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**Geographies of politics and the police: Post-democratization, SYRIZA and the politics of the  
“Greek debt crisis”**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the entangled dynamics of de-politicization and re-politicization in the midst of the “Greek debt crisis”. Critically revisiting Jacques Rancière’s political writings, it argues that, despite common criticisms to the contrary, his oeuvre foregrounds the impurity of democratic politics. Rancière, the paper contends, offers critical heuristic tools in understanding and engaging with how processes of post-democratization and democratic politics intersect, become entangled, and are mutually constituted. Simultaneously, however, it also challenges Rancière’s almost exclusive emphasis on political subjectification to argue for a plural understanding of the modalities and spatialities of democratic politics. Reading the politics of the “Greek debt crisis” through this lens, the paper unpacks how post-democratization has unfolded through an uneven and contested geography articulated at multiple scales. In parallel, it also maps the diverse and impure modalities of democratic politics in crisis-ridden Greece: from the staging of disagreement through the 2011 squares movement to the articulation of everyday commoning and solidarity movements to SYRIZA’s meteoric rise to power. In so doing, the paper demonstrates how post-democratization and democratic politics are being shaped in constant relationship and tension.

**Keywords: Rancière, post-democratization, democratic politics, Greek debt crisis, impure politics**

## Introduction

In a political landscape scripted by the dogmatic imposition of austerity policies and exclusionary responses to ongoing migration flows, the current political conjuncture in Europe is marked by a seeming paradox. On the one hand, for many critics, the dominant responses to the economic and political crises facing European countries and the EU also manifest a crisis of democratic politics and polity (Balibar, 2012; Brown, 2015; Rancière, 2010). Articulated around concerted efforts to foreclose the institutional and public spaces for the expression of political disagreement, such responses not only contribute to a crisis of trust and participation in representative politics (Balibar, 2012) but, more importantly, lead to the erosion of democracy by pitting ‘democracies against democracy’ to borrow Jacques Rancière’s (2011a:76) formulation. On the other hand, the current European conjuncture is also marked by the emergence of plural and diverse forms of democratic politics ranging from popular uprisings like the Indignados and occupy movements (Karaliotas and Swyngedouw, 2019) to grassroots politicization through everyday contestation of austerity (Arampatzi, 2017; Garcia-Lamarca, 2017) to forms of left populist politics like SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), Podemos and Corbyn’s Labour Party (Stavrakakis, 2014; Kioupiolis and Katsambekis, 2018). How are we, then, to make sense of the concomitant unfolding of processes of de-politicization and re-politicization that mark the European political conjuncture? And how are we to understand the ways in which processes of de-politicization and re-politicization meet, mutate, and shape one another?

These and related questions are at the epicenter of vigorous debates around the political that have animated the field of critical geography over the past decade (Beveridge and Koch, 2017; Bond et al., 2015; Dikeç, 2013; 2015; Larner, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2011; 2018). This article contributes to these debates by arguing that – despite common criticisms to the contrary – Jacques Rancière’s political writings foreground the impurity of democratic politics and, in so doing, offer critical heuristic tools in understanding how processes of de-politicization and re-politicization intersect, become entangled, and are mutually constituted. Rancière’s conceptualization of the distribution of the sensible as the stage of the confrontation between the competing logics of politics and the police, I argue, offers important tools in deciphering the histories and geographies of the current disposition and transformations of the police-politics relationship. Simultaneously, however, I challenge Rancière’s almost exclusive emphasis on individual political subjectification to argue that a plural understanding of the modalities and spatialities of democratic politics can provide more nuanced insights on democratic political processes.

Through an exploration of the politics of the “Greek debt Crisis”, I offer an empirically nuanced account of the contingent and situated ways in which post-democratization and democratic politics are enmeshed, intersect with and transform one another<sup>i</sup>. I, thus, move beyond totalizing accounts of post-democracy that characterize strong variations of the post-political thesis (Millington, 2016) to show that in the Greek context post-democratization has unfolded through an uneven and contested geography articulated at multiple scales. Simultaneously, I mobilize the notion of ‘transitional unities’ (Balibar, 2012:477) to map the diverse and impure modalities of democratic politics in crisis-ridden Greece: from the 2011 squares movement to the articulation of everyday commoning and solidarity movements to SYRIZA’s meteoric rise to government in 2015. In so doing, on the one hand, I demonstrate how the post-democratic order has been challenged and re-shaped through its encounters with democratic politics; or, better yet, how post-democratization has been shaped in a constant relationship and tension with democratic politics. On the other hand, particularly through a reading of SYRIZA’s trajectory, I document how forms of democratic political action that emerged in the crisis context were incorporated and subsumed in the police order consolidating post-democratic trends.

The argument proceeds in three steps. The first part critically revisits and expands upon Rancière’s political writings to sketch a conceptual framing of the intersecting modalities of post-democratization and democratic politics. Building on this, the second part unpacks the politics of the “Greek debt crisis” particularly focusing on the intersections between post-democratization and diverse modalities of democratic politics to chart their dialectic relationship. I conclude by highlighting some of the analytical and political implications of the preceding analysis.

### **Politics is impure: Post-democratization and the modalities of democratic politics**

Jacques Rancière is one of geographers’ key interlocutors in recent debates around the political – or the post-political as the literature is often, but misleadingly, labeled. Rancière’s notions of the police and post-democracy (1999) serve as keywords and critical tools in geographical accounts that document how dominant efforts to silence and repress political antagonism and democratic disagreement ‘unfold in and through socio-spatial, environmental and scalar transformations’ (Swyngedouw, 2011:371) that seek to exhaustively order the social field. In parallel, Rancière’s writings on politics, democracy and equality also animate accounts that re-affirm the possibilities for democratic politics through the opening of new spatialities of and for politics (Davidson and Iveson, 2015; Dikeç, 2013;

Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017) predominantly through an emphasis on recent urban uprisings (Karaliotas, 2017a; Erensu and Karaman, 2017). These perspectives, however, have rarely been brought into dialogue leading to an analytical and empirical gap in our understanding of how processes and geographies of post-democracy and democratic politics intersect and are shaped together. This section fills in this conceptual gap.

