

## **Carcerals and Olympic Masculinities in Christos Tsiolkas's *Barracuda***

***Panos Gerakis***

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

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### **Abstract**

In an effort to draw attention to the masculine crisis occurring in the era of globalisation, this paper elaborates on Australian author Christos Tsiolkas's novel *Barracuda* and the central character's self-discipline and struggle into reaching Olympic achievement. The course of his rise as a potential Olympic athlete but also his fall and crisis within an institutional framework of disciplines, which often symbolically turn into nightmarish prisons, resonate with Michel Foucault's 1975 work *Discipline and Punish*. The latter's ideas about discipline and the "carceral" will help interpret Tsiolkas's novel and further understand how the Olympics work as a mechanism of discipline and compliance towards a kind of hegemonic masculinity and its inevitable crisis.

*Keywords:* masculinities, globalisation, Tsiolkas, Foucault, bodies, sexuality, crisis

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**C**hristos Tsiolkas, Australian novelist and essayist of Greek descent, has been one of the most acknowledged Australian authors (Vasilakakos 360) and influential observers and commentators of Australian society at the present time. His novel *Barracuda* (2013) is the story of a teenager, Danny Kelly, "a hot-blooded, self-centred, doggedly determined Olympics-aspiring swimmer whose introverted young adult mind is a swirl of competing impulses" (Buckmaster). The title of the novel speaks for itself: barracuda is the name of a solitary predator fish living at sub-tropical open seas, capable of extreme speed in short bursts, in its attempt to outrun its prey. Other than a swimmer, Danny is also a lower-class young "wog"—a slang term in

Australian English referring to immigrants having reached Australia mainly from Eastern and Mediterranean Europe, standing for “Western Oriental Gentleman.” Thanks to his phenomenal talent for swimming, he is soon awarded with a scholarship that takes him to the most prestigious but snobbish college in Melbourne despite the objections and skepticism of his old-fashioned leftist father. The boy is soon to suffer harassment at school and a certain degree of pressure at home due to his “wog” background and class, but none of this matters to him as he very quickly becomes obsessed with the idea of dedicated, almost compulsive training that would potentially lead to a successful Olympic swimming career. Nonetheless, his dream soon fails him, as to everybody’s surprise he comes fifth in a key international race in Japan (winning would mean his qualifying for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games). His reaction at that moment is far from that of an “honourable defeat,” as he immediately breaks out in bitterness and swearing, and has to be sedated to be carried off the swimming pool. Confused about his teen sexuality and class belonging, Danny spends the rest of his adolescent and early adult life in shame, haunted by the ghost of failure. The reader follows this heavy feeling of shame and humiliation that occupies all of Danny’s thoughts throughout the entire course of the novel; Danny finds himself trapped in a vicious circle, ending up in prison due to a violent attack against his ex-swimming partner and untold object of love, Martin Taylor: the angrier he becomes, the more he fails to break away from his demons of failure and obscurity. As Terence Blacker comments:

In his own eyes, Danny has become that unacceptable thing, a loser. Describing the decline and fall of a would-be super-jock, Tsiolkas takes on some meaty themes: society’s obsessive competitiveness, a teenage boy coming to terms with his homosexuality, snobbery and prejudice, the smugness of liberal Australia, the challenge of living a good life.

Danny as a character is first and foremost a body; a body that as Michel Foucault claims in *Discipline and Punish* “serves as an instrument or intermediary” (11), regulated and dictated by institutional forces. Besides, the character’s physicality is described to such an extent that almost all emotional experience is presented as bodily symptom in the

novel. “a certain force exerting pressure on the character is, among others, globalisation, and particularly globalisation in the name of Olympic achievement emerging in the novel as a mechanism that creates unhappy subjects; subjects in crisis. The role and pressure of Olympic sports resonate with Foucault’s ideas in *Discipline and Punish*, as well as Raewyn Connell’s examining of global (masculine) identities that legitimize their hegemony over other ones, thus producing certain ways of being. Connell’s term “hegemonic masculinities” derives from Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations in his *Prison Notebooks* (first edition published in six volumes by Einaudi between 1948 and 1951) reappearing in 1995 to describe socially legitimised male dominance over femininities and other masculinities and at the same time marginalisation of the latter as socially legitimate (77). By exploring globalisation as a regulatory system upon the character’s (masculine) body, what is examined here is masculine discontent of a body subjected to discipline. In particular, the “Olympic spirit” as a synecdoche for globalisation is not an ideal in the novel; it is rather a regulatory force, that is, an ominous machine that produces either hegemonic or “castrated” and “defective masculinities.” In similar vein, this essay will discuss how the Foucauldian concept of discipline can shed light on how discipline works in Tsiolkas’s *Barracuda*, and whether it finally produces docile and perhaps content bodies, or, on the contrary, bodies in crisis.

