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**The Struggle for Modern Athens:  
Unconventional Citizens and the Shaping of a New Political Reality**


by


**Othon Alexandrakis**

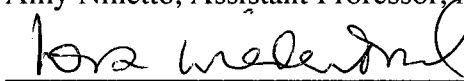
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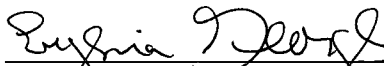
**Doctor of Philosophy**

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# ABSTRACT

The Struggle for Modern Athens:

Unconventional Citizens and the Shaping of a New Political Reality

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Othon Alexandrakis

The dissertation is based on over one-and-a-half years of ethnographic field research conducted in Athens, Greece, among various diverse populations practicing unconventional modes of citizenship, that is, citizenship imagined and practiced in contradiction to traditional, prescribed, or sanctioned civil identities. I focus specifically on newcomer undocumented migrant populations from Africa, the broadly segregated and disenfranchised Roma (Gypsy) community, and the rapidly growing anti-establishment youth population. The work maps the shifting narrative, physical, and ideological topographies these communities occupy separately, and during times when they coalesce. I posit that, both in their everyday struggles and at times when their actions spill into public spheres, be it for economic, social, political, or other reasons, these communities influence how the broader population perceives and practices modern citizenship.

To outline the wider socio-political and economic context of this work, an ethnographic account of each of these communities is provided separately, exploring both their contemporary circumstances and the historical trajectories and conditions that brought them about. This is followed by a closer examination of two cases in which



these communities come together. The first case concerns the cooperation of members of the undocumented African migrant and Roma communities in the transportation and selling of various illegal and gray-market goods. The second case concerns the spontaneous coalescence of anti-establishment youth, undocumented migrants, and the Roma during the December 2008 civil unrest in Athens. Through these ethnographic accounts and case studies I develop the conceptual and theoretical framework that supports the central arguments of this work.

In conclusion I demonstrate that citizens are turning away from state-sanctioned discourses descriptive/prescriptive of a nation-centered citizenship and, crucially, are beginning to reconsider modern civic identity and democratic engagement in relation to the influence unconventional citizens are having on the various public and private spaces where these are negotiated and enacted.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would never have been written without the support, patience and encouragement of my wife, Jordana Alexandrakis. She accompanied me to Athens in 2006. Together we worked hard to make our little health NGO a success, and she helped me to navigate the various intellectual puzzles and complexities of conducting fieldwork. Along the way we experienced some of the happiest and most frightening times of our lives. Although Jordana appears only sparingly in the following (her own request), the reader should know that she was often with me on-site, and always behind me. Jordana: you made this adventure possible and I dedicate this work to you.

Financial support for my time at Rice and my research in Athens was provided, in part, by a generous Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Fellowship. I am grateful to SSHRC for all their support.

I am indebted to a number of people at the Department of Anthropology, Rice University. Among them I would like to single out Amy Ninetto and Nia Georges. Both Amy and Nia provided invaluable critical feedback on article manuscripts and numerous dissertation drafts. Also, I wish to thank Stephen Tyler for teaching one of the most inspiring classes of my academic career, and Carole Speranza who put up with me in her good way.

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Most of all, however, I am indebted and deeply grateful to Jim Faubion. Jim gave me freedom to think about anything I found interesting, and provided guidance when I got lost along the way. He knew exactly what I needed, and he knew exactly when to push me. One of the reasons I came to Rice was to be close to the author of *Modern Greek Lessons*, a text that changed the way I looked at Athens. I am leaving Rice with a mentor (as you put it, Jim, in that time-honored and most encompassing sense of the term), and with the hope that some day I will be able to do for another student what Jim has done for me.

Also, I offer my humble thanks to the many people who helped me along the way in Greece, especially my family. I am particularly grateful to George, Mary and the entire Englezos family. Also, Aliko and Eleni Alexandrakis were our foundation and a source of inspiration for me. Both sides of the family helped Jordana and me through the most difficult times we faced in Athens, and reminded us every weekend that family is where the heart lives. I cannot thank you all enough for your kindness, hospitality, and boundless support. I also wish to mention Othon Alexandrakis (Sr.), and Aristidi and

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As ever, I wish to thank my parents, Roula and Costas Alexandrakis, for their support and fierce encouragement. A special thanks to Roula for her careful editing of the Greek in the text that follows. Finally, my sister Catrina Alexandrakis lived the trials and tribulations of the grad student life along with me, albeit in Calgary, Canada, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in the Geosciences. Her deep intelligence and intuition helped me to work through various professional and theoretical issues along the way.

Last, but certainly not least, I also extend heartfelt thanks to my consultants in the field. The people I worked most closely with were patient and kind; I owe them an enormous debt. Also, warmest thanks to my Romani and undocumented migrant consultants, whose names I cannot reveal. Among the many things I learned while working with and alongside these gentle people was that endurance can come from hope, and that strength of spirit can turn sorrow to wisdom. While some of these consultants remain in Athens, I know that many found new pathways that have taken them, variously, away. I wish everyone luck, health, happiness, and to those still searching, *bon voyage*, *καλό δρόμο*.

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## Chapter 1

### *Point of Departure: A View of Athens*



*Figure 1: Athens from Lycabettus Hill.*

The view from the highest point in Athens, Lycabettus Hill, the ancient “hill of light”, reveals several otherwise hidden qualities of the city. Athens is relatively small, but it blends seamlessly into the neighboring suburbs making it seem much larger. The urban totality resembles a nearly solid mass of white/gray limestone and concrete stretching from the feet of the surrounding mountains to the ocean, utterly filling the Attica plain. Dotted the expanse are a few large archaeological sites, the Acropolis being the most famous, and two or three large parks. High above the city the din of street life becomes a distant murmur accompanied by the chirp of birds, cicadas and the clinking of glasses from a nearby café (see figure 1). Lycabettus Hill has become a

favorite spot of the younger staffers of nearby embassies, although some tourists and locals come too. Foreigners are usually struck by the incredible view, but locals are generally more attentive to what they consider to be the “cleaner air” at the top of the hill, perhaps more an indication of how hot and smoggy the city can get than of the cleanliness of the breeze up above it. At night, the view from Lycabettus Hill transforms. Buildings and parks fade into darkness while the illuminated Acropolis seems to float on a rocky pedestal and the lights of cars, storefronts and homes reveal the labyrinthine quality of Athens’s streets. The juxtaposition between the city’s archaeology and modern pathways is captivating.

Walking along the streets of Athens can be difficult. In nearly every place I went, apartment buildings stood tall and close together, streets and sidewalks were almost universally broken and cracked, garbage bins were pushed haphazardly against curbs and often overflowed with refuse, people bustled about pushing other pedestrians and speaking loudly into mobile phones, cars and motorcycles drove quickly and parked on sidewalks, black soot covered buildings, and the homeless begged for money. However, I also saw a wide variety of architecture, I experienced hundreds of families descending on inner-city squares and cafés for evening tea and coffee, I was welcomed warmly into neighborhood bakeries, breathed in wonderful aromas emanating from kitchen windows in the evenings, I walked beneath thousands of fruit trees that lined the streets offering everything from figs to lemons, and heard what seemed at the time to be every language spoken around the world. Both descriptions of Athens are accurate and, to varying degrees, describe every suburb of the city.

Of course, each part of Athens also has unique qualities. The city is comprised of small urban villages<sup>1</sup> defined by administrative/political but also narrative, social, and economic borders. For example, Psyrri (Ψυρρή) was once an up-and-coming arts quarter in Athens which has now deteriorated into an entertainment district packed with bars and clubs, and Mets (Μετς) is an area comprised of old homes that were constructed using stone from nearby archaeological ruins. Each of these locations has its own street life, unique history known by local residents, and individual feel. Overall, one experiences Athens as a “fragmented conurbation”; there is certainly very little sense of “traditional cohesion” (see Faubion 1993:39). Getting to know each neighborhood, each urban village in the Attica plain, would take a significant amount of time. Consider that the Attica region is divided into four prefectures including Athens, Piraeus, East Attica and West Attica. The prefecture of Athens consists of 45 municipalities and 3 communities, including the capital of the country the municipality of “Athens”. Each of these municipalities and communities has its own elected mayor. The municipality of Athens consists of 55 small neighborhoods (including Psyrri and Mets) and seven districts, again, with their own elected representatives. According to the Greek Interior Ministry, the municipality of Athens has a land area of 39 km<sup>2</sup> while the urban network that makes up the greater Athens prefecture measures 361 km<sup>2</sup>. The totality of the Attica plain is 3,808 km<sup>2</sup>.

I carried out my field research in a handful of the urban villages concentrated around the Athenian core and within Athens itself, and along a number of routes that

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<sup>1</sup> It has been said that these urban villages somehow approximate the social quality of Greece’s rural life. While this may have been true when some of these areas were originally established (particularly on the city’s borders, where people sought to produce a kind of quaint, yet aristocratic rural lifestyle), the affective quality, let alone the social and cultural significance of urban villages in Athens today is much more complex and varied, as the following chapters will argue.



crisscrossed through and out of the Attica plain. One of my key sites was Halandri, a suburb near the core, famous for being the birthplace of Euripides and, in more recent history, for being the rich cottage country of the Athenian elite. Today, the place remains a well-to-do area containing a thin, but celebrated stretch of green space surrounding a small creek that runs near its exclusive shopping and residential areas. I also spent a lot of time in Kifissia and Vrilissia, both of which were once considered separate from Athens, but because of better road access and the new Metro subway system are rapidly expanding as upper-middle class commuter neighborhoods. Closer to the core of Athens I also conducted research in Kypseli, a neighborhood with a complex and changing demographic, and in Athens itself near Omonia Square, Victoria Square, and in and around the Monastiraki area.

\*

My dissertation is based on over one-and-a-half years of ethnographic field research conducted among various, diverse populations practicing unconventional modes of citizenship. I use the term unconventional citizenship to denote any group that aspires to some form of civic or collective life, but that for whatever reason is denied access to, or in turn rejects, current civic identities. Unconventional citizens are therefore not necessarily insurgent citizens as Holston (2008; 2009) formulates, although these are included too. Instead, I also consider non-insurgent, generally acquiescent, but rejected/marginalized populations and “inside groups” like current, participating, but disaffected or “dangerous” citizens, to use Panourgia’s term (2009), as unconventional citizens. This broad definition allows me to examine the multiple interconnections between seemingly disparate communities and the multiple complex direct and indirect

ways they come to influence and change broader underlying understandings and practice of being in/of the state. I focus specifically on newcomer undocumented migrant populations, the broadly segregated and disenfranchised Roma<sup>2</sup> community, and the anarchist and rapidly growing anti-establishment youth population. My work maps the shifting narrative, physical, and ideological topographies these communities occupy separately, and during times when they coalesce. I posit that, both in their everyday struggles and at times when their actions spill into public spheres, be it for economic, social, political, or other reasons, these communities influence how the broader population perceives and practices modern citizenship.

In this work I provide an ethnographic account of each of these communities, exploring their contemporary circumstances and in some cases the historical trajectories and conditions that brought them about. Chapter two follows the story of a young undocumented migrant from Mauritania named Jigo as he lands on the island of Mytilene, travels to Athens and transitions from a condition of traveling to one of permanence. Throughout I explore the socio-cultural processes, strategies, and the broader implications of his survival. I also explore more general migrant experiences, understandings, and engagement with the *polis* and its borders. In chapter three I undertake an examination of modern socio-political change in Athens alongside a study of the rise of an anti-establishment youth and its relationship with the contemporary anarchist movement. The fourth chapter in this work focuses on the Roma community of Halandri. I follow the story of my consultant, Vasilos (see Alexandrakis 2003), while exploring the broader cultural/national identity politics this community negotiates, their enactments of citizenship, and the spaces of resistance they create within urban settings.

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<sup>2</sup> Otherwise known as Gypsies (Τσιγγάνοι).

Throughout these three chapters and into the concluding chapter, I explore various points of connection between and among these populations and the dominant society. In chapters two and three I show how undocumented migrants have come to influence contemporary Greek political identities, effectively opening the possibility for unconventional citizens to have an effect on popular perceptions and practices of modern citizenship. In chapters four and five I detail one of the more subtle and one of the more public interactions between various groups of undocumented migrants, both of which are having a broader affect on dominant civic identities. I focus specifically on the cooperation between the Roma and the undocumented migrant community in transporting and selling various illegal or gray-market goods, and on the spontaneous coalescence of anti-establishment youth, undocumented migrants, and the Roma during the December 2008 civil unrest in Athens<sup>3</sup>.

I conclude the dissertation by arguing that increasingly critical citizens are turning away from state-sanctioned discourses descriptive/prescriptive of a nation-centered citizenship and, crucially, are beginning to reconsider popular understandings of modern civic identity and democratic engagement relative to the multiple influences unconventional citizens are having on public and private spaces. The dissertation ends with a discussion of some of the broader theoretical implications of this work and its relevance to the study of sociopolitical change in Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> Other points of contact which I refer to, but do not explore at length include the anarchist support for migrant rights, partnerships between Roma and their various non-Roma contacts (including at open-air markets), etc. These points of contact, or the social, economic, and political implications of these various points of contact, also influence the experiences, narratives, and perspectives that inform political identity negotiation among the dominant society.

## *Methodology*

Prior to this work I conducted field research in Athens in 2003 for my MA. At the time I lived in Halandri and spent my days mainly with the local Roma population, but also at various hospitals and private clinics across the city. Since 2003 I returned to Athens several times, maintained my contacts and conducted informal field research within the various spaces and with the various people I found interesting. I returned to Athens for my dissertation research in 2006. When I arrived initially the city was nearly deserted. Most local people were still on vacation and vacationing foreigners were concentrated in the tourist areas or were still lingering on Greek islands. The outlying suburbs, like Halandri where I planned to make my home for the year, were quiet. However, in the following months the city and its suburbs livened up and I began to explore the surrounding areas and to conduct participant observation among several populations I was interested in. For this project random sampling was not a viable strategy. Instead I conducted opportunistic sampling relying on social networks. Sample inbreeding was avoided by seeking multiple diverse entry points from different social strata reflecting important dimensions of each research population. Eventually I met a number of key contacts<sup>4</sup>, established research relationships with them, and conducted hours upon hours of unstructured interviews.

Of note, I also spent quite a bit of time completely lost in Athens (my love of shortcuts through the urban landscape often led me in unexpected directions), and in this way got to know the city and many of its surrounding areas. Being lost eventually became another field method for me. On some of my forays into the city I would take the

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<sup>4</sup> These contacts included government employees, important organizers and spokespeople associated with the various communities I engaged with, and others whose specialized knowledge I was interested in.

Metro to unfamiliar stops or I would connect to the light rail or bus system and randomly disembark, walk, photograph, and explore new places in and around Athens. Near the end of my fieldwork this method evolved further. I was interested in regaining this sense of “being in a new place” in the areas with which I was familiar. To this end I began to perform a theater exercise<sup>5</sup> according to which I would select a location that I had studied extensively and I would stand in it silently, without my watch or mobile phone, for hours. For me, this exercise succeeded in rendering the familiar strange again<sup>6</sup>, it helped me to recreate the “anthropological place”, and eventually became an invaluable tool that I would use to regain perspective as my fieldwork progressed and I became increasingly comfortable.

While in the field I also co-founded and operated a small NGO<sup>7</sup>, *Minority Equality Research in Action* (MERIA) (see Alexandrakis 2008). The other members of MERIA included my co-director and fiancé at the time, Jordana McMurray, and a number of partners including several doctors based in and around Halandri, a teacher who worked in Halandri, and numerous volunteers. The purpose of the organization was threefold: first we endeavored to provide partner-backed community health education to the Roma community of Halandri; we provided policy recommendations to the Ministry of the Interior; and last, we consulted with local medical clinics interested in developing outreach programs<sup>8</sup>. Personally, MERIA allowed me to give something back to the

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<sup>5</sup> I learned this from my aunt, Aliko Alexandrakis, who is an actress and teacher in Athens. The exercise is based on Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

<sup>6</sup> The idea here was to recapture a sense of “astonishment” as described by Shweder, that is, returning to a pure sense of being in the world (1991).

<sup>7</sup> I co-founded the not-for-profit organization *Minority Equality Research In Action* (MERIA) in Canada, but we operated exclusively in Greece.

<sup>8</sup> We worked mostly with private clinics in developing outreach programs.

Roma community that had helped (and tolerated) me since my MA<sup>9</sup>. I felt that my involvement with this community could no longer be one of an observer, or even participant-observer. When Vasilo and a number of other community members asked me to find a nurse that could answer their medical questions, I obliged and MERIA was the outcome. For my dissertation research the NGO also provided invaluable access to particular political circles, exposed me to the various laws and expectations governing NGOs in Greece, and eventually became a para-ethnographic site (see Holmes & Marcus 2005a; 2005b) which is still productive today. Of course, the NGO also raised a number of problems, which I address thoroughly in a recent publication (Alexandrakis 2008, see Appendix 1). I will, however, recount here one instance where my role as an ethnographer was complicated by my responsibilities as the director of MERIA.

In the final months of my field research the Roma community we were working with requested that we help them arrange for a medical team to visit the compound to conduct general check-ups and to administer vaccinations including a tuberculosis vaccine. MERIA had several medical professionals on staff, but they could not conduct the check-ups or administer medicine due to complications associated with licensing foreign doctors and nurses. This was not a problem, however, as one of our goals was to create lasting relationships between the Roma and local health service providers. Some research led us to two nearby public clinics. Unfortunately, speaking with the administrators in charge of these sites revealed that an outreach-style program<sup>10</sup> would be problematic. Both administrators argued that it was not within their means to conduct

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<sup>9</sup> Some anthropologists I have trained with suggest it is not really clear when fieldwork actually begins and ends. In retrospect, my experiment with MERIA was perhaps an unwitting extension of my MA field research. As the following will show, the NGO proved useful to the present work, but presented some practical and other issues along the way.

<sup>10</sup> The concept of outreach was problematic for us on several other accessions as well (see appendix 1).

off-site care, and in both cases they did not understand the value of this methodology explaining, “έχουν αυτοκίνητα, τους βλέπω στη λαϊκή. Αν θέλουν εμβόλια, ας έρθουν εδώ” (“they have cars, I see them at the farmer’s market. If they want vaccinations, they can come here”). I explained what outreach was and detailed the multiple ways it could benefit the urban poor. I even offered to raise the necessary money for transportation and supplies through the NGO, but the administrators still refused. In both cases the reasoning behind their refusal emerged after some conversation: if the Roma wanted to be part of the community, if they wanted to be “like us” (σαν εμάς), then they would have to act like every other member of the community and access medical help at the clinic. The particular phrase the administrators used, “like us”, commonly indexes perceived ethnic difference between Greeks and non-Greeks. I had encountered the powerful connection between healthcare and national identity during my MA research, so this was not an unexpected turn. Healthcare providers working in the public system in Greece unofficially regulate access to medical services at the various points of initial contact between staff and potential patients. When taking medical histories, during visual inspections, and by checking medical records, medical staff including doctors and nurses open or restrict access to care according to whether or not the potential patient appears to be a proper citizen: a category of belonging and entitlement informed primarily perceived ancestry, appearance, and linguistic competence. When MERIA staff presented these clinic administrators with research supporting the value of outreach for vulnerable populations, they still refused explaining that this kind of care was not within their means, not part of their mandate and, in the end, that conducting outreach would not be “right” (σωστό). Neither hospital administrator would change or modify the established model

of access to healthcare, and by extension the Greek patient identity<sup>11</sup>, in order to better serve the Roma, a population they deemed to be “unlike them” and their community.

I later approached a contact at the Ministry of Health to see if we could get support from a higher level. He too refused. Not willing to give up, I undertook to convince this individual and several others I had spoken with including some members of another health NGO, that outreach was beneficial and, indeed, that the Roma were worthy of this kind of care. I had become a full-time advocate. This did not concern me in and of itself; in fact, it can be argued that some of the best ethnography has been written by advocate anthropologists (see for example Farmer 1992; Fortun 2001; Scheper-Hughes 1993). Instead, my concern was that advocacy was taking up all my time and was even coming to inform which field sites I was visiting and the questions I would pursue in each. My involvement with the vaccination outreach issue got to the point where I was canceling meetings with non-health-related contacts, as it were, and losing touch with groups I had worked very hard to get to know. In the end I decided to put the vaccination program on hold. Unfortunately, I left the country before I had a chance to pursue the matter further. The following month a tuberculosis outbreak caused over half the population of the compound to fall ill<sup>12</sup>. Two children subsequently died.

I was unable to maintain a hybrid advocate/anthropologist identity in the field. Had the subject of my research matched more closely with the mission of MERIA and had all my field sites related to the issue at the heart of my advocate activities (equality and access to healthcare), even if indirectly, I would have been able to keep this

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<sup>11</sup> The standard Greek patient identity is complex, certainly variable, and informed by particular formal and informal nationalist discourses. The typical patient/doctor interaction involves an overt show of deference by the patient toward the doctor underscored by the willing payment of a bribe for their service.

<sup>12</sup> The outbreak was covered by Skai News on September 28, 2007.



positioning. However, as it was, the threads, chains, paths, and conjunctions of locations<sup>13</sup> my study demanded I follow, and the concept-work I engaged in, were not always related to or aided by MERIA. I maintain that the NGO was worthwhile and productive as a field method, even now that I have returned from the field. Moreover, the Roma community we worked with remains, without exception, grateful for our involvement. At the time, however, I had to realize that my identity as an advocate had to be second to my identity as an ethnographer; albeit one with responsibilities to his longtime consultants.

### ***Wading In ...***

On a warm Tuesday evening in November, about three months after I arrived in Greece, I came home from a long day in Athens to find my front door locks shattered on the ground. When the police arrived and the locksmith released the jammed bolt holding the door in place I walked in to find everything ransacked, my laptop, camera, and voice recorder missing, and a large sum of money gone. Panic gripped me as I stood in the overturned room, the police dusting for fingerprints and my landlady quietly pacing the hall. The only things left were my notebooks, some clothes, my passport, and a profound sense of insecurity and fear.

In the week that followed I slowly overcame the paranoid need to check my door twelve times a day, the anxiety that welled up inside me every time the elevator stopped on my floor, and the need to hide even my most worthless possessions. I eventually started to wonder who the thieves were, how many of them were involved, where they

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<sup>13</sup> I do mean to evoke Clifford and Marcus's seminal text *Writing Culture* (1986), although I do not wish to imply that multi-sited ethnography somehow conflicts with an advocate anthropology.

learned to break through security locks, and what had happen to my possessions. This was an important moment in my fieldwork. Following the break-in I found myself trolling the seedier parts of Athens ducking into pawn shops, alleys, basements, and talking with shady characters looking for information about the thieves that broke into my home or any hint of my stolen items which I imagined had now become part of the criminal underworld. Through it all, I was aided by the Roma who directed me to places I never imagined existed, several of my Greek neighbors who drove me around and helped me explore locations public transportation did not reach and where taxis wouldn't travel, and the undocumented migrant community which let me into their homes and networks, helped me find hidden places, and protected me throughout.

Eventually, I replaced some of my missing items and abandoned my search. However, the contacts I gained and the worlds to which I found access stayed with me and informed my larger questions. The following pages will help the reader understand both the secret and the open places in and around Athens and it will explore the narratives of some of the most reclusive, guarded, and influential people in city. This work endeavors to render a little strange a city that has become all too familiar to researchers and in doing so, challenge the way we think about Athens and the social, cultural, and political changes that shape it today.

## Chapter 2

### *The Invisible*

On November 12<sup>th</sup> 2003, a boat laden with fifty-three Africans prepared to depart from Senegal for a four-day voyage to the south of Italy. On board was twenty-one year old Jigo, a police officer from Mauritania desperate to escape the poverty and racism he suffered at home. A month earlier he had quit his job, paid nearly three months salary for passage, and was looking forward to what he thought, based on the stories he heard from friends and family, was going to be a promising new life in Europe. Once loaded with its human cargo the boat slipped away from the port of Dakar, unimpeded.

On their second day at sea the captain informed the passengers that the ship was entering heavy weather typical of the Mediterranean ocean that time of year. Everyone was to stay below. Jigo waited hopefully but the days passed with difficulty; the small hold was becoming inundated with the stink of human waste, sweat and other filth. Most passengers began to run out of food, were having trouble sleeping, and began to miss their homes and families; others were becoming restless. Jigo remained quiet hoping the close quarters would not rouse baser human instincts among the passengers: the tales of rape and murder on these ocean crossings were well known to him and, no doubt, to the others crossing with him.

With the passing of time concern began to grow. General consensus among the passengers was that the trip was taking much too long. Making matters worse, the captain had ceased communicating with the cramped mass as too had the small crew of four burley sailors. Speculation circulated within the hold that the boat had been sighted and was forced to detour; others wondered whether the ship was lost. Finally, after

almost a week at sea one of the crew came down to announce that they would arrive that night and instructed everyone to prepare. A mixture of jubilation and angst gripped the passengers.

Well after sundown, at nearly ten o'clock, the passengers were instructed to move to the deck. In the distance Jigo saw a small cluster of lights faintly illuminating a grey landmass, the borders of which blended seamlessly into the surrounding darkness. As the boat moved closer, he removed his identification papers and some money from the duffle bag he was carrying and placed them in the pocket of his coat. Lack of sleep and hunger helped the cool ocean air penetrate his body; shivering, he waited. As per the instructions they received in Senegal, a small boat was to meet them in the ocean to ferry them to land where another contact would lead the group to safe lodging for the night. Excitement grew on deck, although the captain and his crewmembers looked stern and drawn – all five of them remained in the control room, staring fixedly ahead.

Without warning, at about eleven, the boat came to a stop some distance from land, well away from the lights and well away from the shore. All eyes turned to the distant beach for any sign of a boat, but it was too dark to see. What happened next signaled to Jigo the end of his dream and the beginning of a new chapter of his life. One of the crew appeared on deck holding a handgun and instructed everyone that the contact was not coming and the crew couldn't risk getting closer. Jigo realized what was happening: he would have to swim to shore in the icy water, without his belongings and, perhaps worse, would have to fend for himself on the other side. After some delay, fierce shouting and crying, the captain agreed to take them closer to the island, but eventually everyone, including some younger children, was forced overboard.

Jigo does not recall how long he swam, but when he reached the beach he lay numb and shivering on the sand frozen and unsure if he would survive the night. He had little money, no passport, and no idea where he was, but he wasn't going to wait for the authorities to find him. He was an undocumented migrant: he had to run. Forcing his frozen limbs into motion, Jigo began to move.

That night was a blur. He and an older man from the boat – a tailor's apprentice from Senegal – lumbered to the main road and walked until they spotted a small shed in a field nearby. They forced their way in and slept huddled together on bags of what seemed to be cement. At daybreak they moved on, following the road at some distance to avoid being seen until they came to the town they observed from the boat. For the first time Jigo and his companion spoke at length. On the outskirts of the city they discussed their shock, fear, helplessness, and longing for the people and places they left behind. They walked closer to town wondering what they would do, how they would find food, and where they would sleep. No longer dreaming and hoping for a great tomorrow, these two men were wholly concerned with basic, immediate, human needs: food, shelter. However, a greater shock awaited them still.

Sitting at the port, Jigo and his companion ate a loaf of bread they had purchased from a bakery. Once again silence sat heavily between them until, finally overwhelmed, Jigo began to weep. The suspicion he fought since arriving was confirmed when the baker did not understand his rudimentary Italian. The captain had cheated them all. Jigo was trapped on the island of Mytilene, Greece.

Jigo's story and the similar narratives of thousands of other undocumented migrants are forming what can be considered a new Greek oral tradition. These narratives circulate among migrants informally by word of mouth within their communities, usually in private. They cannot be described as hero's tales but rather as stories of people pursuing what they perceive to be an ordinary trajectory: migrating to Europe to find work, but also to fulfill particular gender and class expectations specific to their places of origin (see Goldschmidt 2006; Mai 2007; Sørensen 2000)<sup>14</sup>. Greece is typically described in these stories either as an unexpected arrival point or as a transit hub or gateway to the rest of Europe. I met very few migrants that chose to come to Greece specifically; and those who did travel to the country on purpose did so usually to join stranded loved-ones<sup>15</sup>. Despite the fact that thousands of undocumented migrants come to Greece every year, very few wish to be there. From my interviews it became clear that Greece is not regarded as a European state by these travelers, but rather as a kind of liminal place on the border<sup>16</sup> of a *true* Europe: one that fulfills the narrative expectations of that place held in Africa, and particularly in the ex-colonies of Western and Sub-Saharan Africa from where the majority of African migrants to Greece originate. For these undocumented migrants, location of true Europe is an imagined, utopian understanding of Western modernity. Of course, it must be noted that African narratives

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<sup>14</sup>While the scholarship exploring migrant lives in Europe is growing (see for example Fikes 2009; Wikan 2002), research exploring this phenomenon, pre-travel, from Africa is lacking. The referenced materials focus mainly on Moroccan immigration to Spain. Of note, the anthropological literature concerning globalization and migration (Ong 1999; Ong 2003; Tsing 2005) offers some insight, but ethnographic works exploring the specific human, economic, and narrative links between Africa and Europe are necessary.

<sup>15</sup> I conducted interviews with about 150 undocumented migrants. Besides with my core group of seven long-term contacts, most of these interviews were one-time conversations had with individuals at chance encounters.

<sup>16</sup> On the concept of borders see Baud & Schnedel (1997), Schendel (2005), Wendl & Rösler (1999), and Schmidt-Nowara (1999).

concerning Europe certainly vary according to multiple factors as do the specifics of what a “Western modernity” might entail; however, Africa’s colonial past plays an underlying structuring role in all these narratives (see for example Jerad 2007:61). Thus, the “modern European land of promise” is typically formulated as contrary to a perceived “wronged and troubled Africa” – indeed, many of my consultants indicated a sense of entitlement to a successful life in Europe, even if that life was illegal or temporary. Now, whether a “Europe” in the image of “African narrative Europe” truly exists aside (see Ossman & Terrio 2006), Greece does not meet the narrative expectations of this imagined place. The country’s deficiencies are known even in Africa where, according to my consultants, Greece is identified as a place hostile to undocumented migrants, denying them opportunities and tolerances that other places like Italy, Spain, and France are believed to provide<sup>17</sup>. Add the fact that Greece is well-known internationally to be a transit hub where legitimate and better qualified migrants can stay while they secure legal documents for passage to Canada, the United States, England, and other Western nations, and the country’s claim to being part of the Western or European bloc is further deteriorated. It is interesting that the combination of expectations inspired by colonization-structured narrative in Africa and the reality of oppression in Greece, places the country outside of Europe for the majority of illegal newcomers; an imagined geopolitical positioning Greeks have notoriously endeavored to overcome (Faubion 1993) but which current state policy and social practice seem to be defeating. For this large global migratory population, Greece is anything but European despite the image it tries to portray. Among undocumented migrants, what ‘Greece’ means is encoded in recurring

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<sup>17</sup> This sense of distance from Europe is further compounded by the fact that Greek authorities have made it quite difficult to obtain permissions and other official documentation to stay in the country, in contradiction with EU policy; albeit this likely affects more established immigrants rather than newcomers.

themes that shape newcomer narratives: a moment of plummeting realization that life away from home would be vastly different from what was expected; entrapment; a desire to escape; and a longing for safety unobtainable at the current location.

In exploring this undocumented migrant oral tradition more closely it is useful to consider the connection between the individual and Greece more closely, in other words, to consider the conceptual role 'place' serves in these narrative accounts. Beyond literal significance, 'place' can be taken to provide reference, that is, to describe the motion of the individual: conceptually, the collection of 'places' makes space and time (Bal 1997; Mikkonen 2007). Thus the relationship between individual and place is both *fleeting/transitional and collectively constitutive of an experience of movement*. Place is also central to understanding causality in these travel narratives. In descriptions of place after place and the events that occurred in each, narrators link particular experiences with particular sites which, combined with the lack of agency in these stories, makes movement tantamount to fate. In other words, according to undocumented migrant narratives, the experience of travelling which in itself is part of a kind of predefined trajectory (modern manifest destiny?) subjects the traveler to a series of untoward, uncontrollable experiences culminating in their arrival.

However, something very interesting occurs to undocumented migrant narratives once these people have lived in Athens for some time: although their arrival stories do not change, reference to place is substituted with descriptions of tasks and practices in stories of everyday life thereafter. Perhaps not unexpectedly, these stories are often difficult to follow as they assume a great deal of knowledge about local social networks and economies. Moreover, they seem to lack a sense of concreteness, which can easily



be confused as a lack of commitment to truth and accuracy by the western listener (Potter 1996) requiring a great deal of attention and suspension of certain engrained narrative conventions. As the expected endpoint (ideal Europe) of the journey from Africa is ostensibly never reached, that is, the journey seems suspended in a liminal place, motion is redefined in narrative in such a way that fate is replaced by agency. Here we have an indication that the relationship between the undocumented migrant and Greece is problematic since the narrative link between the two which was expected to be one of transition subject to the same conditions and momentum that governed previous relationships along the journey becomes one of unexpected and undesirable permanence. Thus Greece is a place outside of narrative and outside of an imagined topography defined by historical, economic, and power relations within which the migrant may endeavor (between Africa and Europe). In light of this problematic relationship, the omission of place in narrative can be taken as a kind of therapeutic poetics where the speaker, unable to reconcile the errant, negative experiences suffered in terms of a fateful transition, invents a new strategy in response to the reality on the ground to help both manage present difficult experiences and to create the potential for a return to the expected travel/arrival narrative by appropriating an element of control and power<sup>18</sup>. With this new strategy, motion erases place as a source of stability and consequently agency replaces fate. Without place, motion, in turn, is defined relative to placeless practice and time. Causality is repositioned squarely within the realm of the speaker's perceived scope of influence. All this, of course, is an exercise in redefining experiential frames which can be taken as central to a process of reflexive subjectivity (redefining

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<sup>18</sup> This is accomplished by the individual, but not wholly separate from the group, as will be explored in further detail below.

one's subject position<sup>19</sup>) or shaping emergent subjectivity in response to particular societal and, arguably, basic human conditions (Kleinman & Fitz-Henry 2007)<sup>20</sup>. Let us consider this phenomenon further.

Numerous autobiographical works by African migrants to Europe describe a common experience of disengaging or somehow circumnavigating the toxic contexts in which they found themselves immersed upon arriving at their European destinations (see for example Aidoo 1977; Bâ 1986; Bugul 1991). These travelers, separated from their homes, struggled with a common desire to reconcile their histories and dreams and to position their lives safely and comfortably within the reality they came to inhabit. The narratives of my undocumented migrant consultants in Athens (African and otherwise) approximate this experience of coping with a difficult location, except they would deny having arrived at the endpoint of their journey. This is an important distinction. While the autobiographical works detail strategies employed by the authors to make life more comfortable/bearable, my consultants were instead trying to make life easier so as to create a capacity for further travel (or escape, as many put it). As one migrant told me,

I knew it would be difficult once I realized what had happened, but I expected to find passage from here eventually. The problems I have now are worse than I had in Senegal. The things I have to do to survive, the way I live, I don't want to talk about. I don't know myself anymore, but I'm fighting. Life will become easier once I move on.

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<sup>19</sup> Veena Das's exploration of subjectivity in relation to violence and witnessing was instructive in exploring this phenomenon (2000). Where this work differs from hers is in her use of the "violence" category which I wish to escape, or at least reorient to reflect a more complex reality (the need to do so is also hinted by Das 2000:222).

<sup>20</sup> Although Kleinman and Fitz-Henry do not discuss this phenomenon directly, they do however explore a conceptual framework of an understanding of human subjectivity in response to change and experience.

Driven by experiences of racism, frustrated by the inability to communicate<sup>21</sup>, and troubled by a deep sense of alienation and disillusionment, the African migrants I spoke with sought solace and control by any means necessary. To achieve this they employed a myriad practices and what can be described as adaptive cognitive schemata, including the narrative phenomenon described above. The migrants I met were not victims of errant emergence or contextual consequence, they must be thought of as creative individuals capable of exercising a degree of agency. Desperation and penury can be crushing but can also spur hope and ingenuity. While some migrants suffer from hunger and violence, are incapacitated by illness, or self-destruct by becoming addicted to alcohol, drugs, gambling, or any other means of slow suicide<sup>22</sup>, the rest involve themselves in flourishing social networks and powerful, albeit informal and sometimes illegal, economies.

Here it is useful to examine the synergy between individual agents and the undocumented migrant community, or the subjective agent and the collective (Biehl et al. 2007:17). The collective can be thought of as a matrix of intersubjective relationships between individuals who have been socialized through communication and violence to reciprocally recognize one another as a community. Jigo and his fellow undocumented migrants share a number of key personal historical elements in terms of social space, habitus, experiences of violence and narrative (Bourdieu 1977; 1998; Foucault 1977). On the streets, these commonalities facilitate similar subjective production of knowledge, communication between individuals, and ultimately, understanding within the group. This mutual understanding leads to consensus, which in turn engenders a collective rationality rooted in communication-based practical reason. This is the foundation of a

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<sup>21</sup> Very few undocumented migrants arrive in Greece knowing the language. However, even those who pick it up are often ignored, silenced, and otherwise unable to communicate with local people.

