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“Living through narratives”: Narratives as a means of survival for the homeless people in Athens¹

Abstract:

This paper aims at portraying the modern narratives, not only as a means of communication, but mainly the narrative's transformation into a means of survival for the socially marginalized population groups. The analysis of the homeless people's narratives is combined with a broader “system of roles”, used by the homeless to present themselves in the social scene, essentially within the framework of a Goffman-type performance. Thus, the homeless present themselves occasionally as being “unhappy”, “weak”, “kind” etc. in order to gain the sympathy and help of the people passing by. As a result, their narrative combined with their performance is not a mere narrative of their life, but also a dynamic means to get through the daily urban difficulties.

Key words:

homelessness, poverty, beggars, narratives, performance, survival strategies, street ethnography.

Introduction

This paper refers to a modern phenomenon of social marginalization, the homeless, the appearance of whom has become particularly noticeable during the period of the crisis, after 2009, in Athens, as well as in other urban centers of the country, given that their number increases continuously (Donou 2013, 118-120). I got occupied with the homeless partly due to my doctoral thesis, which refers to the beggars of the city (identities – networks – collectivities – survival strategies). Even though the two groups are not identified, however many homeless people beg in order to survive (Fabrega 1971; Lu 1999; Glasser and Bridgman 1999), and, indeed, narrations – true or invented – with which they try to cause the pity of passersby and finally receive the much desired help, constitute their basic means (Lankenau 1999a). Thus, narration essentially constitutes their basic means of survival in the cities.

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In this paper, I will initially talk about the issue of the homeless in Greece, its categories and the anthropological and social studies that have been elaborated internationally. Then the methodology of the present project will be presented, while, subsequently, based on theoretical schemes, which have been proposed by Goffman (Goffman 1959; Goffman 1963), Lankenau (Lankenau 1999a; Lankenau 1999b) and other researchers, an attempt will be made to analyze the narrations of the homeless, as a dynamic means of survival, in order to earn money or other material goods from passersby and the shopkeepers of the Athens area.

The ethnography of homelessness

In general, the issue of the roofless and homeless population is often mistaken for and integrated in the issue of beggary, while these are two completely distinguished situations, in which sometimes and where appropriate, in individual cases, we identify that members of these teams follow identical survival strategies. The basic cause is that in order to cope, the homeless beg to a large extent (Glasser and Bridgman 1999, 75-77). However, this tactic is not always the case; neither is it absolutely necessary for a homeless person to beg in order to survive, nor, of course, is it a rule that beggars do not have permanent accommodation. Moreover, as it became obvious in the social and demographical data that were cited, a small number of beggars live and survive in the street without permanent residence.

Particularly in Greece, there is confusion around the issue of the homeless (who they are, how they define themselves, how they survive, which groups and sub-groups they form etc.) mainly for three reasons. First, the phenomenon of the homeless, at least until the beginning of the financial crisis in 2009, was by far smaller than in European countries and America². Second, in absolute conjunction with the previous, it is a fact that there is not even one institutionally organized and legally institutionalized definition, nor, unfortunately, is there any official policy for this group of people; the homeless and roofless population of urban centers, and in general of the Greek territory, has not been counted, and has not been observed thoroughly, a fact that causes misinterpretations, by integrating the homeless in the population of people who just live below the poverty threshold. In addition, the formal approach becomes more complex, since, as pointed out by Sapounakis in a relative report (Sapounakis

² Donou rightly highlights that “during the last few years a new type of homeless persons appears more intensely, the newly homeless, who have lost their house due to financial problems. The financial crisis of the last years led them to unemployment and low income levels, and this, in turn, to the loss of housing” (Donou 2013, 118).

2001), many organizations and ministries are involved in the issue of the homeless and their –desired– housing, so that it is not possible to have a total and targeted dealing of the issue. Third, the confusion between the homeless, the beggars, the vagabond, the urban nomads, is also intensified by the homogenizing and qualitatively inadequate presentation of the phenomenon to the Press, where, often superficially, people, who were marginalized due to the crisis in categories and groups, in which they do not belong, are ranked. And forth, there are no official data regarding their number, their origin etc.

The situation abroad appears to be different. There, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and other scientists study the phenomenon in collaboration, through an interdisciplinary perspective. Systematic social researches revealed that the issue of the homeless does not have one dimension and is not limited to a single category of people: those who do not have permanent housing. On the contrary, there is variety regarding the groups that live in the streets (drug addicts, beggars, released from prisons, mentally ill etc.), as well as regarding the form that lack of housing takes every time, due to personal choices or wider social conditions. The development of researches on the homeless population experiences an explosion after the 1980s, mainly in the USA and France, where the issue of the SDFs after the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s obtains bigger and bigger dimensions (Garnier-Muller 2000). Albeit, in America, with Anderson's study (Anderson 1923), and then Zorbaugh's (Zorbaugh 1929), the study of the culture of the homeless begins, this current experiences a drop and recovers many decades later, in the middle of the 1980s. As Hagan and McCarthy point out, until the middle of the 1980s, the life of the homeless in America was almost exclusively captured and known to the general public, through projects of journalistic type (Hagan and McCarthy 1998). More systematic studies, such as the ones of Rossi (Rossi 1989), of Snow and Anderson (Snow and Anderson 1993), of Glasser and Bridgman (Glasser and Bridgman 1999), of Lee and Farell (Lee and Farell 2003) and of Lee et al. (Lee et al. 2010) enlightened more globally the life of the homeless, who were "unknown" until the day before, deepening, through systematic ethnography, in two main points: a) the causes that led them to live in the streets; b) the living system of the homeless: survival strategies in the city, information networks, reciprocity and solidarity networks, which they develop in the urban network, the culture of the street.

