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# Erisian Mysteries: The Art of Squatting, Resistance and Solidarity in Exarcheia, Athens

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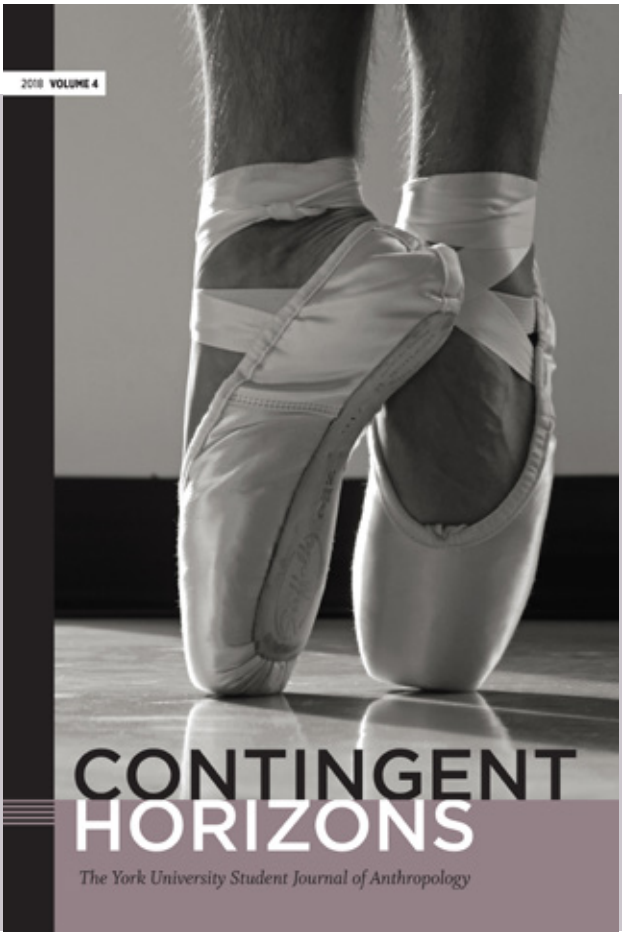


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# Erisian Mysteries

## The Art of Squatting, Resistance and Solidarity in Exarcheia, Athens

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This article is guided by the central question: how have the anarchists and residents of Exarcheia in Athens, Greece, manifested, both spatially and socially, forms of resistance to the state in the face of austerity and following the 2008 December riots? Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the anarchist neighbourhood of Exarcheia, located in Athens, this article investigates how anarchist dissent and solidarity have manifested spatially through grassroots organizing, solidarity networks, spatial forms of resistance and other infrastructures of dissent.

**KEY WORDS** Greece, solidarity, anarchism, activism

Many traditional anarchist principles have formed the basis for organizing within radical movements globally; specifically, these include militant street demonstrations and destruction of public and private property. These organizational forms tend to attract media attention, rather than more seemingly mundane forms of resistance such as mutual aid, self-organization and equality. It seems that such everyday forms of resistance are not characteristics typically associated with anarchism in mainstream discourse. Yet, as I observed in Athens, Greece, during fieldwork in July 2016, many anarchist efforts were focused on forms of resistance that I will describe as lateral relations and solidarity. As I will discuss, during my fieldwork I found anarchism was being used as a rejection of state power, economic inequality and structural violence.

Athens is important, on an international level, as a location for anarchists and anti-authoritarian activity. The 2007–2008 Greek financial crisis, the migrant and refugee crisis, and previous civil hostilities to the state, position Greece as a site in which grassroots solidarity movements or alternatives to capitalism can flourish. A failure of capitalism and the state—which has been ineffective with providing essential services to Greek citizens—as well as the subsequent introduction of alternatives made Greece an interesting field site for me to consider the projection of modern radical movements on both sides of the political spectrum.

This article is dedicated to understanding experiences of anarchists and residents of Exarcheia, an anarchist neighbourhood located in Athens, with a focus on networks of solidarity and resistance. First, I outline a historical background of the economic, labour and civil factors that contributed to the social climate in Athens, Greece, during my research.

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I will consider the historical roots of contemporary Greek civil unrest, which include the Greek Civil war from 1946 to 1949, the Athens Polytechnic uprising of 1973, and the 2008 December riots, as well as their influence on contemporary spatial relations and infrastructures of dissent within Exarcheia. Second, I provide an in-depth analysis that focuses on how forms of dissent and solidarity were negotiated and reproduced after the 2008 riots, and in wake of events including the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, the sovereign debt crisis in Greece (in the aftermath of the global crisis) and subsequent austerity measures. Based on historical analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, my investigation considers how dissent and solidarity manifested spatially within Exarcheia. This will include key experiences in the field and interviews with my interlocutors. Finally, the nature of squatting and spatial resistance will be examined within the context of two particular neighborhoods, Prosfigika and Exarcheia respectively.

I call anarchist forms of resistance the Erisian Mysteries—the secretive rituals of resistance, solidarity and subversion practiced by Athenian anarchists today; often considered to be violent or threatening by outsiders. Erisian pertains to Eris, the Greek Goddess of discord and chaos, and mysteries refer to the secrecy of anarchist practices.

