

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

Patterns of contentious politics concentration as a ‘spatial contract’; a spatio-temporal study of urban riots and violent protest in the neighbourhood of Exarcheia, Athens, Greece (1974-2011)

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## Abstract

Existing studies of urban riots, violent protest and other instances of contentious politics in urban settings have largely tended to be either event- or time-specific in their scope. The present thesis offers a spatial reading of such politics of contention in the city of Athens, Greece. Tracing the pattern of the occurrence of these instances through time, the research scope of the thesis spans across Greece's post-dictatorial era (i.e. post-1974, the Greek *Metapolitefsi*), concluding shortly after the first loan agreement between the country's national government and the so-called 'troika' of lenders (IMF/ECB/EU).

The thesis includes a critical overview of literature on riots in a historical and geographical context; questions on methodology and ethics in researching urban riots; a discourse analysis of violence concentration in Exarcheia; ethnographic accounts on everyday life in the neighbourhood and a 'rhythmanalysis' of the Exarcheia contention concentration during the period of research.

Seeking to explain this concentration the thesis introduces the notion of the 'spatial contract': rather than signalling a type of discord, the concentration of mass violence in Exarcheia through time is hereby conceived as the spatial articulation of a certain form of consensus between Greek authorities and their subjects. In this way, the thesis places the concentration of urban violence in Exarcheia solidly within the social and political context of the country's post-dictatorial era.

The thesis suggests that it would be beneficial for future human geographical research to trace such concentration patterns of urban riots. By exercising a cross-scale reading, it would then possible to place these and other forms of contentious politics within a social equilibrium that is far more complex and often much more consensual than it might appear to be.

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*In living memory of Babis. Once again, you defied time.*



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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

|          |           |  |
|----------|-----------|--|
| AAL      |           | Academic Asylum Law.   |
| ADEDY    | ΑΔΕΔΥ     | Supreme Administration of Greek Civil Servants' Trade Unions.              |
| ASOEE    | ΑΣΟΕΕ     | Athens School of Commercial Studies.                                       |
| ECB      | EKT       | European Central Bank.   |
| EFEE     | ΕΦΕΕ      | National Student Union of Greece.  |
| ERT      | EPT       | Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation.   |
| EU       | ΕΕ        | European Union.  |
| GD       | ΧΑ        | The Peoples' Association – Golden Dawn, colloquially <i>Golden Dawn</i> .  |
| GSEE     | ΓΣΕΕ      | General Confederation of Workers of Greece.                                |
| IMF      | ΔΝΤ       | International Monetary Fund.   |
| KKE      | ΚΚΕ       | Communist Party of Greece.   |
| KKE (in) | ΚΚΕ [εσ.] | Communist Party of Greece [Interior].                                      |
| KNE      | ΚΝΕ       | Communist Youth of Greece.   |
| LAOS     | ΛΑΟΣ      | Popular Orthodox Rally.  |
| ND       | ΝΔ        | New Democracy.   |
| NTUA     | ΕΜΠ       | National Technical University of Athens, colloquially <i>Polytechnic</i> . |
| PASOK    | ΠΑΣΟΚ     | Panhellenic Socialist Movement.  |
| SYRIZA   | ΣΥΡΙΖΑ    | Coalition of the Radical Left–United Social Front.                         |
| YPEChODE | ΥΠΕΧΩΔΕ   | Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works. |

# 1. Introduction

This thesis was written at a very peculiar time. Preparation for its research commenced almost simultaneously with the riots<sup>1</sup> of December 2008 in Athens, Greece. In hindsight, these riots may have acted as a harbinger to the global financial crisis of 2008-09 overall — and the ways in which this crisis descended upon the Greek territory in particular. At a time when the Greek national debt crisis was swelling rapidly, I began this research from abroad. Then, in the same month that the Greek government finally entered its initial loan agreement with the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (May 2010), I landed in Athens to start fieldwork. At that volatile moment, with the vast majority of my fellow academics, commentators and interlocutors focusing on our accelerated historical time, I found myself writing a thesis in defence of the idea that space still mattered.

In purely spatial terms then, the setting of this thesis is the compact neighbourhood of Exarcheia<sup>2</sup> [Exárcheia<sup>3</sup>, Εξάρχεια] in central Athens, Greece. With

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1 The literature of contentious politics often uses the terms ‘insurrection’, ‘revolt’ and ‘uprising’ to denote acts, some riotous, that are more politically conscious than many of the acts of rioting studied here. Exarcheia did indisputably see at least one major uprising, in 1973, and two major revolts (which some would also claim as uprisings), in 1985 and 2008. I use the phrase “riots and other forms of contentious politics” throughout the thesis to include all of the above. Discussion of how both professional and popular discourse make or fail to make these distinctions in the history of Exarcheia appears in chapters 2, 4, and 5.

approximately 22,000 residents this densely populated<sup>4</sup> neighbourhood nevertheless accounts for just 0.6% of the city's total population, itself in excess of 3.5 million<sup>5</sup>, while its land size of 0.9 km<sup>2</sup> equals just 0.21% of Athens overall<sup>6</sup>. In December 2008 this neighbourhood with the size of a small town came into the global spotlight: the death of a 15-year old boy, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, following a confrontation between youth and police in the heart of the neighbourhood, sparked weeks-long riots and unrest that spread across the city, the country and in many cities across the world.

Even the faintest knowledge of Exarcheia and its history might suffice to suppose it was not entirely coincidental that the Grigoropoulos incident took place

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2 I have opted to spell the neighbourhood Exarcheia as opposed to the also often-encountered Exarchia, Exarhia or Eksarhia, since the former lies the closest to a transliteration of the neighbourhood's Greek name.

3 Throughout the thesis, Greek names and terms are given in their English translation, followed by their ISO 843 transliteration and the Greek original in square brackets [].

4 Exarcheia has a recorded population density of 24,500 residents/km<sup>2</sup>, according to the country's 2001 Census. By comparison the municipality of Athens had a population density of 16,800 and the Athens Metropolitan region had 7,600 residents/ km<sup>2</sup> according to the same census — while Greater London's population density for 2007 was 4,863 residents/km<sup>2</sup> according to the UK Office for National Statistics.

5 According to the 2001 Census of the National Statistical Service of Greece.

6 Exarcheia has a size of 0.9 km<sup>2</sup>; the city of Athens spans over approximately 412 km<sup>2</sup>.

there. Long perceived as a delinquent neighbourhood, at least in a part of the country's public discourse (as outlined in detail in chapter 4), Exarcheia has also historically held the status of an intellectual hub and an epicentre of Athens' cultural and intensely political activity.

The above qualities might at first appear as glaring contradictions in the neighbourhood's character (as explained in chapter 5), yet they would be much easier to comprehend in the context of Exarcheia's history. The two largest universities in Athens — the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA, colloquially known as Polytechnic) and the University of Athens — were located in Exarcheia or its immediate vicinity from their foundation<sup>7</sup> until the gradual relocation of their main campuses and activities to the suburb of Zografou in the 1980s. This historical concentration of universities could ostensibly explain why Exarcheia became an epicentre of student uprisings from the early years of the modern Greek state; a notable, very early predecessor to the Grigoropoulos riots includes the so-called *Skiadiká* uprising of 1859<sup>8</sup>,

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7 The NTUA and the University of Athens were founded in 1836 and 1837 respectively, following shortly after the foundation of the modern Greek state in 1830.

8 The *Skiadiká* uprising took place on May 10-11, 1859. The then minister of Foreign Affairs, A. Ragavis, tried to promote the purchasing of Greek products for the rejuvenation of the local economy. Students supporting his idea took to the *Pedion Tou Areos* (Mars' Field) in the immediate vicinity of Exarcheia, wearing *Skiadia*, a particular type of hat from the island of Sifnos. A number of hat importers, who would be damaged by the move, sent their employees to the Field to mock the protesters. In the ensuing conflict, police intervened, injuring three demonstrators. On the 11th, the conflict spread, with thousands of protesters occupying the University and the police shooting against the crowd.

one of the earliest contentious protests recorded in the modern Greek state's history.

Over a century later but only a few streets away, another student uprising broke out: the anti-dictatorial uprising of November 1973 was centred around the Polytechnic campus in Exarcheia. Students confronted a military force at the gates of the Athens Polytechnic and many died in a protest that became a landmark of anti-dictatorial struggle and was officially commemorated by the post-dictatorial regime. Some of the annual commemorations of the original 1973 uprising were held as protests and turned into fresh riots themselves<sup>9</sup>. Riots have also erupted in the neighbourhood after killings by police took place there (1985, 2008) and during police operations that would lead to mass — and often violent — arrests. The largest such operations were the so-called Virtue Operations [Epicheiríseis Aretḗ, Επιχειρήσεις Αρετή], which lasted from late September/ early October 1984 to May 1986<sup>10</sup>. Police arrested hundreds in what their own publicity at the time described as an attempt to “cleanse”<sup>11</sup> the neighbourhood from what were perceived as its undesirable populations.

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9 In the years 1974, 1980, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995 and 2002.

10 There is, in fact, a disagreement among many of the Exarcheia residents and commentators alike regarding the time span of the Virtue Operations. Some claim the operations started as many as eight years earlier, in 1976. For the purposes of this thesis, the Virtue Operations will be considered to include the mass-scale police operations in these 20 months alone (10.1984-05.1986).

11 The word cleanse [ekkathárisi, εκκαθάριση] was used in police press releases during the operation: Athens daily Eleftherotypia, <http://www.iospress.gr/ios2007/ios20070513.htm> (last accessed: 10.11.2011)

Finally, smaller-scale and largely spontaneous riots occurred frequently during and following the summer of 2004. The highly visible, round-the-clock riot police presence established in Exarcheia at the time — ahead of the 2004 Olympics — was sustained in the succeeding years, and small-scale skirmishes between police and groups of youth between 2004 and the time of writing are counted in the hundreds<sup>12</sup>.

With such an abundance of noteworthy events, and given the rich and long history of contentious politics in Exarcheia overall, it seemed imperative for me to set chronological boundaries to the research. I have opted for the period between 1973 and 2011: in deciding the point in time from which the thesis' research narrative would commence, the Polytechnic events of November 1973 appeared as the most obvious choice. Not only did these events appear to mark the evolution and character of the neighbourhood in a number of ways (as explained in chapters 5 and 6), they also appeared determinant on a national level throughout the entire period from the end of the dictatorship onward, the period which began with the *Metapolitefsi*. *Metapolitefsi* [Metapolíteysī, Μεταπολίτευση] literally translates as polity or regime change. In its tightest definition the term denotes the turbulent, transitory period between the fall of the Junta of the Colonels in the summer of 1974 and the legislative elections of November 17th of the same year<sup>13</sup>. In a broader sense, however, the *Metapolitefsi* denotes the entire historical period and regime that succeeded the Junta<sup>14</sup>. It is in this

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12 Documentation of such smaller-scale riots is scarce. However, an article in the Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* on January 20, 2007 claimed at least six such incidents occurred in Exarcheia between May and June 2005 alone: [http://archive.enet.gr/online/online\\_text/c=112,dt=20.01.2007](http://archive.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112,dt=20.01.2007) (last accessed: 10.11.2010)



sense synonymous with the lesser-used Third Hellenic Republic<sup>15</sup> and it describes a period that has seen one of the least authoritarian rules in the country when compared not only to its immediate successor, but to a substantial part of the history of the modern Greek state as a whole.

## **Initial research conceptualisation**

In its original conceptualisation, this thesis would have provided a detailed ethnographic study of Exarcheia. Even though such an exercise is indeed included in the end result (chapter 5), the original idea had been to keep focused exclusively on this

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13 The date was chosen for its obvious symbolic value as the first anniversary of the student uprising of 1973.

14 There is in fact a lively, recurrent debate in Greek academia and in the public discourse in regard to declaring an “end” to the Metapolitefsi. For some this would be in 1981, when Andreas Papandreou lead PASOK to power — it has been argued that this was a moment when the “Civil War’s losers” came to power. Another moment is 1996, when the death of Papandreou saw him replaced by Constantinos Simitis, who lead the country’s modernisation [eksygychronismós, εκσυγχρονισμός] project. Then, it was declared again in 2008 — in the wake of the Grigoropoulos riots — and then once again in 2010, following the signing of the first government-EU/ECB/IMF memorandum.

15 The Third Hellenic Republic was officially declared in 1975, with the promulgation of the new Constitution on June 11 1975. The Constitution is still in effect, with revisions in 1985 and 2001, at the time of writing (mid-2012). Its two preceding Republics lasted from 1822-1832 and 1924-1935; in-between, the history of the Greek state has largely been monopolised by long royal reigns.

more introvert study of the neighbourhood, grounded upon the belief of the inherent power of place to shape the social events that occur within it<sup>16</sup>.

This claim requires some further explanation: I selected Exarcheia as my field of research having experienced first-hand the neighbourhood's ambience, its peculiar ability to bring together political activists, fringe artists, delinquents and every in-between combination imaginable, as it seemed at the time. As a teenager growing up in the western port city of Patras — approximately 150 miles west of Athens — a weekend trip to Exarcheia was priceless: stocking up on reading material was almost an excuse, in hindsight, to delve into the mysteriously tense atmosphere of the neighbourhood's narrow streets. And so, years later, sitting by a desk a few thousand miles away, I evolved the original research question almost naturally: the project would have to be about Exarcheia in itself, finally allowing me to explore the qualities and conditions that had made the neighbourhood this magnet for dissent, captivating so many in the process. There must have been, I believed, a given quality of this place that allowed for this peculiarity. In other words, the neighbourhood must have had a somewhat inherent capacity, as was the exact wording of the original research conceptualisation, for rioting and for contention. The neighbourhood's relationship to the rest of the city of Athens did not interest me as much, except for the fact that it was antithetical to its everyday normality — what with Exarcheia being a focal point for the city's riot and contention

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16 As discussed, of course, in much of the critical human geographical tradition post-Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1991) — but also see Soja (1989) for a reading that builds on Lefebvre to argue that “social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent” (ibid: 81) and Ross (1988) who read the outbreak of the Paris Commune as signalling the “emergence” of social space — the first major historical event produced due to its space, and then producing space in return.

— and then, perhaps, a site in which these riots and contentious politics were contained. Soon enough, however, with research underway, I came to realise that this latter point was highly important, perhaps the most important one raised in the thesis: there was little use, as it quickly became evident, in conducting a purely ethnographic study of Exarcheia without at the same time conceiving this everyday reality of the neighbourhood within the country's wider social and political context. There is no way, in other words, in which one can possibly understand the Exarcheia phenomenon without also understanding the Metapolitefsi. Yet, crucially, this relationship also works vice-versa, as I will argue: it is indeed necessary to read Exarcheia's spatial qualities (in our case: concentration of riot and contention) in the wider Metapolitefsi context. At the same time, it is entirely possible to reach a clearer understanding of Metapolitefsi — a hugely important chapter in the history of the modern Greek state — merely by tracing its mark on the tiny space of Exarcheia.

## **Central and sub-research questions**

This thesis was therefore driven by a desire to comprehend better the repeated occurrence and geographical concentration of riots and other forms of violent, contentious politics in Exarcheia, Athens between 1973 and 2011; that is, both through and in the context of Greece's Metapolitefsi. The main research question driving the entire thesis can be stated as follows:

*How can we explain riot concentration in Exarcheia during Greece's Metapolitefsi and what can this concentration tell us about the role of the neighbourhood in the Metapolitefsi in return?*

The research question is based on a number of assertions that were put to the test through the research period. The first assertion was that riots and other forms of contentious politics were largely concentrated in Exarcheia — a concentration thoroughly discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. The second assertion was that there was a relationship between Exarcheia's riot and contention concentration on the one hand, and the particular social and political characteristics of the Metapolitefsi on the other. Of course, while this relationship was still an assertion when building the research question, proof of and an extended analysis of this relationship is built throughout the thesis — culminating in chapter 7, where I proceed to develop the idea of the spatial contract to account for the role played by Exarcheia in the Metapolitefsi.

Apart from such assertions, there was one more complication in the research that had to be resolved: the way that riots and contention are perceived depends, for a large part, on one's viewpoint: how 'we' see riots and contention in Exarcheia, in other words, largely depends on both who 'we' are and where we stand. This complication includes the question of reflexivity and the moral stance of the researcher (which partially forms the discussion in chapter 3). Standing close enough to the research subject allows the immediacy and contact prerequisite to a solid ethnographic research. Standing far enough, on the other hand, allows an apt vantage point in order to place Exarcheia and its riot concentration in the broader context. And so, this "viewpoint complication" was solved via the reading Exarcheia at a number of different geographical scales, which produced different questions in return. At the local scale, there was the question of how these riots and contention were dealt with by residents and users of Exarcheia — a question of how, in other words, people living and acting in the neighbourhood understood its contentious character. At the greater (national) scale,

there was the question not only of how Exarcheia was perceived, but also how it positioned itself in a political landscape that was for a large part non-contentious, always in the context of the turbulent history of the modern Greek state. In-between these two scales lies the level of discourse. Media coverage of the Exarcheia contention may have been detrimental not only in the popular conception of the neighbourhood but also on the state discourse and action in the neighbourhood in return. These different layers, or better even, the different geographical scales from which one can read the Exarcheia contention, are tackled in the sub-research questions of the thesis, as follows:

1. How are riots and contention in Exarcheia conceived in popular (media) discourse and what are the likely effects of this conception upon the reality of the neighbourhood in return?
2. What is the everyday reality of living in a ‘riot neighbourhood’ and what is the relationship between this everyday reality and contentious events that occur there?
3. Building on the previous question: to what extent does the coexistence of conflict and ‘ordinary life’ in Exarcheia reflect Henri Lefebvre’s (1999, 2004) concept of rhythms? And what may a theory offer us when expanded from its original scope of daily routines to span annual, or longer, rhythms of intersecting contention and serenity?

The discourse chapter of the thesis (chapter 4) deals with the first question above; its first two empirical chapters (5 and 6) correspondingly deal with questions 2 and 3 above, while chapter 7 synthesises their research findings in order to offer a more complete response to the main research question.

## 1.1 Riot and contention concentration in context

Another driving force behind this research and analysis was the considerable disparity between the occurrence of urban riots and other forms of contentious politics on the one hand, and the attention paid to them by social scientists (geographers included) on the other. This statement might very well appear more damning than it should be — and it therefore requires some explanation. Of course, contentious politics overall have been the subject of intense academic research and discussion; there is, after all, an entire school of thought dedicated to their study<sup>17</sup>. What is more, there are some — even if few — voices within this school of thought that have argued for the importance of “space in contentious politics” (Sewell 2001), in an attempt to trace the “geographies of contention” (Martin and Miller 2000: 144). From the geographers’ perspective, the legacy of Manuel Castells’ (1983) work on the “city and the grassroots” has been picked up by Routledge (2003)<sup>18</sup> and by Pile and Keith in their “geographies of resistance” (1997<sup>19</sup>). Overall, the existing body of work on contentious politics (and its niche, if growing sub-division concerned with their spatiality) has three identifiable

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17 Perhaps most notably Charles Tilly (2003) has studied contention in a number of countries across Europe, over three-and-half centuries (1650-2000); another study of his with a similarly wide scope has focused on France (1986) and the birth of social movements (2004).

18 In this work (2003) Paul Routledge studies the Peoples’ Global Action (PGA) as a grassroots social movement that engages in multi-scalar political action; one of the most explicitly geographical readings of the spatiality of contentious politics; here, of a particular social movement.

limitations, namely:

(a) Unlike works on contentious politics overall (with an often-encountered breathtaking historical scope), the study of riots, where existent, seems to be dominated by a tendency to study them either during or immediately after their occurrence. From the studies on urban riots in the United States in the late 1960s<sup>20</sup> all the way to the much more recent studies on such outbreaks of violence<sup>21</sup>, social scientists have inadvertently focussed primarily on riotous events concurrently, as they happen. To a great extent, this urge to research contemporary events is understandable<sup>22</sup>. While this tendency demonstrates the importance social scientists rightly attribute to these events, this

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19 In this volume, it is Routledge once again that contributes to the spatiality of resistances, looking at Nepal's revolution.

20 Particularly notable here is the special issue of the Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science (Vol. 29, No. 1). Titled "Urban Riots: Violence and Social Change", it includes contributions by Berger (1968), Cloward and Piven (1968) and Macchiarola (1968) — and it essentially comprises one of the most extensive attempts to comprehend the wave of urban riots that occurred across US cities at the time.

21 Among the abundance of scholarly interventions discussing the Greek December of 2008, see Astrinaki 2009, Iakovidou et al (2010) and Sotiris (2010). The events of the summer of 2011 in the UK, conversely, have been discussed to a lesser extent — with notable exceptions however including Lewis et al. (2011) and Slater (2011), whose juxtaposition of the riots to the "broken [UK] state" echoes the juxtaposition, by Dikeç, of the French riots and French urban policy as discussed further on.

immediacy is problematic (and limited) when it is followed neither by further study in the light of subsequent events nor by a historical scope and perspective. The following might act as illustrative example: while searching for studies on the legacy of the Brixton Riot of 1981 as part of my research for chapter 2, I was surprised to find very little in terms of academic research on the legacy of the riots — this, despite the fact that this particular event did in fact have a very concrete legacy in directly influencing UK state legislation<sup>23</sup>.

(b) The study of riots and other forms of demand-less, contentious politics has come to the fore in the literature largely due to the turbulent events of the past years — a rule not without notable exceptions<sup>24</sup>. For the most part, however, focus is on contentious politics that still articulate demands — social movements, even more violent ones, as

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22 I am also personally guilty of this tendency to write about contentious events concurrently, while they are taking place (e.g. Vradis 2009, Vradis & Dalakoglou 2010, Vradis & Dalakoglou 2011). The present thesis is separate from my previous (and joint) work in that it builds this much-needed historical perspective — deriving only from current events (as the events of December 2008) to put them in a broader context.

23 Following the Brixton Riot of 1981, Lord Scarman recommended that the so-called “Sus Law” be abolished. The law, with roots in the Vagrancy Act of 1824, gave police the authority to stop and search individuals acting on suspicion (hence the name, adopted from British slang). Many members of London’s black and Caribbean communities believed that it was also used by the police to discriminate against them. The law’s subsequent abolition is a good example of the direct influence of the ‘issueless’, ‘demand-lacking’ riots upon state legislature, and by extent the relationship between state and its citizenry.



long as there is dialogue with existing order. And yet, the “issue-less riots” (Marx 1970) can also tell us much about the wider social and political context in which they occur; the example of the Brixton riots above is a strong one — so is the case with Exarcheia, as will be shown further on.

(c) The study of riots and contentious politics, has, to my best knowledge, largely ignored the spatial concentration and congregation factor: despite the fact that such concentration is evident in a number of historical examples<sup>25</sup> this repeated occurrence within the same spatial localities appears largely to have evaded the literature.

In summary, lacunae were identified within the literature on riots and contentious politics overall concerning (a) the study of such occurrences over longer periods of time, (b) the inclusion of more confrontational, non demand-making events and — perhaps most importantly — (c) the study of their spatial concentration over time, a point that extends from point (a) but nevertheless opens up an entirely new

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24 Perhaps most notably here, an exception is found in the work of Mustafa Dikeç, who has been concerned with the geographies of the urban policy of the French state (2007c) and the ways in which these influenced urban unrest (2007b), to create what he termed “Badlands of the Republic” (2006, 2007) — also an attempt to understand the recurrence of the “revolts of the 1990s ... and the 2005 revolts” (2006: 159).

25 Cities that have seen a concentrated, repeated occurrence of riots include, but are by no means limited to Los Angeles (1965, 1992) Paris (1965, 1995, 1997 and 2005) and of course, Athens (1985, 2008 — and throughout the eighties, nineties and noughties).

prospect in their study.

As I intend to show, Exarcheia was deemed an ideal case study for a research aspiring to contribute to the filling of the lacunae above. The section below places the Exarcheia riot concentration in the context of Athens' and Greece's recent and not-so-recent turbulent context. It explains in some detail the inherent spatiality of the political landscape in Greece and then further, the contentious nature of this national political landscape.

## **1.2 Riots in Exarcheia in Athens' and in the Greek context**

Throughout its post-dictatorial times, Greece has seen riots of exceptional frequency for a country that is a long-lasting member of the European Union and had enjoyed — until recent years at least — relatively high levels of prosperity. Why would this be? Why does the country hold such a strong culture of demonstrations-turned-violent, riots and other forms of contentious politics — arguably much more so than most European countries?

There exist a number of different hypotheses that would explain this contemporary (not just violent) protest culture. First, one could trace this culture's roots back to the country's recent dictatorial regime (1967-1974) and its legacies: the succeeding democratic regime (the Third Hellenic Republic, as explained earlier on) is very young when compared to its European counterparts, only dating from July 1974. For this reason, it can be argued, parliamentary politics have not been firmly established as the exclusive form of political mediation: indeed, street protests (largely understood as a more direct form of such political mediation) are extremely frequent in the city of Athens overall: Greek authorities report “an average of two protests a day in the city —

many of which turn destructive. And that is not including strikes, riots, or other forms of dissent.”<sup>26</sup>

Second, as mentioned already, riots have been at times (twice at least in Exarcheia alone: in 1985 and in 2008) sparked after excessive force was exercised by Greek police officers, whose reputation in this respect dates back to the seven-year dictatorship and the culture of immunity enjoyed at the time. During its post-dictatorial transition, Greece did not go through the large-scale reforms of public security forces that took place during similar transitions in other countries. In 1997, twenty-three years after the fall of the military regime, junta-friendly officers were still organising public gatherings<sup>27</sup>.

It is perhaps to be expected that Greece’s turbulent recent political past would percolate through to the present. As recent history includes not only dictatorship (1967-1974) but a civil war (1946-1949), there exist at least two generations in the country’s population that have lived through war and famine, dictatorship and exile. When the Greek state joined the European Union in 1981 it carried within it a vivid political past of extreme tension and division — the “unstable politics, civil wars and also still dictatorships in the [European] south” (Leontidou, 2010: 1179) — yet one that was for

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26 “In Greece, the culture of protest” Christian Science Monitor,

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0129/p20s01-woeu.html> (last accessed: 05/08/2012)

27 In 1975, then government minister of Defence, Evangelos Averoff, discharged 139 military officers dubbed “junta droplets” in an apparent attempt to downplay the extent of size of the junta-friendly public force: “The [junta] droplets have water taps, too”

<http://www.iospress.gr/extra/extra19971112.htm> (last accessed: 11/08/2012)

many years subdued by the discourse of progress, Europeanisation and prosperity that the European Union integration brought with it.

That year (1981) and the succeeding years of the same decade saw a crucial turning point in public political discourse in Greece. On the one hand, as explained, the discourse around the country's rife political tensions quietened down in face of its impending European integration: European Union entry had become Greece's first post-dictatorial 'national' goal, largely displacing discussion of internal social or political divisions in the name of this newly-found national purpose and unity. At the same time a parallel — and as I want to argue, non-coincidental — process was the introduction of the so-called Academic Asylum Law (AAL). Officially known as Law 1268/1982 of the Greek state, the AAL largely prevented the police and army from entering academic campuses in the name of academic freedom. The law was founded on the premise of public memory of the bloody events of November 17th, 1973 and the strong sentiment against the repetition of such events. On that date the dictatorship forces had stormed the Athens Polytechnic, quelling the anti-dictatorial protest that was taking place inside and assassinating scores of protesting students.