At first, this might sound counter-intuitive particularly within Anglophone geography that has encountered Rancière's work through various translations and particular debates (Chambers, 2011; Dikeç, 2015). Indeed, perhaps the most common critique toward Rancière's political thought – and geographical elaborations upon it – revolves around concerns of affirming a clear-cut distinction between politics and the police. For Beveridge and Koch, for example, the police/politics distinction risks reifying a rigid distinction that in its effort to maintain the 'purity' of politics 'reduc[es] actually existing (urban) politics to police order' (2017:34). In so doing, so the argument goes, Rancière's thought poses a limited and limiting understanding of politics as a pure, radical and spontaneous moment (Beveridge and Koch, 2017; Uitermark and Nicholls, 2014). This framework, critics argue, has little to say about the messy empirical reality wherein politics and the police become entangled. This is also the kernel of critiques against Rancière's conception of post-democracy and democratic politics. For many critics, Rancière's schema – and geographical engagements with it – 'risk that other less confrontational, everyday and domestic forms of radical action are overlooked or undervalued' (Bond et al, 2015:1162; Larner, 2014; McCarthy, 2013). In all, then, both the police/politics and the post-democracy/democracy distinction – as the specific articulation of the former in the current conjuncture – are criticized for constructing an 'omnipresent and omnipotent' post-democratic closure (Beveridge and Koch, 2017:37; Larner, 2014) through being rather 'limited in their explanatory ability to capture the nuances, limitations and generative opportunities' (Bond et al, 2015:1163) of politics.

Undeniably, the police/politics couple covers two 'distinct practices, operations and systems of representation that are not homogeneous; (...) two fundamentally opposed heterogeneous logics' (Rancière, 2016:150). However, for Rancière, politics is anything but pure. As he insists:

'The distinction between politics and the police takes effect in a reality that always retains a part of indistinction. It is a way of thinking through the mixture. There is no world of pure politics that exists apart from the

world of mixture. There is one distribution and a re-distribution' (Rancière, 2010:207).

But what is the distribution that Rancière alludes to here? Both the terrain and stakes of political activity are, for Rancière, what he defines as the 'distribution of the sensible' (*le partage du sensible*): 'a certain cutting out of space and time that binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility' (2009:31) to shape 'the forms of part-taking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed' (Rancière, 2010:36). Here, the word *partage* is used in its twofold meaning to designate both that 'which separates and excludes (...) and that which allows participation' (Rancière, 2010:36). The distribution of the sensible refers 'both to what is acceptable and naturalized' and 'to an "aesthetic" register [comprising] what is seen, heard, and spoken, what is registered and recognized' (Swyngedouw, 2011:375). Politics and the police are two ways of distributing the sensible: 'two ways of framing a sensible space, of seeing or not seeing common objects in it, of hearing or not hearing in it subjects that designate them or reason in relation to them' (Rancière, 2010:92).

The police is a 'governmental logic' (Dikeç, 2013:82) that comprises of 'all the activities which create order by distributing places, names, functions' (Rancière, 1994:173). It is the instituted, symbolic and material, order of governance 'that distributes bodies within the space of their visibility or their invisibility and aligns ways of being, ways of doing and ways of saying appropriate to each' (Rancière, 1999:28). Rather than a totalizing and fixed order, the police signifies the always contingent and incomplete effort to exhaustively order the social field by allocating every body, object, and activity in their proper place to define what can be seen as an object of political dispute and what not, what is heard as political voice and what as the noise of the rabbles (Rancière, 1999; Dikeç, 2015). Politics, on the contrary, is the disruptive engagement with the police distribution of places and capabilities making evident its sheer contingency (Rancière, 1999). Politics not only emerges from within instituted police orders but also acts upon and transforms them by configuring 'its own space' (Rancière, 2010:37); polemical scenes where subjects uncouneted (for) in the police order stage 'a dispute over what is visible as an element of a situation, over which visible elements belong to what is common, over the capacity of subjects to designate this common and argue for it' (Rancière, 2004:6). Politics, in this sense, is impure. It has neither 'proper' places nor 'proper' objects distinct from those of the police; 'all its objects are blended with the objects of police' and its spaces emerge by 'relocating, reshaping or redoubling' the places of the police (Rancière, 2011b:5). This is why, diverging from other

post-foundational authors, Rancière maintains ‘the name of ‘the political’ [for] the field of encounter – and “confusion” – between the process of politics and the process of police’ (2011b:5). Rancière’s political writings, then, open up new ways for understanding the intersections and mutations of processes of de-politicization and re-politicization by foregrounding the (re-)distribution of the sensible as ‘the product of processes and tensions embedded in particular historical and geographical contexts’ (Dikeç, 2015:90).

In this vein, Rancière’s notion of post-democracy is a way of understanding and engaging with the current ‘disposition of the police-politics relationship’ (Rancière, 2016:150). Coined in the conjuncture of 1990s France, post-democracy is a term – and a polemical intervention – that aimed at ‘displacing what the declared present of democracy is’ (Rancière, 2016:149). It introduces a split in the notion of democracy in order to trace the contemporary modalities and re-compositions of the police logic unfolding under the name of democracy. In Rancière’s schema, then, post-democracy denotes:

‘the paradox that, in the name of democracy, emphasises the consensual practice of effacing the forms of democratic action. Postdemocracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimisation of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations of social energies and interests’ (1999:101-102).

Post-democracy comprises two broad and interrelated dynamics. First, it entails a re-ordering of governing in ways that seek to foreclose democratic control and disagreement. As Erik Swyngedouw has argued, contemporary transformations in urban and environmental governance have been pivotal in the articulation of post-democratization (2011; 2018). For Swyngedouw, the reconfiguration of the scalar gestalt of governing through the emergence and proliferation of both sub-national and supra-national institutional arrangements and agreements (like public-private partnerships and urban development agencies, the IMF, the EU, etc) has resulted in forms of governance-beyond-the-state that increasingly operate at a distance from the people as sovereign (2018). This reconfiguration profoundly transforms the relationship between peoples and instituted forms of governance (Rancière, 2016:151) acting as an institutional lock-in mechanism to insulate the economic from the democratic political (Swyngedouw, 2018) and consolidating ‘the political powers of authorities who are not accountable (experts, judges, committees)’ (Rancière, 1999:97). Second, post-democracy entails a scripting of the sensible world as ‘a world of necessity’ (Rancière, 2016:151): it is the unquestionable identification of



democratic form with the logic of global capital (Rancière, 1999). A world wherein there is no opportunity for dissensus since there is only one way to engage with the undisputable givens of the situation (Rancière, 2010). Reducing the act of governing into a techno-managerial exercise, this scripting re-affirms the peoples' impotence to understand and intervene in the complexity of our world. Political disagreement and dissensus are, thus, constructed as irrational and irresponsible and a panoply of discursive and material practices is mobilized to foreclose and suppress the staging of democratic disagreement (Karaliotas, 2017b; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014).