In addition, through systematic research, the in-depth and essential investigation of the multiple meanings of the sense of "homeless", who is not just the person living in the street, became feasible. Arce, Tadlock,

Vergare and Shapiro (Arce, Tadlock, Vergare, and Shapiro 1983), by studying the life and the course of the adult, as well as underage homeless, point out that the homeless do not live their entire life in the street, but – on the contrary – they point out that their housing conditions vary; they distinguish three categories of homeless people: a) street people, who live regularly in the street, not always in a continuous manner, but occasionally and from time to time, although for periods longer than 30 days at a time; b) the episodic homeless, who from time to time find residence with relatives, friends or acquaintances, and in case they live in the street, they remain there for periods shorter than 30 days, c) the situational homeless, who live in an asylum or in a center for homeless care, due to personal problems, which obstruct their living with other people. In the same framework, Roth and Bean (Roth and Bean 1986), based on the idea that the locations that are chosen by the homeless to live differ very much, they distinguish the following categories of homeless people: a) street people, who in general live in the street and do not have any relationship with homeless welcoming centers or institutions; b) shelter people, who are homeless seeking for help in shelters or institutions for the homeless; c) resource people, who, even though they do not have a permanent residence, live in the street and not in an institution, having beggary as basic source.

Glasser and Bridgman (Glasser and Bridgman 1999, 15-26) determined the homeless as people who can be: a) roofless: this is the most visible form of the phenomenon of the homeless, who live on the sidewalk, on benches, in parks or in abandoned buildings, in a framework of chaotic life, and who are not social services users; b) homeless: these are people, who, even though they have the capacity of access to asylums or institutions, they are determined as homeless due to inadequate support for their social reintegration; c) people living in insecure housing, something that is often due to their failure to acquire permanent residence, and d) people living in inadequate accommodation.

It therefore becomes evident that the phenomenon of the homeless is multifactorial and multilevel: it is not the result of just the financial situation or the lack of housing, but it has a direct relationship with the inadequacy of social support networks, personal choice within the framework of self-marginalization, as well as the social seclusion that groups or individuals undergo today.

The Methodological Tools of the Ethnographic Research

Entering the ethnographic field as a researcher, I was confronted with a series of issues, which led me to a grid of considerations. Fieldwork in the

urban area reveals a series of problems for the researcher, who meets a series of objective difficulties in his attempt to provide an as much as possible coherent and detailed picture of the action and the life of the people he studies in a heterogeneous and mixed area, where distances and spatial differences are huge, thus causing difficulties in the ethnic recording (Wacquant 2008, 10-12). In addition, the homeless constitute a group with special characteristics, and to which access is extremely limited and difficult.

Regarding the ethnographic field, I consider it appropriate to point out that the research I realized was not exclusively focused on the area where I first met the homeless. It was multi-sided and multi-focal, based on the modern trends of ethnographic practice. Today, the statistical sense of the ethnographic field that referred to a specific area, which was identified with the sense of community, a sense which par excellence dominated in the classical anthropological method, is nearly extinct (Marcus 1995, 95-117). Today, cities – and not only cities – constitute an area of interactivity and mobility, where ideas, cultures, and population groups are in a perpetual transfer either in the same urban web or from city to city (Wacquant 2008, 33-37). Marcus named this ethnographic practice multi-sided ethnography (Marcus 1995, 95-96). Today, the ethnographic research in the city focuses not only on one, but on various observation and participation fields, and concentrates on the spatial and temporal circulation of cultural meanings, within a system of formation and reconstruction of identities.

Therefore, based on the above perspective, I applied the “follow the people” technique, which was introduced by Marcus, by following the subjects under investigation in their movements in space and time. Through fieldwork, I ascertained that there was a fixed “continuity” in the life of the homeless: routes in the streets of Athens, beggary in the streets of Athens and in public transportation, feeding in the homeless centers of municipalities and church, seeking of food in trash cans outside supermarkets. The above “invisible” aspects become visible (like a number of other parameters: motives, strategies, representations) only through “kinetic ethnography” (Williams 1995, 25-28), while this way the liquidity of the “rigid and concrete” field of traditional anthropology becomes understood. I managed to record these multilevel movements of the homeless, which do not only signal movement in space, but are also more related with survival strategies, as well as issues of prestige and identity, by moving myself with them, following the homeless.

The qualitative method of research included: a) observation and participant observation. The access to the ethnographic field was decisive for the course of my research in its entirety (Berg 2007). I did not consider it appropriate to use a covert strategy of access to the field (see also Gounis

1999, 108-118). I revealed my identity from the beginning and the respondents were fully aware of who I was. After they had selected the areas, where I would perform my initial fieldwork, I followed 3 basic strategies of access: a) creation of a group of communication with key persons, who would guide me; b) the development of a web of relationships with the informants-homeless; c) the snowball method (Cohen 1984, 223-229). b) In-depth interviews. I did not use in my research objectivity tools (for example, structured questionnaires), which, on the one hand, specify and “objectify” the results of the research, but, on the other hand, fail to provide us with the spontaneous reactions and answers of the subjects of the research (Cohen 1984, 223-225). On the contrary, semi-structured questionnaires were used. c) The method of biography with life narrations was used (Denzin 1989). Often one of my questions triggered the beginning of an extensive narration, which referred to the respondent’s past; thus I let the informer narrate his “personal story” without interruptions and interferences (Bertaux 1981, 5-8). d) The method of focus groups, with interviews of 3-6 persons, within the framework of a multi-method approach, is useful and significant, since it produces rich and in-depth ethnographic data, while it provides the capacity to observe and analyze the interaction between the members of the teams, something that was not feasible through interviews with individual persons (Yin 2003).