## Methodology

Participant observation, formal and informal interviews were the primary ethnographic methods used for this research. I visited the neighborhoods of Exarcheia and Prosfigika, almost daily for the duration of a month in July 2016 as part of York University's Ethnographic Fieldwork school in Greece. Although I informally interviewed seven people, only transcripts from interviews with two of my interlocutors are included in this article, because I felt that their experiences and perspectives were the most relevant to my work on anarchist activism.

Both of my interlocutors were Greek men, in their late twenties to early thirties, holders of doctorate degrees, active anarchists, and lived or had lived in squats. The elder of the two, Peter, was a student pursuing a second doctorate degree in theatre and a guerrilla party-planner. Yusuf, was an Ivy League graduate soldier and former priest. The method of data collection used with Peter was primarily formal and informal interviews consisting of speaking, recording, drawing and visiting sites of interest. Participant observation, in the form of active engagement, discussion and action were the ethnographic tools used with Yusuf. All interlocutors provided verbal consent. All the names of my interlocutors, people I spoke with, and anarchist organizations I discuss have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of the people involved.

## Historical origins of the debt crisis and Athenian anarchist movement

From speaking with my collaborators, I was able to discern that much of the current political polarization in Greece can be traced to the pivotal events of the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), the Greek military junta of the Colonels (a military dictatorship), and subsequent popular student and anti-authoritarian movements in the last half century. At the end of World War II, the tension between the political right and left manifested in a

civil war between the Greek government and the National People's Army of Liberation (or ELAS) (Kalyvas 2006). The former was supported by Western, capitalist countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States (O'Ballance 1966). 2 was a guerrilla army under the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece (the KKE) that led resistance both during and after WWII (O'Ballance 1966). Both ELAS and the KKE were a part of the National Liberation Front (or EAM) which was the primary social resistance movement during both the occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers and the civil war (O'Ballance 1966). The EAM is the one of the most significant movements in modern Greek history and consisted of many leftist groups (O'Ballance 1966).

The political polarization between the right and the left following World War II resulted from divisions created by the Nazi occupation between 1941 to 1944 (Kalyvas 2006). The government of King George II fled the country for Egypt, and as a result was of little consequence in the eyes of its citizens (Kalyvas 2006). A puppet regime installed by Germany lacked legitimacy and was an economic and policy disaster (Kalyvas 2006). The vacuum of power created by the Nazi occupation was manipulated by resistance movements, chiefly among them the far-left EAM (Kalyvas 2006).

In 1944 the EAM set up the Political Committee of National Liberation; a provisional government in the mountains, colloquially known as the Mountain Government (Kirk and McElligott 1999). Therefore, the EAM renounced the legitimacy of both the Nazi puppet regime and King George II's government in exile (Kirk and McElligott 1999). After the withdrawal of German forces, and the lack of cooperation between the United Kingdom and EAM-ELAS, a civil war broke out in Athens (Christodoulakis 2016). The geographical and political space of Athens in particular has consistently been a battleground for struggles between not only the state and militants, but for ideological tussles of the right and left (Kirk and McElligott 1999).

After British forces open fired on EAM demonstrators, the first phase of the civil war had begun (Christodoulakis 2016). On February 12, 1945 the EAM conceded defeat and signed the Treaty of Varkiza (Christodoulakis 2016). Thirteen months later there was a general election held with communists abstaining from voting (Christodoulakis, 2016); a tactic of strategic-passivity I noticed still being used by Athenian leftists during my fieldwork. Nonetheless, the monarchy was restored to power and as a result there was a full-scale launch of guerrilla warfare (*andartiko*) by EAM-ELAS (Kirk and McElligott 1999).

One of my interlocutors, Peter, told me that he often heard police or fascists call anarchists, or other leftists, "mountain soldiers," reminiscent of the guerrilla fighters of the civil war. Resistance in Greece is shaped by the mountainous terrain, and its geography facilitates guerrilla tactics. Under the influence of the EAM-ELAS, people began to organize from the bottom up; transforming residents from disorganized farmers into disciplined soldiers and collaborators. According to Tim Kirk and Anthony McElligott (1999), during the civil war "the notion of the Mountain acquired a different meaning and other dimensions in our imaginations" (127) as the Mountain became intricately linked with guerilla tactics, anarchy and resistance.

Ultimately, the struggle was unsuccessful on the part of the EAM (Christodoulakis 2016) but I found that the war never truly ended in the hearts of the people. These are not isolated historic events that are removed from everyday life: they are almost tangible,

even today, for many Greeks; the past coloured everything that Peter and Yusuf said. These events functioned as ruptures to the rapport between the public and the state, eroding trust between the two, and creating grounds for organization, solidarity and resistance towards the Greek government.