The split in the notion of democracy that post-democracy introduces enables Rancière to maintain an emancipatory understanding of democracy. 'Democracy', he argues, 'is not the parliamentary system or the legitimate State' (Rancière, 1999:99). Democracy is the process of political subjectification that disrupts the workings of the police by demonstrating its sheer contingency (Rancière, 1999). Democratic politics open up symbolic and material spaces for staging the dissensual appearance of 'the people' (Rancière, 1999). The people, who Rancière evokes here is neither a pre-defined group that shares ethnic qualities nor a sociologically discernible part of the population or the sum of this population's constituent parts (Rancière, 1999). The people, as democracy's political subject, signifies the inscription of the 'part of those who have no part'; the 'uncounted' who break with the allocation of names, places and roles in the existing order to partake in what they have no part in (Rancière 2010:40-41). Hence, democracy, Rancière contends, is 'the power of those who are not entitled to exercise power — a rupture in the order of legitimacy and domination' (2000:124).

Thus framed the distinction between post-democracy and democratic politics has three analytical implications for understanding their relationship. First, post-democratization does not operate over an abstract and homogeneous space; it is not a global project that settles upon localities and homogenizes politics. Rather, post-democratization is a situated and contingent process with differentiated, heterogeneous and uneven dynamics (Swyngedouw, 2011; Doucette and Koo, 2016; Karaliotas, 2017b). Post-democratization unfolds as a slow path-dependent process of collision and fusion with previous institutional regimes and modes of political practice. Second, the possibilities for democratic politics 'have to be taken from a given setting' (Rancière, 2011b:5). This is why, contrary to other post-Althusserian authors, Rancière does not dismiss the 'inscriptions of the democratic process in the texts of the constitutions [and] the institutions of the states' (2011b:5) as

mere facades but seeks to understand how their redoubling can create new openings for democratic politics. Third, however, democratic politics ‘has no proper place nor any natural subjects’ (Rancière, 2010:39). Democratic politics can occur anywhere and be enacted by anyone. Contrary to criticisms of reducing political subjectivity to the heroic radical, this understanding foregrounds democratic politics as a process whose geographies and histories are not ‘just made up of great striking deeds, but also of the ongoing effort to create forms of the common different from the ones on offer’ by the post-democratic police (Rancière, 2011a:79-80).

However, Rancière’s writings rarely engage with the everyday practices and tensions of becoming a collective political subject (Karaliotas, 2017a). As Rancière himself recognizes ‘the weakness of my work isn’t so much having sacrificed individual subjectivization to collective subjectivization but the opposite’ (2016:118). As Etienne Balibar (2012:447) argues, however, ‘the simple category of ‘subject’ – even if we conceive it in a dynamic manner, as a process of subjectivation that never ends (...) is insufficient to give an account of the construction of political processes’. What is needed, for Balibar, is a plural grammar of political activity that takes into account process of political subjectification but also ‘the bearers of the political (social groups and individuals)’ and political actors ‘or more generally the types of political agency’ (2012:477). Doing so, requires moving beyond the almost exclusive emphasis on urban uprisings that characterizes geographical engagements with Rancière’s writings (for notable exceptions see Garcia-Lamarca, 2017; Velicu and Kaika, 2017). It calls for thinking democratic politics as an ‘ongoing confrontation’ (Dikeç, 2015:104). In the context of the ongoing European crises conjuncture, this means, on the one hand, extending our understanding of democratic politics to incorporate how grassroots movements seek to contest austerity policies and politicize the crisis (Arampatzi, 2017; Garcia-Lamarca, 2017). On the other, it also calls attention to how left populism – revolving around the construction and interpellation of a plural, inclusive, and heterogeneous ‘people’ against the elites – challenges the post-democratic scripting of the crises through varying localized articulations (Stavrakakis, 2014).

These three modalities of politics are not disjointed for two reasons. First, all three are constructed in and against the post-democratic distribution of the sensible. In their different tropes and repertoires they disrupt the post-democratic closure that seeks to impose austerity and exclusionary migration policies as the only viable response to the multifaceted crises facing European countries. Second, the discursive, spatial and

organizational repertoires of these modalities are developing in dialogue with one another both locally and throughout Europe. Research on recent urban uprisings has documented how the process of political subjectification ignited in the squares are inspiring grassroots experimentations with alternative ways of being, saying and doing in-common (Arampatzi, 2017; Gracia-Lamarca, 2017; Karaliotas, 2017a). Simultaneously, contemporary forms of left populism are also drawing some of their discursive and organizational references from the squares protests while also articulating links with grassroots movements (Kiouпкиolis and Katsambekis, 2018). This is neither to assimilate these modalities nor to portray them as different phases in a linear and gradual process of politicization. Rather, I argue that an emphasis on the spatialities of and ‘transitional unities’ between these modalities can provide important insights on the messy articulations of democratic politics.

In what follows I read the politics of the “Greek debt crisis” through this lens. Focusing on the intersections between post-democratization and democratic politics and the articulation of different modalities of democratic politics, I provide a situated account of the mutually constitutive relationship between processes of de-politicization and re-politicization.

### **Enter Greek ‘Demo-Crisis’: Uneven geographies of post-democratization, SYRIZA, and the challenges of and for democratic politics**

The so-called “Greek debt crisis” introduced an era of deep political transformations that radically altered the discursive and institutional co-ordinates. Being the first Eurozone country to face a public debt crisis – in the aftermath of the US subprime mortgage crisis – to be quickly followed by Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland, Greece constitutes a key node in what continues to develop as a deep crisis of the Eurozone (Lapavitsas, 2012) and the European political project more broadly. Since 2010, the country has, for many scholars, become the experimental laboratory for cutting-edge post-democratization processes articulated by national and international elites in an effort to insulate the imposition of draconian neoliberal austerity measures from democratic disagreement throughout Europe (Stavrakakis, 2013). Simultaneously, however, Greece has also been one of the hotbeds for a multi-faceted and heterogeneous democratic politics developing across the continent and particularly in Southern European countries and Ireland (see Hadjimichalis, 2017; O’Callaghan et al, 2014). More than a debt crisis then, the Greek and European travails constitute a ‘demo-crisis’ (Kouki and Liakos, 2015:np). For Kouki and Liakos, this term signifies how the elites have tried to first construct and then silence the *demos*, the people, as an obstacle to their efforts to respond to the crisis of the neoliberal project by

implementing ultra-neoliberal policies (2015). To this I would add a second interrelated dimension: how the *demos* has also re-appeared as a political subject seeking to challenge and destabilize the dominant scripting of the European crises.

Focusing on Greece, this section unpacks these interrelated and intertwined dynamics of post-democratization and democratic politics. In so doing, it traces the relationship between processes of politics and the police over three periods – and three cycles of struggle – in the past decade: the early crisis years between 2009-2012 marked by the imposition of two bailout agreements and the squares movement; the period between 2012-2015 wherein an autocratic turn in the post-democratic script was met with multiple solidarity and commoning movements; and, lastly, SYRIZA's term in government that began with efforts to renegotiate the country's bailout agreement but was marked by the signing of a third memorandum.