<sup>22</sup> This too might be seen to represent a form of escape or “moving on”.

kind of informal grass-roots self-governance approximating what Habermas would describe as democratic collectivity based on communicative reason (on communicative reason see Habermas 1995:155-157; on deliberative democracy see Igwe 2004:190-274)<sup>23</sup>. I am not implying here that the undocumented migrant population of Greece constitutes a political entity in the traditional sense; rather, the collective resembles a social network with a common protection strategy and closely related economic activity. Yet, it does operate on principles of consensus and shared ethics. Membership is dependent simply on one's background, situation, and willingness to engage socially with other members of the collective. Of course, the impetus to join is very strong, considering the dire situation most undocumented migrants find themselves in upon arriving in Greece. There is an obvious comparison to be made here with gangs, particularly American gangs (Phillips 1999; Vigil 2002; Vigil 2007) or Italian mafia (Fentress 2000; Jamieson 2000; Schneider & Schneider 2003). I would argue, however, that the collectivity cannot be characterized as a "gang-style" group for many reasons, key among which is what can be described as a social and cultural detachment from the city and its residents, impermanent and expectedly temporary membership to the group, and an unwillingness to confront authority.

Members of this community, like Jigo who eventually made his way to Athens, live in small often interconnected groups within a restricted scope of social action/participation and cityscape. These small groups are typically formed according to pre-arrival nationalities and sometimes by chance as newcomers meet and help each other.

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<sup>23</sup> I realize that Habermas was referring to political systems, states, and citizens. Again, my argument is that the functioning of the undocumented migrant community *approximates* Habermas's deliberative democracy, hence my interpretive indulgences.

It is common for members of these groups to come and go according to work opportunities, police pressures, and other factors such as internal violence or dispute. Membership is most capricious within newcomer groups. However, as individuals find work and make contacts within the larger Athens undocumented migrant community, they typically leave the newcomers for good (often friends will break away together) to join more established groups. By 'established' I mean immigrants who have been living in Athens for several months, are able to support themselves financially and have developed a broader social support network. Rarely do undocumented migrants live alone, and in few cases newcomers are recruited directly into illegal occupations. Of course, this is all informal and variable, but, according to my experience can be taken as standard practice.

As mentioned above, communication is central to membership and the maintenance of the internal social dynamic of this community. Besides frequent, more traditional face-to-face communication, the ready availability and relative affordability of mobile phones, and their text messaging functionality, has brought this community closer together by enabling rapid and broadcast communication and serving as an open forum for large numbers of individuals, while on a functional level serving as a safety and productivity tool<sup>24</sup>. Individuals are able to disseminate information about available work, dangerous areas, community happenings, and request help or information at any given moment. Thus, the collective stays well (inter)connected and easily adapts to changing

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<sup>24</sup> Although it should be noted that prior to the availability of mobile phones migrants communicated by word of mouth in more independent units. I would argue, however, that a larger unified community still existed.

circumstances and opportunities pursuant to common interests<sup>25</sup>. Of course, another advantage of the mobile phone is the privacy it affords its users from the public: mobile phones enable the secrecy of the collective. Consequently, to an outsider, the movements and activities of members of this community can seem sudden, impulsive, nonsensical and sometimes erratic or illogical. Let us consider two examples, the first to do with one of the most public undocumented migrant occupations, and the second to do with housing.

It is typical to see African street vendors hawking goods one moment then packing up and running down back alleys the next, only to set up a few blocks away or to return to the same street again to resume selling. In some cases clusters of vendors can be seen loitering on street corners with their wares slung over their shoulders in plastic bags or tatty suit cases. Most striking are the circumstances when the street is devoid of street vendors one moment then host to ten or twenty vendors the next, their displays erected in mere seconds. These movements are to avoid municipal police patrols that ticket and arrest unlicensed vendors and are accomplished by having a lookout or group of lookouts patrol the surrounding area in communication with each other by mobile phone. These latter individuals are the most difficult to identify but comprise a vital part of the work group and get a cut of the daily profits. The lookouts have excellent knowledge of city streets and, perhaps more importantly, the typical movements of the municipal police (easily identifiable by their decorated black leather jackets). Moreover, they constantly vary their avoidance strategies and hiding places. On some days that I spent with them the vendors were instructed to cluster in a given alley, other days they were instructed to scatter and regroup at a pre-designated safe space before redeploying.

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<sup>25</sup> It would be interesting to consider this phenomenon from the perspective of Certeau's study of everyday object reappropriation and mass culture individualization and production (1984).

The day's movements, experiences, and avoidance strategies are often shared between lookouts that are friends, who work the same or overlapping areas, or who meet en rout to pick up goods or to sell. In cases where an area becomes too dangerous, mobile phones are used to disseminate a warning message. I found this phenomenon incredible, not only in terms of coordination, but also because of the degree of local knowledge required to be successful. This population possesses urban navigational skills that I – a person who has spent many years in Greece and who speaks the language fluently and can read street signs, directions, and maps with ease – could only dream of. Undocumented migrants like Jigo even know official and unofficial Greek place-names within the city which they use interchangeably with their own.

It should be noted that despite all this it is common for vendors to be arrested and ticketed, although the loss of a few workers and the confiscation of their inventory is typically accounted for by the group which purchases or borrows goods to sell according to these risks. With the exception of Jigo who by all accounts had been very lucky up to that point, every vendor I spoke with had been detained by the police at one time or another. Most spent time in jail, some were released after only a few hours, still others were beaten while in custody<sup>26</sup> and spent several weeks recovering with friends before returning to work. Instances of violence against migrants in custody are not usually reported by the media despite public interest.

One can see how the individual's relationship with the city would be shaped by these groups and, ultimately, the collective. If one's sole opportunity to work, one's safety (from the police, trouble-making Greeks, thieves, etc.), and movement through the city were informed by these networks, one's impression of Athens and understood

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<sup>26</sup> For more on police attitudes toward migrants see Antonopoulos (2006a).

relationship to it (in terms of a productive dialectic) would, to some extent, be shaped by the larger collective: an informal, adaptive, growing, action-oriented group of undocumented migrants. Modern communication technology also affects the housing choices and even the spatial organization members of the collective employ within their houses. When Jigo first arrived in Greece he spent the night in a small shack with one friend. After meeting and asking the help of some other undocumented migrants who were working on Mytilene he traveled to Athens by ferry with three other newcomers and headed directly for Omonia Square, the center of Athens (Faubion 1993:38)<sup>27</sup>. He had no further direction, but found a place to hide once he arrived. A few streets beyond Omonia Square are a number of dilapidated buildings. The bones of their beautiful neoclassical architecture are exposed in places where layers of paint have peeled away and pieces of stone have crumbled. The decorative iron railings that adorn their balconies and stairways stand bent in places, rusting and neglected. For one interested in the city's architectural past, these gorgeous homes stand like ghosts: their bold wooden doors barred shut and broken windows boarded tight. To passers by, the only signs of life associated with these places are the thick bushes that have overtaken the gardens and, for the intrepid few that venture closer, the odor of human occupation seeping out between window boards. Jigo lived in one of these homes for several months upon first arriving in Athens. He and his friends were told a large bluish building had recently been vacated, so they scouted it out and decided to move in (the weather was becoming very cold). They discovered an entrance in the back of the home: someone had pried open the door to the cellar and widened a hole in the floor where a toilet was once supported on

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<sup>27</sup> As Faubion notes, there is more than one "center" of Athens, depending on one's perspective and convictions. Omonia, however, is definitely the center for undocumented migrants.



the first floor, but which had fallen through. Jigo and his friends slept upstairs at night, three flights above the bustling street in a home that would have once belonged to the rich, famous, and powerful of the city but which was at the time certainly mired in various inheritance claims and by sale, building and renovation restrictions. In the home they found cooking utensils and other useful detritus from past lodgers. As time went by they added to this collection a few blankets to sleep on, some clothes, and a discarded woodstove. Eventually they made friends with some Nigerians involved in the selling of cheap Chinese imports and they moved away. At the time of the writing of this chapter the home was occupied by a different group consisting of three Nigerians (including one woman), one man from Senegal and a few others (including one Afghani man). Out of necessity, the group shared the home although they did not travel together and were not particularly friendly. The Nigerians lived upstairs and the others lived on the first floor<sup>28</sup>.

When I asked Jigo where he was staying at the time of my fieldwork the answer came in reference to subsistence strategy like “with my work partners, here and there” or “in a spot we found away from the police, but close to our supplier”. He explained that they paid €410/month, that their landlord was a Chinese man, and that their bills were difficult to afford so they resorted to stealing much of their water from the outside taps<sup>29</sup> of nearby buildings. When pressed he identified a specific area of the city and the street

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<sup>28</sup> Although it may be tempting to draw parallels between undocumented migrant strategies for finding and appropriating urban spaces in Athens and those of the homeless of other major urban centers, especially in North America (Desjarlais 1997; Glasser 1994; Wagner 1993), I would argue that the similarities are limited. The history, global flows and local socio-politics that inform the Greek context are unique, undocumented migrants in Greece view and treat their homes (of all description) as temporary utilitarian “stations”, and that the socio-cultural networks these places host are markedly dissimilar. A more productive examination might compare the Athenian phenomenon to studies attentive to the subjective experience and patterning of urban spaces (see for example Le Marcis 2004).

<sup>29</sup> These taps are found mostly in older buildings. Their purpose was for watering gardens and washing stoops and sidewalks. It is difficult to imagine these activities occurring in today’s densely populated urban core, and especially in the areas where immigrants live such as Kypseli where greenery is nearly nonexistent and cars are parked on sidewalks to allow passage on the roads.

name and number, but hesitated when asked what the neighborhood was like or if he liked the building. Whether the home and the area were comfortable or aesthetically pleasing was not important to him, or, as I would discover, to others within the community. These homes are not secret places; in fact I visited many undocumented migrants in their homes to conduct interviews. Some of these homes were located in rented apartments (from Greeks or established legal immigrants), and others were visible to the public (in abandoned buildings, makeshift housing in alleys, etc.). Most of the homes I visited were known to the larger community as friendly sites and community members often move among them. Jigo and his friends were very content to move from home to home and even to move around within the space of the home (trade sleeping areas, shift piles of expanding stock, etc.<sup>30</sup>). Permanence was not an issue for this group, as it seems not to be for the larger community; instead, safety and access to wages (which could also mean minimizing rent) seemed to be the primary criteria for choosing a home. The seemingly universal moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive similarities among undocumented migrants evident in this common disregard for the look/feel and use of space stems from their subjective experiences of/global flows contributing to the dispositions that create consensus among the collectivity. When asked about their homes in Africa or their ideal homes in the future, both aesthetics and space were described as not only important, but vital to their happiness – notably, more so among Muslim immigrants. As I came to understand it, this temporary disregard, or willing suspension of subjective aesthetic bias, is part of the cost of living in a liminal place and of relying on, or investing in, the collective to provide protection and an eventual escape.

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<sup>30</sup> This arrangement of homes will reappear in chapter 4 in the exploration of Romani houses. In fact, the broad concept of moving from home to home within friendly areas is another concept that will reoccur in that chapter and which the reader should note.

The coalescence of the individual and the collective is evident in the above examples. The larger group serves to buffer the individual against his or her toxic environment: on a physical level by helping newcomers meet basic human needs; a social level through informal support networks; and on an existential level by reconciling reality with the dreams, plans, and expectations migrants feel are at risk in Greece and by providing answers to moral questions. At the heart of the collective are a knowledge structure and a guiding sense of reason that are common to each individual and which unite the group and maintain a particular safe and productive relationship with the outside world. It is important to underscore the role suffering plays within this social group. As the experience of near total hardship is common to every individual within the collective, the response to it, that is the strategic actions taken by its members and the perspectives they adopt as a result, interweaves the individual evermore completely with the larger suffering social group (Kleinman 2000:238-239). Suffering drives the individual to the collective, informs the functioning of the collective itself, and contributes to keeping its members together. This can be seen as an agglomerating factor operating in addition to the force of attraction of Habermasian collectivity based on communicative reason. The two forces are complementary and mutually enabling. Of course, it would be folly to assume that Jigo and his friends are not agentive, even as suffering pushes them together and communicative reason facilitates their intersubjective bonds. Granted, Jigo was a victim of error and had to rebalance under difficult circumstances, with limited resources, and despite a restricted possibility for creativity (this theme is explored most notably by Masco 2006; Petryna 2002). However, while struggling in Athens, Jigo nonetheless retained his faculty for reflexive subjectivity and was certainly able to consider his

situation and the relationships he was making critically. Ultimately Jigo chose to become part of the collective and to participate in the communicative practices that define it: he inserted himself in the social life of the collective and its economic networks; he chose to engage with Athens and the people living in it according to the demands and rational of the group; and he guides others as they arrive to the country in the same way he was guided. Moreover, like many others, Jigo may also choose to move beyond the collective by assembling the necessary elements of social mobility. In doing so the *bricoleur* might achieve a private revolution. While communicative reason will always attract him to the collective and will enable him to remain a member; stability will lessen the push of suffering thereby opening the possibility for a new chapter in the undocumented migrant's life.

Once Jigo gains a degree of stability, in the traditional sense of the word (Ossman 2007a:1-2), he may opt to disengage from the collective to resume his Europe-bound journey or to pursue new trajectories as others have done before him. Here we glimpse the complex relationship between the undocumented migrant and mainstream Greek society as buffered through the collective. Let us revisit the concept of 'motion': before arriving to Greece, motion for undocumented migrants was tantamount to the fulfillment of a desired trajectory from a homeland to a dream nation; however, upon arriving at this hostile, liminal place (Greece), motion became redefined in the cradle of the collective in such a way that place was erased and (group enabled) agency became a determining force. However, motion may change once again, as I will argue, when the undocumented migrant achieves a degree of security and stability and is able to contemplate a choice: does the individual wish to remain engaged with the collective and pursue placeless

motion, resume pre-Greek motion, or define a new kind of motion altogether? Those individuals that leave Greece to pursue their dreams end their direct influence in Athens; although they do support the systems of passage that see them out, provide a narrative element for their fellows still in the country (in the sense of “my friend that made it to Europe...”, bolstering the African narrative and local escapist narratives), and partake in the EU-wide migrant reality that ultimately affects broader policies that influence Greek policy-making (in often unpredictable ways). It should be noted that those individuals that do travel to Europe do so usually following a route similar to the one they took to arrive to Greece: through some underground passage. These routes are often dangerous and very expensive. Women in particular are at risk with hundreds, if not thousands, ending up in forced prostitution rings (Lazaridis 2001)<sup>31</sup>. All secret travelers often suffer from harsh travel conditions, hunger, and sometimes the dangers of abandonment *en route*. Smugglers often gather groups of ten to twenty individuals, transport them to some border region in the north, and then guide them over often on foot to meet transporters who see them to the next contact point or to their final destination (by boat, truck, or car). This path is very difficult, but the lure of a fruitful future often proves too tempting.

Alternatively, however, the undocumented migrant may choose to stay in Greece. In doing so, they will join thousands of other undocumented migrants who now make a life in the city pursuing various occupations, some of which are connected to the

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<sup>31</sup> Current or official figures are not available, and estimations are based on word of mouth and incomplete police figures. Based on interviews with local Africans and with NGO workers interested in the issue, I am confident that the number of African women forced into prostitution by networks of human smugglers operating in Greece is safely in the thousands. This problem has become large enough to attract the attention of many aid organizations including one which sought to bring attention to the situation by holding a Miss. Africa beauty pageant in Athens coupled with a conference on prostitution, human trafficking, and AIDS (Tzilivakis 2006b). I believe the irony and contradiction here were intentional.

collective of newcomers and some which are not. As unofficial permanent residents of Athens, these undocumented migrants will slide into an emerging category of “permanent illegal local” – an individual whose perspective on place and particular modes of interaction with it signal to locals the manifestation of a different kind of citizen.

After many conversations it became plain to me that Jigo will most likely remain in Athens once he gains a degree of security. His trip from Africa was so traumatic that risking a similar path again seemed, at least when I met him, unthinkable. Moreover, Jigo was starting to accept that Greece is part of Europe, or rather, that the Europe he imagined – a tolerant place rife with opportunities owed, or at least available to, hard-working enterprising individuals with his past – doesn’t exist. This occurred over time as his contacts grew in Athens and he began to hear stories of Africans that did manage to travel to other places like Italy and France only to find life as difficult as it was in Greece. The realization sent Jigo into several months of depression during which time he missed his family terribly and considered surrendering to the police – a desperate attempt to go home that would, inevitably, have led to his incarceration and eventual release back onto the streets of Athens worse for the experience. Instead, he made use of the numerous phone centers in Athens operated mostly by immigrants to make inexpensive long-distance phone calls to his brother and mother who encouraged him to stay and make what he could of the situation. Eventually, and with the help of his local friends, Jigo overcame his depression. It was around this time when Jigo began to consider staying in Athens, and also the time when he began to break from the collective.

With help from the *Migrant's Place* Jigo was improving his Greek. The *Migrant's Place* was established in 1997 by the NGO, *Network of Social Support for Refugees and Migrants*, as a place where migrants and refugees could interact with Greeks, gain support, and find information. It has since grown into an influential center where many different minority groups (of every ilk) meet. Since its inception, the *Migrant's Place* has offered Greek language lessons as part of their “Πίσω Θραυιά” (Back Benches) program. Through the *Migrant's Place* and elsewhere Jigo had also met a few migrants that successfully transitioned into a comfortable life in Greece selling produce at urban open-air markets (the *laiki*, *λαϊκή*) which he saw as a potential future – certainly better than hawking counterfeit designer purses on the street. However, in early 2007 Athens and most other local governments in the Attica region changed the regulations governing the issuing of vendor's permits such that only citizens and permanent residents of Greece could obtain them. Hundreds of foreign nationals were suddenly out of work, or forced to work illegally, sparking large protests. Jigo, still interested in becoming a market vendor, asked me to research applying for permanent resident status. I contacted the Canadian Embassy<sup>32</sup> for direction and then proceeded to the Foreigner's Bureau at their suggestion.

The phone number I received from the Canadian Embassy connected me to a man with a rough voice who answered with an abrupt “yes” after the phone rang eight or ten times. After confirming I had the right office and receiving some verbal abuse for speaking too slowly, the man informed me that the office was located far from the reach of public transit and had limited hours – it was probably not worth my time to travel there.

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<sup>32</sup> I am a Canadian citizen and have had contact with the embassy in Greece on other occasions, including earlier that year when my apartment in Halandri was burglarized.

Undaunted, however, I insisted and he gave me directions which involved taking the Metro to Omonia Square and then a taxi. I decided, however, that I would walk from the Metro station thinking it would only take me twenty minutes or so, judging by the map. I had not visited Omonia Square for years; in fact, on previous visits to Greece I had avoided Omonia because of its reputation for being an unpleasant area frequented by unsavory, strange, and even dangerous characters (see Faubion 1993:39). I did not know what to expect. Once I arrived at Omonia station I exited the underground and entered the crowd on street-level. I was surprised to see hundreds of people of various backgrounds: African, Asian, Roma, Indian, etc. Perhaps most striking was the diversity of clothing styles people wore ranging from dashikis and hijabs to suits and yarmulkas, and the multitude of languages, most of which I couldn't identify. Many of the people moving past me were on their way through the square towards other parts of the city; others seemed to have traveled there to loiter. I was instantly attracted to this place, the most alive, diverse Greek space I had ever witnessed.

As people continued to push around me I gazed up at the mix of neoclassical and more modern architecture letting my mind drift to Omonia's early history. During the reign of King Othon, this was intended to be the center of Athens<sup>33</sup>; and indeed it felt that way standing in the crowd. The Square is situated at the confluence of Leoforos Pireos (Pireos Avenue is named for the large commercial port and accessed via Panagi Tsaldari Street), Leoforos Athinas (Athena Avenue), Leoforos Stadiou (Stadium Avenue), Leoforos Eleftheriou Venizelou (Eleftheriou Venizelou Avenue named for the famous Greek Prime Minister), Leoforos Tritis Septembriou (September Third Avenue, to

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<sup>33</sup> Von Klenze and Stamatis Kleanthis were principally responsible for planning the shape of contemporary Athens, and particularly for envisioning Omonia Square (Faubion 1993:38-39, 66-69).



commemorate the 1843 revolution which led to the birth of the Greek constitution), and Leoforos Agiou Konstantinou (Saint Constantine Avenue). These are all major arteries – symbolizing an assemblage of important national narratives – that spill thousands of cars into and out of the Square day and night. Add to this the hordes of pedestrians brought in by the large Metro station which links several major public transportation routes and Omonia seems to fulfill the vision of a city center set out for it so long ago. More than a meeting place of roads, symbols, and routes, Omonia felt to me like a place that draws people to it. Standing there I thought that if Jigo was not instructed to go there from Mytilene that he would certainly have made his way to Omonia anyway. I eventually made my way from the Metro station to a nearby sidewalk and began to think, in a moment of bohemian idealism, it was wonderful that the city's morphology established long ago achieves true cosmopolitanism today, one of Classical Hellenism's central preoccupations<sup>34</sup>.

Yet, as I stood and watched the foot traffic from a corner, trying to get my bearings, another aspect of the square began to show itself. There were shadowy figures huddled in semi-secluded places, poor women were begging aggressively, a group of drunk men were cavorting on the stoop of a nearby building, a disheveled girl was convulsing in tears on the pavement some distance from me over the loss of her boyfriend, a mentally unwell elderly man was disappearing into an alley offering his body to the highest bidder wearing nothing but what appeared to be a loin cloth, and a small group of men smoking a cigarette laced with hashish were looking me up and down with what I interpreted to be mal-intentions. The tone of Omonia changed for me in an

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<sup>34</sup> Cosmopolitanism in its traditional sense is arguably not an aspiration of contemporary Greek society (Faubion 1993:75-76).

instant: for the first time, I felt unsafe in Greece. I also understood why many people do not consider this place the center of Athens, despite its geographical and symbolic attributes (Faubion 1993:38-39). While at a glance, and from afar, Omonia seems a cosmopolitan ideal, experiencing the place however makes it obvious that beneath its façade the square is home to the failings of society and a large segment of the population that differs fundamentally from the dominant. A different kind of citizen occupies Omonia. It is a place of transience – a passage rather than a destination<sup>35</sup>. The Square can never be the symbolic center of Athens for everyone that lives in the city, although it undoubtedly is for those that occupy it and its seedy perimeter. For the rest, Omonia might better be described as an unfortunate contradiction or testament to the inability of the state to reconcile its dreams with its reality: a structural vision in sharp contrast to lived experience. Some contacts would later tell me that it is this attribute of the Square that makes them think of it as the center of Athens and Greece, symbolic of what those mean to them, but acknowledged that most others would disagree.

I immediately left Omonia following Panagi Tsaldari Street to get to Leoforos Pireos, which would lead me past the ancient cemetery of Keramikos to Petrou Ralli Street and the Foreigner's Bureau. After an hour of walking, I realized this would be a long hike. Wandering up Leoforos Pireos I noticed the neoclassical buildings were now very run-down and seemingly abandoned (I would later discover that several of these are used by undocumented migrant newcomers). There was also an increase in the number of stores owned by Chinese immigrants, although these were not like the Chinese stores adorned with lanterns found around Athens and its nearby suburbs. Instead they were

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<sup>35</sup> Syntagma Square opposite the contemporary parliament might be considered a destination and also the true center of Athens (see Faubion 1993).

distribution centers evidenced by the many migrants and Roma moving in and out of them with boxes and bags of goods, some loading cars and trucks. When I entered one I found samples of the purses sold on streets, many knickknacks and house wares sold at farmer's markets and at some discount stores, etc., with bulk pricing indicated per 100 units. As I continued my walk the Chinese stores and neoclassical buildings became more infrequent. Eventually Leoforos Pireos came to Petrou Ralli Street and I realized I might be in trouble.

Walking Petrou Ralli Street was like descending into a nightmare. The street seemed to take me deeper and deeper into social, political, and moral decay: the heart of a failing city. The elevated overpass leading away from Leoforos Pireos overlooked a sprawling mass of grey block apartments surrounding a large grey school: the bars over the broken windows, graffiti covered walls, and crumbling exterior resembling a prison more than a place of education – in session, no less. Walking along the broken sidewalk I passed chop shops standing alongside demolished factories, a Delta corporation sorting site (apparently closed as the company was in the midst of a price-fixing scandal), two army bases, government administration center, sprawling city bus depot, a dilapidated hospital in worse condition than the aforementioned school, and a seemingly abandoned industrial complex in and out of which a steady stream of African and Middle Easterners were moving. I was struck by the fact that the Greek state and what can be considered its antithesis – the underground economy of foreign people, goods, and ideas – were operating unimpeded side-by-side. The street seemed to reflect the current failings of the city and the state. With official structures unsuccessfully attending to core needs of

citizens, like health and education complexes<sup>36</sup>, and unwilling to see let alone address the broader social reality which shapes the cityscape, the population of Athens (legal and illegal) turns its back to the state and searches for modes of independence.

Eventually I arrived at the Foreigner's Bureau. The entrance was guarded by two armed men in blue uniform (resembling Greek riot police outfits) who stopped me abruptly as I attempted to enter the compound and asked to see my identification. I presented my passport and the mood changed immediately from one of confrontation to one of curiosity and goodwill. The men directed me to a room on the main floor inside and suggested I speak to a man named Vassili, who they claimed could help me. With newfound confidence I walked into the building and to the large room indicated to me by the guards. It was a very large white space with three plastic chairs at one end and a row of teller's windows at the other. A quick headcount indicated that there were over three hundred people waiting, and only one teller to help them. This was a loud place. People were sitting on the floor, others were leaning against the walls completing forms, and children ran about. There was no discernible line; instead a bunch of people crowded around the teller's window all shouting incoherently in broken Greek. The teller, however, seemed completely unfazed.

I tried to enter the glob of applicants near the teller, but was quickly pushed out. I also tried getting the teller's attention from the other end of the row of windows, to no avail. Eventually I leaned against the wall and waited to see if the number of waiting people would dissipate which, predictably, it didn't. After an hour I decided to retry on a

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<sup>36</sup> As per the news (Athens News and Kathimerini in particular) and public opinion, one might add to this list of failing government agencies and reforms: OTE (the national phone company); the port authority; public power corporation; Hellenic Railways; and pension reform. These agencies and initiatives were all embroiled in corruption, scandals, crippling labour disputes, or involved in poor business and/or safety practice.

different day when a short man emerged from the depths behind the teller's windows and motioned for me to join him. Needless to say I was surprised, but since this was probably my only chance to speak to an official I did as instructed. A few minutes later I found myself sitting in a comfortable office away from the noise. Vassili, as he introduced himself, seemed to occupy a position of authority within the department (although I was never able to verify his title) and apologized for the disarray I witnessed explaining that, "the Albanians and Middle Easterners are noisy, less civilized people." After checking my Canadian passport he explained that I stood out among the crowd and he wanted to help me. The injustice of the situation had not yet hit me so I proceeded, gratefully, to ask about permanent resident status for Jigo. Vassili was fascinated that a foreigner of Greek descent was interested in the plight an undocumented African migrant, but was not inclined to help. However, once he discovered I was a student at a prestigious American university, and conducting research, he once again became very forthcoming and helpful. He advised me that Jigo occupied a category of citizen the state was reluctant to change: keeping undocumented migrants in limbo gave the government options. I was told that the government might eventually hold an "amnesty day" like it had some years ago in 1998 when 370,000 undocumented migrants managed to acquire residence permits, and later in 2001 when 350,000 more did the same<sup>37</sup>; although Vassili thought that was unlikely considering the state had given citizenship to thousands of ethnic Albanians of Greek descent only a few months back in November (2006). Moreover, he explained that government agencies were in no position to handle the increased workflow of an amnesty day because offices like his were not computerized meaning applicants would have to be processed manually into a non-integrated system. He also suggested that a degree of

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<sup>37</sup> These figures were reported by the Greek Interior Ministry.

corruption within the Interior Ministry and the surrounding “leech” industries such as lawyers and notaries made the prospect of spontaneous legalization for the estimated 500,000 remaining undocumented migrants in Greece<sup>38</sup> unattractive due to the potential loss of income from bribes<sup>39</sup> (see Kathimerini 2006). In terms of external help from the EU, Vassili explained that even Europe-level directives designed to aid undocumented long-term residents to become legal were being hampered by Greece<sup>40</sup> which had introduced roadblocks in terms of extraordinary application fees and other inhibiting requirements to restrict access to long-term status. For example, the state requires applicants to provide a photocopy of a valid passport, residence permit, income tax return for two years indicating a minimum income, a document from the tax office indicating that the applicant does not owe taxes, proof of medical insurance, a certified copy of a rental agreement, applicants must successfully complete 100 hours of Greek language and 25 hours of history and culture classes, pay 900 euros, and provide three passport photos (Tzilivakis 2006a). While these requirements may be appropriate for some applicants, they make application for the huge number of undocumented migrants living in the country nearly impossible. In later interviews with Greece's Deputy Ombudsman, Andreas Takis, I was told that even short term residence permits are difficult to obtain

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<sup>38</sup> This was Vassili's estimate. Based on my fieldwork and on interviews I conducted with various NGOs, I would put the number of undocumented migrants around Greece in the thousands, perhaps as many as four or five thousand if not more.

<sup>39</sup> This is obviously a very controversial subject, and it is possible that my contact was exaggerating the situation to seem more interesting and knowledgeable.

<sup>40</sup> This situation reaches beyond residency status. In April 2008, the UNHCR accused Greece of mishandling asylum applications of refugees. Of 25,113 applicants in 2007 only 8 people were granted refugee status with 138 more on appeal. The Hellenic Police Head of Asylum, Nikolas Stavrakakis, argued that complications regarding the determination of the *intent* of applicants plus administrative backlog are responsible for this situation. The UNHCR accuses the country of being behind on its EU commitments and of violating human rights (BBC 2008; see also, UNHCR 2002; 2008). Greece is happier to keep asylum seekers in limbo for over four years in some cases than to meet its commitments.

because of document requirements and application fees, effectively shutting out undocumented migrants.

In Vassili's opinion, the state would never relinquish control over formal access to citizenship in Greece and that "amnesty days" were held in response to political pressures rather than a genuine desire to aid undocumented migrants. When asked why the government favored this response to the growing undocumented migrant population, Vassili explained that in his opinion Greece should not have to deal with the "remnants of the world", that undocumented migrants are useless citizens and should return to their places of origin. By his account, the ones in the country had already maximized their potential contribution and were nothing but a drain on resources and a source of insecurity. In this case access to citizenship, or even permanent resident status formalized by various papers and stamps provided in part by Vassili's office, would give the migrant/foreigner access to what Herzfeld might term the nation's "intimate space" (2005). For Vassili, granting citizenship to Jigo and other actual or potential migrant applicants contradicted his perception of the high status of the Greek identity which, as he deployed the concept, indexed an ethnocentric nationalist sentiment with overtly racist undertones. By his estimation, honorary "Greekness" could only be granted to non-indigenous individuals worthy of Greek status (read: individuals of perceived Greek heritage) and who through naturalization (πολιτογράφηση)<sup>41</sup> might adequately represent and uphold the broader social, cultural, and historical elements that inform the Greek identity and, by extension, the general national(ist) consciousness (see Anderson 1983). The idea of Jigo with full citizenship was an affront to who Vassili perceived himself to be, both as a citizen and as an individual, and to what he perceived the nation to mean,

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<sup>41</sup> On naturalization in Greece see Gourgouris (1996:33), see also Balibar & Wallerstein (1991:348-349).

both ideologically and symbolically (for more on racism and Greek identity see Tzanelli 2006 ). Although I should have perhaps expected this, I was nonetheless shocked to hear overtly racist and ignorant comments from a government official – especially one working at an office that serves immigrants.

I left the office disappointed. My interviews with Greeks had revealed this attitude in the past, but I did, nonetheless, have hope that a government representative might take a different line or at least indicate a positive upcoming policy change. This is a crucial time for Greece as its undocumented migrant community is on the cusp of a major change driven by several international political and social phenomena. With EU expansion and the resultant opening of the job market in Europe, numbers of undocumented migrants moving to Greece from such countries as Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine and Romania will continue to drop<sup>42</sup>. Meanwhile, however, the flow of undocumented migrants from Africa and Asia is on the rise and will continue to increase<sup>43</sup> – an inevitability the state has not accounted for, at least publicly. The total number of undocumented migrants will increase and, under current policy, it will be nearly impossible for this population to legalize (Baldwin-Edwards 2005). So while one source of population flow is being closed off, another is only starting to open and flowing into a basin from which it cannot easily escape. Greece will soon be inundated with migrants like Jigo joining the growing informal community of survivors engaged in illegal selling practices and other such activity while EU borders become further

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<sup>42</sup> This phenomenon was acknowledged by Greece's Interior Ministry in an announcement made December 18, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> This was also acknowledged by the Foreign Ministry, although mentioned in passing and without any projected population figures. An increase in migrants from Africa and Asia is also predicted by a number of NGOs working in Athens and the by several members forming the National Commission of Human Rights.



regulated and monitored and Greece – arguably in a bid to retain a perceived iron hold on the category of citizenship and access to it – continues to resist EU attempts to provide legal and regulated passage through them.

As I walked back down Petrou Ralli Street deep in my thoughts I looked up and saw a strange figure staring back at me. A large modern sculpture constructed of scrap metal and garbage stood two stories tall in the parking lot of an abandoned factory. I hadn't noticed this artifact on my way to the Bureau as I was walking on the other side of the street, but now facing the thing I was completely transfixed. The figure represented a crazed woman with wild hair. She was screaming and clutching the sides of her body with rusted hands. A gash tore from what would be her pelvis up to her chest to reveal a red material which captured the light and twinkled with revolting realism. She was painted black except for where the rust had flaked away to reveal brown underneath, and her eyes were blue. No plaque or marking explained the piece or identified an artist. She simply stood in failed space, trapped in a horrible moment, violated, exposed, and abandoned.

As Jigo becomes more established and if he cannot find work at the market, he will most likely sell his labor illegally in the agricultural sector or in the city at one of numerous manufacturing companies that exploit illegal workers in factories or most likely at construction sites as casual labor (unless he learns a specific skill)<sup>44</sup>. He may

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<sup>44</sup> The issue of undocumented migrant exploitation by companies in Greece has recently made news in the country. Greece's highest court recently ruled in favour of illegal Albanian immigrants who were underpaid by the farm owner they worked for. This ruling came as a surprise to Greece's agricultural sector which relies heavily on immigrant labour (about 90% of the workforce according to Haralambos Kasimis, professor of rural sociology at the Agricultural University of Athens), a large percentage of which is also undocumented migrant labour. However, it should be noted that undocumented migrants still have

also become involved in illegal work related to drugs, theft, or the import of illegal market goods (encompassing all manner of items that are brought in undeclared to customs) – an unlikely fate for Jigo who still considers himself a police officer at heart. At the time of my interviews with him, Jigo was close to escaping the gritty throws of basic survival, had chosen to stay in Athens, and was on his way toward disengagement from the collective that had served him so well until that point. Doing so he was about to make a major transition, one in which the benefits of living as part of the collective would have to be tended to alternatively.

On a basic, practical level, Jigo's new job would have to provide him with enough money to pay rent (likely in a shared accommodation with other migrants), purchase food, clothing, and other basic necessities. If he is successful he might have enough left over to send home – which is his dream – using, most likely, one of the many Western Union branches that have sprouted around Athens in recent years<sup>45</sup>. Socially, he would always have the friends he made during his time with the collective and living in accommodations frequented by other members of this group. Hopefully, he will also make contacts within the Greek community. At the time of our interviews, Jigo told me his only friends were members of his selling group, me, and the Greek police (he added jokingly). Everyone else, he explained, was racist. However, other members of the collective and established undocumented migrants had reported making friends with priests at local churches (a claim several priests denied when asked), outreach workers from humanitarian groups like PRAXIS and the aforementioned *Migrant's Place*, and

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no means to recover unpaid wages unless they legalize their status in the country – an impossibility for thousands.

<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that these cater to immigrants as they advertise money transfer rates primarily to places in Africa like Senegal and Nigeria.

most commonly with homeowners who would employ them randomly to do odd jobs like gardening/landscaping or cleaning sheds. Of note, and contrary to my expectations, not a single undocumented migrant I met reported being friends with a local under the age of 30 (which they estimated). Particularly interesting is that local teenagers, and even those that emulate the style of dress the Africans wear and who consider themselves “liberal connected cosmopolitans”, avoid contact with undocumented migrants unless they are purchasing goods from them. However, my consultants reported that what Greek friends they did have would sometimes give them casual work or pay for meals occasionally, if they need help. This is certainly considerate, but not reliable. For most settled undocumented migrants, in a time of emergency, social support still comes from within their community.

However, perhaps the biggest transition Jigo will make as he disengages from the collective has to do with his perception of the situation he is in and the moral and existential angst that accompanies it. Disengaging from the collective and deciding to stay in Athens requires Jigo to reconceptualise his trajectory, the narrative that brought him to this point, and his understanding of his place in Athens. This marks an important subjective shift. Once the individual overcomes or at least learns to manage their initial fear and suffering, they arrive at a condition where they may safely exercise increased creativity and critical engagement with the system of knowledge that governs and unites the collective. Of note, I am not speaking here of a “logocentric”, or as Habermas would call it, Western, rendition of the subject. I do not mean to imply that the individual knows and acts in isolation, or to propose an analytical perspective informed by a view of the individual in relation-to-self alone. Following the Nietzschean tradition, the subject I

describe is fundamentally connected to transsubjective phenomena. These phenomena may be thought of here as a complex of histories, codes, and flows, shaping knowledge and reason. I realize I am making a leap from Nietzsche through to more recent theories proposed by Foucault, Bourdieu and others. However, the fundamental understanding of the subject as part of an influential matrix – however one wishes to define that relationship and that influential matrix – unites these thinkers and carries into my intended use here. Just as Jigo is not an automaton of the collective, he is also not independent from the world around him. The balance here lies with the conditions in which the individual finds themselves and, arguably, with the human capacity for creativity and critical thought.

