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STAGING EQUALITY IN GREEK SQUARES: Hybrid Spaces of Political Subjectification

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Abstract

This article stages a dialogue between Jacques Rancière's political writings and the squares movement in Greece. From May to July 2011, a heterogeneous multitude of protesters reclaimed the squares of the country from their allocation in the police order and articulated a multiplicity of divergent discursive, organizational and spatial repertoires. This was an urban political event that reasserted the importance of urban spaces in expressing political dissent and experimented with new ways of being and acting in common. This article draws on Rancière's conceptualization of politics to read the squares movement as an opening of spaces of political subjectification. At the same time, through a close ethnography of the squares, it highlights the tensions that marked this process and focuses on two of them: the coexistence of nationalist and equalibertarian discursive and performative repertoires and the co-implication of horizontal and vertical organizational practices. The article builds on this analysis to argue that the squares movement opened hybrid spaces of political subjectification and to explore some of the tensions in Rancière's political writings. This reading, in turn, informs a discussion of the legacies of the squares movement.

Key words: political subjectification, hybrid spaces, Rancière, squares movement, Greece

Introduction

The year 2011 was a year of urban protests. Their emblematic starting point had been the insurgencies in Morocco and Egypt in January. Subsequent protests in Spain and Greece erupted during the summer, and again during the autumn with the Occupy movement in North America and the UK. In a global circulation of revolt *the people* reclaimed urban (public) spaces to stage dissent with hegemonic politics and experiment with new modes of political collective action (Merrifield, 2013).

This article focuses on the squares movement in Greece that developed during the summer of 2011. Almost two years since the outbreak of the 'Greek crisis', the imposition of severe austerity measures and the closing down of institutional and public spaces for the expression of political disagreement ignited an unprecedented political event in the country's contemporary political history. From the end of May to the end of July 2011, hundreds of thousands of protesters occupied Syntagma Square in Athens and other public squares across the country to stage their dissent with the state of the situation. Protesters in the squares, who came to call themselves the Indignants (*Αγανακτισμένοι*), were a socio-economically and ideologically heterogeneous multitude (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2014). Although most were variously affected by the imposed austerity measures, they differed in 'their social situations, coping strategies, and narratives of blame, thus creating a plural embodied space of discontent' (Athanasiou, 2014: 3). This was a—collectively produced—political space in which the protesters enacted direct democratic practices and performatively traced new ways of being, saying and acting in common. How are we, then, to read this urban political event and the spaces it opened up?

In contemporary political theory, political collective action is commonly discussed through the literatures on contentious politics and new social movements, placing particular emphasis on identity formation and strategic considerations (McAdam *et al.*, 1996; Melluci,

1996; Della Porta and Diani, 2009). Over the past fifteen years, scholars writing on the geographies of resistance and social movements have engaged, critiqued and expanded these literatures by focusing on concerns over place, space, scale and networks (Leitner *et al.*, 2008). In urban studies, in particular, this body of work has been brought into dialogue with early urban social movement research, developed since Manuel Castells' ground-breaking work *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), thereby transcending the 'relative isolation' of the field (Pickvance, 2003: 102). This has allowed a broadening of the scope of urban movement research beyond Castells' collective consumption, cultural/territorial identity, local state politics triptych, while simultaneously insisting on the role of cities as 'incubators' for social movements (Uitermark *et al.*, 2012: 2549; Nicholls, 2008; for a recent critical review focusing on the question of the subject see Rutland, 2013). Together, these literatures have provided important insights into the manifold spatial, discursive and organizational repertoires of (urban) social movements (Featherstone, 2008; Leitner *et al.*, 2008) and the role of key organizers in linking geographically or conceptually diverse groups and struggles (see Leontidou, 2010; Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012, which focus on Greece in particular). Importantly, a key theme in these literatures has been to explore how participation in networks (of movements) and convergence in space constitutes an essential element in the formation of collectives and the transformation of identities (Routledge, 2003; Featherstone, 2008; Nicholls, 2008; Castells, 2011; for an account of the Occupy movement from this perspective see Sbicca and Perdue, 2014).

Indeed, in coming together in the squares, the protesters were moving beyond their established identities 'predicated on a *transsubjective*, broadly shared but differently situated sense of vulnerability to the injuries of injustice' (Athanasiou, 2014: 3, emphasis added). Yet the squares movement constituted a break with previous subject positions that cannot be adequately captured through an emphasis on identity formation or the coming together of diverse (urban) social movements. Rather, it kindled an incipient process of becoming a collective political subject (Stavrides, 2012; Douzinas, 2013; Prentoulis and Thommasen, 2013; Athanasiou, 2014). Hence, notwithstanding the importance of the insights the literatures on (urban) social movements and contentious politics have contributed, this article seeks to move a step further to account for this spatialized process of political subjectification.

To this end, the article engages with the political writings of Jacques Rancière (1992; 1999; 2001; 2011a). For Rancière, politics is a process of political subjectification that centres on the rupture with previous subject positions through the opening of spaces (Rancière, 1999; Dikeç, 2013). Arguably, then, the process of becoming a political subject and its spatialized expression in the squares are two elements of the movement that resonate with Rancière's notion of politics (see also Basset, 2014, and Davidson and Iveson, 2014b, on the Occupy movement). However, the spatialized tensions that characterize this process are rarely addressed by Rancière or in accounts of politics that draw on his writings (for a notable exception, though not one that engages with space, see Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2013). This article seeks to fill this gap by paying particular attention to the multiple—and at times conflicting—discursive, organizational and spatial repertoires of the squares. Through this lens, I argue, the squares movement could be read as an opening of hybrid spaces of political subjectification that was marked by tensions. In order to illustrate this point and reflect on the characteristics of these spaces, I focus on two such tensions within the squares: the co-existence of nationalist and emancipatory discursive and performative repertoires and the frictions between horizontal and vertical organizational practices.