*From the Greek Success Story to 'Greek exceptionalism': Re-ordering post-democratization and the appearance of the people as a heterogeneous political subject*

On 23 April 2010, PM George Papandreou announced the signing of the first memorandum on a loan agreement between Greece and the IMF-EU-ECB troika. Ratified a few weeks later in the Parliament, amid massive popular protests, the agreement offered Greece a €110 billion loan on the condition of draconian austerity and structural adjustment measures. The memorandum radically ruptured the Greek political landscape. In the years prior to the crisis a consensual mode of politics was articulated in Greece in line with similar transformations in other Western European democracies. Since the mid-1990s, the country witnessed the confluence of the mainstream centre-right (New Democracy (ND)) and centre-left (PASOK) parties on a 'liberal-modernizing agenda' (Kioupiolis, 2014:145). The imaginary of 'Strong Greece', emblematically condensed in national and international acclaim for Greece's Eurozone membership and the hosting of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, was setting the scene for a host of policies revolving around the organization of mega-events and the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects coupled with extensive privatizations and the deregulation of the labour market (Karaliotas, 2017b). A consensus politics hailed neoliberal policies as the key to an era of prosperity and participation in the Eurozone as the two major political parties alternated in power. The advent of the crisis initiated a radical reorganization of the discursive and governance coordinates which rather than breaking with the post-democratic script amounted to its consolidation.

Overnight the Greek success story gave its place to discourses of failure, catastrophe and national salvation. The symptom of Greece's failure was the accumulation of debt. Debt, however, was also the nodal point in the articulation of discourses 'creating and sustaining shame and guilt and thus legitimising punishment' (Stavrakakis, 2013:315). A massive discursive operation staged by national and international media and elites (Kouki and Liakos, 2015) sought to construct Greeks – and the country as a whole – as indebted subjects (Lazzarato, 2012) who have lived beyond their means enjoying a lazy and hedonistic lifestyle on the back of financial mismanagement and irresponsibility. Similar narratives were later mobilized to explain the public debt crisis in the rest of the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain) – the term PIIGS itself being a prime example of the derogatory discourses adopted by European elites in the crisis conjuncture (Featherstone and Karaliotas, 2018). And if debt was the symptom of the country's sickness, the underlying cause was ascribed to 'Greek exceptionalism': lack of productivity, the proliferation of corruption and political clientelism, and the inefficient but ever present state-bureaucracy that led to the country's deviation from 'normal' European states (Tsakalotos, 2010). Importantly, all Greeks were said to be equally responsible for this deviation.

What was effectively silenced in these narratives, however, was how the "Greek debt crisis" was also the result of the unfolding of the financial crisis of 2008, growing trade imbalances within the Eurozone, the architecture of the EMU and the position of Southern European countries within it (Hadjimichalis, 2017; Lapavitsas, 2012). What such 'nationed narratives' were seeking to efface was how the crises in Greece as well as in other Southern European countries and Ireland were symptoms of a systemic crisis not just of the Eurozone but of the broader European political project (Featherstone and Karaliotas, 2018)<sup>ii</sup>. Embedded in these narratives was also the legitimization of draconian austerity measures as the prescribed remedy for the Greek malaise. The memorandum was precisely that: the bitter pill prescribed to Greeks by their doctors, according to then president of the IMF Dominique Strauss-Khan and then PM Papandreou (Featherstone and Karaliotas, 2018). Brought together these narratives effectively amounted to 'a de-politicized naturalization of the crisis' while also maintaining 'a state of permanent economic emergency' (Žižek, 2010:85). Politics in the midst of the crisis became a task that is 'too decisive and too sustained not to be left to the experts, to those who know how' (Rancière, 1999:113). The political field, the elites insisted, was divided in two camps: an 'enlightened oligarchy' who could understand and manage the objective givens of the situation and the ignorant masses unable to see beyond their grievances (Sevastakis, 2011).

Accordingly, governance reorganization since the outbreak of the crisis sought to insulate decision-making from this irresponsible and dangerous people. Institutionalized in the form of law the memorandum between the Greek state and its creditors became the overarching framework of governance acting as a 'lock-in' mechanism to 'insulate economic relations from democratic control' (Brenner et al., 2010:193). While the Greek Parliament formally approved the memorandum, a radical re-configuration of the geo-institutional coordinates of governance resulted in decision-making power being unevenly (re-)distributed among the Eurogroup, the ECB, the IMF, and the national government (Kioupkiolis, 2014). Decision-making was reduced to negotiations between the Greek government, European political elites and the EU-IMF-ECB technocrats. Happening invariably behind closed doors, these negotiations remained a tightly controlled spectacle with limited information available to the public. Yet, it was through these negotiations, that massive privatizations, severe cut-backs in the welfare state and the radical deregulation of the labor market were introduced to later be summarily ratified by the Parliament with little or no debate and often bypassing formal procedures. Furthermore, the institutionalization of the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF) as a quasi-governmental organization with the mandate to implement the €50 billion worth privatization plan actively sought to 'restrict governmental intervention (...) in the process' (HRADF, 2011:np). During these first crisis years, national and international elites sought to insulate the imposition of draconian austerity from democratic disagreement through this multi-scalar governing framework that marginally respected the formal envelope of democracy combined with narratives of the crisis as a non-political, technical issue that the masses could not comprehend.

This post-democratic closure was thoroughly challenged by the squares movement during the summer of 2011. Taking their inspiration from the Arab Spring protests and the Spanish Indignados that began a few days earlier, a multitude of protesters from divergent socio-economic and political backgrounds occupied Syntagma square in Athens and many other squares across Greece to stage their discontent with the state of the situation. For two months, between May and July 2011, the squares movement articulated a performative critique of the existing liberal democratic institutions and system of political representation. At its core was the people's claim to be counted as equals — to have an equal voice in the politics of the crisis:

'For a long time decisions have been made for us, without us ...  
We are here because we know that the solutions to our problems can come only from us...

In these public squares we will shape our claims and our demands together...  
DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOW! EQUALITY – JUSTICE – DIGNITY’  
(Popular Assembly, 2011:np)

A process of political subjectification was unfolding through the opening of spaces in Syntagma and other occupied squares. In Syntagma, while the “upper square”, the space directly in front of the Parliament, remained the key arena for the expression of indignation and anger, the “lower square” was transformed into a scene of collective self-organization consisting of various groups that catered for the protesters’ daily needs and the organization of the movement (solidarity kitchen, first-aid centre, multimedia group, translation group, cleaning group, etc) as well as thematic discussion groups and a Popular Assembly (Karaliotas, 2017a). A new political community and a new sensible world were constructed in and through the squares articulated around new modes of saying, being and doing in-common.