Another parallel development in public discourse in the country (reflected in national press coverage of the time, as shown in chapter 4) is the significant appearance for the first time of articles dealing with the 'Exarcheia issue', or rather, as often presented, the so-called 'Exarcheia problem': a series of articles appeared between the years 1981-1982 across the national press covering the alleged appearance of new, so-called "tribes" (youth cultures) that frequented the neighbourhood of Exarcheia and its nearby areas, including of course the Athens Polytechnic itself — loitering, causing havoc on an everyday level and occasionally rioting against the police. Nicknamed anything from "Sioux", "Metropolitan Indians", to simply "the punks", these youth of

Exarcheia were quickly put under the national spotlight as a phenomenon that was new, significant and worrying — but quite tellingly, in no case were they treated as directly political.

The extended media coverage of Exarcheia in the early 1980s was chronologically succeeded by the police “Virtue Operations” of 1984-1986. This is potentially the first time when there is such a clear succession of events: first a shift in public discourse of the neighbourhood, then a shift in the political balance at the time and finally, the launch of the police operations within it. It is also a case during which public discourse on Exarcheia turned around rapidly; extremely rapidly, in fact, compared to what was taking place on the ground. What happened in the years between the late seventies and the early eighties? Did Exarcheia truly turn from a picturesque neighbourhood to what professional discourse had by and large dubbed an anomie ghetto over such a short course of time? There is no substantial evidence that would prove the rise of any factors that would justify this discourse turnaround (e.g. crime or anti-social behaviour). Much larger issues were at stake; indeed, it is arguably the first time during which the grounded reality in Exarcheia interacted in such a violent way with its representation on the national (discursive) level. The riots that followed (1985) can only be seen in the wider socio-political context of the time and in the context of all the events that preceded them.

### **1.3 Thesis chapter plan**

Chapter 2 offers an overview of key bodies of academic literature that feature the study of riots. The chapter is divided into three main sections that correspond to these three bodies of literature, namely past and present acts of collective violence,

urban social movements (with particular focus on the Right to the City) and crowd control through urban design. The chapter purposefully broad and heterogeneous in its scope, reviewing bodies of literature that span across history, political science, urban design and human geography, always with a focus (or lack thereof) on contentious politics and riots in particular. This abundant body of work shows the importance of the detailed study of riots and, at the same time, the pitfalls that lie in studying them in isolation in any of these disciplines alone. In its conclusion, the chapter offers some initial suggestions on the contribution to the riot literature that could be made by a systematic, historically broad study of riots and riot concentration in particular.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological and ethical questions of the thesis as these were raised before commencing the research, during fieldwork and through to the thesis' completion. The chapter includes reflections on the questions of methodology and methods (3.1 – 3.2), the obstacles and ethical considerations that arose from these (3.3) — in turn leading to some broader questions on the adequate distance of the researcher when studying riots and on the ethics of the research, which is discussed in the final part of the chapter (3.4).

Chapter 4 is concerned with the professional Exarcheia discourse — specifically offering an analysis of national media discourses of Exarcheia. It opens with an overview of discourse analysis in urban research, proceeds to an explanation of the research methodology followed and then offers this analysis of media discourses — more specifically, discourses of the neighbourhood in national circulation newspapers in Greece between 1981-1985 and 2001-2005. The discourse analysis is not a self-standing exercise, of course. The reasoning behind it is to attempt to illuminate a possible relationship between the ways in which the neighbourhood is perceived from afar and the different ways it is conceived on the ground. Further, it offers a number of

interpretations of the role of the representation of Exarcheia in the context of wider social and political transformations that took place in Greece during the two five-year periods under examination here.

Chapter 5 describes everyday life in what has been only too often described as a “riot neighbourhood”; it is solidly ethnographic, presenting the outcome of fieldwork research conducted in Exarcheia between May 2010 and September 2011. At one level, the aim of this research exercise was to juxtapose the everyday (multiple) realities of the neighbourhood to its professional discourse as presented in the preceding chapter. At a second level, however, the chapter also sought to identify social and political equilibria in the neighbourhood: from describing the drug-dealing spots of Tositsa street to the citizens’ self-organised recreation at the square, I began to realise that what I was witnessing were not contradictory activities; rather, there were a number of social and political activities that were so antithetically furious that they allowed Exarcheia to become what I termed a “whirlwind of stability” — a term that, as I explain, is not at all as paradoxical as it first appears.

Chapter 6 on “The Rhythms of Exarcheia” highlights the apparent contradictions one encounters in Exarcheia over the course of a day and night. From the contentions of night-time to the daytime serenity (but often enough, vice-versa) the neighbourhood has built and sustained a cyclical rhythm. Using the tool of Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre et al.1999, Lefebvre 2004) the chapter shows how it might very well be possible to apply the notion to the longer cycles of contention and serenity in Exarcheia: from the neighbourhood’s “annual riot rites” (6.4), to such fluctuation within the entire post-dictatorial regime (6.5).

Chapter 7 then investigates the wider social and political implications of riot concentration in Exarcheia during and in relation to the Metapolitefsi, as this was

researched and discussed in previous chapters. The chapter first delves into existing theoretical schemata to explain the Exarcheia riot concentration (7.2) before arguing that a number of key findings make these schemata largely inadequate for explaining the Exarcheia case. Attempting to fill this lacuna, the chapter introduces the conceptual tool of the ‘spatial contract’. It explains how the tool was conceived, first in response to the social contract (7.4.1) and then specifically to describe the case of Exarcheia by adducing “three (plus one)” key elements of the spatial contract as it existed in the neighbourhood (7.4.2).

The final chapter (chapter 8) provides a brief summary of the thesis before then offering a number of suggestions for directions of future research: research that could be undertaken specifically in the field of Exarcheia and in the field of the two-way, dynamic relationship between social and political processes and their spatial articulation.



## **2. Riots in a historical and geographical context**

This chapter traces the ways in which riots and other forms of contentious politics have been addressed in the literature. It identifies a number of existing lacunae and suggests ways in which the present research can help address these.

The first part of the chapter focuses on the position of acts of spontaneous, collective violence in history (Section 2.2). Here, emphasis is placed on the role that was previously attributed to such acts, as a form of mediation between the ruled and their rulers rather than as an expression of discontent by the former toward the latter. This role largely applied, it is argued, to cases where such riots did not necessarily hold discreet political characteristics. This concept of acts of spontaneous, collective violence has radically shifted, however, (if not been altogether lost) since the eve of the French Revolution of 1789. The Revolution, widely conceived to have marked Western civilisation's passage into modernity, was also one of the early major historical events in which participating crowds exchanged traditional motives for ground-breaking, revolutionary demands. Another event that occurred just under a century later (once again in Paris), caused another turning point in our understanding of the role of spontaneous, collective violence in history: the Paris Commune of 1871. French authorities had already used the experience of the Revolution to conceive the city's major urban restructuring plan, which aimed at repressing, if not altogether preventing, social unrest. In this sense, the trouncing of the Paris Commune set a milestone for subsequent state control of social unrest via urban design.

Following the passage into modernity and the birth of industrial capitalism and

parliamentary representational democracies, a quadruple ‘riot paradox’ emerged: first, the apparent spontaneity of such violent crowd action was now conceived as incompatible with the organising structures of industrial capitalism’s working class. Second, its physical violence lay in apparent contrast to the values of the emergent bourgeois democracy. Third, these seemingly disorganised, chaotic crowds were disobeying the principles of order and crowd control as incorporated into the design of modern cities: in other words, the heartlands of the emergent capitalist landscape required orderly crowd flows and riots were seen to disrupt this flow. Last but not least: larger-scale riots-turned-revolts (or even, revolutions) could threaten to change the course of history. Even smaller-scale riots could create fissures in history’s linear and solid modern narrative. Both, therefore, had to be excluded from modernity’s positivist discourse; a discourse that left little space for any disruptive occurrence.

The paradox here is that despite all these developments, riots continue to take place. How can we explain the continued occurrence of such seemingly spontaneous, violent crowd action?

The next part of the chapter (Section 2.3) focuses on a number of these seemingly paradoxical (and much more contemporary) riots in cities of advanced capitalist countries in North America and Western Europe, from the 1960s U.S. ghetto uprisings to even more recent riots in cities and regions, including cities of the English North, Los Angeles, Paris and Athens, Greece. Through this otherwise diverse body of work, a tendency is identified for contemporary riots to be seen as quintessentially urban: as acts, that is, specifically responding to local (in our case, urban) conditions, even if the causes creating these same conditions are structurally deeper. Such examples of structural causes include the interracial tensions that led to the outburst of riots in

northern England in the early 2000s or the long-term social policy fallacies and the post-colonial effects in the case of France.

There is therefore a tendency in existing literature to read riots largely as occurrences of a particular locality, rather than to examine the wider (social, political, national) conditions that lead to such outbursts within the locality in question. If riots are local manifestations of wider structural forces at play, we must then question their often-encountered spatial concentration. In other words: if the structural causes of riots extend beyond particular localities, why do these riots remain concentrated, as they often do, within these localities?

The subsequent two sections of the chapter (Sections 2.4 and 2.5) weave through three bodies of work, each relating to the riot concentration question. First, the bodies of work on Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City (USM and RttC) are presented briefly with an explanation of how riots can be understood as either. Should riots fall into either category, their concentration could be read as an attempt for the spaces in which they take place to gain a degree of autonomy from central authority.

Section 2.6 then offers an alternative reading of riot concentration, presenting it in the context of crowd control via urban design. Of particular interest here are the methods and techniques developed to contain riots and other forms of contentious politics spatially. In this light, riot concentration appears as almost perfectly opposite to their role presented in Section 2.4. Riot concentration, it is argued, might in this sense comprise a mode of governmentality instead: containing what appears to be mostly inevitable social unrest and therefore safeguarding against its social and geographical spread.

## 2.1 Riots and contentious politics as events in history

Garry Marx defined a riot as “a relatively spontaneous illegitimate group violence contrary to traditional norms” (1970: 23). This is the working definition of riots used in this section. Here, I draw from two key works on historical occurrences of such spontaneous illegitimate group violence. First I draw from E.P. Thompson’s (1971) study of 18<sup>th</sup> century grain riots in England and the “moral economy” that underlay the actions of their participants<sup>28</sup>. Second, I draw from Eric Hobsbawm’s study of “city mobs” in medieval pre-industrial cities of Europe (1965). Hobsbawm saw these mobs as a movement drawing from “all classes of the urban poor for the achievement of economic or political changes by direct action” (Hobsbawm 1965: 116). He saw riots, further, as an act of mediation between the rulers and their populace: “provided the ruler did his duty, the populace was prepared to defend him with enthusiasm. But if he did not, it rioted until he did” (1965: 116). Similarly, E.P. Thompson shows how grain riots in 18<sup>th</sup> century England were “risings of the people” (E.P. Thompson 1971: 108) that were aimed at correcting what they saw as unjustly high prices in grain: the riots were therefore aimed at “setting the price [right]” (E.P. Thompson *ibid*: 108). In this sense, both Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson acknowledge aspirations to the collective actions that they study, even if these aspirations were rooted “in terms of traditionalism and conservatism (the ‘church and king mob’)” (Hobsbawm 1965: 110), with their participants being “informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs” (E.P. Thompson 1971: 78).

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28 A study of the grain riots of 18th century England was also conducted by Randall and Charlesworth, 1999.

None of these aspirations were guided by any overarching ideologies, which is why Hobsbawm described city mobs as “a pre-political phenomenon” (1959: 110), with E.P. Thompson agreeing, in that the crowds’ moral economy “cannot be described as ‘political’ in any advanced sense” (1971: 109). This understanding of spontaneous acts of violence as “non-political” was severely challenged after the events of 1789 in Paris. The French Revolution was in this sense a milestone event during which “crowds [became] impregnated with the slogans and ideas of the political groups contending for power” (Rudé 1959: 196). It marked an end to rioting by the menu people (the common people) that was guided exclusively by traditionalism and conservatism (Hobsbawm 1959: 122). Over the course of the events of 1789 in Paris crowd action became “revolutionary” (Rudé 1959: 196): what started as a riot turned into a Revolution. A riot could from now on comprise a historical event as defined by Sewell (2005); for him, historical events are “sequences of occurrences that result in transformations of structures” (2005: 227).

It is worth considering the notion of the historical event in order to understand when it is possible to consider riots as such. The notion of the event is discussed extensively from a philosophical perspective by Badiou (2003, 2005) and by commentators on his work (Barker 2002, Bensaïd 2004, Bosteels 2005, Hallward 2003, 2004, Hewlett 2004 and Osborne 2007); from an anthropological perspective by Shalins (1991) and Amin (1995), and also by McLean (2004) in terms of its legacies in the present. Sewell (2005) has also offered a theory of the event and what could comprise such a “historical event” in particular. Given the multi-disciplinary study of the event, its definitions also vary. The present chapter uses the definition offered by Bassett (2008). For Bassett, the event is described best as a “major historical turning point, or

moment of rupture in time and space, which brings something new into the world” (Bassett 2008: 895). It is, in other words, a “totally disruptive occurrence” (Badiou 2003: 20) that is both rare and unpredictable. Badiou has been criticised for his view of the historical event as being purely absolutist; for offering a conceptualisation of the event as a type of “miracle” (Bensaïd 2004). Taken to an extreme, this understanding of the event describes something that could never quite happen since “nothing new can ever be added to being and therefore no event understood as an eruption of something coming from outside the totality of being could ever take place” (White 2008: 17). In essence, this view of the event (or of its lack of ability even to emerge) also denies it both any historical agency and context.

From an entirely different viewpoint, Marshal Sahlins (1985, 1991) criticises the Western conceptualisation of history as insular; for Sahlins, focusing on the difference between “event” and “structure” has created a false dichotomy, not just between the two, but also in our understanding of the past as separate from the present.

Sahlins, Badiou and Sewell come to the event from considerably different perspectives. Yet between them, they raise the question: at what point does an event become historical? And what can a historical event tell us about the social and political context in which it takes place? The French Revolution is a historical event; it has unquestionably left its mark on history. The Paris Commune is also a historical event to a certain extent. But what about smaller-scale events? And crucially: at what point does the scale of these events become too small for us to consider them historical as such?

Stuart McLean (2004) offers an alternative way of engaging with past events, focusing his work on a study of the great Irish Famine of 1840. McLean looks at the ways in which this event from the past (the Famine) is narrated in the present; how a

pre-modern event is assimilated within the structures of modern rationality. His approach has infused the conceptualisation of the historical event in this thesis, particularly how it seeps through to the present.

The discussion on the historical event and its relation to both its concurrent and our present structure may seem to be delving into the abstract, the semiological, but this is far from so. First, our use of language in conceiving and narrating our historical past is far from a neutral medium, as shown by Hayden White (1975). As argued in Chapter 4, the way in which events are talked about matters profoundly. Second, the thesis studies the occurrence of riots past and present; one key question guiding the research is therefore under what circumstances these riots become historical events. Our choice of words, therefore, is extremely important. How can we distinguish between an ‘everyday’ riot, a revolt, an insurrection, or a revolution? At what point do riots begin to “transform structures”, as Sewell (2005) describes? A final, under-explored, question concerns those riots that fail in ‘transforming structures’. What is the relationship of these riots not against structures, but towards them?

The role of riots in the event/structure debate may be more easily illustrated by looking at another historical example, once again from Paris. As shown earlier in the chapter, the events of 1789 were unanimously seen as a Revolution. Less than one hundred years later, another event that was once again politically conscious took place in the same city: the Commune of 1871. The Commune has been discussed at great length among human geographers and is possibly one of the most discussed historical events in our discipline. In addition, the Commune has also been much celebrated by scholars of the Left as a crucial historical event. Between them, human geographers and scholars of the Left have read the Commune as anything ranging from a genuinely

popular uprising against the Haussmannisation of Paris (Lefebvre 1965) and the city's fortification against insurgent identity (Gould 1995), to a projection of class and community upon space (Harvey 2003), or to the emergence of a "social space" (Ross 1988). For Ross this "social space" is synonymous with the Lefebvrian "everyday life": a space that is anti-hierarchical in its nature, challenging established order by emphasizing the so-called horizontal (egalitarian) aspects of social imagination over the vertical<sup>29</sup>.

But one fact remains irrefutable: no matter how much the Commune has been celebrated in scholarly and political circles, this event did not reach the success of the 1789 Revolution. The Commune was not a history-changing moment in the sense that the Revolution was. The Commune has even been seen as healing the rupture that was caused by the 1789 Revolution (Furet 1995).

But why? What could the reasons be that hindered the success of the 1871 event? Scholars appear to agree over the major change that took place in the physical landscape of Paris between the two events. Lessons from the 1789 Revolution's success pushed the city's authorities into a radical urban restructuring; the city's "Haussmannisation"<sup>30</sup> project (Chapman and Chapman, 1957; Jordan 1995), initiated a few decades after the Revolution was "motivated by the desire to insulate Paris from insurrection" (Jordan 1995: 188). Newly-designed boulevards "cut a strategic swath

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29 For an overview and criticism of Ross also see Sheppard (1991).

30 Named after Baron Haussmann, chief planner of the city's transformation conducted between 1858-1870. A comprehensive study of his works is offered in Jordan (1995).



through the [city's] riotous eastern neighborhoods” and provided routes “into the habitual centre of riots” (Jordan 1995: 188). Haussmann’s project was completed in 1870, only a year before the outbreak of the Commune. His new boulevards were praised for aiding the advance of the Versailles Army to quell the unrest. A review of the spatial nature of the repression of the Commune comes from Casey Harison (2000) who focuses on Paris’ Place de Grève to show us how this “revolutionary square” (Tilly 1986) played a formidable role in the forming and then the sustaining of the city’s “contentious repertoire” throughout the 19th century. This space marked Paris from the Revolution of 1789 to the Commune of 1871 as the century’s “capital of revolution” (Tilly, *ibid*).

We can therefore identify two major turning points in our understanding of the relationship between spontaneous violent crowd action (the event) and structure. Both of these turning points occurred in Paris in the 19th century, specifically between 1789 and 1871. First, the radical restructuring of Paris that followed the events of 1789 partially came as a response by the city’s authorities against the capacity of spontaneous acts of collective violence to create longer-lasting changes in social structures; to create a threat to existing social and political order. Second, the Paris Commune of 1871 was one of the first major acts of collective violence to occur in a setting that had been designed to prevent such events as this from occurring. The Commune was in this sense the first in the series of spontaneous acts of violence faced with the “increasing sensitiveness of governments to rioting in capital cities after the French Revolution” (Hobsbawm 1965: 124).

The passage to modernity saw violent crowd action largely repressed via urban design. In addition, the dawn of the time of bourgeois democracy and industrial

production saw this type of action labelled as out-dated due to changes in social stratification; the crowd's spontaneity was seen as (a) "incompatible with the long-lasting solidarities" of the then emergent working class (Hobsbawm 1965: 124) and (b) politically marginalised, as Western bourgeois democracy was conceived to be "both an improved substitute for violence and altogether incompatible with any form of violence" (Moore 1966: 1).

In summary, we have traced riots and other forms of contentious politics in history, to see how they have turned from historical events to events that question the structure in which they occur and then, with the change to modernity, to events that are repressed by this exact structure.

Despite these deterrents, a series of riots have taken place in recent years that resemble — even if only partially — their historical predecessors (before the French Revolution) in terms of their spontaneity, the articulation of largely single-issue demands, and an apparent lack of a wider ideological framework guiding them. The following section now examines some key riots of this kind and traces how they have been encountered in the literature.

## **2.2 Contemporary contentious politics: irrational riots after the Age of Reason**

In the last four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and first one in the 21<sup>st</sup> a number of major riots have taken place in the cities of Western Europe and North America. These include: the black ghetto uprisings that swept through U.S. cities in the 1960s (Boskin

1969, Conant and Levin 1969, Connery 1968, Firestone 1971, Fogelson 1971, Gilje 1996, Herman 2005, Macchiarola 1968, Methvin 1970, Marx 1970); the Brixton riots of 1981 in London (Kettle and Hodges 1982); the Los Angeles Watts uprising of 1965, and the Los Angeles Rodney King riots of 1992 (Baldassare 1994, also discussed in Davis 1990); race riots in northern English cities including Bradford, Oldham, Leeds and Burnley in 2001 (Amin 2003, Bagguley and Hussain 2008); the French suburb uprisings of 2005 (Balibar 2007, Dikeç 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, Mestries 2007)<sup>31</sup>; and the riots of December 2008 in Greece (Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou 2011, Petropoulou 2010). There are two important common characteristics among this wave of 20th and 21st century riots. First, they appear after a long absence of events of their kind in history: London's Metropolitan Police dubbed the Brixton events of 1981 as "the first serious riots of the 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>32</sup>. Second, this wave of riots has been seen as quintessentially urban, occurring in large cities of North America and Europe. These riots have specifically concentrated in areas of cities that are impoverished or troubled—facing racial tension, in the US case, or social exclusion<sup>33</sup> in the French example.

Academic works engaging with these riots have treated them as urban riots,

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31 Also see a rare comparative analysis between the events in Britain and France in Waddington, Jobard and King (2009)

32 [http://www.met.police.uk/history/brixton\\_riots.htm](http://www.met.police.uk/history/brixton_riots.htm) (last accessed: 02.09.2011)

33 One of the most extended analyses of this concentration is included in the special issue on urban riots in the Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, edited by Connery et al, 1968

inextricably linked, that is, to the locality in which they occur. With this interpretation, the series of race riots in the 1960s in the US were more of ghetto uprisings and less of a locally articulated explosion of interracial tension and animosity in the country (Boskin 1969; Connery 1968; Moore 1966, 1973, Firestone 1971, Fogelson 1971) and France's civil unrest of 2005 was a "banlieue<sup>34</sup> uprising". In the French case, the literature provides a more coherent explanation of the structural causes that led to the formation of the banlieue-ghettos at the first place: the "postcolonial dimension that 'sets apart' populations of immigrant origin" (Balibar 2007: 48) is realised through the French state's social and urban policy of immigrant segregation (Dikeç 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c) and through the spatial demarcations of the republican integration project (Mestries 2007). Yet even where wider structural causes of riots are identified, an underlying understanding remains that riots occur *because* of their locale (and its conditions of exclusion, racism, or what else), not merely *within it*.

This tendency might be aided by an often-encountered concentration and repetition of riots within certain localities. Yet such a reading deprives us of a substantial explanation for the continued occurrence of riots in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century metropolises in Europe and North America. Riots do take place, in defiance both to our passage into modernity and to the changes it brought in the organisation of societies overall and urban structures in particular. The questions therefore emerge: what factors may have led to this continued appearance of riots to date? Why do they emerge in particular in the period post-1960 and, even more so, post-1980? And what social actors

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34 As explained in Balibar (2007: 48), the term banlieue directly translates as suburb yet in the French context it resembles the US ghetto or even, the South African township.

may have ‘benefited’ from these riots’ appearance and from their often-encountered spatial concentration?

The next section of the chapter now offers two possible readings of this continued appearance and spatial concentration of riots. First, riots are studied in the context of Urban Social Movement (USM) literature with the focus here being on the way in which riots appearing in a repeated, concentrated manner can potentially create a condition of relative autonomy from urban and national authorities alike. Riots are then juxtaposed to the Right to the City (RttC) literature, once again questioning what it is that their concentration may signal.

### **2.3 Riots, Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City**

The term Urban Social Movement (USM) was introduced by Manuel Castells in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983, original French edition in 1972) and has been used since to describe a number of extremely diverse, grassroots citizen initiatives arising in cities across the globe in the neo-liberal era<sup>35</sup>. Broadly conceived, these movements are locally-based social struggles with an ideological scope often not extending beyond their campaign’s own focus: Castells denied USMs the capacity to “be a social alternative. [They are] only the symptom of a social limit [...] They are a reaction, not

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35 The work of Castells is drawn upon and expanded in Stuart Lowe’s *Urban social movements: the city after Castells* (1986) and by Chris Pickvance (1974).

an alternative” (Castells 1983: 327). This apparent lack of a strong overarching ideological scope has in turn offered a welcoming terrain for political actors who are unable to perform significantly at the national or international level: for example, in the United States under Reagan, or the UK under Thatcher and elsewhere during the neo-liberal prominence. When seen in this light, urban social movements may have then emerged in reaction to the neo-liberal advance across most national (and certainly an international) level during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This reading, however, sharply contradicts a particular right that many of these movements claim to struggle for: the Right to the City (RttC). The term, introduced by Henri Lefebvre (1996), did not comprise such “a suggestion for reform” (Purcell 2002: 101) in its original conception, nor did it “envision a fragmented, tactical, or piecemeal resistance. [Lefebvre’s] idea is instead a call for a radical restructuring of social, political, and economic relations, both in the city and beyond” (ibid 2002: 101). “The right to the city” adds David Harvey (2003: 939) “is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire” (ibid 2003: 939). More utopian than pragmatic in nature, Lefebvre’s RttC should nevertheless “...modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services” (Lefebvre 1996: 34).

Thanks to this more pragmatic reading, a group that is, for example, campaigning for better access to municipal services could claim to be struggling for the RttC. This, however, would be a partial understanding of the Lefebvrian concept.

Lefebvre identified a second aspect to the RttC, the right to appropriation. This comprised “the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy, and use urban space, and so this notion has been the primary focus of those who advocate the right of people

to be physically present in the space of the city” (Purcell 2002: 940). Unlike the first aspect of the RttC (access to municipal/ urban services) this second aspect (physical presence/ access to certain spaces of the city) does not necessarily derive from negotiation with urban authorities; such presence can be safeguarded by a group’s decision to actively occupy a certain space, or by its refusal to leave when asked to do so.

Another Lefebvrian concept is now useful in order for us to illustrate better the difference between these two aspects of the RttC: the concept of autogestion. The term, usually left untranslated from the French, has been given the meaning of “grassroots control” (Brenner and Elden in Lefebvre 2009: 14). Lefebvre himself defined autogestion as

knowledge of and control (at the limit) by a group — a company, a locality, an area or region — over the conditions governing its existence and its survival through change. Through autogestion, these social groups are able to influence their own reality. The right to autogestion, like the right to representation, can be proclaimed as a citizen’s right (1996: 252-3).

The RttC can therefore be read as a territorial expression of the right to autogestion. Lefebvre himself had suggested the right of autogestion is “becoming increasingly concerned with issues over the organization of space — urban campaigns and so on” (Lefebvre in Elden 2004: 227).

Existing USM literature covers to a great extent struggles that relate to the first aspect of the RttC, which concerns access to municipal and urban services. The following paragraphs focus on USM literature in relation to the second, under-explored, aspect of the RttC — the aspect concerning groups’ rights to physical presence and

access to certain spaces of the city. This aspect may be the most relevant to our question on not only the occurrence, but also the spatial concentration of contemporary riots.

