"Trajectory of suffering" and educational route in K.'s biographical narrative
From a stigmatized national to a transnational identity

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Figure 1: *The forest with petrified nightingales* (2006) [detail] © Andreas Maratos

This paper summarizes the "process structures" in the context of Fritz Schütze's "Narrative Analysis" and investigates in greater detail one of these, the "trajectory of suffering", on which the German sociologist himself focuses his studies. Subsequently, the paper presents the "trajectory of suffering" in the biographical narrative of a second-generation woman of Albanian origin studying at a Greek university and goes on to trace her educational route from a stigmatized national to a transnational identity. The analysis clarifies K.'s different experiences in the course of her educational trajectory from primary school to university, depicting a slow and difficult displacement from the state of insecurity, shame and concealment of her national identity to that of self-esteem and emancipation.

Keywords: biographical narrative, trajectory of suffering, immigrant, Albania, transnational identity.

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"Narrative Analysis" and "Process Structures"

Fritz Schütze's "Narrative Analysis", developed in Germany in the mid-1970s in the context of biographical research rooted in the North American traditions of interpretive sociology, such as the Chicago School (Tsiolis, 2006: 58; Apitzsch & Inowlocki, 2000: 53-54), is both a theoretical approach to the study of biographical narratives and a methodological proposition for analysis. "Narrative Analysis" focuses more on "the way individuals experience, process and deal with changes in their state as dynamic processes" (Tsiolis, 2006: 58) and is therefore considered appropriate for the study of biographical narratives of social subjects, be these individual or collective, who have experienced unexpected situations that have led to violent rearrangements in their lives (mental disorders, drug addiction, educational difficulties, imprisonment) causing a host of consequences. For the same reason, it is considered to be suitable for the study of biographical stories of immigrants, who, due to their immigration history, have experienced crucial social changes and transformations that have largely shaped their living conditions as well as their way of perceiving them.

The German sociologist Schütze focuses his "Narrative Analysis" on how the social subject deals with the changes he has been exposed to during his lifetime. He observes that the ways in which individuals are involved and interpret historical processes play an important role in the overall formation of these macro-historical processes. On the other hand, he claims that the deeper the researcher delves into the riddles of a biographical self-presentation, the more he is confronted with the very structural processes and the human efforts undertaken to reconcile with them (Schütze, 2014: 227). He distinguishes the ways of experiencing biographical changes between those that characterize the "heteronomy" of the social subject and those that characterize his "autonomy" and "self-determination".

The "process structures" that characterize "autonomy" are "the biographical action schemes" and "the creative metamorphoses of biographical identity" while, on the other hand, "the institutional expectation patterns" and the "trajectories of suffering" correspond to the model of "heteronomy" (Tsiolis, 2006: 70). "Process structures" that correspond to the model of "heteronomy" state the fact of the loss of control over the planning of one's life and the feeling that one depends on forces outside and beyond him, while "process structures" that characterize "autonomy" state one's ability to organize a life plan with a certain relative stability and to follow it vigorously (Schütze, 2016: 12-13; Tsiolis, 2006:70). In light of this conceptual framework, "process structures" are perceived as "broader biographical sections of experiences" (Tsiolis, 2013: 164-165) that constitute four different ideotypes of life models and complex interpretive patterns, through which we can understand the specific guidelines of a person's action during his life.

"Process structures" emphasize, on the one hand, the internal structure of these sections of experiences and, on the other, the fact that they are not static but capable of changing (Tsiolis, 2006: 69-71). In this way, the final articulation of these structures can depict the "timeliness of life story" (Tsiolis, 2006: 71)

and thereby renders, even from the point of view of the present, the biographical experiences as they are distributed in the different periods of life of the individuals and ultimately helps in the understanding of "how someone became who he is" both as a form of self-knowledge and as vital information for the researcher himself (Tsiolis, 2006: 71, Szczepanik & Siebert 2016: 287). To put it in Schütze's own words, "the life history of a person can normally be seen as a sequential combination of biographical process structures" (2016: 12).

Furthermore, "process structures" demonstrate the fact that biographical narratives are treated by Schütze as the place where social and historical events meet the world of the human subject and are therefore a privileged field for studying the relation between structural parameters and individual understandings and actions. That makes Schütze's "Narrative Analysis" – among other biographical methods – capable of providing a "sophisticated stock of interpretive procedures for relating the personal and the social" (Bornat & Wengraf, 2000: 2). This would help inform standard sociological practice of the importance of the individual's point of view, though the extent to which individual agency can influence structure has yet to be shown (Rustin, 2000: 45-46).