Physicality centering on Danny’s existence as a “body” is the only language he boasts of having in order to communicate with the world, and water is the surface he uses not only to float, but also to inscribe his voice and existence. His disciplined body is the only instrument that he possesses; a shield to protect him from all racist comments at college. Other than that, Danny generally remains inarticulate and ideologically withdrawn throughout the course of the novel. His “strong legs,” clearly defined “muscles like steel” and “perfect body” (Tsiolkas 75-76) suffice to stand against all harassment and erase any kind of discrimination. The realisation of his being the fastest and strongest in “Cunts” College (this is how Danny disdainfully calls his school) elevates him to the legendary status of the “Barracuda,” the supernatural “psycho swimmer” who “seeks to leap out of the ‘shit’ of the working class and bypass the ‘fake’ middle class” (Papastergiadis 130).

Among the ethical questions that Tsiolkas introduced in *The Slap* (2008)—his most acclaimed novel—there is a more subtle critique at work centred on “the broader ethical question of discipline and its ambiguous place in the modern world” (Mathews 210). The same pattern pervades *Barracuda*. While Freud saw discipline and control as a force exerted on the “ego” by the “super-ego” (*Complete Psychological Works* 146-147), Foucault examined discipline and punishment as institutional forces, and observed embodied subjectivities in their formation under socio-historical coordinates. In Judith Butler’s words, “[f]or Foucault this process of subjectivation takes place centrally through the body, and in *Discipline and Punish* the prisoner’s body appears not only as a *sign* of guilt, of transgression, as the embodiment of prohibition and the sanction for rituals of normalisation, but that body is itself framed and formed through the discursive matrix of a juridical subject” (230). Within this matrix of discipline Foucault introduces in *Discipline and Punish* the notion of the “carceral,” in which he discusses how the law is transformed into a norm within the carceral continuum, but also the establishment of a reign of the normative, to which everyone must subject their body. In this way, the idea of the carceral, which is a form of discipline at its most extreme, is applied on the body, producing knowledge, establishing power relations via surveillance and control, and maintaining subjection (Foucault 295).

In *Barracuda*, discipline on a first level appears as self-discipline. Its unfolding, though, extends to other methods of discipline, both visible in the form of institutions and less visible ones, deriving from the self. Yet, even the latter, which come to manifest themselves as self-discipline, soon prove to be the result of institutional discipline. As it was mentioned above, Danny Kelly is above all a body; much of his physicality is a filter for his consciousness but also a field of existence. Foucault views the body as “object and target of power” (136); an instrument that “is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces” (136). In this approach to the body, Foucault acknowledges the importance of “regulations,” that is, “the methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility–utility” (136).