In *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) Manuel Castells identified two different forms of protest “developing at the same time and in the same places: the ghetto riots [of 1960s USA] and community-based struggles” (Castells 1983: 49). In his work on USMs he therefore read the outburst of violence in the U.S. cities’ ghettos as another type of an urban social movement; a form of political protest across cities that came “from a common matrix of contradictions underlying the fabric of the inner cities, defined as the spatial manifestation of ethnic segregation, urban poverty, economic discrimination and political alienation” (1983: 49).

Identifying common structural causes in riots that were occurring across the country allowed Castells to position himself against those who read the events of the time as mostly “issueless riots” (Garry Marx 1970: 22), where “a generalized protest belief [was] absent” and which therefore only had “slight implications for social movements and change” (ibid). For Castells, the common structural causes underlying all these riots was a single connecting thread among many. A common slogan was spreading across the rioters of the time: “black power” (Castells 1983: 54). The slogan made no demand from the authorities and yet it was overly political, as Castells argues, in that it could allow these communities to claim a degree of autonomy — even if this was temporarily and spatially restricted:

‘black power’ was not just a slogan. It was the practice of an excluded community that transformed the walls of its prison into the boundaries of its free city. On the basis of this self-reliance, of the newly conquered autonomy, it imposed demands, improved its conditions, and negotiated its entry into the institutional system.



(Castells 1983: 54)

Castells therefore read the series of U.S. urban riots as USMs because they claimed the right for their participants to reuse certain spaces (the black ghettos) for their own purpose; to turn them into an “organizational basis of the revolt” (Castells 1983: 53) or else, into a space that the black community could emerge from as a collective actor, similar to “the concentration of industrial workers in the large factories being indispensable to the formation of a labour movement” (Castells 1983: 53). Through the act of rioting, argues Castells, the ghetto was partially inverted: from a space of exclusion it temporarily became a “space of freedom” (ibid.1983: 53).

If the outbreak of a riot can provide a place (a ghetto or otherwise geographically restricted area) with a limited degree of autonomy from central authorities, another question emerges in turn: could the often-encountered, repeated occurrence of riots in specific places be a sign of autonomy of those places from their authorities? The question is under-explored in much of the existing bibliography, which focuses on the local causes that lead to riot occurrences, rather than the structural ones or on the impact that these riots can have upon the structure.

Certain places have experienced repeated occurrences of riots. This simple fact alone can suggest that some of these riots may help produce the social and political conditions necessary, at the very least, for their — concentrated — recurrence: from Los Angeles’ South Central, to the suburbs of Paris (2001, 2005) and vividly in this project’s case study, to Exarcheia in Athens (including but not limited to 1973, 1985, and 2008). What does this repetition tell us about this particular category of “contentious politics”, to use Tilly’s term (1986)? If we were to place such riots within the USM tradition, then

we might expect (as argued earlier, according to Castells) a certain degree of autonomy to emerge for the riot actors and the spaces in which they act. Should this be true — and Castells argues it is — what could be the response, past and present, of urban and national authorities to riots and their disruptive potential? It would be sensible for authorities to recognise the occurrence of riots and their concentration as a potential threat, but could they be regarded in a different way? Could there be a form of a ‘riot management’ narrative, according to which order is maintained precisely by the spatial concentration of mostly unavoidable events?

## **2.4 Riot concentration, crowd control and urban design**

We now take another look at Paris, the city that shaped our understanding of the role of cities both in aiding social dissent and enforcing social control. The city’s radical transformation under Baron Haussmann (1852-1870) was a seminal project, decisive in the repression of the Paris Commune of 1871. In addition, the Haussmannisation of Paris marked the dawn of the era in which urban design holds centre-stage in (i) preventing, (ii) repressing, or at the very least (iii) geographically containing social unrest. In this way, urban design became a technique of governmentality, which includes “the techniques and strategies by which a society is rendered governable” (Jones 2007: 174). It became possible to render a society’s population governable in this way, argues Michel Foucault (2007), thanks to “policing” — which he uses in its broader meaning to include all regulation aspects of “human coexistence, and of dense coexistence [in particular]” (ibid. 2007: 335). Mitchell Dean reads this policing specifically in terms of the government (management) of poverty (Dean 2010: 101-102)

while Colin Gordon (1991) traces this model of policing and government back to the roots of Christianity in Western culture; it is a “pastoral model” (Gordon 1991: 9) that we see at play today. It was in this broader sense that Foucault read policing as being inextricably connected to the urban condition, which is where dense human coexistence exists at its peak. Under the capitalist framework, policing became all the more crucial, charged as it was with safeguarding “the circulation of goods” (ibid. 2007: 335). Different aspects of urban ‘policing’ therefore became core techniques of governmentality: urban planning, urban policy concerned with population movement and crowd control in cities overall. In Haussmann’s plan for Paris, wide boulevards cut through some of the city’s predominantly working-class neighbourhoods, which were seen as areas in which unrest was more likely to erupt. Haussmann’s aim, claims Jordan (1995) was double-folded: not only would these areas become segmented (therefore losing some of their potential rioting capacity) but also the new wide boulevards cutting through them could facilitate the swift deployment of government troops should riots actually take place. In this sense, Haussmann aimed both at the prevention of unrest and its repression should such unrest materialise nevertheless.

The course of events in 1871 showed that Haussmann’s plan had mostly failed in terms of preventing unrest (the Commune did happen), yet it was largely successful in its repression: the swift restraint and eventual repression of the Commune was largely attributed to Haussmann’s city plan (Jordan, 1995).

What urban policing techniques have been used in facilitating such methods of governmentality after Haussmann? An important motive for rebuilding cities since the mid-19th century, argues Hall (1988), has been “removing the environments which encouraged political disorder” (Hall 1988: 28). Such political disorder (riots included)

has continued to appear in cities despite their supposedly riot-proof design and also despite the social deterrents as discussed earlier. In face of this continuation a shift has occurred, it is argued, from urban design aimed at eliminating disorder to a design aimed at dealing with (that is, containing and swiftly repressing) what Upton and Upton (2007) have briefly discussed as “riot clustering”.

Between the examples of concentrated, repeated riots in cities of Western Europe and the US discussed in the previous section, the French model most definitely stands out. The largely unique urban policy of the French post-colonial state linked welfare provision to residential location: recipients of such welfare were forced into the suburb-ghettos (*banlieues*) of major cities (as explained in detail in Dikeç 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). In this way, a potentially diffused condition of social tension — namely, the social integration of ex-colonial population into France — was spatially concentrated and isolated from the rest of the urban entity. For this reason, a high stake for French authorities during the uprising of 2005 was for the unrest not to spread out of the *banlieues*; in particular, for the troubles not to reach the Parisian city centre. One of the largest police operations of that year took place not in the troubled *banlieues* but in central Paris, after a rumour was spread that youngsters were organising a night of unrest in the heart of the French capital<sup>36</sup>.

In the U.S. case, on the other hand, ethnic ghettos were created by capital-led

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36 “Public Meetings Banned in Paris”, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200511/s1505112.htm>  
(last accessed: 17.11.2011)

forces shaping cities overall. The rapid industrialisation of US cities, the arrival of labour forces from outside urban areas and from outside the country as a whole quickly saw the formation of “sections of the inner city exclusively occupied by one ethnic minority” (Ward 1982: 258). Authorities, both “federal government and local” (Wacquant 2008: 80) were “doubly responsible for the extraordinary social and spatial concentration of the black subproletariat in the fin-de-siècle hyperghetto” (2008: 80). Actively supporting the “rigid segmentation” of the housing market, argues Wacquant, the authorities perpetuated it “through their housing policies” (2008: 81). In both cases, what the authorities focused on was essentially the regulation of the ghetto: by containing it in the French cities’ suburbs or by ensuring that it appears in what are already deprived areas, to minimise economic loss, in the US case.

There has therefore been an evident shift in urban policy making and praxis, from the previous attempts to eliminate spaces that hold potential for social unrest (the legacy of Paris’ Haussmannisation) to a focus on the concentration of riots in specific places and attempts to manage this concentration, as illustrated in the examples of contemporary France and the 1960s US. This is not to argue that authority-led attempts to radically transform spaces of potential unrest do not exist at the present time; naturally they do, even if included in other projects, including that of gentrification — the seemingly positive regeneration of an area, which is what happened in the case study of the present research: the Athens neighbourhood of Exarcheia has experienced two major urban regeneration plans since the mid-1980s (in 1984-5 and in 2004), both of which explicitly aimed at eliminating the area’s conceived “riotous character” (Tsagaratos 2001 and in-person interview, Chapters 5 and 6). Exarcheia is therefore an ideal case study both in order to examine how repeated riot occurrences can aid (or even

become) an urban social movement but also, a case study for authority-led attempts to prevent the occurrence of riots, not just to contain them in space.

## **2.5 Riots in the Greek context**

So far, we have seen how urban riots remained an important form of social action post-modernity. As the present research concerns itself with the study of riots in Athens, a Mediterranean capital, it is now also imperative to look at the city's wider socio-political context. As Leontidou (1990) has shown, post-WWII urban development in Athens and other Greek cities was largely spontaneous, with the "golden years" of such spontaneity stretching from 1950 until the start of the military Junta in 1967 (Leontidou 1990: 127-171). Whether in terms of their overall planning (or lack thereof), their growth ("Athens grew haphazardly" Leontidou 1990: 137), or their neglect in terms of mass housing provision (Leontidou 1990: 139), Greek cities — and Athens in particular — have grown largely without centralised, state intervention.

Naturally, such lack of formal guidance and provision for urban growth has significantly contributed to a 'duality' in much of Athens' everyday reality. Rather than falling into a linear historical fallacy that would conceive Athens' reality as somewhat pre capitalist, it has been suggested that this should be conceived as informal instead: the city's owner-built sector, for example, formed "the material basis of [its] spontaneous urban development" (Leontidou 1990: 141).

It is largely beyond the scope of the present thesis to enter into the discussion concerning the extent to which riots take place over policing (as was evidently the case with the events following the killing of Kaltezas in 1985 and Grigoropoulos in 2008) or

whether they are so-called ‘police [instigated] riots’. The question, of course, is crucial, but it is at this point assumed that many, if not most, instances of rioting in Athens include elements of both. In particular, riots that take place immediately during, or immediately following large, otherwise peaceful demonstrations in central Athens are most likely to include both participants disgruntled with the police or the peaceful nature of the demonstration and, potentially, police agent provocateurs that act in the interest of the police themselves: manoeuvring demonstrations into particular routes, or helping instigate a riot at a particular time, paving the way for an official police intervention in response.

Herein lies the difficulty of this question. How can one judge with any absolute certainty whether rioters on the streets are genuinely disgruntled individuals, or individuals directly acting on behalf of the police? It is simply too difficult to know who is who:

Some of them are angry young anarchists, some hooligans, while in some other cases there have been allegations and photos of provocateurs who infiltrate peaceful demonstrations to scare off citizens and to give pretexts to the riot police to unleash violence against the crowds of protesters

(Leontidou 2012: 301).

However, and this is an important distinction, while the composition of rioters at large-scale demonstrations-turned-violent is unclear, largely due to these demonstrations’ size, the same is not true as regards the small-scale but nevertheless high-frequency riots such as many of those that took place in Exarcheia during the research period. There appears to be a general consensus (informally, at least) that such acts are the work of non-police actors: whether these are Leontidou’s angry young

anarchists, also encountered at demonstrations, or hooligans, is still of course an open question.

Why is the distinction important? If these lower-intensity, Exarcheia-specific riots are neither police-instigated nor necessarily coming in response to police action, a schema that would explain their emergence and their persistence is still absent and much required.

One possibility of course, would still be to use hermeneutically the concept of spontaneity to explain these smaller acts of rioting. As explained by Leontidou (2012: 299), Antonio Gramsci originally used the term spontaneity in the context of social movements to distinguish those movements from “conscious leadership” (Gramsci 1971: 196, quoted in Leontidou 2012: 299). Importantly, Gramsci suggests that there is no such thing as “pure” spontaneity and that social movements that appear to be spontaneous are “social movements where leadership cannot be tracked” (Dalakoglou 2012: 535).

Leontidou had previously used the notion of spontaneity hermeneutically, to help us understand the uniquely informal development of Mediterranean cities throughout a significant part of the 20th century. Later, she once again used the same spontaneity schema, this time in order to explain the emergence of the “movement of the piazzas” (Leontidou 2012) in Athens and, by extension, in other cities across the Mediterranean. In this endeavour she was subsequently joined by Dalakoglou (2012) who argued that the events of December 2008 were also part of recent “spontaneous collective actions [that] have evolved into more concrete socio-material anti-systemic infrastructures” (2012: 536).

Might this be an adequate explanation? Could we indeed use the notion of



spontaneity to understand the repeated occurrence of the smaller-scale riots concentrated in Exarcheia? At this point it is appropriate to give a brief overview of academic responses to the larger-scale events of December 2008 in order to discuss how these are different from the ‘everyday riots’ of Exarcheia. The December events opened up a dialogue in Greek academia (both inside the country’s confines and across its Diaspora) that sought to understand the origins, the nature, and the future prospects of the events, variously termed an “urban social movement” (Petropoulou 2010), a “youth movement” (Sotiris 2010), a “rebellion” (Mentinis 2010), a “revolt” (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011), an “eruption” (Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou) or an “explosion” (Bratsis 2010).

The choice of terms is important, showing that there are some significant differences in the ways in which the events were conceptualised among academics, and beyond. Perhaps with the exception of Petropoulou (2010), a broad consensus appears that the December events signalled a break with their recent social and political past (hence the terms “ruptures” and “eruption”, for example) as well as an extreme discontent with their present (hence the terms “rebellion”, “revolt”, or “explosion”).

It might be possible to understand the discourse on spontaneity, as presented earlier in this chapter, to be part of, or even an extension of, this later body of work. Conceiving such events as spontaneous might very well imply on the one hand that they do not contain any formal (or at least, visible) structure — that they are counter-hegemonic, as Gramsci terms it. On the other hand, spontaneity here may also imply that such events lie both outside and against their existing socio-political structure: take the example of Bratsis, who argues that “the political ‘explosion’ that took place in Greece [in December 2008] was a symptom of a systemic and deep-rooted legitimisation

crisis of the Greek state” (Bratsis 2010: 192). And later, where he argues that the Greek state has dealt with its “periodic crises of legitimacy” with the use of “key mechanisms [...] which both functioned to produce legitimacy and to bridge the gap between centralized state power and the agency of the popular classes”. (Bratsis 2010: 192)

The larger-scale riotous events such as December 2008 can be read as both spontaneous and rupturing. And further: they can be conceived, as by Bratsis above, as an unfortunate result of what happens when the Greek state exhausts its legitimacy-producing mechanisms. But is it appropriate to argue the same for the ‘everyday riots’<sup>37</sup> of Exarcheia? There are two essential problems with this conceptualisation.

(a) As will be argued extensively in Chapters 5 and 6, the repeated occurrence of these smaller-scale riots does not necessarily create ruptures — neither in Exarcheia, nor in the wider urban or national context. If anything, these riots can be understood as part of the neighbourhood’s daily rhythm instead (as argued later, particularly in Chapter 6). In other words, the concentrated occurrence of these riots might very well be ensuring the formation of an equilibrium between serenity and tension, an equilibrium that ensures the perpetuation of these riots.

(b) Second, and by extension: this repeated and spatially concentrated occurrence of riots must therefore lead to questioning, partially at least, their spontaneity: not

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37 The term ‘everyday riots’ is used here to denote small-scale, clandestine acts of collective violence as occurred in Exarcheia (and documented in chapters 5,6 and 7) and to distinguish these from larger scale revolts — including those in 1973, 1985 and 2008.

questioning of the identity or the intentions of those participating in the riots (not, in other words, whether they are disgruntled youth or police provocateurs) but rather, of their capacity to create fissures or ruptures to the social and political terrain in which they take place. Indeed, as is to be argued again later in the thesis (Chapter 6), the act of rioting *per se* can, under certain circumstances, be very well conceived as both spontaneous and as simultaneously playing a key role in maintaining the social order of the structure in which it takes place. By extension, it might be then entirely possible to argue the same for the wider political context in which these everyday riots take place, i.e. that their repeated yet concentrated occurrence signals a role in maintaining this wider political structure. Riots may be helping to maintain wider political order. Contradictory? Not necessarily so, but most definitely a hypothesis that requires some explanation.

Through the research on Exarcheia, the thesis has built upon existing debates on spontaneity (as discussed in this section) and on the relationship of this to grassroots social action — riots in particular. Through the discussion of the ‘spatial contract’ in Chapter 7 and through the overall concluding remarks in Chapter 8, the thesis attempts to highlight the need for us distinguish between different types and qualities of riots. As a whole, the thesis has been conceived and set up in a way that prioritises the question of structure versus the question of individual agency. This distinction is not meant to signal that individual action is less important, but that we always need to comprehend individual action both in its wider social and political context and in a historical depth. In addition, as argued in the following chapter (Chapter 3), this largely structural approach is most relevant in a research on urban riots.

Rather than placing myself in a moralising position, judging the good or the evil

nature of the individuals participating in a riot, I have attempted to position their actions as a whole — their frequency, their repetition, their patterns of occurrence overall — within the social and political context of their time. In the long-standing debate of agency versus structure, spontaneous collective actions (to which the current thesis places riots) would either not fit at all (having, for some, no agency) — or, at best, would be seen as spontaneous acts that are incapable or unwilling to alter in any way the socio-political structure in which they take place. This, even if a capacity has been recognised for a riot to develop into a more concrete infrastructure (Dalakoglou, 2012). And yet, the “everyday riots” of Exarcheia might very well hold a key position, not just in the everyday reality of the neighbourhood but in the social equilibrium of Athens and the political equilibrium of Greece overall. In contrast to the rupturing events of 2008, which signalled a breakdown of the Greek state’s mechanisms of legitimacy (Bratsis 2010), the ‘everyday riots’ of Exarcheia were merely too persistent and concentrated to signal a rupture; instead, these events — their peculiarly concentrated pattern, their astonishing persistence through time — might possibly be seen as a latent mechanism of social order maintenance, as a mechanism for the perpetuation of the legitimacy of the Greek state precisely through its absence from, and tolerance of, these repeated riots against its symbols of authority.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, explains the methodological considerations of the research on the ground as shaped by the concerns above. Not a question of agency, but a question of structure has meant that the issue of geographical scale had to be addressed time and time again. The chapter also explains in further detail what the wider stance of the thesis is in relationship to the structure/agency question when it comes to ‘who acts’ in urban riots. Not just an ethical question (even although this is important, and

therefore extensively addressed in the second part of Chapter 3); putting the seemingly insignificant ‘everyday riots’ in a context of social and political structure can help us understand them between the spontaneous/non-spontaneous dichotomy, as part of the wider socio-political context in which they belong.

In this chapter I have woven through a body of work that cuts through disciplines (including History, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Philosophy and Geography) and through time: throughout this endeavour, my primary aim has been to comprehend better our ever-shifting understanding not simply of how riots occur, but also the different roles they potentially hold in their respective social and political context. In furtherance of that aim, I tracked the role of riots pre-modernity, conceived as a mediating force between rulers and ruled (Section 2.1), and showed how this understanding came to a halt on the eve of the French Revolution. With the passage into modernity, riots were deemed incompatible with the new socio-political reality. What is more, as I argue, this passage into modernity also included a conceptualisation of ‘historical events’ as entirely outside their structure (the event-“miracle”, as given by Badiou), outside to such an extent that they become impossible. Along with our linear (progress-centred) conceptualisation of history came the negation of the capacity of singular events to create ruptures within it, let alone change its course.

At the same time, while riots, revolts and revolutions were fought at the ideological (the discursive) level, a very similar operation safeguarding against them was taking place on the ground, in very material terms: the fortification of Paris ahead of, and against the 1871 Commune might very well comprise one of the earliest successful historical examples of dealing with urban unrest purely by planning means.

Entering our present time, therefore, riots and other forms of violently

contentious politics found themselves outside the ideological apparatus (conceived as irrational, unable to claim a place in a linear understanding of history) and outside the material one as well, with the design of cities aimed very specifically at preventing, or at the very least halting their emergence.

Against all these odds, riots continued apace. In Section 2.3 I show that, even though such recent occurrences are plenty, on the whole their concurrent literature denies them historical agency; riots are deemed anything between an anomaly and an anachronism. The two subsequent sections of the chapter (2.4, 2.5) offer two alternative conceptualisations of contemporary movements (the potential, that is, to include them either in the USM literature, or to that relating to the Right to the City). Section 2.6 places riots in the context of contemporary forms of urban design and control. Now looking specifically at the spatial concentration of riots (not just their overall occurrence) this part suggests the possibility of this concentration signalling a form of a space-based governmentality; a spatial management and at the same time, articulation of dissent. Building on and further expanding from this positioning of riots in the governmentality literature, the final section of the chapter (2.7) has looked specifically at the occurrence of ‘everyday’ (i.e. very frequent, but mostly low-intensity) riots that are spatially concentrated. It brings them into the existing body of work on spontaneity, raising the question of the extent to which their occurrence is, indeed, spontaneous.

### **3. Methodology: questions of research methods and ethics**

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology that has guided the present study (3.1) and adduces the research methods deployed, as a result, for each of the research questions (3.2). The chapter outlines the obstacles arisen during fieldwork and the ethical considerations prior to and during the time that it was conducted (3.3). Stemming from these considerations, the chapter then proceeds to discuss questions of positionality and reflexivity that arose throughout the present study (3.5) and concludes by offering some potentially generalisable insights into the ethics and moral questions in researching urban riots (3.6).

#### **3.1 Discussing methodology**

The present study has been conducted in support of the idea of human geography shifting away from strictly empiricist and positivist research, toward studies that are more “interpretative and in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973: 5). Supporting that idea would place this study in the hermeneutic tradition — this, in the sense that its primary objective has been to offer such an interpretation of meaning: to study riot concentration in Exarcheia in itself was not enough, nor would it be enough to provide a more positivist, statistically-driven research of the concentration of contention there. The underlying, driving question behind the study as a whole has been to understand what this concentration means; to try and interpret it.

The human geographical discipline in itself plays host to various, often conflicting methodological traditions — and my need to combine empiricist information with a more distant, interpretative angle has meant that as a result the methodological approach of the study has also combined elements from the ethnographic tradition (Geertz 1973) and from interpretative human geography, as outlined for example in Hoggart, Lees and Davies (2002: 22). This interpretative (hermeneutic) tradition has been criticised for paying “scant attention to action” (Hoggart, Lees and Davies 2002: 33), as accounts belonging to it have arguably “downgraded the importance of practical activity” (Thrift 1996: 33). Acknowledging and taking this criticism into account, the study has also sought to provide an analysis of Exarcheia based on everyday practices that occur in the area; it has sought, in other words, to identify the “unreflective, lived, culturally specific (...) reactions to events which cannot be explained by causal theories (accurate representations) or by hermeneutical means (interpretations)” (Thrift 2000: 274).

How does this attempted combination of methodological traditions translate in the specific research methods that were employed for the study? On the one hand, the study has used research methods directly employed from human geography’s interpretative tradition; methods that include, for example, ethnography specifically for human geography (Herbert 2000) — a research method that despite its relatively long-standing presence in the discipline (e.g. Smith 1984), has nevertheless failed to register the interest it would seemingly deserve from human geographers, given how it is such a “uniquely useful method for uncovering the processes and meanings that undergird sociospatial life” (Herbert 2000: 550). On the one hand then, ethnography can help modern geography to correct, as Herbert points out, what Gregory (1989) claimed to be



“one of [its] greatest betrayals” (1989: 358, quoted in Herbert 2000: 550) — that is, “its devaluation of the specificities of place and of people” (ibid: 358). But on the other hand, the explicit aim of this study had been to move beyond specificity; to utilise its empirical results in order to reach some broader — and, at the same time, generalisable — conclusions. On the other hand then, research methods employed in the tradition of interpretative human geography have also been utilised here. These stem once again from the neighbourhood’s lived experience; aiming to understand the everyday experience of people in the neighbourhood and how this condition might in turn interrelate with the moments of riot and other discontent that might be centred there.

Each of these methodological approaches comes with certain drawbacks, limitations and — most importantly and particularly in the case of the ethnographic research — some important ethical considerations. To an extent, the combination of different approaches has helped to account for the weaknesses of each approach alone. In order to fully comprehend how these different approaches, different distances from the research subject have been applied in the case of Exarcheia, it would be useful to elaborate on the actual research methods deployed for the study — and it is to these research methods that we now turn.

### **3.2 Research methods and techniques: an overview**

This section presents the methods that were utilised for the different parts of the research, directly corresponding to each of the study’s sub-research questions as outlined in chapter 1 (“central and sub-research questions”).

### 3.2.1 The media discourse of Exarcheia

This section presents the research methods deployed for the first sub-research question of the study, namely:

*“How are riots and contention in Exarcheia conceived in popular (media) discourse and what are the likely effects of this conception upon the reality of the neighbourhood in return?”*

Here, the original aim of the research exercise was to establish an understanding of the representation of the area in the public sphere, with particular focus on its portrayal in relation to riots and other forms of contentious politics. The research exercise focused on the content and discourse analysis of media (national newspaper articles) that related to Exarcheia — and three key historical periods (1981-1985, 2001-2005 and 2008) in particular.

The process of analysing the Exarcheia media discourse included identifying, examining and interpreting a selection of articles in three Greek national circulation newspapers, Eleytherotypia [Ελευθεροτυπία, Press Freedom], To Vima [Το Βήμα, The Tribune] and Ta Nea [Τα Νέα, The News]<sup>38</sup>. The three newspapers were chosen with the aim of covering as wide a political spectrum as possible, since they are considered to

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38 <http://www.enet.gr>, <http://www.tovima.gr> and <http://www.tanea.gr/> respectively. Articles from approximately the year 2000 onward were directly accessed from each of these newspapers' on-line archives. For older articles from the three newspapers (required for the events of 1984/85), I have also referred to the Greek Parliament's Library, which holds an extended newspaper archive.

have a moderate Left, moderate Right and centrist political inclination respectively. The archives of each of the newspapers were searched for their coverage of Exarcheia during the periods 1981-1985 (period A), 2001-2005 (period B) and in the immediate aftermath of the events of 2008 (period C). The three time periods were chosen in order to include the build-up (for A, B and C) and the aftermath (for A and B) of events that placed Exarcheia in the national spotlight. It was envisaged the three allowed space for comparison, given that period A saw mounting social tension that included instances of rioting, while period B also saw mounting tension in the neighbourhood that nevertheless did not escalate in a similar way.

For both the historical periods under research, I conducted a content analysis of the newspaper data available (literally identifying how often Exarcheia was mentioned in each medium), which was then followed by a textual analysis; identifying, that is, the context in which the area had been mentioned, the connotations assigned: its overall representation. Following the advice on content (textual) analysis offered by Hoggart, Lees and Davis (2002: 159-160) I have focused on the language that was used in these articles; their authorship/readership relationship and their intertextuality, to the extent that this existed in each individual case.

Finally, I conducted a discourse analysis of articles from this article pool. For Tonkiss (1998) discourse analysis “involves a perspective on language which sees this not as reflecting reality in a transparent or straightforward way, but as constructing and organizing that social reality for us” (1998: 246). Some of the elements that were sought in undertaking this discourse analysis are borrowed from Potter and Wetherell (1994) and have included variation as a lever; rhetorical organization and seeking accountability of claims/actions.

