, negotiate and appropriate historical events to make them their own, and to get a feeling of familiality and a domestication of a general, unfriendly homogeneous history. History is brought into local experience and it is understood as a familial process that enables the constant reference to the past not as something distant and static but as something that is continuously found in a dialogue with the present and is certainly perceived as close and alive inspiring action in the present and mobilizing future reactions. He argues on a culturally constructed view of history and brings out the possible dangers of the commodification of a unified history:

> History is dangerous to the present when…commodified for tourist consumption, museumified, made an object of nostalgia. Understanding the relevance of the past means more than simply reconstructing the hidden histories of those omitted from dominant national or local historical narratives. It means charting the different modes of a given people's historical consciousness, the different ways that people establish connection between past and present… Their (the Kalymnians') "obsession with the past entails a much broader range of concerns, and stems from their belief that history represents a storehouse of themes and patterns, revealing motivations and constitute important ingredients of the present (1998: 303-204)

The passage from history to histories and what more lived histories and diverse experiences uncovers the interrelations between the national the local and the personal. This passage also is also mediated and translated by cultural capital (family and educational) and is in most cases mediated by habitus[7] and class differentiations (Kravva, 2011). This way the past can be re-evaluated, re-thought and lead to

interpretations and readings that leave room to individuality, human agency but also social limitations and boundaries; human agency is found in a constant negotiation process with the existing social structure reshaping and creating new social possibilities. Hence, life histories reveal the constant reading and evaluation of belonging, inclusions and exclusions.

A life in crisis or critical lives? Comfort food as a creative response

Lives in crisis can be analysed as critical loci in one's life where known life patterns are being endangerd. Following the classical analysis by Douglas (1966) we can argue that culture is an ordered pattern, a code that entails "powers and dangers" especially during phases of experienced marginality and abnormal situations. Thus critical moments require different strategies in order to overcome them. Foucault (1986) has argued that such places of experienced marginality constitute heterotopias, meaning non-places, places inbetween past and present experiences, a reflecting mirror of ruptures, crises and deviation. Such critical loci time and space are often messy, disorganized and confusing and call for differentiated behaviours and strategies.

According to Seremetakis (1994) the sensory responses may occur through difficult situations, forced experiences of crisis but also during separations, ruptures and cross cultural contacts. Consumption functions a means employed by individual so as to maintain control of their lives. Consuming specific food during periods of social uncertainty may reveal the will to maintain control and achieve stability of life conditions; during these turbulent episodes in our lives food acquires a central role exactly because every other certainty is disturbed and endangered.

Comfort food becomes really important when individuals deal with such critical moments in their lives; it can be seen as a survival strategy in order to deal with crises and respond creatively. The issue of agency acquires great significance here. Individuals are not passive victims but active creators of their lives who make decisions and take "risks" so as to manage anomic situations. As discussed below hunger, the spectrum of death during the Nazi occupation and also the re-organisation of life after the Second World War were critical episodes in a woman's life history. Comfort food becomes visible in her narrative especially during these liminal phases and marks time since it enabled the adjustment to past conditions but also it created new ways of materializing identity and belonging. In the first crisis episode that follows Mrs Evgenia narrates how she managed hunger and deprivation during the

Second World War and was able to provide 'comfort' food to her beloved and his whole family which was hiding in Athens. In this case food exchanges were a way to actively respond to hunger and a strategy to survive. Exchanging food items was a creative response, which framed and expressed cultural and subjective agency, and enabled her to adjust and actively respond to the extremely fragile conditions of that time.