## The Colonels, Polytechnic uprising, and the origins of Exarcheia

The National Technical University of Athens (hereafter referred to as *Polytechnio*) is located on Oktovriou Street. In November 1973 an uprising took place within *Polytechnio* precinct and also within Exarcheia (Kotea 2013). Initially, students who were discontented with the military junta met within the main building of *Polytechnio* to discuss resistance (Kotea 2013). Nevertheless, the event evolved from a discussion to action; the students organized a movement against the junta and their foreign allies, such as NATO) (Kotea 2013). They occupied *Polytechnio* and constructed a radio station to disseminate their message of solidarity in the face of dictatorship to the rest of the country (Kotea 2013).

Due to strong civilian support and the militancy of the insurgents, the junta's dictator, Georgios Papadopoulos, ordered a suppression of resistance (Kotea 2013). On November 17th, 1973, a tank destroyed the central gate of *Polytechnio*, killing student occupiers in the process Kotea 2013). The occupation of *Polytechnio* was an act of defiance that only exacerbated the situation, as Papadopoulos was replaced by an even more ruthless dictator, Demetrios Ioannides, the former chief of the military police (Kotea 2013). Nonetheless, the regime eventually collapsed in 1974 following a failed coup against Turkey to seize control of Cyprus (Kotea 2013). After the collapse of the military junta, Constantinos Karamanlis returned from France to lead the government (Kotea 2013). As Prime Minister, Karamanlis unified the administration and the military, and legalized the KKE (Kotea 2013). On the first anniversary of the polytechnic uprising in 1975, Greece had its first ever free elections and Karamanlis' newly formed conservative party, New Democracy, won a majority (Kotea 2013). This history of unrest and uprisings in Greece is foundational to the current anarchist movement in Exarcheia in the wake of the 2010 debt crisis.

## Anarchist squats and solidarity networks

I first met Yusuf, one of my main interlocutors, in Plateia Exarchion, or Exarcheia Square, which is in the centre of the neighbourhood. We spoke with ease and he lead me to *Polytechnio*. I waited in the main hallway of *Polytechnio* as Yusuf slipped through closed doors opposite the entrance. Inside, a meeting was taking place that I was not privy to, so I waited in the entrance and observed.

Yusuf informed me that we would be meeting up with other anarchists; there was a group of anarchists and refugees (including children) protesting within the neighbourhood. They had been sitting outside an empty government building because the refugees had been promised housing and yet were stuck on the street, vulnerable to attack by nationalist extremists.

When we arrived, there was conflict and confusion amid the refugees who were largely concerned that rioting would cause backlash—they were worried for their children's safety.

One woman was pressing for mobilization; to forcefully take the building and occupy it. Although many anarchists were in favour of this, the refugees seemed hesitant. The disagreement led to confusion: "If the refugees don't agree, we can't take any action," said Yusuf.

Leonard, a Ukrainian anarchist visiting for a few days, nodded his head in agreement; it would be wrong to use the refugee's vulnerability as a platform to promote anarchist ideals under the guise of solidarity. "Some just want to seize a building; it's not about necessarily helping the refugees," said Leonard.

We walked down to a side street in Exarcheia, sitting down in an alleyway restaurant. After we finished eating, Yusuf insisted on paying the bill. As we made the trek up to Strefi Hill, we spoke about the demonstration planned for the next day.: "We're meeting up with two other guys to decide what to do," Yusuf explained. He laughed as he saw me huff, slightly, while climbing the final stair. "You'll have to get into shape to run from the cops!" said Yusuf, and he and Leonard laughed.

We walk along the fenced side of a basketball court, which was brightly illuminated so we continued on just a little past it. Two men waited, with a roll of posters and a large green bucket on the ground beside them. Yusuf introduced Leonard and I, and after our initial greeting they had everyone turn their phones off, placed them in my bag, and put it behind a rock approximately five to six feet away from us. "For security purposes," Yusuf supplied, as he saw my curious look. "We're planning what we need for the protest."

One man, Yannis, spoke first. He insisted we needed milk, marijuana, fireworks, and glue. The first two items were to combat the effects of tear gas; he explained that milk has long been used by activists to neutralize tear gas. Yannis stated that marijuana helps with opening the airways and relaxing after a riot, and he explained that the fireworks were to be potentially used as weapons to throw at police. Finally, I realized that we needed the glue to post the posters as I looked over to where another man, Marko, was making a glue-like mixture for us to use as a paste.

"Okay so, there's four of us, which position do you want?" Yannis asked, pointing at me. I stared back, dumbfounded. "Well, which positions are there?" I asked. Yannis and the others outlined three positions; offence, defence and medic: the offence's objective was to push the line, they would have most contact with the police and would need to be aggressive; the defence needed to hold and maintain the line without giving any ground to the police; and the medic was needed to be support for both, and thus needed to be prepared to push forward and take the offensive position if the offence fell back. Hesitant to participate actively in the protest, I half-heartedly agreed to be the medic, with the intention to remedy the situation after by emphasizing my role as a researcher and an observer.