The detailed process under which the media discourses of Exarcheia were researched and unveiled is explained in full detail in section 4.2 of Chapter 4 (Research Methods).

But why would these discursive themes matter? For an answer, one only has to look at the first of these themes, that is, the theme of violence: This theme saw a rapid upsurge both in the lead-up to, and the aftermath of mass violent events such as riots — this, surely, is largely to be expected. As explained by Low (2001) this “discourse on fear of violence” is expected to “legitimate and rationalize class-based exclusion strategies and residential segregation” (ibid 2001: 45). This would in turn lead to the discourse calling for more policing, in the sense portrayed in the third discursive theme, that of the policing of the area as a form of cleaning/sanitation.

In other words: it is plausible for discourse to act consecutively as an instigator, a catalyst and then a harbinger for the materialisation of social events that may shape in return the entire structure, the material reality of a place.

This notion — namely that the discourse on and of a given place can potentially shape its structure and lived experience — is not new. Lynch (1960) explained how the accumulated perceptions of a city by planners can have this precise effect, eventually shaping the structure of the city to fit their perception. Yet analyses of such perceptions and perspectives on cities tend to focus on the experts or the power-holders: there is a tendency to assume that only the discourse of certain groups with access to power (growth coalitions, entrepreneurial communities and so on) will be potentially constitutive of a place. This follows on the heels of the critique of discourse as constitutive, perhaps most famously argued in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Yet the discourse analysis that I conducted for my research purposefully avoided focusing

on the discourse of the power-holders within, or those with an immediate interest in Exarcheia — such as city planners or local politicians. The national media discourse was chosen as the most appropriate, not least because it had the potential to show how such discourses potentially act on two different levels. On the one hand, it has a tangible effect on the ground. Indeed, I examined the discourses on Exarcheia and the ways in which these were or not related to activities that were taking place on the ground at the time — including, for example, acts of violence, its policing and the attempted plans for the neighbourhood's gentrification.

But there is another level on which this discourse may act. Choosing to focus on the discourse on the neighbourhood from a distance has also offered me the opportunity to see how this tilting of perspective may in fact essentially allow for a reading of certain social processes inside Exarcheia, as an apt metaphor for much wider social and political transitions: looking at the neighbourhood, with all its contradictions, its struggles, the attempts at its gentrification, the outbursts of violence in response — these can all be read as a way of describing changes that were often-times occurring at the national level instead. It may be therefore possible to read Exarcheia as a type of discourse in itself: one only has to think, here, of the abrupt introduction of the discourse on Exarcheia as a violent neighbourhood in the time-frame of a few years, in the early eighties, as mentioned earlier on. What happened during those few years? Did Exarcheia truly turn from picturesque neighbourhood to an “anomie ghetto”, over such a short course of time? There is no substantial evidence to prove the rise of crime or anti-social behaviour to any extent able to then justify this turn-around of public discourse on Exarcheia. And so I would like to offer another explanation of this turn-around, one that is partially based on the reading that the urban theorist Robert

Bauregard offers for the discourse of “urban decline” that seems to have dominated the representation of industrial and post-industrial U.S. cities for some time. In his 1993 book, *Voices of Decline*, Robert Bauregard provides an excellent example of discourse analysis — analysis that as pointed out by Loretta Lees (2004) is outstandingly lacking within urban studies. The few notable exceptions (including Amin et al 2000; McCann 2004; Mitchell 1996 and Rutheiser 1996) largely come to prove the rule. In filling this gap through his work in *Voices of Decline*, Bauregard shows how this “urban decline” has been used as a euphemism that makes it possible to bring back, through the back door, the issues of race, of class and of national decline in the United States’ national agenda. The suburb versus the urban core discussion, for example, is also one that represents the hidden discussion of race and class. In other words, the discourse on “urban decline” conveniently acts as a metaphor — or better even, as a euphemism to allow for the reporting of developments that may no longer be reported as easily or explicitly as they would have been in the past. In this way, the white middle class flight to the suburbs is presented through what is an ostensibly more “neutral” reading of a generic population shift away from the core, the inner United States cities: it is not black populations then moving to the urban core, it is this urban core being in “decline” — and so on.

There are a number of useful parallels that can be drawn to the Exarcheia case, albeit with some limitations. The first and most important limitation is that Greece, as a country that never quite fully went through the process of US or Western European levels of industrialisation, never developed as strong a class stratification as correlates with that process. In addition, prior to welcoming its first wave of mass migration (in the early 1990s, primarily from Albania and other neighbouring countries), Greece was

also — relatively speaking, of course — one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in Western Europe. But as it was pointed out earlier on, what the country has aplenty is a rich past of political conflict: to the present day, memories of the civil war and the dictatorship are still very much vivid and alive. This history of political tension and division could not be tucked away overnight once the discourse of progress and Europeanization appeared in the horizon, in the early eighties. It is therefore possible, and this is the hypothesis that is worked through in the chapter on the Exarcheia discourse (chapter 4), that the mainstream Exarcheia discourse (that is, the discourse largely focused on crime, riot and disorder) may have also been used as another euphemism; a smoke-screen for the political divisions that had still been running rife on the ground: political divisions that had to be otherwise mostly expelled from this professional discourse, incompatible as they were to the country's post-dictatorial, European Union-friendly image of national unity, development and prosperity.

### **3.2.2 Ethnographic tools**

This section presents the research methods deployed for the second sub-research question of the study, namely:

2. What is the everyday reality of living in a 'riot neighbourhood' and what is the relationship between this everyday reality and contentious events that occur there?

Upon my arrival to the field in Exarcheia, I conducted a double, parallel exercise of trying to acclimatise myself in a neighbourhood that, for a large part, I knew already. This is an inherent contradiction that I discuss in detail in chapter 4 — in short,

however, the exercise was near-inverse to the more conventional ethnographic method of participant observation; I was trying to acclimatise myself to the neighbourhood and to experience the feeling of “being there”, while at the same time consciously trying to keep aside those elements of my prior knowledge that could potentially skew my pool of informants and my access to the field.

Already before arriving to the field, I had concluded on a number of research methods that I would be using once there — including (i) in-depth interviewing of initial (and potentially, key) informants and (ii) focus groups with relevant social actors in Exarcheia.

My initial list for potential informants included the following:

- i. Past and present government officials from the ministries of Public Order and Citizen Protection (responsible for the Police) and Public Works (Urban Planning).
- ii. Past and present ministerial advisers. It was anticipated that topic-specific experts and advisers would be more accessible than government officials and more knowledgeable on the specific aspects of regeneration and policing in Exarcheia.
- iii. Urban planners responsible for the two state-led urban regeneration schemes for Exarcheia that specifically aimed at the elimination of urban disturbances and riots in the area (the “Virtue Operations” of 1984-1986 and the regeneration scheme prior to the Athens Olympics of 2004).
- iv. Researchers from the Greek Police’s Academic Research Unit, to establish



further the nature and aims of policing in the area and possible changes throughout the examined period.

- v. Past and present members of administration of both the Athens Polytechnic and Athens University and other members of their academic communities (staff and students). In particular, an enquiry into the role of the universities' presence (and their eventual relocation) in riot concentration in Exarcheia. Their role is potentially particularly important, not least due to Law 1268/1982<sup>39</sup>.

For the in-depth interviews, I followed the standard ethnographic practice of recording all interviews in notebooks in the field and later in second notebooks at home; I then elaborated on the information received and the dialogues as I remembered them. The transcription in the second notebooks took place either on the same night or in the following morning, which allowed me to have fresh the memory of the narratives. Eventually, from July 2010 on I started audio recording semi-structured interviews with my key informants, after developing the intimacy and ease necessary; I kept the original audio files for the sake of empirical evidence and in order to triangulate the information that I had already recorded in my fieldwork notebooks.

I intentionally left these interviews for later on in the fieldwork, both in order to avoid alienating my informants (since building familiarity is necessary in order to use

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39 AAL, the so-called “academic asylum law”. As explained in further detail in chapter 1, the law largely prevented, in the name of academic freedom, police and army from entering academic campuses. The law remained into effect until the summer of 2010.

sound recording equipment) and because this allowed me to focus the interviews around themes which by then I knew were relevant both to my informants and to my own study (interview techniques drawn from Dewalt and Dewalt 2002). In conducting these interviews I placed particular focus on existing, well-known problems as identified by previous researchers — including the gap between lived experience and communication (Giddens 1987) as well as the social position of the interviewees and its impact on the information that I was gathering (Barley 1983).

During this first period of fieldwork (May 2010 – late summer 2010) I also focused on building relationships of trust with key informants and, through the “snow-balling” technique, with other informants that I was subsequently introduced to. This then lead me to the second period of the fieldwork research (September – November 2010), which is when I started conducting my in-depth, semi-structured interviews and taking notes of my conversations with informants.

My attitude with these interviews was primarily reflexive — that is to say, I was trying to extract information that was important for me, yet at the same time also trying to understand what topics may have been important for my informants themselves. In turn, I used this knowledge for the third period of my fieldwork (December 2010 – February 2011), which is when I conducted a series of focus groups. I intentionally left this exercise for late in my fieldwork, aware of the fact that by that point I would have potentially distilled the important themes — therefore, these focus groups had the potential to be much more focused and productive.

I had intended to conduct this research with existing (social, political or other) groups as well as with groups of people that I invited to get together specifically for the

purpose of this study<sup>40</sup>. Eventually, I took a conscious decision to only utilise groups of the latter category (i.e. people who I had invited to attend specifically for the purpose of my research) and to attend existing groups' meetings as a plain observer. I explain this decision — and the ethical issues that I had to juggle in making it — in section 3.3.

Methodologically, I also opted for entirely new groups, instead of utilising existing ones, as I also aimed to get together people who might have not found themselves in the same group before, to try to achieve the “dialogic interaction” (Hoggart, Lees and Davies 2002: 213) that lies at the core of focus groups' efficiency. In order to stimulate discussion I screened archival footage from my case studies (the “Virtue Operations” of 1984-86 and the events of December 2008) to my focus group participants. Last but not least, I also presented participants in the focus groups with questions that had emerged from my in-depth interviews earlier on.

Throughout all these three stages of fieldwork, I continued to conduct my archival research — that is, looking at the national newspaper archives for their coverage on the neighbourhood (as explained in full in section 3.2.1).

I allowed for a two-month period at the very end of my fieldwork (February – April 2011), during which I attempted to interpret my findings and bring together my first theoretical conclusions while I was still in the field. I considered this to be an important reflective exercise, allowing me to present these initial findings to the informants; to then receive feedback from them, and to feed the results of this reflective

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40 The focus groups with existing groups would have included groups such as the Exarcheia Residents' Initiative, the Exarcheia Business Owners' initiative, the Network for Social and Political Rights and the Network for Migrant Support.

exercise into the theoretical conclusions, as articulated in the second part of chapter 6 and chapter 7 in its entirety.

The table below presents the different stages of my fieldwork in Exarcheia and the research method(s) deployed in each:

|                                      | First period | Second        | Period          | Third | period       | Final | period |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------|
|                                      | May – August | September     | – December      | 2010  | March – June |       |        |
|                                      | 2010         | November 2010 | – February 2011 | 2011  |              |       |        |
| Participant                          |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| Observation                          |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| In-depth, semi-structured interviews |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| Focus Groups                         |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| Archival                             |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| Research                             |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| Initial                              |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| conclusions & /                      |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| Reflexive                            |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |
| exercise                             |              |               |                 |       |              |       |        |

Table 3.1: Fieldwork time-line: May 2010 – June 2011

In conducting and then analysing the findings of this ethnographic exercise, I have adopted Michael Burawoy's "extended case method" (Burawoy 1991, 1992, 1998<sup>41</sup>). Burawoy's research method has allowed me to conduct precisely a reading of Exarcheia and the everyday life in the neighbourhood that cuts through geographical scale: it has allowed me "to locate", that is, "everyday life in its extralocal and historical context" (Burawoy 1998: 4) and to extract, as a result, "the general from the unique" (ibid: 5). Of course, this idea of extending beyond the field of ethnographic study is not unique to Burawoy's work, as he himself has been quick to disclaim (ibid: 4). Perhaps even more than Burawoy himself, I entered the field as a researcher that was very much acquainted with it. It therefore seemed inevitable, just as in his case, that "my study [would have] violated each of the four principles of positive science"<sup>42</sup>. As a result, it was only logical to write about Exarcheia "from the standpoint of participant observation" (Burawoy 1998: 6).

This exercise would inevitably involve a degree of reflexivity, of interaction with a social setting that I knew only too well. Under no circumstances was I to be a complete "outsider", a social scientist examining an issue distant and foreign to them, nor was I exactly the "outsider within" (Burawoy 1998: 25) that ethnographers often-

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41 Burawoy's argument is in turn largely grounded in structuration theory (Giddens 1984, 1991).

42 To outline these principles of positive science, Burawoy refers to Katz (1983) and his "4Rs", i.e. avoiding to "distort" the worlds that we study (reactivity); finding criteria by which to select our data (reliability), unambiguously setting the code for this selection (replicability) and guaranteeing that the slice of the world that we study is typical of the whole (representativeness).

times consider themselves to be — that is, “strangers whose objectivity is vouchsafed by distance” (ibid: 25).

Neither quite reflexive, then, nor exclusively positivist — and conducting participant observation does not necessarily mean that the exercise had to exclusively fall under each of the two categories. It is indeed possible to conduct “participant observation” according to positive principles, which would involve, for Burawoy, to “bracket involvement as bias” (1998: 25) and to instead concentrate on “deriving decontextualized generalizations from systematic analysis of data” — to therefore make theory “the result and not the pre-condition of research” (ibid: 25).

This is precisely the way by which I mean participant observation and the exercise that I conducted while in Exarcheia. Instead of fully immersing myself, ethnographically, into the everydayness of the neighbourhood, I have sought for those elements of everyday life there that could be extracted and then extended beyond the confines of the everyday itself. In conducting the purely ethnographic part of my study (chapter 5), I have striven to conduct a “spatial ethnography” of Exarcheia — an exercise that looked at the spatial qualities and balances of the neighbourhood, rather than focusing on the individual acts of the people who lived and acted there. Then in my attempt to locate, as per Burawoy, everyday life in its extralocal and historical context, I proceeded to an analysis of the rhythms of Exarcheia (chapter 5): from the rhythms of the everyday, I have extended out, in a spiral-like reading, to the altering rhythms of the week, the year, to reach the entire historical period under research.

### **3.2.3 Analysing rhythms**

This section bridged my ethnographic study of everydayness in Exarcheia, as

outlined above, to my study of the neighbourhood in a wider historical as much as socio-political context. In doing so, it addressed the third sub-research question of the thesis, namely:

3. (...) to what extent does the coexistence of conflict and ‘ordinary life’ in Exarcheia reflect Henri Lefebvre’s (1999, 2004) concept of rhythms? And what may a theory offer us when expanded from its original scope of daily routines to span annual, or longer, rhythms of intersecting contention and serenity?

Here, my exercise was two-fold. On the one hand I tried to establish (i) the size, frequency and the different types of riots and other forms of contentious politics that took place in Exarcheia and (ii) to document activities that could potentially defy the neighbourhood’s portrayal as concentrating riots (as discussed in chapter 4). On the other hand, I also took the ethnographic findings of the previous section, to try to build a solid understanding of the neighbourhood that extends beyond the everyday. I am using Henri Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) as a research method; as a tool with which to understand the everyday reality of the neighbourhood — and beyond. Based on, but also extending beyond Burawoy’s encouragement (as referred to prior) to extract “the general from the unique”, I conduct a *rhythmanalysis* in the field of time, instead of space: starting from the unique (the everydayness of Exarcheia) I then attempt to extract its more general condition (the neighbourhood’s position and role in the Greek state’s post-dictatorial history).

This hybrid methodological approach aided me significantly to overcome both practical limitations and ethical considerations that I was faced with prior to and during

the research. The following section now outlines some key such limitations and considerations, before proceeding to discuss some potentially generalisable points based on my Exarcheia experience.

### **3.3 Obstacles and ethical considerations**

Throughout the study, I encountered two major sets of obstacles and considerations: on the one hand were the practical limitations that I was faced with during the on-the-ground research (deriving from its limitations in time, resources or otherwise — as explained further below). On the other hand, I was also — and much more significantly — faced with a number of moral/ethical considerations, which I outline along with the steps I took in dealing with them.

First, in terms of the purely practical obstacles and limitations to my study: the initial, and most formidable obstacle concerned the subject of my study itself. Perhaps expectedly so, I had considerable difficulty in gaining access to government officials, policy-makers and other higher representatives of state authorities (as also explained in chapter 4). At the same time, the Greek Police offered little help in granting access to their archival material — and so, the initial plan of conducting a discourse analysis of both media and state discourses on Exarcheia had to be limited to the former instead.

I had expected to face an issue of access to those more directly involved in the riots and contentious politics past in Exarcheia, but this was far from so. Declaring that my study was for academic purposes did little to deter my informants and interviewees, even though the request for anonymity was made often — and has been fully respected. In terms of gaining access to these groups, I have benefited both from my extended



fieldwork (starting in the spring of 2010) and from my prior links to key individuals and groups in the neighbourhood.

In addition, my research for the first research sub-question (on the discourse of Exarcheia) had to take into account the time limitations of the research and, at the same time, the formidable press coverage that Exarcheia has enjoyed through the years in a vast variety of media in the country (print, radio, TV, internet). For purely practical reasons I opted for the print medium (national-circulation newspapers) and in order to select as wide a pool of articles as possible, I opted for three newspapers that would cover, between them, the largest part of the country's mainstream political spectrum.

Before arriving in Exarcheia, I was aware that conducting research on a socially and politically sensitive topic such as urban riots and street-based contention requires a careful consideration of the ethical and moral implications of the research: questions of “who benefits” from the research, as well as of course the researcher's position, quickly emerged in my preparatory work. At the same time, conducting research in Athens — where I had not resided fully, prior to this study — as an academic who had lived outside the country for just short of a decade, affiliated to non-Greek universities throughout this time, meant that I could have been considered by many to be a complete outsider. On the one hand, I expected this to make easier my positioning amidst the delicate social equilibrium of Exarcheia, with all intra-neighbourhood competition, contradictions and antagonisms that I was aware of before my arrival. Indeed, to a large extent this perceived ‘outsideness’ worked to my advantage. But at the same time, I still considered myself to be largely studying what I would consider my own, ‘instead of other cultures’ — as Bourdieu (1990) would have argued, given the fact that I was born in the country and resided there for the largest part of my life, so far. What is more, I

was already very familiar with the social and political milieu of Exarcheia before arriving in the neighbourhood; even after moving out of the country I continued to visit regularly — 2-4 times per year from 2004 on, which is when I first developed a strong interest in it. By the time I arrived in Exarcheia, in May 2010, my local ties were too strong to consider myself an outsider, but having just moved in, it would be difficult to call myself an insider, either. Where did that leave me? Neither quite an auto-ethnographer (as, for example, per Lakhani: 2000) nor exactly a complete outsider ethnographer of a population foreign/alien to my own; my fluctuating insider/outsider relationship to Exarcheia continued throughout the fieldwork and in fact proved crucial in providing me on the one hand with strong bonds to the community that I researched (not, in this way, an exploitative relationship to it) and on the other hand, granting me the appropriate distance so as to allow a considerably sober gaze over the community.

This ambiguous relationship that I built with Exarcheia continued to seep through during and following the entire period of my fieldwork. Soon after arriving, conducting and then completing this fieldwork exercise, I realised that much of the writing on post-fieldwork approaches by other ethnographers appeared to sit rather uncomfortably with my own experience. To an extent, at least, I had been expecting to enter “a situation of self-deception and self-discovery in fieldwork” (Daniels 1983: 195) — to be confronted with a situation in which “the researcher and the native reveal their characters in the course of requesting and offering information about the study” (ibid: 195). Or similarly I had expected as per Katz (1983) to be able to interrogate my own position to that of the objects of my study: “by interrogating the subject positions of ourselves as intellectuals as well as the objects of our inquiry”, he argued (1983: 495), “we can excavate a “space of betweenness” wherein the multiple determinations of a

decentered world are connected” (ibid: 495). The completion of the fieldwork exercise has left me, contrarily, with a mixed and essentially conflicting experience. On the one hand, the on-the-ground information collected has been invaluable in reaching the conclusions of this study. On the other, the disparity between this experience and the writings on fieldwork that I have encountered have led me to draw some — potentially more generalisable — conclusions regarding the question of my positionality and reflexivity during the conducted fieldwork.

### **3.4 The distance of the researcher**

In the architecture of the academy there is an internal relation between researcher and researched in the production of power-knowledge that makes all ethnographic writing, in part, an act of betrayal.

Keith 1992: 554

As I briefly outlined in the thesis introduction, a strong incentive that drove my research was what I saw to be a misrepresentation of Exarcheia in Greece’s public discourse — and in the country’s national media in particular. As someone who carries both the experiences of living in the neighbourhood but also following the events there from afar for long segments of time, I felt that there was a strong disparity between the two.

However, over the course of my research I have come to realise there was something much more crucial lurking than a gap between the lived experience of

Exarcheia and its mediatic representation. The absence from this professional discourse of what I understood to be key social and political characteristics of the neighbourhood potentially has the power, as shown in Beauregard's metaphor earlier on, to conceal the political tension and struggles still rife on the ground: by reading the history of Exarcheia, it might be possible to trace many of contemporary Greek history's hidden tensions and muted struggles. In inverse fashion to Beauregard's examples, then, reading Exarcheia can become a useful metaphor and a tool for reading key elements in the Greek state's contemporary political history as a whole.

For the above reasons I quickly realised that a "pure" ethnography of Exarcheia, that is, a detailed articulation of the area's everyday tensions, its struggles and its contradictions could potentially reveal invaluable information about the country's recent transformations — but only once I, as a researcher, had "zoomed out" to place my ethnographic findings into Greece's socio-political context. This "zooming out" would have been the — relatively speaking — easy part for me. The difficulty lied in zooming in. While conducting my fieldwork, I was repeatedly faced with questions on the morality of researching both urban riots and the case of Exarcheia in particular. These ethical questions that I had to deal with did not, to their largest extent, match the questions that many ethnographers pose to themselves — as articulated, for example, in Cassell (1980). Neither however did I personally experience the "comparatively equal basis" (1980: 31) that Cassell claims that observers and the observed often participate in: the subject matter of my research and the confidence shown to me by some of my interviewees placed an enormous burden of responsibility upon me, concerning both the nature of the information I held and the ways in which I could manage and interpret it. Inevitably, the question of handling such information led me, once again, to the question

of distance: how far or how close should one stand to their research subject? How far or how close should they “zoom” and focus when researching urban riots?

I grappled with this question of distance both in this chapter and in the discursive and the empirical chapters of the present study (4-7). By “distance” I here mean both the spatial distance (researching from afar) and chronological distance (researching events past). In the case of Exarcheia, Athens, there seem to be plenty of comments, analyses, and theses on the seminal uprising of the Athens Polytechnic in 1973, for example. But when turning at the unrest of December 2008, only a few yards away from the Polytechnic, one is faced with an awkward silence at best and an outright dismissal of the events at worst. Similarly, commentators outside Exarcheia have often been quick to dismiss events in the neighbourhood and often even the neighbourhood itself as a centre of anomie and lawlessness, a de facto apolitical and anti-social evil lying in the heart of Athens.

In the course of researching Exarcheia I have tried to address the question of distance by effectively researching the area from a number of different positions: I research violent action both past (including 1985), and present (2001-2004, 2008-2011). I conducted fieldwork while living in the heart of the neighbourhood and then continued my research from afar (as of the fall of 2011). The questions regarding distance that I have grappled with during my research, as articulated in the previous pages, are far from theoretical: in essence, they can shed light on one of the prime questions that all researchers find ourselves with at a stage of our research: why does it matter?

The answer to the question can only be offered by a combination of shifting distance and perspectives on the research subject; once this exercise takes place the results are extremely rewarding. Ethnographic research in Exarcheia as conducted in

chapters 5 and 6, reveals the richness of the area's social, cultural and political past and present. It also reveals the diversity of its populations, the multiplicity of reasons for which people chose to live, work and act there. And, last but not least, it also reveals that the act of rioting — partaking in mass acts of violence — might be much less incomprehensible than the dominant media discourse would allow us to think.

My study of Exarcheia discourses began as inward, before taking an outward reading: I have examined, in other words, the effects of the Exarcheia discourse from two different yet complementary perspectives. First from “above”, that is, from its mediatic representation. Here, I presented the Exarcheia discourse from a shifted, national-level perspective and placed this discourse within the national political setting, in order to offer a reading of it as a euphemism for the description of social and political processes that were largely repressed in two distinct historical periods: the early 1980s (in the midst of the Europeanisation dream) and the run-up to 2004 (the year of the Athens Olympics). The second perspective on Exarcheia was from the ground, from the everyday struggles, contradictions and challenges faced by people living in the neighbourhood — and perhaps even more so, from the contradictions and challenges faced when attempting an ethnographic study with them.

For these reasons, questions of distance and perspective have been key in this thesis. I have dealt with the questions of positionality and reflexivity and have tried to employ my dual outsider/insider position and to push it even further: to read Exarcheia both from within, and from outside — essentially, to “zoom in” and “zoom out” of the neighbourhood, not completely unlike the way in which we shift our perspective when looking at our subject through a photographic lens. In all cases, I have kept my focus tightly on Exarcheia: allowing, in this way, an exercise similar to that conducted by

Beauregard, as explained earlier on.

Attempting to answer why national media has largely conceived Exarcheia as a centre of anomie and violence can potentially reveal a euphemistic role of the neighbourhood in return — that is, its discourse describes the continuation of Greece’s rife political tradition by other means, often in language that moves that tradition into an “apolitical” context. It is to these discourses of Exarcheia that I will now turn.

## 4. The Exarcheia Discourse

This chapter presents discourses of Exarcheia in national circulation newspapers in Greece, focusing on the periods between 1981-1985, 2001-2005 and in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 riots<sup>43</sup>. It traces different ways in which the neighbourhood was represented in these professional media, before explaining how such discourses of Exarcheia may have potentially acted in a euphemistic manner: by using contention inside the neighbourhood, that is, to reflect key social and political processes and transformations of the Greek Metapolitefsi as a whole.

The chapter opens with an overview of existing literature in urban geography that has used discourse analysis as a research tool (4.1). This section shows how it is plausible for the discourse of a particular place to shape the concrete reality of the place in question. The following section (4.2) of the chapter then introduces the research methods utilised to study the media discourses of Exarcheia. Section 4.3 adduces a number of indicative brief articles (or article excerpts) on Exarcheia as published in the newspapers under review, spanning over all three research periods. The chapter then adduces key discourses of Exarcheia (4.4) as extracted from the pool of articles studied.

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43 For this exercise, three (relatively) small time periods have been selected from the recent history of the neighbourhood, keeping in mind the question of feasibility — in order to allow, that is, both for an efficient and in-depth analysis of the neighbourhood's discourse during these three time periods. In addition, focus on print (newspaper) media was opted for in order to make the exercise more effective — since the translation of printed text allows for greater accuracy over audio or video transcription and translation.