Dramaturgical strategies: Narratives as a means of survival for the homeless

In this research, I initially contacted and then I interviewed 13 people, who fall within the category of the homeless, and begged in the city of Peristeri (a big municipality in the periphery of Attica).

There is another version in the issue of the homeless, not only in Peristeri, but also in the wider region of Athens: the geometrical increase of the homeless population after 2010, when the results of the crisis started to become obvious in the modern Greek society (Sapounakis 2001; Donou 2013, 119-120). Particularly in Peristeri, even this relatively small number of people, who lost their job and ended up in the street, caused surprise, as well as questioning in the local society. I ascertained this surprise not only by those who are involved in the feeding and social benefits procedure of the Church and the Municipality, but also by the people of the neighborhood or the shopkeepers, who had not faced similar situations ever before.

“For us here, the homeless are something unknown. Peristeri, and mostly here, Bournazi, is still what we call a “neighborhood”. We knew

about the homeless, we had seen them in the center or more in American movies. Here we didn't have homeless people also because when someone needed help, wouldn't you help him? Everyone would help him [...]. This is the first time now, eh, let's say two-three years, that we have seen the first people without a home, sleeping on the ground. Not only foreigners, but also Greeks. We are not talking about drug addicts and such stories, I don't know about the foreigners, they come and then others come, I pity them too, they are people. However we were surprised, to see a child you have known for 20 years or couples living in the street? Is this Greece, is this Europe or are we moving lower than the third world" (Christos, 58 years old, owner of a PRO-PO shop in Bournazi).

As long as I was performing my research in Peristeri, I was impressed by the reactions of the inhabitants to the phenomenon of the homeless; they were not negative, like in the case of drug addicts (cf. Cook 1975); the inhabitants of the neighborhoods were mostly surprised and bewildered by this phenomenon initially. At a second level the sense of fear supersedes: fear regarding the outcome of the financial crisis, regarding the duration of the crisis, and mostly fear regarding the likelihood of them ending up being homeless themselves, without an income and a fixed salary:

"I see these people and I cry, I cry for them and for the situation. Virgin Mary, I say, make something happen, so that we can escape this. Anyway, their life is an example for us all" (Vaggelio, 48 years old).

Out of the 13 homeless people, whom I contacted and interviewed, 6 are Greek and 7 are immigrants (from Albania, from Pakistan and from Sudan). They do not all fall within the category of the homeless, who are characterized by complete lack of housing and live in the streets (street people – roofless). In total, out of the informers, 8 may be characterized as "street people", since they live in the street for a period longer than two months, 2 fall within the category of the "episodic homeless", since they sometimes live in the street for a time period and sometimes they are hosted in friendly houses or in stores and basements of neighbors or in abandoned stalls, while 3, who live in an abandoned house near the National Road, at the height of Lenorman Street, fall within the category of "tenuously housed people", in the sense that they live in inadequate and non-secure accommodations.

The narrations of the homeless are particularly interesting, in the sense that they reveal a different world, the world of the daily culture of

the street, while they shake down projected stereotypical perceptions of the previous years (Spradley 1970, 42-50). I believe that the issue of the homeless, as it has been formed and is still formed today in Greece, has certain particularities regarding the other studies that have been elaborated globally; the particularity of the diversity of the phenomenon is due to a series of factors: a) the phenomenon of the homeless, which was numerically limited until recently in the Greek territory, does not have neither the extent, nor the complexity that is presented in American or European studies (Rossi 1989; Garnier-Muller 2000). Even though in Greece we do not have total studies yet regarding the issue of the homeless, I do not think that the issue of the homeless population is due to the same causes as with American studies; a more careful study of the ethnographic testimonies below provides answers to this question; b) the issue of the homeless in Greece, and the explosive dimensions it has obtained, should be studied in the light of the financial crisis of 2009, which affected the lives of the Greeks and the immigrant workers who lost their jobs; c) the parameter of family and community solidarity, which is directly related to the issue of the homeless, is also significant; i.e. how does solidarity have an impact in a determinative way, either on facilitating their daily routine, or on them being able to revert to the living standard that they had in the past.

The dynamics of narratives

For decades, the study of the groups that live and survive in the streets, like homeless, beggars, urban nomads, drug addicts etc. was limited into a static treatment of their role in the streets. As it is pointed out by Lankenau, several sociological and anthropological studies were not able to provide the dynamic dimension of the life and survival of the homeless (Lankenau 1999a, 183-185). This dynamic dimension consists in the timely adoption of dramaturgical strategies by the acting subjects, i.e. the homeless, which are readjusted and recreated perpetually, in combination with the communicative interactive effect between passersby and beggars in the streets (Lee-Farrell 2003).

The categorization of the homeless in one and only category is a limitative tactic, which entraps the researcher in a static and unilateral consideration of the phenomenon of homelessness, in which the person, being stigmatized and marginalized, perpetually reproduces outwards the same image, so that passersby pity him. However, reality in the field of research is completely different, since social subjects appear to be holders of multiple roles, not exclusively during beggary in the streets, and thus their strategies and roles are often alternated, as we will see below, as well

as in the world of everyday life, in the circle of relatives, friends or in the neighborhood, the parish etc. For example, I met elderly homeless people or homeless people with chronic health problems, who begged outside of temples, pleading passersby, usually narrating stories about their disease or the problems they are facing. I met many of these people again and again in Peristeri, not in their places of “action”, but in the street where they live, and they invited me themselves to interview them; during these meetings, and observing their behavior in the framework of the neighborhood and their family environment, I ascertained that they present a very different “self” than the one they presented during their meetings with the sensitive passersby in the street.

Homeless create and then recreate the repertoire of their dramaturgical strategies depending on the audience, which they address, and according to the area they are. A relative example is provided by the area of the cemetery, particularly on the Saturdays of the Souls, Good Friday or during funerals. When they are outside the cemetery during these days, they narrate stories relative to the death of spouses, children or other loved people and family members. On the contrary, in other time periods, they develop a different repertoire of narrations, which refer either to their terrible financial situation or to problems of health, housing and welfare, which they deal with.