In the first part of the novel, Danny appears as a “good subject” due to his self-discipline as a young athlete. All his focus is on his everyday training, which is the medium, as he boasts, to progress, become “a better swimmer” (Tsiolkas 17, 23), gain a place of belonging among his peers and maintain his scholarship despite the adversities he faces in his upper-class school. The conviction that the new school “will make him a better swimmer” (Tsiolkas 17, 23) keeps echoing in his mind as the sole voice of motivation, despite his feelings of unhappiness and suffocation. Foucault’s words about regulating the body within a “temporal elaboration of the act” (151) resonate with Danny’s coach’s efforts to teach him “how to recognise his muscles, explaining exactly how to breathe, how to think ahead of the water” (Tsiolkas 23), within “enclosure” and, of course, a “rank” to occupy (Foucault 141, 145). The most articulate form of institutional framework that has come to exert its forces on Danny’s body appears in the name of the bourgeois college that he has to attend. According to Foucault, the power to punish within the spectrum of the carceral “is not essentially different from that of curing or educating” (303). Besides, the notion of the carceral “naturalises the legal power to punish, as it ‘legalizes’ the technical power to discipline” (Foucault 303). In this sense, and considering the omnipresence of the disciplinary characteristics of “enclosure,” “rank,” and “temporal elaboration of the act” (of training) at school, one cannot help but consider the prestigious college as another form of the carceral upon the young man. An example that illustrates this perfectly is the tall wire fence which separates the school campus from the rest of the world. The scene of Danny’s leaving the school grounds for the river in his quest to be alone almost reminds of a prison escape that must pass unnoticed from surveillance (Tsiolkas 45). Danny clearly has to turn himself (within institutional discipline) into a machine in its ability to command water by training the body and developing breathing techniques. He also has to conform to the school regulations and etiquette (Tsiolkas 43, 264). His failing to do so is equated in his mind with loss of any privilege that his class cannot afford anyway, and, as a result, collapse and confinement within what in his perceptions he would otherwise be destined to live with: a mediocre lower-class life with no access to what he has dreamt of. At a first level, all of Danny’s self-discipline stems from his fervent desire to be “the strongest, the fastest, the best,” but, upon further analysis, this self-discipline emerges from his need to

attain a higher social position and break away from the limitations imposed by social institutions due to his sociocultural background.

Nonetheless, something seems to be wrong with Danny's attempt towards self-discipline. In Foucauldian terms, the disciplinary mechanics here produce "docile bodies" only on the surface. Indeed, in the novel there is a form of discipline that "increases the forces of the body in terms of utility" (Foucault 138) but fails to diminish its forces in political terms of obedience. This discipline turns force into "aptitude" and "capacity" but fails to "reverse the course of energy" into obedience (Foucault 138). By observing this self-discipline, Danny behaves seemingly innocuously, but does not produce an obedient self. On the contrary, all this self-discipline only suppresses anger and hatred (Tsiolkas 26), as seen, for example, when Danny initially refuses to master the butterfly stroke and insists on freestyle instead (Tsiolkas 157). His body is the epitome of a self-disciplined body on a first level, but this act of self-discipline only works as his defense against all pressure; in fact, training serves as shelter. It is clearly directed towards the production and enforcement of masculine hegemony and prevalence over all the other institutionally more shielded bodies of his college partners. His suppressed anger soon breaks out in the most violent manner, as when he physically attacks Martin Taylor. Danny's working-class masculinity physically prevails over Taylor's bourgeois masculinity in an institutionally unacceptable way (physical violence), and because this is a symbolic infringement on the institution's regulations, Danny's institutional punishment will be exacted in the form of imprisonment. Prior competition with Danny always prevailing during swimming races was of course appropriate as an institutionalised and legitimate hegemony, but only temporarily. Sporting competence stands as masculine hegemony to Danny. However, Danny's body is far from a docile one, as he seeks to transcend its limits and identity imposed by hegemony, and rise above the working-class "wog" identity. In this sense, self-discipline has eventually failed him—whether one considers it a culturally necessary Freudian suppression of drives and instincts (*Civilization* 32), or the result of regulation (Danny's desire to prevail and survive as a hegemonic masculinity) doomed to fail from the beginning because its institutional framing, that of an appropriate competitive masculinity, runs against a larger institutional framing, that of class, ethnicity, and money. Instead of this, Danny finds himself between conflicting

institutional frameworks that produce conflicting drives, and is being forced to account for his loss and passive disposition between the two. In other words, in the novel, Danny's body does not become "a useful force" because even though it becomes "a productive body", it does not successfully develop into a "subjected body" (Foucault 26).

Finally, the actual penal prison, or "despotic discipline" (Foucault 236) appears both as institutional punishment and as fictional reality in the novel. To Foucault, imprisonment comes as an acute form of subjectivation of the body, but the "soul" is also very important, as "it is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (30). Apparently, By deploying the concept of "the soul" Foucault Does not refer to the concept of the psyche in psychoanalytic or Augustinian terms; as Butler argues, "[a]lthough Foucault is here specifying the subjectivation of the prisoner, he appears also to be privileging the metaphor of the prison to theorise the subjectivation of the body" (231).