The chapter concludes (4.5) with an attempt to understand the prominent discourses of Exarcheia in light of some of their key concurrent developments in the country: according to this concluding argument, it may indeed be feasible to understand some of these discourses of Exarcheia as a metaphor or even, a euphemism for social and political tensions otherwise concealed — if not altogether expelled — from public discourse.

## **4.1 Discourse analysis in urban research**

Why is it important for urban geographers to take into account the discourses, narratives and other forms of talk about the places that they study? “Narratives”, tells us de Certeau (1984), “go ahead of social practices in order to open a field for them” (1984: 125). Therefore, it is imperative for us to understand how the image of a place is constructed and what effect this constructed image in turn has upon the lived experience of the place in question. Studies of this kind span across academic disciplines, including history, anthropology, media studies and of course, geography. McDonald (2003) argued for the importance of studying discourse as a means allowing us to “reinstate the relationship between the operation of the text and the world beyond the text” (2003: 1).

The significance of narration, discourse and social representation has been grasped in the field of urban studies and, as a result, an increasing number of urban researchers have sought to integrate the study of language and culture into urban geographical analysis<sup>44</sup>. In most cases, discourse analysis has focused on the portrayal

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44 Key examples here include Beauregard (1993); Imrie and Raco (2003); Lees (2004); McCann (2004);

of a given place within its wider social, political or financial context. For example, Wilson (1996) and Rutheiser (1996) share a reading of discourse of their particular case study as a mechanism that serves the interests of specific power groups still grounded within the case study area — whether this is Atlanta’s entrepreneurial community in Rutheiser (1996) or Indianapolis’ growth coalitions in Wilson (1996). Of course, not all readings are fit for all purposes: Slater (2002b) has shown how different discourses of gentrification stem from different national contexts — and therefore, how it is important to take into account the “geography of gentrification” (Ley 1996, quoted in Slater 2002b: 132). Analysing the discourse of our research subject therefore matters — tremendously so. Lees (2004) has identified two main strands of discourse analysis. The first descends from the long Marxist tradition of political economy and ideology critique: “discourse analysis is a tool for uncovering certain hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve certain vested interests” (2004: 102). The second strand draws on post-structural theory, citing the work of Michel Foucault as its main influence. Here, discourse is conceived as part of a process through which “things and identities get constructed (...) Discourses are not simply reflections or (mis)representations of ‘reality’; rather they create their own ‘regimes of truth’—the acceptable formulation of problems and solutions to those problems.” (2004: 102).

As Lees points out, despite such interest in discourse analysis in urban studies, there is a significant lack of emphasis not only on how these two strands of discourse analysis differ but also on how they may, in some cases, intertwine. Outside the field, a number of significant works have successfully attempted to blend an “ideology critique

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Mitchell (1996); Rutheiser (1996); Slater (2002a, 2002b); Wilson (1996) and Zukin et al. (1998).

with poststructural understandings of discourse as constitutive” (Lees 2004: 103). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is a prominent example of such. Even if engagement with this said divide is not common between urban researchers, a rare yet significant exception is to be found in the work of Robert Beauregard — and his book *Voices of Decline* (1993) in particular. There, Beauregard describes what he considers to be a deficit in urban theory and research in confronting the issue of representation: “urban theorists”, he argues, “very rarely, if at all, reflect on how rhetorical interventions influence their interpretations” (1993: xi). In response, he focuses on the rhetoric on urban decline by pursuing

an interpretation of urban decline that considers how the discourse functions ideologically to shape our attention, provide reasons for how we should act in response, and convey a comprehensible, compelling, and reassuring story of the fate of the twentieth-century city in the United States.

(Beauregard 1993: xi)

Beauregard concludes by remarking that urban decline has been used as a type of euphemism to indirectly address issues that are “shameful, difficult to articulate, painful, or emotionally volatile” (1993: 286). These include the issues of civilisation, racism, and even national decline: the discourse on urban decline, therefore, “frequently ‘stands in’” (1993: 286) for such concerns. Of course, in the Greek example there might not be similar issues to those described by Beauregard that an urban decline discourse could “stand in” for. But the concept, overall, is very important: if the discourse of a place (however negative or positive) can be plausibly conceived as a euphemism (or in other words, a metaphor) for wider socio-political processes at play, what would the Exarcheia discourse potentially read like — and what wider discourses could it be

“standing in” for?

Before answering the question, it would be appropriate to elaborate further in the choice of the *type* of discourse that is to be analysed in this chapter. Why focus on the written, media discourse of Exarcheia? Indeed, in urban studies — as in other fields — the study of discourses of a given place has not been limited to print media; to the contrary, these studies have included both more formal/official discourses (e.g. state discourses, including policy and legislation) and more informal/popularised discourses (e.g. narratives in fiction; oral media discourses including TV, radio and cinema; pictorial representations, and informal, oral narratives). Indeed, cities have been read through their cinematic narratives<sup>45</sup>, through their mapping discourses<sup>46</sup>, through their marketing discourses<sup>47</sup>, their visual and architectural transformations<sup>48</sup> and their discourses as projected in planning<sup>49</sup>. Cities, finally, have not only been read through their discourses (formal or otherwise) but also through the *absence* of discourse — through the absence, that is, of alternative discourses; an absence imposed by the formal

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45 Clarke 1997; Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001.

46 Tallack 2000.

47 Gold and Ward 1997.

48 King 1996.

49 Pinder 2005.

(state) authority. This is what Hazan (2010) has called the ‘invention’ of Paris: the erasure of memory of events past in the city and the effective re-invention, by this process, of the city as a wholly different place.

The present chapter looks at one particular type of discourse (professional media) of the neighbourhood of Exarcheia. Why, out of all the options above, should one choose to study specifically the media discourse of a given place? Media discourse, it can be argued, provides us with an indispensable tool: as McDonald (2003) points out, “the media’s forms of talking and thinking interact with those of wider society — sometimes setting an agenda, but frequently reacting to perceived public derives or concerns” (McDonald 2003: 2). The media discourse of a place, therefore, is not simply some ‘middle ground’ between more official and unofficial discourses that stand on either side. Rather, it potentially provides an opportunity to comprehend how the agenda-setting discourses and public concerns interact with one other. It therefore provides an opportunity to comprehend a key process in the interaction between the discourse of a place and its material reality.

The research conducted in this chapter commenced with this precise hypothesis — i.e. that the discourse of a place (specifically Exarcheia) can have a tangible effect on the place in return. This hypothesis has already been tested in previous studies; for example, in the global cities literature where the branding of a city as “global” has been hoped to precede the acquisition of such a “global” status by the city in question (even if this actual acquisition has been often questionable; the debate is outlined in the ‘place marketing/branding’ literature, e.g. Gold and Ward: 1997). A second example is that of the discourse of fear — primarily, crime — and the ways in which this discourse can accelerate processes of urban fortification and segregation. “[T]he discourse on fear of

violence and crime”, argues Low (2001), “legitimizes and rationalizes class-based exclusion strategies and residential segregation” (2001: 45). Caldeira’s (2000) notion of the “talk of crime” follows a similar line of thought: such “talk of crime” includes “everyday conversations, commentaries, discussions, narratives, and jokes that have fear and crime as their subject” (2000: 19). This talk is “contagious”, feeding in as it does into “a circle in which fear is both dealt with and reproduced” — it is some talk, therefore, that is “not only expressive but productive” (ibid: 19).

One way, therefore, to understand the relationship between discourse and its material effect is what we could label to be a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ discourse: should it be reproduced enough times, it may eventually become engrained into the concrete reality of the people that it concerns<sup>50</sup>. But another process may also be true: some of the areas that have repeatedly hosted urban riots have, in fact, become *categories of their own* of media reports. As shown by Hargreaves (1996), areas that repeatedly played host to rioting in France had previously been constructed as “deviant” via their media discourse. Hargreaves goes on to show that mass media discourse then acted as a catalyst in the reconstruction of the French term *banlieu* (literally: suburb), from having a merely spatial connotation to becoming “a synonym of alterity, deviance and disadvantage” (Hargreaves 1996: 607). From that point on, it was a matter of time before *banlieu* would become a synonym of *rioting*, as well. What had been a

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50 Indeed, Litton and Potter (1985) studied both media and participants’ interpretations of the occurrence of the 1980 Bristol ‘riot’ (sic), in which they analysed “accounts of the causes of the ‘riot’” (1985: 372) and they showed how the categories of “‘race’ and ‘government cuts’” had repeatedly appeared in the explanations of the participants and the media alike — but crucially, the media category of these cuts had preceded the riot, too.

geographical category became, in Hargreaves' words, a "news category" (1996: 607).

There is a key difference here, between the categorisation and representation of factors that may contribute to a riot on the one hand and the turning an entire area that may play host to a riot into a category in itself, on the other. "The act of representing the 'disturbing and threatening' creates a consensual universe", argues Moscovici (1985: 372). Breaking down the factors contributing to a riot can therefore dismantle this consensual universe and reveal catalyst factors such as those described by Litton and Potter (1985). Similarly for Low (2001), critical discourse analysis "provides a complementary methodology for decoding talk about urban fear as an acceptable, socially constructed discourse about class exclusion and racial/ethnic/cultural bias" (ibid: 45). On the other hand however, the constitution of entire area/s as riot-prone and "deviant" (as per Hargreaves' terms) would threaten to obscure factors that are very plausible to contribute to a riot.

With these thoughts in mind, the next section outlines the research tools that were used for the study of media discourses of Exarcheia. It is worthwhile to mention a difficulty in replicating Hargreaves' notion in the case of Exarcheia. Indeed, the French banlieues may have become a "news category" — but this was in a country where the majority of its urban population actually resides there, in those banlieues. In comparison, Exarcheia is only a small area; with a population of 22,000, it is only a mere fraction of Athens' total. In this sense, Exarcheia could not have become a "news category" in any similar way. Despite this fact, it is still important to trace both the sheer volume and the widely divergent discourses (and their news categories) coming out of a neighbourhood whose population was not only small but also homogeneous both ethnically and in terms of its class composition.

## 4.2 Research methods

The research included an initial content analysis and a subsequent discourse analysis of articles on Exarcheia. The process included identifying, examining and interpreting a selection of articles in three Greek national circulation newspapers, *Eleftherotypia* (Freedom of Press), *To Vima* (The Tribune) and *Ta Nea* (The News). The three newspapers were chosen with the aim of covering as wide a political spectrum among *mainstream* press as possible, since they are widely considered to have, respectively, a moderate Left, moderate Right and centrist political leaning. It should hereby be noted that the three newspapers do not necessarily represent the most characteristically Left-wing or Right-wing among the press in the country — there are, in other words, publications that are much more clear-cut in terms of their political affinities and therefore, a content and discourse analysis of their articles would have been, potentially, much easier an exercise. However, the choice of the three titles above was dictated by a need to find newspapers that had sufficient political/ideological differences between them, while at the same time covering as large a percentage of the newspaper circulation overall as possible. In other words, newspapers that had as key a role as possible in informing public opinion in the country.

The archives of each of the newspapers were searched for their coverage of



Exarcheia during the periods 1981-1985 (period A)<sup>51</sup>, 2001-2005 (period B)<sup>52</sup> and December 2008 – January 2009 (period C). The three time periods were selected in order to include the build-up and the aftermath of two major events in periods A and B<sup>53</sup> as well as the aftermath of the events of December 2008; all three placed Exarcheia in the national — and in some cases, international — spotlight. It was envisaged that researching across the three periods would allow space for comparison, given that period A saw mounting social tension that included instances of rioting, while period B also saw mounting tension in the neighbourhood that nevertheless did not escalate in a

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51 Period A (1981-1985) includes the first part of the police-led Virtue Operations [Επιχειρήσεις Αρετή, *Επιχειρήσεις Αρετή*], which saw consecutive mass police raids in Exarcheia. The official (state) discourse presented these as an attempt to establish a stronger everyday police presence in the neighbourhood and to deal, in this way, both with petite crime and with its overall conceived ‘delinquency’.

52 Period B (2001-2005) includes an attempt led by the then Ministry of Urban Planning and Public Works (ΥΠΕ.ΧΟ.ΔΕ) to regenerate Exarcheia Square ahead of the Olympic Games of 2004 — and the opposition to the plan on the side of the local population.

53 Namely the death of teenager Michalis Kaltezas on November 17th, 1985 after confrontations with the police (in period A) and the attempted regeneration of Exarcheia square in the summer of 2004 (in period B). Even though both periods included and ended with a week-long confrontation between residents/local activists and the police, during the winters of 1984-85-86 and of 2003-2004 respectively, there is a substantial difference: period A culminated in the riots and the death of 15-year old Michalis Kaltezas, while opposition to the regeneration of Exarcheia square did not escalate to such a level of tension.

similar way. Period C, finally, comprised a period of outright social and political tension.

At this point a disclaimer would be necessary. The list of newspaper articles (and excerpts) covering events in Exarcheia, as adduced further on in the chapter, is in this way highly selective and by no means entirely representative of what has been an extremely diverse media coverage of the neighbourhood through the years. One reason for this lack of representativeness is the mere fact that Exarcheia saw way too much of a varied coverage: more often than not, the way in which events in the neighbourhood were covered seemed to depend on the political allegiance(s) of the publishing medium. As a result, the professional media discourses of Exarcheia in the Metapolitefsi ran between anything from the positively inclined to the outright hostile — in this way effectively reflecting much of the country's entire political spectrum. This chapter has purposefully kept focus on articles that were published in the three national-circulation newspapers above. In so doing it has excluded the extended coverage of Exarcheia both in newspapers and publications of the radical Left/ the anarchist milieu and — at the other end of the spectrum — in the publications of the far-right. On the one hand, as explained already, this decision was made by means of feasibility. On the other hand, all three newspapers consistently ranked among the top five nationally in terms of their circulation throughout all three periods of research<sup>54</sup> — therefore, they were much more

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54 According to the statistical data provided by the Athens Daily Publishers Association

([http://www.eihea.gr/circulation\\_en.asp](http://www.eihea.gr/circulation_en.asp), last accessed 04.12.2012) and Argos Net, the country's only nationwide press circulation company (<http://www.argos.net.gr/index.php?lang=EN>, last accessed 04.12.2012). Eleftherotypia ranked among the top three newspapers in circulation until it ceased publication, on December 22, 2011.

of an appropriate pool for studying specifically the popular, mass discourse of Exarcheia.

A second disclaimer concerns the selection process of the articles presented in this chapter. Often-times Exarcheia was reported in the press in the context of violence that could be classified — very loosely — as ‘rioting’; including cases, that is, of lone (clandestine) actions by small groups that would attack specific targets — not as part of a larger crowd, let alone as part of a demonstration. Only a single such article has been adduced in the media discourse analysis below (4.3.5), by means of illustration. I have otherwise abstained from including articles that refer to such clandestine acts by urban guerilla groups (or in solidarity with them) as I consider them separate from mass urban riots, which is the focus the present study. Starting from this, an overall note regarding the use of the term ‘riot’ throughout the present study would be of use here. In existing contentious politics literature the terms ‘riot’, ‘insurrection’, ‘revolt’ and even ‘uprising’ seem to be used intermittently; often, it appears, with little consideration of the varying actions these might denote. When deciding on the term that I was to use in my own study, the term ‘revolt’ was rejected as it describes a mass act inclined “to overturn, overthrow” (from the Latin term *revolitare*, cause to roll). ‘Uprising’ has a more negative connotation (deriving from mid-13th century, “action of rising from death or the grave, resurrection”, with its meaning of ‘insurrection’ or ‘popular revolt’ only attested later on). ‘Insurrection’, finally, while seemingly more appropriate than the previous two, also includes a connotation of ‘rising up’: the term derives from *insurgere* — ‘to rise up’, ‘rise up against’. This, I considered, could therefore denote acts that were more politically focused than many of the acts of rioting that I intended to study. In short: the vast majority of the events that I studied were riots. And yet, Exarcheia did

indisputably see at least one major uprising (in 1973) and two major revolts (some would claim these to be uprisings too) in 1985 and 2008. The phrase ‘riots and other forms of contentious politics’ is used throughout the thesis to include all of the above.

And so, I was looking for media coverage of Exarcheia either on its everyday condition, or on any such ‘riots’ that may have occurred during my period of research — a period that spanned just over ten years, or else over approximately 3,700 days. During this time the three newspapers issued a combined total of approx. 11,110 issues, containing an average of 50 articles per issue. Out of this *article population* an initial pool of 617 articles was drawn, which included the key words “Exarcheia”<sup>55</sup>, “Exarchiot”<sup>56</sup> and any of their main linguistic variations — “Exarcheion”, “Exarcheiotikos” and “Exarcheiotiki”<sup>57</sup>.

Of this initial article pool 119 articles on Exarcheia were excluded as irrelevant (advertisements, classifieds, etc.) and another 171 were excluded since they referred to the neighbourhood in passing only<sup>58</sup>. This left an article total of 317, which were distributed unequally between period A (73 articles), period B (35) and period C (211).

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55 Εξάρχεια.

56 Εξαρχιώτης-Εξαρχιώτισσα, lit. the resident of Exarcheia.

57 Εξαρχείων, Εξαρχιώτικος, Εξαρχιώτικη, all lit. of Exarcheia.

58 These included news items strictly related to one of the academic institutions in the neighbourhood; announcements and reviews of cultural events; obituaries, etc.

In my initial attempt at a content analysis I identified an array of keywords that I considered to indicate either a positive, neutral or negative coverage of Exarcheia and the events taking place there<sup>59</sup>. I have grouped these keywords as shown in the following table. Keywords denoting negative media coverage included ‘violence’, ‘crime’, ‘chaos’, ‘anarchy’, ‘hoodie- or hoodlum-wearers’, ‘drug-dealing’/‘drug-dealers’<sup>60</sup>. Keywords denoting a positive coverage included ‘bloom’, ‘pedestrianisation’, ‘regeneration’ and in some cases, ‘policing’<sup>61</sup>. However, in the process of identifying adequate key words, a number of words were initially chosen and then eventually dropped from the selection as they did not indicate positive or negative coverage of the area *per se* — including, for example, the words ‘heroin use’, ‘policing’ and ‘neighbourhood’. It would go without saying that the categorisation of the terms is subjective, reflecting as it does the viewpoints of the authors of the articles in question (hence why terms appear in more than one category, too); categorising ‘regeneration’ as a positive quality, for example, reflects the often-encountered, overtly positive portrayal

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59 The connotation of the keywords largely dependent, as shown in the next section, in the context in which they were used.

60 The respective Greek terms: βία, έγκλημα, χάος, αναρχία, κουκουλοφόροι, ναρκεμπόριο/ναρκέμποροι.

61 The respective Greek terms: άνθιση, πεζοδρόμηση, ανάπλαση, αστυνόμευση.

of regeneration (and eventual gentrification) attempts in much of the press.

| <b>Positive connotation</b> | <b>Neutral connotation</b>      | <b>Negative connotation</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pedestrianisation           | Neighbourhood                   | Molotov                     |
| Blossoming                  | ‘Broom’ (for police operations) | Violence                    |
| Intellectual                | Policing                        | Crime                       |
| Ideas                       | Heroin/ heroin use              | Chaos                       |
| Policing                    | Regeneration                    | Anarchy/ anarchist          |
| Regeneration                |                                 | Hoodlum-wearers             |
|                             |                                 | Drug-dealing/ drug-dealers  |
|                             |                                 | Drug use                    |
|                             |                                 | Heroin/ heroin use          |

Table 4.2: *Select key-words indicating positive/negative coverage of Exarcheia and events taking place in the area.*

Based on the identified keywords, the research pool of 108 articles on Exarcheia during periods A and B can be labelled respectively as providing either a positive, neutral or negative coverage of the area<sup>62</sup>.

| <b>Newspaper</b> | <b>Eleftherotypia</b> | <b>To Vima</b>   | <b>Ta Nea</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
|                  | (moderate Left)       | (moderate Right) | (centrist)    |              |

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62 Articles from period C have been excluded from the table, since their overtly negative coverage of Exarcheia largely skewed the results.

|                   |          |            |            |            |
|-------------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Positive coverage | 8 (20%)  | 5 (15.6%)  | 6 (16.7%)  | 19 (17.6%) |
| Neutral coverage  | 14 (35%) | 9 (28.2%)  | 11 (30.5%) | 34 (31.5%) |
| Negative coverage | 18 (45%) | 18 (56.2%) | 19 (52.8%) | 55 (50.9%) |
| Total             | 40       | 32         | 36         | 108        |

Table 4.3: *Newspaper articles covering Exarcheia during 1981-1985 and 2001-2005 (combined).*

As explained earlier on, the three newspapers were chosen with the aim of covering as large a part of the political spectrum as possible — since they are widely considered to have a moderate Left, moderate Right and centrist political leaning. And yet, an immediate observation from the table above is the relatively insubstantial difference between the coverage Exarcheia received in the three newspapers: while Eleftherotypia (moderate Left) seemed to offer a marginally more positive coverage, the difference overall remains rather small. In addition — and most importantly — the positive coverage of the area is largely skewed due to the inclusion in this category of articles dealing with impending waves of regeneration attempts both following the “Virtue Operations” of 1984-1986 and the regeneration plans ahead of the Athens Olympics in 2004.

A pitfall of the *content analysis* above became quickly apparent. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) have explained, “[content analysis is] a quantitative approach, because although it deals with qualitative data, the analysis is quantitative” (1987: 32): there was therefore an evident need to study the articles that had been gathered in a qualitative manner. In order to do so, a close reading of selected articles has been conducted in the

following section (4.3) under the guidelines suggested by Parker (1992). The main aim here has been to identify specific discursive themes in the coverage of the area; to identify ‘repertoires’ and to examine closely both the rhetoric and the structure of the arguments presented. Finally, an attempt has been made to outline what Van Dijk (1998: 6) describes as “key relations” — meaning

those interrelationships between words which are considered important in the interpretation of the discourse; in particular, these include the agents of actions in the text, the attributes assigned to various persons or things, and the various modifying and negating words and phrases associated with these

(Van Dijk 1998: 6).

Moving beyond what is being said, in other words, section 4.3 will now try to understand the *context* in which it is said; the wording used to describe actions that take place in Exarcheia — and to start thinking of the overall image of the area these discourses could be building as a result.

### **4.3 The Exarcheia media discourse**

This section presents a selection of newspaper articles that covered events in Exarcheia in all three research periods. These articles have been chosen for being both indicative of wider discursive themes and substantial enough in their content to allow for a more in-depth analysis<sup>63</sup>. Each article is briefly placed in its social and historical

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63 In most cases, for the sake of brevity, only an excerpt of the article is included in its English



context. An analysis of the discursive themes — what Litton and Potter (1985) would call *interpretative repertoires* — and the overall structure of these articles is then presented in section 4.4.

#### 4.3.1 “An eye-witness account of the “raping” of Athens”<sup>64</sup>

*Plaka, Acropolis, Omonoia, Syntagma, Kolonos, Strefi, Lycabettus, Exarcheia, and between them, modern roads, crowded and overpriced (by whatever financial criterion), roads once unpaved, roads once of the neighbourhood and of love. Roads that are ‘buzzing’, roads of the pollution of any shape and form, roads of loneliness today! Exarcheia, an area of a few hundred square metres, where in the past 50 years the following made a first appearance:*

*Then, the first housing block in Greece! The renowned ‘blue’ housing block... Now, the first ‘organised’ [sic] anarchists! With their slogans on the walls. The first political and social minorities, which ‘blossomed’ after the end of the dictatorship, and underwent difficult struggles for the establishment or the preservation of their rights.<sup>65</sup>*

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translation by the author, with the Greek original adduced as a footnote.

64 Ta Nea, 23.06.1984.

65 Ζωντανή μαρτυρία για το “βιασμό” της Αθήνας. Πλάκα, Ακρόπολη, Ομόνοια, Σύνταγμα, Κολωνός, Στρέφη, Λυκαβητός, Εξάρχεια, κι ανάμεσά τους, δρόμοι σημερινοί πολυσύχναστοι και πανάκριβοι (μ’ όποιο οικονομικό κριτήριο), δρόμοι τότε χωματένιοι, δρόμοι τότε της γειτονιάς και της αγάπης. Δρόμοι της ‘βαβούρας’, της κάθε είδους και μορφής ρύπανσης, δρόμοι της μοναξιάς σήμερα! Εξάρχεια, μια περιοχή ολίγων εκατοντάδων τετραγωνικών μέτρων, όπου πρωτοπαρουσιάστηκαν, μέσα στα τελευταία 50 χρόνια: τότε, η πρώτη πολυκατοικία της Ελλάδας! Η περίφημη ‘μπλε’ πολυκατοικία.... σήμερα, οι πρώτοι ‘συγκροτημένοι’ αναρχικοί! Με τα συνθήματά τους στους τοίχους. Οι πρώτες πολιτικές και κοινωνικές μειονότητες, που ‘άνθισαν’ μετά τη μεταπολίτευση και έδωσαν τις δικές τους δύσκολες μάχες, για την κατάκτηση ή διασφάλιση των δικαιωμάτων τους.

The article paints an extremely mixed picture for a number of central Athens neighbourhoods, Exarcheia included. Specifically in relation to Exarcheia, it gives an ambivalent reaction to the presence of political minorities there — on the one hand it seemingly praises the fact that they have been allowed to “blossom” in the area, but on the other hand implying they, too, contributed to the “raping” of Athens referred to in the article title. By this over-dramatising verb, the author denotes the apparent deterioration of infrastructure and living conditions in the city’s central neighbourhoods. Last but not least, the word “organised” is in quotes when referring to the anarchists in the neighbourhood — most likely, as a way for the article’s author to denote doubt about whether “organising” and “anarchism” are indeed even potentially compatible.

#### **4.3.2 “Exarcheia shall be “free”, promises the Police General of Athens to residents of the area”<sup>66</sup>**

The article reports on a meeting between residents of Exarcheia and M. Mposinakis, the Police General of Athens at the time. The meeting took place after one of the numerous police stop-and-search operations in the area as part of the Virtue Operations of 1984-86. The injuring of locals detained by police during the operation was caught on camera, raising tensions in the area — hence this subsequent meeting. The article opens with a quote from residents who had attended the meeting:

*... it is not acceptable for hundreds of residents, customers of sweet-shops and*

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66 Ta Nea, 5.10.1984.

*passers-by to be treated as anti-social and marginal individuals.*<sup>67</sup>

And concludes with comments by the journalist themselves:

*... finally, it appears that after the meeting Mr. Mposinakis gave his 'promise' to the committee that the police forces that have been in the area in recent times will withdraw, and that he will intervene in order for the truth and the real facts to appear at the trial of the 18 people arrested [in the preceding days]*<sup>68</sup>.

Of course, it is stunning to see the choice of wording in the article's title — to promise that the neighbourhood would be “freed” implies, of course, some type of admission that the neighbourhood was not free as of previous.