As we walked through the streets of Exarcheia that night, Leonard admired the posters we were pasting. "Pretty girls and AK47's," he sighed, gesturing to the YPJ (*Yekîneyên Parastina Jin* in Kurdish) soldiers on the poster, an all-female military unit within the Syrian Democratic Forces. The others agreed that the girls on the poster were indeed beautiful. While they were preoccupied I spoke with Yusuf, explaining that I was there to observe and not to participate in anything illegal. "We're posting these aren't we," he laughed, gesturing to the revolutionary posters we were pasting to every available surface. "Anything too illegal," I amended.

## Alternative moralities, strategic-passivity, solidarity economies, action and everyday resistance

Peter and I met at a cafe on a side street off of Plateia Exarchion. He quickly dispelled my preconceptions of anarchism and what it meant to be an anarchist. According to Peter, many people who do not identify as anarchists actually might participate in everyday anarchist actions but find that labels do not suit them, and alternatively some people may say "I am an anarchist" however their beliefs and actions might not align with what I am calling lateral anarchist principles—a form of collaboration between comrades that does not pertain to a hierarchy of authority. Moreover, following Peter's argument, some people who identify with tenets of (lateral) anarchism: solidarity, self-organization and anti-oppression, may instead choose to freely associate and practice anarchism through 'doing' rather than 'being'.

Action was an important concept in the anarchism that I witnessed; it was through everyday action and resistance that difference was thought to be made. Peter explained: "The reason we are participating is to open the political spectrum and transform what may at first not seem to be political, and to then transform it with our participation." According to Peter, politics is the organization of everyday life which sets the parameters within which you can exist in society. Therefore, anarchists sought to open up a different conceptual space to navigate their reality; a space that existed outside (or within) a capitalist, state-governed society. -

Although my interlocutors are well educated, they felt that many anarchists have little need for high theory from long dead thinkers. This is because the temporal and spatial reality is different, and anarchism insists on action. Although Peter and Yusuf are familiar with foundational thinkers on anarchism such as Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, they found contemporary anarchists to be more relevant. Peter often cited *Armed Joy* by Alfredo M. Bonanno (1998) as being relevant work, whereas Yusuf encouraged me to read *Caliban and the Witch* by Silvia Federicci (2004).

Peter explained that anarchism and any spatial or material manifestations of anarchism were an ongoing project. Anarchism, I was told, seeks to recreate society from within by subverting and undermining structures of state and capital domination. From our conversations, I learned that it is through action, not destruction, and by the creation of new structures and forms of association, that anarchy is built within the shell of the current society; the materials around us are merely projections of our own ideas; the diameters of the road, the seating in a car, the arrangement of houses into neighbourhoods. Therefore, we speculated, the state and capitalism are reinforced visually and spatially as rational, and even naturalized as ways of living. The building, we discussed, is a tool; not an end in itself. Therefore, we wondered: if state-sanctioned materials and spaces can be appropriated by anarchists, then could anarchist principles also not come into fruition? That is to say; materials that once functioned as tools of the state now serve as manifestations of anarchism.

Anarchy is not chaos, violence and discord but rather the creation of new relations, and forms of engagement. Jean Weir (2016) describes the use of armed struggle in the 2008 anarchist uprisings in Greece as not for violent means but rather "a tool to bring the revolutionary perspective to the fore and present the hypothesis of the need for immediate attack in an unequivocal discourse addressed both to the anarchist movement and the wider movement of the exploited" (35). Therefore, every squat, act of political graffiti, and communal kitchen

is an action of resistance to the state and capitalism. These alternatives are undermining the existing structures, existing simultaneously. Anarchy is the revolution of the everyday; making soup for a refugee is as powerful as throwing a Molotov cocktail. Both are different forms of solidarity and defiance in the face of oppression and state violence.

According to David Graeber (2004), Marcel Mauss is important to anarchist thought because of his interest in "alternative moralities" (21) to capitalism. Mauss' work challenged the assumption that societies without market economies or money operated on barter systems that used the principles of the market but had not yet developed centralized currency. Mauss contested that these were not barter systems but "gift economies" (22) and were rooted in ethical systems at odds with modern capitalist global economics, which is motivated by profit (Graeber 2004, 21–24).

Alternate forms of markets have emerged in Greece in response to the austerity measures, for instance the solidarity economy among the anarchists I interacted with while conducting research. Similar to the gift economy, the solidarity economy I observed in Athens based its actions on the purpose of increasing the quality of life rather than profit. There were many grassroots structures such as housing initiatives, autonomous clinics, education groups, solidarity kitchens, and other forms of social cooperation that I encountered. Such organizations are dedicated to improving the quality of life for not only individuals, but the community as a whole, as Graeber (2004) suggests.