The empirical analysis of the article is based on my observant participation in the movement and discourse analysis of its key texts. As far as discourse analysis is concerned, my analysis is grounded in the discourses emanating from the direct democratic practices of the squares, both Syntagma and beyond (that is, Popular Assemblies' votes and minutes, manifestos of the movement, and so on). Furthermore, in order to offer a more nuanced analysis of the heterogeneous discourses within the squares, I also engage with texts published by smaller collectives that participated in the occupations. My participation in the squares movement in Athens and Thessaloniki also provided invaluable material for the empirical analysis conducted in this article. I paid particular attention to the organizational practices and the performative repertoires of the movement (for example, banners, chants, dress codes, and so on). While my analysis focuses mainly on the occupation of Syntagma Square, which was the key site of the movement, I also extend its scope to the repertoires of other occupations across the country.

The article commences with a reading of Rancière's understanding of political subjectification as a spatialized and performative process. The second section briefly situates the squares movement within the context of the hegemonic politics around the 'Greek crisis' and the police ordering of urban space in Athens. In parallel, it traces the continuities and discontinuities between the squares events and the recent history of radical politics in Greece. The third section reads the squares movement as an opening of hybrid spaces of political subjectification. In doing so, it focuses on the aforementioned key frictions that emerged within these spaces. This discussion then serves as an entry point to explore some tensions in Rancière's conceptualization of politics. In light of this analysis, the final section briefly reflects on the legacies of the squares in dialogue with the insights gained in previous sections.

Political subjectification and the opening of stages of equality

There is now an emerging body of geographical work that mobilizes Jacques Rancière's work to inform readings of emancipatory politics (Dikeç, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2011; Dikeç 2012; 2013; Davidson and Iveson, 2014b; Swyngedouw, 2014) often explicitly focusing on the urban uprisings that have been unfolding since 2011 (Bassett, 2014; Davidson and Iveson, 2014a; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014). This article seeks to contribute to this body of work by engaging with Rancière's notion of political subjectification. Before moving on to discuss the particularities of this understanding, though, it is important to briefly introduce the notions of the police and politics as conceptualized by Rancière.

For Rancière, the police are an institutionalized socio-spatial order of governance in which everyone is 'assigned' their 'proper' place according to a seemingly natural order of things (Dikeç, 2005). Within such an order, every activity and body is given its proper place, name and function in the whole. Thus, the overarching principle of the police order is saturation, in the sense of 'the absence of a void and of a supplement' (Rancière, 2001: n.p.n.). As Swyngedouw observes, the Rancièrean notion of the police is close to Foucault's understanding of the governmental dispositif 'that signals a shift in state power from sovereign to bio-power' (Swyngedouw, 2011: 375). Therefore, the police designates the multitude of 'the activities which create order by distributing places, names, functions' (Rancière, 1994: 173) and should not be misconceived as referring to totalitarianism (Dikeç, 2005). This ordering constitutes what Rancière (2001: n.p.n.) calls a 'partition of the sensible'. The notion of the 'partition of the sensible' refers 'both to what is acceptable and naturalized as well as to an "aesthetic" register as that what is seen, heard, and spoken, what is registered and recognized' (Swyngedouw, 2011: 375). As Dikeç (2012: 673) notes, 'Rancière uses this almost oxymoronic word—"partage" means both "partition" and

"sharing"—deliberately to refer to what is put in common and shared in the community (understood broadly), and what is separated and excluded'.

By contrast, politics, for Rancière, is the disruptive engagement with the police order and revolves around reconfiguring the partition of the sensible (Rancière, 1999). It is this conflict that he defines as disagreement (*ibid.*). More than a conflict of viewpoints, disagreement is '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). This confrontation begins from a *wrong* that constructs a 'polemical universal' by articulating the 'presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society' (Rancière, 1999: 39). Importantly, for Rancière, equality is neither a goal that politics strives towards, nor instituted in the form of law; it is a presupposition that can only be discerned through its enactment (*ibid.*: 33). Schematically, then, Rancièrean politics always entails a confrontation between 'those who act in the name of their equality' and the hierarchical police order that 'presupposes their inequality' (May, 2010b: 73).

Here, the political subject emerges through the 'torsion brought about by the presupposition of a universal equality (politics) and the particular forms of hierarchy inscribed within a given social order (police)' (Schaap, 2012: 11). More specifically, political subjectification is conceptualized as 'the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience' (Rancière, 1999: 35). Put simply, political subjectification is the process of *becoming* a collective political subject through the enactment of the presupposition of equality by a part that has no part (May, 2010b). Yet, the Rancièrean 'part that has no part' does not correspond to a particular social group that is marginalized; rather, it emerges through political action 'as an entity that cannot be accommodated within the prevailing social order and yet demands to be' (Schaap, 2011: 36).