This political process was anything but pure. On the one hand, the squares movement was opening new democratic spatialities by reclaiming the public squares from their allocation in the neoliberal post-democratic order and transforming them into new spaces for the staging of disagreement. On the other, as the porous topographic differentiation between the “upper” and the “lower” Syntagma square made palpable, the political subject emerging in the squares was also internally split (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2016). While protesters in the “upper square” developed nationalist discursive and performative repertoires identifying their political community with the Greek nation, protesters in the “lower square” followed an emancipatory logic constructing the demos as an open and plural political subject (Karaliotas, 2017a). Two conflicting names of ‘the people’ were staged in the squares seeking to construct different but co-existing political subjects: *the ethnos* i.e. those belonging to the “Greek people” by virtue of their origin and bloodline (“upper square”) and *the demos* as the uncounted for in the Rancièrian sense (“lower square”) (see also Rancière, 2011b). The co-existence of an exclusionary/nationalist and an emancipatory logic within the squares movement is not a reason to dismiss the democratic openings of the movement. Rather, it highlights how a singular notion of the political subject – particularly if this refers to individual subjectification – cannot fully account for the messiness of democratic politics. It is by unpacking the spatialization of democratic politics in the squares and excavating its discursive and performative nuances that we can analyze how this democratic political subject was shaped through internal tensions, conflicts and struggle. It is in its impurity and hybridity that the squares movement

constituted a radical rupture in the post-democratic order and these two logics of politicizing the crisis would mark Greek politics in the following years.

Despite repeated violent police repression and concerted efforts to dismiss the movement as an irrational populist outburst (Pantazopoulos, 2011), the squares thoroughly de-legitimized the implementation of the memorandum and shook pre-existing relations of political representation. The post-democratic order could not remain intact. In November 2011 PM Papandreou was forced to resign in favor of a coalition government under former President of the Bank of Greece and Vice President of ECB Lucas Papademos. Papademos' government was the first government to be supported by PASOK and ND MPs – together with the small far right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) – consolidating the convergence of the two parties. The political establishment's response was the formation of a cross-party coalition seeking to govern through an alleged consensus on the country's salvation. Despite the rhetoric of consensus, however, Papademos' government was not elected by popular vote but supported by MPs elected in September 2009. In a move similar to the formation of the Monti government in Italy, putting an unelected technocrat in command was, thus, the Greek and European elites' reaction to the disruptive staging of democratic disagreement. In this, it both exemplified and consolidated the efforts to reduce crisis governance into a techno-managerial exercise and to immunize this allegedly democratic mode of governance from elections and democratic accountability.

*Law and (Dis)Order: Autocratic post-democratization and the articulation of everyday politicization*

The double elections that followed in May and June 2012 confirmed the major decline in support for pro-memorandum parties. On the contrary, the parties opposing the memorandum witnessed significant gains as the democratic rupture of the squares was translated to Parliamentary representation. SYRIZA, until then minor party of the left, increased its votes from 4.13% to 26.89% becoming the major opposition party. SYRIZA's electoral success should be read against the backdrop of the squares movement. While political parties were not welcome in the squares, SYRIZA members actively participated in the movement in a personal capacity, forging links with activists and participants. More importantly, in the aftermath of the squares, SYRIZA articulated a left populist strategy with direct references to the movement (Katsambekis, 2016). This is encapsulated in SYRIZA's electoral motto in May 2012: 'They decided without us, we're moving on without them'. Criticizing the anti-democratic processes that introduced the memoranda, equality, justice and dignity – as posited in the squares – became nodal points in SYRIZA's discourse.



Similarly, the newly formed far right-wing ANEL (Independent Greeks) capitalized on the nationalist anti-memorandum rhetoric staged in the squares to gain 33 seats in Parliament. Nevertheless, in June 2012, a pro-memorandum coalition government was formed between ND, PASOK and DIMAR (Democratic Left) under the leadership of ND's president Antonis Samaras.

Seeking to suture the democratic opening brought about by the squares movement, Samaras' premiership resorted to an autocratic post-democracy logic (see also Swyngedouw, 2019) revolving around the de-legitimization of alternative voices and the portrayal of 'the people' and democratic politics as an enemy. In the run-up to the 2012 double elections a sustained campaign of fear was launched by the country's mainstream media and politico-economic elites 'to purge the debate of alternative points of view and eliminate criticism of the memorandums' (Kouki and Liakos, 2015:np). This discourse continued to constitute the main legitimization strategy throughout Samaras' term attacking the credibility of alternative voices by labeling anti-austerity critiques, and particularly SYRIZA, irrational and irresponsible (Stavrakakis, 2014) or anti-patriotic and anti-Greek (Glynos and Voutyras, 2016). Simultaneously, contentious politics were assimilated with the racist practices of the Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn through the theory of the so-called two extremes (e.g. Kasimatis, 2013). The populism/anti-populism frontier became the horizon of hegemonic discourses dividing the social and political field in two groups, the irresponsible populist rabble and the enlightened modernizers, in order to legitimize the implemented policies in the name of necessity and expertise and delegitimize critiques in the name of the ignorance of the masses. This operation was often stripped of any positive content for the implemented policies. What Samaras' government could offer, instead, was law and order. In this context, migration was increasingly linked with unemployment and crime rates fuelling a racist rhetoric around the consequences of austerity. Simultaneously, protests were portrayed as causing civil disorder.

Samaras' governing practice followed a correspondingly autocratic logic. The revisions to the memorandum resulting from negotiations with EU-IMF-ECB technocrats continued to be ratified through summary procedures in the Parliament. Law-making was performed with minimum deliberation in Inter-Ministerial Committees and often without a Parliament Plenary vote. Paradigmatic in this respect is ND's decision to dismantle the country's Public Broadcasting Service (ERT). Exemplifying the government's autocratic logic, ERT's closure was introduced through a ministerial decree, without parliamentary discussion

or approval. The decision was implemented, literally overnight, by police forces, resulting in black TV screens across the country. Hand in glove with this decision-making practice, Samaras' government often resorted to the use of brutal policing. Police pogroms against migrants and drug users in the Athenian city-centre became common place and numerous social centers and squats were evicted between 2012 and 2014.

But as the government was unwilling to acknowledge the devastating consequences of austerity and striving to exhaustively order bodies and activities, a proliferation of everyday solidarity and commoning movements were putting a city of equality in confrontation with the city of the police. Democratic politics did not end with the cleansing of the squares in the summer of 2011 or after the 2012 elections. Rather democratic politics re-territorialized from the squares to the everyday life of Greek cities. Over 400 solidarity and commoning initiatives were formed since 2011 stretching to almost every neighborhood of every city: social solidarity health clinics and pharmacies and solidarity initiatives for those in need; workplace occupations and collectives; social groceries and social currencies; cooperative networks bypassing "middlemen" in the distribution of products; social centers and housing squats (Vaiou and Kalandides, 2016)<sup>iii</sup>.