Again, at a first level of analysis, the prison as institutional punishment and disciplinary method seems to effectively exert control over Danny's body. He appears to have conformed to this confined/confining reality, with his body regulated on a certain schedule of training, working, learning new skills, as well as studying (Tsiolkas 206). Danny, who has spent all his teen life submerged in hatred, reaches a new level of realization of institutional power during his incarceration: "I thought I knew all about hate but until I got to prison I had no idea how much hate there was in the world" (Tsiolkas 207). Danny's existential passivity continues, and his aggressive drives seem to have been contained. Yet, incarceration per se has not succeeded in producing a "productive" or "disciplined" body as a result of reformation. Ironically, Danny transgresses the disciplinary mechanics of the prison by "inventing" new forms of violence (directed towards himself) that bypass the institutional ones: prison as discipline does not seem to matter much to Danny, because the real surveillance and submission is not to the disciplinary orders of prison but to Carlo, his inmate and sexual partner who watches over him and claims authority and ownership over Danny's body in the most hegemonic masculine manner (Tsiolkas 204-205). The rather explicit sexual scenes depicted in the novel show Danny's absolute submission to Carlo in a sexual act that is more rape than an intimate sexual scene, despite Danny's processing of it as an induction

to pleasure (Tsiolkas 205). Sexual violence in this line of thought can be seen as self-punishment (Danny's finding ways of inflicting violence on himself), but also as resisting the carceral through a body that counters institution as a disciplinary method by inventing alternative ways of punishment or even self-punishment that, oddly enough, bring pleasure. In Freudian terms, it could be claimed that violence as self-punishment works as disciplinary punishment upon Danny, but then again Danny has transubstantiated this to pleasure (*Civilization* 6). Again, this partial failure of the institution upon Danny's body and subjectivity is revealed in the following lines, where he seeks a return to an unreal world, rather than the real one that prison was supposed to have prepared him for:

[I] won't hit or maim or kill, because I have promised myself never to hit or strike or hurt anyone again. But to do that I have to remain outside of the world. This is what terrifies me most about stepping out into the sun again. I have to find the subterranean world once I am out. I have to find the world without sun. (Tsiolkas 209)

Discipline upon Danny is rather ambiguous while at work during his imprisonment, as it has indeed eradicated aggressive drives on the one hand, but on the other also reversed part of those into a symbolically self-destructive force which wishes to revert entropically to a "world without sun" (Tsiolkas 209)—a womb prior to existence—and perhaps "without son," without defining himself as a product of his family and heritage. The prison is ignored as a regulatory force in the novel. It appears by the character's admission that he will not commit another crime or resort to violence again, not because he has changed into a good, disciplined citizen via institutional conformism but because his personal ethics orders him so. However, even with the imprisoning effect at work, Danny admits his difficulty in finding compatibility with the mundane world outside prison. He often seeks refuge in the literary world of the nineteenth century seeking out heroic realities in which "[f]ate determines destiny far more ruthlessly than does choice or desire" (Tsiolkas 96) admitting, thus, his *mal du siècle*. On the one hand, the prison is seen as a symbol of the character's imprisonment within the social self and incapacity to break away from his self-limitations. If the prison is seen as a synecdoche for the



institutionalised world of order, it might be another disputable mechanism amidst a society that has failed to produce balance. On the other hand, Danny's universe appears as a very narrow confinement with several forces in conflict with one another. This is because another prison—the prison of his soul—suffices to keep Danny entrapped and appears to be far more confining than the actual prison in the novel. Within this claustrophobic imprisonment to which he has subjected himself, the fictional prison appears to be the only shelter of balance and order in his life, as if the world had been semantically reversed. Besides, the prison in the novel is probably the only place where class and race are not commented upon by Danny; there are no “golden boys” and no need to be the fastest or the best. In this sense, the institutional value of the prison is not to be underestimated. During his suspended time Danny discovers humility and a pattern of life that he will bear outside prison. Ironically, the adoption of a passive gay sexual role also helps him discover a different version of his masculinity, that of a socially less active and competitive one. At this level of analysis, although the prison has not reformed Danny's body directly to his perceptions, it has constituted, in the form of self-reproduction, a model of existence for Danny to adopt as a safe shelter within a vast inner prison that he cannot tolerate, as well as a great institutional prison consisting of the social and economic networks of his erstwhile institutionalised life which previously failed him and to which he must return, in spite of his having failed them too:

You construct a ladder and you climb that ladder, out of the hell you have created for yourself and back into the real world. That is atonement, a world I discovered in there ... I have enough of my own guilt, I still have nights when sleep won't come because I am reliving the piercing shame I have enough guilt. (Tsiolkas 177)

The Foucauldian idea of discipline as a manifold regulating order brings together sportsmanship and the Olympic spirit ideals with other forms of discipline in the novel, namely the college and the prison. Echoes of that are even implicit in the very definition of Olympism:

“Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of the body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles” (“Promote Olympism”).