As Davidson and Iveson (2014a: 141) suggest, such an 'approach rejects the idea that any particular claim or subject is pre-destined to be a/the political actor'. Political subjectification, for Rancière, is not the process by which a social group becomes conscious of its conditions and 'finds its voice' (Rancière, 1999: 38). Rather, politics, as the unfolding of modes of political subjectification, move beyond established identities. Hence, political subjectification 'is never simply the assertion of an identity but the refusal of an identity imposed by others, by the police order' (Davis, 2010: 88). Political subjectification, in other words, always involves a 'process of dis-identification or de-classification' (Rancière, 1992: 61). However, it also entails 'the inscription of a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community' (Rancière, 1999: 37). This does not suggest that political subjects are created *ex nihilo*. Rather, political subjectification creates subjects by 'transforming identities', as these are defined and allocated by the police order, 'into instances of experience of dispute' (Rancière, 1999: 36). As Todd May (2010b: 78) notes, the *we* of such collective subjects is 'neither the source of the action nor its outcome. It emerges alongside [their] ongoing activity, feeding and being fed by it'.

There is a final element in Rancière's notion of political subjectification that is particularly interesting from a geographical perspective and relevant for the analysis of the squares movement. Political subjectification, Rancière (2011a: 15) writes, 'opens specific stages of equality'. Political activity here takes a spatialized form. Politics, Rancière (1999: 88) argues, 'is performing or playing, in the theatrical sense of the word, the gap between a place where the demos [as a political subject] exists and a place where it does not'. It is a 'conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of

those present on it' (*ibid.*: 26–7). In other words, politics entails the performative, discursive and spatial, production of cases of equality within a situation of inequality (Schaap, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011) or what Peter Hallward calls 'staging equality' (Hallward, 2006). Political subjectification, thus, unfolds in and through the opening of stages of equality (Dikeç, 2012; 2013), seeking answers to questions such as '"where are we?", "who are we?", "what makes us a we", "what do we see and what can we say about it that makes us a we, having a world in common?"' (Rancière, 2009a: 116).

Yet Rancière's insistence not to reduce politics and political subjectification to sociological categories and causal mechanisms has invited criticism. Alberto Toscano (2011: 223), for example, has argued that Rancière's framework is characterized by a general 'anti-sociology' that results in the 'refusal of any social explanation and causality for politics'. However, Rancière is not denying that 'a given form of subjectification does not occur at just any time and, in any case, with the same force or the same potential for contestation' (2009b: 202; quoted in Lane, 2013: 43). Rather, as Jeremy Lane (2013) argues, what he is seeking to avoid is to translate such causality to a form of explanation that reduces the emergence of a political subject to a simple correspondence between a socio-spatial situation and forms of consciousness (2013). However, in spite of this, Rancière's framework does not say much about the internal dynamics, tensions and even conflicts that emerge within processes of political subjectification. Todd May's Rancièrean reading of contemporary democratic movements (2010a) clearly suggests that it would be wrong to suppose that such tensions and conflicts will not emerge because of the movements acting on the basis of the presupposition of equality. The squares movement is not different in this respect. Hence, the emphasis on the diverse spatial, discursive and organizational repertoires of (urban) social movements as articulated within geographical work (Featherstone, 2008; Leitner *et al.*, 2008) can contribute by informing a reading of the spatialized practices of political subjectification that took place in and through the squares. However, it is important to note from the outset that the article's focus on such practices and repertoires does not so much seek to explain them as the manifestation 'of underlying interests or identities' but rather treats them 'as the plane on which' a number of tensions over the characteristics of the political subject that was in the making in the squares developed (Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2013: 169).

In the subsequent sections of this article I mobilize this framework to read the squares movement. In doing so, I highlight the hybrid character of the spaces of political subjectification that the movement opened, while simultaneously tracing some tensions in Rancière's writings on politics. However, before doing so, in the next section I situate the squares movement within the hegemonic politics around the 'Greek crisis', the ordering of the city centre of Athens and the trajectory of radical politics in Greece.

Situating the squares movement
The squares movement unfolded in response to discussions centring on a new round of severe austerity measures as part of the revision of the loan agreement between the Greek government and the European Union–International Monetary Fund–European Central Bank institutions (referred to hereinafter as the EU–IMF–ECB institutions) first introduced in May 2010. While a comprehensive account of hegemonic politics in the 'Greek crisis'[1] lies beyond

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[1] Contrary to hegemonic discourses that narrate the 'Greek crisis' *solely* in terms of the idiosyncrasies of the politico-economic configuration in Greece, it has been repeatedly documented that the spread of the financial crisis of 2008, growing trade imbalances within the Eurozone, the architecture of the European Monetary Union and the position of the countries of the European South in it also played a pivotal role (Hadjimichalis, 2011).

the scope of this article, it is important to briefly note two of its central tenets so as to better understand the squares movement. First, governance and decision making around the Greek debt crisis was from the outset reduced to consensual negotiations between the Greek government, European political elites and the EU–IMF–ECB technocrats. On the one hand, these negotiations were invariably happening behind closed doors, which turned the information available to the public into a tightly controlled spectacle. On the other hand, the institutionalization of the memorandum and the decisive role of the ECB and the IMF served as 'lock-in mechanisms' to 'insulate economic relations from democratic control' (Brenner *et al.*, 2010: 193). As a result, while the formal envelope of democracy in Greece survived, this geo-institutional (re-)configuration consolidated a mode of governance beyond sovereign people (Swyngedouw, 2011). Secondly, within such a configuration, the successive agreements between the Greek government and the EU–IMF–ECB institutions were not an effort to tackle the idiosyncrasies of the Greek economy, but rather part of wider efforts by national, European and global politico-economic elites to mobilize the crisis to reinvent neoliberalization in the face of its own crisis (see also Brenner *et al.*, 2010)[2]. While the policies that accompanied the agreements revolved around devastating austerity measures, the deregulation of labour markets and extensive privatizations, they also entailed spending huge amounts of money to bail out Greek banks and Greek bond holders—in 2011, predominantly German and French banks (Hadjimichalis, 2011). This set of policies is an exemplary case of the hegemonic politics that were in place in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 in the global North in general and the Eurozone in particular. It is against these two intertwined tenets of these crisis politics that the squares uprising erupted in Greece.