#### **4.3.3 “The perpetrators were anarcho-fascists”<sup>69</sup>**

The newspaper (Ta Nea) published a series of three articles in a single day, all concerning the riots that occurred on October 25, 1984 inside the Athens Polytechnic campus, by Stournari Street. The newspaper had initially reported on the riots the next day (the 26<sup>th</sup>) and then published these three more in-depth articles on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The first

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67 ... δεν είναι δυνατόν να αντιμετωπίζονται εκατοντάδες περίοικοι, θαμώνες ζαχαροπλαστείων και περαστικοί σαν αντικοινωνικά και περιθωριακά άτομα.

68 ...φάνηκε τέλος, μετά τη συνάντηση ότι ο κ. Μ. Μποσινάκης έδωσε την ‘υπόσχεσή’ του στην επιτροπή ότι θα φύγουν οι αστυνομικές δυνάμεις που βρίσκονται τον τελευταίο καιρό στην περιοχή και θα μεσολαβήσει ώστε να φανεί η αλήθεια και τα πραγματικά γεγονότα στη δίκη των 18 συλληφθέντων.

69 Ta Nea, 27.10.1984.

article included responses by political parties and their youth wings in particular. It was titled ‘The perpetrators were anarcho-fascists’<sup>70</sup>, directly quoting from a statement on the events as issued by KNE, Youth branch of the Communist Party of Greece. In a separate column the newspaper published a statement by Kostas Laliotis, the government’s vice-minister for the youth (“vice-ministry of new generation”) at the time. His statement was titled “The troubles were set up by organized crime leaders”<sup>71</sup>. The final article, part of which is reproduced here, was entitled “They understand nothing but violence”<sup>72</sup>. This article opened with lyrics by the UK band The Sex Pistols<sup>73</sup>.

The article goes on to report on the journalists interviewing what they name as ‘punks’ and ‘anarchists’ in Exarcheia<sup>74</sup>, in an attempt to understand the causes of the

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70 “Αναρχο-φασίστες οι δράστες”

71 *Novoi schediasan ta episeidia*: the word *vovoi* literally translates as godfathers, hereby meant as ringleaders/mafia bosses.

72 “Δε τους συγκινεί τίποτα εκτός από τη βία”

73 A combination from two different songs of theirs, in fact: “No Feelings” (the first five lines) and two verses from another song, “Anarchy in the UK” (the last two): I got no feelings / A-no feelings / For anybody else / (except for myself / my beautiful self dear) / Don’t know what I want / But I know how to get it.

74 They actually distinguish between the two, even though they never quite explain with what criteria

rioting. The journalists pose the question: [should you be using] “violence in response to violence”, or “violence for the sake of it?” The response:

*Violence [only] in response to violence’, says the (only) girl in the group. ‘If they harm me, I’ll respond, I won’t stay indifferent. But I won’t harm anyone who leaves me alone’. ‘Violence for the sake of it’, comes the other opinion. ‘I believe in violence and I want to stir trouble. I do not care where [this violence] comes from. For me it is an everyday occurrence. I make no distinctions. I am forced by the state of things to act in this way.’<sup>75</sup>*

There are some key discursive themes that can be identified here. First is the fact that the article has adopted — verbatim — a statement by the Communist Youth as its main title — a statement that uses a rather bizarre characterisation (“anarcho-fascists”) to describe the perpetrators of the events. Then, matched by the intervention by a government vice-minister and finishing off with an (anonymous) interview with two of the people involved in the events, the overall balance of the article seems to be unanimous: Exarcheia played host to violence — whether “anarcho-fascist”, lead by a mafia, coming as an act of defence or even, if it was merely violence for the sake of it.

#### **4.3.4 “ATM’s burnt – damage caused to five cars”<sup>76</sup>**

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they do so.

75 “Βία στη βία’, λέει η κοπέλα της παρέας. ‘Αν μ’ ενοχλήσουν θα αντιδράσω, δε θα μείνω αδιάφορη.

Δε θα πειράζω όμως εκείνον που με αφήνει στην ησυχία μου’. ‘Βία για τη βία’, η άλλη άποψη.

‘Πιστεύω στη βία και θέλω να ενοχλώ. Δε μ’ ενδιαφέρει από πού προέρχεται. Για μένα είναι

καθημερινό φαινόμενο. Δεν κάνω διαχωρισμούς. Αναγκάζομαι από τα πράγματα να λειτουργώ έτσι’.

The following two excerpts (4.3.4, 4.3.5) are exemplary of a rather popular news category in the reporting of Exarcheia in the national press, particularly, it seemed, during period B (2001-2005). This category included the reporting (typically in very brief articles) of actions of property destruction in the neighbourhood that occurred, most often, during night-time. Such actions would include, for example, the destruction of ATM units, clandestine attacks on bank branches, on political party offices (the HQ of PASOK in particular, at Charilaou Trikoupi street at the time), police targets, vehicle vandalism and so on. Tracing through the archive of the Eleftherotypi daily between 2001 and 2005 alone, one can find at least twelve articles that would fall under this category, covering incidents as the above. Typically, reporting in these articles would be limited to a description of the action and the estimated destruction this had caused. For example:

*Persons unknown caused damage to five cars and to an ATM of “Alpha Bank” in the early hours of Saturday, in Exarcheia. A group of approximately 20 youths who had been at the Polytechnic [in the preceding hours], threw stones, sticks and molotovs at Stournari Street, causing minor damage to five private use vehicles that were parked there, completely destroying the nearby ATM and breaking the façade of the theatre that exists in the area. The perpetrators disappeared immediately afterwards<sup>77</sup>.*

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76 Eleftherotypia, 20.12.2004.

77 Έκαψαν ATM – ζημιές σε πέντε αυτοκίνητα. Ζημιές σε πέντε αυτοκίνητα και το μηχανήμα αυτόματης ανάληψης χρημάτων (ATM) της Τράπεζας «Alpha Bank», προκάλεσαν άγνωστοι τα ζημερώματα του Σαββάτου, στα Εξάρχεια. Ομάδα περίπου 20 νεαρών, που βρίσκονταν στον χώρο του Πολυτεχνείου, πέταξαν πέτρες, ξύλα και μολότοφ στην οδό Στουρνάρη, με αποτέλεσμα να προκληθούν μικρές ζημιές σε πέντε σταθμευμένα Ι.Χ., να καταστραφεί ολοσχερώς το μηχανήμα

#### 4.3.5 “The molotovs were a revolutionary greeting”<sup>78</sup>

A follow-up to the previous article — and an often-encountered, undeclared “conversation” between the perpetrators of acts as the one described above on the one hand, and newspaper journalists on the other: following 4.3.4, it appears that the perpetrators of the acts contacted the newspaper to testify the reasons behind their action:

*According to an anonymous call to Eleftherotypia, the clashes of last Saturday in Exarcheia took place “as a gesture of solidarity against the state terror that was in the beating of [our] comrades” and, the caller added, “as a revolutionary greeting to comrades of ‘November 17’ and ‘ELA’<sup>79</sup> and as a gesture of solidarity to the hunger strikers in the prisons.<sup>80</sup>*

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ανάληψης χρημάτων και να σπάσει η τζαμαρία θεάτρου που βρίσκεται στην περιοχή. Αμέσως μετά οι δράστες εξαφανίστηκαν.

78 Eleftherotypia, 26.10.2004.

79 Urban guerilla groups dismantled near that period, as the majority of their members were arrested by the police.

80 «Επαναστατικός χαιρετισμός οι μολότοφ». Σε «ένδειξη αλληλεγγύης στην κρατική θηριωδία που εκφράστηκε με ξυλοδαρμούς συντρόφων» έγιναν, σύμφωνα με τηλεφώνημα αγνώστου στην «Ε», τα επεισόδια του περασμένου Σαββάτου στα Εξάρχεια. «Είναι ένας επαναστατικός χαιρετισμός σε συντρόφους της "17 Νοέμβρη" και του ΕΛΑ και μια ένδειξη αλληλεγγύης στους απεργούς πείνας κρατούμενους των φυλακών», πρόσθεσε. Αποτέλεσμα των επεισοδίων ήταν να καταστραφούν

#### **4.3.6 “Landing in the abaton [prohibited land] of the delinquent. The Exarcheia Operation: How and why the police intervened in the square of anarchy.”<sup>81</sup>**

An article most typical of the coverage that Exarcheia was receiving at the time (winter of 1984), at a crucial period that coincided with the commencing of the Virtue Operations. More crucially even, articles that covered a supposed “delinquency” of Exarcheia had started to emerge in the press already from the summer of the same year — a few months before, that is, the police operations themselves commenced.

*Violence has tended to become the new disease in Athens. It comes immediately after unemployment, price rises and social inequalities in the list of national insecurities. In some way, Athens as a city is worried from the moment when its youth “discovered” drugs<sup>82</sup>.*

#### **4.3.7 “They denounce the ‘broom’ [police sweeping operations] in Exarcheia”<sup>83</sup>**

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ολοσχερώς ένα περιπολικό και τρία ΙΧ., να καούν τα παραθυρόφυλλα ισόγειου διαμερίσματος πολυκατοικίας και να καούν δύο δέντρα.

81 To Vima, 7.10.1984.

82 Απόβαση στο άβατο των περιθωριακών. Επιχείρηση Εξάρχεια: πώς και γιατί επενέβη η αστυνομία στην πλατεία της αναρχίας. Η βία τείνει να γίνει η νέα αρρώστια στην Αθήνα. Έρχεται αμέσως μετά την ανεργία, τον πληθωρισμό και τις κοινωνικές ανισότητες στη λίστα των εθνικών ανησυχιών. Κατά κάποιο τρόπο η Αθήνα φοβάται από τότε που οι νέοι της ‘ανακάλυψαν’ τα ναρκωτικά.

83 Eleftherotypia, 10.10.2002.



In the period building up to the Athens Olympics of 2004, a number of articles started appearing in the newspapers examined here that reported a supposed increase in the number of policing operations (patrols, detentions, arrests) in Exarcheia. For example, the article titled “*They denounce the ‘broom’<sup>84</sup> in Exarcheia*”<sup>85</sup> is a brief report on the arrest of eight members of Synaspismos<sup>86</sup>. The report concludes with the claim that the police informed those arrested that “*their [police] operations would continue due to the [counter-]terrorism [operations of the time] and [Olympic Games of] 2004*”<sup>87</sup>

#### **4.3.8 “Exarcheia comprises a multicultural roof”<sup>88</sup>**

The article below reports on another oft-encountered Exarcheia phenomenon: the largely clandestine, night-time violent incidents in bars and cafés in the

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84 Broom [skoupa, σκούπα] is often used — colloquially — in the Greek press to denote large-scale police operations, as they supposedly “sweep through” an area (like a broom would do).

85 Καταγγέλουν τη σκούπα στα Εξάρχεια.

86 Synaspismos was the successor of KKE (internal) and both a predecessor and the main party in SYRIZA, a parliamentary left wing coalition.

87 Οι προσαγωγές που διεξάγουν πρόκειται να ενταθούν το επόμενο διάστημα, λόγω της τρομοκρατίας και του 2004”.

88 Eleftherotypia, 17.09.2003.

neighbourhood that could often-times spiral out of control. More of a drunken brawl, but short of any politically coherent action, these events kept recurring in regular intervals — I was, in fact, personally witness in at least two similar incidents during my own fieldwork.

*The owners of the bars of Kallidromiou Street are determined to maintain the multicultural character of the area in which they live, work and create; this “lively cell in the centre of the city”, as they told us after the attacks that two of them suffered last week — during working hours — by a group of persons unknown.<sup>89</sup>*

#### 4.3.9 “Follow us to the police station”<sup>90</sup>

Yet another Exarcheia reporting theme — mass detentions of demonstrators, or even passers-by in Exarcheia, often-times reported in the media as a routine operation. This article dated 13.10.200, for example, was simply titled “Tens of detentions of youths in Exarcheia. ‘Follow us to the police station’”<sup>91</sup>. The article came at a crucial time, however, narrowly preceding the larger-scale operations that the neighbourhood

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89 Πολυπολιτισμική στέγη τα Εξάρχεια. Αποφασισμένοι να διατηρήσουν τον πολυπολιτισμικό

χαρακτήρα της περιοχής στην οποία ζουν, εργάζονται, δημιουργούν, το «ζωντανό αυτό κύτταρο του κέντρου της πόλης», όπως χαρακτηριστικά είπαν, είναι οι ιδιοκτήτες, κατά πρώτο λόγο, των μπαρ της οδού Καλλιδρομίου, μετά τις πρόσφατες επιθέσεις που δέχθηκαν δύο από αυτά (σε ώρα λειτουργίας), από ομάδα αγνώστων, την περασμένη εβδομάδα.

90 Eleftherotypia, 13.10.2002.

91 “Δεκάδες προσαγωγές νεαρών από Εξάρχεια: «Πάμε μαζί στο τμήμα».

saw ahead of, and during the Athens Olympics in the summer of 2004.

#### 4.3.10 “The big ‘broom’ of 2004”<sup>92</sup>

The article below also belongs to the same theme as 4.3.9, reporting on the increased police road-checks and the stop-and-search operations conducted ahead of the 2004 Olympics. The term “broom” (also explained in footnote #39) is often used to describe such operations in mainstream media to denote both the sweeping manner with which the operations are conducted and the magnitude and forcefulness of these. The term has neither a positive nor negative connotation *per se*; this is largely determined by its context. The article below was published on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004 — only days, that is, before the commencing of the works for the regeneration of Exarcheia Square that were accompanied by another extensive police operation and increased police presence in the area overall.

*The operating staff in drug rehabilitation centres have expressed their concern that there will be extensive police operations primarily against drug users, ahead of the Olympic Games this August (...) “There is an increase in police road-checks, particularly in Exarcheia, in Omonoia and by Tritis Septemvriou [Street], as the users themselves claim”<sup>93</sup>.*

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92 Eleftherotypia, 30.05.2004.

93 Η μεγάλη «σκούπα» του 2004. Την ανησυχία τους ότι ενόψει των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων, τον Αύγουστο, θα αναπτυχθούν ευρείας κλίμακας αστυνομικά μέτρα εις βάρος κυρίως ναρκομανών εκφράζουν οι υπεύθυνοι των κέντρων απεξάρτησης (...) «Έχουν αυξηθεί τα μπλόκα της αστυνομίας, ειδικά στα Εξάρχεια, στην Ομόνοια και στην 3ης Σεπτεμβρίου, όπως υποστηρίζουν οι ίδιοι οι χρήστες».

#### 4.3.11 “Exarcheia, or: ‘it’s the cops who sell the heroin’”<sup>94</sup>

A rather intriguing article that follows soon after the completion of the Olympics; essentially, following the failed regeneration operation of Exarcheia square, this is the first article (that I identified at least) which re-opens the “Exarcheia issue” in national press and the question of ‘what is to be done’ with the neighbourhoods — not by coincidence, only a few days prior to the annual commemorative demonstration of November 17<sup>th</sup>:

*The day of the week: Exarcheia. In 1830, Kleanthis Schubert<sup>95</sup>, in delimiting the centre of the new capital, leaves Exarcheia outside (...) Did Nechayev “plan” Exarcheia? “Fury and consciousness”, writes one of the latest slogans on the walls of Exarcheia — paraphrasing the well-known slogan of the French May [of 1968]. After approximately ten years of “calm”, the square appears to offer, once again, hospitality (or is it refuge?) to a new generation of anarchists. In a period of 15-20 days, small groups took to the side-streets of Exarcheia once again — and the police ceased the opportunity to leak to the press: on November 17<sup>th</sup> there will be — “there are worries” — [violent] incidents. Which will “set off, once again” from the Exarcheia ‘asylum’<sup>96</sup>...*

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94 Ta Nea, 9.11.2004.

95 Here, the author of the news-piece has seemingly made a mistake in confusing the two designers of the masterplan for Athens that followed the foundation of the modern Greek state: the two were Stamatios Kleanthis and Gustav Eduard Schaubert, who were appointed to design the new city under the orders of Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first head of state of the independent Greek state (1827-1833).

96 Η λέξη της εβδομάδας: Εξάρχεια. Στα 1830 ο Κλεάνθης Schubert, οριοθετώντας το κέντρο της πρωτεύουσας, αφήνει εκτός τα Εξάρχεια (...) Ο Νετσάγιεφ «πολεοδόμησε» τα Εξάρχεια(;) «ΛΥΣΣΑ

#### 4.3.12 Cocktail... made of molotovs<sup>97</sup>

These last articles (4.3.12-13) are two out of literally hundreds that covered the events of December 2008, sparked in Exarcheia and spilled across the entire city. The reason why this article has been chosen — what is particularly intriguing about it — is that the journalist describes the aftermath of a series of attacks by rioters who set off from Exarcheia, according to eye-witnesses, but chose to attack property in the adjacent, upper-middle class neighbourhood of Kolonaki. The journalist interviews shopkeepers and barkeepers at Skoufa Str, a main thoroughfare between the two neighbourhoods, reflecting on their anxiety in regard to the — then still ongoing — disturbances:

*“Our trading volume has dropped by 80%”, say the owners of bars in the area. “It is not merely the fact that there are only a handful [of customers] that show up. Even those who do, don’t drink. Without being in a good mood, how can there be any consumption?” Skoufa street comprises a remarkable case: it connects two different worlds. It begins from Exarcheia, as an extension of Navarinou Street, and leads all the way to Kolonaki Square. A street that shows, in a very concrete way — even if it is through night-time entertainment — the stratification of our society: financial, cultural or else. In the first bars, closer to Exarcheia, there is more of a rock aesthetic in the air. As we head up toward Kolonaki, things get more pretentious — without, of course, some stages in-between. Only one or two cafés and bars were salvaged. “No, not Skoufaki [a*

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και συνειδηση» γράφει ένα από τα τελευταία συνθήματα σε τοίχο των Εξαρχείων – παράφραση τσιτάτου του Μάη. Περίπου ύστερα από δέκα χρόνια «ησυχίας», η πλατεία δείχνει να προσφέρει φιλοξενία (ή καταφύγιο) σε μια νέα γενιά αναρχικών. Μέσα σε δεκαπέντε-είκοσι μέρες μικρές ομάδες ξαναβγήκαν στα στενά και η Αστυνομία άρπαξε την ευκαιρία για διαρροές στον Τύπο: Στις 17 Νοεμβρίου θα γίνουν - «υπάρχουν φόβοι» - επεισόδια. Που «θα ξεκινήσουν για μία ακόμη φορά» από το «άσυλο» των Εξαρχείων...

97 Eleftherotypia, 21.12.2008.

*local bar]” shouted some members of the... urban destruction team, and they passed it by. They did not touch “Ribeca” [another bar] either. Perhaps, the fact that the particular building was under renovation, making it look like a construction site, played a determining role.<sup>98</sup>*

#### **4.3.13. Residents — shopkeepers: Riot police must get out of Exarcheia<sup>99</sup>**

Last but not least, the following excerpt is from the reportage on the “demonstration/gathering” against the police presence in Exarcheia, called by the Citizens’ Initiative of Exarcheia. The positive inclination of the journalist is remarkable — and comes to remarkable contrast to the previous article:

*Get out”. Hundreds of residents of Exarcheia demanded last night that Riot Police Units are removed from the area because of the trouble that they cause. They [the residents] organised a peaceful demonstration for approximately two*

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98 «Έχει πέσει ο τζίρος μας στο 1/5» λένε οι ιδιοκτήτες των μπαρ της περιοχής. «Δεν είναι μόνο το ότι έρχονται ελάχιστοι, αλλά κι αυτοί δεν πίνουν. Χωρίς κέφι, πώς να υπάρχει κατανάλωση;» Η οδός Σκουφά αποτελεί μια πραγματικά μοναδική περίπτωση: ενώνει δύο διαφορετικούς κόσμους. Ξεκινά από τα Εξάρχεια, ως συνέχεια της Ναυαρίνου, και φτάνει μέχρι την πλατεία Κολωνακίου. Ένας δρόμος που παρουσιάζει με πολύ απτό τρόπο, έστω και μέσω της νυχτερινής διασκέδασης, τη διαστρωμάτωση της κοινωνίας μας, οικονομική, πολιτιστική κ.λπ. Στα πρώτα μαγαζιά, χαμηλά στα Εξάρχεια, επικρατεί μια πιο ροκ αισθητική. Και όσο ανεβαίνουμε προς το Κολωνάκι τα πράγματα γίνονται περισσότερο δήθεν. Χωρίς, βέβαια, να απουσιάζουν και οι ενδιάμεσες καταστάσεις. Από την καταστροφή δύο μόνο καφέ-μπαρ γλίτωσαν. «Όχι, όχι το “Σκουφάκι”» φώναξαν κάποιοι από την... ομάδα αστικής καταστροφής και το προσπέρασαν. Ούτε και το στέκι «Tribeca» πείραξαν. Πιθανότατα να έπαιξε ρόλο και το γεγονός ότι στη συγκεκριμένη πολυκατοικία έχουν στηθεί σκαλωσιές και ο χώρος θύμιζε απ’ έξω γιαπί.

99 Eleftherotypia, 17.12.2008.

*hours outside the Fifth Police Station, called for by the Citizens' Initiative of Exarcheia. "They have targeted Exarcheia. From the time of the Junta already, the neighbourhood would bring together citizens from all over Athens. The social centres of Exarcheia were always sites of ideas; this was the most vibrant neighbourhood in the city. With the peaceful co-existence of residents and shopkeepers. The authorities have tried to demonise the neighbourhood. They've succeeded", told us A. Athanasopoulos, the owner of a taverna in the neighbourhood.*<sup>100</sup>

#### 4.4 An analysis of Exarcheia discourses

What kind of discursive themes emerge in this mosaic of media portrayals of Exarcheia? This section attempts an initial analysis and interpretation of these discourses, attempting to establish the “critical language awareness” that Fairclough (1995: 209) has argued is necessary in order to unveil the broader social and political goals of a given discourse.

It is possible to identify a number of key discursive themes from the previous exercise. First — and by far most prominently — there is a discourse of violence, as illustrated in the language of article 4.3.1: the “raping” of Athens; 4.3.2: the discussion on police-inflicted violence; 4.3.4 and 4.3.5: the report of violent, clandestine actions.

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100 Να απομακρυνθούν οι διμοιρίες ΜΑΤ από τα Εξάρχεια γιατί προκαλούν καθημερινά επεισόδια, ζήτησαν χθες εκατοντάδες κάτοικοι των Εξαρχείων, πραγματοποιώντας ειρηνική διαμαρτυρία για περίπου δύο ώρες μπροστά στο Ε' Αστυνομικό Τμήμα Εξαρχείων, που διοργανώθηκε από την Επιτροπή Πρωτοβουλίας Κατοίκων Εξαρχείων. «Τα Εξάρχεια στοχοποιήθηκαν. Από την εποχή της χούντας συγκέντρωνε πολίτες απ' όλη την Αθήνα. Τα στέκια των Εξαρχείων αποτελούσαν πάντα τόπο ιδεών, ήταν η πιο ζωντανή γειτονιά. Με ειρηνική συνύπαρξη κατοίκων, καταστηματαρχών. Οι αρχές προσπάθησαν να τα δαιμονοποιήσουν. Τα κατάφεραν» προσθέτει ο Α. Αθανασόπουλος, ιδιοκτήτης ταβέρνας.

The second discursive theme was on a very distinct type of *occupation* of the neighbourhood [as implied, by police] and its overall separation/exclusion from the rest of the urban entity — this is once again illustrated in 4.3.2, “*Exarcheia shall be free*”; and then again in 4.3.6, “*Landing in the abaton [prohibited land] of the delinquent*”. Last but not least is the discourse that reads the large-scale policing operations in the area as a form of cleaning/ sanitation operation — this is prominent in articles 4.3.7 and 4.3.10.

Let us focus for a moment on the discourse on a supposed occupation [by anti-social elements, as implied in the reporting] of the area and that of its overall separation/exclusion from the rest of the city. In 4.3.6, the word “abaton” was used in the article title. Translated as “prohibited land”, the word is in fact colloquially used to denote a sanctuary<sup>101</sup>. The term is hereby used metaphorically, to imply that police are not allowed in the area — a type of a “no-go” zone for them and a sanctuary for the “delinquent”. It denotes, therefore, an urban entity that is seemingly and in some way independent from state authority; beyond their reach. The term was used repeatedly in the coverage of Exarcheia during period A (1981-1985), but more often than not by carrying a similar connotation to the term “ghetto” — a term also encountered frequently<sup>102</sup>.

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101 The term literally translates as “inaccessible” (á-vaton) and in the Greek context, it colloquially refers to the ban of women from the monastic state of Mount Athos in Northern Greece

102 For example in the articles “The unseen part of the iceberg” (To Vima, 3.11.1984), “Ten Years of War” (To Vima, 24.11.1985), “Rendezvous with the syringe” (Ta Nea, 16.12.1985) and “Eyewitness



By means of comparison, some indicative article titles on Exarcheia in the preceding years, that is, before 1981, have included: “*Exarcheia suffers from a lack of organisation*”<sup>103</sup>; “*The city centre’s neighbourhoods begin to fade*”<sup>104</sup>; “*New kindergarten in Exarcheia*”<sup>105</sup>; “*Themistokleous Street is pedestrianised*”<sup>106</sup>. The period between the two sets of articles being (from the late seventies to the early eighties) did not see any dramatic population, social or political change taking place in the neighbourhood — certainly none drastic enough to justify in themselves such a dramatic change of the discourse of Exarcheia.

Another example, in the use of the word “ghetto” — a word very frequently encountered in articles on the neighbourhood. It should be recalled that it is indeed difficult to term any areas of Greater Athens as “ghettos” in any sense that is remotely close to the form of exclusion and marginality encountered in cities outside the country<sup>107</sup>. The way in which the term has been used to describe Exarcheia, in most cases, denotes a supposed (conceived) tendency of the neighbourhood to become

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testimonies of the raping of Athens” (Ta Nea, 23.6.1984).

103 To Vima, 28.02.1973.

104 To Vima, 11.04.1973.

105 To Vima, 04.06.1976.

106 To Vima, 15.03.1977.

autonomous from the urban/national authorities: the neighbourhood as an abaton, a no-go for police — and, as the line of thought goes, a “ghetto” where various types of delinquent/ illegal activity takes place. This is perhaps one of the most important discursive themes of Exarcheia — encountered along with the word “abaton” either immediately prior, or following large-scale police operations in Exarcheia (as was the case in the news item in section 4.3.6).

Moving to the period between 2001 and 2005, that is, the years immediately preceding and following the hosting of the Olympic Games of 2004 by the city of Athens. In the winter of 2003/2004, a failed attempt to regenerate Exarcheia took place — an attempt that was centred around the regeneration of the neighbourhood’s central square<sup>108</sup>. This attempt was preceded by consecutive police operations to remove, in large numbers, the drug-addicts, the homeless people and the stray animals from the neighbourhood — same as with most other parts of central Athens. A relatively neutral coverage of the events, as in the article “*The big broom of 2004*”<sup>109</sup> was to be quickly

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107 If one was in desperate need of a neighbourhood/ area to term as a “ghetto” in Greater Athens, certainly Exarcheia could not rank anywhere high on their list; if we were to use extreme social and geographical immobility and a high rate of social exclusion to understand and to define a “ghetto”, it would most probably be somewhere like the area of Zefyri in the far North-eastern edge of the city that would come to mind.