In 2010, two years after the 2008 December riots, Greek economists declared a 'sovereign debt crisis' (Rakopoulos 2013). Many social, health and education programs were cancelled, and Greek pensions were cut in half, and then half again (Rakopoulos 2013). Theodoros Rakopoulos (2013) suggests "[t]he imposed austerity measures [had] also added a political dimension to the debt crisis" (103). As a result, solidarity emerged in the face of state violence, this time in the form of unemployment, rising cost of goods and extreme debt (Rakopoulos 2013). Rakopoulos (2013) states:

> There are many forms of resistance to austerity, in particular the efforts to seize and squat empty or derelict buildings. Many of these squats also function as community centers; anarchists in Prosfigika assisted refugees and baked bread for them as well. Some of these squats have, in addition, been turned into informal social centers, providing voluntary services of various kinds to people who have become impoverished in surrounding areas. (103)

Another instance of solidarity, post financial disaster, which Rakopoulos (2013) speaks of, is RAME (a fictitious acronym used by Rakopoulos to describe the informal group): unemployed and homeless youth who seized a building close to the Botanical Gardens (the Botanic Squat) and formed a collective that distributed food. RAME essentially functioned as an anti-middleman movement that connected farmers with customers (Rakopoulos 2013). Anti-middleman movements, popular throughout Greece, respond to middleman systems in which both the farmer and the customers are shortchanged so the middle-man can turn a profit (Rakopoulos 2013). RAME's 'free-man' markets allowed customers to buy directly from farmers who bring produce from their own farms in the countryside (Rakopoulos 2013). Cutting out the need for a middle-man offered benefits for both farmers and customers (Rakopoulos 2013).

Although RAME planned to alter their collective into a formal co-operative, they did not become a new type of middle-man because, although they acted as a medium between the producers and consumers, "[t]his formal body would work through a market mechanism underpinned by internal solidarity, in which producers and consumers came to know each other personally and were concerned about each other's well-being, rather than the anonymous pursuit of individual gain" (Rakopoulos 2013, 105).

The producers were meeting face to face and building a network of free-association based off of mutual interest. This allowed the transaction to become more humanized; they could see one another as people both struggling in the face of austerity. This form of solidarity economy was very much related to notions of everyday revolution; through humanizing processes and the subversion of the typical producer and consumer relationship, RAME and their consumers were able to open up a space in which consumption operated on solidarity, rather than profit.

## 2008 December riots: Student Years, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, and anarchist space

According to Peter, the "Student Years" refer to the time period from 2006 to 2007 in which a massive anti-state student movement flourished. Peter recounted how every Thursday there were clashes between students and police, and 'counter-universities,' or centres, that taught the theory and practice of state resistance. He described how guerrilla 'anti-courses' were offered, enabling students who were frustrated with potential university privatization to fight back. He explained that students were willing to fight in the streets using tactics from anti-courses: Molotov cocktails, glass bottles and fireworks; these "anti-courses" were geared towards more radical forms of resistance and organization.

An important moment during the first years of *metapolitefsi* (a transitional period following the end of the military junta) during the late '70s, involved a struggle in the universities that was sparked by the efforts of the right wing government to institute educational reforms (Georgiadis 2005). During this struggle anarchists had a significant presence, as well as other groups and individuals with an anti-authoritarian and libertarian perspective. This struggle surpassed the boundaries of the university by involving n the presence and participation of many more people, who were not strictly students, such as other youth as well as workers (Schwarz and Sagris 2010). However, Peter told me that by May 2008 the student movement died because the immediate threat of privatization was lacking.

Contemporary civil resistance can be understood as stemming back to the treaty of Varkiza (noted above) which set the stage for some of the most violent protests and demonstrations in Greek history according to my interlocutors. On December 6, 2008, fifteen year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos was killed by two police officers in Exarcheia (Chrysopoulos 2014). The resentment of the student movement was the fuel that fanned the flame of the 2008 riots, and the gun that shot Alexandros Grigoropoulos was a fire lit within heart of the country. December 2008 was described as "the month when the country's divided past returned in full force" (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011, 13).

What followed Alexandros' murder was indescribable: it was not an assault on a single person, but on the Greek people. This is because of the significance of where Alexandros was shot; in the heart of anarchist territory, on an adjacent street to Plateia Exarchion.

This was a symbolic killing as it represented the violence the state uses against civilians, and the audacity that agents of the state would have to encroach on anti-state territory and murder a fifteen year old boy. Such a blatant attack could not go unanswered, and the response was felt not only in Exarcheia, but in all of Greece.

December 2008 is a key point of reference for understanding the trajectory and current platform of the anarchist movement in Athens. Although it was initially contained within the centre of Exarcheia, it transcended both geographical and ideological boundaries. The riots were as much about Alexandros, as they were about the rioters. The seeds of the anarchist movement in December 2008 were sown during World War II, in the mountains of Eleftheri Ellada, within *Polytechnio,* and on the streets of Athens. Indeed, Peter described the December riots as a "moment of revolution" in which thousands of people freely entered into the "anarchist space;" a space in which the public is anti-state. He recounted how people had signs stating: "I am dead. You have killed me." Thus, the public stood in solidarity with Alexandros Grigorpoulos, people of all classes united in the face of a common enemy: the state.

Peter told me that the "anarchist space" is not so much a physical location as it is a negotiation: people can freely enter the "anarchist space" and navigate it as they so choose. People were not only freely associating with one another, but they were associating with an anarchic theoretical framework that maintained that the state was unnecessary or even evil. Moreover, the term "anarchist space" is one of many terms used to refer to an engagement with anarchist or anti-state ideology. Yusuf for instance, used the term "scene" rather than space to refer to the engagement that people had with anarchist theory.