Crisis episode one:

Geographies of hunger, famine and deprivation during the War

A systematic discussion on starvation and famines goes back to the book published in 1981 by Amartya Sen, an economist of Indian origin, who was awarded the Nobel prize for his contribution in examining these phenomena form a perspective of a more "humane" and social economy. By social economy I mean that for Sen economy is not only about numbers and percentages but must be treated as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon where social and cultural factors and also historical trends and ruptures must be co-examined. If research fails so there is a danger of misunderstanding or even not understanding at all the social reasons and consequences of the above phenomena. For Sen famine and deprivation have a historicity; we can reconstruct great disastrous famines that led to starvation such as in 1333-7 in China, when four million people died in one region only, or in 1770 in India, when almost ten million deaths are estimated, or in Ireland the so-called "potato famine" (remember Van Gogh's picture the "potato-eaters"!) killed one fifth of the Irish population and led to a significant emigration of the left population.

In his analysis of starvation Sen (1981) emphasizes that starvation, which is thought as an extreme outcome of a food crisis, is characterized a sudden collapse of the level of food consumption. It is important that the economist suggest that starvation has two important dimensions: it is time specific but it can also be group specific. The first draws our interest to specific historical ruptures or conditions that may lead to generalized food crisis and the second focuses on the commanding of power over food. This is a reminder that some groups can suffer acute and absolute deprivation and hunger when they seem to be-for specific historical and political reasons- cut off from the rest of a population.

Following Sen's notion of entitlement Caplan (1992) proposes an anthropological view of hunger that takes seriously into account the notions of

exchange and reciprocity. We need indigenous voices and local accounts and to bring them forward the concept of agency could prove useful. This will open new possibilities in the analysis of the complex and historical phenomena of hunger and famine that will enable to go beyond passive and victimizing discourses. People, even when faced with these situations of generalized crisis, do make decisions and adopt survival strategies. As Caplan (1992: 19) puts it: "For this reason, famine situations can be and have been changed". Thus in order to understand hunger and famine situations we need to focus on the causes, the consequences and also human reactions to cope with them. This has serious implications both on an individual but also on a collective level: people respond to hunger individually but also as a group, meaning that they organize their lives to deal with it. Inevitably hunger is a great source of danger and risk and a threat to social order (Millman & Kates, 1990) Yet, the history of hunger or the histories of hunger are still to be written since those who have suffered hunger rarely write history.

Memories can also be memories of hunger and hunger can be seen as the locus of debating and conflicting memories. Oral narrations of such experiences open new possibilities for oral histories of hunger that still remain to be recaptured. Sutton (2001) argues that Kalymnians were obsessed with food partly because of the hunger they had experienced during the Second World War. For him, situations of extreme hunger may provoke imaginative responses and this stresses the link between past and present, the constant effort to respond to present conditions of life drawing form past traumatic situations. This way the past is remembered but also re-lived and projected on to the present and future.

According to Hionidou (2006), famine in occupied Greece during the years 1941-44 was "the last 'significant' European famine in terms of mortality. However, this critical episode is largely "invisible" and for the most repressed and forgotten in official Greek historiography. What is implied is that there is an emphasis on the political aspects of the German occupation but there is a lack of in depth analysis of the social consequences and the experienced food crisis of that time:

> While not forgotten by the Greeks, many of whom have experienced it, the famine has been effaced from the official Greek memory. The contrast with the Irish famine is stark" … "most works focus on the political rather than the social aspect of the occupation" (Hionidou, 2006: 1)

The severe food crisis during the Occupation was a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. The main reasons were the dramatic reduce in food availability and the curtailment of communications thus a severe lack in transport facilities. Also the government and the occupying forces tried regulate and control the market and the prices and this resulted in the creation of black markets with uncontrollable prices and a subsequent monetary chaos and a total de-regulation of dieting conditions (Hionidou, 2006). There was still a local production in the periphery that gradually acquired centrality and urban centers such as Athens or Thessaloniki were those who suffered the most by the situation described above. Access to local production became synonymous to life and survival. It is true that hunger was more devastating in the big urban centers, the Athenian hunger is beyond any comparison whereas the periphery- with the exemption of isolated island or mountain communities- enjoyed some kind of self-sufficiency based on food exchange and autonomy.