Returning to the disengaging migrant, this does not mean that members of the collective necessarily become negative about the group, or refuse its communicative reason which is based, after all, on a rationality shared by all members of the collective. Rather, safety affords the individual freedom of subjective reflexivity to reconcile the persistent, underlying contradiction between the expected world, based on narrative and personal history, and the experienced world – Athens. Despite the palliative affects of living within the collective, the schism between the individual's vision and experience of the world persists prompting, with time, an evaluation of their criteria of truth and success and its relationship to knowing and acting. This reflexive time can be very traumatic for the individual, despite having achieved a level of physical safety, since many migrants are pressed to address troubling moral questions concerning their place in the world, throwing into uncertainty the embedded and embodied narratives and structures of their place of origin and path of travel which, in the end, distances the

individual further from a perceived “home”. Among the undocumented migrants I met, reconciliation of this tension required a reconceptualization of place, the person/place dialectic, and time: a new view of motion.

Before continuing onto a closer examination of motion it is interesting to note that a mechanism for exiting the collective is effectively built into its purpose providing a linear trajectory for members wishing to pursue it, albeit with important transformative effects. Central to this exit mechanism is the undocumented migrant, truly a *bricoleur*, building capacity for self change. Over time the individual collects an assembly of relationships, knowledge, and experience, which enables a self-transformation and exit from the group. This is the primary reason why the collective does not constitute a “culture”. Despite certain conditions and features of the collective reminiscent of a culture like the unifying knowledge, rationality, common history, and experience shared by most newcomer undocumented migrants, and the sense of meaning generated and shared by members beyond their conscious control (Fischer 2003:7), the collective is nonetheless an entity people pass through and do not have the capacity to change as deviation from its fundamental principles means departure from the group. In effect, the collective is defined more by the state and supra-state processes than it is by its members, despite constituting a space where the latter can struggle against the former. It is a product of migratory flow, a way to appropriate power and enable movement in a system hostile to it. The collective is not a space where people can enact their vision of life and relationships (Rosen 2002:x); instead, it is a space that empowers people to resist the contrary vision of life and relationships enacted, sometimes brutally, by others.

Many of the settled undocumented migrants I met had lived at one address, one location, for extended periods of time – in one case for over ten years. Yet, despite considering these places their home, every one of my contacts told me they were prepared to leave at a moment's notice. This hints at a complex relationship between the individual and space, one in which the individual is suspended in a state of liminality, unable to reterritorialize, or become part of a new code-territory<sup>46</sup>, after having deterritorialized (Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1987]), or disengaged (socially and psychologically), from their place of origin – the latter a process necessary in the reconciliation of the internal conflict described above. For these individuals, Athens is made up of hiding places, opportunities, and danger-zones. They navigate the city based on a vision of modern/cosmopolitan personhood or citizenship defined by a particular experience of repression and violence: the product of the clash between local histories, international migratory flows, and a deeply territorialized state. In practical terms this means understanding and blending in with local society as stereotypes, leaving no financial footprint, avoiding state agents, remaining alert to quick economic opportunities, and not putting down roots or investing in either place or local people. Tracing the movements of established undocumented migrants around Athens is like mapping invisibility onto space: an exercise in chasing ghosts<sup>47</sup>. Perhaps one must employ a new kind of map, like the one Deleuze and Guattari describe of a rhizome: “always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits” (2003 [1987]:21). Fixed place cannot be the referent for a study of undocumented migrant motion. These individuals move just like Octavio Paz's description of the relationship

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<sup>46</sup> Deleuze and Guattari describe the relation between a specific social and moral order and the space it is inscribed into and that is defined by it a “code-territory” (2003 [1987]).

<sup>47</sup> For mapping and non-typical citizenship see Le Marcis (2004).

between an aura of another people and the local, as a kind of floating entity that moves and transforms like a cloud, never quite existing, never quite vanishing, but always there and adept in its particular mode of interaction (1985:13). Undocumented migrants use advanced urban navigation skills and understanding of local people, structures, and economy, to interact with and move around the city. As a result of this, their lives are also ordered around economic cycles, fluctuations of consumer desires, and the ebb and flow of political opinion; however, they act on the verges of these phenomena, in anticipation or in prevention, so as to ensure their relative invisibility and anonymity. Settled undocumented migrants are masters of the quotidian and the unimpressive, following particular modes of special interaction and temporal practices characteristic of their complex motion to remain safe and successful just outside the candid experience of local people and comfortably within the latter's normative expectations.

Yet despite this evanescent presence, settled undocumented migrants living in Athens, and generally in the Attica plain, are limited to a particular territory both by choice and because of the dangers of moving. This has a number of important implications for both undocumented migrants and local people. First, undocumented migrants see Athens as the site where a vision of a successful, revised, life-away-from-home can be realized indicating a space-based commitment to a particular imagined subjective reality. That is, most individuals recognize the transformation Athens has had on them and, moreover, that this change was necessary in order for them to live in the city they have chosen to remain in. Second, despite their lack of investment in the city in terms of property *etc.*, undocumented migrants are not likely to leave even when pressured to do so; rather, they will adapt and continue to live in the way they have

learned to. Third, the lack of distinct ghettos in Athens (see Malheiros 2002)<sup>48</sup> means it is difficult to isolate this population spatially. True to a vision of rhizomatic existence, the multitude of undocumented migrants in Athens is interconnected<sup>49</sup> but has no center, hierarchy, or organization in place or otherwise. Finally, many settled undocumented migrants start families in the city, and their children – still not Greek citizens by law – adopt an understanding of motion similar to that of their parents complete with an understanding of safe zones, although sometimes with a lesser overall willingness to move or impulse to remain invisible as they become involved in schools and other rooting institutions and phenomena<sup>50</sup>. In Athens these family units are singular in their tenuousness and disconnection from ancestry (the rhizomatic undocumented migrant is anti-genealogical after all) but not community (both in the sense of being actively connected and connected by virtue of belonging to a common milieu in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense [2003(1987)])<sup>51</sup>.

For my local Athenian consultants this connection between the undocumented migrant and Athens is not obvious. At the most they had noticed an increase in this population on the streets, on public transportation, and in the media: stories of undocumented migrants being intercepted at the borders, smuggling rings being broken

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<sup>48</sup> Despite the fact that Mediterranean cities tended to have no socio-geographic distinctions due to the nature of property construction and urban development, historically; ethnic segregation is nonetheless now occurring. Athens is starting to show signs of ghettoization in places, although this is still a nascent phenomenon. Areas like Kypseli and around Platia Victoria are becoming increasingly ghetto-like, although not completely so.

<sup>49</sup> Albeit not in the traditional sense by, for example, mobile phone as per the collective, but they are interconnected by virtue of their belonging milieu.

<sup>50</sup> Interestingly these children do not fit either category of local or foreigner, as imprecise and problematic as those categories may be, but bridge these imagined exclusive groups, albeit with difficulty and still in a tentative manner as these children are still not well integrated into the education system or other spaces where they might explore a local identity for themselves.

<sup>51</sup> The children of these immigrants exemplify the need to move beyond devising categories of people who move differently across landscape towards and understanding of how mobility produces a variety of worlds that, together, make up society (Clifford 1997; Ossman 2007a:14; Urry 2000).



and illegal goods being confiscated were common in print and broadcast news in 2006/07. In cafés and other public areas conversations about undocumented migrants usually drifted towards the 2005 Paris riots; although locals generally dismissed this as a “French phenomenon”, certainly not something Greeks would ever have to deal with since, they thought, there were not so many undocumented migrants living in the city. Still, however, a kind of revolt or upheaval driven by “foreigners” seemed to be a common concern. Legalization also came up in these conversations with most people in support of government initiatives to document the undocumented migrant population, although general consensus had it that such a project would never be undertaken effectively due to bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of political will. However, perhaps the most interesting theme that arose from these conversations was a sentiment that undocumented migrants should be recorded and monitored, but not treated to the same rights and privileges of locals. Implicit in these statements was a vision of the migrant as non-citizen, sojourner, and potentially dangerous other – an individual that did not, and probably could not fit the current category of citizen. Their movement into the country was accounted for as a byproduct of Greece’s attractive path toward modernization and its increased fame internationally<sup>52</sup>, and as a phenomenon which could be addressed by increasing border security and setting stiffer punishment for those who come through illegally. I will argue in the following chapters that this sentiment is tied to a popular understanding of both the contemporary political reality and risk-cosmopolitanization, ultimately playing a part in subjective political identity formation.

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<sup>52</sup> The 2004 Athens Olympic Games were broadly credited for this supposed international fame.

*Advocacy: Fighting for a New Migrant Experience of Greece*

One of the major factors shaping the settled undocumented migrant's experience of being local, and thus the various strategies of survival they employ, is their understanding of their place relative to the mainstream population, an opposition enforced day to day through ongoing dialogical negotiation (Hermans & Kempen 1993; Hermans 1996; Hermans 2001)<sup>53</sup>. This is a model rooted in Mead (1934) and Bakhtin (1992) which permits us to examine culture and self as mutually constructed. The dialogical self concept provides access to the social, historical, and cultural context, the communicative relationships become the center of analysis, and the 'voices' that appear in the individual discourse give us access to the significant others with whom the individual is in dialogue. Mainstream Greek voices<sup>54</sup> (in their various manifestations) play a large part in shaping the idiosyncratic identity negotiations migrants undertake subjectively and intersubjectively. Irini Kadianaki at the department of psychology, Cambridge University, recently conducted a study examining migrant perceptions of the Greek population, in which the latter was characterized as closed, inaccessible, hostile and materialistic (2009). In the same study Kadianaki examined African migrant perceptions of Greek views on migrants which were reported as ignorant (some migrants thought that many Greeks were unaware of them), xenophobic, and stereotyping (migrants believed local Greeks associated them with poverty and disease). In all, the settled migrant community sees no possibility of social integration with the mainstream:

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<sup>53</sup> This work improves on previous work focusing on "states of being", favouring instead processes rooted in cultural practice.

<sup>54</sup> Of note, for more on popular understandings of 'racism' and 'prejudice' in Greece see Condor et al. (2006) and Figgou & Condor (2006).

as mentioned above, migrant life in Greece means a life of segregation defined and enforced by engrained public categories of otherness.

Beyond the doubt among migrants that they may ever integrate with the mainstream, a number of institutional and legal frameworks of migration in Greece until the early 2000s ensured that this population was unable to represent itself politically (Gropas & Triandafyllidou 2009). As mentioned above, my interviews with senior-level lawyers at the ombudsman's office and with administrators at several Foreigner's Bureaus confirmed that the state's intention – as these individuals understood it – was to ensure migrants had no access to conventional citizenship (also observed by Gropas & Triandafyllidou 2009). Migrants are to remain liminal, in the law and society, until Greece can develop a strategy to reduce the human inflow from abroad and manage (or reduce) their local integration. My consultants explained that at the heart of this move was an attempt to avoid a “cosmopolitan” Greece whereby “Hellenism” might be adversely affected by multiculturalism. This is not a new argument. Greece has long been an area of interconnection and rich ethnic mosaic (Andromedas 1976), but historically, the state has insisted to the contrary (Just 1989). It follows that attempts to extend citizenship to individuals not of Greek descent has been met with resistance by politicians and activists citing a need to preserve “Greek ethnicity”. To this end, undocumented – and even documented migrants with no claim to a Greek heritage – have been barred from citizenship by extraordinary application fees, procedures, and requirements among the most rigid and exclusionary in the EU (see the naturalization law 2910/2001, articles 58-64). At best, these individuals and their children can hope for

permanent resident status – a “second stage” liminality giving them legal permission to reside in the country albeit in a state of political disempowerment.

However, a broad constellation of non-governmental and non-profit organizations work to alleviate the migrant community’s otherwise unaddressed human needs, to develop their economic and social potential, and advocate for their rights including: various cultural and sports associations, women’s associations, trade unions, other professional organizations, human rights NGOs, or NGOs active in the protection of refugee and asylum seeker rights. To this list we can also add several informal advocacy groups as Sotiropoulos would put it (2004), but also several unexpected, perhaps non-traditional advocacy groups including at least two collectives of young people that have formed patronage relationships with members of the migrant community and various anarchist organizations that appeal to the community’s history and experience (as we will see in chapter 3). These groups have created a rich, active, and increasingly vocal civil society<sup>55</sup>; albeit one that has an unconventional relationship with its stakeholders. While some migrants are active within these groups, the vast majority remain effectively disengaged. This does not mean that they do not participate in demonstrations or appreciate positive propaganda and legal help, but more destitute migrants are absorbed and limited by the bitter throws of basic survival while those in comparatively more comfortable conditions are hesitant to seek aid outside of their trusted networks.

Small group outreach programming is the only method by which activists have been able to create enduring working links with new and situated migrant networks as this strategy is highly compatible with the internal sociality of the larger migrant

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<sup>55</sup> Beck argues that a European civil society arises only when religiously, racially, and/or ideologically opposed populations struggle over the political reality of Europe, and this is certainly the case in Greece (Beck 2006:167).

collective, an observation supported by other advocate/fieldworkers like Katerina Rozakou<sup>56</sup>. However, ‘outreach’ is a methodology still underutilized by Greek NGOs: almost no hospitals or health organizations offer such services, nor do legal advocates, or even local food and clothes-distribution organizations. The only groups I came across that sent representatives to migrant homes and spaces, and which actively challenged the “us vs. them” mentality this community has developed, were: MERIA, the health NGO I directed; and an anarchist organization situated near Exarchia. Of note, Rozakou identifies two additional outreach-based NGOs in her work, including “Volunteer Work Athens”, but I had not encountered these in the field nor am I aware of any more.

Yet, despite these various NGOs and interested organizations, the situation for migrants has not improved in Greece; in fact, things continue to worsen as the population grows, the economy fails, and the state does not respond. Other foreign claimants to citizenship such as politically enabled co-ethnic returnees and immigrants of Greek descent are arguably making headway in negotiating future access to citizenship for all migrants; however their efforts are largely predicated on the principle of *jus sanguinis* or citizenship based on bloodline. As a result of this, undocumented migrants with no claim to Greek heritage will remain in political limbo for the foreseeable future relying on local connections to inflammatory political groups, basic health and service NGOs, and the underground networks of, primarily illegal suppliers and transporters, to support, employ and protect them. Within this political crucible a timid population is coming to develop a strong anti-establishment ethos while struggling to achieve the migrant Hellenic dream.

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<sup>56</sup> She does, however, note that tensions and failures can result as aid workers deploy entrenched cultural categories and follow moral and political convictions rather than focusing on the needs of migrants.

In this chapter I have examined the problems faced, and coping strategies employed, by the newcomer undocumented migrant community living in Greece. I have also examined the settled undocumented migrant community and the problems they face. The preceding also touched upon a popular sense that undocumented migrants are potentially dangerous and certainly not citizens. The following chapter will situate the influence undocumented migrants have within an understanding of the contemporary socio-political change in Greece. Of particular importance is the role transnational flows of people have had on the individual's understanding of nation and citizenship. Note also the points of interconnection between the migrant and the anarchist communities.

## Chapter 3

The heavy black door before me was worn from years of use and exposure, its paint peeling and blistered. I searched the building's façade but couldn't find a street number or mailbox; in fact, the only identifying mark I could see were the letters "Φ Α" scratched into the stone that surrounded the door. It was stifflingly hot. I checked my directions once more, looked at my watch, and reached for the door's brass knob, turning it tentatively. Somewhere within the old wood a mechanism released and the mass swung back silently on large hinges. Entering into the foyer I looked over my shoulder, instinctively, and removed my sunglasses. My heart rate increased as I stood in the dusty space fumbling with the clasp on my bag, trying to retrieve my field notebook. Behind me a spring caused the door to close with a decisive thud and I was blinded by the sudden darkness: my breathing slowed to a quiet staccato and I became aware of the muffled sounds of the street I had just left and the strange shapes in the shadows that now surrounded me. My eyes adjusted eventually and I began to see details in the cramped, graffitied space: the floor was a mosaic of the old style where stones were set in cement, then sanded down and polished to reveal their intricate interiors; two doors, one broken, stood on either side of me; a light fixture hung by its wires above me; and a spiraling staircase made of wooden slats held tight by an ornate iron banister curled before me. An acrid smell I could not identify hung in the air. I steeled my nerves and began to climb the stairs, as per my instructions. Never had I been so aware of my footfalls as I was at this moment.

On the second floor of this old house located at the heart of Athens's activist and political dissident district, Platia Exarchia, I found a poorly lit lounge. I entered and

introduced myself to the man already sitting in one of two seats away from the windows. He smiled and motioned for me to come in. Striking two matches simultaneously he lit a hand-rolled cigarette, then tossed them still burning into a crumbling fireplace nearby. One bounced off the mantel and began to scorch the old wooden floor, but I did not react. His movements were bold and hasty, but confident and assuring. The air on this floor was sweetened with the fragrance of freshly boiled Greek coffee, some of which I accepted in a small chipped cup. As my senses adjusted to the new surroundings I began to notice random pieces of broken antique furniture near the walls, ornate yet crumbling plaster details in the ceiling, and three other doors blocking off adjoining rooms. However, my attention remained squarely on the man sitting across from me: one of Greece's most formidable public disturbers. A self-professed "freedom fighter and educator of the public", this man's fame for using any means necessary to achieve his goals preceded him, and I was nervous. Across from me sat one of Greece's most aggressive anarchists.

Having once been involved in more closely organized anarchist groups in Athens and Peloponnesus, my contact, who I'll call Nikos, was now independent but well connected in the political world (official and unofficial) and among Athens's thugs, criminals, youth, and idealists. I gained access to him over a period of a month which I spent hanging out at Platia Exarchion (Πλατεία Εξαρχείων, Exarchia Square) and attending several protests – some violent<sup>57</sup> and some peaceful – where I made it known to as many participants as I could that I was interested in meeting their organizer. I gave my phone number out to over fifty people during protests and in the darker streets of Athens after they ended. Eventually I found myself meeting with one of Nikos's close friends.

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<sup>57</sup> Among the many things I learned in Greece is an appreciation for the sting of teargas!



This preliminary meeting at a busy café at Syntagma Square (a very symbolic location I thought) went well, if quickly. Eventually I received a call from Nikos himself and we met in this old, seemingly abandoned house, whose owner I didn't know.

Simply sitting across from this man I felt like I was committing a crime, as though speaking to Nikos would invite the scrutiny of the police. The rumors of his masterminding of car bombings and shootings were well known, although I never discovered if he was truly involved. Before our meeting a contact whispered to me that this was the man who coordinated the attack on the US embassy in Athens earlier that year – a claim Nikos denied. I wondered how he could walk the streets freely, why he hadn't been caught and jailed. It made no sense to me that I, a foreign student with no special investigative skills, was able to find, meet, and interview this individual - but there I was.

Consider a man: tall and slender with neatly coifed black hair and brown probing eyes. Nikos was in his late forties but the sheer forcefulness of his presence made him seem younger. When we met, Nikos still walked the streets of Athens anonymously despite the fact that his alleged activities colored the front pages of newspapers regularly adding fodder to debates about public security and policy. He described his existence in the city as evanescent, volatile, yet absolute. Nobody officially paid Nikos though he looked well-dressed and carefully put-together: his vintage leather jacket was appropriately distressed; leather boots scuffed but not worn; an expensive motorcycle helmet sat on the floor beside him; and an understated yet plainly visible Omega

chronograph rested on his wrist echoing the sense of steadfastness, strength and precision this man seemed to embody.

Nikos's father was a butcher and his mother was a violin teacher. He grew up in Attica with his two older brothers in a home that had been in the family for two generations. His father's recent decision to sell the property to a developer in exchange for two apartment units and some cash came as a disappointment to Nikos, but not a surprise. He explained that the destruction of old homes, that is, "the erasure of family histories recorded in stone and soil, to make way for apartment blocks serving national and corporate needs", was common: "just another example of the destruction of our city and the degradation of its citizens". Nikos's parents don't know what he does for a living; "they think I teach at the university" he says chuckling, eyes locked on me.

In his youth Nikos was very interested in politics, and traveled to England in his early twenties to study government and international relations. During this time away from home he observed Greece and began to grow increasingly restless. Nikos did not consider himself an anarchist yet, although he was already enamored by the thought of the freedom-fighter, the dissident in disguise, which he felt was the only answer – the only Greek answer – to what he perceived to be the growing ideological and economic chokehold the state and international corporations were having on the citizens of his homeland. The idea that political change can only be accomplished in Greece through violent protest is not uncommon, especially among the middle-age population that witnessed the Polytechnic uprisings. His views were hardly radical or militant or even iconoclastic for the late 1970s, a time still touched by the student movements of nearly a decade earlier. A clearer indication of Nikos's bend towards radicalism were the heroes

to whom he looked up to in those early days which included: Emanouil Dadaoglou, the anarchist who led the revolution against King Othon in 1862; Alexandros Schinas, the anarchist/educator who assassinated King George 1 in Thessaloniki on March 18, 1913<sup>58</sup>; and above all, the organizers and participants of the student movement that resisted the military junta between 1967 and 1974 in Athens. As he explained to me, these individuals embodied the perfect balance of vision and action: a potent mix of rhetoric and force, which he felt was the only means of actualizing real social change. While in England he also read works by Mikhail Bakunin (Bakunin 1916; Bakunin 1990), Tolstoy, the first Greek anarchist publication in the daily “Light” (Φώς) published on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1861, and other more contemporary anarchist texts (especially the periodicals *Solidarity* and *Riot*) some of which were passed to him by friends in Athens who had become involved in anarchist circles. Upon his return Nikos skipped the obligatory Greek military service making him a draft-evader (ανυπότακτος); although Nikos had somehow obtained official discharge papers: a feat he shrugs off as quotidian and uninteresting. After a year of considering his options Nikos sought to become involved with the only group he felt could improve the life of Greeks, the anarchists. As a young, educated, and energetic individual he moved easily within the organization meeting evermore influential people and becoming more deeply involved.

For years Nikos wrote rhetoric, tracked media, and helped develop strategy, but his biggest talent was in organizing public action. In time Nikos became more deeply involved in this latter aspect of his work necessitating his isolation from his moderately anarchist friends like those individuals who participated in anarchist action occasionally

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<sup>58</sup> The assassination made the front page of the New York Times on March 19<sup>th</sup>. Of note, Alexandros Schinas worked in the pantry of the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City before moving to Greece to start an anarchist school.

but held more mainstream political opinions: servicing the needs of the movement pursuant to the anarchist ideal required freedom to act outside the law and across several incompatible social networks inevitably attracting police attention which could be harmful to his associates, I was told.

“The problem with the Greeks”, Nikos explained to me, “is their simultaneous dependency on, and detestation of, the system”. I had heard this before in my conversations with other Greeks; however, Nikos argued that this phenomenon was the result of intentional state strategy, rather than the product of socio-political and economic history as I was generally told elsewhere. He claimed that this situation was achieved through the centralization of not only the mechanisms of the state, but also of the minds of its citizens. Asked what he meant by the centralization of the mind and why the state would endeavor to centralize the citizen, Nikos explained, rather abstractly, that centralization was the political operating paradigm in Greece. Large centers of administration create the illusion of power on which citizens subsequently focus their actions. This was a way of controlling the public<sup>59</sup> and of projecting an image of strength which, he continued quickly, Greece ultimately wished to deploy beyond its borders in an effort to remain dominant within the Balkan region and to spread its influence beyond. Nikos argued that the Balkan region was of special concern to Greece due to the recent birth of post-socialist states and their struggle with neoliberalism. He explained that these states, still largely in transition, were open to Hellenic political influence which he suspected was already flowing through various channels to shape fledgling foreign

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<sup>59</sup> I imagine he meant spatially. Niko was unwilling to pursue the idea of a “centralized citizen” further. I suspect this was part of the anarchist rhetoric he deployed elsewhere, but which didn’t seem to work in this conversation.

government policy affecting the availability of such things as migrant labor to Greece and other resources. Of course, Nikos continued, Greece itself could be seen as still struggling with neoliberalism itself: the principles of which the state seemed to embrace wholeheartedly (not to mention the association with progress that neoliberalism evokes); but the deeper implications this paradigm carries in terms of government structure, policy, and function<sup>60</sup>, the Greek government fears and resists. According to Nikos, this leaves the country in a peculiar position within Europe, where the citizenry generally thinks the country is becoming neoliberal (economically, and in terms of global political play<sup>61</sup>) and behaves accordingly, and yet the state has no intention to pursue a neoliberal agenda. The ideological divide between the people and their government achieved by this political misdirection, keeps the people out of step with official actions and intentions therefore insulating the state from popular, organized, critical interference allowing them to pursue their plans, nationally and internationally.

Of course this came across as specious, or at least oversimplified, and I suspected that Nikos realized this. Organized protests occur regularly across Greece and it seemed to me that nobody was under the impression that the country was actually pursuing a strict neoliberal agenda; in fact, ongoing public discussions of overt political clientelism and multilevel corruption within the government seemed to make the possibility of this popular impression impossible. Nikos's further assertions regarding the state's underlying secret aspirations relative to nearby post-socialist states were also problematic. However, I dared not challenge him directly; instead I asked if he thought Greece had a chance at becoming an international power and Nikos answered "perhaps not in a

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<sup>60</sup> Greece's fervent maintenance of a centralized government is a prime example of its resistance to neoliberalism.

<sup>61</sup> That is, in terms of support for particular neoliberal EU or even UN policy.

straight-forward manner”, adding that the upper levels of the government probably realized this too. He explained that the state was being controlled, on the one hand, by big business which was dependent on the state’s compliance to maintain profits and, on the other hand, by the EU and US<sup>62</sup> which manipulated Greece for their economic and political ends. So, Greece was pursuing an agenda of regional domination with the interim intention of obeying its masters. However the state’s long term goal, Nikos pointed out, was informed by delusions of a “cultural right” to greatness, certainly among Western nations and ‘naturally’<sup>63</sup> among the rest. Their willing manipulation by business and foreign states might thus be seen as an attempt at reaching an ultimate end through a particular means: “play the fool” (παίζουν την πάπια)<sup>64</sup> now, to gain control later. Once again, I remained generally unconvinced by Nikos’s argument, although recent news items about political scandals gave credence to his assertion of a link between government and big business. I sat quietly and nodded, writing carefully in my notebook. “Whatever the motivation,” Nikos continued, “the citizen is manipulated, confused, and pacified - his mind just one more item to be managed and controlled.”

This last thought hung in the air as Nikos took a deep breath. After a few moments of silence, during which he lit another cigarette and gazed at the broken chandelier above, he changed topics returning to his main interest: the streets. He continued, “As I explained, citizens are lulled into complacency by confusion and misdirection perpetrated by the state and its agents, and by the tyranny of labor bonds.” I

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<sup>62</sup> Of note, the influence of the West on strategies of Greek governance is well documented (see for example Gourgouris 1996).

<sup>63</sup> Here Niko made a veiled reference to an assumed sense of superiority among ancient Greeks towards eastern nations, and particularly the Ottoman Empire. His vision of the state operating under the tenets of a reincarnated, reinterpreted, and somehow mutilated and misapplied ancient Greek ideology was obvious.

<sup>64</sup> This is a Greek phrase translated, literally, to “play the duck”. The meaning is that one pretends to be ignorant.

had encountered this sentiment numerous times at protests and in cafés around the Platia (Exarchia Square). The only hope for Greece, according to Nikos, lies with the youth and with immigrants. Beginning with the latter, he explained that abused newcomers were finding their voices, and that these people – forced into close quarters within increasingly dense ethnic enclaves throughout the city – were banning together informally to fight for equal rights in the workplace and for better living conditions. Being, in his opinion, the most abused sector of society, and simultaneously the most important cog in the Greek economic machine<sup>65</sup>, immigrants, including undocumented migrants, were in a unique position to bring about change, although they were reluctant to mobilize because they had suffered years of domination, fear, and repression. To mobilize the community, anarchists had become involved in operating and supporting immigrant cultural centers, formally and informally, where they provided information, legal advice, language classes, etc. When it came time to act against the state or the police, Nikos explained, he relied on local organizers who in turn relayed his messages to immigrants at these centers, in workplaces, and in specific neighborhoods. He explained that communication with this category of citizen was difficult since, he suspected, much of what he told his contacts was lost in translation by the time it reached larger groups on the ground. Nevertheless, these individuals were receptive to him and happy for outside support, especially if they suffered from overt injustice like increased police brutality and economic exploitation.

Continuing on, Nikos explained that he believed the plight of undocumented migrants especially gave a person “perspective” (προοπτική). According to him, this group experiences a different Athens, one where hardship is the norm and where their

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<sup>65</sup> This sentiment is supported by a recent study conducted by Haralambos Kasimis, professor of rural sociology at the Agricultural University of Athens. Immigrants are especially important to the agriculture sector and generally in jobs that are dirty, dangerous and/or difficult (which middle-class Athenians refuse).

cultural identity is openly repressed and targeted, a situation made worse by the lack of effective immigration policy and tolerance of casual racism and organized racism (perpetrated mostly by unions, especially with connections to the KKE). He explained that migrants were invested in their families/community and in exhausting, shallow productive activities (basic often unsteady wage earning), all the while remaining vigilant against violent outsiders; they had no interest in Hellenic discourses of any kind, no investment in politics, and no interest in corporations or big business. This isolation, which was partially voluntary and partially enforced, afforded them distance from state posturing, indoctrination, and chicanery. Consequently, according to Nikos, migrants were poised to attack the state at its financial core with a view towards improving basic human standards of living: they were not sidetracked or distracted by “fake” or “strategic” state issues. Migrants were interested in the locus of life, death, and equality. This, of course, was another oversimplification. While migrants were certainly interested in life, death, and equality, they were also attentive to the political climate and to specific legal frameworks that stood to benefit or harm them. Clarification was impossible, however, as he continued on excitedly to explain that as migrant communities grow, and second generation migrants become more numerous and desire better lives than those of their parents, that the state would soon experience more pressure to change the way it treats this community and would be forced to pay reparations for illegal detainment and other state abuses suffered by the first generation. Nikos looked to this second generation as a major source of future support for Greek anarchy. “You remember Paris”, he asked, “soon people will be talking about ‘Athens’”.



On the other hand, he continued, is the former of the two influential groups he mentioned, the youth, who he argued were more directly engaged with the state and with what he called “counter philosophy.” Picking up his shiny black mobile phone, Nikos explained that at the heart of youth involvement in anarchist activities was a broad disappointment with the “system”, disillusionment, and the paradoxical influence of technology in their lives. Sensing my interest in this latter point, he explained that while the youth were being isolated by technology (including television and the internet) from the values held by their parents, they were simultaneously interconnected amongst themselves through mobile phones, email, and the internet. Of note, blogging and social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace have recently become very popular in Greece (for example, see Tsimitakis 2008). Evidence of this can be seen at the numerous internet cafés that operate around the city (many being open 24 hours a day).

This double function of technology made the youth generation open to, and more receptive of, alternative messages. In fact, one key recruitment technique Nikos employed involves sitting at cafés popular with younger people and sending text messages to the mobile phones in the immediate vicinity via Bluetooth technology. These messages would sometimes include photos or videos, but always relay messages of public action or jokes with sharp anti-establishment sentiment, usually at the expense of the police. Of note, one’s phone must be set to receive Bluetooth messages, which often requires input from the user to activate the antenna – a common habit among teenagers upon arriving at a café. This means, students and other youth arriving at known communication spots will activate their Bluetooth antennas in order to receive these

messages: they actively, and independently, seek these messages which are at the same time considered entertaining and subversive<sup>66</sup>.

Nikos continued to explain that even during protests he often used mobile text technology to coordinate people on the ground – the same strategy employed by student organizers of the 2006 school occupation/protest which saw high schools shut their doors for months around the country<sup>67</sup>. Email and the internet had also been useful tools for the anarchist movement. People interested in their actions would navigate to particular websites<sup>68</sup> where anarchist groups post newsletters and other media and where those interested could sign on to particular email lists and have messages from these groups delivered as they were released. All this, Nikos explained, was helping fuel the movement which had lost steam in the 1980s. Indeed, despite an indefinite and fluctuating following (there is, after all, no official anarchist or anarchist-sympathizer registry), today's calls to gather at protests often attracted hundreds if not thousands of people with youth-oriented issues bringing the biggest numbers. It follows that some of Nikos's best contacts were student organizers, both at high schools and colleges/universities. These individuals had huge networks and could communicate quickly.

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<sup>66</sup> I was only successful in receiving one of these messages on a day I followed a group of teenagers to a café in the Pangrati area. The message, a video, depicted a series of violent protests interspersed with pornographic images set in rapid motion to a popular techno song. The red anarchist symbol (a capitol "A" enclosed in a circle) flashed at the end of the video.

<sup>67</sup> This was a protest he was involved in, but refused to discuss with me at any great length. Student protests and occupation of schools is famously linked with anarchist involvement. Following 1991 student uprising during which nearly 1500 schools were occupied and shut down, the number of anarchists swelled. These new recruits to the movement have remained involved with formal and informal student organizers.

<sup>68</sup> See for example: <http://anarchy.gr/> (the main website for Greek Anarchy; includes news and community activities); [http://www.geocities.com/a\\_deltio/](http://www.geocities.com/a_deltio/) (an online newsletter distribution site); <http://www.geocities.com/anarcores/?200810> (point of information, or "counter-information" distribution); <http://www.chekov.org/anarcho/index.php> (a more internationally focused Greek anarchy site).

Beyond student organizers Nikos also had a number of other people he called upon in preparation for protests, including professional protesters who also had their own networks. Having a bad reputation, Nikos didn't go into much detail about this group except that they got paid (sometimes very handsomely) to bring thugs and hooligans that mad a lot of noise, attracted a lot of attention, and often incited violence. Asked why he would involve these people in his protests, Nikos explains that they attracted media attention and that this was good, even if the media lambasted the protesters for their actions. Putting out a message was important, and drawing attention was important. Violence made an issue appear more urgent, which was fine according to Nikos. Professional protesters were therefore essential, if controversial. Of note, some of these organizers were rumored to be the sons of rich and influential Athenians. It is widely believed that these privileged individuals – usually disillusioned and rebellious – used the influence of their families to escape police detention and prosecution, plus had private funds at their disposal for transportation and bribing. I never discovered whether this rumor was true or not.

Continuing on, Nikos explained that one of his most useful contacts was a well-connected member of the Athens police. Throughout the interview I was waiting for this moment. There were suggestions on the street that police officers might be involved in rioting, that undercover police might be part of a corrupt group involved in inciting violence at protests to serve the desires of political puppeteers seeking to divert public attention from certain issues, but also benefiting anarchists who, on occasion, wished to draw media coverage. I pretended to be ignorant of the issue and Nikos continued. He explained that the police involvement in protests was complex, and that only sometimes

did they participate with his knowledge. Other times the police would simply appear in plain clothes and begin breaking storefronts and burning cars. Nikos explained that most of these police agitators were known to frequent protesters and so their unexpected appearance indicated the time to leave for organizers and their crews. On the occasions when Nikos wanted broad media coverage to convey a point or to draw attention to a situation, he would contact his “friend” in the police explaining that “as long as they have something to gain I can always count on something burning.” Asked if he pays for this service, Nikos answered “no”, rather forcefully, that the police “eat from many troughs.”

Eventually, the discussion slipped into a tirade over police corruption. Nikos became very animated as he explained the gamut of illegal police activities including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and the importing of illegal goods: naturally, these activities were carried out in partnership with local and international human smuggling rings and local groups of illegal migrants, which the police exploited but had no qualms targeting when public attention demanded it. All this served the corrupt and the powerful.

Checking his watch, Nikos took a deep breath, leaned back in his chair, and looked me in the eye.

“You see, it is very complicated. Anarchy is not like it used to be. Today only some people support us and our messages have to be edited to reflect their needs and interests, which are often dictated by the needs and interests of the state, or the few that run it. The state is powerful and organized, despite its appearance. They know how to manipulate people, how to take away our rights covertly, and how to silence detractors even before the voiceless victims want to be heard. We have immigrants hitting them on the fundamentals of human existence. We have the youth fighting their more overt attempts to confuse and further their own destructive, corrupt agenda. We have traitors from within their own ranks joining ours, helping the state on Monday and fighting against it on Friday – like hell hounds feeding on sin<sup>69</sup>. And I’m in the middle, coordinating the effort, tearing

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<sup>69</sup> The reference here is to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Book 2) where Sin, born of Satan, is raped by Death (her son with Satan), and gives birth to hell hounds (dogs) which return hourly to her womb and feed endlessly

down the façades, questioning the lies and the deception to help people to see more clearly. Remember me in the near future. A time will come in Greece when the weak will understand anarchy as their path to freedom, and we will be there to help them rip at capitalism and consumerism, overcome the subjugating police, and void any ‘big national ideas’<sup>70</sup>, ideologies of sovereignty, and aspirations for imperial power. ”

***Greek Anarchy: A Historical Constructivist Examination of the Contemporary Tenets of Popular Hellenic Political Dissent***

I left the meeting half an hour later energized albeit a little paranoid that I was being followed by undercover police officers (a few days of life-as-usual cured me eventually). Nikos was intoxicating: a confident, well-spoken man. Heading towards the Platia I suddenly found myself sympathizing with his opinions and perspectives. This gave me pause: was I losing my academic perspective, did I always harbor anarchist tendencies and not realize it, or was something else going on? Reflecting back on our meeting it became obvious that Nikos’s philosophies regarding the character and problems of Athens’s citizens were not wholly uncommon, if a bit extreme and articulated in the rhetoric in which he was steeped. Even his perspectives regarding controversial social phenomena, such as the alienation of Greek youth, were consistent with opinions I had heard previously among students and activists. In fact, the more I reflected on the meeting, the more I began to question the “radicalism” of Nikos’s views. Despite occasional fiery predictions of the end of the state and the demise of the police, our conversation was focused on mainstream concerns such as civil liberty, freedom of

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on her bowels and are, in turn, reborn (see Abrams 1996:700-701). I am uncertain whether Niko was familiar with this reference, although he may have read Milton at university.