Such initiatives were pivotal in ameliorating some of the immediate consequences of austerity. More importantly, they also articulated 'struggle communities' that contested austerity in the everyday by prefiguring and building an alternative political community (Arampatzi, 2017). Many of these initiatives forged links with initiatives elsewhere articulating an incipient solidarity and commoning network that spread across the country and Europe (Featherstone and Karaliotas, 2018). This incipient network drew its inspiration and repertoires from the practices prefiguratively staged in the squares, aspiring to a new mode of everyday life articulated around equality and collective self-governance (Karaliotas, 2017a). Filling their ranks with a new generation of activists who were linked through the politicized solidarity forged in and through the squares, the localized nodes in this network served as the dispersed but interlinked meeting spaces for the democratic political process initiated in the squares. A key actor in the networking of these initiatives was the platform 'Solidarity for All' established by SYRIZA and funded through partial donations of its MPs' salaries (Vaiou and Kalandides, 2016). This solidarity network contributed immensely to the politicization of everyday life. It produced dissensual spatialities that made perceptible, sensible and livable common alternatives to Samaras' austere and post-democratic cities by reclaiming and transforming their very spaces.

ERT's occupation and self-management illustrates this point. Immediately after the government's decision to dismantle the service, workers' and solidarity assemblies were held in ERT's buildings across Greece. Supported, materially and virtually, by thousands of people in solidarity, the workers went on to occupy ERT's infrastructures and to broadcast self-managed TV and Radio programs. These programs acted as a megaphone for the activities of the anti-austerity movements unfolding at the time: from the anti-gold mining movement in Halkidiki, to the movement against auctions to workers' co-operatives and solidarity initiatives. In parallel, they enjoyed the support of SYRIZA and, in turn, further promoted SYRIZA's discourse as the main political party against austerity. Occupied ERT became a key political infrastructure in redistributing the sensible experience around the crisis by voicing alternatives to the dominant discourse that could now reach broader audiences. It also served as an important meeting place for forging politicized solidarities.

In this sense, during this period, democratic politics were sustained and fuelled through transitional unities forged among various movements but also between grassroots movements and SYRIZA in their common struggle against austerity and post-democratic closure. A symbiotic relationship between SYRIZA and solidarity and commoning initiatives developed. On the one hand, this was facilitated by SYRIZA's strategy as a 'mass connective party' seeking 'to connect in a flexible way (...) diverse actions, initiatives and movements' into a more or less stable federation and to cultivate new forms of political agency and action (Spourdalakis, 2013:103). This approach –adopted by SYRIZA since its formation in 2004 – has, in the crisis context, enabled a politics that 'entailed both direct/individual participation in the movements and the horizontal articulation of the party with the movements' (Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, 2018:212). On the other, the institutional openings that SYRIZA was creating were central in materially supporting the movements and increasing their visibility. But this was not a homogeneous process as grassroots movements developed a diversified strategy vis-à-vis SYRIZA. For example, participation in the networking with 'Solidarity for All' was a matter of heated debate in movement assemblies and in the broader Assembly of Initiatives that took place in Athens in November 2012 with different attitudes and strategies developing (Vaiou and Kalandides, 2016). Actually, it is the attitude of agonistic pluralism that developed within the squares (Kioupkiolis, 2014) that enabled movements to pursue diverse strategies while also maintaining a sense of unity against a common enemy. It is once again in the messiness and diversity of these transitional unities that the nuances of democratic politics can be traced shedding important light on

their articulation and transformation. And it is through these messy and hybrid unities that Samaras' autocratic post-democracy was brought to an end.

When ND failed to elect a President of the Republic in December 2014 elections were announced for 25 January 2015. On 27 January Alexis Tsipras announced the formation of a coalition government with the participation of SYRIZA and ANEL. This collaboration between a left-wing and a nationalist, far-right party – surprising as it might sound and problematic as it is – was also enabled and legitimized through the uneasy co-existence of emancipatory and nationalist logics in the squares (Karaliotas, 2017a). The two logics of politicizing the crisis staged in the squares – emancipatory and nationalist – were the building blocks of the two parties' left- and right-wing populisms, which converged toward the common enemy of the memoranda and the old political establishment. The next section looks at SYRIZA's government trajectory to unpack how it re-configured the co-ordinates between post-democratization and democratic politics.

#### *SYRIZA in Government: Democratic openings and post-democratic closures*

A minor party of the left with roots in the Euro-communist and radical tradition as well as the alter-globalization movement, SYRIZA developed a left populist strategy during the crisis (Katsambekis, 2016; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). The discursive shift to the signifier of 'the people' as opposed to traditional left signifiers (like class and movements) enabled SYRIZA 'to establish 'chains of equivalence' among heterogeneous frustrated subjects, identities, [and] demands (...) by highlighting their opposition to a common 'other': (...) the 'pro-austerity forces,' the 'memorandum,' the 'troika' and so on' (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014:129). The political subject interpellated by SYRIZA was plural and heterogeneous seeking to capitalize on and engage with the democratic political process initiated in the squares and continued through everyday commoning and solidarity movements. The 'mass connective party' strategy, outlined above, was key in maintaining the momentum of this articulation, as the direct participation of SYRIZA members in anti-austerity protests and movements was coupled with efforts to represent these movements in the realm of institutional politics (Katsambekis, 2016). Simultaneously, particularly since May 2012, SYRIZA also moved beyond mere opposition to austerity seeking to articulate its own alternative and stepping up as a party that was aiming at left government. The demands of anti-austerity movements and some of the practices developed within solidarity and commoning initiatives became key nodes in SYRIZA's alternative program. In the run-up to the January 2015 elections, SYRIZA continued to frame its aim as restoring the power of

the people against the establishment whereas, reflecting a “pragmatic” shift, its government program revolved around post-Keynesian policies seeking to vindicate different grievances staged during the crisis. The opening epigraph of the party’s program read: ‘We are counting on you. Not on the oligarchy. [...] On the sovereign people’ (SYRIZA, 2015). It is these transitional unities that make SYRIZA’s government trajectory important from the perspective of democratic politics and not just the electoral win of a left populist party.