Although demonstrations and even violence can have an important role in dismantling forms of oppression created and reinforced by the state and capitalism, they often function as a springboard. For instance, protest-action towards the military is more than an expression of collective grievance. Such action, as I argue later, was a key element in the ongoing construction and reconstruction of Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian collective identity. Insurrectionist street-protests become as much an aspect of identity formation as they are a tactic (Kalyvas 2010).

The term "anarchist space" also is reflective of the importance of space as a concept in anarchism. Many anarchists have written about how space can be used as a vehicle for radical social change: Peter Kropotkin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon are both foundational thinkers on anarchism who wrote about anarchist geographies; however, the increasing complexity of our societies has made the field of anarchist geographies evolve (Springer et al. 2012). Our planet has been radically reshaped by global capitalism, which has only exacerbated geographical inequalities (Springer et al. 2012). In the article *Reanimating Anarchist Geographies*, Simon Springer et al. (2012) discuss connections between space (or geography) and anarchism. They state: "Social transformation is, of course, necessarily a spatial project, and a spatial dimension to the effective critique of existing structures is an important element of imagining and forging spaces for new ones" (1593). Therefore, it would be impossible to map out spatial resistance in Exarcheia cartographically as resistance is not spatially or temporally static. Instead of the State deciding which groups of people are allowed to occupy which spaces, during my fieldwork the people themselves took control of the terrain. This suggested that rather than have the space define the person, the person should define the space.

## Legacies of December 2008: The spatial politics of Exarcheia, anarchist geography and "In the shell of the old"

According to Marianthi Kotea; "[t]he identity of Exarcheia is certainly due to the symbolism that the whole area had gained because of the polytechnic uprising" (2013, 22). I too noticed that the riots were much more than just violent or militant displays of anger towards the state. The December 2008 riots that engulfed Greece were a foundation for the development of infrastructures of resistance that I noticed among my interlocutors and that continue today. Furthermore, expressions of hostile civil disobedience functioned as a springboard for other manifestations of solidarity that I observed.

Anarchists have long been concerned with the dangers of using a political strategy that was not based on principles with which the future society would be shaped by (Ince 2012). This concern has led to the development of what anarchists call "prefigurative politics" (Ince 2012, 1652). "Prefigurative politics" maintain that anti-democratic or anti-egalitarian methods cannot create a free and equal society (Ince 2012). As such, anarchists are as concerned with the "here-and-now" as they are about tomorrow, if not more so, and this ties in with anarchist principles of everyday revolution and anti-utopianism; anarchists do not dream of utopia (Ince 2012, 1652). Instead, as Peter put it; they want to "smash up the marble" in an alternate way by dismantling oppressive pillars of society to see what possibilities lie ahead. However, prefiguration "is not purely a strategic or tactical move—prefigurative praxis involves a fundamental acknowledgement that no revolution is ever 'complete'" (Ince 2012, 1652). Indeed, Rudolph Rocker states: "I am an anarchist not because I believe in anarchism as a final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal[;] Freedom will lead us to a continually wider and expanding understanding and to new social forms of life" ([1956] 2005, 111 quoted in Ince 2012, 1652).

Revolution is a long process through which forms of resistance and solidarity can be reconstituted within the shell of the old (Ince 2012). Anarchism lives in constant tension between the daily and the possibility of another day, and it is within this temporal tension that spatial transformations can occur because "[u]topia is an unattainable goal which will never be achieved, but in striving to achieve it, we can move towards revolution through the constant creation and adaptation of revolutionary practices and relations in everyday life" (Ince 2012, 1653).

Territorialization for anarchists, according to Anthony Ince (2012), is the process of creating and maintaining solidarity networks in an "institutional pattern across space," that is not so much about the physical space (Ince 2012, 1662). Rather, it is concerned with the relationships that redefine the material space (Ince 2012). Exarcheia can therefore be understood as a physical space that, through spontaneous demonstrations of anti-state and anti-capitalist solidarity, was reinforced as a radical leftist territory. In turn, the geography of Exarcheia—with its cafes, bookstores and graffiti—reinforces those same solidarity networks. The territorialization of Exarcheia, following Ince's (2012) thinking, can be understood as having developed over many years, protests and negotiations.

## Prosfigika I: Refugees, free-association networks, and the art of squatting

During the final night of my stay in Athens, I planned to attend a demonstration in Exarcheia. Wearing all black and carrying only my phone and a red bandana, I walked

with a fellow anthropology student to Plateia Exarchion. Along the way, we noticed that there was a heavy police presence, becoming more concentrated towards Exarcheia. Riot police were parked on every corner and had even placed barricades that blocked access to all streets leading to Exarcheia.

Once in the square, my companion and I met up with Yusuf. However, there were still debates happening at *Polytechnio* regarding how to proceed with the demonstration; many felt that they were lacking both the resources and the numbers. Yusuf was committed to the protest and suggested we go to Prosfigika to get supplies and plan some form of action. As we walked to the squat, Yusuf informed my companion of the reasons for that night's demonstration—the police had been shutting down squats. Yusuf told us that a refugee had been killed in Thessaloniki, which was exacerbating hostilities between anarchists, refugees and the police.