<sup>70</sup> Niko refers here to the “Great Idea” (Μεγάλη Ιδέα) a concept originally articulated in 1844 by Ioannis Kolettis, Prime Minister under King Othon. The “Great Idea” expresses the goal of establishing a Greek state that would encompass all ethnic Greeks by re-establishing a Greek territory encompassing the borders of Ancient Greece as described by Strabo (extending west from Sicily, to Asia Minor and the Black Sea to the east, and from Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus, north, to Crete and Cyprus to the south). The “Great Idea” was the core of Greek foreign policy until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although some like Niko would question whether it still is.

speech, socio-economic change, social security, etc. Of course I realize that these concerns span various political ideologies and that I shouldn't consider it strange to hear an anarchist address them, but Nikos's rather familiar analysis of the issues was surprising. His only deviation from mainstream opinion, that I could determine, was his fondness for immigrants and especially illegal migrants. In the end I was not becoming an anarchist, but anarchy was resonating with discourse I was already familiar with from other contexts.

*Anarchy in Modern Greek History (1832-1974)*

Nikos represents a very modern version of anarchy, and modern anarchy has some interesting and important connections to broader contemporary Athenian political thought and imaginary. The movement traces its intellectual roots to a number of mid-nineteenth century writers such as Mikhail Bakunin, Petr Kropotkin, William Godwin, Max Stirner, Benjamin Tucker and Lev Tolstoy among others (Kinna 2005; Marshall 1992; Woodcock 1962). The first anarchic action in Europe occurred in Italy where the movement became closely linked to working-class activism and eventually trade unions. The first Greek anarchist of note, Emanouil Dadaoglou, arrived in 1849. Dadaoglou was a merchant from Smyrna who met and was influenced by the noted Italian anarchist organizer Amilcare Cipriani. Shortly after arriving in Greece Dadaoglou was joined by a wave of other Italian political refugees<sup>71</sup> (Pomonis 2004). As noted above, Dadaoglou was involved in the 1862 revolution against the first king of Greece, Othon<sup>72</sup>, which

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<sup>71</sup> These dissidents were expelled from Italy following the War of Two Sicilies.

<sup>72</sup> Othon was made the first king of Greece in 1832 under the Convention of London, whereby Greece became an independent kingdom (free from Ottoman rule) under the protection of the United Kingdom, France, and the Russian Empire.

proved ultimately unsuccessful, as were his subsequent attempts to establish an anarchist organization in Greece. Dadaoglou was a follower of Bakunian anarchy, also known as collectivist anarchy which informed the anarchist paradigm in Italy and subsequently Greece (Kottis & Pomonis 2006; Pomonis 2004; Woodcock 1962). It is interesting to note that Bakunian collectivism, among other things, touts decentralization and autonomy, a system that would have fit rather closely with established early modes of rural Greek inter-village socioeconomic relations, particularly during the period immediately prior to and following the collapse of Ottoman rule in the country. This combined with the general poverty and distress that colored this period suggests why anarchist rhetoric would have been appealing to a mass audience. Let us consider this point further.

According to anarchic collectivism the state is replaced by a system of decentralized federation. This federation in turn consists of free autonomous communities, each of which owns its own property and means of production (Bakunin 1973; Kinna 2005:17-19; see also Kropotkin & Baldwin 1970). In the late-Ottoman Greek period, around the early 1800s, many regions, and indeed individual villages in the country, had become isolated both as a result of imposed travel restrictions by Ottoman overseers and protectionist internal socio-economic strategies practiced by each village (Jelavich 1985; Vakalopoulos 2003). I will argue below that this is the first instance of a protective localization which develops and changes over the years ultimately coming to influence popular perceptions of the state. At that early time in Greek history, Bakunian anarchy, or collectivism, could have been seen by the immediate post-Ottoman peasantry to approximate the mode of regional organization they were familiar with while rejecting the subjugation associated with monarchic rule (Ottoman or otherwise). Numerous local

attempts by individuals in positions of power to establish leadership can be seen as evidence of this general desire for Hellenic autonomy<sup>73</sup>. During this time the principles of decentralized federation might have easily been applied in the popular imagination to the concept of sovereignty, providing a model of quasi-anarchic, total internal freedom: government solely to ensure no foreign leadership – a model that still resonates with many rural Greeks today. However, the infighting, violence, and the state of disarray that resulted from various attempts to form a governing authority following independence would have nullified this vision for some leaving them open to the idea of either foreign rule or pure anarchy (on the political infighting during this time see Brewer 2001; Kaloudis 2002).

Of course, the early Greek anarchist movement failed, despite the fact that its supporters were initially tolerated and managed to attract followers. The failure of these early movements can be explained variously. Perhaps communication technology and quick information dissemination had not developed to the point where a virtual leaderless community might have been formed (a degree of spontaneity seems to be key to anarchist group formation both today and in the past). Perhaps if backers were involved and had activated pre-existing networks an anarchist movement could have been formed quickly among a pre-organized group. If we take the mass anarchist movement of 1868 that mobilized in Spain roughly around the same period of Greece's independence as a point of comparison, the above seem to be likely causes of anarchy's failure: Bakunin had sent several disciples to Spain to spread his message among the peasantry, instantly creating

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<sup>73</sup> Of note, some scholars of Greek history would disagree with this point (see for example Carey & Carey 1968:12; Kaloudis 2002:84) arguing instead that Greece was ready for a monarch, and a foreign one at that since infighting made a local candidate impossible (Van der Kiste 1994). I, however, am unconvinced that all Greeks desired another foreign ruler or ideology and that the general state of anarchy in the country was seen as negative by the majority.



several points of communication and coordination; and these disciples found pre-existing social networks amenable to anarchism that were simply activated and mobilized in support of the movement (see Holmes 2000:59; Mintz 1982). However, one other major difference separates the Spanish from the Greek example. In Spain, organizers found an oppressed but potentially explosive rural population whereas in Greece the population had recently been freed: the revolution was already half over. It is likely that local people were ultimately uninterested in actively mobilizing to resist yet another ruler. Perhaps they were willing to trade home-grown leadership and autonomy for peace, order, and freedom under foreign control.

Whatever the reason a mass anarchy movement failed to materialize in Greece, smaller more temporary organizations did nonetheless come together mostly around Athens, western Peloponnesus, and in the north of the country following one or another iteration of anarchy including anarcho-romanticism, anarcho-communism, anarcho-workerism, and anarcho-christianism. However, after 1920 anarchist activity in Greece seemed to cease altogether. Again, there are a number of reasons why this might have occurred, but I will highlight five possibilities or contributing factors. First, the eventual domination of Greek working-class movements by Marxist-Leninist ideology effectively cut anarchists off from their prime recruiting grounds. Anarchists were also wary to mobilize and advertise as the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), famously hostile towards anarchists, enjoyed substantial political success and social influence during this early period of the country's history. Also, Greeks, despite their political orientation, seemed eager for a strong state with strong dynamic leadership, therefore the anarchist message might have been seen by the public as dangerous, counterproductive, and un-

modern<sup>74</sup>. Anarchist ideology did not resonate with the political zeitgeist. Eventually, of course, larger events in Greece succeeded in not just silencing, but stamping anarchy out completely, key among which were: the dictatorial regime of Metaxas between 1936 and 1941; the war and German occupation of Greece between 1941 and 1945; and the subsequent civil war between 1947 and 1949 (Clogg 2002a; Clogg 2002b; Heurtley 1965; Higham & Veremes 1993; Iatrides 1972; Kourvetaris & Dobratz 1987; O'Ballance 1966; Petrakis 2006). During this period, the citizen came to re-evaluate their relationship with the state and, during times when the government ceased to exist, came to return to localization as a means of both resistance and, perhaps most importantly, protection. The civil war was especially a period of intense localization as trusted networks became concentrated further along the lines of political ideology.

Contemporary Greek anarchism re-emerged in 1967 when international student rebellion and libertarian movements plus local socio-economic and political conditions made the anarchist agenda relevant again. It is important to consider this early time in Greek anarchist history in some detail. By 1967 the KKE had been outlawed in Greece and Left wing groups were fiercely fighting for political power against the ruling British, and eventually American-backed, conservative government which had dominated since the end of the civil war in 1949. Greeks all over the country, and especially in rural areas, were suffering from severe economic inequality, underdevelopment, underinvestment, and poverty (Mazower 2000). Left wing politicians recognized this situation as an opportunity to broaden their support and so began to mobilize trade unions and students against the Right; an easy task as, in addition to the difficult conditions mentioned above,

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<sup>74</sup> The period between 1924 and 1936 was particularly tumultuous as Greece underwent twenty-three changes of government, one dictatorship and thirteen coups of varying degrees (Van der Kiste 1994:152-153).

the newly revived patron/client method of rewarding conservative supporters and of promoting conservative interests was causing added civic unrest. Fearing the return of the Communist Party, the government took aggressive measures against all Left and Center political groups including the manipulation of ballots during elections to ensure conservative victories, and even the assassination of a leftist member of parliament Grigorios Lambrakis (Athenian 1972:42). Eventually, however, Left wing persistence succeeded and the Center Union party led by George Papandreou formed government in 1964. Unfortunately, this marks the beginning of another turbulent time in Greek history.

Following the 1964 elections, tensions grew between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus prompting the establishment of a UN Peace Keeping force (UNFICYP) on the island. Diplomatic attempts to resolve the problem largely failed and the American government became increasingly concerned that Greece would destabilize NATO thereby harming US military and economic interests (Stefanidis 2000; Stefanidis 2007). This led to a period of external interference, internal political struggle and tension between 1964 and 1967; however, it should be noted, the specifics of the events that occurred during this time are still shrouded in controversy. Some analysts believe that the US began to support the Center Union Party of Papandreou in order to create stability; still, others believe the Americans backed anticommunists, conservatives, and King Constantine against Papandreou in order to restore the political climate that followed the civil war (Coulombis 1976; Coulombis 1966; Nicolet 2001; Stefanidis 2007). What is certain, however, is that during this period the Greek military was growing unhappy with the government and sought to increase its influence in political circles. To this end, military leaders began to create internal secret associations that supported the monarchy, were

anticommunist, and were fiercely anti-liberal (for example: IDEA, the Sacred Bond of Greek Officers; EENA, Union of Young Greek Officers) (Danopoulos & Gerston 1990; Gregoriades 1975). All this culminated in 1966 and led to events that would change Greece forever.

During this period it could be argued that the various internal and external forces vying for control of the country had, if not dismissed then at least overlooked, democratic principles and became absorbed in increasingly dangerous posturing, chicanery and manipulation to gain power. In the meantime, citizens were left to observe the situation through the media which was in turn divided into three distinct political camps mirroring the socio-political fractures that had divided the citizenship since before the 1930s: monarchists in support of democracy; anti-monarchists in support of democracy; and communists, obviously not interested in either democracy or the monarchy. Thus, there was an uncoupling between state-level players who were vying for power and control in both overt and covert ways, and citizens who were viewing state-level politics through polarized outlets. Greece had reached a condition of political inertia: neither was the government able to act nor was the divided, distracted and increasingly polarized citizenry able to effect change. We can take this period in Greek history to once again promote localization. As individuals became further entrenched in party politics and came to view detractors as potentially dangerous, one's network of politically like-minded contacts took on a meaning of safety. During this time the anarchist agenda was again largely irrelevant to the majority, although the movement's voice was not completely silenced. Some anarchist propaganda from this period indicates the movement sought to cut across the political spectrum, to reveal the stalemate that had

stymied progress, and to warn about external interference. These texts framed the political reality at the time in terms of a moral debate inspired by libertarian discourse: why should the citizen be confused by and suffer for the government which was more interested in internal wrangling than in the suffering populace – a sentiment that continues into anarchist writing today. Of course, these messages were broadly ignored by the majority and the situation continued to worsen, again, because citizens were entrenched within their political ideologies and dissenting voices rang as dangerous. Ultimately, King Constantine, seeking to maintain the monarchy and eager to stay in the military's favor, attempted to resolve the infighting and political maneuvering that had rendered the government ineffective by dismissing Papandreou<sup>75</sup>. This proved disastrous.

On April 21<sup>st</sup> 1967 the military junta of Georgios Papadopoulos and his Colonels came into power. The dictatorship was brutal, imprisoning opposing politicians, communists, and certainly anyone identified as an anarchist (see Athenian 1972:115). Papadopoulos came to power at a time when the population was frustrated by political incompetence, infighting, and corruption (Clogg & Yannopoulos 1972). It met little if any resistance from left or right wing politicians or, predictably, from King Constantine who supported Papadopoulos and his Colonels<sup>76</sup>; however, public tolerance waned quickly as the initial shock of the take-over faded and the reality of military rule settled in. In fact one could argue that over the seven year period of Papadopoulos's rule the conditions for the resurgence of anarchism in Greece were cultivated. The dictatorship

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<sup>75</sup> There was a power struggle at the time between the King and Papandreou over who was in command of the military. Fearing Papandreou was secretly trying to abolish the monarchy the King sought to replace him.

<sup>76</sup> The role of the King is actually quite ambiguous as some evidence shows him in support of the junta while other evidence indicates the opposite. Some have suggested that he was supportive of the Colonels at first, but then eventually came to resist them (Gregoriades 1975; Schwab & Frangos 1970)

quickly became associated with oppression, xenophobia, anti-intellectuality and tyranny (Faubion 1993:103; Wilkinson & Hughes 2004:557). The press was restricted, public action was banned, and fear descended as neighbors, friends, and spies, among others, could prompt the arrest and imprisonment of nearly anyone at any time. Protective localization had reached an extreme, perhaps even a breaking point. Deep ongoing suspicion and frustration left a scar on the collective political psychology. It can be argued that the distrust of the government and suspicion of other citizens became embedded in the Greek psyche at this time.

With time, even the supporters of the junta began to have doubts. The initially alluring vision of strong leadership Papadopoulos exuded faded due to the spread of contradictory rhetoric by the junta propaganda machine. At first the master narrative was populist, then overtly dictatorial, and eventually just confusing as narratives began to appear based on an ill-defined ideology concerning the “fashioning of a New Man”(Woodhouse 1985:31). As the junta wore on other abstractions emerged that were both plainly newspeak and incongruent with reality. Despite, or because of problematic propaganda, close monitoring of the public, and tight regulation, public agitation grew and, arguably, localization began to break down as individuals united along a growing sense of anger with the junta. Anarchists started to circulate anti-establishment propaganda rife with moral-libertarian rhetoric, held secret meetings, and even attempted to organize several factory worker unions (which were illegal at the time). Whispers of anarchist support for mass protest began to circulate in Athens adding to the chorus of voices demanding freedom from oppression (Kinna 2005:4). Eventually, in 1973, divisions and infighting within the junta, government ineptitude, and popular unrest led to

a dramatic student uprising. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, over a thousand students and anarchists occupied the Polytechnic University in Athens<sup>77</sup> provoking a violent response from the government on November 17<sup>th</sup> (Andrews 1980; Fatsi 1974), and precipitating the removal of Papadopoulos by Colonel Dimitrios Ioannidis. Ioannidis, in turn, made a number of catastrophic mistakes bringing Greece on the verge of war with Turkey prompting the mutiny of his supporters and the decision to dismantle the dictatorship for a return to democracy (Clogg 2002a).

The return to democracy brought with it a number of important changes to the way individuals in Greece perceived themselves relative to each other and to the state. Localization, which had been translated and lived in various iterations since Ottoman rule, had ultimately relocated of the locus of citizenship and nation from the macro-social to the intersubjective<sup>78</sup> and spread among the population a general, underlying sense of mistrust of the state<sup>79</sup>. This in turn provided the conditions for the next period of political change and for the return of anarchism.

### *Modernization and Greek Socio-Political Change*

The year 1974, when the country returned to democracy after the fall of the military junta, and the late 1990s, a period of normative national global awareness and political reflexivity, can be thought of as the defining moments of the current Greek

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<sup>77</sup> Incidentally, the Polytechnic University is only a few blocks away from Platia Exarchia.

<sup>78</sup> Herzfeld demonstrates that nation and citizenship are negotiated and have normative authority at the level of intimate, local, social spaces (1985).

<sup>79</sup> Of note, this came up in an interview I had with a senior aid to the Ombudsman. According to this consultant, deep rooted mistrust of the state undercuts the Greek Ombudsman's effectiveness since citizens don't believe the office to be impartial.

episteme<sup>80</sup>. Faubion argues that 1974 marks a period of continued modernization for most Greeks during which the normative influence of key historically-rooted nationalist discourses were modified by a rapid influx of imported human orders; a phenomenon which, according to a Weberian reading of modernity (1993:143), not only inspired critical self-realization, but also brought a Greek modern subjectivity to a broader population. Greece's membership into the European Union and eventual incorporation into the eurozone deepened and broadened the influence of imported phenomena that drove this modernizing renegotiation. We can take this period of reconsideration to mark an important moment of subjective change in the country during which the existential qualities of citizenship began to be renegotiated. By the late 1990s a new importation complicated this process of subjective renegotiation. As North Africa, the Mideast and the Balkans destabilized politically and economically, Greece experienced massive migrant inflows, in fact, Greece became the main point of entry for undocumented migrants (King 2000)<sup>81</sup>. The official reaction to this situation can be characterized as inadequate and damaging (see Antonopoulos 2006b): the state took few measures to accommodate, assimilate, integrate, or at the least register and manage the massive need this population brought for employment, healthcare, and social assistance. At every turn the government pursued a strategy of, as my consultants in the Ministry of the Interior put it, general reticence and inaction while acquiescing reluctantly to mandatory EU directives. However, the flow of immigrants did not abate, nor did their needs lessen;

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<sup>80</sup> I mean this term in the Foucaudian (2002) sense as in a historical *a priori* that grounds knowledge and its discourses.

<sup>81</sup> Frontex data presented by the ex-Minister of Interior Prokopis Pavlopoulos show that Greece is the main point of entry to the EU for illegal immigrants. In 2008, 146,337 illegal immigrants were arrested in Greece (24.54% of the total number of illegal immigrants arrested in the EU). In the same year, Spain's share was 16.88% and Italy's was 14.33%.



instead, the thousands of near destitute individuals coming into the country formed informal protective collectivities as described in chapter two, which provided the employment, housing, and social assistance individuals needed. Subsequently, this new survivor population began a slow morphogenic transformation of Greece's urban centers, dramatically altered the labor market (see Christopoulou & Kosma 2009:12)<sup>82</sup>, and facilitated the development of illegal and grey-market economic spheres.

As the city and the economy changed around them, many Athenians came to understand their security and political being not only in the terms provided by nationalist/sovereignist discourse and imported global phenomena, but relative to a changing topography – that is a social, economic, and political landscape in addition to a physical landscape – swayed undeniably by forces outside official controls. Here, Greek citizenship underwent a second major existential shift in which the structures of governance and the socio-cultural and historical determinants of local life were seen to be vulnerable to errant cosmopolitanization<sup>83</sup>. This change was registered within media discourse and in private conversations. The national concern over foreign perceptions of Greek progress and modernity, which could up to that point be considered a Greek rhetorical idiom indexing the popular post-1974 national/civic identity renegotiation, became supplemented by popular concern over destabilized locality articulated in terms of social, economic, and even “cultural” security. This locally-defined security discourse proliferated contributing to what was becoming a growing gap between the

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<sup>82</sup> It can be argued that the transformation of the labor market began in the late 1970s with early inflows of Albanian workers. While this is undoubtedly true, since the late 1990s undocumented migrants have further transformed agriculture, but also manufacturing, construction, and other areas of labor requiring relatively low or no specialized skills.

<sup>83</sup> On cosmopolitanization, and especially “risk-cosmopolitanization” see Beck (2006); see also and Ossman (2007a).

“decentered/destabilized” citizen and a perceived out of touch and increasingly inept state. For example, by the late 1980s and into the 1990s the once dominant center-left Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) party began to fall out of favor as it failed to address growing concerns over the economy and minorities, remaining, instead, faithful to outmoded post-junta modernist/nationalist discourses (Tsakalotos 2008). This ultimately weakened the party’s political hegemony and precipitated its fall from power. Yet, even well into the 1990s the two dominant political parties in Greece, PASOK and the center-right New Democracy (ND), continued to react to growing public concerns over security (variously defined) in accordance with the nationalist/sovereignist political discourses and sensibilities of the post-junta era, with very little if any success. An infamous example of this includes the “undocumented migrant roundup” programs of the 1990s ordered and justified by classic nationalist/sovereignist “us versus them” rhetoric: a bumbled, police-driven effort to quell public fear resulting in few arrests and the onset of a legal/political quagmire that would draw criticism from human rights groups around the world (see Antonopoulos 2006b). Once again, the state demonstrated its inability to manage a phenomenon perceived to be contributing to the destabilization and insecurity of the citizen.

Moving into 2000, Greeks were coming to struggle with a culminating variety of serious social, political, and ideological problems. The post-junta governments had deployed failed social policy after failed social policy (Petmesidou & Mossialos 2006), suffered from ongoing structural weakness and inefficiency (Danopoulos & Danopoulos 2001), openly struggled with political clientelism and corruption (see Featherstone 2008; Featherstone & Papadimitriou 2008), and seemed increasingly powerless relative to

global and transnational social and political-economic forces<sup>84</sup>. The failure of the state was articulated in the media and beyond, dually, in terms of internal ineptitude (see figure 2) and impuissance relative to external forces (see figure 3).

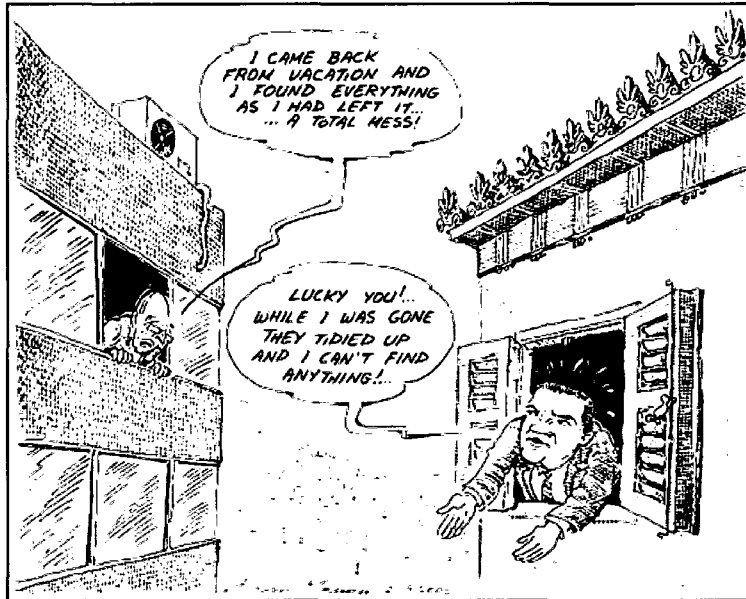


Figure 2: Political cartoon, I Kathimerini (H Καθημερινή) newspaper August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000

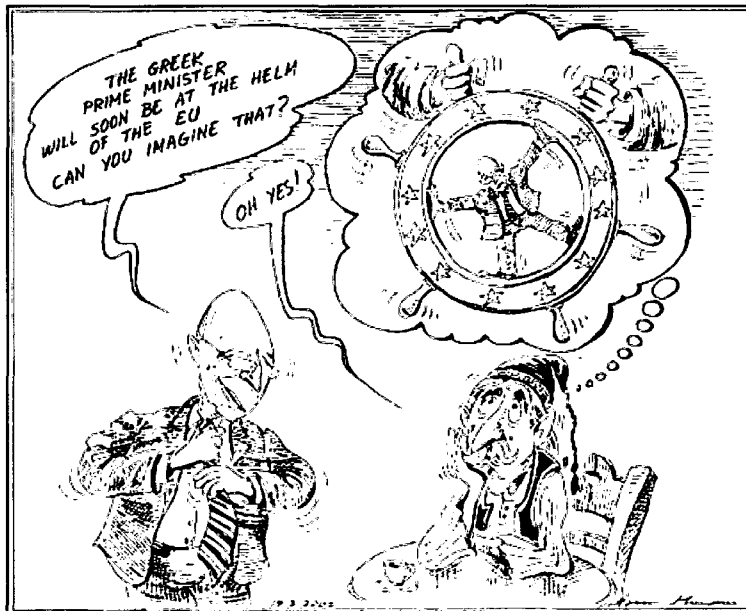


Figure 3: Political cartoon, I Kathimerini (H Καθημερινή) newspaper March 19th, 2002

<sup>84</sup> In the case of foreign policy, Ioakimidis argues that Greece used to produce not policies but “procedures” and “management” as substitutes for policy (1999:180), a strategy analysts argue is still very much in practice in Greece today (see, for example, Monastiriotis & Tsamis 2007).

Moreover, despite nearly 35 years of debate and civil action, the conditions of life, particularly among the lower and middle classes, remained broadly unsatisfactory and prospects for a positive future remained questionable: the state seemed unable or unwilling to effect changes desired by the citizenry. As the formal publics of the state came to be seen as increasingly ineffective and isolated from civil publics, cynicism towards political parties, politicians, and the political process spread and deepened (see Kafetzis 1994; 1997).<sup>85</sup> Consequently, the public sphere underwent a subtle transformation.

In a critical reflexive turn, civil publics began to attend more closely to suprastate and sub-state forces of various kinds that were perceived to have normative primacy over the domestic forces of governance and that were relevant to grassroots domestic issues. For example, as Greece entered the Eurozone between 2000 and 2003, individuals discussing the economy informally around kitchen tables and at cafés broadly dismissed the state as having lost control over commodity pricing, even as the media indicated otherwise<sup>86</sup>. In my interviews, most people described looking to various international political-economic trajectories in considering whether their wages would increase, the price of groceries would go up, or, for instance, whether the rates of private bank loans would drop. This critical reflexivity brought about a transformation in local discourses of risk and change whereby the rhetoric of unmitigated exposure which underlay the various

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<sup>85</sup> This phenomenon has also been noted in the Netherlands (referred to locally as the “gap” between voters and political representative) and in Germany where it is referred to by the term *politikverdrossenheit* (see Igwe 2004:332).

<sup>86</sup> According to Alexis Papahelas, the managing editor of *I Kathimerini* newspaper, Greeks suffer from a lack of public discourse where economic, social, and other issues might be debated (Papahelas 2009). This was certainly the case in the early 2000s, a period when the media was very interested in government strategies, interventions, and failures concerning the economy opting to gloss over the concerns and perspectives of ordinary citizens.

security concerns of the 1990s was replaced by rhetoric of ‘connection’. This effectively oriented individuals to think of themselves, and indeed the world around them, as integrated within wide-reaching economic, social, and discursive rhizomatic networks. Here we had the beginning of a transformation in political subjectivity which, as the following will demonstrate, came to promote a new mode of localization driven and informed by an interconnected civic consciousness<sup>87</sup>.

The significance of this phenomenon is multiple, but for the purposes of this work I will focus on two important considerations. First, individuals began to consider issues related to transnationally-driven local change within idiosyncratic national/civic identity negotiations. The impuissance of the state apparatus coupled with the decline of the country’s formal moral order resulting from poor governance and growing popular disillusionment, led the public to look towards private, local social experiences in their attempts to navigate unknown and unexpected contexts arising from new transnational interconnections and flows<sup>88</sup>. This resulted in the creation of a discursive space where formal ideological frameworks for understanding public life were supplemented with increasingly authoritative transnational discursive flows pertinent to various local socio-political and economic issues. What followed was the relocation of an imagined Greekness from the authority of state-sanctioned formal publics and “first-principles” national unity based on “cultural identity”, language, and the common history they promoted, to the level of micro-scale daily life where being Greek was being defined relative to the local effects of various national and transnational flows.

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<sup>87</sup> Note, here we see the breakdown of the national (Anderson 1983) and transnational (Basch et al. 1994; Hannerz 1996) dichotomy; an analytical perspective which has shaped anthropological investigations of such community-building phenomena as the internet. It is arguable that this dichotomy has also stymied examinations of Europeanization in its various forms.

<sup>88</sup> See Herzfeld (2005) on cultural intimacy.

I came across an example of this in 2003 in interviews with vendors and shoppers at open-air farmer's markets across Athens (the λαϊκή). This was a time when the prices of food and commodities were fluctuating due to Greece's adoption of the Euro and perceived deeper integration into European and international markets. The vendors I spoke with agreed that the price individuals were willing to pay for produce was becoming less associated, as it once was, with the reputation of the villages that grew it<sup>89</sup> and the vendor's ability to attract customers. According to these individuals it was therefore difficult to maintain a particular price point by way of traditional selling strategies that rely on these value markers like the hyper-Greek identity performance. As Herzfeld (1986) notes, farmer's markets are a site where the symbols of traditional Greek identity such as the public performance of masculinity choreographed to lyrical taunts delivered between vendors evoking honor and shame are a defining characteristic. Instead, haggling shoppers had made it clear that the price of produce was being set largely by the advertisements of multinational grocery chains and the new economic pressures endured by the middle class: there was a shift in subjective valuation criteria from traditional national/cultural markers to quality/quantity per Euro. As one vendor with a languishing stack of peaches put it:

Είμαι έξυπνος και φωνάζω πιο δυνατά απ'τους άλλους αλλά έχω βουνά εδώ! Γιατί δεν έρχονται σε μένα – τι, δηλαδή, δεν έχω καλά φρούτα? Τους κλέβω? Όλο ζητάνε «καλύτερες» τιμές. Δεν είμαι σουπερμάρκετ εδώ. Δεν μπορώ να δίνω έκπτωση σε όλους. Αμάν πια, ένας Έλληνας είμαι. Δουλεύω για το ψωμάκι μου φίλε. Όλοι έχουμε προβλήματα οικονομικά, όμως – έλα τώρα – τι θέλουν πια ... Κάποτε ερχόντουσαν σ'εμένα για τα καλύτερα φρούτα – «στον Άκη για ροδάκινα ωραία απ'τη Βέροια ». Τώρα πάνε στον Μαρινόπουλο.

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<sup>89</sup> These place-specific discourses are laden with traditional nationalist/sovereignist rhetoric such as achieving success/quality through perseverance and hard work, links to innovative generations-old clever processes, and superiority of product tied to the unique natural quality of place.

[I am clever and I yell louder than the others, but I have mountains here! Why don't they come to me – what, that is to say, I don't have good fruit? I cheat them? They're always asking for “discounts”. I'm not a supermarket here. I can't give discounts to everyone. My goodness, I'm one Greek. I work for my bread, friend. We all have problems with money, but – come now – what do they want ... Once they used to come to me for the best fruit – “to Aki for peaches from Veria”. Now they go to Marinopoulos<sup>90</sup>.]

The farmer's market is a site where individuals experienced and negotiated being Greek: shoppers viewed the market as an essentially Greek phenomenon and reported feeling a sense of Greek-ness when they were in the crowd among the stalls listening to competing vendor call-outs. However, these individuals were coming to redefine the site's significance and to shape their engagement with it, consciously, and increasingly, in consideration of the broader transnational context in which it was situated and which affected their lives. In other words, the traditional symbols of national identity that were a part of the farmer's market were coming to be experienced relative to newly authoritative, subjectively relevant, transnational economic phenomena. The meaning and function of the farmer's market was coming to reflect the new sensibilities and expectations of connected, critically reflexive individuals. The verbal exchanges between shoppers and vendors were becoming discursive sites where this new national identity was being negotiated.

The second significance of the changing political subjectivity I wish to examine here concerns a transformation in the sense of unity or commonality that unites Greeks, and the implications of this in terms of public action. As individuals came to negotiate being Greek in consideration of increasingly authoritative locally-relevant translocal

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<sup>90</sup> Marinopoulos is a supermarket chain (formerly, Champion Marinopoulos). The company opened its first supermarket in Athens in 1962. In 1999 the Marinopoulos group joined with the French Carrefour group to become the biggest retail chain in Greece. As of 2007 there were 145 Marinopoulos supermarket stores across Greece.

phenomena and discourses, immediate social networks, the members of which were variously attentive to similar phenomena and discourses, took on special significance. The intersubjective relationships individuals maintained, and the common discursive spaces these individuals engaged with on a regular basis, came to be the micro-scale foundations for a sense of unity based on a common experience of identity negotiation. This does not mean that individuals dismissed traditional nationalist discourses of cultural, linguistic, and historically-based unity, or lost their connection with Greeks outside their social networks. Rather, the connection to these other people remained but came to be informed by a more complex perceived commonality: individuals felt connected with other Greeks by the knowledge that they and their social networks were negotiating daily life relative to a set of variously similar local conditions and transnational flows and trajectories. While the specifics of particular localities may have differed, individuals were nonetheless united by a similar civic consciousness based on a similar political subjectivity<sup>91</sup>.

By the late 2000s, following the temporary nationalist fervor that accompanied the 2004 Athens Olympics, micro-scale idiosyncratic identity negotiation intensified with the country's growing socio-economic problems and deepening international interconnectedness. During this time there was a proliferation of informal activist groups which came together in ways consistent with social network-based civic unity, civic unity based on rhizomatic aggregation of localized individuals, and in some cases both. An

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<sup>91</sup> Of note, I am not suggesting that the neighbourhood was in some way replaced by networks, nor do I mean to evoke images of deterritorialisation or "mobile" citizen versus "territorial" citizen, whereby the latter is associated with the sedentary, historically conscious and culturally homogeneous (see Appadurai 1991:1998). I am describing something in between, but more towards the deterritorialized; a state of feeling connected not only by master narratives or "territorial" elements in general, but also increasingly by intimate, contingent, dispersed or "mobile" elements.



example of the former includes the formation of neighborhood collectives which came together along existing social networks to address issues of local concern: in the Athenian neighborhood of Halandri, individuals came together to fight environmental degradation; and in the neighborhood of Ag. Paraskevi, individuals came together to fight the sale of a local landmark home to developers interested in erecting a nightclub. In these examples, individuals belonging to interwoven social networks were attentive to common situations, conditions, or issues of concern, came to engage with related discursive spaces which formed publics that in turn informed united group action. The vigilante “Street Panther” group which advocates for pedestrian rights by vandalizing illegally parked cars with stickers provides an example of rhizomatic aggregation: as more and more people came together on the web in internet chat rooms to share stories of frustration over blocked sidewalks due to illegally parked cars, social capacity grew and the “Street Panthers” came together. In this case individuals with common subjective experiences and frustrations sought out publics where they could voice their concerns and opinions. An informal organization was subsequently formed by motivated individuals who coordinated public action according to the group’s dispositions and structure. Finally, groups like the “Open Assembly from the Hill of Strefi” (“Ανοιχτή Συνέλευση από τον λόφο του Στρέφη”) which was formed to protest the illegal burning of forest land to enable development in the mountains near Athens, provide an example of how local social networks came together to protest an issue of local interest, but subsequently attracted others who participated in the publics the group created and pursued action on their own or through their own social networks to support the cause.

These three examples demonstrate new modes of activism based on emerging political subjectivities, modes of social capacity-building based on intersubjective networks/rhizomatic aggregation, and the civil publics they create and become part of. This is not to say that groups like these did not exist before, but rather that they are becoming more common, remain informal and often evanescent, are attentive to conditions and discourses of interest to a more critical and translocally connected subjectivity, and are coming to have more serious political implications. Consider, for example, that civil public-based groups are having a delegitimizing affect on the established civil society. Greek civil society has been dominated by the state since the late 1970s; a reality which, since the end of the 2004 Olympics, became increasingly obvious, more frustrating, and more disheartening to local people. Through the granting of selective state loans, licenses, concessions, jobs, and by way of party-led labor organizations and professional organizations, Greek political parties have maintained control over activist groups of various kinds. In fact, Greek civil society can be considered arms-length formal publics of political parties (see Sotiropoulos 2004). Needless to say, this has contributed to the continued weakness of this sector (Diamandouros 1991; Lyrintzis 2002; Makrydemetris 2002; Mavrogordatos 1993; Mouzelis 2002:238-245) and to popular frustration and disillusionment (Makrydemetris 2002; Mouzelis & Pagoulatos 2005)<sup>92</sup> especially as the issues these groups support are coming to be increasingly defined by state-level political wrangling rather than the

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<sup>92</sup> Of note, some have argued that two enclaves of strong civil society have existed in Greece since their inception: associations of liberal professionals, and trade unions of the wider public sector (Sotiropoulos & Bourikos 2002). However, my field research indicates that corruption both within these organizations and within the government nonetheless ensures their close political and ideological alignment even if they are officially uninvolved with each other.

interests and concerns of citizens and as the civil action they undertake fail to achieve sustained benefits<sup>93</sup>.

Social action potential is thus moving from formal organizations to informal activist groups engaging in various socio-political activities in pursuit of locally relevant ends. In this relocation the kinds of civil action individuals may engage in are also being redefined by a combination of emerging group dynamics and, increasingly, by the translocally informed publics at the heart of these initiatives. As this trend intensifies, Greece is seeing a growing popular politics based on an ethics informed by critical civic sensibility increasingly decoupled from formal discourses. In this turn, space has opened within the political landscape for deeply democratic social action, but also for the proliferation of radical factions. As the following will demonstrate, these radical factions are coming to influence certain groups attentive to publics compatible with their socio-political goals. Among certain groups, this is contributing to an increasingly ideologically-based animosity towards the state, rather than frustration or disillusionment based primarily on experience, and is moreover bringing the tactics of globally connected insurgent groups within the purview of domestic politics.

### ***The Rise of an Anti-Establishment Youth: Exploring the Paréa***

By 2000 it was increasingly plain that the government had failed the youth of Greece: drug and alcohol use among this population was increasing (Kokkevi et al. 2000;

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<sup>93</sup> The classic academic rendition of a strong civil society posits its independence from major institutional spheres, organizations, and markets, ensuring freedom to act in an uninhibited manner between the citizen and the state according to a logic of civic solidarity (Cohen & Arato 1992; Lockwood 1964; Tester 1992). The close involvement of the state in civil society suggests that this is not the case in Greece; however, this work argues that civil society in fact does exist, but one must examine the political field on a different scale to find it.