The Olympic spirit as an ideal and vision is hovering over the entire novel; a goal and a dream to pursue, but also a haunting memory of failure. In *Barracuda*, the Olympics in their global dimension are far more effective than any other formal institution as a mechanism of discipline. The same occurs if one regards the Olympic Games as an expression and practice of neoliberal globalisation in today’s society. According to Kazuo Uchiumi, “as the influence of the Olympics in the world becomes stronger, the political and economical utilization of the Olympics grows” (10), with billions of people around the world watching in real TV time and the host country proceeding to enormous expenditure but at the same time receiving very significant economic benefits, such as facility construction, maintenance, and financial development. Furthermore, sports have always been a surface upon which masculinity is expressed, too. Murray Drummond argues that a key theme in sporting identities and men is the connection of the former with masculinity and the importance that the latter place on sport as a means of boosting their masculine identities (140). Danny is no exception to this. His entire subjectivity as masculine identity is encompassed within his athletic performance; achieving in sports means establishing hegemony via the masculine, muscled body and fighting off all adversities, with gender also transcending class and social status. Of course, if sports and sporting competency are associated with masculinity, and considering the character’s struggle to achieve hegemony over his opponents, then prevalence in sports over the opponent comes to signify masculine prevalence as well. Coach Frank Torma’s voice is another form of hegemonic masculinity, often emerging in the name of order and discipline; however, this voice does not always resonate as the voice of ethos and fair play in accordance with the noble athletic spirit that will culminate in the Olympics, at least not in Danny’s mind, which is blurred by anger against his opponents. The scene between Torma and Danny, just a few minutes before the latter’s disastrous Fukuoka race, is reminiscent of being in a military camp, with Danny as a soldier before the battle

and Torma as a macho drill sergeant in an American war movie, “like he was Bruce Willis or Tom Cruise” (Tsiolkas 186). His father’s voice resonates in Danny’s head in the middle of the heated moment as an intermission to make the contrast of the two father figures even more striking, with his actual father deconstructed in the novel as a withdrawn, marginalised masculinity—denuded from all fatherly quality.

Given that the Olympic Games are in sporting terms the highest form of achievement, (masculine case) pride, and global recognition, Tsiolkas does not hesitate to deconstruct the Olympic ideal in the era of globalisation in his *bildungsroman*. While the principles of Olympism comprise all honourable values in one global sporting event that is held every four years to foster peace and unity throughout the entire globe, from a Foucauldian point of view the institutional dimension of Olympism can arguably be perceived as an idealisation of the institution and the athlete’s body acquiring subjectivity and regulating itself via self-discipline to transform all physical impulse into materialist-driven activity, lured by fame and money. In that vein, *Barracuda* conveys a darker aspect of the noble institution of the Olympics. Danny set himself the goal of becoming a globally acknowledged swimmer. Yet the boy’s subjection before the Olympic dream appears problematic as all motivation and feelings regarding the fulfilment of his supreme goal as well as his self-discipline are far from the noble ideals of Olympism, that is, to constitute an ambassador for one’s country in a peacemaking global event. He obsessively seeks to be “a name” (Tsiolkas 457), to be “the best in the world” and does not hesitate to articulate his aspirations in his statements (Tsiolkas 175). Danny’s entire identity is centred on his achievement, but both his inflated ego and ignorance of limits fail him. Danny is not only an angry young man, but an ignorant man, as well, with his enthusiasm exceeding all ethos and self-discipline. In this frame of thought Danny proves how the practice of discipline has not taken effect on his body, with the latter maintaining “materiality that is ontologically distinct from the power-relations that take that body as a site of investments” (Butler 234). Danny’s efforts are hasty, impulsive, defying all conformity to discipline, time and effort. All his willfulness is invested in a goal, similar to that of all other teenage athletes of his rank. What differs, though, is the real motive (the wish to shatter all class and ethnicity barriers), of which Danny is not consciously aware; because this shattering is not feasible, his attempt via training only inflates his

passion, but at the same time it also inflates his ignorance and pride. He often appears as insulated within a shell which is difficult to open up to the outside world:

Danny didn't think it was a matter of patience, he thought it was all about competition, that it was only in the pool itself, in his control of the water and of his breath, in the being in his body not in his head, that he would prove he was ready, that he could beat them all. (Tsiolkas 108)

Danny remains at a loss, especially if one considers the anger that blurs all his thoughts and responses. The Olympics, thus, turn into another prison, comparable to the sentence Danny serves in the actual prison, and arguably even worse, for his sentence is additionally burdened by ethical, gender, and class failure. The Olympics, then, are another carceral, as they magnify all his emotional distress but also self-deception. The character remains trapped in the obsession with Olympic achievement and later becomes haunted with the memory of the Olympics as failure to his existence as a whole. Within this imprisonment, he cannot consider or even negotiate any other way of attaining happiness. In terms of those tensions, Danny has to stand in the forefront of two battlefields at the same time. The most apparent one is that of an individual against his swimming opponents. Nonetheless, this schema is invested with another tension, as Danny remains a wog; an immigrant boy against his projections on an unreachable, self; that of the "golden boy" and the "champion by birth" that all his college partners are thanks to their pedigree. These conflicting impulses Danny experiences adequately explain his self-punishing and finally self-destructive tendencies. In this fight, there seems to be no winner. There is only a defeated man who soon turns into a "loser" (Tsiolkas 276, 288), the fruit of a greedy, dark globalisation. Danny's delusional and narcissistic vision becomes entirely apparent in the following lines, in which victory does not come for itself but as triumph of an overinflated ego, and also as revenge and humiliation over others:

[t]here would be a national holiday and he would ride through Melbourne with the prime minister and everyone would be cheering him, except Taylor and Scooter and Wilco and Morello and Fraser, except Tsitsas and Sullivan—they

wouldn't be there, they wouldn't have dared show their faces, because they knew he was better and harder and stronger and braver and faster. (Tsiolkas 58-59)

The character's most explicit entrapment in the Olympic carceral takes place on the evening of the opening ceremony; darkness turns into a nightmarish trap, from which the young man can find no escape: screens are installed everywhere (Tsiolkas 281), bars and public areas are teeming with hordes of people who are celebrating Australia's moment, everyone is victoriously cheering "*Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi*," and Danny is suffering what he sees as his failure multiplied and laid bare in the eyes of the public. He is trying to escape the stigma and the "plague" of his failure with its "omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him" (Foucault 197). The Olympic event symbolically transforms the hype via the omnipresent screens into a reversed "panopticon" with its major effect "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201), which this time comes in the name of the Olympics. Danny is once again subjected to institutional force exerted on him as imprisonment.

After Danny's aggressive act and serving of his sentence, all his feelings and thoughts are burdened with shame. Danny is tormented, crippled emotionally and physically (as shown by his refusal to swim). However, only towards the end of the novel and before Torma's funeral does Danny admit guilt: "What I did to Martin was one of the biggest mistakes of my life—no, *the* biggest. I regret it every day" (Tsiolkas 490). Danny at this point "searches his soul, recognises his sinfulness, pitches the demands of his conscience higher" (*Civilization* 63). The admission of his mistake seems to signal a critical point in the shift of his ethics after the crisis he goes through and his imprisonment. Danny's dedication to social work for the mentally and physically impaired is an integral part of this shift, even though he is a withdrawn and quiet observer who continues to stay aloof; his anger seems exhausted, but his shame persists. Before the start of his new life and during his time in prison Danny had discovered another