The "negative experience" and the stages of "trajectory of suffering"

The German sociologist is particularly interested in the "negative experience'" (Tsiolis, 2006: 76) which we could call trauma, as well as in an extensive dimension of the biographical research, which focuses on people who went through a period of deep personal or collective crisis, in the context of historical or personal events that violently overturned the data of their lives (Rosentha,l 2003: 916, 917). Schütze is interested in the way in which the state of deep "suffering" is experienced by the acting subject, in the timing of events, and ultimately in how this is transcribed and evaluated in the aftermath of the unplanned biographical narrative.

The "trajectory of suffering" is the term that reflects the painful processes of experiencing reality that come "from the vortex of social change processes" (Tsiolis, 2006: 59). Human beings trapped in this vortex, either as individuals "I" or as a collective "we", lose their balance, become deregulated and experience the events of their lives in a negative way. In this situation, everything around them appears uncertain, dangerous and gloomy and they feel fragile and unstable in a confused social and personal identity, unable to deal with either the circumstances of life or the changes that occur and they are gradually left to be lost in the whirlpool of circumstances from which they seem incapable of escaping by taking some kind of intentional action (Schütze, 1999). "In the course of their suffering they become strange to themselves", to put it in Schütze's words (2016: 11). Moreover, quite often the abandonment of social subjects in such a "trajectory of suffering" means that the difficult situation is transferred to fields other than the one in which it first appeared, as well as that it is accompanied by the embodiment of mental pain with the simultaneous occurrence of psychosomatic diseases (Schütze, 1999: 157, 158). It

becomes clear, therefore, that the "trajectory of suffering" identifies a condition of entrapment and loss of control over the life of social subjects, marked by great mental pain, and constitutes a state of "heteronomy" for them.

There are seven evolutionary stages in the "trajectory of suffering", according to Schütze (1999: 156). These stages constitute the processes, in the sense of both external interactions and of internal fermentations, through which the problematic situation develops:

- The formation of the potential of the trajectory of pain;
- The activation of this potential, which results in the person feeling unexpectedly threatened and powerless to react;
- The effort to regain and maintain at least some precarious balance in dealing with everyday life;
- Loss of recently acquired balance;
- The complete disorder of self and life;
- The biographical attempts to reconsider and overcome the trajectory of pain;
- Strategies to thereafter avoid the trajectory of pain.

The "trajectory of suffering" and the educational route in K.'s biographical narrative

K.'s biographical narrative as a "reconsiderative construction of experiences" (Dausien, 2000: 231) presents the features of what Schütze called the "trajectory of suffering". The way K. reconsiders and redefines the history of her life from the perspective of a second generation immigrant in Greece, a university student in the Department of Philosophy, has almost all the characteristics and includes almost all the stages of such a trajectory.

K. arrived in Greece from Albania in 1999, at the age of six, with her mother and younger brother, travelling with illegal documents. They escaped from living conditions which have been described as extremely difficult, both in terms of material poverty and a state of misery as such. Her father was the first to attempt the migration journey to Greece in the early 1990s, crossing the borders through the mountains, and for eight years was being arrested and repatriated again and again by border guards or police officers who used violence against him. The first installation of the family in the new country took place in a village in northern Greece and then in a large city where they have been permanently established ever since. Father worked mainly in building construction and mother as a house cleaner or in care work for the elderly without insurance cover. K. changed several schools until she ended up in an elementary school and then in a high school where the majority of the student population were foreigners like her. At the end of a generally positive student sojourn in high school, she passed the national university entrance exams and was admitted to the Department of Philosophy of a provincial university, where she studied, leaving behind family and friends.

The formation of the "trajectory of suffering" in the specific life narrative – and with special emphasis on the role of the educational system in it – proceeds evolutionary stages as we describe in the following paragraphs.

- <u>"The formation of the trajectory of suffering"</u> (Schütze, 1999) took place in the context of the family's extreme poverty in Albania, in other words in conditions of structural or institutional violence (Galtung, 1969), which on the one hand deprived K., her brother and their parents of the basic means of survival and which led them to a dead end forcing the family to emigrate to Greece, while on the other hand it shaped the ways in which family members reacted to stimuli, established emotions and behaviors compatible with their weak social position, such as submissiveness, lack of assertiveness, guilt and shame. Later on, these "integrated social structures" (Bourdieu, 1999; 2002) – in other words, the internalized social subordination – made K. want to escape:

    "{140} there are many things that I don't like about myself, especially the elements of my character; I think I got them from my parents, {141} so I want to get away from what they are and from who I am".

    "{145} … it bothers me that they do not claim things for themselves {146} that they are very timid and too emotional and often get oppressed by others".