Madianos et al. 1995); burglaries, pick pocketing, and random muggings were on the rise inspiring among young people a sense that they lived in an ever more dangerous city; and troubling economic trends and the uncertain state of the social security system was making it obvious that the youth would always have to rely on their families for protection, hindering the individual's failure to succeed independently (Chtouris 1992; see also Flaquer 2002). However, the youth population was let down most profoundly by the failing education system. Despite reforms and counter-reforms by alternate governments, the elementary and secondary education system in Greece remained poorly managed, underfunded, relied on outmoded teaching methodologies, and often suffered from political intervention<sup>94</sup>. At this time, daily life for the majority of Greek youth consisted of attending classes at these ramshackle, ill-equipped, state-run schools followed by hours of expensive private tutoring<sup>95</sup>. This tutoring would be offered most commonly by public-sector school teachers looking to supplement their meager salaries by covering material which should have been offered in the classroom. Students from wealthy families would end up in better private lessons and would therefore be more prepared for exams than their less wealthy classmates. In addition to extending the school day by hours and demonstrating the failure of public institutions, private tutoring would also provide young people with a soft introduction to public sector clientelism and corruption<sup>96</sup>. Secondary education would end with national exams for placement in the

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<sup>94</sup> For example, a history textbook for 12 year-old school children was the source of much debate and posturing in 2007 by politicians and church officials who claimed it glossed over important national(ist) issues. The text, which was compiled by academics from various universities, was eventually amended.

<sup>95</sup> This intense program is interrupted only by summer and religious holidays during which the majority of young people unleash the pent-up desire for freedom from study.

<sup>96</sup> It is also quite obvious that the education system contributes to Bourdieusian social differentiation (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), a reality students recognize in informal terms.

college and university system: a ferocious competition usually resulting in vast disappointment.

Beginning their college or university careers, students would move into a sphere which has been overtly controlled by the dominant political parties for decades, where party agents and representatives of unofficial political movements peddle their ideologies openly and actively attempt to polarize and even radicalize the student body (Kontogiorgis 2009). Moreover, it would become obvious that the administrations at these schools were crippled by corruption and poor management, academic standards were shockingly low, faculties openly condoned most academic offenses<sup>97</sup>, and that campuses were neglected and disintegrating<sup>98</sup>. Whereas afterschool tutoring offered an advanced look at clientelism and corruption, colleges and universities stood as microcosms of the broader state of politics in the country. Students entering into these spaces tended to adopt flippant attitudes toward them and developed clever strategies to circumnavigate requirements and policies with a view toward “getting through” the system rather than gaining an education (Kontogiorgis 2009:93). In effect, the time individuals spent in college and universities resulted in what is tantamount to a multi-year training ground for a fractious citizenship contemptuous of formal processes, representatives, and structures, prone to potentially mischievous civil action. Graduation would be followed by a lengthy job search in a market which has been very small since the 1980s (Greece 2009b) and relatively closed due to the clientelism governs much of the hiring in the country. Even the youth that were fortunate enough to find jobs would

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<sup>97</sup> According to my interviews, these academic offenses include the submission of “purchased papers” and plagiarism. At some universities it is even common practice for professors and teaching assistants to “ghost write” papers, theses, and other academic works for students willing to pay for these services.

<sup>98</sup> This was due mostly to neglect and vandalism.

be disappointed as the average salary for university graduates was, and continues to be, insufficient for an independent life. As more and more graduates found themselves unemployed and/or socially immobile<sup>99</sup>, frustration and anger grew.

However, the political polarization of students and the ingrained disillusionment with the state their experiences at university/college promoted was not new; in fact, it can be argued that students in Greece had been exposed to this reality and had been moving toward the civic subjectivity described above since before the country's 1974 return to democracy<sup>100</sup>. Yet, there is no question that the civil action students undertake today lacks the sense of political purpose that characterized the actions of the youth movements of the past: older generations fought for concrete and identifiable political ends like political reform and the termination of military rule, whereas the purposes of the current youth generation are more difficult to discern beyond a general rejection of the state and authority. This is becoming a defining characteristic of the youth population since 2000. To understand this break from the older generation it is instructive to look at how today's youth population views themselves relative to their predecessors and to the past in general. Due to a variety of reasons, including the social and curricular deficiencies of the education system, temporal distance from the civil action of the past, and a growing preoccupation with economic security, young people have lost a sense of historicity, or, awareness of the historical dimension of the social reality they live in (Askouni 2000; see also Voulgaris 2000). Evidence of this is provided by the dismissive attitudes parents are met with when talking to their children about the youth struggles of their time, the broad

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<sup>99</sup> Unemployment numbers have steadily increased over the past ten years for the 25-and-under population of Greece. Labor economists I interviewed and statistics provided by the Greek National Statistical Service (2009b) suggest that a quarter of this population are out of work.

<sup>100</sup> Incidentally, and as mentioned above, the country's return to democracy was the result of a student uprising at the Athens Polytechnic.

disinterest among young people in editorial news items by pundits in the media, and by the general attitude of most young people that the past is the doing of flawed generations whereas the present and future belong to them. It follows that established political discourses do not resonate with this population, even if particular political ideologies do. This poses a problem for analysts interested in studying youth politics as the motivations that drive this population and the socio-political mechanisms which produce sustained, collective public action are not obvious. The key to understanding what moves students today, including younger secondary school students, beyond partisan politics and disillusionment toward broad participation in anti-establishment action and the condoning of violence against symbols of authority is identifiable at the level of micro-social practice.

During this period between the late 1990s and into 2000 there was a surge in the popularity of anti-establishment material such as punk, post-punk, low-bap (a sub-genre of the Greek hip hop music scene that emerged during the mid-1990s), and underground music and such anti-establishment practice as attending illegal clubs among other expressions of discontentment and frustration with the state and authority in general including graffiti and vandalism, especially in the major cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. Also during this period the internet became a national youth obsession (see for example Siomos et al. 2008)<sup>101</sup> and young individuals began to explore anti-establishment material online. The most popular sources of this material were websites such as indymedia.org, anarchy.gr and, eventually, various pages on the social networking sites myspace.com and facebook.com. Digital music by edgy independent

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<sup>101</sup> Data from Greece indicate that from 1999 to 2006, the percentage of households using the internet increased from 9% to 33.7%. In September 2007, 3.8 million Greek people had access to the internet. Among people ages 12 to 18 years, 70% to 80% are internet users (Greece 2009a).

artists from around the world distributed through websites, over peer-to-peer networks, and by online radio stations such as “Radio Revolt” became another popular source of online anti-state discourse. Of note, “Radio Revolt” openly supports anarchist activities and even provides a forum where the letters of jailed dissidents are read. Anti-establishment bands like “Hands of Cain” which had originally formed in Athens in 1983 but never released a record, and “On Sea” (“Ev Plw”) which formed in Athens in 1985 to little commercial success<sup>102</sup>, were being rediscovered online<sup>103</sup>. Finally, young people began to read blogs maintained by anarchists and others sympathetic to the anarchist cause both in Greece and abroad. Up to 2007 one such popular blog entitled “follow the rabbits” was maintained by an anarchist. To generate interest and an “insider” following, the author would tag city walls with rabbit graffiti in the style of the British graffiti artist Banksy. Of note, these blogs didn’t address political concerns exclusively, but rather discussed a wide range of issues and themes from sports, especially soccer, to popular television programs.<sup>104</sup>

As individuals belonging to interwoven social networks struggled with common conditions and issues, the anti-establishment discourses they consumed primarily online fostered a sense of unity based on a shared anti-establishment ethos, especially as these discourses were incorporated into the publics young people attended to socially (see Shirky 2008; Warner 2002)<sup>105</sup>. Yet, community-based, rhizomatic, or mixed anti-

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<sup>102</sup> Of note, the track “dream” from this record was dedicated to the political radical Mixalis Prekas.

<sup>103</sup> In fact, some of these bands, like “Hands of Cain”, became such online hits that their music was picked up by record companies and is currently available for sale in brick-and-mortar stores on vinyl.

<sup>104</sup> I focus here primarily on the internet, although magazines, graffiti, etc. are other mediums by which anti-establishment discourses are disseminated. The key is that unlike previous examinations of subversive media (Downing 2001), these mediums convey discourses that are not necessarily locally bound, even when they are locally produced.

<sup>105</sup> Theorists have long noted the special role small gatherings play in developing a common spirit or sense among a population (Giesen 2001; Habermas 1991:32).



establishment collectives failed to proliferate during this time. It wasn't until after 2004, during the deepening political-economic failure of post-Olympic Greece<sup>106</sup>, that broader popular anti-state youth action began to occur. The reasons for this are twofold: first, during this period anxiety and frustration over the conditions young people faced had deepened among this population considerably, especially as the promise of a "Modern European Greece" slipped away (Papahelas 2009); second, anti-establishment discourses, and the publics they contributed to, came to inform intersubjective practice within micro-scale youth sociality (see Agre 1999:4; Brown & Duguid 2000 on "communities of interest"; Lave & Wenger 1991 on "communities of practice"). As the following will demonstrate, large-scale anti-establishment, and indeed anti-state youth action during this time, was enabled by the taking-up of micro-scale anti-establishment activity.

Into 2004 and afterwards downloaded digital music and video was often shared between friends in person or remotely using mobile messaging technology and email. As more sophisticated mobile phones became available, young people began to load them with small caches of their favorite anti-establishment material which they would share among friends and especially new acquaintances, adding a layer of popular dissident meaning to established greeting practice among Greek youth (see Wilson & Peterson 2002). For example, upon meeting someone new, individuals would typically exchange mobile phone numbers. The new relationship would then be negotiated, at least in part, over mobile text message over the coming days and weeks. In place of deliberately

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<sup>106</sup> During this period the newly elected New Democracy government discovered an exceptionally high budget deficit, verified by Eurostat, thus initiating the Excessive Deficit Procedure by the European Commission. By 2006, the dept was coming under control, but the subsequent global economic downturn tied to the American sub-prime market collapse and increasing oil prices coupled with a lack of Greek structural economic improvements, sent the country back into national dept. This occurred while the unemployment rate increased, inflation rose, GDP dropped, and government expenditures grew (see Monastiriotis 2009).

composed messages, the initial electronic communication between new acquaintances often took the form of humorous forwarded text, video, or images, again typically with either overt or implicit anti-establishment meaning. This was and continues to be seen as a way of establishing positive rapport without seeming too eager or interested: a play at appearing connected (with popular culture and the youth zeitgeist), and socially adept. Thus portable caches index an important aspect of one's identity during social interactions<sup>107</sup> while strengthening intersubjective bonds. It follows that the anti-establishment messages, images, and actions portrayed by this material often inform bonding activities within established groups such as attending particular concerts, committing vandalism, cutting class, breaking the law, contravening certain social and cultural conventions, etc.<sup>108</sup> These bonding activities have become discursive spaces where idiosyncratic identity negotiation take place, strengthening intersubjective bonds and a sense of unity with other youth. Over time these micro-scale intersubjective bonding activities have come to include more involved activities requiring a greater degree of commitment and even some risk.

Today, young people from 10 years old and up talk openly and often act boldly against the state/establishment and the "situation" (κατάσταση), not only as a means of protest but also as a way of bonding or showing solidarity with their friend groups and peers, a local social category referred to as one's *paréa* (παρέα). A dramatic example of this occurred recently in an Athenian suburb where students acted collectively to trap their teachers in a classroom, demanding the reinstatement of an expelled classmate in

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<sup>107</sup> Miller (2004; 2005) and others have noted the use of circulated electronic material in the formation of specific and sometimes iconoclastic youth identities. The Greek example shows the formulation of specific political identities.

<sup>108</sup> Of course, the degree and specific iterations of these actions depend on multiple factors like, for example, context and the socioeconomic status of the friend group.

exchange for the teachers' freedom: a micro-scale revolt against authority. Such an act would not have been possible had the students not felt an affinity towards an anti-establishment ideology, or if students did not feel a sense of unity with peers, both within their social circles and beyond them, that enabled this kind of broad political solidarity. The paréa has thus become a site of non-political, civil or proto-civil social potentiality. Consider another example: adolescents and younger university-age people have taken to occupying abandoned houses on the weekends where they hold parties, screen movies, organize environmental action, and, more recently, pursue "DIY"<sup>109</sup> living by planting vegetable gardens, generating their own power, and reusing discarded furniture and appliances from the neighborhood<sup>110</sup> (see figure 4).



*Figure 4: An occupied home in Halandri, Athens.*

<sup>109</sup> This is a popular acronym for "do it yourself": a trend that has become popular among environmentally conscious individuals (see for example Purdue et al. 1997) and generally those looking to save money, fight consumerism, and global corporate influence (see for example Strachan 2007).

<sup>110</sup> For more on these kinds of urban "squats" see Ruggiero (2001).

These groups, while employing guerrilla-style anti-state politics in occupying owned land, demonstrate that the popular anti-establishment publics include not only discourses based on and advocating for political insurgence, but also environmentalism (see figure 5) and libertarian civic ideologies with connections around the world.



Figure 5: A banner hung outside the occupied house in Halandri, Athens, reads: “the creek must remain green: no more cement, no more lies”.

Of note, some of the groups that occupy houses like the Prapopoulou squat in the Athenian suburb of Halandri have begun to host their own websites<sup>111</sup> and to run their own blogs, effectively contributing to the anti-establishment publics that inspired them. Let us consider the Prapopoulou squat more closely.

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<sup>111</sup> As of the publication of this article the Prapopoulou squat website could be found at: <http://protovouliaxalandriou.blogspot.com/> (.)

While discussing the plight of local migrant groups with a friend who worked at the Athens office of an international NGO, I was told about a house located in Halandri where local youth had created a “safe space” for undocumented foreigners, individuals of “contrary social opinion”, and for those curious about foreign cultures, language, and society. He gave me general directions and I headed off the next day to find this house, purportedly the first “safe space”-style center in the Athenian suburbs. After a short walk I found myself in an affluent neighborhood walking along a creek towards the north-east of the suburb. It seemed doubtful to me that any kind of dissident social movement could manifest in this area. At the time, I had been living in Halandri for nearly a year and had visited the suburb regularly many years prior to my fieldwork; but I had never seen this house, nor had heard anything about it. In fact, I had walked the same street my contact pointed me to several times and had never noticed anything out of the ordinary. As I approached the end of my directions I began to look for an old shack, or, in a moment of J.K. Rowling-inspired imagination, a nondescript door hidden between ordinary apartments; however, what I found was a large abandoned home on an enormous plot of land – apparently the only magic hiding it from me before was my own selective attentiveness.

The property alone must have been worth millions of Euros, but the home was also quite substantial consisting of at least two floors and an expansive cellar. Looking at it for the first time I was amazed that this large home and its property had remained untouched by developers; it later occurred to me that the site was probably protected from sale by the usual tangle of inheritance claims that complicate the legal standing of old properties like this. Unfortunately, my efforts to learn more about the site’s legal status

and history from its current owner(s) were unsuccessful, nor was the mayor's office very forthcoming with information about the plot<sup>112</sup>. I resorted instead to interviews with neighbors, archival research, and to what might be considered architectural archaeology. Eventually I discovered that the property belonged to a local wealthy family named Prapopoulou and that the house was likely built between 1915 and 1930 at a time when Halandri consisted mainly of farm fields. The architecture of the structure tells us something further. During this period, prominent Athens-area architects like Vasileios Kouremenos and Emmanouil Lazaridis were introducing rationalist style to Classicism resulting in a kind of "archaizing modernism" (Condaratos & Wang 1999:22-24). Note this was not modern architecture but rather a modernization, or updating, of the classical design language achieved through its simplification or generalization and stylization; a trend that had become popular among the Athenian bourgeoisie. Accordingly, the ornaments that adorn the building, and indeed the general structure itself, were designed to exude geometrical clarity and firm proportions. However, perhaps with the intention to soften the building's appearance or to add a further sense of refinement, the architect who designed the Prapopoulou estate added elements of French Art Deco to the ironwork that form the balconies and the gates that surround the property. At the time of its construction, the building would have presented an update to a familiar Greek aesthetic achieved through a progressive design language itself touched by artistic modes *en vogue* throughout Europe and in Greece: it would have been a vision of cutting-edge Greek architectural grandeur at the periphery. During this period, and up to around the 1960s, wealthy Athenian families often built summer homes in the Halandri region. It was also

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<sup>112</sup> In fact, the staff at the mayor's office was very polite but reluctant to give me any information about the property when I approached them.

common for families to return to the villages from where they came to build or expand family (patriarchal) homes. It is unclear whether the Prapopoulou family originated from Halandri or not. Regardless, this house which was built among the trees at the meeting point of a peaceful creek and the main road that led to Athens, the Prapopoulou estate would have stood for wealth, refinement, and ultimately, progress and promise.

When I first saw it, however, the house looked worn, old, and out of place. Its exterior had been damaged by years of exposure and neglect and the land that surrounded it had become overgrown and wild. Yet, I couldn't take my eyes off it. Despite the damaged exterior and unkempt surroundings, the structure was striking: just as the Acropolis contrasts with the urban nest that surrounds it, so too does this house contrast with the rows of apartment buildings it separates. In contemporary Greece, anachronism seems to carry power. Both the Propopoulou estate and the Acropolis represent different imagined moments in the national history-ideal – the Acropolis standing for the familiar Classical past, and the estate representing a relatively more recent period of growth, wealth, and an accompanying gentrified periphery. Both sites are laden with symbolic meaning and their uses inevitably converse with those meanings. For example, while the Acropolis is used by the government for both symbolic and economic nationalist ends which accord with and support the broader public perception of the site, the Propopoulou estate is being used by rebellious anti-establishment youth pursuing activities that contradict the politics, modes of wealth-making, and socio-cultural practices the estate stands for. This may seem negative, but consider the broader context. Instead of maintaining the site as a symbol of Greek prosperity, the current legal owners of the land were perceived to be wrangling over who would benefit most from the estate's eventual

demolition and the raising of modern apartment buildings: an image of modern corruption, greed, and the failure of the traditional family unit. On the contrary, the site's current users were seen by their neighbors, positively, to be preserving the historic building from demolition<sup>113</sup>, maintaining the feel of the neighborhood, and promoting green living even if the local residents were, in the end, a little suspicious of what went on in the house. So, the Propopoulou estate stood, simultaneously, as a symbol of what is wrong with contemporary Greek society and how it might be different.

On the day I discovered the property there was no sign of life in or around the house, but several subsequent night visits revealed that a large group of young people were frequenting the site. Most of these nocturnal visitors would leave the property after three in the morning, although some would sleep there. I recognized a number of these individuals from my visits to Platia Exarchion, from various protests, and from around the suburb, although I didn't know them personally. In time I conducted interviews with some of the more regular visitors, including the site's self-appointed grounds-keepers. These individuals spoke about being part of a broader national<sup>114</sup> and international<sup>115</sup> collection of occupied sites, about preserving green-space, experimenting with off-the-grid living, and about providing free habitation for all and especially the urban poor. These individuals had established a large garden, installed a wind-powered generator on the roof, and were advertising free Spanish lessons, free movies, and the hours of operation of a café that was available to be run by any group interested in raising money.

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<sup>113</sup> It is illegal to demolish the building while it is occupied, even if occasionally.

<sup>114</sup> There is another house such as the one in Halandri located at 37 Lelas Karayanni Street in Athens, although several more exist across Greece. The Lelas Karayanni house is famous, however, as it has been occupied for several decades and was recently targeted by the urban beautification and development committee of the 2004 Olympic Games.

<sup>115</sup> Some of these sites have adopted the symbol of a circle with a zigzagging tree or arrow splayed across its middle. This symbol signifies an interest in environmental activism.



One of the occupying youth later told me that this café sharing scheme and the language lessons were inspired by similar programs at the *Migrant's Place* at Platia Exarchion. The language lessons are particularly interesting: whereas the main goal of the language program at the *Migrant's Place* is to teach Greek to newcomers, the language program at the Prapopoulou Squat aims to teach foreign languages to local Greek youth. The site had also been adapted to accommodate several computers, a recreation/games room, and a library with comfortable furniture, all of which were available for anyone to use free of charge. The site's blog, which was maintained by one of the regular users from inside the property, was linked with the online network of other international occupied sites and was advertised, and itself advertised, the indymedia.org website which was in turn run by a local anarchist group<sup>116</sup>.

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Presently, it is common to find five or six small groups of two or three young people using the site during the week. On the weekends they usually hold parties or host concerts, which attract larger numbers. It is important to emphasize that young people are not acting collectively as in a “unified virtual youth community”, but, again, in small, not necessarily politically self-aware groups based on social networks. Of note, Habermas would doubt that these kinds of groups are in fact political (Cohen & Arato 1992:212), but the following demonstrates that they do act according to a specific

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<sup>116</sup> On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Greece's national Independence Day, unknown persons entered the Propopoulou estate at 3:30 AM, stole a computer tower and set fire to the structure (Squat 2008). Within a few minutes the fire consumed the first floor and spread to the upper level causing the roof to collapse. Local residents called the fire department which arrived in time to save little more than the burnt-out shell of the building. Similar attacks on occupied sites were subsequently carried out across Greece in the months that followed, but the culprits were never discovered. However, in the weeks following the fire the young people who frequent the site held a benefit concert and protest on the property to raise support for the repair of the building. Nearly five hundred people from the community and beyond participated in the event. Presently, the site has been restored to functionality and is improving daily.

underlying political ideology for identifiable, if loosely defined, political ends. Members of these groups describe feeling connected to a broader anti-establishment movement, community, or ethic, but not restricted by or acquiescent to any particular organization or structure. An interview I conducted with a high-school-aged boy attending a party at the Prapopoulou squat reveals this sentiment. Of note, this interview was conducted in English because I was introduced to him as an “American university student”, and he insisted on conversing in English, as he explained, partially to practice his language skills but also because he deemed using English with me showed hospitality (φιλοξενία):

Othon (O): So why did you come tonight?

Consultant (C): My friend heard about this place so we came to see what it’s like.

(O): How did he hear about the squat? From a member, I mean, someone who comes here often?

(C): Member? No! ... squats ... I don’t think they have members! My friend got a text message about the party and we came. This is one of those places where people just come to have a good time. We come to places like this often, we like it.

(O): Are you guys making a statement by coming here? Is there a political reason you go to parties at squats?

(C): No, no statement really. One friend will call another when we hear about these parties and we just go, you know, to meet girls ... [laughing] ... We feel comfortable at squats like this, they’re free spaces and everyone likes that. People like to feel free for a while ... that’s as political as we’ll be tonight!

(O): Would you come back here by yourself when there’s no party?

(C): I don’t know ... maybe, but probably not without my friends. We’re not really here for the squat, although we feel good about supporting it ... no, we’re here because it feels right and we want to have fun.

On occasions, as in the above example, when more than one paréa gathers socially, individuals still identify with their own paréa primarily, and with the totality second<sup>117</sup>.

The intersubjectivity at work in these larger gatherings is thus quite complex. Within their paréa, individuals are connected by a sense of friendship and/or kinship, but to the

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<sup>117</sup> McPhail (1991) has also observed this phenomenon among gatherings of small pre-existing social groups.

larger group the connection is based more broadly on a sense of participation in a space informed by the shared anti-establishment ethos. On the macro-level, then, the paréas participating in anti-establishment action have an affinity towards each another but are not formally associated. Thus, the coming together of various paréas is not necessarily about actively protesting the establishment *per se*, but the result of a subjective decision pertaining to micro-scale social activity informed by anti-establishment publics. A large gathering of these paréas can best be described as a temporary aggregation of nodes that comprise a single rhizome which, once all together, act with general consensus. The primary difference between gatherings like this and other rhizomatic groups like the “Street Panthers” is that youth gatherings are typically made up of distinct paréas that come together, rather than individuals.

### *Anarchy and Youth Politics*

It is the intersubjective dynamics and tendency to gather at events that are informed by an anti-establishment ethos that the anarchist movement in Greece takes advantage of today. Essentially, by tapping into the broad anti-establishment sentiment that pervades the youth population, anarchists are able to mobilize large numbers to support their causes by way of rhizomatic aggregation. Today, this is achieved by contributing to the publics that the youth consume, particularly over the internet. One anarchist organizer explained to me that he stays in touch with the youth population passively by maintaining an internet presence, which I will detail below. He refers to the youth as “casual anarchists” suggesting that the majority are likely to support the anarchist cause but do not actively seek out anarchist materials. This represents a major

strategic shift from the anarchist resurgence of the 1980s when organizers were still interested in creating associations and were dedicated to producing regular propaganda, usually in the form of pamphlets and short periodicals. These groups sought to build an active following which they thought would seek out anarchist texts and would subsequently participate in formally coordinated anarchist activities.

Between 1982 and 1983 there was even an attempt to form an *anarchist political party* called the “Anarchist Federation”, but this was mostly an exercise in political criticism and didn’t last for very long. During this time a number of anarchist-communist groups also formed with the Group of Anarchist-Communists of Nea Smyrni<sup>118</sup> (Ομάδα Αναρχοκομμουνιστών Νέας Σμύρνης) being the most influential. The leaders of this association worked with the publisher Eleftheros Typos (Ελεύθερος Τύπος, Free Press) in Athens to produce “Anarchist” (Αναρχος), a leaflet dedicated to promoting their activities and spreading the political theory of Peter Kropotkin and Murray Bookchin<sup>119</sup> (a mix of classic anarchist philosophy and more modern anarchist perspectives on decentralization, anti-capitalism, and ecological awareness). Some years later, in November 1986, another group appeared calling itself the Anarchist-Communist Cell of Ano Liosia<sup>120</sup> (Αναρχοκομμουνιστικός Πυρήνας Άνω Λιοσίων) which published the magazine “Autonomous Action” (Αυτόνομη Δράση) in partnership with a small circle of anarchists (not anarchist-communists) from Piraeus. The magazine ran until 1991 and included

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<sup>118</sup> Nea Smyrni is an inner suburb of south-central Athens.

<sup>119</sup> Murray Bookchin was a Trotskyist communist rather than a Stalinist. His appeal to modern anarchists is his stand against urbanization and for ecological awareness which provides a nice supplement to classical anarchist theory that does not address these issues adequately (see Bookchin 1992; Bookchin 1995; Bookchin 1999; Bookchin 2007).

<sup>120</sup> Ano Liosion is a poor working class suburb in the west-end of Athens.

articles criticizing local municipal activities, engaged with broader current affairs, and encouraged the formation of a unified anarchist community.

It is interesting that, following the restoration of democracy and the official decline of the KKE, anarchist-communist groups begin to form. Ideologically this phenomenon is understandable considering the close proximity of Bakunian theory to Marxism<sup>121</sup>; however, considering the years of suffering anarchists endured at the hands of communists, it would seem surprising that social support would exist for the formation of a group following such an ideological hybrid. Of course, numerous anarchist groups unrelated to communism also arose after democracy was restored. These are numerous, but the largest and most vocal is the Libertarian Syndicalist Union (Ελεύθερη Συνδικαλιστική Ένωση) based in Athens but with nodes in Paros, Rhodes, and Trikala. This group has published a lot of material mostly addressing issues relevant to the working class.

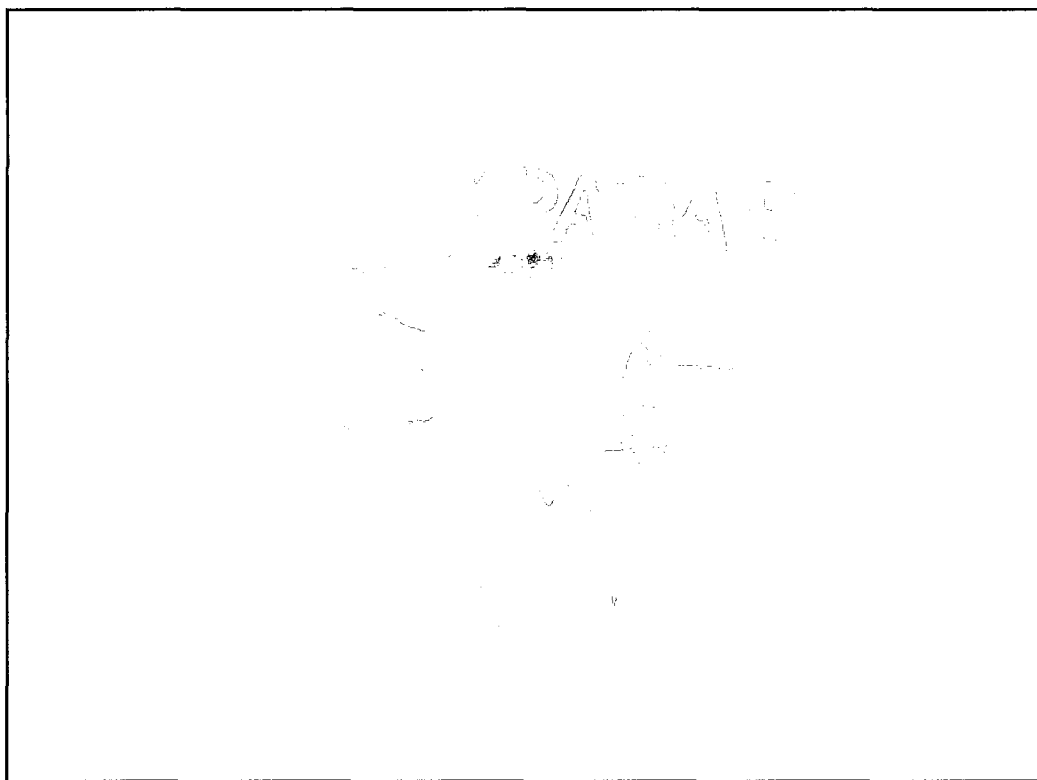
There are also other notable more recent anarchist publications of this style. These are put together by anarchists from Athens, but also Nea Smyrni, Peloponnesus, Thessaloniki, and elsewhere, by casual supporters of the movement seeking to raise awareness of particular issues or to criticize the state and its agents, but also by well educated individuals including a number of students involved with university publications both in Greece and elsewhere in Europe who engage in the more philosophical aspects of anarchy. The most important texts include: “The Children of the Gallery” (Τα Παιδιά της Γαλαρίας) which is still publishing; “Red Thread” (Κόκκινο Νήμα) which is an editorial group that has produced several books and translations of key anarchist theory; “New Topology” (Νέα Τοπολογία) which is also still publishing;

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<sup>121</sup> I refer here to classical Marxism (as in Marx et al. 2004) rather than Leninist communism.

“Anares” (Αναρες), and some others. These works represent the 1980s-style publication of anarchist material intended for consumption by current members and others with a specific interest in anarchy and anarchism. To make these works more accessible, some of the publications are now available online directly from the publishing group. Archival websites have also sprung up which make scanned versions of these texts available.

However, publications such as these do not reach a broad audience, nor do they typically succeed in attracting new followers. Another style of anarchist text, also pioneered during the 1980s, hints at the current approach. Unlike periodicals and pamphlets, anarchist graffiti is visible in almost every part of the city and is accessible by nearly every citizen. These are often works of exceptional creativity (see figures 6, 7, 8).



*Figure 6:* Tag-style graffiti found downtown Athens. Translation: “Terrorism is working until death”.



*Figure 7: Tag-style graffiti found downtown Athens.*



*Figure 8: Tag-style graffiti found in Halandri.*

Walking along the streets of Athens one's eyes graze upon hundreds of subtle messages, some scrawled in dripping paint, others neatly stenciled in spots, all part of the mental

and physical fabric that makes up the city. Graffiti is part of the cityscape, informs its readers by entertaining them or evoking familiar themes peppered with anarchist meaning, and encourages them to consider and hopefully support anarchy. It is these qualities of easy accessibility in familiar spaces, relevance, and inspiration that form the foundation of the most recent, and arguably the most successful anarchist recruitment strategies.

To attract a maximum number of new people interested in anarchy, my anarchist contact maintains humorous websites, communicates actively during networked video games, and posts messages in various popular online chat rooms. The anarchist messages he codes in his communications and websites lean towards libertarianism rather than nihilism and gloss over internal ideological divisions within the anarchist ranks so as to keep things simple and to generate curiosity. Contributing to unofficial soccer team fan pages and broadcasting messages during various “first person shooter” online games are especially fruitful for my consultant. At the time of this interview “Call of Duty” was the most popular networked game. My anarchist consultant would play the game at popular internet cafés in and around Athens and would use the game’s internal voice and text communication capability to advertise his websites, or he would use an instant messenger client to send links to other players. This day-to-day online strategy is focused on incorporating local and translocal distinctly anti-state discourses into the publics with which young people engage. He explained it is important to disseminate, or facilitate the dissemination of, translocal as well as local anarchist discourses for two reasons: first, these translocal discourses often address the broader socio-economic connections that shape current local problems and concerns more authentically; second, translocal anarchist discourses promote a sense of connection to a wider international movement.



This strategy has even come to influence the most recent anarchist graffiti. On one occasion I encountered four young boys spray-painting anarchist slogans in English and French on walls in downtown Athens. When I asked why these messages were not translated into Greek I was told:

Χρησιμοποιούμε όλες τις γλώσσες επειδή επικοινωνούμε με όλο τον κόσμο. Καταλαβαίνεις ότι τα ντόπια προβλήματα είναι στην πραγματικότητα παγκόσμια προβλήματα; Είμαστε όλοι δεμένοι μαζί - κλωστές ενώνουν τον Bush<sup>122</sup> με την Αθήνα, Αθήνα με την Κίνα, Κίνα με τη Βραζιλία ... είμαστε όλοι στον αγώνα. Γράφουμε στα Γαλλικά και Αγγλικά γιατί ο κόσμος είναι μικρός και η αναρχία δεν αναγνωρίζει σύνορα.

[We use every language because we communicate with the entire world. Do you understand that local problems are in actuality global problems? We are tied together – threads connect Bush<sup>123</sup> with Athens, Athens with China, China with Brazil ... we are all in the same game. We write in French and English because the world is small and anarchy does not recognize borders.]

Occasionally, my anarchist consultant also uses the internet to advertise specific public action. These calls reach a large number of young people but don't always guarantee a significant turnout. In addition to this strategy, my contact also utilizes a more directly controllable public (see Warner 2002:50): distribution messages over mobile text, which he uses to contact key individuals in the community (usually student organizers) who in turn mobilize their *paréas* as described above. This contact method is especially useful when anarchists wish to quickly disseminate information or coordinate action. Of note, contrary to the ethnographic cases provided by other studies on broadcast text messaging and crowds (see for example Raphael 2003), the anarchists I spoke with did not feel they could “control” crowds or groups of people directly, but rather relied on key people within the crowds to manage and mobilize the crowds.

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<sup>122</sup> This is a reference to George W. Bush. This interview was recorded in the aftermath of a 2007 protest against American foreign policy near the American embassy in Athens.

<sup>123</sup> See previous footnote.

Finally, several of my anarchist contacts described supplementing these communication strategies with random invitations to young people at chance encounters, sometimes in person and sometimes anonymously via mobile multimedia messaging technology. This latter method illustrates how receptive the youth have become to anti-establishment publics and how ingrained within micro-social practice the anti-establishment ethos has become. Recall Nikos's Bluetooth café recruitment strategy. Switching on the Bluetooth antenna of one's mobile phone has become a popular ritual young people perform when visiting public places. In fact, it has become standard social practice for anyone with a mobile phone under the age of thirty-five and has even transformed some social conventions mostly to do with politeness in public places<sup>124</sup>.

It is clear that the new communication strategies are working. Contributing to anti-establishment publics and tapping in to youth intersubjective dynamics has allowed the core of dedicated anarchists to mount numerous large protests including: the 1998 action against the appointment of teachers based on a state-defined system of meritocracy; the 1999 fight to stop reforms to the social security system; the 2002 awareness campaign to preserve local natural and ecological environments threatened by construction; ongoing action in 2003 and 2004 against the Olympic Games in general; the 2006/2007 student movement for improvement to the education system; and finally the 2008 protest against, again, changes to the social security system and especially pensions. Of course interspersed among these major protests are countless other minor protests. Before losing count I recorded over 162 distinct anarchist-supported or anarchist-organized protests in Athens during the period of my fieldwork. However, the most impressive anarchist-

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<sup>124</sup> Baker (2003) describes how publics can create and transform social practices in his study of another technologically-mediated anti-establishment public, Interkom.

supported protest was yet to come in December, 2008. I will discuss this event at length in chapter five.

### ***Local, Extreme: A Word on the Edges and Evolution of the Greek Political Sphere***

One of the most striking qualities of contemporary political life in Greece is this pointed anti-establishment sentiment that divides the youth population and the older generation. While both groups are increasingly critical and inattentive to formal publics, the youth have come to harbor a sense of negativity towards the state itself which anarchists tap into and, based on an understanding of youth sociality, subsequently take advantage of to mobilize supporters. However, the older generation does not share this contempt for politics and political parties, although that is not to say political participation among the mainstream hasn't changed. As indicated by the recent campaigns of the various political parties in Greece, public attention is now split between issues of both national importance and of local relevance; perhaps the latter serving to index the party's broader ideological positioning while the latter speaking to the issues that influence actual voting practice. Whereas sovereignty, the EU, and the role of the church are still important nation-level concerns, it is debates over immigration policy, local economies, jobs and education that win votes. Local experience is therefore paramount here. Consider the following.