However, the process of political subjectification that took place through the squares movement can only be understood if seen against the backdrop of the police ordering of the city centre of Athens as well as the repertoires of preceding contemporary (urban) social movements and insurgencies in Greece. Since the mid-1990s the imaginary of 'Strong Greece', emblematically culminating in the country's Eurozone membership and the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games at Athens, was setting the pace for urban polic(y)ing. The privatization of public land, the organization of mega-events and the construction of urban mega-infrastructure projects were consensually promoted as key vehicles for achieving this imaginary. Thus, the city centre of Athens, where Syntagma Square is located, became the epicentre of an extensive process of commodification of urban space. New architectural symbols were constructed to further the anchoring of banks and the commercial and retail sectors in the city's expensive neighbourhoods. Alongside these stand the headquarters of administrative, financial and judiciary authorities that were traditionally located in the city centre. Yet these niches of power and wealth are still interspersed with immigrant neighbourhoods and the historically radical Exarcheia area (Petropoulou, 2010). Over the past ten years, and especially since the outbreak of the crisis, the city centre has been marked by an ongoing battle that, on the one hand, involves gentrification processes in areas such as Metaxourgeio and, on the other hand, neo-Nazi pogroms against immigrants in areas such as Agios Panteleimon (Dalakoglou, 2012).

At the same time, Athens, and in particular the city centre, has recently been the locus of urban movements and protests—most notably the December 2008 riots. Before the December riots, urban social movements in Athens had emerged mainly in response to the

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[2] Here I use the term neoliberalization to refer to the geographically variegated, contingent and contested process of market-disciplinary restructuring (Brenner *et al.*, 2010).

mega-projects for the Olympic Games. These movements have been articulated with the wider alter-globalization movement through their participation in the World and European Social Forum protest camps and digital activism (Leontidou, 2010). They have also succeeded in forging bonds between previously unconnected movements and urban dwellers through the actions of key activists (Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012). Nevertheless, their participants were predominantly middle-class urban dwellers, university students and members of environmental groups and Left-wing parties.

The trajectory of contemporary radical politics in Greece has undeniably been marked by the December riots. On 6 December 2008, 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot dead by a policeman. The incident led to spontaneous massive riots that, within hours, had spread from Exarcheia throughout the city. Protesters mobilized digital communication tools to organize the riots and confront the police forces (Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2011). Since the downfall of the military junta in 1974, ephemeral street protest has been the central form of political mobilization in Greece (Vradis, 2011). This 'spatial contract' of protest was thoroughly challenged by the December riots (*ibid:* 216). In the days that followed the death of Alexis Grigoropoulos, a series of public buildings were occupied. The building occupations formed nodes in a decentralized network that constituted places of encounter, counter-information hubs and strongholds for clashes with the police (Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2011). They also inspired and strengthened the formation of long-term collectives, mainly through the creation of a network of more than thirty new social centres, squats and local assemblies in Athens (*ibid.*).

Undoubtedly, the roots of some of the repertoires of the squares movement can be traced to the alter-globalization movement and the December riots (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos, 2011; Vradis, 2011; Leontidou, 2012). On the one hand, the practices of horizontal, networked organization and direct democracy introduced by the alter-globalization movement and developed by urban social movements were central to the squares movement. So was the use of social media tools (Leontidou, 2012). One the other hand, the December riots constituted a prelude in the 'breaching of the spatial contract' that the squares movement launched by moving beyond 'an ephemeral presence of people in public space' (Vradis, 2011: 216). Yet, as will become evident in this article, the heterogeneity of protesters, the unprecedented mass character of the event and, most importantly, its transformative dynamics in giving birth to the formation of a new political subject cannot be adequately understood through an exclusive emphasis on these practices and repertoires.

Opening hybrid spaces: tensions of political subjectification in the squares
On 25 May 2011, tens of thousands of protesters flooded Syntagma Square, following a mobilization in solidarity with the Spanish movement of Indignados in front of the Spanish embassy. The initial call for the gathering was issued through a Facebook event page on 20 May. Three unknown young men organized the event to express indignation with the austerity measures (Indignants in Syntagma, 2011). The call succeeded in addressing large and diverse parts of the population, while simultaneously moving beyond all established political parties and existing social movements. Within days, the page had over 7,500 members. When it was withdrawn, the new group that was created on 25 May attracted 12,500 members within hours (To Vima, 2011).

The people's gathering in Syntagma was named the 'Indignants', based on the name of the Spanish movement. In the two months leading up to 30 July, when municipal police razed the infrastructure and tents of the Syntagma occupation, the squares movement evolved into a massive and heterogeneous staging of dissent. People from divergent socio-economic

strata and manifold politico-ideological backgrounds reclaimed Syntagma Square from its allocation in the police order. Whereas the number of previously 'invisible' citizens that participated in the occupation is impossible to know and varied significantly from day to day, opinion polls indicate that it could have been well above two million (Douzinas, 2013). Especially on the days of the general strike on 15, 28 and 29 June, hundreds of thousands of people protested in Syntagma Square and in the surrounding streets. They were met with heavy police violence and extensive use of tear gas. Beyond Syntagma Square, similar initiatives were organized in several neighbourhood squares in Athens, in the White Tower Square in Thessaloniki, as well as in other cities across the country (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos, 2011).