Therefore, from the outset I ascertained that the said persons did not have a stereotypically passive attitude towards daily reality, and as acting subjects they followed a dynamic strategy of representation of the self and their multiple selves depending on the social conditions and the persons, whom they addressed, while they particularly insisted on the handling of impressions against others, a handling which, if successful, would create emotions of sympathy and compassion to passersby, with benefits for the homeless.

The dramaturgical model, which was introduced by Goffman (Goffman 1959) and has the acting subject, who acts as manager of impressions, as a main axis, helped me disclose this dynamic of the dramaturgical strategies, as a means of survival. The theoretical thinking of Goffman provides us with a theoretical framework for the study of transitory and ephemeral or even impersonal social contacts in the street, for the wish of the participants in the framework of social interaction and contact to become and –mainly– to feel desired by handling impressions and forming multiple selves, personages and façades.

Using the theatrical stage, Goffman analyzes the daily, face-to-face interaction, with terms from the theatrical dramaturgy, making the daily arena the social counterpart and equivalent of the theatrical stage, however without the dramaturgical model being identified with real life.

The persons or performers perform in front of different people (audience) multifarious social roles within the framework of a performance/interpretation in various circumstances and in different time periods. He pointed out that performance/interpretation can be determined as the entire activity of a certain participant in a given occasion, which influences in any way any of the other performers. The predetermined action scheme, which unfolds during a performance, and which can be presented or played in other situations, is called a localized “role” or “piece”.

In the performance field, motives play a significant role; their adoption varies per occasion and situation, depending on the wish of the acting subject to manage the grid of impressions that is formed about him by the audience. When the motives of the performer enjoy acceptance by the audience, they are changed in strategies of action, which aim at exercising drastic influence and effect to a large part of the audience, and, in addition, the realization of the performer’s plans.

The performer becomes manager of impressions and holder of multiple selves at the same time: occasionally and depending on the audience the performer’s behavior changes and is readjusted, having essentially a repertoire of selves, which are adjusted to the needs of the situation, within the framework of social interaction, as products of social exchange.

In *Sigma* (1963) he is occupied with a variety of stigmatized persons, such as the physically disabled, the mentally ill, drug addicts, prostitutes, the poor and even the members of religious or ethnic minorities, while in *Asylums* (1961) he deals with the issue of stigmatization of the inmates of psychiatric hospitals. According to Goffman, all the above people converge to the stigmatization that they undergo, even though they originate from heterogeneous and mixed life courses. The stigmatized, as carriers of a corrupted identity, disrupt the regularity of social life, break the regulatory frameworks of the hegemonic speech of propriety and outward appearance, and are not included in the socially acceptable ones (see also Becker 1966). During the procedure of social interaction, they do not respond to the wishes of others and essentially contradict the horizon of expectations of the other party, the “normal” participants in the procedure of interaction (Day et al. 1999, 1-4).

However, the offer of Goffman is extremely significant in the following level: it breaks and fells the so far existing views on the passiveness of aberrant persons. It achieves this incision by proving through examples the dynamic attitude of these people, particularly in the phase of “presentation of the self”. Through this perspective, Goffman makes acting subjects, stigmatized subjects, dynamic subjects, who, on the one hand – even though being in a disadvantaged position according to social criticism – can han-

dle the impressions in a social scene, in a meeting to their advantage, and, on the other hand, can proceed with actions, which are beneficial for them, by felling their stereotypically manufactured deviation, as well as their socially determined marginalization.

In this framework, I will make an attempt to distinguish the repertoire of the dramaturgical strategies that the homeless follow in the street, the way in which they are presented before passersby, the “self” that they project during face-to-face meetings with the people they talk to, and, mainly, the way in which they beg. This is not only a strategy of homeless people in Greece. As it is pointed out by Glasser and Bridgman (Glasser and Bridgman 1999, 75-77), seeking money or food through beggary constitutes a basic survival strategy of the homeless in America. Indeed, the two anthropologists express their surprise regarding the fact that, while anthropology has internationally attended issues of “the culture of the street”, however there are not enough anthropological studies on beggary (Glasser and Bridgman 1999, 75).

It is a fact that beggary and the homeless population are linked, not in an absolute degree, but there is a correlation between the two situations, since these are two different social phenomena: there are beggars who are homeless, as well as homeless who are beggars, in order to survive, without this being the rule. This fact has been pointed out decades ago by the anthropologist and psychiatrist Fabrega (Fabrega 1971), in the provincial town of San Cristobal, where he traced several homeless people, who due to the lack of housing and the failure to obtain goods, turned to beggary. In the same framework, while performing a research on the homeless of New York and the city of Tucson in Arizona, Williams (Williams 1995) points out that beggary is a basic “role” of the homeless, in essence a survival strategy, in order to survive in the cities. Beggary causes the pity of passersby according to Williams, while it provides enough return as compared to the other two dramaturgical strategies (of the “helper”, who offers help and is paid, and of the dramatic narrator, who narrates stories in order to cause the pity of passersby).

Hagan and McCarthy (Hagan and McCarthy 1998) offer us systematic information regarding beggary by the homeless. In their research on homeless youngsters of Toronto and Vancouver, they discovered that the practice of beggary is extremely widespread among the homeless youngsters (about 1/3 of the homeless beg), while they observed that it is a supplementary action for many, which supplements their income from illegal actions (participation in gangs, drug sale etc.).