As I have mentioned above, the dominant parties that make up the mainstream ends of the political spectrum are the center-left Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) party, and the center-right New Democracy (ND) party. Between and beyond these parties, and yet still within the Greek political mainstream (unlike anarchy and anti-

establishment politics in general) are the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), and the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS)<sup>125</sup> to name the most popular and successful. Of course, the KKE has had a long history in Greece; as mentioned above, they played a significant role in shaping the country's current political reality. SYRIZA formed in 2004 and stood for neoliberal reform and increased civil liberties. This party has seen some successes, but its flourishing has been hampered by infighting and, arguably, by ongoing public suspicion of left-wing politics (see Panourgia 2009)<sup>126</sup>. Of special note, however, is LAOS. Despite a slow start in 2000, LAOS has managed to make gains year after year<sup>127</sup>. This is surprising as the party is generally regarded as far-right, populist, or nationalist and pushes, among other things, an anti-immigrant and anti-gay platform. Their strongest gains have been in major urban centers, and seem to contradict the popular turn towards more liberal politics, as evident in broader voting patterns. This suggests growing pockets of support for the extreme-right ideology this party espouses.

In the last election, this far-right party won its greatest number of seats in Thessaloniki, Athens, and Larissa: all three of these centers have seen recent explosions in immigrant and undocumented migrant numbers. Larissa is a particularly interesting case as it is an agricultural area and major transport hub linked by road and rail to the port at Volos and to Athens and Thessaloniki. Larissa is also a main hub for immigrants working as laborers in the agricultural sector and for undocumented migrants as they move either to Athens or out of the country. Larissa, Athens, and Thessaloniki are major

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<sup>125</sup> There are various other parties as well, but they fail to attract large numbers of voters and have never won any seats. I focus on SYRIZA and LAOS because they are the more politically successful of these "secondary" parties.

<sup>126</sup> Some of the founding parties of SYRIZA had links to communism.

<sup>127</sup> See <http://ekloges.ypes.gr/pages/index.html> for official election results.

thoroughfares of transnational flows of various kinds. Voting for LAOS could be seen as a form of local resistance to a perceived risk these flows bring; an analysis supported by the fact that LAOS continues to perform poorly in immigrant-rich rural areas outside these major thoroughfares and landing points. Whereas sudden inflows and influence of immigrants and migrants may be perceived by locals as problematic, the stable and productive presence of these populations is seen as unproblematic. A vote for LAOS could therefore be seen as a vote for the stabilization of rapid changes, be they actual or anticipated, articulated in terms of nation and conservative values evoking stillness or stability. The LAOS success can therefore be interpreted not as a desire for a return to 1970/80s nationalist politics or even as a decisive vote against foreigners, but rather as an indication that the publics to which local people are attentive suggest the experiences they are having are somehow potentially problematic. While the mainstream parties both offered strategies to shape or manage flows of people in and through Greece, LAOS proposed to stop and in some ways reverse this by suggesting the deportation of unwanted outsiders.

Of course, analyzing voting patterns is notoriously problematic, but the recent LAOS success suggests a broader reality relevant to this work and is therefore worth a careful look here. Political support is shifting more readily among a public which is now less entrenched in particular political ideologies and discourses and more attentive to local realities and translocally-inspired publics. Some conflict between these publics and local reality benefitted LAOS. As we will see in the following chapter, this conflict may actually be the result of the survival strategies employed by particular marginalized groups and the sense that the cosmopolitanization of the local has moved from a factor

influencing daily life to one that is now endangering everyday life. This is an example of one of the ways unconventional citizens are having an influence on mainstream Greek politics.

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In this chapter I have examined modern Greek socio-political subjectivity, and mapped an important split between the youth and the rest of Greek society. I have also shown how the different socio-political experience of the youth population, which ultimately fosters the development of a popular anti-establishment sentiment, also opens them to the influence of the anarchist movement. Through the strategic incorporation of key transnational discourses into the publics the youth consume every day, the anarchist movement, in turn, inspires the youth population to support their causes (be it casually, or during public action). The youth are thus, variously, bringing the migrant-friendly, anti-state, anti-capitalist, militant environmentalist, and generally libertarian discourses the anarchists produce and channel to mainstream attention (through occupations, protests, in general attitudes, etc.). The end of this chapter offered a glimpse as to how unconventional citizens can influence the politics of Greece and offered an interpretation of recent shifts in the Greek political landscape. The following chapter will focus on the final group of unconventional citizens this work explores, the Roma. In so doing it will add yet another layer of complexity to an understanding of the influences shaping political identity in Greece today.

## Chapter 4

At two-thirty in the afternoon on a hot Tuesday in mid-August I arrived at the Roma compound in Halandri to meet an old friend. I walked along the hilly street that divided the site into two halves and which connected it to two nearly parallel main roads, one to the north and the other to the south. This was the most direct way into the compound, but also the most dangerous. Cars usually flew blindly over and down the sudden rises and falls of this pot-holed street at high speed: strangers to the area looking for a shortcut between major traffic arteries often turned onto this road unwittingly; a happening that was on the rise as in-car satellite navigation was becoming more common. Finding themselves in the midst of the Roma the vast majority of drivers would hasten a speedy escape – to everyone’s peril<sup>128</sup>.

Crossing into the residential tangle, I made my way quickly over the deeply rutted dirt path and around discarded building materials and play-things. Most residents were milling about, bleary-eyed, unable to take their afternoon naps due to the intense heat. Nearly four years of unusually extreme late-summer temperatures had made this nearly delirious meandering-about a common sight at the compound. The sound of conversations, playing children, and radios bubbled in the hot air around me. The piercing screech of folk music from a nearby loudspeaker would occasionally disrupt the calm, jerking the few individuals on the verge of napping out of their reverie. I patted the usual dogs and walked along the path up to my friend, Vasilo, who was sitting in an old desk chair near her house. By the time I reached her a throng of young children had

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<sup>128</sup> This near automatic speeding behaviour, which seems illogical considering the broken road and obvious risk to children playing in the street, is a function of the invisible border that surrounds Romani spaces, which, as will be explored below, most Athenians observe as marking dangerous place.

gathered around me, those related to Vasilo holding my hands and clothes as I approached.

Today, Vasilo was happier than usual. Upon seeing me a large grin grew across her care-worn face. She stood and strode purposefully into her house waving for me to follow. Once we were in her home she handed me a glass of cold lemonade and declared proudly, “We found them!”. The confusion on my face made her smile even wider. Vasilo and I have enjoyed a relationship that began with my graduate education. In 2002 I conducted fieldwork at this same compound on the edge of the Athenian suburb, Halandri, where I was now living. My MA was based on the stories she shared with me and the struggles she endured and that I witnessed (Alexandrakis 2003). Over the years we kept in touch through friends and I would visit her whenever I was in Athens. By the time I came back in 2006 to formally begin my dissertation research, I shared with Vasilo a familiarity few outsiders to this Roma compound could claim with any of its members.

The room in which we sat today was part of her new home. In 2004 Vasilo had expanded the old home I was familiar with in 2002, divided it in two by erecting plywood and cardboard walls, and had given the old half to a family friend and the new half to her daughter, Evi, who was recently married and had just given birth to a boy. Vasilo’s new home was on the opposite end of the same side of the compound, about a two minute stroll, in a corner on top of a small hill away from other houses. It boasted a powerful wood stove and a good size television positioned in the middle of the main room. This was the only place in the compound that received the MTV Europe station and its wildly popular and constantly replayed, dubbed-over program, “Pimp My Ride”: an American show based in California in which a popular rap artist takes the broken-down car of an



underprivileged viewer to be repaired with flashy paint, television monitors, stereo equipment, and, moreover, to be customized with unusual features like interior waterfalls, hot tubs, chandeliers etc. This program attracted men and boys from all over the camp to Vasilo's home adding to the usual cacophony made by the young children that would gather there regularly.

Most of the compound residents I had interviewed regarded Vasilo as a trustworthy local authority on childrearing. Since the day I met her, she worried constantly about her seven children, and especially her two youngest boys who suffered from various ailments, while watching over the majority of the children of the compound. To an outsider, Vasilo would appear to provide an unofficial daycare service to absent or working parents, at times watching as many as twenty kids. To the local community, however, Vasilo was just another mother who happened to be well-informed about children and to whom young ones gravitated naturally. Most adults simply left in the morning knowing that Vasilo would care for their kids. So today, as per most days, Vasilo's house was bursting with young men and boys engrossed in the television, discussing the latest automotive creation and making lofty plans for their own vehicles, while small kids played noisily with each other. My host presided over the ruckus with the calmness and sense of authority characteristic of a riot officer in the midst of a rowdy demonstration.

After failing to guess what the object was that she had found and which was making her so happy, Vasilo motioned for me to follow her to the old home where Evi was living. As we walked the children came too, ducking into their own houses to check for their parents. Once at the old house I was presented with the grand discovery: my

glasses. I was dumbstruck. A week earlier, I had visited Evi whose baby had recently been diagnosed with thalassemia, also known as Mediterranean Anaemia<sup>129</sup>. At my home, later that night, I discovered my glasses were missing, but I didn't think they fell at the Roma compound; in fact, I was certain I had left them on the Metro. Seeing them again was a happy surprise, as was the fact that they had been cleaned and the arms had been tightened – the work of Vasilo's second-youngest son, Johnny<sup>130</sup>, also a thalassemia sufferer. I thanked the group profusely as they laughed. A white university student from North America of Greek descent relying on the goodwill and organization skills of a nearly destitute Romani family was a delicious symbolic role-reversal that seemed to tickle even the youngest members of Vasilo's family. For nearly two months afterward I couldn't leave the compound without being reminded to take my glasses by nearly everyone I passed (whether I was wearing them or not).

### ***Identity and the Compound: The Complex of Romani Space and (Inter)Subjectivity***

The ebb and flow of daily life at this Roma compound is as fascinating as the site itself; in fact the two are intimately connected. There are numerous spatial/cultural connections encoded in the materials, architectural styles, and physical organization of make-shift homes and broken laneways in and among which the Roma live, play, work, and die. Many of these were noted in my MA thesis (Alexandrakis 2003) and by other

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<sup>129</sup> This is an inherited form of anaemia caused by faulty synthesis of haemoglobin.

<sup>130</sup> Johnny was the primary source of information for my MA. Since 2002/2003 when I conducted my MA research, Johnny's condition had continued to deteriorate slowly. Moreover, bad experiences and frustration with the hospital system kept Johnny from seeking medical attention, usually until he was extremely sick. Physically, the boy's growth was obviously stunted, his skin was pale and tight, and Johnny exhibited a noticeable lack of energy for a young teenager. Emotionally he was reserved and at times hostile.

researchers, especially Karathanasi (2000), Lydaki (1997; Lydaki 1998), and Williams (2003). To non-Romani Athenians, the most striking characteristic of any Roma compound is, simply, its physical appearance and the kneejerk emotions of fear and loathing the space evokes (see Panourgia 1995). The Roma, in turn, regard the physical difference of their neighborhood and the mainstream population's aversion to it, first, as a protective border between the Roma camp and its surrounding neighborhood: a zone which functions simultaneously as a repellent of potentially harmful outsiders and purifier/localizer of potentially (symbolically) dangerous externally originating materials and discourses. This is related to the noted Romani in/out existentialism (Karathanasi 2000; Sutherland 1975). Secondly, and contrary to the positive significance noted above, the Roma also regard their space as evidence of a national prejudice against them. Despite appreciating the protection and freedom to live according to Romani socio-cultural traditions and internal trajectories, the border nonetheless also signifies segregation, disenfranchisement, and the ever-present threat of physical and symbolic violence on the outside.

The duality of the border mirrors other conflicting dualities in the Roma experience. Evi's husband had once explained to me that he dreams of owning a home and some land on the island of Crete where people "understand strong men that do what they want" just as he does (see Herzfeld 1985), and where his kids could grow up safely. In this we see the conflict between the Romani and Greek identity in his description of a protected yet "typical" (Greek) home and conflation of the classic masculine Greek figure and "free Gypsy" trope. On the one hand there is no question that the Greek and Gypsy tropes are compatible, and, as we shall see below, have actually become deeply integrated

within normative (inter)subjective Romani identity negotiations. On the streets, this compatibility is evidenced by the integration strategies the Roma employ. In a practice that highlights the underlying commonalities between the mainstream non-Romani Greek and Roma identities, the Rom will often hyper-perform commonly held nationalist discourses to establish a baseline familiarity from where communication can proceed. Specifically, the Roma display: recalcitrance rooted in a perceived need for independence; a capacity for deeply impassioned appeal in the face of injustice; cleverness bordering on trickster; and especially for men, a baseline heavy pensiveness performed typically with the aid of a cigarette and concerned texting on a mobile phone. This strategy underscores the compatibility of the two identities and hints at the broader discourse-based similarities between them. On the other hand, the history of violence and prejudice, and continued persecution suffered by Romani people in Greece make an integrated “Greek life”, or the achievement of equal social status with the mainstream, impossible for this population, a reality which contrasts with the subjective identity politics the Roma engage in. Herein lays the conflict: in addition to claiming any number of Romani tribal identities the Roma identify themselves as being Greek based on a concept of ethnogeny, yet they are unable to experience and practice this aspect of who they are within the public sphere<sup>131</sup>. Again, a closer examination of the compound can elucidate this complex identity politics. The compound is a microcosm of a near-ideal Greek/Romani dream nation: and the management of trajectories that transgress its borders reveals the ongoing subjective and

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<sup>131</sup> Contrary to the perspective offered by most ethnographic works exploring the Roma, this work takes this embattled community as part of the population totality of the city/country in which they are situated. This is not to suggest that I am somehow glossing over the Roma culture and history, or the unique lived experience of being Romani; rather, I am challenging the inherent anthropological tendency to invent groups (see for example Gal & Irvine 1995).

collective struggle to reconcile the phenomena and conditions that deny an integrated Greek life.

Within the compound, the Roma engage in what might be considered typical Greek practices alongside Romani practices. In fact, it would be inappropriate to distinguish between the two as – just like the Roma identity – the Greek and Roma are indistinguishable in idiosyncratic experiences of daily life and identity negotiations. For example: Romani families pride themselves on sending sons for the mandatory military training period, even though they know these boys will be abused there for being Roma or rejected for service entirely; they observe national and Greek Orthodox religious holidays with special fervor, often using the leftover paraphernalia they sell to the mainstream public on the streets to enhance their own celebrations; and they follow Greek media and especially soap operas passionately, especially as occasional Gypsy-like characters appear. In these examples, the Roma engage typical contemporary Greek identity markers like military service, observation of religious holidays, and consumption of local media, albeit with added meaning specific to the Romani condition.

This conflation of Greek and Roma in daily life is also observable in the very structures that comprise Romani compounds. A number of core Romani architectural characteristics remain such as the center-facing orientation of houses, house sizes, and patterns of internal and external use (Karathanasi 2000). Specifically, Romani homes are usually between five or six hundred square-feet in size, and comprise of single rooms divided variously by temporary cardboard walls and/or hanging cloths which, in turn, are regularly moved to change the interior to suit the occupants' needs, whims, and/or aesthetic visions. Also distinctively Romani is the process of mitosis which Romani

dwellings undergo regularly as social and kin ties change over time. When the need arises for a new home in the community, it is common to subdivide and expand the current dwelling of a relative or close friend rather than build a new one. This is accomplished by erecting a more permanent wall somewhere near the middle of a home, pushing out other walls, and adding a new doorway. However, Romani houses have also come to be adorned with pillars that are used to hold up awnings and doorway overhangs, whitewashed walls with blue accents, Greek flags and religious icons, and all manner of Greek architectural particulars. Some homes even have clay shingles laid over the corrugated metal sheets or plastic-dressed cardboard that usually make up the roofs of Romani houses, others feature outdoor coffee tables fashioned from discarded pieces of marble. However, perhaps the most symbolic mix of Greek elements into Romani architecture occurs much more clandestinely.

In addition to pillaging building materials from construction sites, some Romani men have begun stealing supplies and artifacts from archaeological excavations in and around Athens. The materials they gather are highly sought after in Roma camps as they provide their owners with a great deal of cultural capital. Of note, the value of the material does not seem tied to its type (artifact versus modern tool or supply), age, or aesthetic quality; rather, the Roma prize the fact that it was taken from an archaeological site, only. When asked about this I was told that archaeological sites concentrate the Greek identity: they contain material to which national discourses are connected; they have an air of ancient authority and mystery; powerful, educated people seem to be in charge of the sites and the materials within them; and, perhaps most importantly, the sites are closed to outsiders and, significantly, even to ordinary individuals who have a claim

to the symbolic capital contained therein. So, by breaking in and taking materials from these sites – saws, bags of cement, tarpaulins, or archaeological material – the Rom symbolically breaks through the barrier keeping them and others away from something truly, and in some ways fundamentally Greek, which they then bring into their safe space. This bolsters the consumer's sense of Greek-ness, demonstrates power over a limiting authority which is both a prized Romani and Greek trait, and ultimately heightens the individual's status.

The compound is thus a place where the Roma can practice and experience power over the segregation and prejudice they suffer regularly, and where they can practice their identities unhindered by the state. The use of particular materials in the architectural designs of housing also indicates the local social importance of a national/civic identity, even if it means circumnavigating the gatekeepers of that identity to achieve this. For the Rom, appropriated symbols of Greek-ness - narrative, performance, or material – are manifestations of a claim to belonging.

### ***Identity and Practice: Negotiating and Being Romani***

The increasing importance of national symbols and discourses in idiosyncratic Roma identity negotiations runs counter to the trend among the mainstream Greek population of turning away from such phenomena, placing normative authority instead on increasingly transnational discourses, flows, and symbols. While both the Roma and the mainstream population seem to have left the processes and structures of the state behind, the Roma, as shown above, remain attentive to its discourses and symbols. This divergence is most evident at settings where the two populations meet regularly, like

urban open-air farmer's markets (the *λαϊκή*). Every week sellers come together at predetermined segments of road in the various neighborhoods of Athens, and indeed at other cities and towns across Greece, where they sell an astonishing variety of goods: produce, cheese, olives, fish, and various other foods, household items, clothes, fabric, and depending on the size of the market, prepared food and electronics. These goods are sold by farmers or their helpers, but more commonly, by middle-men who purchase items (both local and imported) from suppliers and brokers. To participate in the market as a seller, individuals must acquire a license from the local municipality. This is a process which has become increasingly expensive and closed to non-citizens, or more generally, individuals not in possession of a national identity card. Thus the tightening of the licensing rules has forced many long-time sellers out of the proper market space and has given rise to illicit license acquisition, bribery, and outright illegal selling. Shoppers who have attended the market for years have noticed this change: main selling streets have contracted slightly, visible minorities have been nearly eliminated from the main seller profile, and the periphery of the market has expanded and become inundated with unlicensed vendors. These "outside sellers", as it were, peddle mostly small goods like toys, cheap electronics, and clothes; items that can be packed up quickly should a police officer appear and which are readily available from non-regulated importers.

The Roma have a long history of selling goods at farmer's markets across Greece, and continue their involvement in this urban folk institution even now with the tightening of the licensing rules. Those possessing identity cards, with enough money for permits, and with access to a reliable car and stock of sellable goods, often work at the market as this provides a reasonable income and, as the following will show, prestige. Those



without the requisite paperwork, funding, transportation and/or supplier contacts typically peddle their goods at the edges of the markets or otherwise drive around in trucks selling whatever they can street to street. This latter selling strategy is particularly Romani; that is, roving produce sellers are almost always Romani and have been for generations. The image of the dented Toyota or Datsun pickup, weighted down by produce and several members of a Romani family rolling through residential areas, loudspeaker beckoning shoppers, is common to nearly every part of Greece – a truly unifying national symbol<sup>132</sup>. The sound of the advertising over the loudspeaker, usually consisting of a rhyme or clever phrase, is especially significant. On the one hand understanding the screeching, distorted message spoken in stylized Greek requires not only a strong grasp of the Greek language, but also a familiarity with various regional and local accents, Romani vernaculars, and phraseology that traces its roots back to the post World War Two era or before. The roving Romani produce salespeople maintain a distinct linguistic phenomenon with important connections to popular memory. On the other hand, the call to purchase vegetables can be likened to the call to pray in Muslim countries, not because it has any religious significance, but in the sense that these calls fill the air during predictable times of the day, evoke a common memory and experience among the public, promote a feeling of unity (national and/or communal), and link food to this broader sense of unity, memory, and identity. Going to the street to buy a watermelon or garlic from a Romani vendor was described to me as a quintessentially Greek experience.

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<sup>132</sup> In fact, the image of the Roma street vendor was used during the opening ceremonies of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. It is also important to note that the Roma were also seen as a national unifying force during the period of Ottoman rule. Some scholars have suggested that traveling Romani entertainers maintained a sense of Hellenism across the country by bringing to villages and cities distinctively Greek stories and songs from across the country.

From the Romani side, many individuals appreciate the freedom of movement associated with this form of selling, especially during the summer months when Romani families tend to visit their relatives<sup>133</sup>. Many Roma market sellers offer their stock at discount to these roving individuals during the days of the week when the market is closed or to get rid of overstock. In this way, Roma market sellers also act as suppliers within the compound. This is one example of the thriving hidden economy that operates within Roma compounds. Another example are informal “compound shops”: what might be considered small convenience stores operated out of homes and stocked with a combination of locally sourced farmer’s market goods and with other small items purchased in bulk from nearby shops. These small compound shops allow the Roma to get the items they need without facing the usual prejudice that dogs them at most off-compound establishments; moreover, these shops are meeting places, social hubs, and often provide essential services to the community like cooking simple meals for busy parents and providing transportation either in an emergency or regularly to nearby beaches or popular spots much cheaper than taxis and without the hassle most Roma endure on public transportation. Again, the cornerstone of this informal economy is the farmer’s market: without local market sellers and their supplies, these internal and satellite vendors would have difficulty maintaining their inventories and services, and Roma compounds would suffer.<sup>134</sup>

It is easy to understand why the legal selling of goods within markets is highly regarded among the Roma community. However, beyond the economic benefits, their

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<sup>133</sup> Of note, the romantic nomadic Gypsy stereotype is far from the Roma reality. Most individuals have a permanent home, but will travel to visit family and friends occasionally. Very few Roma live in vans or trucks traveling endlessly from place to place.

<sup>134</sup> Other informal, internal, economic activities include the trade of various car parts, tools, and the sale of locally raised pets like mice and birds.

importance to the local economy and to poor families and the cache associated with having wide reaching networks of non-Romani Greek contacts, most Roma identify the traditional Greek-ness of the market and its connection to the national folk tradition as a major source of prestige. Not only do Romani market vendors participate in a space closely associated with Greek folk tradition, but they must also master the performance of traditional Greek folk identity in order to be successful. Specifically, Romani sellers must become proficient in what may be called “market calls”, or the poetic taunts and jibes stall keepers direct at their competitors and the lyrical rhymes advertising their products to passers-by. Typical calls locate the product’s place of origin to particular villages and growers in the countryside; more established vendors can even refer to their own reputations in promoting their products or challenging competitors. This latter strategy hints at the conflation of the Greek masculine identity which is in turn rooted in folk culture (see Herzfeld 1985) and successful vendor performances. These performances are part of the market milieu and have for decades been considered an indicator of product quality: the better or more entertaining the call, the more “folk” the seller seems, and the better his/her product is considered to be. So, on a practical level, the more proficient the Rom is at performing the folk identity, the better they fare at the market, the more the community benefits. Symbolically, however, the more proficient the Rom is at performing the folk identity, the better they are able to transcend the Roma/non-Roma divide, the more they are able to live an integrated life true to the Roma identity. In effect, these individuals seem to resolve the conflict between who the Roma perceive themselves to be and who they are permitted to be in the public sphere. Market vendors, like the thieves who bring construction material from archaeological sites to the

compound, demonstrate the heightened importance of national symbols and discourses to a kind of civic therapeutics that occurs within Roma spaces.

However, as noted above, the mainstream Greek population is turning away from nationalist discourses and symbols, placing normative authority instead on increasingly transnational discourses, flows and symbols. This is creating a rift between the mainstream population and the Roma in terms of an imagined and experienced civic identity. A closer look at recent changes in the purchasing habits of shoppers at urban farmer's markets exemplifies this growing difference. While sellers still call to each other and to shoppers, the values of their goods are no longer affected, in any significant way, by their competence in this performance. Instead, values are coming to be more directly affected by competition from nearby supermarket chains, local economic pressure on the middle class, and by the prices set by farmers, wholesalers, and brokers who sell stock. This is changing the feel of the market, selling strategies, and communication between sellers and shoppers. Vendors now set up their stalls in ways that resemble supermarket displays more closely, they fluctuate their prices as the day goes by so that the most aesthetically pleasing fruit and vegetables that sell first are priced higher than the "less-than-perfect" fruit, and in negotiating prices with customers sellers have come to emphasize value in terms of quality/quantity rather than highlighting the item's provenience and his/her own reputation. This transformation is indicative of, both, a broader change in mainstream idiosyncratic and intersubjective negotiations of civic identity, and a growing disparity between this population's experience of citizenship and that of the subaltern Roma.

Traditional nationalist symbols, discourses, and flows are coming to be redefined among the mainstream population relative to an emerging transnational existentialism, as indicated by changing consumer practices, while the Roma continue to pursue a civic identity attentive to the nationalist elements they are broadly denied. The emerging rift between these populations can thus be considered in terms of differing social significances of the country's early modern past. Whereas the Roma regard elements from this period as central to their identity and position within society, non-Romani Greeks have largely turned to other discourses and conditions in defining their citizenship. This is not to say that early modern Greek discourses and symbols are altogether unimportant to the mainstream population, but rather that they have become less authoritative in terms of identity negotiation<sup>135</sup>. At the market, Roma sellers have adapted to new consumer tastes and modes of bargaining by replacing the folk aspects of their market performance with tactics catering to a population that determines value independently of this. Key among these new tactics are the offering of spontaneous "loyalty discounts" to customers purchasing more than one kind of produce at a time, and remaining stoic in response to incoming taunts from competing vendors. They have also taken advantage of the growing indifference toward the product's place of origin to purchase cheaper supplies brought in from abroad. All but abandoned are outright sales tactics rife with nationalist overtures, overt or implicit links to folk tradition, and ultra-Greek identity performances.

For some Romani sellers this has been a difficult shift, in fact, many stall owners now hire immigrants to serve customers. These immigrants do not engage in calling,

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<sup>135</sup> Of note, there is even a turn away from representations of Greek-ness rooted in this early modern period in theatre and other mediums.

offer good service for low wages, and portray a national/ethnic neutrality that doesn't distract from the produce and that customers feel comfortable with and empowered by. However, some Romani sellers I interviewed simply could not abandon calling altogether, so, as their hired workers managed the stall they engaged in more neutral calling highlighting the quality of their product, broadcasting prices, and inviting shoppers to sample goods. These sellers explained that their commitment to calling was more than a simple sales strategy or observation of market tradition, but rather emanated from their sense of Greek-ness, or from what might be called a sense of structural nostalgia (Herzfeld 2005:147). They argued that true Greeks would not abandon this practice, and that the Romani persistence in calling was indicative of a positive future. While the mainstream comes to look away from nationalist elements in defining itself, the Roma are seeing their adherence to a core national/folk identity as evidence of a civic worth and legitimacy. In the compound, stories circulate about easily swindled shoppers willing to spend more money on "pretty fruit", an indication of a diminishing popular cleverness tantamount to a diminishing "Greek-ness" (the remaining "ugly fruit" making its way to compound shops takes on a new nationalist significance).

Individuals also identify the exposure of the mainstream population to forces outside of the national borders as a negative overall influence on national identity. This is contrasted with a steadfast Roma local/national focus achieved, partially, by the insulating qualities of the compound itself and by the conditions of poverty and social exclusion and immobility that keep the Roma away from influences that might turn them from their perceived heritage. This is not to suggest that the Roma desire the state of ongoing violence and discrimination they endure, but rather that they feel it has come

with an unexpected benefit: the victim holds stronger to their identity in the face of violence which, ironically, is perpetrated by a jailer who in the process deludes their own. When I asked whether the Roma were therefore becoming anachronistic or “time capsules” of a particular moment in the Greek identity, they argued that no, in fact they too were changing, but remained true to the place and history from which they came and with which the Roma aspect of who they are intertwines. Here we come to the heart of the modern Roma identity complex in Greece. Vasilò, her family, and everyone at the compound in which she lives negotiate their identity within the increasing isolation of the compound and relative to an increasingly hostile outside world. The conditions in which they live are shaping these subjective identity negotiations and internal intersubjective relations. The result of this is the continued socio-cultural and socio-political differentiation of the Roma from the mainstream, deeper disaffection among the former as the government continues to harm them, and increasing frustration based on a sense of persistent injustice. All this results in more pronounced localization of individuals within compounds, which in turn are coming to be interconnected by strong socio-economic links forming rhizomatic connections. Thus, the Roma identity is coming to be shaped by a double discourse: that informing subjective Romani/Greek negotiation and that informing a broader, dynamic, intersubjective negotiation.

Here we can see that in the ongoing process of becoming Romani, the individual manages two differentiating factors. The subjective seeks to reconcile the metaphysical with the existential, while the intersubjective engages with the formal and informal socio-political reality. This is not necessarily much different than the ongoing process of identity formation facing any individual, Romani or otherwise; however, the Romani

situation is unique in that the intersubjective aspect of the identity politics in question contribute to a broader subaltern identity politics that is coming to influence the mainstream. Above I argued that the urban farmer's market was a place, almost an institution, where the Roma encounter the mainstream at various points between suppliers and consumers. These points of contact and the range of spinoff practices, conditions, and trajectories associated with them, have various socio-cultural and economic significances. Another such institution is the drug trade; however, this phenomenon unites more than just the Roma and the mainstream population, but also brings undocumented migrants and global outlaws into an unfortunate chain. The spinoff practices, conditions, and trajectories associated with this are also unfortunate, if instructive.

***On the Edge of Romani: Feathering in and out of Liminal Space, Negotiating a New Outlaw Being***

A person needs a little madness, or else they never dare cut the rope and be free.

(Nikos Kazantzakis, 1883 – 1957, Greek writer and philosopher)

If you could see my thoughts, my dreams, you'd want to stab me – sometimes I want to kill myself too ... I don't know when it will happen; sitting in the back of a truck driving along an alley at night - terrifying images flash in my mind: I'm killing my father; I'm having sex with a whore while my sister suffocates in the adjacent room. When I was younger I would only smoke hashish in dark places so people couldn't see me ... whenever I was high I thought my dreams would become real; I was scared. And yet look at me now! My brothers fear I might hurt them, and I have sex to feel safe while the people I love suffer. My life is my nightmare.

(Recalled by the author from a conversation with Vasilo's son, Christos)



Vasilo has a third son to whom I referred only briefly in my MA. This individual, who I will call Christos, is about 18 years old. Vasilo gave birth to him while she was living in the Zefiri neighborhood outside Athens; a dangerous part of town the mainstream Greek population tries to avoid. The residents of Zefiri are mostly Romani, but there are also some Greeks, Albanians, and Middle Easterners; almost all of them are very poor with the exception of a few suspiciously wealthy families. These latter families typically own legitimate businesses like stores and garages, but according to my contacts in the area, may also be involved in other more nefarious activities. Christos was born in one of the larger Roma camps at Zefiri and grew up playing in its dirt and gravel spaces. When he became older Christos refused to go to school; instead he spent his time roaming the streets of Zefiri testing personal and social boundaries and making trouble. It is during this time and within these spaces that Christos made his life-long friends and gained several blood brothers. It is also within these spaces that Christos became involved with drug trafficking. Vasilo doesn't like to talk about this part of Christos' life as it coincided with her husband's alcohol-related death, but she does admit knowing that her young son was becoming involved with dangerous people and was beginning to pursue dangerous means of making money. Due to this, and in an attempt to make a new start, Vasilo uprooted the family and moved to Halandri hoping to give her children a better life. For the majority of them, she did. Christos, however, could not escape the underground world he had entered. While Vasilo ran around Athens seeking medical help for her two younger boys, and while she looked after her daughters as they met husbands and got pregnant, Christos continued to travel back to Zefiri, continued to use and sell drugs, and continued to get into trouble with the police.

In 2003, Christos was in jail for possession of hashish. By 2007, he had been released, but was so deeply entwined within the drug world that Vasilo had just about lost touch with him. One afternoon in September, I was having a drink on Vasilo's doorstep when she told me Christos had called and was planning to drop by for a visit late that night. Hoping to meet him I asked if I could stay until he turned up, but Vasilo said this might be a bad idea. Until that day I had not spent much time with Vasilo's family after dark. Roma compounds are notoriously dangerous places after sundown, and I always made it a point to leave before things got too wild. Children often speak of night time as a period of fear and danger when the areas they play in are transformed into something unrecognizable by the urine of drunken men, general destruction, and the burning of lost toys and abandoned material. Night time is also when the police conduct raids and gangs exact revenge. Going outside after dark is unthinkable until an individual is able to fend for themselves. This fear contributes to a sense of instability to outside places and a feeling that safety is tied to one's toughness and blind courage. Children often display these characteristics when faced with uncertain situations and sometimes while playing. Children also develop a general disregard for toys at a young age, save the few prized items to which they have special attachments and usually keep hidden indoors – a practice mirroring the hoarding and hiding of culturally significant materials and important documents their parents practice<sup>136</sup>.

That night, however, I insisted on staying until Christos arrived in the hopes of getting an interview. We moved into the house, had a bite to eat, and passed the time chatting and watching television. Before I knew it the sun had dropped below the apartments to the west and Vasilo's youngest son had fallen asleep. Her middle son,

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<sup>136</sup> The hoard is known as the Youko.

however, had become visibly nervous: even though we were inside, it was plain that people around the house were being rowdy, perhaps in an effort to impress or intimidate me. I could hear gunshots, smashing bottles, loud music accompanied by the laughter of men, and even the distinctive sounds of the occasional fistfight. With every passing hour my thoughts turned from the interview I was hoping to get to the safety of everyone in the house.

At just past one o'clock in the morning Vasilo's phone rang. Christos was nearby and called to say he would be arriving with a few friends. Vasilo explained to him that I was there, that I was a friend, and that she needed his help to get me safely out of the compound. Twenty minutes later I heard a car pull up followed by shouting and the shuffle of shoes in the dirt. A handsome young man strolled into the house, embraced Vasilo and signaled for me to get up. Christos paused at the front door betraying what seemed like a flash of uncertainty, but then pushed it open and strode outside with a cocksure swagger that, at that moment, made me feel brave by extension. I followed him out of the front door with Vasilo by my side and we proceeded around the back of the house towards a cinderblock wall that marks the end of the compound and the beginning of a large office tower's parking lot. As we walked, Christos told me I was foolish for waiting so late to go home and that I could have called him to arrange an interview at a better time. He also told me that I had put Vasilo and his younger brothers, who I had just realized were following us, in danger. I apologized nervously and suggested, with insincere bravado, that I could make it the rest of the way on my own. Christos stopped abruptly, as if he had been waiting for the offer, programmed his number into my phone, winked, and walked back to the house with his family. I stood alone in utter darkness

about seven meters away from the wall, not moving a muscle. Besides the span of uncertain terrain that lay before me, I suddenly realized the final leg of my escape required I scale a three meter tall barrier obviously designed to keep people in. Various scenarios flashed in my mind. I knew there was no barbed wire on this section of the wall and, after quickly dismissing several options, decided that a simple running leap would at least give me a handhold on the structure's top edge. I convinced myself to sprint the remaining distance, quietly, and when I was a few strides from the wall, I jumped. My body hit the cement blocks harder than I expected, but I scrambled up fairly easily. Looking back, the compound seemed to have descended into chaos. Men stood around large piles of burning garbage set in the main street that divides the site, groups of younger men scuffled with each other randomly, and women could be heard yelling here and there indoors. I let myself down from the wall into the parking lot and made my way to its gate, looking as little as possible at the security cameras and floodlights that surrounded me. I ducked under the swing-arm blocking the entrance and walked casually up the sidewalk, relief washing over me.

Within ten minutes I had hailed a cab and was on my way home when my mobile phone vibrated in my pocket: it was Vasilos checking to see if I was alright. I assured her that everything was fine with me, but I was worried about her. Laughing, she explained that this was the usual late night ruckus that occurs at the compound, albeit perhaps a bit closer to her house than usual. She continued to tell me this is why young children (and, evidently, anthropologists) are not permitted to roam the compound after dark. Christos was still there, but planned to leave with his friends in a few hours; Vasilos suggested I call him the next day. Although I managed to get Christos on the phone several times

after that night, I never saw him again. I even traveled to Zefiri on several occasions, but he would always call to cancel our meeting or would simply not show up. Regardless, however, our phone interviews were productive and Christos did help me one additional time. Some months after the night we met my apartment was burglarized and my laptop, camera and some other items were stolen. Christos suggested a couple of pawn shops where my things might turn up. Despite the fact that I never found them, the time I spent searching for these shops and speaking with their proprietors indicated to me that an underground trade in illegal goods, broadly construed, was bringing together a variety of people I never expected. Mentioning this to Christos, I discovered that he himself was part of this broader complex social underground network.

His trajectory into this plane of interaction was facilitated by the economic activities Christos pursued; specifically, selling drugs and transporting illegal goods – the latter being a business he discovered while in jail. The more dangerous aspect of this life took him to see dealers and gang members all over Athens and beyond, although the majority of his time was spent working for unofficial Chinese importers moving counterfeit merchandise from points of entry to small shops for further distribution. I asked Christos if he liked this life, if he was “satisfied” (ικανοποιημένος), as per the Greek expression, with what he did and how he made a living. He was not; while he claimed to be having lots of fun, he was unhappy about the lack of respect shown to him by individuals outside of his group of friends. He also lacked what he described as “quiet” (ησυχία), translated also, perhaps, as “stillness”: life was frustrating and, as he explained, always full of trouble and noise (φασαρία). He only felt safe around his friends and within the various Roma camps that he visited. Outside of these safe zones

Christos was dogged by the police and suffered the abuse of passively hostile citizens. Stories circulated among his friends of Roma men and boys being beaten by police, of pregnant women who had miscarried in police holding cells, and of random arrests followed by fake charges and extended jail times for the unfortunate Roma few used as scapegoats by well-connected criminals and their police insiders.