Over the first few days the gatherings were confined to practices of ritualistic moaning and cursing against corrupt politicians. The Indignants declared their commitment to remain outside political ideologies and parties. The only symbol allowed in the square was the Greek flag. This early stance led to many commentators and political organizations, including the Communist Party and many anarchist groups, dubbing the movement apolitical. However, a Popular Assembly was soon instituted in Syntagma Square that already at its first meeting articulated a clear political message:

> 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 Vote, 2011a, emphasis in original).

The protesters' disaffection with political parties and their dissent against austerity politics were common elements that united them. The Indignants shared the view that the Greek government, through its signing of the memorandum with the EU–IMF–ECB institutions and its compliance with the loan conditions 'had violated the basic "democratic contract" with the people' and had to be ousted (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013: 448). This common belief was metonymically enunciated through references to the struggles against the military junta of 1967 to 1974. One of the most commonly heard slogans in the squares was: 'Bread–Education–Liberty, the Junta did not end in '73'. A popular symbol was that of the helicopter to link the occupations in Greece with the protests of the Argentinean people against the IMF. In 2001, President Fernando de la Rua, under pressure as a result of popular uprising, was forced to vacate his presidential palace from the rooftop via helicopter. The Indignants' hope was that something similar would happen in Greece. A corresponding chant was coined: 'On a magical night, just like in Argentina, let's see who gets in the helicopter first!' This effort to link the squares movement with the Argentinean uprising points towards the Indignants' discontent with the decisive role international—and largely undemocratic—institutions played in the 'Greek crisis'.

The inscription of the name of the Indignants in the discursive horizon and the enunciation of dissent against the *wrong* of the memorandum with the EU-IMF-ECB institutions was the first step in the process of political subjectification in the squares. At the core of the movement was the people's claim to be counted as equals; to have an equal voice. This was articulated through a performative critique of existing liberal-democratic institutions and political representation. This twofold political stance was formulated in its most explicit form in the central banner of the White Tower Square occupation in Thessaloniki, which read: 'We have a voice. Real Democracy Now!'

Political subjectification unfolded in and through the opening of spaces. In Athens, while the space directly in front of the Parliament remained the key niche in the expression of indignation and anger, Syntagma Square proper was transformed into a 'network of connected microsquares' (Stavrides, 2012: 588) that hosted a series of Thematic Groups and collectives as well as the Popular Assembly. Each collective focused on a specific task: a solidarity kitchen, a first-aid centre, a multimedia group, a translation group, a group responsible for cleaning the square, a group responsible for coordinating actions in the neighbourhoods of Athens and across the country, several thematic discussion groups, and so on. In parallel, a series of arts performances and thematic discussion events were organized. In these discussions, the Indignants deliberated on themes such as possible alternatives for the country's public debt problem (including default and the writing off of 'odious debt', the role that Eurozone's architecture played in the 'Greek crisis', and the possibility of exiting the Eurozone. A new political community and a 'new world' were being constructed in and through the spaces of the squares. In this sense, the occupation of Syntagma Square and other squares across the country put a 'new world' in confrontation with the 'world' of the police (see Rancière, 2011a). Yet, as was obvious from the early days of the occupation, this process of political subjectification was filled with tensions. These tensions manifested themselves not only in the discursive and organizational repertoires of the movement but were also evident in its spatialization. The remainder of this section explores this theme in more detail.

Demos or ethnos? The two names of *the people*
As was to be expected, not all protesters shared the Popular Assembly's political imaginary. Soon a porous and fluid topographic differentiation emerged between 'upper' and 'lower' Syntagma Square (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014). In this subsection I look more closely at the discourses and repertoires of these two spaces. The 'upper square'—the spaces directly facing Parliament—was the key area for expressions of indignation and anger against MPs. The number of protesters in the 'upper square' varied significantly depending on parliamentary activity, and the most common chants heard here were 'Thieves' and 'Traitors'. In parallel, a noticeable number of protesters drew their discursive references from the Greek war of independence (1821-1827). Greek flags, flyers reciting the sayings of 1821 heroes and a few people dressed up in traditional 1821 costumes were part of the symbolic matrix of the 'upper square' (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013). This grotesque canvas was filled in further by means of dramatic gestures against the walls of the Parliament, ritualistic collective moaning and cursing of corrupt politicians, as well as by a row of gallows, prepared for the traitor MPs.

Beyond aesthetics, as Kaika and Karaliotas (2014) delineate, the discourses of some of the groups that gathered in the 'upper square' made recurring references to the signifiers of Greece and the Greeks in narrating the causes of the crisis and a way out of it. Interestingly, this applied to both right-wing groups (such as the 300Greeks and the Greek Mothers) and left-wing groups (for example, Spitha). Despite differences in their rhetorics, both portrayed the crisis as a collective threat to the Greek nation, which had been betrayed by corrupt political elites who were cooperating with foreign occupiers (300Greeks, 2011; Karampelias, 2011). Simultaneously, demands for 'jobs for Greeks' (Greek Mothers, 2011: n.p.n.) and for the ousting of the 'occupation government' (Karampelias, 2011: n.p.n.) were proposed as remedies for the nation's troubles. While it is true that not all participants in the 'upper square' shared a common ideological agenda, what is important is that participants in the 'upper square' were identifying the *we* of their collective with the Greeks: they were constructing a subject that could be identified through a specific given quality.