> I cannot say we had great difficulties during the occupation, even though there were things that were missing. But we kept on -especially with the cosmetic products-which were very much in demand, especially in the country side. We continued, however, even on my own when Leo was hiding in Athens. I sold face creams, colognes, perfumes and they gave me wheat, barley, corn and beans. Those I sold or distributed to people I knew. I never took money, everything was done by barter, and with some of the money I only took from certain clients. I bought the required material for the preparation of cosmetics. We lived conventionally, we only cared to make it through the day. One could not plan for the day after.
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> With the help of two Armenian friends Rosel and Meliné who worked for the Italian consulate Leo managed to escape to Athens which was under Italian occupation and the situation was less dangerous for the Jews. This is how we escaped to Athens, to Nea Ionia. We were led there by a woman who agreed to get a loaf of bread as a reward. But when we finally went there I also gave her beans and wheat. She was overwhelmed with happiness. There was great hunger in Athens. Almost every week I had to bring them food provisions from Salonica. It is in Athens where the two brothers of Leo were hidden. This is where they accidentally met in the street. At first Leo stayed in the house of an uncle of mine called Notis Papadopoulos. His wife Christina Klonaridi and him had a son Mimis from Dimitris, his grandfather's name. This child from the time he was four years old had a heart and kidney problem. I went to visit them regularly to take provisions to them, but Leo had to leave from there because one evening a friend of my uncle's came and said: "Quickly, Kostas has to go from here". He had issued for him two false identity cards with the names of Nikos Raftopoulos and Kostas Mavromatis. The Raftopoulos one was real, it belonged to my aunt's husband. The other one was issued from the 2nd Police Precinct of Salonica. It was a false name on a false identity card. They knew he was a Jew, but they wanted to help him. Many Jews issued false identity cards at the time.
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> There was great hunger during the war in Athens, that is why I brought provisions from Salonica. Except for the little money I made at the shop, I also had some travelling salesmen that took some good to the villagers that worked in the black market. They

> asked for our face creams and gave us wheat and barley. I would take them to my parents but also saved some for Leo and his niece's children. I had baptised them Dimitri and Despoina, but after the war they became Jewish again.
>
> Once I remember a young boy dying in front of me from hunger... We tried to help him but unfortunately he passed away we all continued our life… Seeing carriages with corpses was a common everyday thing...
>
> In Athens I tried to sell certain things I made by myself. Once I remember I had brought many walnuts and a friend of mine had a license for a carrier because he had been wounded in the war. We put the nut on the carrier and sold them, and to make more money we cleaned them and sold them.

Crisis episode two:

Strategy a:

Domesticating city life: food geographies

The reconstruction of Jewish life after the War in Thessaloniki was difficult partly due to the political instability but also because of the generalized economic depression. The low public profile of the Community was the outcome of the almost total extinction of the local population: from the 48,000 Jews only 2,000 people had survived the concentration camps and returned. But the city had changed too since it was at the time a city without Jewish schools, without Jewish shops, without synagogues, without Jewish neighborhoods and without Jewish families (Lewkowicz, 2000). The Jews who chose to stay in Thessaloniki after the War (many emigrated to Palestine or even went to Athens) were faced with absences, silences[8] and felt the urgency or reconstructing communal and familial life.

Mrs Evgenia married Leo a few years after the War and this way she "officially" became a Jewess. In her narrative there was an emphasis on the process of becoming a "proper" Jewish woman by cooking "authentic" Jewish food and serving this kind of food to her new family –the family of her husband- in order to be accepted by them. In her narrative cooking and serving food was a powerful means of constructing a functional kinship, stabilize family relations and of course being accepted by meaningful others aw "one of them". In her afterwar life food mediated relationships and enhanced comforting feelings of acceptance.

So, the second critical phase took place right after the War when Mrs Evgenia experienced the transition from being a Christian to becoming a Jew and this was mainly achieved through cooking and serving "authentic" Jewish dishes. In other words, cooking for her was an everyday "rite of passage" from Christianity to

Jewishness, from one identity to the other. Her narration reveals a continuous process of exclusions, inclusions and interchange: a process of not being born as a Jew but becoming one through food.