Christos would have preferred a job with a legitimate transportation company but he never pursued this thinking nobody would hire him because he had no contacts in the business, couldn't read or write very well, and had no government documents. In fact, he didn't have a national identity card, proof of residence, no driver's license, social insurance card, and certainly no passport. Christos was invisible to the state except for a short police file which, according to him, listed a fake last name and a made-up address<sup>137</sup>. This lack of documentation had several implications beyond limiting his economic activity and shielding him from the scrutiny of the state. Christos was also unable to access social security or welfare programs, and he had difficulty accessing the healthcare system. Whenever he needed medical attention Christos went to his mother or to his blood-brothers. Vasilo kept a small stock of pain killers and antibiotics for such emergencies and was on good terms with the neighborhood pharmacist in case these items didn't help. Christos' blood brothers would also look after him in case of a medical emergency, but lacked any medical contacts or knowledge. Instead, they mostly provided social, economic, and moral support. In terms of the former, this group was well connected with local priests who would occasionally provide them with food,

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<sup>137</sup> It should be noted that most Roma I met had two names: a Romani first name and a Greek name. Neither name is primary; in fact, they are often used interchangeably in the compound, albeit family members and close friends use one's Romani name more frequently. Christos referred to his Romani name as his real name and claimed to have several Greek names (aliases). This hints at the complex identity politics Christos was engaged in.

clothing, and counseling more established members of various subaltern communities and sympathetic illegal importers who could be called upon to provide work or economic help. They looked out for each other and shared money and resources like cars, phones, and clothes. Perhaps most importantly, however, the group also provided its members with a sense of belonging and worth. Christos explained that selling and taking drugs was bad and that he always feared his younger brothers would follow his example. In moments of doubt, and what sounded to me like depression, his friends would step in to reassure him that the path their lives had taken was due to the social violences they endured. In times of sadness and fear, the group would remind Christos of his responsibility to the network, would take him drinking<sup>138</sup>, and keep him busy with work and travel. In his mind Christos saw himself as a troubled hero.

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I was surprised when I discovered that, beyond a core of Roma blood brothers Christos had been close to since his childhood, his broader friend group also consisted of several African immigrants and Middle Easterners. Besides some Albanian Roma, close non-Roma work contacts, and a small number of poorer Greeks of non-Roma descent who find their way into larger Roma compounds, outsiders are usually excluded from Roma social circles. However, Christos explained that his circle of friends was quite permeable: anyone victim to the same difficult reality he was, or who pursued the same or related economic activities and engaged in the same or compatible survival strategies, were welcome within his group. There was a deep sense of impermanence and forced liminality among the people he surrounded himself with: they moved along the borders of

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<sup>138</sup> Drinking in a group is an important identity-strengthening and health-making activity among the Roma (Alexandrakis 2003).

official spaces, interacted as secretly and as briefly as possible with mainstream actors, and had no permanent homes. In this latter regard they were nomadic (see Deleuze & Guattari 2004) in that they shared a stable territory, but no one spot or space in the landscape representing a permanent home – cognitively, actually, or even perhaps spiritually. This fluidity of place, navigated by a game of push and pull with and against various dangers, is a defining characteristic of the plane of interaction in which Christos and his broader group made a life.

On a more intimate level, the intersubjectivity these individuals engage in is a primary unifying aspect of their social space. These are friendships and working partnerships founded, on the one hand, on discourses of struggle and, on the other, on acts of agency over one's condition. This discourse occurred variously through verbal exchanges and on bodies (in the form of scars, tattoos, and in displays of exhaustion). The acts of agency against social oppression in which individuals engaged included overtly illegal activities like stealing and vandalism, brazen taunting and intimidation of community outsiders, and even dangerous activities like walking into traffic and drunk driving. There was a sense among group members that their broader social network which, again, existed and moved within liminal spaces and which was defined by difficult history and transgressive activity, was always in flux. Besides a handful of core friends, Christos' contacts changed regularly as individuals, dangers, and work opportunities moved, and connected various subaltern groups through their most liminal members. For example, Jigo was on the periphery of this network. During the time when he sold counterfeit goods, Jigo relied on a varied network of friends and illegal importers and transporters for stock, but was never close to them. Instead, and like the



main Roma population, Jigo relied on the collectivity for safety. As he detaches from the collective, he may become a part of the larger network of the nearly-invisible that skirt the landscape, under the radar, according to the ebb and flow of people, opportunity and safety. Alternatively, he may pursue a life of emulated normality in which he will remain detached from the collective, the liminal network, and also from the broader society. His experiences, convictions, friends, and economic activities will influence the path he takes, as they did for Christos.

The motion of the network and the access its members are granted to the resistance strategies of the various subaltern populations from where they come provide its members with a degree of protection and reinforce the socio-cultural intersubjective complexity that define group membership. Christos has spent many nights in various apartments and appropriated spaces under the protection of undocumented migrants. He has also dressed in the clothes of his Afghani friends and used Gujarati words to secretly communicate with his group when they were detained by police. Beyond the practical strategic value of these interconnections, Christos also thinks of himself as partially defined by the assemblage of diverse experiences, spaces and the people that connect him to them: this plane of liminal existence and the intersubjective connections that shape idiosyncratic identity negotiations might be taken as one of the few cosmopolitan social phenomena in Greece (see Beck 2006; Ossman 2007b).

Christos' complex sense of belonging caused him endless anxiety. While Vasilos negotiated a balance between a "Greek" and "Romani" being, Christos actively struggled between a "Romani-Greek" and an "invisible/illegal other" identity. In his words:

Christos (C):

We are who we are, as people. I don't know about Roma or about Greek, they're practically the same for me ... those Roma that live in one place and worry about basic things fight with that – not me. The problem is between being like my people or being like a dog, chasing opportunities and running from dangers. The dog isn't free. The dog isn't lazy. The dog is like he is because he's forced to be that way ... anyway, who I am is my burden.

Othon (O):

Your sister's husband once described wanting some land on Crete where he could raise his kids. Is that something that appeals to you too, or would you prefer to continue living like you do.

(C):

... [unintelligible profanity] ... he's always dreaming! No, I don't need land and a house because I could just visit him! [laughing] ... seriously, but, I understand what he wants, although I don't need it. I'd be happy to have my friends, to keep selling, but – ideally – I'd like to make an honest living out of it – maybe I can sell something else, or get paid for transporting something the police don't mind. I'd like to pass a police officer without thinking about who's with me or worrying if he'll chase us.

(O):

So you like your current lifestyle?

(C):

Like I've told you before, there are problems, but I like living for the next thing, for the next move, for the next place ... and to each place I bring who I am and the friends that I have. I'm Romani. I'm a Gypsy. I don't know how you want to think about that, but that's who I am and I don't worry about it. My mother doesn't understand me and wishes I would change, but I have to think about my friends too and the life I live.

Christos didn't feel as though he was engaged in the modern Roma identity negotiation.

In fact, he referred to himself as a “dog” or a stereotypical “Gypsy”. Whereas the former characterization can be taken to index the hardship and suffering he endured in his life, referring to himself as a Gypsy has special significance. As per above, the main Romani population perform aspects of the Gypsy trope that are shared with non-Romani (Greek) individuals to “blend in” in public places outside of the compound. From trickster to pensive texting, this identity performance marks a baseline commonality between the Romani and non-Romani Greek individual rooted in various narratives (nationalist and otherwise) that prize independence and intelligence. Christos perceives the Gypsy trope

similarly, although as the following will demonstrate, he deploys the concept as a bridge to the mainstream Romani population in a manner that has two important implications.

Christos identified himself simultaneously as an outsider and as a representative. In terms of the latter, Christos struggled with a sense that he stood as a figure of corruption to the Roma community. He didn't share the same general concerns, engage in the typical activities, or live among them for any sustained length of time. Moreover, many Roma community members looked down on Christos and others like him for bringing a bad reputation to the broader group, for bringing questionable outsiders to the Roma compounds, and for attracting the attention of the police. There was no question that Vasilo would have preferred that her son abandon his friends and lifestyle, look for more steady work as a vendor or perhaps laborer, and move permanently to a house somewhere in the compound. Part of Christos definitely yearned for that reality.

Alternatively, however, Christos felt like his life also contributed positively to what he perceived to be a campaign for Roma rights, equality, and justice. Here, the Gypsy trope indexes the deployment of recalcitrance and trickster tactics against the oppressor to gain power and equality<sup>139</sup>. By flaunting the law, escaping police detention, and by creating, maintaining, and using spaces and pathways outside of the mainstream Greek population's reach to survive and to sell illegal goods, Christos felt like he was dealing a blow to, not just the state hegemony, but also to the forces of capitalism that contributed to social differentiation; note, he did not necessarily see himself as fighting regular Greeks, but rather the state and the police. The simple act of moving a box filled with counterfeit purses from one place to the next constituted, for Christos, an act of

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<sup>139</sup> Incidentally, recalcitrance and trickster can be seen to have the same meaning among the mainstream Greek population.

subversion which he perceived ultimately aided the Roma cause by weakening the structural forces of oppression that kept them down and which condoned, and in some cases encouraged, broader social oppression.

(O): ...I mean, why, Christos. You know it's dangerous, and I realize that you don't have many other options, but surely there are other things you could do. There are people who will help you learn to read. You could stop taking drugs ...

(C): Don't you think I want to stop? My life is hard. Sometimes I wish it would all just stop. My brothers are scared of me sometimes. My sister won't let me see my nephew any more.

(O): So then?

(C): So nothing! I have responsibilities and I'm good at what I do – it's part of me. Don't think this is just about making money ... I'm good at this and I have to do it. [Profanity] the police officer who chases me and who beats my friends. They caught my father once and almost killed him – for nothing.

(O): So you stand up to the police?

(C): Every day I laugh at them, friend. If they catch me, I'll fight, I'll lie. I'll kill them. I don't care. But even if they don't catch me I'll be there, always. What I do goes against what they want, and that is good. That helps my brothers ...

(O): How?

(C): ... if the police doesn't get what it wants, then we can do what we want. My brothers and my mother won't be poor; we'll all be the same ... maybe my brothers can go to school ... If my moving boxes didn't threaten the police and the government, why would they care? No, I help my family by hurting the police and taking money from the government

Christos and his group justify their behavior, partially, through a discourse of grassroots resistance and what they construe to be civic action: fighting corruption and state sanctioned violence in the name of equality for a specific group of disempowered citizens. On the surface the allusions to civic engagement seem contrary to the spirit of the activities Christos and his friends pursue, especially when one considers more

conventional advocacy campaigns, protests, and lobbying that various interest groups undertake, formally and informally (Sotiropoulos 2004). However, the Roma have almost no access to the traditional spaces through which Greek civil action is organized and from where protests, in their various manifestations, are deployed, such as universities and job sites which are engaged by various political organizations and trade unions. Furthermore, while the Roma maintain protective rhizomatic networks that operate within and between Roma camps across Greece, these same networks could not easily be activated to undertake an offensive stance against social oppression. The reasons for this are various and include: first, an aversion to self-identify as part of a distinct group worthy of special recognition as this would complicate Romani claims to mainstream Greek identity; secondly, the fluid and contingent intersubjective dynamics on which Romani rhizomatic networking is based is not amenable to the formation of traditional social action collectives as these require reliable and predictable numbers; third, the demands of basic survival often eliminate the possibility of participating in public action that would take time and might expose the individual to further scrutiny. Christos and other Romani men and women active in this liminal network effectively create a space through which the Roma can act and be heard in political spheres; this is in opposition to the main Roma population's aspiration to "blend in" or "fit in" with the mainstream Greek population.

In deploying the Gypsy trope in the way that he does, Christos achieves something beyond a justification for his activities. It can be argued that Christos's view of his economic activities as doubling as advocate activities can be considered a mode of

therapeutics which resolves the tension between the Roma and liminal-Romani identity through a renegotiation of the Gypsy identity which strings the liminal-Rom, the main Rom, and the mainstream Greek together. Whereas the main Romani deploy the Gypsy trope to facilitate their social integration with the mainstream Greek population, the liminal Romani deploys the Gypsy trope to unify with the main Romani and to enforce their collective equality with the mainstream Greek population: a deployment of 'Gypsy' that repositions the illegal and dangerous activities the liminal-Roma engage in as an alternative to the civic disengagement/disenfranchisement of the main Romani population. Therein lies a purpose and a meaning for the life Christos leads, often enjoys, and is troubled by. Without this reconfiguration of 'Gypsy', Christos would simply view himself as a hoodlum who has strayed from his roots to feed his addictions and to make money: an image he balks at in its various manifestations (for example, imagining his sister is dying while he is distracted by his personal needs or by viewing his brothers as fearful of him).

At the heart of this therapeutics is a drive for recognition, asserting one's presence and worth among both the main Romani and even the mainstream Greek. In light of this significance to the Roma, one is compelled to consider the significance of this liminal sphere to its members with connections to other embattled populations. I have argued that the state uses access to citizenship as a means of legitimizing its authority, maintaining nationalist discourses that underlie the nation's sovereignty, and to create legal grey areas where it can act (or not act) with impunity to preserve a particular formal/informal demographic for political and economic reasons<sup>140</sup>. It can be argued that

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<sup>140</sup> The political reasons behind this include the aforementioned power retention and legitimating strategy, but also in terms of foreign policy. The economic reasons the state maintains this population might be seen

while this strategy for dealing with unwanted local populations is rooted in nationalist/sovereignist discourse that can be traced to the foundation of the contemporary Greek state, its deployment in the repression of particular groups was refined over decades of dealing with the Roma. In this way, the state has divided Greece into a nation of citizens and quasi-citizens: individuals who satisfy the criteria of belonging established and enforced by the state and its agents, and those who self-identify as members of the civil public but who are unrecognized as such by the state. This latter population is just starting to find a public voice. As mentioned above, politically enabled co-ethnic returnees and immigrants of Greek descent are beginning to speak and act publicly, as are large communities of domestic workers from the Philippines and some groups of Albanian migrants – sometimes on their own, and other times through various organizations like: cultural and sports groups, women's associations, trade unions, other professional organizations, human rights NGOs, or NGOs active in the protection of refugee and asylum seeker rights (see Gropas & Triandafyllidou 2009). However, like the Roma, undocumented migrants remain woefully underrepresented.

Groups from this population are coming together in the liminal space formed by the moving and selling of illegal material of various kinds to support themselves and their communities. Just as Christos can be seen to relieve the tension he feels between being Roma and being part of the liminal network by conceptualizing the moving of illegal material as supportive of the identity he seems to have drifted from, so too can the involvement of members of the undocumented migrant population involved in the same

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to include the maintenance of a low-wage informal workforce to sustain the agricultural and construction industries.

activity be seen to address the perhaps broader tension between, on the one hand, being trapped and being free to move on to another part of Europe, or being repressed and being a citizen as they once dreamed they would be. On the surface it would seem that the individuals operating within this liminal sphere could be seen as a Greek example of what Holston has described as the rise of new kinds of citizens seeking to expand democratic citizenship (2008). However, there is an important difference: first, the Roma and others involved in this liminal network do not have a clear political message, but rather identify their political purpose as simply to be recognized, which they achieve through disruption. This need to become visible, to become an identifiable public, speaks to a deeper desire for basic human identity and for the ability to create positive social meaning. It also underscores an important social trend across Athens, and Greece: certain segments of the population be they Romani, Greek youth, or undocumented migrant, are all calling for recognition – to be seen and heard.

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This chapter examined the identity politics the Roma community struggle with on a daily basis in Greece. Whereas the undocumented migrant population is barred from conventional citizenship outright, the Roma are barred from conventional citizenship in other ways; a reality that precipitates a myriad of Romani resistance and, importantly, integration strategies. It was also shown that this experience of marginalization and violence can foster the establishment of unexpected partnerships between unconventional citizens. In the final section of this chapter I detailed the life of one such ‘mixed group’ and reviewed their (symbolic and actual) encounters with the mainstream population. In the final chapter I will present a case where every group of unconventional citizen



examined in this work comes together to enact a vision of collective life that has had such an influence on the mainstream population that it contributed to the fall of the ND government that was in power at the time and remains a central popular preoccupation over a year after its occurrence. This event, the December 2008 civil unrest, provided a narrative backdrop that has influenced popular socio-political subjectivity since.

## Chapter 5

### *Coalescence: Of Coming Together and Change*

Είμαστε λίγο Ανατολίτες. Η Ελλάδα είναι κοντά στα λεγόμενα «άγρια μέρη» πέρα, και οι Ανατολία επηρέασε την ιστορία μας. Σε κάποιο επίπεδο, αυτό επηρεάζει τον τρόπο που σκέπτεται και τα θέματα που απασχολούν τον πολίτη σήμερα. Αυτό δεν είναι κακό πράγμα. Απλώς, πρέπει να αναγνωρίσουμε ότι ο μύθος της αυτόνομης Ελλάδας βασισμένη σε κάποιο αμόλυντο, πραγματικό Ελληνισμό στην καρδιά του κάθε πολίτη είναι ακριβώς αυτό, μύθος. Το μέλλον της χώρας μας, και ο τρόπος που σκέπτεται και αντιδρά ο Έλληνας, είναι δεμένο με άλλους λαούς.

We are a little Eastern. Greece is close to the so-called “wild places” yonder, and the East influenced our history. On some level, this affects the thoughts and the topics of interest to current citizens. This is not a bad thing. Simply, we must recognize that the myth of sovereign Greece based on a pure, real Hellenism at the heart of each citizen is exactly that, myth. The future of our land, and the way the Greek thinks and acts, is tied with other peoples.

This is taken from part of a conversation I had with an old man at a cafe or *kafenio* (καφενείο) in the immigrant-rich neighborhood of Athens, Kypseli.

One afternoon in June, 2007, I was speaking with an elderly Greek man about the state of the healthcare system in the country. Eventually, our conversation turned to his fear that his children would soon try to place him in a geriatric home (γηροκομείο) where he expected to be treated poorly and perhaps even beaten. Fear of growing old and being taken advantage of by both one’s family and the corrupt healthcare system is common across Greece<sup>141</sup>. Moreover, this fear is probably not unfounded; in fact, I suspect that geriatric abuse, like anorexia and depression, are secret epidemics in the country. As our conversation continued I mentioned that I sympathized with his fears and agreed that

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<sup>141</sup> One commonly voiced fear is that making one’s children executors of the elderly parents’ estate might result in the parents receiving poor, cheaper, or no treatment when they become very old and can no longer manage their own affairs.

geriatric abuse was probably very common, adding I found it unfortunate that Greeks broadly condone this violence. My consultant nodded his head and began to muse as to why this was. He rejected the idea that the Greek “culture” promoted this reality and dismissed the idea that Greece was a violent nation which taught its citizens to behave in this way. Then, after a thoughtful pause, he spoke the words I have recounted above.

It was not surprising that our conversation had slipped into an analysis of Greek politics, sovereignty, and even “national character”, as most conversations I had with this particular consultant usually did. However, I did find his assertion of a link between “being Greek” and what can be considered the country’s cosmopolitan history and future, surprising. This was the first time I had heard such a sentiment from a casual contact with no special training in the history of the country, politics, sociology or the like. This man had worked as an accountant, first for a family-operated shipping company before the Second World War<sup>142</sup>, and after for a small firm involved in bookkeeping for local businesses. When I met him he had been retired for nearly fifteen years. During this time he watched his neighborhood, Kypseli, which was once a well-to-do urban area, come to host a diverse immigrant community. This, he explained, resulted from the fact that most of the apartment buildings were old and that the units had been passed down from generation to generation. The inheritors of these units rented them out, first to wealthy immigrant families looking for a nice neighborhood, and then to middleclass immigrants as the area gained a negative reputation and most Greeks and wealthy foreigners began to avoid it. During this time Romani vendors began frequenting the narrow streets, selling everything from rugs to wash basins to newcomer families. Now, however, the charming apartments, lively streets, and pleasant square are attracting

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<sup>142</sup> During the war, the company’s ships were commandeered and subsequently sunk by the Germans.

Greeks again. My contact referred to this as an example of what can be termed the country's crisis of identity:

Η πλεονεξία και ο ρατσισμός του Έλληνα χάλασαν την γειτονιά μας. Οι μειονότητες την σώσανε. Και τώρα ο Έλληνας θέλει να γυρίσει πίσω! Δεν ξέρει τι θέλει!

The greed and racism of the Greek ruined our neighborhood. Minorities saved it. And now the Greek wants to come back! They don't know what they want!

Whereas Greeks were at first unwilling to work with immigrants, extend them rights of citizenship, or even live near them; now, they were coming to realize that immigrants were crucial to the country's economic success, that they were not necessarily ruining the city, and moreover, that many of them were good people – at least in this neighborhood. According to my consultant, the average Greek had to reconcile their changing reality with a lifetime of contrary thought. Bringing the conversation back to healthcare and his future, I asked whether he thought this influence of “other people” would benefit him if he ended up having to move to a geriatric home. With a chuckle, he suggested it might. He explained that until recently Greeks were so influenced by the East, that certain old “uncivilized” practices had become normal – introduced during the country's occupation and cemented in the popular way of thinking by years of denying that influence. However, as “other peoples” came to integrate into Greek society, my consultant hoped that they would inspire the Greek to reconsider the way they treat each other, perhaps changing the way families and the medical system treat the weak and elderly. The afternoon heat had become tiring at this point and I offered to walk my consultant home. Our deeper conversation had ended on this optimistic note and I felt happy sauntering along with this man, under the shade of bitter orange (νεραντζιά) trees, to the stoop of his

building. Someone had painted a hasty anarchist sign on the wall next to the doorway where my consultant leaned as he searched for his keys. I commented it was too bad young people were vandalizing these beautiful buildings but my consultant disagreed explaining “και αυτό είναι Ελλάδα” (this is also Greece).

By the following year my consultant had died, peacefully in his own home. His widow had moved in with her son’s family and the Kypseli apartment was empty. My consultant had died several months before one of the more dramatic events in recent history had gripped Athens in December 2008. As I watched the events of that month unfold, I wondered how he would have explained them – it seemed that the country was falling into chaos.

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On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Athens was rocked by violence following the shooting death of a young boy, Alexis Grigoropoulos, by a Special Forces policeman in Messologiou Street, in the political dissident neighborhood, Exarchia. As news of the shooting spread, thousands of young people gathered across the city to protest the event. The crowds quickly grew large and boisterous causing traffic to stop and camera crews to descend. Police stood nervously by as limestone and marble torn from the streets and nearby structures began to rain down on them, businesses, and government buildings. This marked the end of public order and the beginning of a youth uprising that would last for nearly three weeks and spread to several cities (Economides & Monastiriotis 2009; Kontogiorgis 2009; Panourgia 2009:xvi).

The street violence of December 2008 prompted researchers to question whether Greece was returning to a period of Molotov politics unseen in the country since the

military junta of the early 1970s and the dissident/anarchist action of the 1980s. Experts of all description claimed that the combination of economic stress, decades of failed social policy, broad dissatisfaction with the government and anger towards the police were bringing about the conditions for a sustained public backlash. Yet, questions remained as to the significance of the event: did the death of Alexis Grigoropoulos mark some socio-political watershed moment for Greece and perhaps Europe, or could the civil unrest be written off as a momentary flash of youth anger? People argued with each other in private and in public places across the country – what it meant to be a citizen seemed to be completely open for debate.

In an attempt to better understand how the events unfolded I contacted several of my consultants, including some anarchists. Even my most seasoned anarchist contact was surprised by the sustained intensity of the December 2008 events. In our interviews he described the opening days of the violence as the most exhilarating time of his life: a moment when he thought anarchy might finally be realized in Greece – and it is easy to see why. Following the shooting of Alexis Grigoropoulos, the youth of Athens came together in staggering numbers. According to my interviews, the protest started as small independent gatherings of enraged youth at universities near the shooting, which then grew to larger mobs and moved out of the universities and into the Exarchia neighborhood, eventually swelling to enormous numbers and spreading to the center of Athens. Participants with whom I spoke reported joining the action after receiving phone calls and texts from friends saying they were going downtown to protest the murder. It is unclear whether anarchist organizers were involved in the distribution of calls to protest that traveled virally over peer-to-peer social networks; but whatever the case, *paréa* after

paréa descended on the city at a precipitous rate. On the first night of the protest my anarchist contact described meeting with “professional protesters” as they are known in Greece: individuals who are paid to escalate public action, cause damage, and to goad reluctant crowds. However, he noted, the youth on the street did not need the encouragement of professionals to cause trouble: while the protesters did not seem to come with the intention of smashing and burning the city, they stayed when the violence started creating impromptu masks to protect their identities and to lessen the sting of teargas. The youth seemed eager to attack the symbols of the state (like government buildings and universities), the perceived partners or puppet-masters of the state (banks and large multinationals), and the state’s protectors (the police). In fact, at the height of the violence, young people managed to coordinate the simultaneous attack of about 45 police stations across Greece, mostly over mobile text (Gravriilidis 2009) and without the intervention of anarchist organizers or their henchmen.

It is important to note that not all of the youth on the streets of Athens that December identified themselves as anarchists, nor did they claim to be taking part in anarchic action, despite acknowledging the powerful anti-state sentiment that seemed to unite the crowd. Most people I spoke with claimed they were there only to protest police brutality and to demand justice, not only for Alexis Grigoropoulos but for “all the youth”. However, engaging in violence seemed, for many of these consultants, to be a natural extension of protesting the state and, even though most people on the streets did not turn to violence themselves, they nonetheless broadly condoned the looting, arson, and general property damage taking place around them. As demonstrated in chapter three, there is no question that the discursive spaces within which the youth of Greece

undertake idiosyncratic identity negotiations, and which have come to include local/translocal anti-state discourses, promote anarchic public action. Moreover, it is easy to see how the political consciousness of the youth demographic may be coming to allow more radical anti-state groups and their tactics within the spectrum of acceptable politics. When individuals make a subjective ethical decision to indirectly support violence against the state in the spirit of solidarity with others taking a stand against the establishment, sympathy or at least tolerance for more intensely violent anti-state action becomes possible. Hence, Athens burned for days, more violent elements were able to act out, and the media became saturated with images of hooded youth, smashed storefronts, and fearful citizens.

Of course the media coverage was partial. Newspapers and television programs splashed countless images of anarchists, or individuals resembling anarchists, on their front pages and across their screens, but broadly ignored the participation of a number of groups of other unconventional citizens. With the exception of a few references to, and images of, visible minorities in the news, who were without exception accused of perpetuating and intensifying violence, the participants were broadly represented as being white youth. Likewise, most researchers have also overlooked the participation of other unconventional citizens, again with the exception of some who have noted the presence of visible minorities, or “foreigners”, among the protest participants<sup>143</sup>. Considering the sorry state of mainstream<sup>144</sup> minority activism in the country (Gropas & Triandafyllidou

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<sup>143</sup> For example, Andreas Kalyvas spoke on the participation of minority groups in his lecture entitled “An Anomaly? Reflections on the Greek December 2008” which he gave at Princeton University, December 2009.

<sup>144</sup> I say ‘mainstream’ here because one might argue that anarchist groups and other far-left groups advocate for minorities, immigrants, and illegal migrants, albeit unofficially.



2009), the act of their striking out in public against state-authority was indeed notable<sup>145</sup>. The observant few researchers who considered their participation explained that minorities, like the broader group they joined, made no direct demands. Instead, and again like their co-actors, they expressed outrage at their treatment by the state and the police. In effect, they joined a general cry for human dignity. This cry also resonated with the Romani youth population; a group completely overlooked by academics studying the December 2008 social unrest until now.

The Roma participation in the street violence against a perceived murderous police force was inspired, in part, by this community's experiences with police brutality. The Romani youth I spoke with explained that they identified with Alexis Grigoropoulos, despite the fact that he was from a white upper-class family. In fact, the Roma I spoke with had inserted Grigoropoulos as the latest case in a history of police brutality against innocent Romani victims. This simultaneously situated the Roma struggle for equality within a broader pan-Greek struggle for basic human dignity while claiming a particular kind of violence (unprovoked shooting) as a Romani experience which other Greeks were only now coming to endure. This perceived joining of a pan-Greek struggle while claiming the broader population has experienced a Roma-specific violence, provided yet another discursive space where the Roma and Greek identities could come together. Consider this more closely. The April 1998 shooting of Angelos Celal in Partheni, Thessaloniki, for which the accused police officer was found guilty but received no jail

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<sup>145</sup> Evidence of the participation of immigrants and undocumented migrants in the December 2008 events is difficult to provide. Besides the interviews I conducted with several participants, one can also take as evidence the Greek Ministry of the Interior's website (<http://www.ekato.gr>) which posted information about the number of arrests of undocumented migrants specifically related to the December 2008 unrest.

term, discipline, or repercussions of any kind<sup>146</sup>, was evoked by many Roma I interviewed as the most egregious example of state-sponsored, or condoned, police violence against their community. Accordingly, until December 2008, the Celal murder was employed in conversations to index oppressive violence suffered by the Roma at the hands of the police. Currently, however, the Roma have begun to evoke Grigoropoulos (or “Alexis”, *Ο Αλέξης*). Grigoropoulos is not identified by the Roma as “one of us” (*δικός μας*), but the violence that killed him is referred-to as “typical” (*τυπικό*), that is, the Roma are not claiming to be Greek like Grigoropoulos but are asserting the commonality of a particular experience of being Greek across communities. In this way, Grigoropoulos is coming to index an emerging connection between the Greek and the Roma based on violent state oppression and resistance to that oppression<sup>147</sup>. Within Roma camps, especially in Athens, “the December events” (*τα Δεκεμβριανά*) refers to a common experience, a common struggle and, importantly, a moment of equality when both the Roma and the mainstream Greek population were united. For the Roma youth that took to the streets, participation in the civil unrest was both a protest against the violence they suffer and an evocation of an ideal, socio-political identity.

For Vasilo’s son, Christos, the social unrest provided an opportunity to act more directly against the state and the police that dog him. On the third night of the rioting, Christos and his migrant friends went downtown to join the groups of young people who were chanting slogans and throwing rocks. Christos brought materials to assemble a Molotov cocktail, “in case it is needed”, as he put it. As the night progressed and the

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<sup>146</sup> In fact, the officer was permitted to continue working for the police.

<sup>147</sup> Of note, the forced eviction of anarchists and youth that occupy houses across Greece by the police is also mentioned by some Roma as a common experience. However, they are quick to point out that the lands they live on and are forced to leave are rightfully theirs whereas the youth and anarchists are trespassers.

crowd grew boisterous, Christos found an opportunity, lit the alcohol-soaked wick sticking out of his bottle and he threw the cocktail toward the police line. He heard the bottle smash and the crowd cheer, but he didn't see where the bottle fell as he had already begun to run toward the Polytechnic University<sup>148</sup>. Christos had moved his protest against authority from hidden spaces and smuggling routes, literally, to the front of popular attention: with a smash of glass and a flash of igniting petrol, Christos took a fleeting public stand against the conditions of his and his brothers' lives, for his migrant friends, and for all those who stood with him. During the protest, these unconventional citizens had entered the civic space of the *polis* and became political actors for all to see (see Christodoulidis 2007:195). Afterwards, at the university, Christos met a number of young people and some self-identifying anarchists who thanked him for taking part in the action. These individuals referred to the collection of people taking refuge at the university and who were protesting on the streets as a united front against the state. Christos described feeling a momentary sense of belonging to a larger group, of being an outlaw *cum* citizen, perhaps part of a broader citizenship that was putting into question its own boundaries (see Rancière 2007:57, 62). Thus, like in 1974, the Polytechnic had once again become a ground where citizenship was being re-imagined; albeit this time by a collection of individuals with unconventional claims and experiences of belonging to the civic totality.

In the days after the December 2008 civil unrest I wished that my consultant from Kypseli was still alive. I wondered what he would say about the immigrants and illegal migrants he lived among, the Roma that sold him fruits, the anarchists that spray-painted his stoop, and the anti-establishment youth that were finding his neighborhood so trendy,

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<sup>148</sup> A law dating back to the Junta prohibits police from entering and making arrests on university grounds.

spontaneously coming together against a nation that they perceived had robbed them of their rights and their dignity. I wondered if he would have regarded them as citizens, or at least recognized their actions as civic in nature. My Kypseli consultant had known this collection of individuals during a time when they enacted their citizenship quietly, but he had missed the period when they moved squarely into the public sphere and subsequently returned back to their pre-December 2008 lives. I am certain that my consultant would have been very excited to discuss the events, if not with me, then certainly with his family and friends as much of the country was doing. In fact, in the months following December 2008, most people I spoke with wanted to tell me their interpretations of the civil unrest. I received numerous emails with links to YouTube videos depicting undulating crowds and visceral chanting. The events had thrust the question of major political change to the forefront of the Greek public consciousness. In both private and public conversations, individuals considered a different Greece in which the collective of rioters would not have acted out. One is compelled to think that if the nation is only as real as the social imaginary permits it to be (see Gourgouris 1996), then in those conversations, in those intersubjective moments, the nation and the citizen flirted with, or perhaps in some albeit local regard achieved, socio-political transformation.

### ***Points of Contact: A Hidden Political Front***

In the months after the protests, and as Greeks discussed the December civil unrest, those that took part in the protests went back to their usual lives. As I write this chapter, Christos and one of his Roma friends are moving a box of unspecified “goods” from the small town of Kaki Thalassa (just south of Porto Rafti) to Omonia Square in

Athens where they plan to pass it off to a Senegalese man who, in turn, will take it to a buyer. One of my anarchist contacts is updating his website with a new subsection entitled “The Failures of Capitalism” and with links to articles about Greece’s economic problems in British and American newspapers. Two of my high school student contacts are at an internet cafe in Halandri and a university student contact is attending a lecture downtown and then planning to head to a nearby hotspot to meet some friends. However, it would be folly to suggest that these groups have disengaged from the public sphere. As the previous three chapters demonstrated, migrants and the Roma have an ongoing influence over small commodity prices, are changing the affective quality of local spaces, and are inspiring a popular sense of risk-cosmopolitanization (Beck 2006), to name a few influences. Likewise, anarchists and other anarchist-style far-left groups are producing, channeling, and making available anti-establishment discourses which the youth population consumes and circulates internally, essentially feeding the proto-civil styling of parées and maintaining a broad action-potentiality. The influence of unconventional citizens on the socio-political subjectivities of the greater population of Athens, and indeed Greece, occurs from within their communities and at the various points of social, economic, and political contact they share among and amongst themselves and the mainstream population<sup>149</sup>. Let us consider this influence more closely.

As I have argued above, Greeks have moved into a new period of critical reflexivity influenced less by nationalist rhetoric and more by local-level experiences. To be sure, modern civic identity, the nation, and even the meaning of democratic engagement are coming to be framed in relation to the actions and influences

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<sup>149</sup> Of note, immigrants from various origins are beginning to influence the Greek cultural scene including theatre, fine art, and music.

unconventional citizens bring to both public and private spaces. This complex, sometimes subtle sometimes sudden, feathering into various subjective and intersubjective spaces where political identity is made means that unconventional citizens are shaping social reproductions of a future-oriented political contemporary. What this means is that as unconventional citizens participate and reconfigure Greek politics in a multitude of often subtle ways, they are effectively furthering the de-linking of the political subject from ethnicity and nationality on various fronts; in effect, they are helping to remake the *demos*. Through their participation, and in the context of a critically reflexive mainstream, citizenship is expanding<sup>150</sup> and democracy is becoming de-nationalized: we are witnessing the rise of a constituent politics whereby Greek society, that is the inclusive *totality* of Greek society, is putting itself into question and coming to institute itself anew<sup>151</sup>.

The intensity driving this change, the front of the political reconfiguration in question here is located at the unconventional citizen. It is important to underscore that this change is not being spurred by one particular group. Up to now, much attention has been paid to the influence undocumented migrants, and immigrants specifically, have had on various levels of European law and on the political consciousness of individuals living in various European states (see for example Kastoryano 1998; 2005; Sassen 2006). This work demonstrates that not just one, but various diverse groups of unconventional citizens<sup>152</sup> interact with each other and with the political mainstream to inspire broader change, not just at the level of policy and law, but at the level of individual subjectivity.

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<sup>150</sup> See Kastoryano on extending political rights to those outside the conventional category of citizen (2007).

<sup>151</sup> See Castoriadis (1987) and Kalyvas (1998) constituent politics and for the conceptualization of democracy as the self-institution of society.

<sup>152</sup> Again, that is groups that share a sense of belonging, or aspiration to belong to a collective whole, but which are barred from, or themselves reject, traditional modes and categories of citizenship.

The approach I have taken here reveals how the interconnections between groups of variously abused, disempowered and disenfranchised people, that often appear sporadic and even temporary, may in fact hold deeper and evolving socio-cultural implications within those groups and may come to form complex webs of sustained influence (acting at various points) on the mainstream. This work has shown that understanding the growing networks of unconventional citizens across Europe, the internal sociality and broader influence of which may prove to be surprisingly transnational, may be important when considering issues related to broader socio-political change.

This, of course, begs the question whether the emerging political reality in Greece is specific to that country or whether this can be considered the local instance of a broader trend towards popular political change influenced by unconventional citizens across Europe. Balibar has argued that Greece is one of the centers of Europe, not because of the mythical origins of its civilization, but because it condensates the political problems and conflicts facing the continent (2004:2)<sup>153</sup>. Indeed, Greece's exposure to the human and other effects of international conflict, economic crisis, and political tumult outside its borders, and within its borders Greece's deep economic, political, and social problems make the country a privileged space where established European struggles are intensified and new forms of conflict emerge. Perhaps we are seeing the beginning of a drastic reconfiguration of Greek, and therefore of European politics, the emergence of new political subjects, and the actualization of new, and reinterpretation of old, civic struggles.