In the end, we returned to Profigika and drank red wine while Yusuf showed us photos on his desktop of his time in the military. His military identity card was sitting on his bedside table, strewn with pamphlets, papers and books. I recognized the posters we had pasted earlier lying in the corner behind his bed.

We spent hours there in his squat discussing the nature of occupying space as a political agent, and of the solidarity networks that sustained such forms of material resistance. I also thought about the relevance of the recent death of a refugee in Thessaloniki, and how it would relate to anarchists in Exarcheia, particularly within the squat I was in, Prosfigika.

Known as the "building of the refugees," Prosfigika has a long history of resistance, dating back prior to the civil war (Tzirtzilaki 2014). The outside walls of Prosfygika appeared to be derelict; the eight buildings that comprise it were littered with graffiti and shell marks. Prosfygika was a site that was frequented by researchers and academics who have formed a strong network of solidarity with the squatters (Tzirtzilaki 2014). This connection has functioned to aid Prosfygika with strong ties within the anti-authoritarian and migrant circles, and within mainstream academia (Tzirtzilaki 2014). However, Peter disagreed with Yusuf's claim that Prosfygika was primarily a political space; he cited the lack of a central room as a key element to this claim. Peter maintained that Prosfygika was a "living-squat," it's politics being secondary to lifestyle. Interestingly, Prosfigika is located in a hotbed of state space; it is wedged between the Athens Police Headquarters and the Supreme Court of Greece. Ambelokipi is the area in which Prosfigika is located in central Athens, and in recent years has been a popular site of construction and gentrification—inciting resistance from the squatters (Tzirtzilaki 2014).

In 2001 due to the approaching 2004 Olympic Games, the Hellenic Public Real Estate Corporation (KED) used threats of demolition and blackmail to buy 137 apartments (Tzirtzilaki 2014). In 2003 40 more apartments were expropriated by the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Climate Change (YPEKA) as a part of a plan to demolish 6 of the 8 apartment blocks to make more green space (Tzirtzilaki 2014,).

Due to solidarity networks forged by the squatters and anarchists, within the academic community and among residents of Ambelokipi, this initiative was unsuccessful (Tzirtzilaki 2014). However, Prosfigika was still considered a major eyesore that was covered to preserve the appearance of the Olympic Games (Tzirtzilaki 2014). Consistently, agents of the state have been keen to destroy and dismantle Prosfigika in favour of state

sanctioned initiatives that benefit Greece's international reputation at the expense of its citizens (Tzirtzilaki 2014).

Following the Olympics, Prosfygika underwent a radical influx of refugees, anarchists and squatters (Tzirtzilaki 2014). The emergence of weekly assemblies aided in the community organization that created infrastructures of solidarity, such as a communal kitchen, an infirmary, and classes for children (Tzirtzilaki 2014).Thus the Prosfygika neighbourhood is a focal point for struggles of self-organization and solidarity as well as for imaginary and physical reality, as the meaning of community is redefined through the transformation of the neighbourhood into a new community (Tzirtzilaki 2014).

From my research I was able to discern that Prosfygika has strong ties to EAM-ELAS and other forms of radical resistance. Material space, especially radical territories like Prosfygika or Exarcheia, has strong connections to intangible forms of dissent. Just as the people shape the space and so are shaped by it, they affect and are affected by immaterial structures of resistance as well. Athenian anarchists' principles are very much shaped by space and the way in which they express dissent or solidarity manifests as a result (Tzirtzilaki 2014). Indeed, space is not as fixed as one might think. As Eleni Tzirkzilaki (2014) explains:

> dynamic spaces, χώροι εν δυνάμει in Greek, shouldn't be regulated or fixed under a certain label or law, as they escape a fixed definition. These dynamic spaces are like current shelters, they are our answer to the crisis and its violence. They represent a resistance to the prevailing system, generating as resistance an intellectual critique, embodied in the space and in the use of it, suggesting new forms and way of living, as well as becoming communities.

## Prosfigika II: 'Free', communality, free-assocation frameworks, labour-currency, and defence

One night I waited outside one of the doors to a squat in Prosfigika. It was my second to last night in Athens and Yusuf had invited me to eat at his friend Alexandros' place. When I arrived Yusuf and Alexandros' appeared at the door, assuring a concerned neighbour that I was just a friend, as I had been lurking suspiciously outside. They ushered me inside and I followed them up the stairs in the dimly lit squat. Once inside, we crossed the hallway to the living room. It was as poorly lit as the stairwell, save for the red lamp that cast the room in warm colour. Along the cement floors were many empty glass bottles put together in rows. There were also pliers, scissors, screw drivers, and an assortment of other tools. I noticed the symbol for Conspiracy of Cells of Fire, a Greek radical anarchist group, drawn on the door.