In my research I was able to distinguish 2 basic attitudes of homeless beggars in the street: a) the active attitude, in which the homeless pur-

sues direct contact and communication with the other party of the social scene, the passerby; b) the passive attitude, in which the homeless is not asking for money and is not claiming dynamic help, but indirectly, using certain techniques, which may not be directly addressed to the passerby, but sideways and indirectly, attract his attention and urge him to help.

We can accept that the most active role is the one that we can conventionally call “the narrator”. These are homeless, who do only verbally invite passersby or the faithful, who are going to church, towards their side, but they also explain the reason why they are asking for help. As long as I was in the field of the research, many times, particularly in temple courtyards, I happened to be invited close to them, in order to ask me for help. I mention here four characteristic stories that they narrated, as I recorded them, a few minutes after my departure from the field.

“Sir, sir, come here... Please, give me whatever you want, whatever you can, and I wish you health and that all your sins are forgiven! I have 3 children, sir, please, one of them is unemployed, the other is in the army, and the third is sick. And I don't have a husband, he died 2 years ago, I am a widow and I will have to wait for 2 more years until I can get my pension” (homeless, outside Saint Ierotheos).

“Give me whatever you can, son, I was not always a homeless. I have worked as a waiter, in construction sides, on ships, there are not many things that I haven't done... But this damn life brought it this way, so that I have to welter at churches and eat at common meals, and call this a life. But, blame it on the bad sickness that torments me, and from the 300 that I get as a pension from the Agricultural Insurance Organization, I spend more than 200 in medications, which get more expensive all the time, and so, even if you give me 5 cents, you will do me good” (homeless, outside Saint Antonios).

“Please, madam, give me whatever you can. I haven't always been homeless. I have a wife and two children (...). I came here from Pakistan with many difficulties; I passed through Iran, Iraq, Turkey, so many countries, which I often crossed even on foot (...). I have been through terrible difficulties in order to come here and I didn't come here to steal. I came to Greece in 2004, and I worked very much as a tailor, a grill man, and I carried weights. But the crisis forced me to leave the house in which I lived, and to stay in the street with my wife and my two children, who cannot even go to school. Give me something, whatever you want, either money to

buy some milk for my children, or give me some food, or whatever you can” (Amin from Pakistan).

“Please, first listen carefully to my story, and then give me money. No, I don’t want alms in order to make a lot of money; I am not a miser or a thief. I am in terrible need even for 5 or 10 Euros. The money you spend in one day can get me through one, maybe two, weeks. I was a builder, but since 2009 I can’t find a job. And that’s not the only problem, because I got kicked out of the house. My mother is 85 years old and has Alzheimer’s, and only her medications cost 200 Euros per month, and we hospitalized her permanently, while my wife has a health problem and cannot work, and we have survived for the last 5 years depending on the help of passersby. We sometimes stay at a 100-year old deserted house, and other times in a small park nearby. I am asking for your help in order to survive and to not die in the street. I haven’t eaten in two full days” (Charalambos, 58 years old, homeless).

I have recorded dozens of similar narrations by homeless people, who addressed me, as well as passersby. Their narration regarding “how they ended up living in the street” is not unilateral and univocal: i.e. the informers do not blame only the financial crisis for the fact that they do not have permanent housing. Even though today’s crisis is significant in their reason, they do not attribute to it characteristics of a unique cause that forced them to live as homeless. From the ones I recorded, I was able to conclude that, regardless of the actual problem that the homeless is facing, and regardless of the causes that led him to begging, the narrations converge in certain common narrative cores, which: a) poverty, not only personal, but also of family members due to their long term unemployment; b) their casual professional occupation, which, in combination with the lack of professional knowledge and skills, and the failure to find permanent employment, led them to the professional margin; c) the failure to obtain permanent accommodation, due to unfavorable financial situation. Also, they focused on living conditions (abandoned houses and cars, benches, hosting in municipal hostels or rooms of the Church are some of the main places of stay for them); d) the absence of a family home that they would inherit from their parents; e) family conflicts and rupture of family relations with other relatives, usually siblings or spouse, which resulted in throwing them out of the family home; f) problems with alcoholism or other kinds of addicting substances, which alienated them from their family environment and marginalized them from the wider social and professional environment; g) long term severe health problems, which deprived them of the ability for work and vocational rehabilitation; h) the

sudden loss of work, after the financial crisis of 2009, and the failure to find a new job; i) their coming to Greece, either as a migrant destination, or as a stopover – a “passage”, which resulted in their entrapment in the country, and the failure to access any job; j) hunger, since most of them contend that they either have inadequate nutrition or that they cannot get the necessary for their children.

Regarding the degree of truth or lie of these narrations, this cannot be verified. The deeper I was involved with the life of these people the more I discovered that a significant degree of narrations were based on true events. This true basis was also ascertained by my own knowledge of their living conditions.

The world of “affecters”

On the other side there were those who narrated stories with false information; however, there were gradations in this case too. Firstly, there were homeless, who, as they admitted themselves during interviews, combined their true story with secondary false details, in order to move passersby:

“Eh, yes, I add something more, more about my children, to say so, that they are hungry. Not that we are rich, we are not rich with my husband, we barely make ends meet, but our children have nothing to do with this. I mostly say this, because I know that the people who go to church, eh, -how should I put it?-, they feel moved by these family things, -how can I say it?-, they feel for you more, they say “look, the poor woman got out in the street in order to bring up her children”. [...] Yes, it is a small lie, I could say more about diseases, cancer and stuff, but I don’t want to say such things, I think it is rotten luck and they return on you” (Matina, 42 years old).

Other times, the lie is told for reasons of covering up of the actual situation, in which the subjects are, so that they sweeten certain stereotypical, negative impressions, as it is in the case, for example, of Rania, drug user, who believes that her condition as a drug addict would hamper her position and her capacity to get money by passersby, due to the stereotypical perceptions regarding drug addicts, i.e. that they will give all the money from charity to get drugs.