The discourses and repertoires of the 'lower square' stood in direct contrast to this logic. Participants here were closer to the traditions of left-wing, anti-authoritarian and anarchist politics. As a result, their most common references came from previous emancipatory struggles in Greece: from the communist-led movement of the National Liberation Front (EAM) during the second world war occupation, through the resistance to the military junta, to the December riots. The occupation of Syntagma Square was perceived as one more moment and node in this historical sequence (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013).

Certainly, anger with and indignation against the austerity measures and the political elites were equally present in the 'lower square'. Yet, as the Popular Assembly votes repeatedly declared, protesters here sought to move beyond the existing capitalist police order in Greece and beyond (Popular Assembly, 2011b; 2011c). A day after the approval of the revision of the memorandum by Parliament, for example, Syntagma's Popular Assembly insisted:

> that the fight initiated in the squares, and having lasted for over a month, continues (…) The organization and dissemination of a long-term general strike together with the struggle in the squares and the neighbourhoods will be the beginning of the end of today's world of exploitation and alienation. For a society of solidarity and justice. Direct Democracy Now! (Popular Assembly Vote, 2011c).

The key signifiers in the discourse of the 'lower square' were equality, justice and dignity (*ibid.*, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c). Protesters were not only articulating a radical critique of the existing liberal-democratic institutions but were also attempting to enact direct democracy through their collective actions. In performatively tracing the *we* of their political community, protesters in the 'lower square" were beginning from the presupposition of equality of each and everyone.

This tension between a nationalist and an equalibertarian logic (see Balibar and Ingram, 2014) within the squares brings to the forefront Laclau's critique of Rancière's conceptualization of politics, namely, that 'there is no a priori guarantee that the "people" as a historical actor will be constituted around a progressive identity (from the point of view of the Left)' (Laclau, 2005: 247). According to Laclau, Rancière 'identifies the possibility of politics too much ... with the possibility of an emancipatory politics, without taking into account other alternatives' (*ibid*: 246). In order to better understand processes of political subjectification, he argues, 'we need a further step that Rancière has not taken so far: namely, an examination of the forms of representation to which uncountability can give rise' (*ibid*: 247).

The porous coexistence of two conflicting political imaginaries in the squares seems to attest to this point. Although part of the staging of dissent, the spaces of the 'upper' and 'lower' square were articulated around two different logics of political subjectification: one centring on Greece and the Greeks and the other on equaliberty. Given the heterogeneity and diverse ideologico-political backgrounds of the protesters, this is hardly surprising. In his response to Laclau, Rancière clarifies that a staging of dissent is democratic in as much as it 'enacts [...] the mere contingency' of the presupposition of equality (Rancière, 2011a: 4). He then draws a distinction between the *demos* and the *ethnos* as the two names of *the people* (*ibid.*: 5). Whereas the *ethnos* stands for the identification of the people with 'the living body of those who have the same origin, are born on the same soil or worship the same god', the *demos* stands for 'the count of the uncounted' that moves beyond any given quality (*ibid.*). 'The life of the demos', Rancière suggests, 'is the ongoing process of its differentiation from

the ethnos' (*ibid.*). The political spaces the squares movement opened up then emerge as hybrid spaces of political subjectification, in the sense that they became the stage for the constant tension and continuous differentiation between the two conflicting names of *the people*.

Organizing the spaces of the squares movement: horizontality and verticality
A cornerstone of the squares movement was the pre-figurative experimentation with novel organizational practices. The overarching logic that informed the movement's organizational repertoires was the presupposition of equality of each and every participant and the firm belief in the collective deliberation of *the people* as the mode for organizing democratic politics. Indeed, on the basis of this logic the movement operated mainly through horizontal and non-hierarchical collaboration (Douzinas, 2013). Yet, while the squares' mode of organization has often been portrayed as purely spontaneous and horizontal, a closer look unearths a more complex landscape.

To begin with, the Popular Assemblies in Athens and elsewhere were themselves the stages of a mercurial coexistence of two discordant orientations: a logic centred on horizontal and loosely coordinated organization that was averse to institutions and political parties; and one articulated around central coordination, political representation and collective discipline (Popular Assembly Minutes, 2011a; 2011b; Kioupkiolis, 2014). This conflict was made apparent when the Thematic Group on Politics was split in two after the approval of the revision of the memorandum by Parliament (Thematic Group on Politics, 2011). For most members of the group, and for the majority of protesters, the horizon of the movement was to resist the imposed austerity measures and to effect institutional changes. However, for a significant minority the squares were about instituting 'direct democracy without representatives and political parties' (*ibid.*: n.p.n.). This latter group moved on to formulate the Thematic Group on Direct Democracy and continued to discuss how to pursue politics in an unmediated, non-representational and horizontal manner (Thematic Group on Direct Democracy, 2011).

Moreover, as Prentoulis and Thomassen (2013: 181) argue, 'autonomy and horizontality' in the squares were 'not natural or immediate; they [were] instituted'. First of all, ensuring the autonomous and equal co-existence of the participants in the Popular Assembly required the institution of certain rules and procedures. For example, participants' turns to speak were decided by drawing lots, and speakers were only given a minute and a half to address the assembly. In parallel, the activity of the Thematic Groups was also guided by detailed rules concerning decision-making processes within the groups, the role of the coordinators of the groups, the election and the role of groups' representatives in the Popular Assembly, mutual respect amongst the participants, and so on (see, for example, Thematic Group on Direct Democracy, 2011). Furthermore, while the various micro-communities within the 'lower square' maintained a level of autonomy and were directly networked at various levels, they all had to comply with the votes and decisions of the Popular Assembly (Stavrides, 2012). These and other procedures and rules sought to maintain a space of equality and mutual respect among participants. By doing so, they aimed to guarantee the autonomous and horizontal participation of each and everyone in the activities and deliberations of the movement.