SYRIZA’s rise to power signified a rupture in the post-democratic script both in Greece and in Europe more broadly. Disagreement with the memorandum could now be voiced in the echelons of European institutions that so far remained insulated from such nuances. SYRIZA’s first term in power (January - August 2015) was marked by negotiations with the country’s creditors, which foregrounded the European dimensions of the “Greek debt crisis” and contested reducing debt to a techno-managerial question. The turn of events is well known. After several months of inconclusive negotiations, Tsipras was handed an ultimatum on a new loan agreement to respond by calling a referendum on the proposal. On 5 July 2015, amidst an unprecedented campaign of fear staged by Greek and European elites, 61.31% of the voters rejected the deal. Yet, one week later SYRIZA capitulated to the creditors’ demands accepting a third memorandum that was later ratified in the Parliament with the support of ND and PASOK as 39 SYRIZA MPs abstained or rejected the deal.

For many on the left – including SYRIZA MPs who rejected the deal – the signing of the third memorandum was a foregone conclusion given SYRIZA’s leadership commitment to stay within the Eurozone (Lapavitsas, 2019; Stravelakis, 2015). For others, the memorandum resulted from the balance of political forces in Europe; a balance that SYRIZA’s strategy was aiming to tip toward the easing of austerity policies (Douzinas, 2015). Irrespective of one’s assessment of SYRIZA’s negotiating strategy and the party’s incompetencies in implementing it (cf. Mudde, 2017), the calling of the referendum staged exactly what the national and European elites were striving to silence and delegitimize since the outbreak of the crisis: the voice of the people as having a bearing on the question of the “Greek debt crisis”. Despite the democratic opening of the referendum, these intense days and months made apparent ‘the escalating undemocratic scalar organisation of the EU and the Eurozone’ (Hadjimichalis, 2017:186). The unelected institutions of the EC, the Eurogroup and the ECB acted as what Habermas calls a ‘post-democratic executive’ (cited in Balibar et al, 2015:np) to impose neoliberal austerity at all costs and despite popular disagreement. It is, thus, worth noting that the negotiations were not just happening behind closed doors but also that – in

accordance with EU rules – minutes were not kept during Eurogroup meetings and decisions were taken verbally without any transparency (Varoufakis, 2016). Moreover, ECB's decision to interrupt the liquidity of Greek Banks in the run-up to the referendum highlighted the undemocratic operation of the institution and shattered any pretence of independence in the implemented fiscal policies. This is how, 'a very European coup' unfolded (Douzinas, 2015). Extreme pressure was placed not just on Tsipras and his government but also on the Greek people to ensure that they vote as they should. And when the people voted against the elites' will, the undemocratic structure of the Eurozone and the EU served to guarantee that austerity could continue uninterrupted.

SYRIZA's about-turn also foregrounds how a political actor that gained prominence through transitional unities with democratic events and movements against austerity can reproduce post-democratic trends. This is not limited to how SYRIZA handled the negotiations and the signing of the third memorandum, which were characterized by lack of transparency in the information available to the public, bypassing formal party democratic procedures in decision-making (Katsourides, 2016) and voting the memorandum with the support of the pro-austerity parties ND and PASOK. It also revolves around the limitations of a democratic politics that is reduced to the realm of institutional politics and the party. Already before the January elections SYRIZA's "pragmatic turn" toward government reconfigured the party's relationship with movements. As Kioukiolis and Katsambekis argue 'the "mass connective party" gradually lost its "hybrid" content, (...) steadily shifting toward a logic of top-down representation' (2018:212). As seizing power became the party's strategic priority, SYRIZA weakened its horizontal relationship with movements. This was coupled with SYRIZA's reluctance to 'promot[e] grassroots democracy and civic participation' in the party with Tsipras' charismatic leader figure dominating a now more centralized SYRIZA (Kioukiolis and Katsambekis, 2018:213). Such transformations were already closing down the spaces for democratic politics.

SYRIZA's gradual transformation before the January elections was accentuated during its first term as they had to govern in the midst of extreme pressures from national and European elites, empty coffers, and a hostile bureaucratic environment that had crystallized over four decades of ND and PASOK governments. The horizon of SYRIZA's political strategy became confined within the realms of institutional politics both in terms of its negotiating strategy around the memorandum and more importantly with regards to its relationship with movements and alternatives to the crisis. SYRIZA's government was re-

oriented towards an exclusively institutional politics coupled with the statist institutionalization of solidarity to ameliorate the consequences of austerity.

Two policies introduced early in SYRIZA's first term are indicative in this respect. Firstly, as I described in the previous section, occupied ERT was a key node for democratic politics during Samaras' term. ERT's operation during these days articulated an alternative mode of running a public broadcasting service revolving around direct democracy and the inclusion of movements and civil society in designing TV and radio programs. However, when in office, SYRIZA's government quickly proceeded in re-opening the state-run ERT that Samaras' government dismantled with limited public deliberation and without incorporating occupied ERT's proposals. At the time, for SYRIZA, the hostile environment created by mainstream media was such that made the need for a state television close to the party more important than experimenting with a democratic mode of governing ERT. Secondly, one of SYRIZA's first moves was the institutionalization of a solidarity card – issued by the now re-named Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity – and the introduction of Law 4320/2015 that enabled the participation of non-institutional actors in the implementation of the EU's Fund for European Aid for the most Deprived framework. While partially vindicating movements' demands, what these policies also achieved was to confine radical democratic initiatives and movements into a statist perspective. The perceptible and permitted solidarity was now the one that the state was articulating. In this sense, SYRIZA's policies were depriving democracy and democratic politics by reducing them to institutional politics and established actors.

The signing of the third memorandum consolidated these transformations while also leading SYRIZA to enhance post-democratic trends. During its second term, since September 2015, SYRIZA's discourse was quickly articulated around a managerial and statist logic to justify the signing of the memorandum. References to the 'There Is No Alternative' dogma became often as MPs and Ministers struggled to legitimize the implementation of policies they were opposing just a few months before (Sevastakis, 2015). Seemingly vindicating the argument that Eurozone membership was synonymous with austerity policies (Lapavistas, 2019), SYRIZA's turn further foreclosed the horizon of possibility for democratic politics by seeking legitimacy in arguing that the government was doing 'what [was] required by strict necessity' (Rancière, 1999:113). In this setting, SYRIZA's key proposal became the implementation of austerity with a social face while also expanding social and civil rights and fighting against corruption (Katsourides, 2016). When efforts to alleviate austerity were met

with hostility by the creditors and progressive social reforms toned down to maintain the governing coalition with ANEL, the anti-corruption discourse, while addressing deep-seated problems, gradually shifted the discursive terrain into a moralizing field that further foreclosed the possibilities for politicizing the crisis.

The movements that flourished over the crisis, in turn, became gradually demobilized and disaffected with SYRIZA. The massive grassroots campaign for a 'No' vote in July's referendum was the last transitional unity formed between SYRIZA and grassroots movements. SYRIZA's efforts to channel the massive wave of solidarity with refugees that unfolded since the winter of 2015 in the realm of institutionalized NGO actors while also cracking down on housing squats and solidarity initiatives staged by refugees and movements, exemplify this shifting relationship and how SYRIZA's government started to act antagonistically to the grassroots. The democratic opening staged through the referendum was now sealed and the transitional unities formed were shattered.