This was a lab for development; Molotov cocktails seemed to be the primary item, and I noticed the floor was littered with silver canisters that appeared to be nitrous oxide. Overhead, a middle aged man was tinkering with the light. Finally, after a few moments, he managed to fix the light and descended from the ladder. Yusuf introduced me to Amir; a former political prisoner who was held in Iran for 11 years.

Alexandros insisted I eat and Yusuf brought out a massive plate of pasta with chunks of beef and caramelized onions in a red sauce. The ingredients for the meal had been donated by a local grocery store; my interlocutors explained that expired goods are often donated to the anarchists and refugees. Even if they aren't donated, the anarchists explained that they will simply recover the wasted goods from the garbage.

From my observations, the concept of "free" is radically different for anarchists, who attempt to minimize their participation in capitalism. Often it is assumed that things without a price have no value, but Yusuf explained to me this was precisely how the state and capitalism distort reality. Yusuf elaborated that the absence of price is not a reflection of real world value, but merely the artificial value we assign based on monetary cost. For instance, Yusuf informed me that he lived in an apartment within the squat without paying rent or exchanging monetary currency; rather, labour was his form of currency. Furthermore, Yusuf explained that the apartments were communal property and people who regularly participated and laboured in the squat, were allowed to live there.

As Yusuf explained to me, forms of participation and labour became currency. This included political discussions, baking bread for refugees, patrolling the squat, or doing maintenance. Although there were locks on the doors for security, technically the space was communal. The only property that existed within the context of the squat was the personal effects of the squatters. According to Yusuf, tenancy was decided communally according to certain criteria: First, a resident of the squat was required to introduce and vouch for the prospective squatter. The council and assembly would then decide if the person in question could receive a key to an apartment. This was due to the free-association frameworks that facilitated cooperation and non-hierarchical organization. Although there was no central authority, Prosfigika had a council and an open assembly that met two to three times a week and participation in discussion (to a degree) was required to squat in Prosfigika. Generally, the topics of discussion included the inner workings of the squat: security, residency, defense, organization, and so on. One of the most important aspects of the labour-currency was the mobilization and preparation to defend the squat.

"We have the means to defend the squat," Yusuf once said to me, as we surveyed our surroundings from one of his balconies. The anarchists and squatters were capable of using force, arms, and any other means to resist police and other agents of the state. Typically, they favoured homemade weapons such as Molotov cocktails, or even potato guns (an apparatus that can shoot potatoes with extreme force)—however, they also might have used hot water, oil or throw glass bottles.

Yet, Peter once lived in a squat in Patras, and told me that their most valuable 'weapons' were in fact tools of solidarity; modes of communication that allowed people to mobilize quickly. This exemplifies how action and everyday revolution was not always facilitated by violent mobilization; many times it was a network of individuals collaborating laterally for the sake of solidarity. He referred to a loudspeaker as "the community shield" as it could be used to contact comrades to help with defence. Technology was the primary tool employed within this squat, an SMS could function as a panic button. Peter described a group of eleven squatters that turned into more than two hundred thanks to one SMS message. "The best defence is people," smiled Peter.

## Conclusion

The Erisian Mysteries will likely never be understood popularly in their complexities, however, these rituals of resistance to state and capital oppression are essential in our modern world. Alternatives must be found for those who have slipped through the cracks of a failing system. According to my interlocutors, anarchism is not merely violence; it is a cohesive network of non-hierarchical relationships based off mutual association and equality. Throughout my research I found that anarchists in Athens were organized: autonomous clinics, squats, collectives, "free" markets and soup kitchens all attested to the existence of a solidarity economy. Not only did they routinely organize countercultural events such as anti-state demonstrations, but anarchists engaged with poor and working class communities on the ground, daily.

From my research I was able to discern that Greece's long historic political polarization, from the northern mountains to the graffiti covered streets of Exarcheia, has defined social relations since the civil war. "The anarchist space" that my interlocutors discussed, both the metaphysical and the geographical, constitutes the field site of Athenian anarchism and is one of the most relevant forms of resistance for residents of Exarcheia. Buildings, in particular universities, and other infrastructures of the state, are significant in the battle for spatial autonomy. As Vradis and Dalakoglou (2011) suggest: "What remains an open question and a challenge, then, is to try to make sense of this transition of how we position ourselves within it as anarchists, as part of the global antagonist movement, as people inspired by the December revolt who nevertheless want to be better prepared for the next Decembers that are sure to come" (15).

From my research I was able to come to the conclusion that critics of anarchism allege that it is not a viable ideology; anarchism will simply never happen. And yet, anarchism is happening globally, and has predated any form of economic or social organization that is widely used today. Anarchism is happening right now, on the ground—in the streets of Athens, in the squats of Patras and in the everyday revolutions around the world. Furthermore, anarchism is comprised of moments of revolution, glimpses of a reality without state or economic oppression, in which humans organize themselves according to their own means and accords. It is in the moments of spontaneous and even violent mobilization against the state. Anarchy is in the buildings, streets, plazas and mountains of Greece. But most of all, it is in the relationships between people and the solidarity they share in the face of economic and political marginalization. Anarchy has a long historic, social and spatial history that remains at the forefront of politics in Greece today.

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