The relationships between Syntagma Square, the local assemblies in Athens' neighbourhoods and the Popular Assemblies in other cities across the country provide a further interesting example. As early as 28 May Syntagma's Popular Assembly declared its intention to spread the movement to other neighbourhoods in Athens (Popular Assembly Vote, 2011a). Besides, similar initiatives that were spontaneously created in other cities

sought to coordinate their actions with Syntagma (for example White Tower Popular Assembly, 2011a). In this, the local Popular Assemblies were to be the source of decisions while also connecting with one another in a horizontal, networked manner. Yet the networking of the movement was such that vertical relations among the various squares were far from absent. Syntagma's occupation was undoubtedly the central node in this network. From the early days of Syntagma Square's occupation, the Popular Assembly had called every social movement and all workers on strike to join them (Popular Assembly Vote, 2011a). Such calls culminated in general strikes on 15, 28 and 29 June. Syntagma's Popular Assembly call for two days of general strikes on 28 and 29 June, for example, read '48 hours on the street—all of Greece in Syntagma'. The efforts of protesters from other cities to be present at major events in Syntagma Square (White Tower Popular Assembly, 2011a) can be interpreted along similar lines. These were not the only markers of the centrality of Syntagma Square in the movement. The discursive and organizational repertoires of local assemblies in Athens and other squares across the country were also following the patterns developed in Syntagma Square. Activists in Thessaloniki, for example, repeatedly sought to 'formulate texts following the lines of the ones in Athens' (White Tower Popular Assembly, 2011b: n.p.n.). Furthermore, information flows and proposed votes were almost exclusively circulating from Syntagma Square to the other assemblies. Finally, the centrality of Syntagma Square also had a symbolic dimension. Syntagma Square stood as the signifier of the whole movement. It was an emblematic summing up, in a single word and site, of the practices and discourses of the squares. There is no denying that the movement experimented with horizontal networking practices. However, the point is that Syntagma Square held an ambiguous position within the movement. It was one of the links in a horizontal network but also stood 'in a hierarchical relationship vis-à-vis the others because of [its] temporal and organisational priority' (Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2013: 175).

This reading suggests that there was an institutionalized co-constitutive relationship between horizontality and verticality in the squares movement. In terms of Rancière's writings on politics and political subjectification, what this relationship also suggests is that the spaces of equality that were opened up in the squares were ordered by certain institutionalized norms of behaviour. This highlights a tension in Rancière's distinction between the police and politics: the squares movement was not completely horizontal; equality within it was limited by certain vertical relations. As Prentoulis and Thomassen (2013: 181) argue, 'there [was] a mutual implication between horizontality and verticality because the very realisation of equality [was] only possible through some representational space, and such a space unavoidably involve[d] some inequality and hierarchy'. The squares disrupted the logic of the police through the re-configuration of the sensible and the enactment of the presupposition of equality by the part that has no part; but within this new community a new way of counting—a new set of norms and rules—was instituted. To put this in Rancière's terms, equality in the squares was realized through a police order. However, this does not suggest that we cannot differentiate between the two, as '[t]here is a worse and a better police' (Rancière, 1999: 30–31). This is the second sense in which this article suggests that the squares should be understood as hybrid spaces of political subjectification: what happened was 'neither simply politics nor simply of the police order; instead there [was] a mutual contamination between the two' (Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2013: 181).

This co-constitutive relationship raises the question: how were these hybrid spaces of political subjectification held together? What is crucial here—but not addressed in Rancière's writings is how participants deal with the potential conflicts that might arise between free singular subjects within hybrid spaces of political subjectification. As Kioupkiolis

(2014: 154) suggests, the coexistence of the heterogeneous collective of the squares movement would have been impossible without 'an "agonistic respect"' of different outlooks' amongst the participants. He goes on to argue that this ethos 'can serve a "disjunctive synthesis" of rival logics, strategies, ideas and dispositions which combines them in parts while sustaining their tension, fuelling thereby their mutual critique, revision and cross-fertilization' (*ibid.*).

In place of an epilogue: beyond the evental staging of equality
In the face of repeated violent police oppression and the approval of the memorandum's revision by Parliament, the number of protesters in Syntagma Square began to dwindle after the climax of the general strikes on 28 and 29 June. Efforts to re-ignite the occupation, after its cleansing by riot police on 30 July, never managed to mobilize the same numbers or reinvigorate the atmosphere of the May and June gatherings. Four years after the occupations it is necessary to move beyond accounts that either glorify their organizational and spatial repertoires as *the* model for twenty-first-century political praxis or condemn them as apolitical and populist bubbles with insignificant or even deleterious results. This brings to the forefront the question of the legacies of the squares movement.

Arguably, the squares movement disrupted the police order and attempted to reclaim the signifier of democracy from its articulation in hegemonic discourses (Douzinas, 2013; Athanasiou, 2014) by staging the equal voice of the part that has no part and inscribing the name of the Indignants in the discursive horizon. Also, in conjunction with the massive and militant general strikes organized in its aftermath, on 19 and 20 October 2011 and 12 February 2012, it played a pivotal role in thoroughly de-legitimizing the pre-existing relations of political representation in the country. Already in June 2011 Prime Minister George Papandreou was forced to reshuffle his cabinet before resigning in favour of a technocratic coalition government under former President of the Bank of Greece and Vice President of ECB Lucas Papademos in November 2011. The double elections that followed in May and June 2012 also signalled a major decline in the electoral influence of the two major political parties that supported the memorandum. The losses were bigger for PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) that had introduced the memorandum and implemented the accompanying devastating policies. Conservative New Democracy (ND), despite losses in votes, managed to win the elections and formulated a coalition government together with PASOK and DEMAR (Democratic Left). ND's coalition government not only continued to implement the memorandum but was also more authoritarian in its exercise of power. This resulted in the further de-legitimization of these parties. ND's government only lasted for two years and a half in power.