## **Conclusion**

On 22 August 2018, SYRIZA and the EC celebrated Greece's return to the markets as the third memorandum was brought to a close. Nevertheless, the neoliberal austerity straightjacket still defines the horizon of politics in Greece whereas the transitional unities which were formed to challenge these policies were gradually disarticulated. Commenting on the ongoing Southern European crises, Costis Hadjimichalis has argued that '[d]espite limits and contradictions, the radical left (...) is the only political force capable of re-politicising and re-democratising politics' (2017:189). To understand the challenges and limitations facing a plural democratic politics – not limited to Left parties – in the current European conjuncture, this paper insisted that it is crucial to foreground the intersections and intertwinement between processes of post-democratization and democratic politics. I argued that, contrary to common critiques, Rancière's political writings foreground politics as impure, thus, enabling us to unpack the interplay between politics and the police by offering a way to think through their mixture. Moving beyond the sense of totalizing closure transpiring through strong variations of the post-politics literature (Millington, 2016), I offered a reading of the notions of post-democratization and democratic politics that centers on the (re-)configurations of the distribution of the sensible to trace how the two processes are enmeshed and the ways in which they intersect and transform one another. Moreover, to counter the exclusive focus on the political subject in Rancière's work, I



mobilized the notion of 'transitional unities' (Balibar, 2012:477) to provide a plural understanding of the spatialities and actors of democratic politics.

Tracing the uneven, messy, and contested geographies of the politics of the "Greek debt crisis", I documented how such a framing enables more nuanced readings of the geographies, intersections, and transformations of the post-democratic police and democratic politics. Rather than reproducing a totalizing understanding of post-democracy, I analyzed the armature of discursive and institutional practices striving to maintain a post-democratic order in the face of a multifaceted democratic politics. Since the outbreak of the crisis, the making of an indebted country and an indebted people serve(d) in discursively legitimizing a crisis politics that forecloses democratic disagreement. Politics in the midst of the crisis urgency, we have been repeatedly told, is a matter too crucial and too complex to be left to the ignorant and irresponsible masses. This discursive trope was further accentuated in response to the squares movement and even more so in light of SYRIZA's electoral rise, whence the populism/anti-populism frontier emerged as the key discursive modality in de-legitimizing voices of democratic disagreement.

In institutional terms, I illustrated how when confronted with democratic politics, national and European elites resorted to a scalar politics and governance re-organization aimed at insulating the economic from the democratic political. The production of new scales of governance beyond democratic accountability through the successive memoranda between the Greek state and its creditors was pivotal in this respect. The institutionalization of the quasi-governmental HRADF to implement the massive privatization program without government interference, the monitoring and renegotiation of the memoranda in quarterly meetings between Greek officials and EU-ECB-IMF technocrats, and the retreat to the undemocratic bodies of the Eurogroup, the ECB and the IMF in the aftermath of the 'No' vote in the referendum exemplify this process. Here, the "up-scaling" and "outsourcing" of the act of governing act(ed) as institutional lock-in mechanisms to respond to and foreclose the articulation of dissensual spatialities and democratic political transitional unities (see also Swyngedouw, 2018). But Greek politico-economic elites were not passive recipients of these policies. The formation of Papademos' unelected technocratic government in the aftermath of the squares movement and the autocratic turn of Samaras' government in the face of the proliferation of grassroots politicization were pivotal transformations of the post-democratic police seeking to insulate it from democratic disagreement. Foregrounding the diverse spatialities and the transitional unities through which democratic politics unfolded is

crucial in understanding the concomitant transformations of post-democracy and democratic politics. This reading insisted on the impurity of democratic politics. Tracing the emergence and articulation of democratic politics from the hybrid staging of 'the people' in the squares to the prefigurative practices and networks of everyday solidarity and commoning to the institutional openings of SYRIZA's electoral rise, I elucidated how democratic politics disrupts, intervenes in and transforms the spaces and words of the police through the production of multiple and multifaceted dissensual spatialities. While not reducing democratic politics to institutional spaces alone, I demonstrated how institutional spaces were challenged and transformed through the articulation of transitional political unities resulting from the democratic political process. Simultaneously, SYRIZA's government trajectory served as a vantage point to trace the limitations of a politics that remains confined within the realms of institutional politics. This reading, in turn, enabled me to highlight how democratic openings can lead to new closures, focusing on SYRIZA and its perpetuating of post-democratic trends.

The insistence on the contradictions and messiness of democratic politics should neither lead to a paralyzing sense of futility of a local politics confronted with an allegedly fixed and hierarchical scalar order nor to a longing for a pure disruptive politics outside the police.. The "Greek debt crisis" does not re-affirm the impotence of democratic politics. Rather, together with Rancière, I would insist that the emancipatory potentialities of democratic politics rest precisely on their impurity: the possibility of anyone whoever and wherever to act politically and transform the given structuration of our common world. Instead of limiting democratic politics to institutional arrangements and pre-given spatialities and actors, research should unpack how democratic politics unfolds through the production of multifaceted new spatialities and transitional political unities. From a critical geographical perspective that remains faithful to collective emancipation, embracing the impurity of democratic politics requires imagining, producing and engaging with the spatialities, scalar politics and political solidarities that reconfigure the post-democratic distribution of the sensible in the here and now.

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<sup>i</sup> This article draws from three sustained periods of fieldwork on urban infrastructure governance, urban politics and urban movements in Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece over the past decade: a. October 2010 – August 2011; b. June 2013 – September 2013; June 2015 – August 2015. Fieldwork included more than 50 semi-structured interviews with key political figures and movement activists, ethnographic accounts and participant observation in urban protests and movement activities as well as an extensive discourse analysis of relevant media publications, interviews and reports.

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<sup>ii</sup> I use “Greek debt crisis” in scare quotes to highlight the inaccuracy and contradictions of such ‘nationed narratives’.

<sup>iii</sup> I understand ‘solidarity and commoning initiatives’ as the embodied efforts to imagine and organize life in-common building on relations of solidarity (Karaliotas, 2017a). I read both solidarity and commoning as political relations without guarantees (Featherstone, 2012). Rather than thinking solidarity and the commons as fixed, bounded, and given this conceptualization foregrounds solidarity and commoning as fluid and generative political processes (Featherstone, 2012; Jeffrey et al. 2012). This relational reading refrains from reifying solidarity and the commons/commoning as a priori emancipatory, centers on their differentiated character (Noterman, 2016) and highlights their situated articulations; thus, enabling an understanding of their impurity in line with this paper’s theorization of the police/politics distinction.