“I don’t say anything about the joints and the pills, because I know that no one will give me anything. This is why I go further than Bournazi, where

no one knows me, and most of the times I say that I am sick, that I have a big problem with my bones, and thus they feel sorry for me, because others say: "she is sick, she must want medications. She is not a drug addict to just spend it". [...] Ah! I used to say in the trolley that I had AIDS, and there I saw that people again didn't want to give me, I don't know why, but I believe that they thought that AIDS has something to do with drugs" (Rania, 28 years old).

Second, in the case of narrators we can also include "affecters". With this term we can characterize all those, who, even though they don't have health problems or family problems, usually fabricate a "constructed" dramatic story, presenting themselves as sufferers, mostly as blind, disabled, deaf etc. They are poor people and homeless but they promote unreal problems. Usually these homeless people narrate:

a) Stories about poverty, not only personal, but also of family members in combination with stories about health problems:

"I can't say the same story in front of everyone, i.e. that I am poor, and I can't cope, that my husband and I got homeless 3 years ago in 2011, for two years. First of all I can't say the same all the time; people passing by get tired, and may believe that I am doing it on purpose in order to make money. But it is true, and it is the only truth, my personal story, the personal drama I am experiencing for 3 years now, ever since this bad situation (financial crisis) started. The years that I have been living in the streets are so many that, if I repeat the same and the same, no one will believe me. There is also the issue that you are addressing elders, youngsters, and children, people who you have known for years or people who you see for the first time. When, let's say, I see strangers, I mostly say that I am sick or that I have cancer. And I always say that I am poor, which is true. I have observed that health problems move passersby, and thus they give me money. Of course, when I see someone, who I often see in the neighborhood, I ask for help projecting only my actual problem, i.e. my poverty and the fact that I don't have a house to stay in" (Angeliki, homeless for 3 years).

b) Stories about the absence of a family home that they would inherit from their parents. Especially, they focus on family conflicts and rupture of family relations with other relatives, usually siblings or spouse, which resulted in throwing them out of the family home:

“I have been living in the street for 2 years, ever since my mother died, and I got kicked out of the small house that we rented. I can’t find a job. Since no one was helping me, I had to say that my parents kicked me out of the house, and that I did drugs, I suffered from health problems, and I had many problems. I saw that when narrating these stories, augmenting the events and adding a dramatic tone, pretending that I am crying or that I am in pain, I benefited. Passersby paid more attention to me, and helped me with money and food or bed linen and clothes. It is true that pretending to be a young sick person, without family, brothers, permanent residence and saying relevant stories, I benefited much more at a financial level” (Manolis, 25 years old, homeless for 2 years).

c) Stories about homelessness and the failure to obtain permanent accommodation, due to unfavorable financial situation in combination with Christian saying, in order to move the faithful passengers in the courtyards of the churches:

“As I usually beg at the church of Saint Antonios, which is near the park where I sleep most of the time, I always ask for help from the faithful, and ordinarily the elder, who I know that have a pension and can help with one or two Euros. In order to move them, because I know that they are religious people, I put in the stories that I narrate how I became homeless, as well as the issue of alms and God. I.e. I say that God said that we should help the poor and that whoever helps the poor and the beggar will have a good life for him and his children. Faithful people believe these, and when I say these, I attract their interest and they always give me some money” (Chrysoula, 60 years old, homeless for 1.5 year).

d) Stories about diseases, from which they or their family suffer:

“I always put in my stories excessive elements of lies that have to do with illnesses, with cancer or AIDS, let’s say, as well as that my parents kicked me out of the house or that all my relatives have died and I am alone in the world. I do it in order to survive, because this is the way that people, even priests, notice you. The biggest misery brings more help by passersby. It is true, but I am not ashamed to say so, because through these narrations I can live, and I don’t care if someone calls me a liar. My life is very difficult. I have been living in the street for two years, and I haven’t worked for four years. I only live through alms and the church’s common meals” (Eleni, 35 years old, homeless for 2 years).

But also a third level exists; however, this practice is not a general rule. During the research, particularly in means of transportation, I met several people who pretended to be blind or disabled, saying various stories, which had nothing to do with reality, in order to occasionally gain something. They weren't real homeless nor real beggars. One of the indicative cases is the one of Pablo, whom I had met several times in the buses asking for money to buy medications for his sick mother. Approaching Pablo and learning more about his life, I understood that not only did he not need the money for his mother, but he himself denied the identity of the homeless, which was often attributed to him (his phrase in my relevant question is characteristic: "Me a homeless beggar? God forbid! No, man!"). As he admitted himself, his occasional beggary was for him an outlet when he "ran out of" money, which his family provided. I mention some characteristic abstracts:

"We started this [beggary] as a joke 3 years ago with a friend. We had both run out of pocket money, at that time each of us got 20 Euros per week, and we started it for fun [...]. If I tell you that we earned 15 Euros per hour each, -will you believe it?-, in the trolley, number 12, from Saint Antonios to Anthoupolis [...].

It is what they say until you learn how to do it. A habit. And whenever Costas and I ran out of money, we turned to beggary (he laughs). No, we are not homeless, we are not beggars, not in the sense of the old man who is begging, we were just having fun, and earned a supplement now and then [...].

Costas [his friend] has stopped doing it for years, and we have also drifted apart, but I do it sometimes, if I run out of the pocket money that my parents give me, because I don't have a job, I may do it [beg], however in a bus or a trolley, I don't sit on the street, eh, to earn 20 Euros, let's say".