Since January 2015 a new coalition government led by SYRIZA (Coalition of Radical Left) and supported by the nationalist right-wing anti-memorandum ANEL (Independent Greeks) has come to power, retaining office following the elections of September 2015. Since 2012, SYRIZA had experienced a strong increase in electoral support—from 4.13% in 2009 to 26.89% in 2012, enabling it to become the second party in the country. And although political parties were not welcome in the squares, members of SYRIZA were active participants in the squares in a personal capacity, forging links with other activists. But more relevant is that SYRIZA's discourse has since 2011 largely been articulated around the signifiers of equality, justice and dignity as these were posited in the squares. By the same token, ANEL, created in the aftermath of the squares movement, gained 33 seats in Parliament after the 2012 elections. In an interesting twist, the co-operation between SYRIZA and ANEL reflects the uneasy coexistence of equalibertarian and nationalist imaginaries in the squares. In parallel, the thorough de-legitimization of successive memorandums that the

squares brought about was pivotal in the 'no' vote for the July 2015 referendum concerning Greece's bail-out proposed by the EU–IMF–ECB institutions. It is therefore no exaggeration to argue that the eventual staging of equality in the squares significantly contributed to a wider reconfiguration of the political coordinates of party and institutionalized politics in Greece. However, in a context of deregulated financial capitalism and 'neoliberalized global and transnational rule regimes' (Brenner *et al.*, 2010: 339) that operate at a distance from the people, this is not synonymous with effecting fundamental changes in the policies implemented. In fact, SYRIZA's capitulation to the demands of the EU-IMF-ECB institutions during last summer's negotiations points towards the limitations of a politics that remains confined within established institutions and national strategies.

Yet, reducing discussion around the legacies of the squares to the degree to which they effected institutional change does not do justice to a movement that had at its core a critique of actually existing liberal-democratic institutions. The legacies of the squares need also – and more importantly – to be traced in the emancipatory practices and imaginaries that were pre-figured in them. Protesters in Syntagma Square and elsewhere were not only staging dissent but were actively discovering new ways of saying, being and doing in common. It is exactly such socio-spatial practices and experimentations that are proliferating in the aftermath of the squares movement. Greek cities have over the past four years witnessed the development of a plethora of local and neighbourhood assemblies, social medical centres, solidarity support networks for immigrants and the homeless, as well as occupied workplaces and co-operatives of all sorts (Hadjimichalis, 2013). These initiatives not only draw their inspiration from and experiment with the 'incipient ideas expressed [and performed] in the event' (Swyngedouw, 2014: 134) but are also filling their ranks with a new generation of activists that was formed through the squares events. Thus, they are forming nodes in 'the slow but unstoppable production of new forms of spatialisation quilted around materialising the claims of equality, freedom and solidarity' (*ibid.*: 133) initiated by the eventual staging of equality in the squares. Interestingly, similar, albeit geographically differentiated, experiments have emerged in the aftermath of most of the recent urban uprisings across the globe.

Undoubtedly, many of these experiments will fail in the face of various challenges and limitations. While the creation of communities of commoning through social centres, squats and neighbourhood assemblies is an important first step towards the 'ongoing efforts to create forms of being in common different from the ones offered from the state, the [post-]democratic consensus and so on' (Rancière, 2011b: 80), these also carry the risk of defining the community as a closed self-reproducing world, which might lead to forms of enclosure (Stavrides, 2012). This, in turn, might result in some of the initiatives that emerged in the aftermath of the squares to become confined to the limits of 'parochialist politics' (Harvey, 1996: 324) by remaining localized and issue-based. Syriza's recent electoral wins pose a further interesting question with regards to these experiments: their relationships with the state, when the latter is not, at least from the outset, against them. The challenge for radical urban theory and praxis is to engage with such experiments that 're-figure the common of a 'given world' [...] [and] configure a different world-in-common' (Rancière, 2010: 92).

While the political situation in Greece is still rapidly evolving and the answers to such challenges cannot be traced in terms of theoretical analysis alone; the preceding analysis of the squares movement can, perhaps, offer some tentative insights. On the one hand, the socio-spatial experiments that are coproduced in the aftermath of the squares need to remain radically open to 'newcomers' and move beyond a fixed understanding of the subject who participates in them to 'allow new objects to appear as common concerns and new voices to appear and be heard' (Rancière, 2010: 60). Such an attitude might, in turn, benefit from the

ethos of agonistic respect among equals that was forged in the squares. On the other hand, the issue of the relationships between these experiments and the state and the forming of a coalition government between a radical left-wing party and a nationalist right-wing one point towards a recurring need for differentiating the *demos* from the *ethnos* and the always-present tension between politics and the police. Negotiating such relations and dealing with these tensions is, of course, no straightforward task. However, tracing possible paths from an emancipatory perspective undoubtedly requires a fidelity to the presupposition of equality (Hallward, 2006) and 'the egalibertarian practices already pre-figured' (Swyngedouw, 2011: 378) in events such as the squares uprising and the historical and geographical sequence of emancipatory politics they perpetuate.

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