

## ksenitia

the landscape in the south peloponnese is dry and coarse. there are few exceptions to this. one might be the daphne bush, which is soft and grows pink flowers and lush leaves that were used for olympic crowns in ancient times. they are something of a respite in that they are soft and beautiful. but even daphne grows out of the rocky, brown earth. the cacti are strong and grow into densely tangled bushes, each outgrowth larger than my open hand, and root easily if they fall. they, too, seem to emerge from the rocks because you see them along the mountain walls as you drive on the highway. the olive trees, which are everywhere and thought of romantically by tourists, are only soft in their generosity. these are just some examples.

the landscape there has changed over the last half century, as i've been told; the fields that we traverse between villages were not always so wild. before the second immigration exodus, tens of thousands of sheep would pasture there and keep the fields tamed and easier to navigate by foot or mule. now there are paved roads that cut through the unwieldy fields of overgrown foliage. our feet don't touch the rocky ground habitually anymore. as descendants of those who left we often notice the domesticated plants first- in pots on the balconies of apartments in the city from which the villages are now indexed. these act as surrogates for a relationship to the land that is recognized but no longer enacted. we encounter them at the grocer and understand our distance through small potted olive trees that cannot survive the climate of the only homes we have known.

my paternal grandmother with whom i share a name once told me a story about her father who was planting new olive trees in their field in vasara. a neighbour walked by and asked him, why are you planting when all the young people are leaving? he responded by saying, they are leaving, but they will return when the city's resources fold on themselves, and cannot sustain growing life. the second

wave of migrants were leaving from the time of the civil war through the military dictatorship. they went to places that adopted the imperfect democracy of their ancient land and shaped it around modern capitalism, and, attempting to root their home on new land, they came here and planted all that could grow or be domesticated. they have maintained these practices while in their children the landscape grows unwieldy like the fields between villages, people looking on them as if so changed that they no longer belong to them.

in this new context there is no limit to growth, and structural contradictions prevent balance, nurturing, or resilience. the logic of the horizontal landscapes below the ominous, brown mountains - where growth is rhythmic rather than upward - does not translate; horizontality is vilified, as it acknowledges that we are not the mountains. in the village the land is served with a reverence that is both spiritual and practical. by contrast where we have grown we believe that the land serves us; we have abstracted the land. that which covers the neighbour's apron is divine earth to the former, and dirt to the latter. and when we look at the potted cacti on the neighbour's balcony my grandparents look at the cyprus tree that blocks our view, commenting that it was half the height when they moved there, and that cyprus trees will always grow just taller than anything we build.

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