The same circle of "affecters" also includes people, who individually or in groups wander around in stores, houses or vocational training institutes and other public organizations (e.g. tax offices, town hall) supposedly making "collections" for patients or people with chronic problems. Beggary through collections can be included in the strategies of narration in the sense that in this case approaching the donor is achieved through the narration of a story about a person who suffers or about an institution that needs help. Indeed, in the last few years there has been great increase of such movements with people presenting fake papers with seals of supposed institutions, for which they are making collections and other solidarity actions.

The narrator's role constitutes the adoption of a strategy that several homeless undertake to execute in order to survive (Lamaison and Bour-

dieu 1986, 110-120). As the projection and the management of the self is unique, depending on the person, to audience, and the social circumstances, thus a typology of all the roles of the narrators would be infeasible, not only because for example 100 cases of narrators constitute 100 different categories by themselves, but also because we cannot “standardize” narrators, for example in narrators of true or false stories, given that true and false elements are mixed and alternated continuously in their narrations, and those who are narrating stories from their lives, often in other phases when I interviewed them, they (the informers) seemed to be also open to the adoption of false and irrelevant to their true lives stories, in order to confer greater financial benefits.

Albeit, based on the theoretical framework of Goffman (Goffman 1959; Goffman 1961; Goffman 1963) and other posterior researchers (Lankenau 1999a; Lankenau 1999b), we can point out certain basic points. The narrator homeless appears to be the holder of multiple selves and manager of impressions, since, as it is pointed out by Tseëlon (Tseëlon 1992, 115-117), he possesses a repertoire of personages. The repertoire of personages is activated and used depending on the audience, and it aims at a basic target: to maintain the interaction and to overcome the embarrassment that constitutes a negative factor in the procedure of the meeting. Homeless, who narrate their personal stories, appear very different in the temples or the streets, and very different in common meals with people that they know for years or, even more, in their neighborhood.

According to Goffman the management of impressions is extremely significant, in order to control the behavior of others, and mainly the reactions that it causes to them. The narrator essentially guides his activity, in order to transfer to others what is in his interest to transfer. He wishes that the audience forms a good (compassionate) mood towards him, but he actually wants to convince the audience that he also has a positive opinion for them (see also Stark 1992, 341-344).

In the following framework of the possession of multiple selves and of the management of impressions, manipulation in order to achieve the goal is also included, since many performers have great capacity and a strong motive to manipulate facts; only embarrassment, guilt and fear prevent them from doing it. As it is pointed out by Goffman (Goffman 1959, 37-42), performers take risks, while it seems that marginalized people like homeless take greater risks and are involved in the procedure of manipulation. He mentions 3 main reasons: a) these people, being socially stigmatized, wish to reverse the negative image that has been formed about them, and to manage the spectrum of negative charged information and stereotypes to their advantage; b) people who live in the margin

accept the risks of deception and misrepresentation, because there are but a few points that cannot be used in order to certify the presence of a thing that is not actually there. The failure of the others, of the audience, to ascertain and verify whether the narrator's story is true or not, definitely works positively for the homeless, who narrates the story; c) while pretence and the façade are perceived as offences for people who possess central positions or important occupations, on the contrary, in case of daily transactions, particularly in issues such as, for example, charity or help to a person in the street during a sudden event, the falsification of certain data by the performer is not judged with the same degree of strictness, since the performer's actions are not crucial for the outcome of the audience's assumptions.

Ethical issues in the interpretation of a role do not seem to concern performers: under the capacity of the performer, these persons are not concerned about the ethical issue of the realization of these personages, but about the ethically indifferent issue of the manipulation of a convincing impression that these personages are actually realized. The acting subjects are concerned, at a first phase, about nearing, approaching others, and at a second level about being able to convince them, so that the final result is achieved, i.e. the ensuring of a monetary amount through charity. In order to achieve closeness to passersby and to create a climate of confidence, and finally, the provocation of a certainty to the public that they need help, it is necessary that the acting subject is actively involved not only in the narration of personal stories, but often also in a series of other dramaturgical actions, often non-verbal, such as crying, appearance in rugs, which refers to poverty and marginalization situations, or even the misleading use of canes and other accessories (for example, splints), in order to convince that they are suffering from health problems.

In addition, in order to achieve approaching and persuasion, the correct handling of impressions in the "game" of meeting, of interaction, is necessary. Reasonable handling of impressions is achieved with the balanced "spontaneous involvement", which is linked with the balanced expression of sentiments by the performer during the interpretation/performance. An exaggerated and intense involvement, as well as an exaggerated, toneless and neutral spontaneous involvement may cause embarrassment, which in turn will derange the order of social interaction, cancel the communicative dimension of the meeting, a fact that will result in the non-satisfaction of expectations of both sides.

Finally we can ask the question: why all these homeless people (that we can conventionally call "the narrators") are playing this active role and verbally invite passersby? The answer is multilevel. Not all homeless

people narrate stories and beg for the same reasons. The answer that they beg in order to obtain money or the basic food products is only one parameter (cf. O' Flaherty 1991). From the ethnographic research we can point out:

a) Supply of daily survival products (cigarettes, newspaper, small items of daily use, tissues, incontinence pads for the elderly):

“I want to be able to buy a newspaper for the sports section, to read about my team, Olympiakos. Do you have 1.30 euro? I can't wait to gather the amount. I don't have television here in the park. The newspaper is a relationship with the outside world” (Panagiotis, 53 years old).

b) Covering of pharmaceutical needs and hospital tests.

Informers are generally uninsured, since they either have not worked (women, who were occupied with household tasks), or have not worked in years, so they do not have adequate medical coverage. Besides medications, which they generally pay for, many of them expressed the complaint about financial participation in hospital tests during the last years.

c) Supply of coffee, alcoholic drinks or snacks.