dimension of pain in his existential composure, namely sexual pain. This kind of pain, which is different from the physical pain he was used to during training, functions as submission and disciplinary self-punishment for Danny, of course, but, as mentioned earlier, it leads to the discovery of a new pleasure in it, that is, sexual satisfaction. The willful strain to which he subjected his body during his obsessive training or even the link between love and sexual pleasure, on the one hand, and pain, on the other, appear as Danny's realization that life and pleasure are not the zero-sum game of Olympic victories: sex begins as rape during his prison time when Danny is forced into a passive role during sexual intercourse with another inmate, Carlo (Tsiolkas 205); yet Danny describes this sexual intercourse as "safety and bliss," as essential to him "as oxygen" (Tsiolkas 205). The same sexual pattern remains in his relationship with Clyde, the more assertive partner, in his years after prison. It also seems that Danny does not hesitate to experiment with his adopting alternative forms of masculinity. This is something he would not have ever before dared do in the sports world, where establishing a macho masculinity via being the best was on the forefront of all his efforts as an athlete. This sexual submission is something Danny surrenders to, and by this submission he does not necessarily admit having been defeated in all of his struggles as "a man," but rather exchanges this masculinity, which is no longer worth trying to make his own, for another one that will soon prove to be more embracing and humane.

Before and during the critical moment of Danny's attack against Taylor, but also during his imprisonment, and after it, there is no fear of an authority in his perceptions, and no fear of the "super ego" apparent in his affect. The only fear Danny has is that of water. Danny's self-punishment means fleeing from the institutional world, which is an area of tensions, and at the same time resorting to an inner emptiness—an emotional state not wished for but the only mode of existence in which he finds refuge. Danny almost develops a phobia of swimming which denotes the self and an ego without solidity (Tsiolkas 396). Water has turned into a noxious element—as empty and noxious as he sees himself. His existential emptiness coincides with the emptiness he projects on the water. However, in the end, water reveals its healing powers. In a moment of existential realization, and unable to tolerate his emptiness any longer, Danny dives into the water after years of abstinence from swimming while in Scotland with his partner Clyde:

I looked out at the water and it was calm and still and I knew it was deep enough to kill me if I wanted it to and I just stripped of my clothes and I dived in there and I swam for the first time in years, as fast as I have ever swum, and even though the water was so cold it was squeezing my lungs and my heart, I kept on swimming because I wanted to fly and because I was sick of being nothing. And then I just stopped, I just stopped swimming and the people on the shore were calling out to me and I could hear Clyde shouting for me and I just lay on my back in this icy, Arctic water, thinking, Let it fill me up, let me not be a hole, and nothing happened, nothing changed. I realized then that there was nothing left of my dream to lose, so I just turned around and headed back to the shore. (Tsiolkas 446)

Albeit not a catharsis here, contact with water comes to signify an important healing experience for Danny. Confronting the water will lead Danny neither to victory nor collapse. In fact, nothing happens, and Danny can finally realise that nobody expects him to return to the shore as a champion and neither does anyone demand that he be the strongest, the fastest, or the best. He now knows that he can return to the shore and be an ordinary man who leads an ordinary life. Among all those self-realizations and despite his inarticulacy, Danny will also discover his talent for developing communication and sharing via social work with mentally and physically challenged individuals (Tsiolkas 101). Danny seems to have transubstantiated all tension (such as anger or aggression) by embracing a different dimension of social morality, one not centering on traditional competitive masculinity but towards nurturing, loving, and sharing strength instead. As Nikos Papastergiadis observes,

Dan finds peace with himself through his service to others as a social worker. His own relationship to the disfiguring effect of language becomes a resource through which he can empty out his own ego and open himself to the pain of the other. This gestural communion and embodied solidarity stands in stark contrast to the kind of politics that dominated the early part of the novel. (131)

This is how Danny heads towards his own healing and this is why his new humanist sensibility via social work is very important; it opens up to his new existential stance before the world, gives him a place in the world, while, previously he was existentially obsessed with competing and winning. The scene of his swim in Scotland acts as a synecdoche for the entire novel, and Danny is portrayed as a rather noble example of alternative masculinity dealing with crisis: a man that fails the demands of his present, but despite his failure, manages to survive and reclaim his integrity and dignity by washing away the haunting memories of his failure and transubstantiating all negative impulses into noble acts. This new discipline, the one of humanist work, is in sharp contrast with the lures of globalization, such as Olympic success and material ambitions. The latter brought about Danny's mental disruption, disorientation, and final collapse. The former, however, is there to regenerate and heal; through working with disabled individuals, Danny discovers that his masculinity can still stand among other masculinities, albeit not as that of a winner or an Olympic gold medalist. He discovers that one does not have to be an "alpha male" or a "winner-take-all" athlete to exist. Instead, it suffices to live with dignity.

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