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<sup>153</sup> Of note, Balibar argues this is because the country's shifting post-Cold War geopolitical significance and because of the political reforms the country introduced during the mid-eighties (2004).

## Appendix 1

The following article was published in 2007 in *The Anthropology of East Europe Review: Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, volume 25, number 2. I composed this article while I was still in the field. Writing about my experiences and the research strategies I had developed helped me to reflect critically and to improve my methodology. Moreover, the article grew from the various conversations I had with anthropologists and other academics regarding the conceptual and practical significance of *Minority Equality Research In Action* (MERIA) to my overall project, and more generally, of the significance of operating small, focused not-for-profit organizations to complex ethnographic projects. I felt that these exchanges were very productive, potentially relevant to the growing literature on para-ethnography (Holmes & Marcus 2005a; Holmes & Marcus 2005b), and likely of interest to other researchers. Besides the following article, these conversations also inspired a panel which I organized for the 2009 meeting of the *Modern Greek Studies Association* on NGOs, Civil Society, and social change in Greece.



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**WORKING WITH THE ATHENIAN ROMA: CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH  
METHODOLOGIES FOR A COMPLEX FIELD**

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Fieldwork is undoubtedly one of the most intellectually demanding aspects of anthropology. It has been described variously as an exciting (often) location-based research endeavor punctuated by moments of chance leading to illuminating discoveries, and even as a period of deep and sometimes challenging embeddedness necessitating occasional disengagement from the field to retain academic purpose and vantage point. Each experience of conducting fieldwork is different. The techniques anthropologists employ vary according to the particular questions we seek to explore and the conditions we encounter in the field; we all, however, seek to gather data pertinent to our intended subject and also to any emerging, unforeseen, and even hidden phenomena relevant to it. This article will explore both these dimensions of fieldwork, with particular focus on this latter, and more, challenging aspect, by way of preliminary reflection on the methodology I employed during my recent time in Athens researching the contribution Greek Roma make to local modernization and emergent understandings of citizenship and society<sup>1</sup>.

Over the past few years Athens has become a locus of increasing European Union and globalized socioeconomic flows, rapid minority<sup>2</sup> population growth, and Hellenic social change. While the sudden escalation of activity in and around Greece has certainly

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<sup>1</sup> Of note, my forthcoming dissertation focuses equally on Roma and non-Romani Greek minorities, but for the purposes of this article I will focus on the former.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term 'minority' to describe self-identifying collectivities (based on "ethnic", "cultural", or other perceived distinguishing characteristics). I consider Roma to be a Greek minority. Greece does not officially recognize any minority with the exception of a small Muslim population in Northern Thrace.

benefited Greek Roma economically and, to a lesser extent, strengthened Romani claims to equality in law with dominant society, this historically embattled group has also experienced increased hostility from non-Romani Greeks now in the grips of new-found nationalist zeal conflated with modern European aspirations. The opportunity for increased stability and prosperity provided by extra-national forces contrasts sharply with the increased social exclusion of and violence against Roma perpetrated by local populations. It is within this space that my work as ethnographer has unfolded and within which I developed a dual role as both academic and NGO worker.

This article, composed during my fieldwork as reflections on the evolution of my status as researcher among Athenian Roma, will reflect on the purpose and functioning of the NGO I co-founded, the navigational ability it afforded me in formal Greek public life and within the Romani private sphere, the various (gender-related) communicative opportunities and hindrances NGO consultation with Roma presented, and will also explore a number of theoretical concerns associated with what can be termed “research perspective” in complex field settings. Additionally I will consider a number of cases from the field to illustrate my various observations and arguments.

The Athens of “an irreducibly plural effect” James Faubion so eloquently described in his seminal *Modern Greek Lessons* (1993:55) is changing, and Greek Roma, a population largely unrepresented in the literature on Greece in general, are facilitating this new reality. The various significances and anthropological subtleties at work within this complex field are fascinating, and so too has been the process of their discovery.

My departure for the field was, per standard anthropological practice, preceded by lengthy, careful planning. I had prior experience with the Athenian Romani community,

and I sought to add to my previous research a much deeper understanding of the private Romani experience of living and being productive in the city. I designed my methodology in order to gain access to official structures and key individuals responsible for setting the social and economic policy in Greece that influenced Romani daily life, and conversely, which Romani daily life influenced. I situated this approach, in turn, in relation to the experiences of other, non-Romani minorities in the city<sup>3</sup>, and of course the dominant Athenian population.

Currently, the total Romani population in the Attica region of Greece is uncertain, although estimates suggest between 200,000 and 350,000 individuals, or two to three percent of the total population of Greece, the majority living in or near Athens.<sup>4</sup> Roma have been in Greece for centuries; there is, however, no official Greek-Romani history nor are Greek Roma well-represented in official histories of Greece in general; a grievous omission considering the importance of the Roma community to Greek arts (particularly the *laïko*, λαϊκό, or folk tradition, which they helped establish) and state formation (especially the war of independence in which they were instrumental as freedom fighters).

The vast majority of Greek Roma identify themselves as both Greeks and Romani. The Romani aspect of their identity can be very complex. First, Roma claim belonging to specific master clans such as Yifti, Turko-Yifti, Rudara, Kalpazaya, Handuriya, Filipijiya, Fichirya, Erlides, Sepechides, among others. Secondly, individuals claim particular regional identities, such as the Kavala Roma, Halkida Roma, and Patras Roma. Some of the Roma living in the area I work claim membership to several of these categories simultaneously. Linguistically, most Roma in the country are Greek speakers who retain

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this aspect of my research, please see my forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>4</sup> This population estimate is based on the data collected by various local NGOs and activists. There is currently no official population figure available from the state.

a small core of Romanes words, some communities mostly near Thrace speak Turkish primarily, and a small number of Roma in the North of Greece speak Romanes. Almost all Romani communities observe a core set of internal Romani customs including marriage celebrations, coming-of-age rituals, and death ceremonies (see for example, Daskalaki 2003), although the particulars of these customs range widely from group to group.

Perhaps, the most visible Greek Romani characteristic, and the one most often cited by non-Romani Greeks as definitive of Romani culture, is the style and preferred arrangement of homes found in most Roma settlements across the country. Roma tend to construct their homes in an urban wattle and daub manner, utilizing discarded building supplies and other materials to cobble together semi-permanent homes (Karathanasi 2000). These homes are built within a space selected by the Roma, which can be referred to as a compound given that it is both a safe, guarded space (outsiders typically avoid Romani camps) and a space which they are forced to occupy (it is very difficult for Roma to live apart from the collective). Within compounds, Roma organize themselves in what may seem to an outsider to be a random manner, though upon closer examination, homes and the items within and around them are arranged according to a particular experience of space and relationship with material goods. Compounds are quite complex and dynamic sites.

The Alpha compound, within which I carry out my research, is located in one of the northeastern suburbs of Athens.<sup>5</sup> It is situated centrally within the suburb, though isolated from it by short tracts of unkempt land, refuse piles, and fence (Alexandrakis 2003). Within the compound live roughly fifty families, according to seasonal work

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<sup>5</sup> The name of the compound is a pseudonym.

opportunities and the actions (such as evictions) of the surrounding local authorities.<sup>6</sup>

There are several families at the Alpha compound that have lived there for over 30 years. Some of these families have managed to secure steady work in the area and enjoy a level of financial stability uncommon among their Romani neighbors. The majority, however, live day-to-day, work at unsteady jobs, and rely on support from neighbors and family.

Conducting fieldwork among Greek Roma can be very challenging for three main reasons: many Athens-area Roma are very poor and suffer from overt injustices that are difficult to witness, most practice myriad resistance strategies when dealing with non-Roma, and all are stigmatized in such a way that the ethnographer's involvement with Roma often draws censure and even hostility from the non-Romani community. The standard "rigorous hanging out" method employed by many anthropologists in the field is simply not an option here. One must seek a means of moving in and out of both communities without harming one's ability to gather data in either, while fostering relationships that permit access to significantly private areas of life in each.

Additionally, from a methodological perspective, the nature of field relationships with non-Romani Greeks is also crucial, both in informal settings and those in formal, corporate settings. In terms of the former, while research contacts in the field may certainly develop into friendships, informal contacts in Greece are often established and continue to operate following an ethic of individualistic gain. This is not to say that Athenians are somehow manipulative or uncooperative; on the contrary, in my experience they are in fact quite accommodating and enthusiastic. As those familiar, however, with conducting fieldwork in Greece can attest, the researcher's relationship

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<sup>6</sup> For example, forced evictions in one area may lead to a temporary population explosion at the Alpha compound.

with his or her consultant is often determined by, and based on, the relationship the researcher has established with the larger social network of which the consultant is part and the particular individual social aspirations which may be serviced by participating in the research (through the potential gain of cultural capital). Eventually, these contacts may develop into friendships, but this must be cultivated carefully within the context of complex Greek interpersonal politics.

In terms of the latter, corporate relationships often follow the same overarching social rules of referral, reciprocal obligation, and personal gain, albeit in a formal environment requiring particular “ceremonial” practices (such as respecting office etiquette, or preserving a particular power dynamic). Corporate contacts are harder to gain, however, due to the strict divide between formal and informal relationships maintained by most Greeks<sup>7</sup> and due to the lack of benefit, in terms of cultural capital or otherwise, the researcher can offer to this set. In the situation where the ethnographer is unlikely to gain an informal meeting with an individual through one of his or her own social networks, the researcher must find another approach.

The methodology I developed for this project is both sensitive to the dynamics of formal and informal fieldwork relationships: it allowed for the performance of standard research practice among the informal, social contacts while providing access to the latter corporate group through the formalization of the individualistic ethic of gain that underlies many Greek field relationships. This methodology has also helped resolve the three difficulties in working with Roma I mentioned above, while eventually allowing access to intimate aspects of social experience among all three groups: Athenian social

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<sup>7</sup> One's manager or coworker is hardly ever invited for a meal, rarely referred to members of the social network for any reason such as financial advice or car repair, unless a previous friendship existed or one is developed over time.

contacts, corporate contacts, and Romani contacts. The following will describe the research methodology I am currently employing and, first, the advantages and disadvantages this has offered in terms of conducting research among my Roma and non-Roma Athenian contacts, and secondly I will discuss the interesting analytical perspective this strategy has offered and the resulting expanded concept work it has facilitated while in the field.

### **MERIA, Access, and other Practical Considerations**

In July 2006, the not-for-profit organization Minority Equality Research in Action (MERIA) was awarded its Letters Patent from the government of Canada. The purpose of this organization is to aid minority groups in Europe to achieve conditions of equality with the rest of society by building capacity for change through the provision of medical aid, education, and other programming. I co-founded MERIA with a healthcare professional passionate about the cause and assembled a group of advisors from various relevant areas including anthropology, healthcare, and development to help guide the organization. Currently, and at the Romani community's behest, MERIA works with several Athens-area healthcare NGOs and state health offices to provide basic medical services to the Alpha compound in a drive to both explore new outreach models and provide better care for Romani patients, and is also working with Greek education experts to design a tailored curriculum which will be rolled out in the Alpha compound at the time this article goes to press. My time in the field has therefore been spent working for MERIA, while conducting interviews and collecting other data as a private researcher. It is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this strategy.

Beyond allowing me to gain access to the Romani camp in a familiar and non-threatening manner, and allowing me to move between the two communities my research involves (Roma and non-Romani Athenians) without estranging members of one or the other, MERIA has also allowed me several additional advantages. First, along the lines of access, operating an NGO has provided a gateway to certain levels of government and to international bodies and organizations that would otherwise be difficult to engage. These contacts range from ministers and mayors to professionals from the private sector, all of whom I have no informal contact with nor have informal contact with any of their larger social networks. Yet, through MERIA's partners it has been possible to meet and conduct research among this difficult set of consultants.

In Greece, once a professional working relationship has been formed, it is possible to move among one's contact's professional network, acting as a private researcher, following and remaining sensitive to the same social protocol that shapes relationships in the informal sphere. Of course, gaining interviews by this method raises important ethical concerns, especially regarding the power the researcher has in the field. In my work, interviews with corporate contacts are strictly for academic purposes, are confidential, and declared unrelated to MERIA activities. Here I am careful to protect my consultant, the professional who referred me to the consultant, and also the beneficiaries of MERIA. For this reason I establish an academic, informal relationship with the contact through, for example, adhering to the code of behavior that governs informal relations, thus ensuring that my symbolic gestures (such as seating position, language, etc.) reinforce that the power in the relationship lay with the consultant. In the case where the contact wishes to explore my professional activities I have found that it is



important in the Greek context to be forthcoming, but ultimately I refer them to others within the organization should they wish to pursue an official working partnership. If a professional partnership is formed between the contact and MERIA, the research relationship changes.

Once an informal contact (in this case, one referred to me by a formal contact) enters a formal partnership with MERIA, my dual academic/professional identity becomes more difficult to manage as the issues with complicity and power mentioned above become more pronounced and direct. This is unfamiliar territory for many anthropologists in the field. In my case it has been important to recognize the following: once a formal relationship has been formed, it will always be professional and even “off-the-record” exchanges are likely to reflect the particular interests of the contact's organization. Thus, the main difficulty in managing the dual identity is to realize that, in fact, one has a single identity as far as the contact is concerned, that the range of data available is dictated by the formal corporate relationship, and that the interpretation of this data must be sensitive to that fact. The research relationship has been formalized, as has the individualistic ethic of gain.<sup>8</sup>

Conducting interviews with Roma as a private researcher/NGO representative has also been challenging, although very rewarding. I had an already established relationship with the majority of people living at Alpha compound as a researcher, and my return in summer 2006 as a representative of MERIA was not unexpected by the local population as I had discussed this possibility with them during my prior visit. Today I am

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<sup>8</sup> The contact will be mindful of professional advantages and disadvantages presented by the researcher/professional. Data collected and contacts gained will typically be determined on this reality.

treated as a researcher (private individual) first, and as an NGO representative secondly. However, to begin this exploration of the Romani aspect of my fieldwork it is useful to consider one of the unexpected benefits the organization has lent my fieldwork.

While in the field I discovered that MERIA serves as a meeting point for various experts in the areas of, for example, advocacy, healthcare, law, and government. The opportunity to create focused dialogue between people of various areas of expertise and background has been tremendously advantageous. The NGO acts as a kind of “center of study” involving academics, professionals, and local consultants (grassroots intellectuals). The issues the group explores are always focused on MERIA initiatives and community needs, but often stray into more theoretical areas to do with policy, history, and social change. These conversations also serve as useful starting points for private interviews. Interestingly, Roma have been the most enthusiastic participants in these dialogues, which was unexpected considering the usual reticence some researchers encounter from this community when exploring subjects concerning suffering and injustice.

According to my Romani consultants, MERIA meetings (formal and informal) are considered safe discursive spaces where the details of sensitive areas of private life can be shared with non-Roma. I would like to suggest here that the Romani participants deem discussions in the context of NGO consultation safe for two principal reasons: first, the organization and those that belong to it have proven themselves to be sympathetic towards the community (there is little fear that comments might produce negative repercussions); and second, these exchanges approximate the conditions of “true speech” in which Romani men often engage. True speaking refers to a particular style of discourse that occurs at times when men are experiencing moments of heightened

fraternity and sense of collectivity (Stewart 1992:146, 1989; see also “formal speech” in Alexandrakis 2003:78). Stewart explains that true speech occurs when the Roma recount personal hardships and difficulties, and moreover constitutes a discursive space used to demonstrate trust. For the anthropologist in the field participating in true speech with Romani consultants, or even participating in an exchange that approximates true speech, allows access to intimate experiences, personal opinions, and notably, preservation strategies as conveyed through, in this case, desired initiatives, concerns, requests, and recommendations. The aim here is not to infiltrate or trick one’s way into private lives through aping local communication styles, but rather to be sensitive to internal dialogical conventions, which are in fact performed openly within Romani compounds. The goal is to foster productive research relationships, and in this case also constructive relationships.

The fact that I am well known to the community has also facilitated my inclusion and the inclusion of other MERIA personnel during true speech times. When I first began research with this Romani group I was not permitted to join in these exchanges as I had not yet gained the trust of the community nor had I yet effectively demonstrated my singularity and unbiased positioning (non-Athenian and non-Romani, therefore neutral). Once my identity was known, I began to participate in increasingly important instances of true speech where individuals with “fresh wounds” would seek solace and where individuals would strengthen their sense of connection to the Romani collective following symbolic and actual separations from the group (like time in jail, military service, invasive hospital treatment, and the like). Rarely do the MERIA meetings operate at these levels of cultural significance (for example, NGO personnel are not invited to join the strengthening of the Roma collective); however, having experienced

the range of true speech instances, I have been able to recognize its more simple form and the significance it carries. Knowing and understanding modes of Roma communication has been very important in maintaining MERIA. It is likely that many NGOs fail with the Roma because their members do not understand these subtle codes. For example, moments where the Roma are building these trust relationships may be dismissed as complaining or manipulating for more benefit. Of note, some other communication styles are even more difficult to manage, particularly ones employed at times of perceived threat as when NGO personnel and others, like anthropologists, first make contact.

An example of this kind of communicative style is performed by Romani women. The Romani women living at the Alpha compound and, according to personal experience and the accounts of others, other Romani women across the Attica region in Greece employ a particular resistance strategy that makes communication nearly impossible. Specifically, these women, contrary to the rather reticent Romani men, forcefully beg, yell at their friends while ignoring outsiders, and will gather in very large numbers around non-Roma they find in the compound asking questions loudly and often getting into fights with each other. Regardless of the broader anthropological significance of this practice (which is considerable, but beyond the scope of this work), it can be stated unequivocally that Romani women accomplish a definite power shift in their favor by making outsiders uncomfortable and often confused. These practices deny the target speaking space or sometimes even the opportunity to orient oneself within a social situation – outsiders often report a sense of talking to nobody and everybody at once. Interviews with the general non-Romani population living outside the compound have

confirmed the effectiveness of this power-shifting strategy with most consultants reporting they try to avoid Romani women claiming they are “noisy,” “hostile,” “disrespectful,” or “impossible.” When I first began my work at the Alpha compound I encountered this form of communication nearly every day for a month. Needless to say it was very challenging. Eventually, I formed closer relationships with women in the compound through introductions by men or simply when they approached me individually, and these women would intervene and disperse groups forming around me. Of note, in the event where my close contacts were not present, other women who recognized me would intervene, declare my relationship with their insider, and the group communication style would change almost spontaneously so that I could participate. MERIA personnel also had to endure this power-shifting communication strategy until they managed to each form positive relations with the local community.

Currently I conduct interviews, sometimes with individuals but often with groups of women. The subject matter of these group interviews has ranged widely and it seems few issues are taboo. It has also been common for men to join in these conversations. Even children take part on occasion. It is clear that when on my own the women regard me as a private researcher, but when I approach them with another MERIA member they treat me as a representative of the NGO, likely because the other members have not achieved the degree of familiarity with the Roma that I have and so some personal topics like compound gossip and private family affairs are not referred to. To protect my Romani consultants and to maintain their trust, I keep private conversations and research interviews strictly confidential, even when the data gathered could benefit MERIA. My prior relationship with the women of Alpha compound has made it possible for me to

assure them that our private conversations are truly private. In the event where this confidentiality was to be breached, I am certain I would lose the intimate research relationships I have formed with these Romani women.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond verbal communication, Greek Roma are also very sensitive to non-verbal communication cues. Interviews often begin outside of houses and sometimes migrate indoors at the invitation of the homeowner. Learning to negotiate Romani space was initially a challenge. Anthropologists familiar with the early work on the Romani body, especially by Sutherland (1977 see also Miller 1975: 43; Okely 1983: 33-34; Stewart 1997: 207-208), will recall studies of Romani pollution/pure and inside/outside dialectics and the resulting complexity of Romani spatial organization. Greek anthropologists studying the Roma have also noticed the manifestation of these dialectics, especially in social organization, treatment of material goods, and even in Romani architecture (Karathanasi 2000).

For example, in the Alpha compound, stolen or discarded building supplies and large pieces of wood refuse and cardboard are used to create flimsy walls and porous roofs for houses, but no home is built unless a solid cement slab floor is laid to keep the perceived ubiquitous polluting dirt out (especially dirt originating from outside of the compound). Following this pattern, rooms can be added endlessly to homes, but not without cement floors, especially when these rooms are given doors to the outside.

Moreover, only Romani men and women are permitted to build Romani homes: the help

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<sup>9</sup> Of course this begs the question whether a researcher approaching a Romani group initially in association with an NGO can form the same intimate relationships an independent researcher might. Based on my observations at the Alpha compound I would argue that making this transition would be more difficult as the Rom would be wary of the transition from client/provider to consultant/researcher, being uncertain as to whether the “outsider” had something to gain. Greek Roma are very familiar with the client/provider relationship with non-Roma (both at work and in relation to non-Romani service providers), a relationship that comes with strict rules and boundaries maintained by the Roma for their own protection.

of an outsider is considered bad luck (although outsiders are permitted to supply the building materials). All the houses within the Alpha compound are oriented with their doors generally away from the surrounding neighborhood (even when it means the door of one house opens onto mud holes, back wall or bathroom of another house etc.). Loud noise in the form of music from stereos or televisions and noise from yelling provides a constant audible form of insulation from the outside. Also, most every externally originating object, including beds and cookware, is handled with disregard, but certain items like photographs or gold (the former depicting family members or close friends and the latter in the form of jewelry such as that given and worn during celebrations) are cared for closely because they are considered “internal” and/or purifying (see Alexandrakis 2003). Non-Roma must always remain aware of their position relative to these manifestations of the “inside/outside” dialectic and to never become offensive by, for example, asking their Romani hosts to turn down music, tracking dirt into homes, touching sensitive items without permission, or make negative comments about particular building choices (such as the placement of doors and windows). This may seem straightforward at first, but consider that sometimes these rules can change.

As a non-Rom, there is no question that I am considered an outsider to the community despite my prior relationship with them, and as such my movements within the camp are subject to a set of informal rules that follow the inside/outside dialectic mentioned above. For example, it is impermissible for me to enter a Romani home without being bidden to do so. This may appear at first to be self-evident; Roma themselves, however, do not observe a strict border between the interiors and the exteriors of their homes except when an outsider is nearby. The Roma at the Alpha

compound are content to leave doors open day and night, to have holes in walls, park cars partially indoors and sleep and cook in their yards and in the yards of neighbors (if the word 'yard,' with all its connotations, can be applied to describe the area in front of Romani houses); when a non-Romani individual appears, however, the camp becomes spontaneously populated with forbidden zones. The interior of houses is one such zone, but also the spaces behind houses and in the Alpha compound the section of land where houses back onto a fence furthest from the main access are off limits to those not escorted by a local resident. Add to this that forbidden zones often shift and change depending on how nearby families feel or if people move or leave. Learning and respecting internal borders has been extremely important, not to mention difficult. With time, experience, and by learning how to read body language and verbal cues, the borders become more apparent and more easily avoidable.

Currently, I, and other MERIA personnel, experience mostly politeness and tolerance from the Roma, and we in turn have become more accustomed to the particulars of internal Romani communication and the complexity of Romani space, and have developed an effective means of communicating sensitive questions and requests. Sometimes, of course, communications break down or unexpected situations arise. This occurs most frequently when Roma from other compounds come to stay, and when we come to conduct research at sensitive times like when internal feuding has escalated or when celebrations have lead to considerable drinking. In the first two cases we rely on our established relationships and reputation in the compound to aid us in defusing potentially explosive situations. In the latter, rather infrequent case, MERIA personnel are instructed to skip the day's work and I go in alone to collect research data only. In



times of celebration, while many inhabitants of the compound are intoxicated, there are always a number of others who are sober and very excited to discuss the event.

In sum, the productive research relationship I enjoy with the Roma would not have been possible without my prior experience at the camp, nor would MERIA be able to operate successfully. MERIA has allowed me to do fieldwork with both informal and less accessible formal Greek consultants while providing a solution for the major difficulties facing anthropologists conducting research among Greek Roma: it has allowed Roma a venue where they can voice and seek solutions to the problems they face every day; MERIA has allowed me the space to both avoid Roma resistance strategies based on my prior relationship, and to study them and overcome them as they arise occasionally based on the organization's credentials and my experience; and finally MERIA has neutralized the censure and exclusion one typically experiences from the mainstream Athens population when they discover one works also with Roma. Yet in addition to these benefits, running this organization has provided another advantage that I wish to consider presently.

### **Accessing and Understanding Codes, Flows, and Change in the Field**

MERIA has provided a platform from where I can examine specific issues from a perspective perhaps unavailable to many other researchers. Recall the concept of poetics; that is, studying local meaning through close examination of narrative and performance (Herzfeld 1988: xv, 10). Narrative and performance are observable phenomena, but how does one become participatory at the level of unobservable phenomena? How can participant observation be reconceived so that one may study the myriad forces shaping

local meaning in the field more directly, to learn how these forces help negotiate a particular reality, or whether they truly are at play? Of course, traditional fieldwork is adequate here in that one may study larger structuring forces (however one wishes to define them) through any number of analytical models simply by observing people. Studying forces directly, or codes and flows defined here in the Deleuzean tradition<sup>10</sup>, however, may be facilitated by the invention of a vehicle that allows direct access the particular cross-section of codes and flows pertinent to the research question. MERIA has proved to be such a vehicle, given the way it operates in the field.

When approaching a particular field site as a representative of MERIA, the confluence of codes and flows the organization represents elicit a particular reaction at the site. That is, some flows come together while others are resisted or operate neutrally. By analyzing the encounter between the field entity and the control (in this case MERIA), the codes and flows that coalesce in the former become evident. Consider an example: I approached a local health organization on behalf of MERIA to request vaccinations for some Romani children. The manager in charge of operations in the Attica region was very enthusiastic, positive, and sought to develop a program with us that ensured “sustainability,” was based on “outreach,” and developed “community partnerships.” The way she conceptualized a working relationship with MERIA, the way she spoke about her current initiatives, and the way she spoke about Roma (as stakeholders, as victims of broad discrimination, etc.) indicated that she, and by extension her organization, was very much in line with current European development industry concepts, concerns, values, and ideals (which are in turn indicative of particular

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<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this work, Deleuzean codes and flows can be thought of as pre-actualized forces and processes capable of facilitating change at given sites.

identifiable codes and flows). MERIA's profile of values and ideals was completely congruent with those represented by the manager.

Our second meeting, this time with the doctor and social worker assigned to our project, however, was completely unproductive. Our expectations, our understandings of local needs and effective solutions, and even our understanding of what “outreach” is and how it operates were completely different. In fact, the very idea that Roma could benefit from a vaccination program seemed nonsensical to the doctor and social worker. While the local organization employed the current EU terminology, they nonetheless oriented, or redefined the concepts so they fit the established local systems of thought.

Consequently the partnership failed: The organization operated based on a philosophy and strategy indicative of a different cross-section of codes and flows from those represented by and which guide MERIA. In trying to negotiate a working partnership despite this initial stumbling block, it was possible to identify exactly how the two organizations differed. For example, aspects of the Greek sociopolitical history were affecting local understandings of minority-hood and equity. This history, in addition to a collection of embedded codes (in language and the media), engendered a particular reaction to MERIA and our program proposal. Despite the failed partnership, exploring how we could come together allowed local codes and flows to interact with our controlled (known) codes and flows, and I was able to better understand how they influence that particular site and the field in general.

Without MERIA, it may have been possible to gather this data, especially if a foreign organization were to have approached the local organization to cooperate on a given project. MERIA, however, allowed me to accomplish the same end in an expedited

manner while inviting my consultants to creatively examine the particular set of codes and flows pertinent to my research question directly, and on the terms and the environment with which they are familiar with. Other advantages MERIA has offered to date include the ability to move around the field and apply the particular cross-section of codes and flows MERIA represents at various sites (at, for example, other local organizations and government offices) providing an immediate starting point for analysis and basis for comparison. Finally the organization has also allowed me to experience how particular codes and flows influence practice in the field, outside of partnerships with other organizations, but in basic operations (interacting with private citizens, the media, volunteers, and the like).

It should be repeated at this point that the advantage of a vehicle like MERIA simply adds to standard field practice. Even though the data one collects through such a device is pertinent to the analysis of all field phenomena, it cannot and in fact should not replace standard field research methods, but rather be seen as supplementary to them. Beyond increased access to information pertaining particularly to codes and flows, however, MERIA has provided two notable additional benefits.<sup>11</sup>

The knowledge generated through MERIA – that is, details regarding the presence and functioning of particular codes and flows – helps the researcher to understand morphogenic process, or simply, social (and other) change in the field. Some anthropologists have reported difficulty seeing social change or the potential for change while in the midst of conducting fieldwork (especially in complex locations like cities

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<sup>11</sup> These operate in addition to those advantages provided by other strategies practiced by fieldworkers currently, explored most famously in terms of “embeddedness,” “investment in the field,” and “halfie” perspectives (Shweder 2000; Said 1978, 1983; Abu-Lughod 1991). Using a research device like MERIA simply enhances the research conducted through traditional methods.

and when working in difficult conditions), on the grounds that they become focused on particular provocative phenomena following traditional field methods pursuant to their research question and loose sight of what can be thought of as broader generative potentials, gathering assemblages, or generally, processes leading to change. These researchers eventually leave the field and must later reorient their data or place it within a dynamic model developed outside of the field. Of course, this is not a problem for every researcher, and especially those returning to the field after having spent time there before. A research tool like MERIA can offer, even to these experienced anthropologists, an opportunity to remain more directly connected with morphogenic process which might otherwise be obscured by one's subjectivity: expectations and reactions to situations and conditions in the field, which is a real concern for researchers working with disadvantaged populations such as Roma that endure sometimes extreme discrimination.<sup>12</sup> Let us consider this point further.

Beyond those researchers who witness injustice, discrimination, and other difficult conditions in the field that can certainly elicit particular response and sometimes shape investigation, other researchers also apply a particular set of expectations to reality on the ground (wittingly or unwittingly). It is folly to think that the researcher can abandon these perspectives or somehow leave them behind when conducting research. Some anthropologists have embraced this situation and advocate for a “follow your astonishment” (Shweder 2000) technique thus formalizing the projection of expectations and subsequent exploration of particular deviations. In interviews with researchers who

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<sup>12</sup> I do not suggest here that MERIA somehow cancels or neutralizes my reactions to particular situations in the field, on the contrary, the organization indeed helps me to focus my reactions in a constructive manner that will not harm my research, consultants, etc. I simply intend that the MERIA, in addition to this, helps me to remain focused on broader processes which might be otherwise obscured by my expectations and reactions (conscious or not) to the conditions in the field.

follow this technique, it has become clear that on its own, this strategy can limit the investigator's perspective and in the worst cases skew analysis. MERIA, however, has allowed me to gather data that reveals forces operating beyond the level of subjectivity (the researcher's, or the consultant's, for that matter). Thus, as I might project expectations onto the field, the data gathered through MERIA serves to reorient my inquiry and analysis.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, understanding the myriad forces that influence a particular phenomenon has helped me to place that phenomenon relative to other observations often revealing subtle connections between sites or making apparent broader contexts I had not previously considered.

Recall the example above concerning the vaccination program. I was struck by the major difference between my understanding of effective outreach and that of the staff of the other NGO. While the MERIA staff had proposed a program where medical personnel travel to the camp every two weeks to do vaccinations and to consult with anyone who had medical concerns, the local health organization wanted to do a single visit for some vaccinations but mostly to encourage the local population to seek help at hospitals. Funding was not an issue and the medical personnel and means of transportation were available. My initial reaction to this situation was surprise that our two definitions of outreach were indeed so different. I began to examine the concept in the broader Greek context, but was having difficulty finding examples of outreach programming or programming in general that could be considered outreach. Interestingly, most people I interviewed from hospitals and from some local NGOs gave me definitions

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<sup>13</sup> MERIA has also allowed me to formalize my expectations of the field to some extent in the operations strategy and in the corporate mission statement. This formalization makes a number of my biases and expectations obvious to me and to my consultants which has proven quite productive. In some cases my consultants will suggest an alternative line of inquiry or will challenge my emerging understandings of certain phenomena.

of outreach that were very close to those circulating within the EU development community, but were not aware of any actual programs running in the country, while others claimed never to have heard of such services. I was intrigued by this situation and my investigation became a hunt for an explanation as to why and how the EU definition of outreach was being adapted and applied. Eventually, however, I turned to the notes I had collected through MERIA.

During the various meetings with the doctor and the social worker from the organization we had originally approached, I discovered that they viewed minority groups from an ahistorical perspective, as ever-present collectivities without particular claims for special treatment or protection justified by past discrimination, and that they considered programming around particular local needs like those of Greek Roma discriminatory to the broader Athenian population. These perspectives were affected by a cross-section of historical flows associated with particular Greek national narratives having to do with civil liberties and *ethnos*, which were also affecting other aspects of the organization's operations. Their attempts to negotiate a particular working relationship with MERIA were informed by their understanding that "outside" concepts must be adapted to fit the local Greek reality. To accomplish MERIA's goals, including the development of an outreach program in line with the EU vision with this group, it would have been necessary to challenge the underlying embedded flows that informed their perspectives on national identity and understanding of cultural relativity. Instead, we turned our attention towards finding an organization that shared more of the same flows MERIA represents. In so doing we came across a multinational NGO that shared our views and which was in fact quite actively trying to challenge Greek understandings of

minority rights and development programming. They were contributing to a national discourse on the subject and were gathering quite a lot of support. This group was in fact generating potential for broader change as their initiative was part of a larger national conversation affecting the same constellation of codes and flows at play in the local development sphere but which also shaped broader understandings of citizenship.

Without the insight provided by MERIA I would have pursued local iterations of outreach, but would not have immediately realized that these local iterations are part of a larger process of defining citizenship. MERIA helped me to uncover this larger negotiation, or generally, the motion or morphogenic process in the field.

### **Thoughts and Directions**

In conclusion, I will discuss briefly two important additional observations relating to MERIA: one practical/theoretical and one concerning this methodology's relevance to broader disciplinary trends. In terms of the former, MERIA has tended to reorient my investigations away from examining 'collectivity' with reference to 'culture,' thus avoiding potentially limiting categories. This has been a tremendous advantage especially in Greece since "C"ulture is such a total category, a concept used commonly to define everything and everyone including minority groups such as Roma, and which can include phenomena like dress, customs, history, architecture, art, etc. within its delimiting language. Moreover, Greek Roma themselves have a very closed community which on the surface seems to be defined by what could be termed cultural identity, or a particular set of practices and dispositions. It is very easy to slip into these categories, to reproduce them in one's notes, and to conduct research around their logic. MERIA makes plain,



time and again, however, that the intersection of forces pertinent to a particular research issue actually affects a large cross-section of the local population and that it is possible to consider larger aggregates, such as population collectivities, when gathering data or later for analytical purposes.

For example, looking at issues of access to healthcare services and specifically, issues related to access to official structures, it has become evident that Athenian Roma are subject to the same modes of exclusion that affect certain other minority groups living in Athens. This has become an important issue as my research continues, one that was not apparent at first but made evident through a number of MERIA activities. As this large group continues to experience resistance in medical settings they have developed ways of circumnavigating obstacles to healthcare in order to access what they need. Interestingly, the strategies these groups employ, while differing in manner of execution, all target a particular cross-section of dominant narratives to do with Greek understandings of health-making, the body, and civil liberty.

Now, in terms of the latter observation, beyond research strategy and advantages during analysis, MERIA has offered one perhaps unexpected bonus that should be mentioned. The organization has been invited to partake in provision of policy recommendations for a certain branch of the federal government concerned with the welfare of (unofficial) minorities and other internal subaltern populations. Policy is of course not necessarily a new area for anthropologists, yet MERIA has made the task of effectively translating anthropological thought for use outside of our discipline easier and so this advantage should be noted. MERIA makes larger structuring forces plain leading to more holistic and sustainable solutions; it provides the analytical scope to know when

policy is necessary or when targeted initiatives are more appropriate (based on an understanding of emergence); provides the capacity to identify and utilize relevant and diverse data (recall the center of study advantage discussed above); and makes it easier for the anthropologist to write recommendations that will be appropriate to more than one (cultural) group. It is important to stress that this policy aspect of the MERIA advantage is independent of the research and analysis phases of a given anthropological project; it can be argued, however, that a lot of anthropological data is inaccessible or at least lost in translation between the researcher and those it might interest or who might benefit from it outside of the discipline. A research device such as MERIA may help to correct that problem by providing the anthropologist with the tools to present a more accessible analysis of a given reality, when appropriate.

The Roma of Greece are a fascinating group to work with in the field, although those familiar with the exercise will attest that this is not always easy. Beyond the resistance strategies, trust issues, problems with access, and needs for analytical freedom in dealing with a markedly unconventional population, the anthropologist must also deal with the sometimes intolerable conditions Greek Roma endure.

One afternoon while discussing a project with several consultants at the Alpha compound, we were interrupted by a car full of non-Romani teenagers yelling, “tell us the future, Gypsy!” and throwing garbage. My consultants shrugged off the affront, but it has always stayed with me as a potent example of why anthropology is necessary and how the knowledge we create is unique and important. MERIA has simply given me the opportunity to better understand the field in which I work and to make a positive

contribution to it. The organization has also helped me to understand that anthropologists must work to expand the concept work we engage in and to make anthropological thought accessible to other disciplines for the future of our discipline and for the future of our consultants – however each individual researcher chooses to accomplish this. As my fieldwork continues, I look forward to learning more about the sometimes enigmatic Romani population and the changing city they live in and help create.

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