108 A regeneration project that was to be completed with the construction, as the rumour had it at the time, of a new metro station at that precise spot.

109 Eleftherotypia, 30.05.2004.

followed by more descriptions with a martial tone — e.g. *“The undeclared war of Exarcheia”*<sup>110</sup>. And then soon after, in yet another article describing *“Police enter[ing] the abaton”*<sup>111</sup>. Interestingly, here, Exarcheia was no longer “an abaton” but “the” only one — a seemingly unique/ exceptional place, as it was left to the reader to conclude. A few months later, finally, the same newspaper reported on how *“Daily police checks continue in Exarcheia”*<sup>112</sup>.

There are a number of very important differences between the events that occurred in Exarcheia in two of the periods under examination throughout the chapter (period A and period B). During period A (1981-1985), extensive clashes between police and demonstrators in the area culminated with the death of Michalis Kaltezas, who was shot by the police. On the other hand, the attempted regeneration ahead of the 2004 Olympics (and the threat of a wider gentrification project in the area to follow) and the — eventually successful — efforts by local groups and activists to avert this did not see any of the violent scenes of the winter of 1984. Nevertheless, there are some stunning parallels and similarities in the media discourse of the two chains of events. These similarities open up the question of the broader representation of Exarcheia in these media discourse; the causes of this portrayal of the neighbourhood as well as the possible effects that this may have had in return.

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110 Eleftherotypia, 4.6.2004.

111 To Vima, 8.6.2004.

112 To Vima, 31.10.2004.

Let us take one specific discursive theme as identified in the exercise, to try and answer this question. The third such theme that was identified earlier on in the chapter saw the policing of Exarcheia as a type of a cleaning/sanitation operation (articles 4.3.7 and 4.3.10). It is most important to bear in mind the timing of these discourses — having become most prominent, as they did, in the years and in the months leading to the Olympic Games of 2004. This discourse of Exarcheia, therefore, should be conceived in the context of a broader, much bigger discourse of modernity, progress and prosperity that was sweeping through the country at the time. Indeed, this is the time of the apogee of the country's Europeanisation project, with eurozone membership having materialised only a few years prior. With the Games coming up, this discourse of unparalleled euphoria leaved little space for parts of the city that would be delinquent, dirty or otherwise incompatible to the 'Westernisation' and 'progress' that the euro-membership and the Olympics were promising to bring along.

Now placed in the context of this national discourse, the neighbourhood-specific discourse of *policing as a form of sanitation* may become easier to comprehend. An important underlying notion behind this discourse would in this way be that a number of Athenian neighbourhoods did not conform to the visual/aesthetic standards set ahead of the hosting of the Games — and that they had to, consequently, be 'cleaned up' in name of this greater aim. Indeed, at least four more central squares in the city saw regeneration schemes being scheduled and executed successfully ahead of the Games. By contrast, Exarcheia Square was the only case in which the regeneration plans were dropped in face of local and activist opposition.

Let us take another example, that of the first discursive theme that was identified in the chapter — the discourse of violence. This particular discursive theme saw a rapid

upsurge both in the lead to and in the aftermath of mass violent events, riots included. To an extent, this is something perhaps to be expected. And yet, such a “*discourse on fear of violence [can] legitimate and rationalize class-based exclusion strategies and residential segregation*” (Low 2001: 45). A discourse of Exarcheia, then, could in turn lead to a discourse calling for more policing in the sense that it actually happened the third discursive theme identified above (the discourse that saw the policing of the area as a form of cleaning/sanitation). One could plausibly expect, in other words, for key discursive themes of Exarcheia to feed into each other. And this has been indeed the case, to an extent at least: a discourse of increasing violence/unrest in the build-up to the Virtue Operations was indeed succeeded by a discourse of policing operations during and in the aftermath of the operation itself.

But things did not always work in this relatively straightforward way. Sure enough, these reports of an upsurge of violence were quickly followed by a series of mass policing operations; while reports for the need to “clean-up” central Athens were in turn followed by police operations with this precise aim. Yet on the other hand, the regeneration (and even more so, the gentrification) of Exarcheia in the mid-1980s was a process never quite completed; the regeneration of the square, the same. The supposed process by which the neighbourhood was endlessly sinking into a state of anomie and violence never quite reached a definite end, either. In other words, there are, indeed evident cases in which the discourse of Exarcheia has acted as a type of a “self-fulfilling prophecy”. But at the same time, there are also cases where there have been some evidently significant disparities between the discourse *of* the neighbourhood in the national press and the neighbourhood’s *own* reality and its evolution.

Why is the difference between the two (discourse as a self-fulfilling prophecy

and discourse as detached from reality) so important? The question might be better comprehended when placed in a broader context; in our case, Greece's national context.

National media coverage of the campaign for, and the build-up to the Athens Olympics of 2004 by far reflected a hugely dominant discourse of national unity and progress (on a national level) and the idea of cleanliness and safety on the local (urban) level, as shown earlier on. In this case, the media coverage on the neighbourhood preceded (even, it could be argued, may have acted as a catalyst) for the actual developments on the ground: the fears of local workers in drug rehabilitation centres (4.3.10) regarding an upcoming police operation were quickly materialised. But did the discourse really act as a self-fulfilling prophecy in this case? Did it, in other words, actually influence the action that was to take place — or was it, for example, a matter of merely well-informed (or insightful) journalists? The question is important, not least because the notion of such a self-fulfilling prophecy can help bridge some important gaps in our understanding of discourse, decision-making and eventually social and political change that runs across geographical scale — that is, from the national to the local level.

Another important theme that seems to support the argument above also emerged, to an extent, in the newspaper articles covering period C, in other words the discursive theme concerned with the aftermath of the December 2008 events. According to this theme, the death of a teenager in December 2008 and the sparking of a riot in its aftermath *could only have happened in Exarcheia*: According to this understanding, it was not merely the fact that the area had been branded an 'alternative' entertainment destination, therefore attracting a variety of fringe youth cultures (to which the killed teenager, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, also seemed to be drawn). It was also, and perhaps

even more importantly the fact that via this continuously negative media coverage, a substantial number of Exarcheia residents and the “delinquents” frequenting the area had come to feel it as their own, as a site that was indeed near-sacred (the religious connotation of the word *abaton*) and one that was beyond the reach of the police. In this way, the discourse of Exarcheia as an *abaton* had, eventually, persuaded many of the Greek society’s ‘delinquents’ that sanctuary was to be found there.

Nevertheless, it is quite evident that there has never been an absolute, clear-cut ‘cause and effect’ relationship between media discourses of Exarcheia and the tangible reality on the ground, upon the area itself. In addition, the discourse of Exarcheia has not seen any simple, linear change either: its discourse was not of a neighbourhood that sank into violence or anomie<sup>113</sup>. Instead, the discourses of Exarcheia had peaks and lows — a change that reflected but, rather intriguingly, did not always synchronise with its concurrent developments on the national scale. Let us take the example of the pre-Olympic regeneration attempt of Exarcheia to illustrate this point: in this case, it is important to hold in mind that this attempted regeneration failed despite and in face a media discourse of unity and progress (on the national level) and of a conceived need for a ‘purified’, spectacle-friendly image of the city (on the local level). There are numerous explanations that local residents and activists have offered as of why the regeneration was averted<sup>114</sup>.

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113 As was the case with the linearly declining discourse of Parisian suburbs and their eventual turning into a (negative) news category, as per Hargreaves: 1996.

114 These include, from my conversations during fieldwork, the high symbolism attributed to the

Whatever the actual reason, there was evidently a close relationship not only between the discourses, but between developments on the local and on the national level, too. A relationship that was not necessarily (or rather, not always) that between ‘cause’ and ‘effect’: in one case (summer 2004) local developments may have acted as a harbinger for a movement that would spread nationally. But there might be another relationship between local and national: instead of a mere relationship between discourses, or a relationship between concrete developments, there might, potentially, be a third way.

#### **4.5 From discourses of Exarcheia to Exarcheia as a discourse**

Discourse always requires a discursive ‘outside’ to constitute itself.  
Howarth 2000: 103

In its original conception, this concluding section of the chapter would have juxtaposed and compared the media discourses of Exarcheia as articulated earlier on, to the discourse of the neighbourhood offered by its residents and users. Over the course of on-the-ground research, however, it quickly became apparent that such an exercise

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neighbourhood by local activists (and therefore their determination to fight for it) and, even more intriguingly, the emergence of an infant movement, in those years already, that had come to challenge the national progress discourse — a movement that took centre stage in the 2008 events and, some would say, was seemingly vindicated in face of the 2008/09 financial crisis and its devastating aftermath.



would be largely futile: not because there was little or no difference between the two discourses, but for the exact opposite reason. The media discourses of Exarcheia and its everyday discourse seemed so disparate that any comparison would have been a formidable, most likely an altogether futile task. But there is another question that emerges as a result of this incapacity, as a result of the evident disparity between the discourse of Exarcheia and its lived experience: why could it be that Exarcheia has been portrayed so differently in the media from the way in which it is lived (and narrated) by people on the ground? And why could it be that certain themes of the Exarcheia discourse (such as that of the neighbourhood being a centre of anomie, for example) appeared to remain — relatively — unchanged over the course of the years? In answering these questions, we are trying to comprehend the function(s) of the discourses of Exarcheia, this time on the national level. For the purpose of this exercise, I will be juxtaposing the Exarcheia discourses to two key events that took place in the country during the first two periods studied in the chapter (1981-1985 and 2001-2005) — namely, the country joining the European Union (January 1981) and hosting the Olympic Games (August 2004).

The notion that the discourse of a given place can shape the structure of that place in return is not new: Lynch (1960) explained how the accumulated perceptions of a city by planners can have this precise effect, eventually shaping the structure of the city to fit their own perception. Yet, analyses of these perceptions and perspectives on cities tend to focus on the local experts or power-holders: there is a tendency, in other words, to assume that only the discourse of certain groups with access to power (growth coalitions, entrepreneurial communities and so on) may be potentially constitutive of a place. This follows on the heels of the critique of discourse as constitutive, perhaps most

famously argued in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Yet the discourse analysis of this chapter has purposefully avoided focusing on the discourse of the power-holders within, or those with an immediate interest in Exarcheia, such as city planners or local politicians. National media discourses have been chosen to show the function of discourse on two levels, local and national. At the local level, the chapter showed how media discourses of Exarcheia reflected (or not) activity on the ground in the neighbourhood; such activity included acts of violence, its policing and two major regeneration and gentrification attempts.

However, choosing a national-level discourse of the neighbourhood has also offered an opportunity by which to shift our perspective: to examine whether it is possible to read certain processes inside Exarcheia as a metaphor (or as Beauregard would have it, a euphemism) for much wider social and political transitions concurrently taking place in the country. Looking at the neighbourhood, with all its contradictions, its struggles, the attempts at its gentrification, the outbursts of violence that came in response — all could be used, conceivably, as a way in which to describe changes occurring on the national level. In this way, Exarcheia can be read not as a news category (as Hargreaves would have it), but as a type of discourse in itself.

To offer a reading of this kind would highlight a limitation that exists in many discourse analyses in urban studies — namely, failing to engage with the wider social and political context in which their case studies exist. As we saw Beauregard (1993), in a notable exception, explained how 'urban decline' had been used as a euphemism for racial, social and economic tensions still lurking in U.S. society.

Could this euphemism function in the Greek and in the Exarcheia context? Most certainly so: in face of the mainstream, dominant discourses of never-ending progress

that were often prevalent in the country, the discourses of Exarcheia (on violence, on lack of sanitation and so on) may have actually played a euphemistic role — allowing, in this way, the continuation of Greece’s turbulent political discourses by other means. If Beauregard read ‘urban decline’ as a euphemism for issues of social or racial exclusion still prevalent in the US, this chapter opens the question of whether Exarcheia — its transformations, its struggles and its inherent antagonisms — has similarly acted as a euphemism for political and social tension, particularly at times when discourses of these would have been unlikely to surface on a national level. The period leading up to the 2004 Olympics is one such example — during which, national level professional discourses were dominated by a near-unquestionable focus on Europeanisation, modernisation and Western-type progress. At the same time, the Exarcheia discourses may have also acted as a *scalar exodus and metaphor* — giving those disgruntled with the present order — literally — some space in which to articulate their politics, at a time when it would have been difficult to do so on a national level: those willing to oppose the 2004 Olympiad found a perfect opportunity to express their discontent by focusing on opposition to the regeneration of Exarcheia square.

This chapter conducted a reading of the Exarcheia discourses focused on the local level, before placing these discourses in the country’s national context. It examined, in other words, the Exarcheia discourses from two different, yet complementary perspectives: first, a perspective on the neighbourhood itself. Then, the chapter read the discourses of Exarcheia from a tilted, national-level perspective: it placed these discourses within their national political setting. By so doing, it was suggested, it might indeed be possible to understand the Exarcheia discourses as a euphemism for the social and political tensions largely obstructed from national level

discourse in the three historical periods examined. First in the early 1980s (the first peak in the Europeanisation discourse), then in the run-up to the 2004 Olympics (and following euro-zone entry: the second peak in the Europeanisation discourse) and third, during and following the 2008 riots (in the eve of the 2008/09 financial crisis).

All three periods saw great socio-political processes at play: whether during the zeniths of the Olympiad and European Union entry, or during the zenith of an impending financial crisis, the national level discourses had become too homogeneous to leave space for any dissenting voices. During these periods, the media discourses of Exarcheia reflected, indeed, on processes ongoing in the neighbourhood itself. But at the same time, tilting our perspective to the national level would reveal that the neighbourhood *itself* may have become a discourse category: its transformations, its struggles, its antagonisms can be conceived, under this light, as a discourse that is euphemistic for similar transformations, struggles and antagonisms taking place on the national level — yet processes that the larger, homogeneous discourses of national unity and progress allowed little space for.

## 5. Everyday life in a 'riot neighbourhood'

You should be aware of and avoid places where demonstrators frequently congregate such as the Polytechnic University area; Exarchia, Omonia, and Syntagma Squares in Athens; and Aristotle Square in Thessaloniki. University campuses are exploited as refuges by anarchists and criminals. The Omonia and Exarchia areas of Athens are at particular risk for crime and politically-motivated violence. U.S. Embassy personnel and their families are strongly urged to avoid these areas between 9 p.m. and dawn.

U.S. State Department, Office of American Citizens' Services and Crisis Management, country-specific information on Greece<sup>115</sup>

This chapter presents the outcome of my fieldwork research as conducted in Exarcheia between May 2010 and June 2011. The aim of this research was to participate in, and to immerse myself in the everyday realities of the residents, users and visitors to the neighbourhood and to juxtapose this to the public discourse about it: a discourse dominated by the risk of crime and violence, whether politically-motivated or else, as shown in chapter 4 and vividly illustrated in the example of the U.S. State Department advice above.

The chapter opens with a brief technical note on how fieldwork outcomes are presented, followed by a section outlining the theoretical and methodological background to the fieldwork research ('ethnography, geography, violence and the everyday'). The ethnographic findings of the research are then presented following a spatial logic: six key parts of Exarcheia have been identified and used as a base upon which to present the contradictions and tensions, but also often-times the unexpectedly

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<sup>115</sup> [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1127.html#safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1127.html#safety) (last accessed: 10.06.2012)

harmonious, if precarious coexistence that makes up the everyday of Exarcheia.

This ethnography of the everyday in Exarcheia quickly enough brought me back to the aspect of violence: a recurring theme in virtually all my interviews, formal and informal conversations, violence has, beyond any doubt, shaped the reality of Exarcheia on the ground. And yet the effects of the varying facets of this violence are far more complicated than the occurrence of skirmishes between youth and police, or bins set ablaze: the prevalent media discourse as presented in chapter Four had, if not flattened, then at the very least distorted the multiplicity of meanings, the actors and the social antagonisms taking place here into a condensed image. It is these exact multiplicities that the ethnographic findings below will now begin to untangle.

## **5.1 A note on fieldwork and ethnographic methods**

This is a purely ethnographic chapter, relying solely on the oral discourse of my informants; original written material provided by them (group texts/proclamations); and my own fieldwork notes. I present quotations that are longer than two lines as block quotes, while shorter quotes are within single quotation marks (‘ ’) in the main body. My own comments-explanations within quotes are marked in brackets ([ ]). All interviews<sup>116</sup> were conducted in Greek and all translations are mine. All interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the interviewees while I also used notes with the use of notebooks. The quotations appearing here are from a combination of these notes

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116 With three exceptions: my interview with Brady Kiesling, former chief of the political section of the U.S. Embassy, and my interviews with two non-Greek heroin users and informants, who wished to remain anonymous.

and the transcription of the interviews.

All but one of my informants have explicitly agreed to the use of their names in my notes, but have asked for publication from the thesis to be withheld; some were prepared to only use their first name, others have given consent for the use of their surname as well. I have respected each choice while I have also refrained from including details of their personal life stories that were not important for the chapter narrative.

I have made the choice to only include in this chapter material from my fieldwork notes, from participant-observation and ethnographic interviews. The choice is a conscious one, as I considered the need to establish a presence and legitimacy in the field as a cornerstone to all the work I conducted thereafter. Other material from the field —notes from my focus group discussions and so on — is also presented in the subsequent chapters and in chapter 6 in particular ('a rhythmanalysis of Exarcheia'). I discuss issues around my own positionality in more detail in the third part of this chapter ('Taking position, taking place').

## **5.2 Ethnography, geography, violence and the everyday**

Ethnography is neither a passport to a ringside view of the exotic nor a form of methodological avant gardeism.

Keith 1992: 551

A subtle yet important difference exists between ethnographic fieldwork (as encountered typically in anthropology) and geographical fieldwork, most definitely in

the way this was conducted for the purpose of the present research. Since the focus of my enquiry was a geographical area (the neighbourhood of Exarcheia) the subject of my fieldwork study, in essence, was the field itself: my study did not concern a single group — social, political or other — or more precisely, it did not concern any single one of those groups alone. What I have conducted instead is an ethnographic study of an area. This might appear as a contradiction in terms, and one I am aware of: *ethno* + *graphy* is the research and the academic practice of writing (*-graphy*) about a human group; in the early days of ethnography, about an *ethnos* (nation). I have approached fieldwork and ethnography with the angle of Burawoy (1998) and in the manner of Bourgois (1995); I aimed precisely to “locate everyday life in its extralocal and historical context” (Burawoy 1998: 4). I set out on this fieldwork of the everyday familiar with an existing body of work that could help me untangle the contradictions and antagonisms that I was set to discover (Boym, 1995; Boyte, 2005; Cohen & Taylor, 1992; De Certeau, 1980, 1984).

Of course, anthropology as a field has evolved considerably, and even space-based ethnographies have now emerged; there is, for example, an emergent anthropology of roads (Dalakoglou, 2010, 2012) and an anthropology of public spaces (e.g. Low, 2000, 2006). It is in this broadened sense of the term that I deemed an ethnography of the space of a neighbourhood per se possible. At this point, however, some clarifications on how I used this research tool would be of essence.

First, I began my Exarcheia fieldwork specifically with the question of its concentration of violence in mind; more precisely with the question of the concentration and repetition of violence in the area throughout the period under research (1974-2011). And so, even when I studied any mundaneness or peculiarity in everyday life in Exarcheia (the rituals, the contradictions, the antagonisms of the everyday) I persistently



held in focus my attempt to answer the research question: why did mass, politically-motivated violence concentrate itself in the neighbourhood?

Second, this is a spatial ethnography and I have therefore opted to divide my research findings spatially in return: I have organised the presentation of everyday life in Exarcheia by splitting the area in six parts; the reasoning and technique behind doing this is explained further below.

Third, I have opted for a presentation combining my fieldwork notes and a select outcome of of ethnographic interviews that I conducted while in the field. Neither would be complete without the other, and it would only be logical for my research to follow this succession: initially, I placed my self in Exarcheia, trying to immerse myself in the neighbourhood's everydayness (July-December 2010). Following this exercise I succeeded in getting access to key individuals identified during my early stage in the field: individuals, that is, who had come to play a prominent role in the everyday life of Exarcheia, regardless of their some perhaps profoundly different social status and therefore point of view on the neighbourhood. Interviews with them rarely took the form of one-off, structured conversations: in most cases, they were repeated in a number of occasions throughout my second stage in the field (January — September 2011).

### **5.3 Taking position, taking place: a spatial ethnography of Exarcheia**

Upon my arrival in Exarcheia in the spring of 2010 I had to face an obstacle that was considerable and perhaps ostensibly paradoxical: it was not that I did not know enough about the area, as could often-times be the case for a fresh fieldworkers. It was the exact opposite: I knew too much about it. Or, to be precise, I felt that I knew the area

this well; yet of course this knowledge was entirely a personal one, built upon repeated but brief and aim-specific visits to Exarcheia throughout the late nineties and thereafter — including spells of short stays lasting up to a month at a time. I had never, to that point, called Exarcheia home and yet —like so many others— I had been drawn time and time again to the neighbourhood, attracted by its allure as an epicentre of radical politics, subversive visual arts and independent/obscure book publishing, all of which I had become interested in at one time or another.

So, I knew too much about Exarcheia to know where to start from. But which Exarcheia was this? I had a firm picture of the neighbourhood in my mind as it stood when I had been visiting the most frequently — approximately between the years 1998 and 2000. From 2001 on, when I continued visiting from abroad (approximately twice a year) my view of the neighbourhood acquired something of a stroboscopic quality: just like stroboscopic light captures and freezes the movement of individuals at regular split second intervals, so would I capture an image of Exarcheia every few months. These frequent but short visits allowed me a peculiarly strong insight into the mid-term and long-term changes occurring in the neighbourhood: how the centre of its night-life shifted from the main square to Mesologgiou Street (the pedestrian street where Alexandros Grigoropoulos died in 2008) and back again; the flourishing of bars and cafés in specific streets/areas, and how these would rapidly move along from one street on another, en masse; the demise of the printing and book-selling industry in the wake of the financial crisis (most visibly post-2008), and so on.

Upon my arrival, then, my first exercise was one of erasure: I tried to largely remove from my daily routine the sites and buildings that I frequented in the past. True to the swivelling, changing nature of Exarcheia, many of these places were already gone.

I consciously chose to live in the immediate outskirts of the neighbourhood, one street east of Asklipiou St: close enough to dwell through it every day, yet not positioned in its heart, conscious as I was of how difficult it would be to choose one part of the neighbourhood that would not skew my entire understanding in its favour and at the expense of the rest. During the summer of 2010, I spent between four and seven days per week walking through Exarcheia: I made a consistent effort to repeat this exercise at least twice daily, altering between day and night. I also tried to walk through what I conceived to be the neighbourhood's key parts: (a) the area surrounding and including the Archaeological Museum (Tositsa Street; Mpoumpoulinas Street; illustration 5.1), (b) the Polytechnic (including Stournari Street and the east side of Patisson Avenue, illustration 5.2) (c) the square and its surrounding side-streets, illustration 5.3), (d) the area around the park between Charilaou Trikoupi St, Navarinou St, Metaxa St and Zoodochou Pigis St as well as the area in the immediate vicinity of Mesologgiou St and Tzavella St (illustration 5.4), (e) the area around Kallidromiou Street and Strefi Hill (illustration 5.5) and (f) the two main streets outlining the borders of Exarcheia to the south (Akadimias St) and to the west (Asklipiou street, illustration 5.5). None of these parts of the neighbourhood are independent in any formal manner; this was a division that emerged organically, through my fieldwork.

When read together, the ethnography of these neighbourhood parts can help us see (as will be shown in the last part of the chapter) a much fuller picture of Exarcheia's concentration of violence and other delinquencies. Prior to this, what follows now is an ethnographic sketch-out of each of these six parts.



*Illustration 5.1: Tositsa street (pedestrianised section highlighted)*

### 5.3.1 Open air drug-dealing: the case of Tositsa Street <sup>117</sup>

The area in the immediate vicinity of the Archaeological Museum (and the pedestrianised Tositsa St in particular) is a well-known hang-out for drug users, primarily of heroin<sup>118</sup>. During my stay, Tositsa visibly acted as a marketplace for the

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<sup>117</sup> All illustrations are digitally manipulated maps retrieved from the Microsoft Bing Maps Platform and used for educational purposes, abiding to Terms of Use:

<http://www.microsoft.com/maps/product/terms.html> (last accessed: 10.12.2012)

<sup>118</sup> See for example two news reports on Tositsa street: “Fifty-five (55) people were arrested [...] in central Athens along the Tositsa pedestrian street, which is a known hangout for users, police said”,

drug, frequently attracting users from across the city, under a tolerance shown by police within that specific strip of land. This is not to say such tolerance was absolute: I first-handedly witnessed one, and was informed of another two full-scale police raids on Tositsa St, resulting in a substantial (but entirely non-confirmable) number of arrests. Rather than a rule, however, these raids most definitely appeared to be an exception. Even though there was a permanently parked riot police van at the east end of the pedestrianised section of the street (at its junction with Mpoumpoulinas St), this appeared to comprise less of an assurance that police would intervene in the drug dealing and more of an effort on their part to limit and to spatially contain where this would happen. This, at least, was the conclusion of virtually all my informal chats with members of the riot police squad stationed there. Their responses to my questions were near-identical, even if varying wildly in their degree of friendliness: for them to tackle the drug-dealing taking place in their immediate vicinity (and quite literally, in their line of sight) would appear to be anything ranging from “crossing beyond their duty”, “useless” or “helpless”. In one particular case, a riot-squad policeman engaged with me in a much longer conversation, intrigued by my research topic and my UK university credentials. The drug dealing, he told me, “has to happen somewhere” — and, his reasoning continued, it was therefore better for this to happen somewhere where “we

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Athens News Agency, 10.09.2004 (<http://www.hri.org/news/greek/apeen/2010/10-09-14.apeen.html>

last accessed: 17.06.2012) and “...an operation by narcotics officers in notorious Tositsa Street in Exarchia and in the area around Athens University led to the arrest of four foreign nationals who attempted to sell drugs to an undercover police officer”, eKathimerini.com, 27.09.2011

([http://www.ekathimerini.com/4Dcgi/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_wsite1\\_2\\_27/09/2011\\_408264](http://www.ekathimerini.com/4Dcgi/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsite1_2_27/09/2011_408264) last accessed 17.06.2012)

[the police] can keep an eye on what is going on”. It was in this sense “better” for the dealing and public use of the drug to take place in a space as confined and therefore potentially controllable as is Tositsa St, both geographically and morphologically. To its one end lies Patisson, the wide avenue running along the south-north axis in Athens, potentially offering swift access to police, should the need for any such intervention arise. To its other end (that is, the end of its pedestrianised part, on the corner with Mpoumpoulinas street) police have set up an informal mobile base, with riot police and one stationed van taking turns in guarding the junction 24/7; this base has been there since the wake of the Athens 2004 Olympics and remained there throughout my fieldwork. The police force stationed there ostensibly also backs up as protection to the Ministry of Culture building, situated on that very same street corner. As explained, this riot police unit has only exceptionally intervened in preventing the drug-dealing<sup>119</sup>.