In her pre-school years in Albania, K. had lived a precarious life and had felt extremely insecure. The construction of this negative potential continued in later life, being further exacerbated by the destabilizing events of her father's departure to Greece and the separation from his children, his painful returns and departures for a period of eight years, returns in which he bore visible signs of the violence perpetrated on him by those who arrested and malabused him:

    "{5} my father had already come forward in '91, just by the time the borders were opened. {6} He came and went quite often {7} it was quite difficult {8} they caught him in the mountains {9} he was beaten and still has marks on his body and head made by border guards".

The daunting illegal trip of the other three family members to the "land of opportunity", K's long confinement with her baby brother to a tourist accommodation where the family lived while the parents worked long hours, their detection and intimidation by the authorities as they were considered to be illegal immigrants, all contributed to this weak mental background:

    "{31} we went to a house which is one of those apartment rooms that they rent to tourists {32} We waited over there me and my brother alone when my mom found a job {33} My brother was in diapers {34}. I remember that in the mornings we were all alone {35} … and I couldn't take care of my brother somehow I had no idea I was six years old … {39} but we were alone, locked up so we wouldn't leave, so we wouldn't get hurt {40} … I typically remember hearing a dog barking that scared me a lot".

The abandonment of the father's homeland was therefore experienced as a rupture with the previous life which was accompanied by events that were perceived as traumas.

• "The activation of this negative potential, which makes the individual feel unexpectedly threatened and powerless to react" (Schütze, 1999) was located at the time when K. went to the first grade of Greek primary school and was unknown among strangers in a completely new and unfamiliar environment, within which she was marginalized:

> "49. Because I went to school and no one had prepared me for it, I didn't know anything about it in general, basically the school year had already started, so school was something new for me and being in a foreign country was new to me also, so they were both difficult".

> "52. In the classroom I was sitting alone".

The way K. and her family organized their daily life in their place of birth and the biographical resources on which they supported it (language, work, social interactions, habits) were not recognized by the new social environment in which they had to be integrated and which required learning and adopting new habits, something that was a painful surprise and made them feel like strangers (Schutz, 1944; Lutz, 2010: 303; Goffman, 2001: 103). The discovery of national stigma at the time, confirming that "entering public school is the moment one learns its stigma" (Goffman, 2001: 100), the dire embarrassment that K. faces in the unfamiliar environment, the grief and despair she felt being alone and unwanted even by compatriots who were older immigrants though themselves integrated to some extent into the local community, the negative feelings about school that made her desperately ask her parents to abandon it, the sense of disorientation because she did not understand school regularity and felt completely helpless in all its practical aspects, were the characteristics of the situation she had been experiencing at that stage. These feelings were expressed vividly in her narrative:

> "57. I still didn't understand anything. I met a child, Mario, who was also from Albania. 58. But he didn't want to have contact with me because automatically if he had contact with me, he would be excluded from his peers".

> "53 … for a month I was crying at home asking my parents 'why I have to go there, there is no reason to go, I don't understand anything, I don't have friends' 54. And my parents said 'you have to go to school, all the kids do' 55. And I told them that I was not like all other children".

- "The effort to regain and maintain a fragile balance in dealing with everyday life" (Schütze, 1999) took place in the big city where the family settled and in the schools where K. studied. In the last grades of primary school and immediately thereafter, in secondary education, she found peers who belonged to the "circle of homeopaths" (Goffman, 2001: 85), who had had corresponding immigration and social experiences and who did not consider her national identity as a stigma.

  > "105. And I think that I generally calmed down inside myself by then. When it comes to school and acceptance by the kids I think it happened when I went to third school grade where I finally stayed until sixth grade 106. ... Over there things were completely different 107. Because there were children from different countries, so I faced a completely different situation 108. I was finally the child whom the other children wanted to meet, something I had not experienced in previous classes and in previous schools 109. ... I was much sought after by many groups 110. And it was on me to decide which peer group to join 111. And that made me feel very good".

The efforts of "normalization" (Schütze, 1999: 122) or "declassification" (Goffman, 2001: 113) which she and her family made by adopting a Christian name through the official baptism ceremony, by improving school performance and building friendly relations with compatriots as well as foreigners, natives and others, yielded results. The family would provide to the dominant ethnic group – which had the power of "social classifications" by shaping and imposing the dominant "classification schemes" (Bourdieu, 1999, 2002) – the relevant evidence that K. had been displaced by "someone who carried a specific flaw to someone who had a history of correcting this specific flaw" (Goffman, 2001: 72). These efforts therefore guaranteed a future assimilation which would facilitate K.'s social acceptance.