This woman's life history also uncovers a constant process of domesticating this new city and adopting food strategies in order to re-construct her new life in a changed city. Mapping the city via food geographies were central strategies employed so as to achieve the domestication of the "unknown" city. Sutton (2010) analyses how emotional geographies and sensory geographies are mobilized by individuals in their attempt to create a viable place making and map the place. For him foodscapes are important to understand the processes by which relationships and place-making are lived and internalized. What is proposed is a kind of emotional geography in which sensory landscapes can emerge and city mapping can be drawn via a more sensory place-making.

> My husband's aunt taught me how to cook Jewish dishes, mainly sardines cleaned of bones deepen in egg and fried in oil, beans with burned onions and Jewish meatballs made of leek and spinach, and of course lake fish sazan [carpe] which all cook for Pessah, but also throughout the year. I always had at home. I also had vine leaves stuffed with rice and onions, spring onions and dry onions, dill, parsley and all these folded in vine leaves. I prepared at least 150 pieces, because we had many big climbing vines, and plenty of grapes. This woman had taught me to prepare the carpe fish in a ceramic pot covered with crushed walnuts and matza. During that time we bought matza from the ambulant merchants in the street, they sold in big pieces covered with a piece of cloth-nothing to do with the way matzas are sold today. One ought to put the carpes having fried them first, then placed them on the matza with the walnuts, and covered them in the same way, and then one poured good oil over it and watched it cook until the oil had disappeared. After that one had to put it in the refrigerator, or before the war into the ice cupboard. Somebody passed everyday selling ice and we usually bought one quarter.
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> But I also cooked them the Christian dishes. They did not say anything and ate them with pleasure. Except for the fish we also made enhaminados eggs which were put in water to boil with lots of onions and we added a little salt to taste. They had to boil in a low flame, or like we did in old times when we cooked them slowly in the oven. This I remember my niece Lilica use to tell how in Israel they used to bake them in the oven. We liked these eggs, and used to put them often in salads. My father in law, asked for those Jewish dishes. But he also ate others. He never complained, he was a very easygoing person.
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> As far as sweets go, I had only learned the toupischti, and my recipe was published by Fytrakis publishing house, and I even got a price. Mari had taught me this recipe when she stayed in my house. It was very tasty and very easy to make. I didn't like preparing sweets, but I liked to eat them. I would never make cookies or other sweets.

The notion of emotional geographies and the emotional associations and feelings that a specific place inspires (dread, worry, loss, love etc) could enlighten the discussion on the processes of mapping the city and creating viable cityscapes. In this process the role of understanding and domesticating the city via food becomes of central importance. Food is emotionally charged and through it we can attempt to deploy geographies of identities, family and social relations. Emotions enable individuals to filter their past and they affect they ways the present is sensed. Thus space is not an objectified, calculable category but it is experienced, felt, appropriated and managed and therefore articulated and negotiated. As nicely argued:

> An emotional geography then, attempts to understand emotion –experientially and conceptually- in terms of its socio-spatial mediation and articulation rather that as entirely subjective mental states (Davidson, Bondi and Smith, 2007: 3)

Strategy b:

From Christianhood to Jewishhood: eating, embodying and resisting

The body, as Couhihan and Van Esterik (1997) argue could be seen as "a space", a category. Thus it is not exclusively confined to individuality; it is rather a collective affair, a 'social body', upon which communities mirror aspects of their collectiveness: fears, preoccupations and ideal behaviours. And yet the social body is responding to individual feelings and preoccupations and as such is always at the crossroads between the social and the personal.