All the informers mentioned that besides common meals, they are also supplied with some other food products, such as coffees, beers, soft drinks or a light snack (toast, souvlaki etc.). Even though this is not a daily habit, due to financial difficulties, it seems that besides the dietary complementarity, these small, daily “treats” essentially constitute a means of joy and pleasure for these people; a habit that interrupts the monotony and the difficulty of an, in any case, difficult and beyond the limits of normality, life.

d) Capacity to participate in procedures, which are common with other fellow citizens.

Even though we have stereotypically linked the homeless with the senses of the secluded and socially isolated person, this image is far from the truth. Through the ethnographic material of the interviews, another perspective of their life emerges: that of the people who want to participate in daily social procedures, such as drinking a cup of coffee at the coffeehouse of the area, or even to sit in a fast-food. *“We feel like real people, we want to talk... it is embarrassing to be 58 years old and not be able to*

drink a cup of coffee”, says 58-year old Grigoris, while Anna, 60 years old, considers the fact that she can go to the coffeehouse of the neighborhood and spend the minimum required (for example, to order a cup of coffee or an orange juice), both as an action of relationship tightening with the other members of the neighborhood, and as a way of entertainment within her perpetually repeated daily routine. *“I usually take a cheese pie and an orange juice, I see my friends from the neighborhood, the morning passes, then I go to the common meal, and then the same again and again”*.

e) Exclusive dependence of survival from beggary.

During the research, I also traced cases of homeless people, who were completely dependent on beggary in order to survive, both in goods and in money; for example, 2 people from Sudan, who had just come to Athens for the first time, did not know anything about common meals, and stayed in a ruined neoclassical building near Lenorman street, without power or water. The dependence of these people on the help of neighbors and passersby was complete (see also Butovskaya et al. 2004, 5-22). Indeed, they were asking for clothes, food and blankets in order to make it through the winter, and not for money, the value of which they did not know – at least in the beginning. The neighborhood responded, and they stayed in this space for about 1.5 year. I believe that the case of the people from Sudan, completely poverty stricken immigrants, without a trace of personal fortune, who managed to come to a country of the West, within the financial crisis, also highlights the reversal of the example of homelessness, which was developed in Greece during the last decades: there is not just homelessness and beggary with the aim of financial benefit gain any more (fetichism of money), but also beggary with the aim to gather essentials (mostly food, clothing, and medications), for homeless to deal with the coverage of basic needs (Goldberg 1995, 80-84). Through the conversations that I had with the homeless from Sudan, in a neighboring park, I tried to investigate why they are asking for food and other objects instead of money, which is offered to them by some inhabitants. The people from Sudan told me that they preferred food, clothes, blankets and other objects, in the sense that money from beggary is not adequate for the coverage of the above needs:

“We came here with our clothes and all our stuff in a bag, all that could fit in there [...]. Here [abandoned house] there is no power, water, I am cold, I have nothing to cover myself, to wear another piece of clothing. This is why I am not asking for money, as you ask me. What can I do with 5 or 10 Euros? I cannot buy anything. During the first time period here, I did

not know how much this money was worth [Euros] and what I could buy. We knew dollars; we saw your money here for the first time. [...] Asking [begging] from the neighborhood, I managed to get various goods, which helped me live: a carpet to spread on the floor, a pillow, old clothes and shoes to wear, plates to eat, we built a small house [he laughs]. They also gave us a lamp that operates with batteries, so that we don't live in the dark. Every day at noon Mrs. Fotini and others bring us food. We really feel very lucky to have become acquainted with these people. They were unknown to us, and we were unknown to them, and they hugged us as if we were their family" (Andy, 38 years old).

Conclusions

Conclusively, we can support that a) through ethnographic research in the field, and with the use of the biographic method, I was able to end up to the conclusion that informers, through their speech and their lived experience, do not accept their marginalization from society. Mass media may present them as "beings without will", who fatally accept their situation, but, on the contrary, I ascertained that the homeless were active and dynamically social subjects, who participated actively in social procedures. They actively defend their position in the framework of social reality, fighting every day for their survival. b) Contrary to what anyone would expect, the homeless, as it becomes obvious through their speech, do not act randomly and fragmentary, for example by simply making up a story. There is, however, a very different reality, which becomes obvious only through systematic ethnographic research: that social subjects do anything but act without program and planning. The strategies that they follow, without always being completely predesigned, come as an answer to the point in time, in order to survive. c) They have a repertoire of personages. The repertoire of personages is activated and used depending on the audience and tends towards a main target: the maintenance of interaction and the overcoming of the embarrassment that constitutes a negative factor in the procedure of the meeting. Homeless, who narrate personal stories, appear to be very different in the temples or the streets, and much different in common meals, with people they have known for years or, much more, in their neighborhood. d) Their narrations are often false, and they simply aim at moving and creating strong emotions to the audience. e) They do not always address the same story, but they change it depending on when and whom they address. f) Primarily, the thematic core of the narrations of the homeless includes elements of pain, misery, hardships and problems that they experience.

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Георгиос Кузас

„Живљење кроз наративе“: Наративи као средство опстанка бескућника у Атини

Циљ овог чланка није да прикаже модерне наративе само као средства комуникације, већ, пре свега, да укаже на трансформацију наратива у средства опстанка маргинализованих друштвених група. Анализа бескућничких наратива је комбинована са ширим „системом улога“, које бескућници користе да се представе на друштвеној сцени, суштински унутар оквира Гофмановог типа извођења. Стога, бескућници се, повремено, представљају као „несрећни“, „слаби“, „љубазни“ итд. да би добили саосећање и помоћ од пролазника. Резултат тога је да њихов наратив, комбинован с њиховим извођењем, није само наратив њиховог живота, већ и динамично средство савладавања свакодневних тешкоћа у граду.

Кључне речи: бескућништво, сиромаштво, просјаци, наративи, извођење, стратегије опстанка, улична етнографија.