> "112. Slowly I started making friends 113. I was trying to learn the language 114. I was basically trying, better say I wasn't trying (laughs out loud), and it was probably done automatically 116. And then on the fourth grade of elementary school without realizing it at all I was able to read, I could read, I could understand things and I had a very good grade".

The response to her efforts was due to the fact that K., through an unprecedented biographical plan, acquired cognitive resources and set learning goals that made this new school reality accessible to her, but she also acquired friends among this large group of foreign classmates, something that worked out as the prelude to her admission and integration into the community.

> "125. Generally at the time things were very smooth 126. I made friends and went out with the kids".

> "128. Later in high school I had an even better time with the kids 129. Because there were children from foreign countries 130. So I met children from different countries and I felt very comfortable with them (pause) 131. And I studied a lot afterwards".

- <u>"The destabilization of the fragile balance and the collapse of the orientation"</u> (Schütze, 1999) occurred during the second rupture in K.'s life, which coincided with her move to the provincial town, where she was admitted to the university. K. would now have to "renegotiate the image of herself by realizing the new reality" (Tsiolis, 2006: 207). But this new position in the "social field" (Bourdieu, 2002) and more specifically in the educational one, while theoretically placing her in an advantageous position capable of managing an upgraded "symbolic capital" (prestige, positive reputation specially for a woman of Albanian origin and the prospect of a future profession) (Bourdieu, 1999: 335), seems to have led K. to a fundamental "discontinuity" (Tsiolis, 2006: 165). The displacement from the familiar social environment of her school years and the necessity of introducing herself to the new environment by presenting her personal and social identity from the start, as well as the necessity of reestablishing social relations, intensified her apprehension. She feared that revealing her Albanian origin could mean moving from the state of the "discredited" to that of the "discreditable" (Goffman, 2001: 66) and thus returning to the difficult state of the past.

> "176. It was difficult at university because in high school I was used to being accepted and over there I had to start getting to know others from the beginning, I felt I had to start all over again 177. I hadn't done it for many years, I mean to introduce myself, they knew who I was as a child for several years, so when I went over there I started saying "hello, I'm… I come from Thessaloniki" and then I would feel uptight because… because I felt like I was hiding myself from them at that moment and I was trying to change the conversation but not because I was ashamed or something but because I just couldn't for some reason, I would prefer someone else to say for me that this girl is from Albania, but I couldn't say it myself because my pulse automatically went up, I felt something over here in my throat which didn't let me talk at that moment and I calmed down only as soon as I was able to say that".

Moreover, the inability to manage stigma in the course of her studies, the stress verging on panic, as also her spasmodic attempts at managing the "passing" (Goffman, 2001: 112, 155) by disguising her ethnic origins would turn into "survival anxiety" (Duhm, 1987: 56).

> "191. I would rather be examined in a room alone than sit in a crowded amphitheater (pause) 192. I missed classes because I was waking up, I was waking up abruptly feeling awfully stressed, with a feeling of completely unbearable pressure and I was thinking that on the one hand 'you have to go and sit for the exam' on the other hand 'it is so crowded, how would you face the others in public' 195. So, well, I preferred keeping myself in the security of sleep and not think at all and try to calm down and avoid the situation, which in the end didn't do me any good because I have yet to finish my studies (pause)".

> "203. for the first time I am pressed by my parents to finish my studies because they are terrified of the situation now 204. Not to mention the fact that they both do not even belong here, they have no future in any of the two countries because they will not receive a pension either from Greece or from

Albania 205. My father will only be able to retire if he stays here (pause) 206. So what they tell me is that I should finish my studies and go abroad".

In addition, the sense of personal worthlessness and incompetence – which was intensified because of the distance between the "school capital" on which she had relied on during her school years and a "truly acquired cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 2002: 123) – made her feel incapable of fulfilling her obligations to her studies and ultimately contributed to her passivity and her distancing from the university.

"304. Something that, let's say, bothers me is that I haven't read a lot of books and that I haven't studied enough for my lessons or in my life in general and that makes it difficult for me to express myself both in writing and orally 305. And I don't know if bilingualism necessarily plays a role in this 306. What mainly plays a role is that I haven't read enough because in order to express myself I have to learn some symbols, some new words for example, and many times there are particular thoughts – simpler or more strange and complex – that come up and I feel upset because I can't capture and express them either in writing or by painting, somehow, anyhow (pause) 307. And I would like to have received some stimuli from my parents about books for example, but I know it didn't happen and it doesn't happen and okay that's it (pause) 308. Many times when we write something freer, a freer text at university for example, I feel very anxious 309. There have been occasions when I had tried for two whole hours to think of how to start the first sentence, only the first single sentence 310. And what I always write is never what I want to say or what I think".