> Food not only marks the fixed positions that individuals occupy as group members … but it also can be manipulated to modify or change emotional states or feelings. Thus, food and eating represent some of the ways that people use their bodies to respond to social structure through the social creation of personal meanings (Locher et al pp 289)

The body has a history and the bodies have or make their own histories. Thus "the body" cannot be assumed anymore to be a bounded, material entity but a locus of changing inner dynamics, wills and desires but also responding to external social conditions. By the same token embodiment is not to be taken for granted; it is to be understood in response to historically specific cultural activities like notions about

health and well being, political domination, traumatic situations, notions of selfhood, emotional statuses etc. (Csordas, 1994). Traumatic situations are often experienced as moments of crisis where both survival and well-being but also perceptions of selfhood are questioned and endangered.

An engagement with food, eating and non-eating focuses on sensory aspects which are experienced inside and outside of bodies and being transformed via the interplay of bodily boundaries (Sutton, 2010). Embodiment[9] is not a "natural function" or envisioned as a normative, harmonious process; it is often confronted with tensions, doubts, ruptures and ambivalences leaving room to "life politics"[10] and the constant slippage of personal identities much related to issues of bodiliness and incorporation. Thus "the body" hosts self-productive processes both subjective and objective and in any case material, personal and social; it becomes an agent in itself, sustaining personhoods which internalizes discourses but also challenges them and produces altered realities (Turner, 1994).

As noted (Lupton, 1996) food incorporation (or the rejection of food) is central to the construction of subjectivities; the mouth is symbolically loaded and signalizes the boundary between the inner and the outside the passage from the social world to the personal domain. Hence, the body[11] and especially the mouth become liminal, critical zones and the ultimate controllers between the outside and the Self. But also the body and the mouth are entrances and gates where personal battles are fought and resistances are being played out.

> I remember we used to keep Kosher, mainly on certain days, not all year round. But I remember there was a kosher butcher in Aghia Triada Street, owned by two brothers. I remember them all day cutting and cleaning the meat. It was hard. Many Greeks used to buy meat from the Jew because they considered that meat cleaner. The meat they give us here every Sunday has no fat at all, it is wholesome pieces. The old people cannot chew it and there is trouble. Jews don't eat pork nor salami, but neither do Moslems.
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> My husband ate salami. He was nevertheless a true Jew, you could not touch him, but go to the synagogue he would't. All the family were true Jews, but only his brother, Isidor went to the synagogue regularly, the others didn't.
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> My favorite festival was Pessah. If I compare it with the one we celebrate in the Old People's Home one doesn't understand here anything. Here the Rabi reads and the rest of the people eat. "Eh, wait a minute my dear, close your mouth, nobody is going to take it away from you". But there I could understand the festival, and I was very sorry once when Elvina was in Thessaloniki, my niece, that Albertos, my husband's brother didn't want her to come and see how we celebrate, because she was not Jewish. She was very sorry, because she would have liked to watch other customs.

> I used to come here and celebrate together the High Holidays, such as Pessah and New Year's, I gave something for the institution, something to the cook. I always came in the High Holidays and we celebrated them together.

"Visible" subjectivities

What has been attempted was to shed light to the issue of food used as a means to manage situations of crisis. The life history of an old woman who lived and died at the Jewish Old People's Home in Thessaloniki provided the complex camvas on which critical loci are drawn. During these moments of disordering, namely the hunger during the War and also the transition from Christianhhod to Jewishhood, food is seen as a central survival strategy providing comfort, enabling life certainties, promising acceptance and ensuring continuity. I tried to give voice to this woman's experiences and reveal the past conditions as multi-layered, complex and at times conflicting. And I do hope that from my analysis the notion of Self emerges as always in process, constantly made and re-made and actively responding (accepting, neglecting or altering) to the social and historical conditions met. For Stoller what is ethical is for invididuals to:

> … be portrayed as recognizable individuals who suffer defeats and win victories in their social worlds. .. to give our readers or viewers a *sense* of what is like to live in other worlds, a taste of ethnographic things" (Stoller, 1989: 156)

After a series of interviews Mrs Evgenia herself problematised her "belonging", indeed a multiple, contextual and at times conflicting belonging; this old woman described -as Stoller points- the everyday battles and defeats of her multiple subjectivities:

> *I am a Spanish citizen* and therefore I do not vote (in national elections), but until now I vote in the Community's elections. *I care about how the Community is doing, because I live here.* This is *my home*, who supports me here, now? Greece? No, the Community. By the way I have a complain: Here in the old peoples' home *they* don't let us know about the death of our friends. For instance when Mr. Jackos died, I found out about it on the day of his funeral from another friend. Shouldn't *I* have known? Last night I watched by chance a documentary about the Jews of Thessaloniki and their hardship in the camps. Why didn't they let *us* know?

Notes

[1]This life history was taken by Vasiliki Kravva (in 2005-2006) in the context of a European Research programme called Centropa. This is an oral history programme which covers the whole span of the 20th century and collects life-histories but also visual material (such as photographs) of the Jews living in the wider Balkan area. The co-ordinator of the programme in Thessaloniki was the historian Dr. Rena Molho. All the so far processed material can be found in the internet under the address www. Centropa.Org

[2] The topic of food and eating has been analysed from different and diverse angles by numerable social scientists. Some of the most influential are Barthes, 1975, Goody, 1982, Mintz, 1985, Mintz, 1996, Lupton, 1996, Caplan, 1997, Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997, Bell and Valentine, 1997. Kravva (2000) discussed the interplay of food, memory and identity drawing from her fieldwork among the Jews in Thessaloniki, Greece.

[3] For Sutton (2001) synesthesia is defined as "the union of the senses… it draws into question the western five-sense model (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch), making it a useful jumping off point for thinking about other sensory categorizations. Synesthesia also blurs the objectivity and passivity of western sensory models by showing the ways that sensory experience is not simply passively registered but actively created between people… synesthesia has been explored as a key to food memories through the notion that memory has multiple interacting sensory registers" (2001: 218).

[4] Fernandez has described the process of synesthesia as "returning to the whole" in the context or religious revitalization (cited in Sutton, 2001). For the anthropologist synesthesia points at the significance of food in maintaining Kalymnian identity in diasporic conditions, thus when "homeland" is imagined by Kalymnian migrants.

[5] Hamilakis (2013) has explored the interconnections between food, the senses and affect. For him eating and drinking are multisensorial and also embodied experiences that reveal any rigid duality between subject and object as an ontological fallacy. Food becomes part of the self, a view that problematises instrumental and functional explanations. And the self is constantly remade through relational and commensal encounters with food.

[6] On the topic of oral history see Thomson (1978). In his work several topics emerge such as the relationship between historians and the use of oral histories but also memory and the self. In Cowan (2000) Vereni sensitively deals with autobiography, memory and national loyalties in Western Greek Macedonia.

[7] Habitus is used by Bourdieu (1986) so as to give a different account of class relations and social conditioning. For him classifications such as class structures are imprinted on the body; consumption patterns and behaviours are seen as predisposed, always related to the family or educational capital of a person.

[8] Jaleniewski-Seidler (2000) who draws from his own background –he grew up in England- uses the notion of "silence" to describe the situation experienced by the children of Holocaust survivors. The past was not to be passed on to them and instead there was a silence and absence full of anxiety for most young people in the afterwar Jewish families.

[9] A number of ethnographic cases (the Thai-Cambodian border, Fiji islands, Chinese cathartic healing) are used as contexts to explore issues of embodiment, somatization, sensibilities and emotional experiences. All these cases reveal that the body is not a fixed category but always relational and a process in the making.

[10] According to Giddens (1991) "life politics" reveal the everyday making and remaking of the self , a reflexive, never ending project for which the individual is responsible. Inevitably the self creates its own trajectory from the past to a desirable future.

[11] The gendered body and the interplay between gender, meaning and power is discussed by Lupton, 1999 who did her fieldwork in Italy in the town of Bosa on the island of Sardinia and in the city of Florence in the region of Tuscany.

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