Last but not least, the entrapment in conditions of oppression by her sexual partner as well as threats, expulsion, "demoralization" (Schütze, 1999: 151-155; Bourdieu, 2002: 427) and racist humiliation on the part of her partner's parents over a lengthy period of time, remorse for her own parents and brother based on the feeling that she is burdening them financially, lack of confidence in human emotions including love affairs, generalized feelings of shame and guilt, led her to a profound and total questioning of herself and her potential. All these activated and aggravated the trauma that constantly shook her psyche, disorganized her and ultimately caused her psychosomatic disorders (severe sweating, pain, shortness of breath, lethargy, agoraphobia). She ended up with the impression that circumstances were imposing their "mighty fatal logic" on her (Schütze, 1999: 157), against which she felt powerless to react.

- The "biographical processing efforts of the trajectory of suffering" (Schütze, 1999) seem to be very closely linked to K.'s constant reflection on her biographical route and her persistent effort to understand what was happening to her, but this is above all represented by her trip to Spain in the context of the Erasmus program, which offered her new, different and liberating experiences capable of setting a different example for her life, a guide to different choices and the possibility of creating a "transnational biography" (Lutz, 2010: 308).

  > "397. When I went to Spain, every time I was connected to someone I might never see again and said 'I come from Greece but my origin is from Albania' I hadn't any, not a single psychosomatic problem at the time so I was saying it with comfort 398. Because I knew that they also came from many countries 399. And what happened to me here in Greece did not happen to me in Spain when I said 'I am from Albania' and I said it in a low voice and my voice was shaking 400. Over there I was saying it clearly".

  > "411. There were also (laughs) people who were excited by the fact that I spoke Albanian and they asked me to teach them a few words 412. Something you don't find so easily over here 413. And I met a guy from Italy who is of Albanian origin and they speak a dialect that is a mixture of Albanian and Italian so when we met and told him I was from Albania he was very excited and told me some things in his dialect and I could understand and he could understand as well 414. And he told me that at some point he would like to come to both Greece and Albania and I said wow!"

These experiences may help her in the future to see her biography as an "interactive, dynamic and open process" (Lutz, 2010: 301), as a transnational journey through the places where she has lived and through the osmosis of their cultures. K.'s biographical efforts can also be seen as efforts of "personal and social empowerment" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986a: 174; 1986b: 192) when she says "408. I felt very, very liberated", but can further be seen as forms of "symbolic resistance" (Giroux, 1983: 71-77), resistance of an individual who does not want to submit to the socially structured and historically shaped specifications of her life.

The educational institution as a field of limitations and possibilities in K.'s biographical narrative

The educational system seemed to be going through three phases in K's life: a) in the first three grades of primary school it was for K. a new and inappropriate structure for her needs that made her feel unwanted and foreign, b) later, in the "circle of homeopaths" of an intercultural high school, she felt welcomed and integrated, and c) at university she felt unable to meet its requirements and experienced social exclusion. For K., the educational system was in its first and third phase the world of traumatic experiences, of the discovery of stigma and its confirmation, while the second phase as well as the last period of the Erasmus

program became the social space that allowed her to mingle, to make friends and be loved by classmates and social acquaintances alike.

No doubt it has been the world that did not organize her adaptation and integration into the new society (primary school) but at the same time it was the world in which she struggled to prove that she could make it, gaining a better position (high school, lyceum, university) and a new social identity as an immigrant and as a woman in a difficult society (ethnocentric ideology, economic crisis) and in an even more difficult time (international economic crisis, strengthening of conservative and xenophobic ideological and political perceptions).

Moreover, the educational system was for K. the world of reward (performance, acceptance, inclusion) but at the same time of threatened rejection (serious difficulties in her university studies), the world that compensated her "disadvantage" (national and social "inferiority" with respect to student success) but which at the same time constantly reminded her of this "inferiority" (the difficulties of responding to the level of studies and the realization that her learning and educational acquisitions were not enough).

Actually, university had been beneficial to K. as far as it offered her the opportunity to both unlock a new social and professional horizon in her life and to travel for the first time away from Greece (to Spain) and to become aware of a different social reality and different people, whose gaze was not burdened by the stereotypical patterns in Greece, which would not let her see who she really was. Away from both Albania and Greece, in Spain, K. seemed to be liberated from the dystopia of stigma and the binary of "hiding" / "avoiding" that afflicted her life. University may offer her, in the future, the opportunity to renegotiate her relationship with her roots in a creative and liberal manner.

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