On its east side, the pedestrianised part of Tositsa St is confined by the outer wall and fencing of the Athens Polytechnic. The single gate of the Polytechnic that has access to the street is locked up at a regular basis; the two guards who took turns stationed in the security booth during the summer of 2010 would both make sure, as they told me, to allow zero access into the university grounds to those who they considered to be drug users or dealers. During my initial visits to the guards’ booth, I was met with suspicion and disapproval by the guard who, as he apologetically

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119 This particular riot police unit has become a target a number of times through recent years. Often, this has been in the form of skirmishes with youth attending concerts within the Polytechnic grounds. Much more violent was the incident that took place on January 5, 2009: an armed attack against the unit by the urban guerilla group Revolutionary Struggle (Epanastatikós Agónas) saw one policeman, Diamantis Matzounis, shot and gravely injured.

explained soon after I had identified myself, had originally suspected that I was either a drug user or dealer myself. This same guard engaged in a long conversation with me through the night of July 12th, 2010, explaining with quite some zest his own theory of why the Tositsa St drug-dealing was so openly tolerated by the police: “it is a conscious plan”, he told me, “for them to push [the drug-dealing] in the university”. To my enquiry of why this could be the case, he was upfront: “they want to weaken the [Academic] asylum, and [to then] get rid of it”<sup>120</sup>.

Tositsa, in this sense, appeared to me to be a peculiar kind of a ‘black hole’ in Exarcheia — a space only accessible by drug users and dealers and one that was either to be ignored or even avoided by other users of the area. In my frequent observations of Patisson Avenue I also noted that many passers-by would prefer to cross the avenue prior to its junction with Tositsa, using the opposite pavement for their thoroughfare. The difference that I observed between the daily and nightly use of the street (and its immediate vicinity) was also considerable: during the day, there was an uneasy coexistence between drug users/dealers and passers-by; either students of the Polytechnic, shoppers or those waiting at the bus and trolley stop directly at the junction with Patisson Avenue. During night-time, the remainder of the area would become mostly deserted while the drug-dealing and using continued abated and intensified,

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<sup>120</sup> He was referring to Law 1268/1982 of the Greek state, which barred police from entering university grounds in the name of academic freedom. In the summer of 2011 the AAL was nullified by Greek Parliament as part of an education bill voted by the vast majority of three parties’ MPs (the social-democrat PASOK, the centre-right Nea Dimokratia and the populist right, LAOS). The voting in of this education reform bill by MPs of the three parties was widely conceived as a prelude to the coalition government that followed soon thereafter (November 2011).

even.

As with so many of the conditions I witnessed in Exarcheia, the drug-dealing element of Tositsa street was nowhere near to static. In the summer of 2010, just prior to my arrival, a mobilisation by local residents and shop-keepers saw Exarcheia square largely cleared off drug users and dealers (the operation is described in detail in section 5.3.3). As a result, a significant number of users and dealers moved to Tositsa St. In addition, during December 2010 a large part of the drug dealing moved south, to the other main gate of Athens Polytechnic on Stournari St. The move could have ostensibly vindicated the fear of my informant guard of the Polytechnic who had claimed this was a conscious move dictated by the police, in an attempt to slander the school and to pave the way for a lifting or nullification of the Academic Asylum as a whole: the nullification of the AAL did indeed come soon thereafter (in the summer of 2011). Did the moving around of the drug-dealing from one gate of the Polytechnic to the other, only prior to the abolition of the AAL, truly vindicate my informant? Of course, it is impossible to establish to what extent such a cause and effect connection did actually exist. But the question of a relationship between very grounded, local spatial practices and much larger-scale social and political processes does begin to become very apparent, I believe, right here.

There are two key elements I want to highlight among my Tositsa St ethnographic observations: first, the near-exclusive use of the space as claimed and granted to drug users and dealers for the time they were there. This is a motif I had seen repeated in Exarcheia square, and something that was used by residents who participated in the operation against drug users and dealers when questioned by others about the intolerant character of their action: “forcing the [drug] users out of the square is not intolerant”, I was told by one of the activists participating in the action, “[as] the



users themselves tolerate no-one [else] in the square. How can a mother with a child use the space, if there is a junkie next to them shooting up?” The second element is the considerable difference in the use of the space between day and night. The — already uneasy — daytime coexistence between the drug dealers and users of Tositsa St and the users of adjacent streets turns into a single-use drug-oriented space during night-time.

### 5.3.2 The Polytechnic (including Stournari St and the east side of Patisson Avenue)



*Illustration 5.2: The NTUA (Polytechnic) "historical" campus in Exarcheia*

As discussed earlier in the thesis (Chapter 1, Introduction; Chapter 4, Discourse analysis) the Athens Polytechnic (NTUA) has persistently played a prominent role in

shaping the character of Exarcheia. In this part, historical agency apart, I now seek what the everyday reality of the institution's grounds is like. The Polytechnic (comprising of nine Departments) was hosted since its foundation at the Patission campus. As of recent years, however, only the Architecture department remains in the campus, along with two of the School's libraries and a number of administrative services. Even following this reduction in its educational use, the School grounds still play a major part in shaping the everyday reality of Patission Ave and —more evidently even— Stournari St. Students enter the Polytechnic exclusively from Stournari: The Tositsa gate, as discussed (section 5.3.1) is effectively locked, while the gate of Patission Avenue is also permanently locked, opening only in select occasions<sup>121</sup>. That leaves a single, relatively narrow (approximately three meters wide) gate to cater for the entire flow of students, staff and visitors. In spatial positioning terms however this also creates an intriguing situation where the users of the institution are in direct sight to Exarcheia square: I spent many mornings sitting by Stournari street in my attempt to comprehend the relationship of the NTUA building to its surroundings.

Before fully articulating my findings on Stournari and the Polytechnic, some brief history would be of use. The existence of the Polytechnic directly influenced the trade of Stournari St in the years and decades following the dictatorship. The operation of the Architecture school — primarily — and the other engineering schools saw the opening up of businesses catering for their students' specialised needs; shops selling stationery were gradually enhanced with more technical equipment to eventually become, in the late eighties and early nineties, Athens' hub for businesses selling

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121 I only witnessed that particular gate open during the commemorative celebrations for the November 17th uprising in 2010 and 2011.

personal computers and other consumer electronics. Perhaps more than any other parts of Exarcheia, then, Stournari St was a commercial hub for a prolonged period of time; the only part of the neighbourhood that specialised in particular consumer products (PC's, high-tech) in Athens and drawing visitors from the entire city as a result. As Spyros Tsagaratos<sup>122</sup> pointed out to me, the springing up of shopping malls in the Athenian suburbs has had a 'severe effect on shopping in central Athens', and Stournari St was no exception. Even though many PC and consumer electronics shops remained in the area at the time of writing, there was already a sense of demise lingering — confirmed both by my informants and by a single exercise I conducted in the early days of my fieldwork (June 2010): out of a total of 58 shopping units lined up along Stournari Street between Exarcheia square and Patisision Avenue, at least 19 were lying empty.

But what was everyday life on Stournari street like? I spent numerous mornings walking up and down the street, to get a sense of the users present, and their encounters. I can confidently say Stournari is by far the most mixed-use space among those I encountered in Exarcheia. There is one immediately obvious reason for this, namely that it is lined up almost in its entirety with high-rise blocks of flats on both ends (except for the Polytechnic); six, seven or eight-storey blocks that accommodate commercial functions on the ground, residential and professional functions (offices primarily for engineers, lawyers and other professionals) in their upper tiers. There is, then, a considerable mix of users: I counted at least five distinct categories of users that were sharing the space, either concurrently or taking turns throughout the course of the day

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122 Spyros Tsagaratos is an architect and urban planner, who was the ministry-appointed head of the attempted regeneration of Exarcheia (in the midst of the Virtue Operations) in 1985.

and the night, namely:

(i) the students, staff and visitors of the Athens Polytechnic. They have a visible presence, mostly so in the immediate vicinity of the Stournari gate, with small cafés across the road also serving primarily the student community, one bookshop chain (Papasotiriou) also doing so.

(ii) The professionals occupying the office spaces typically found in the upper floors of many block of flats lining up on both sides of Stournari street. The majority, I soon realised, were either graduates of the Polytechnic themselves, or otherwise engaged in professions related to it. An impromptu survey of the 65 offices in flats between the square and Patission Avenue numbered 13 architects; 17 civil engineers; 24 mechanical engineers, but also 11 lawyers (as of November 2010). The community of professionals around Stournari is sizeable; yet their presence in the area, of course, is largely limited to office hours.

(iii) The actual residents — they would be the second most sizeable (second only to the students and staff at the NTUA) but largely lost in the other crowds — apart from specific cafés (the owner of one, Tzortzina's, was an invaluable informant) there seems to be little of a local landmark/ point of reference for residents.

(iv) The consumers coming to Stournari for its computer/ electronics market. During working days' day time, they comprise one of the most visible user groups of the street.

(v) Deserving a separate category not because of their size but because of their extreme

visibility and controversy surrounding them, are the street traders.

(vi) Finally, what is arguably the most controversial and transient category: the heroin users and dealers that were moved, during the course of my fieldwork, from the square to Tositsa street and from there to the Stournari gate of the Athens Polytechnic (also see part 5.3.1).

Stournari Street is one of the most fiercely contested spaces in Exarcheia, even if this might not become immediately apparent to a casual visitor. This contesting has a different outcome at each different part of the day; who appears to hold a more visible presence depends, almost entirely from my observation, upon the time in which someone would visit. Daytime is dominated by trade: bookshops, photocopying shops and high-tech lined up on the South side of the street, opposite the Polytechnic, catering both for its students and for a clientèle arriving from across the city; this, after all, is the traditional high-tech marketplace hub of central Athens, not entirely unlike Tottenham Court Road in London. Unlike neighbourhood shops, the chain-stores in central Athens have so-called “continuous” (uninterrupted) hours of operation, typically staying open from 8 am to 8pm during workdays, a reduced part of the day on Saturdays and close on Sundays. Throughout the course of the day, then, trade prevails; but literally on the side of this trade (on the pavements outside the shops) informal trading also flourishes with small items (sunglasses, bags, but also some electronics paraphernalia) sold by young men (typically, from those I sampled: young, male and of central African descent—without exception, Senegalese or Nigerian). It is not uncommon for police to conduct random searches to these tradesmen which typically end up with their detention and confiscation of their goods; the vast majority of the tradesmen operate without a license and often-times are undocumented themselves, faced with a state mechanism in which

gaining legal status as a migrant ranks among the hardest in the EU<sup>123</sup>.

At the same time, the southern end of the street (particularly the pavement lining up outside the Athens Polytechnic) is used by an entirely different population altogether, even if the common element between the two sides is the academic population (students and staff), similarities end there. As of December 2010, a very visible and, as I was told, overnight transferring of the drug dealers and users from Tositsa street took place, the new “zone of tolerance” being the area in the immediate vicinity of the Stournari street gate. I am using the notion of “zone of tolerance” to describe a sentiment that was common among the vast majority of my informants, even if described in different terms: it was evident by everyone (myself included) that hard drug dealing in considerable quantities takes places openly in certain locales in Athens. This dealing takes place in very specific locales always, yet where these locales are tends to change over time. As much as I was intrigued and keen to know, the lower-rank police officers who agreed to talk to me would not confirm whether the formation of such “zones of tolerance” was a deliberate police policy, or how high up the orders came for their formation, should this be the case. Y, an informant who used to be a serving police officer and agreed to talk anonymously, acknowledged the existence of these ‘zones of tolerance’: “of course, they [the hard drug dealers and users] have to be somewhere”. But why specifically around the Polytechnic? And why would these zones shift over the course of time? I did not get any fully satisfactory answer from any one of my interviewees. An array of hypotheses were thrown in, including, as mentioned, a possible plan to aid abolish the academic asylum; infighting between rival drug dealing networks competing for the

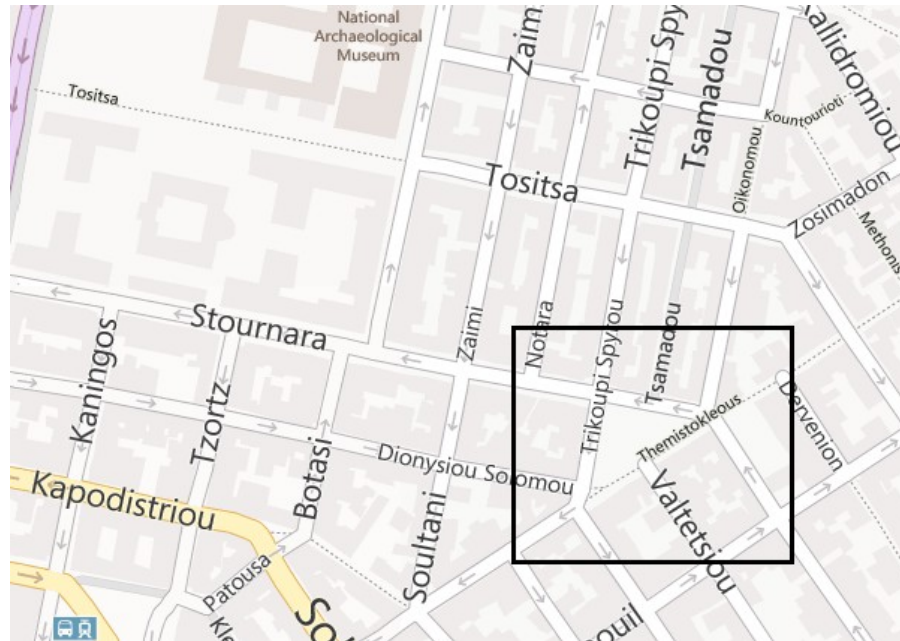
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123 A ‘statistical snapshot’ of asylum figures for Greece is available via the UNCHR website,

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e726.html> last accessed 07.07.2012.

most lucrative spots; the need of police to show that they act, perhaps merely by shifting around these drug dealing piazzas. And yet, following the shifting around of these zones of tolerance over the course of my fieldwork, an impressively fluid pattern emerged very quickly: first it was Exarcheia square that was the main zone of such; then it moved primarily to Tositsa St, and even before a few months had lapsed, it was the turn of Stournari St, once again. The pattern seems messy, chaotic, almost random. It is neither of these, but it edges close to them all. My eventual conclusion is that this fluidity is the mere outcome of too many forces being applied simultaneously: a combination of a NIMBY ('not-in-my-backyard') attitude, with shop keepers lobbying to have the drug-dealing pushed away; police trying to find an ever-temporary solution to an issue exceeding their capacity; a drug market with some steep circles of increase and decline, both largely dependent on location — as is the case with so many other businesses. Perhaps the "truth" of my police informant that drug dealing would happen "somewhere" was not so "plain" after all. For social and economic reasons, the creation of long-living state-supported structures that would regulate the drug market and support drug users allowing them, among others, the security and privacy of using drugs in private spaces has been out of question in the Greek case. What has happened instead, is a fragile balance of a tolerance of public drug use, one that has an intricate spatiality: drug users are tolerated only as long as they adhere both to their shifting around at brief time intervals and to their strict confinement in the space of 'exception' they are allowed to be in. For many years, one such exception was Exarcheia square.

### **5.3.3 Exarcheia square and its surrounding side-streets**



*Illustration 5.3: Exarcheia square and its surrounding side-streets*

An anecdote I was told about Exarcheia square was that it had come about as an accident. In its early urban development days, the story goes, Athens only saw a few main thoroughfares drawn and built. Panepistimiou Avenue, bordering Exarcheia on its south end, was part of the original Athens plan<sup>124</sup>. When Alexandras Ave was designed, much later, as a swift thoroughfare, it was drawn at an angle of approximately 35° to Panepistimiou Ave. Follow the streets parallel to both these avenues inward toward Exarcheia, and at the precise point of their intersection you will meet the small triangular patch of land that is the square.

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124 The first plan for the city of Athens was drawn by architects Stamatis Kleanthis and Eduard

Schaubert in 1832; see Kallivretakis, L. 'Athens in the 19th century: From regional town of the Ottoman Empire to capital of the Kingdom of Greece', available from

[http://www.eie.gr/archaeologia/En/chapter\\_more\\_9.aspx](http://www.eie.gr/archaeologia/En/chapter_more_9.aspx), (last accessed 22.08.2012).



When I arrived to the field, this small patch of land lying in the heart of the neighbourhood had long been associated with hard drug-dealing and drug-fuelled crime: at least since the late nineties, the square stood in sharp contrast with its immediate, buzzing surroundings. Unlike most public spaces in Greek (and Mediterranean) cities, the square appeared near-abandoned, with hard drug-users using it near-exclusively.

But on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010, an otherwise routine incident altered this condition beyond recognition. After two drug-users chased a woman in her twenties and tried to steal her bag, Mr Achilleas Sevastopoulos, the owner of a nearby restaurant ('Achilleas Tavern'), decided to take action. On the following day he brought along his small PA (public announcement) sound-system, playing music and asking heavy drug-users and dealers to leave the square in the intervals. He remained at this spot overnight; during the next few days he started being accompanied by an ever-increasing number of shop-owners and residents. After approximately two weeks the vast majority of users and dealers had left the square. Ever since (and until the completion of my fieldwork in the summer of 2011) the square had been used by local residents and visitors—during the summer of 2010 there were frequent film screenings, feasts, concerts, parties etc., in an apparent attempt to give more permanence to the square's newly-found uses and users.

What appeared to start off as an initiative by a single local shop-owner, then, quickly turned into an informal campaign that was backed by many shop-owners and residents alike: the campaign was for drug-dealing to be moved off the square, but also essentially for other user to "regain" their right to use this space. This initiative was, indeed, remarkably successful. But remarkable not only in the sense that it achieved a shifting around of the geography of the drug trade (after all, as shown earlier, this appears to be more of a rule and less of an exception) but in that it happened without involving any visible violence.

I focus on this incident as it can reveal much about the way that the use of public space is shifted in Exarcheia. The contest over the space of Exarcheia square was not limited to the simplistic schema “drug users and dealers versus everyone else” — far from so. Just like with Stournari St, Exarcheia square also has a user dynamic that will shift dramatically between day and night: during daytime, life in the square is dominated by the 29 shops and kiosks in its periphery: eight cafés, five bars (the line between the two is often blurred), six fast-food eateries, two off-license-type ‘mini markets’, two pharmacies, one betting shop, plus the four kiosks [períptero] in its four ends<sup>125</sup>. In the centre, the square becomes something of a low/no-consumption zone; on the one end (south) is a small but well defined and well-used playground; the remainder is a public space, encircled by seven benches, a statue of the god Eros and an impromptu basketball court, a vivid reminder of the 2010 battle for the square’s use. In daytime, then, Exarcheia Square is for its largest part a tranquil environment. There exist, however, at least two elements that remind the casual observer that this is far from a tranquil neighbourhood. First, the banners near-permanently hanging on the square: the ones I saw during my fieldwork were of explicitly political content; they would declare solidarity with a political prisoner, call to a demonstration, announce an assembly to the square, and so on. Second, the relatively frequent visit of police forces to the square in daytime, and earlier parts of the day in particular: one of the most intense operations by Delta, the motorcycle police, took place in Exarcheia in early morning (August 5, 2011). If anything, the police appear very aware of the fact that the social dynamic in Exarcheia alters dramatically between day and night. “They would

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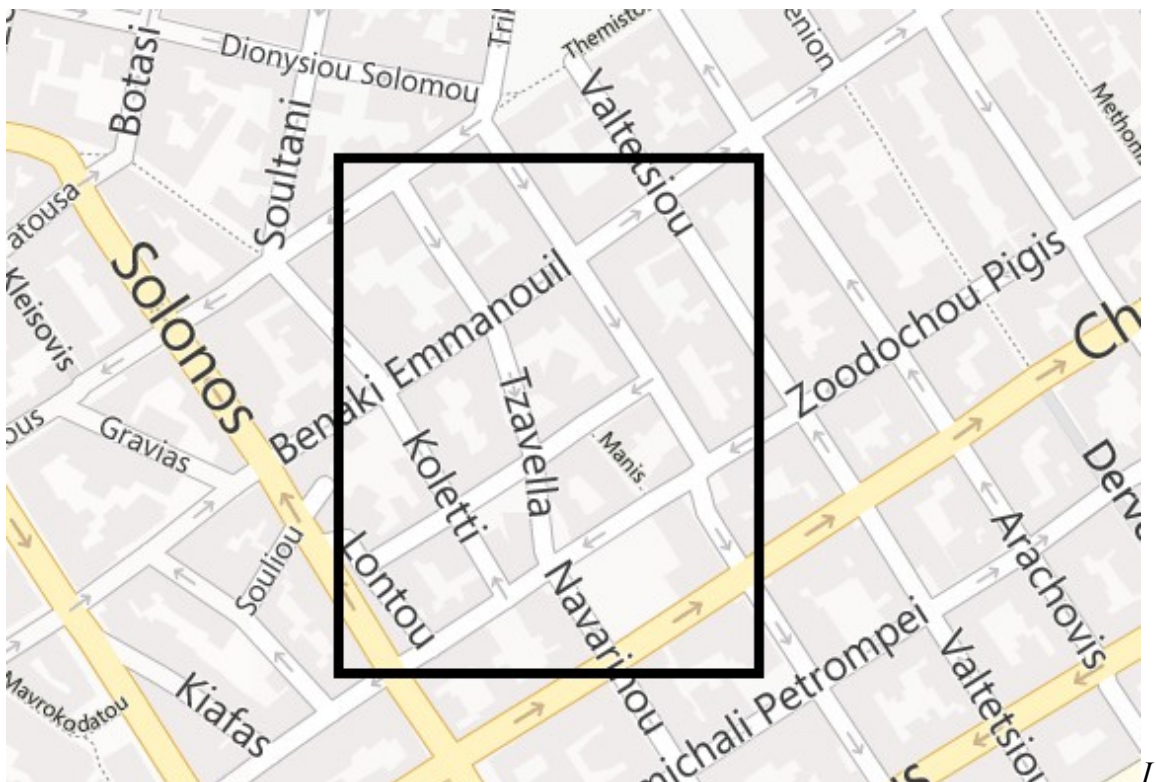
125 As of the summer of 2010, five retail spaces overlooking the square were unused.

never dare show up at night”, was a frequent response to my questioning of informants regarding the increased presence of police in Exarcheia throughout the winter of 2010-11. The judgement proved wrong: police did start appearing ever-frequently in Exarcheia during night-time in the said winter and thereafter. Yet the fact remains: there exists a conviction in many a peoples’ minds that night-time in Exarcheia is “different”, they believe that the police are somewhat “losing control” when the darkness of the night falls upon the neighbourhood.

The explanation for this imbalance in power over the space of the square might be somewhat less poetic. As with Stournari Street, here too I have tried to calculate and to assess the use of Exarcheia space by different categories of users. If daytime is dominated by professionals, consumers and shop-keepers, evenings see a different crowd flooding in. The late evening (yet early by Greek standards, and this is important) — that is, between 7 and 9pm, is a liminal, a turning point. The time when Exarcheia square empties from its day regulars, and sees the evening-ites take their place. This is a much younger crowd: late teenagers, young students, people who have travelled to Exarcheia from outside (often abroad); a crowd that is able to, and willing to consume the Exarcheia idea: to drink and to eat in the neighbourhood. Some, a few, are there for another reason: they want to live, embody and consume the feeling of revolt. In my daily visits to Exarcheia square, as well as Stournari street by the Polytechnic, I was surprised to hear as many people around me speak languages other than Greek; visibly, from their mannerisms and attire, these were visitors, not migrants. Over the course of the past few years —and following the death of Alexandros Grigoropoulos in December 2008 in particular— Exarcheia has become something of a cult neighbourhood to many across the world; a peculiar kind of Mecca-equivalent for the faithful of present time urban revolts. What happens, then, in the area in the immediate vicinity of where

Alexandros Grigoropoulos died?

**5.3.4 The area around the park between Charilaou Trikoupi, Navarinou, Metaxa and Zoodochou Pigis St as well as the area in the immediate vicinity of Mesologgiou and Tzavella St**



*Illustration 5.4: The area around the park between Charilaou Trikoupi, Navarinou, Metaxa and Zoodochou Pigis St*

This particular area is perhaps the one that simultaneously exceeds the confines of Exarcheia and then comes to define and reshape the neighbourhood in return. Let me clarify: the area (not entirely corresponding to any division — administrative, municipal

or else) saw its fame sky-rocket during December 2008, when a 16-year old teenager, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, died after being shot by police at the junction of Tzavela and Mesologgiou Street. In December 2008, then, there was an explosion on the junction of these two streets that few outside the neighbourhood would have been able to predict: and yet, for those working and living in this exact part of Exarcheia, the events came as little surprise — until the moment, at least, when the teenager Grigoropoulos was shot. Even if few would have been able to foresee the spread of the subsequent revolt, it was evident that an explosive situation was brewing. N, a close friend of Alexandros', explains:

after the abandonment of Exarcheia into a junk den, there was a practical problem for many of us. We wanted to socialise somewhere, to hang out, but we were not quite sure where! Exarcheia has many pedestrianised streets, that is true, but most are taken over by way too many cafés and bars already. What about us who just want to chill?

Until approximately two years prior to the death of Grigoropoulos, there were already some cafés and bars springing up at the southern end of Mesologgiou street. Yet the determiningin turning the narrow pedestrianised street from a 'bar street' to the major neighbourhood hangout, was the fact that it combined organised, commercialised entertainment (the cafés and the bars) with — just about — sufficient space, at its northern end, for those who wished to intermingle with everyone else without consuming. Indeed, a stop-over at Mesologgiou Street at any random Friday or Saturday night in particular would show a near-equal spread between those drinking inside the cafés and bars lined up on the street and those hanging out outside, drinking cans from the nearby kiosks, if even that.

It was not uncommon — and I was an eye-witness in two such occasions myself



A few yards away from the bustling Mesologgiou St and its side streets lies the area defined by Kallidromiou St and Strefi Hill. This is, by far, the most resident-oriented part of Exarcheia; Kallidromiou is lined up with some of the area's most stunning neoclassical (residential) buildings, while the small ring-road running around Strefi Hill also has these in abundance. Shipping a coffee in Kallidromio café<sup>126</sup>, taking a stroll through Saturday's open air (laïké, i.e. popular) market, or walking through the greenery of Strefi Hill, one would be excused to question whether they are still in one of the most contentious areas—at least discourse-wise—in Athens, if not Greece. And yet a careful, closer look also reveals many of the tensions that bear naked in the rest of the neighbourhood.

The police station of Exarcheia is on Kallidromiou St (number 12) even if it has no direct eye-contact with much of the street: Kallidromiou has sharp elevation angles, as it runs across the western slope of Strefi Hill and then south-east directly toward the slope of Mount Lycabettus. The area is one of the most residence-oriented not only in Exarcheia but in central Athens overall. But the tranquillity does not come without some considerable exceptions: during the time of my fieldwork alone there were two instances of severe violence in the area's streets. First, on May 14, 2011—an event to which I was ear witness: while approaching the junction of Kallidromiou and Charilaou Trikoupi St, I heard some screaming and shouting coming from the usually buzzing (but not in such way) popular market that takes place every Saturday. What had happened? In a text 'claiming responsibility' for the events of the day<sup>127</sup>, an anonymous group of anarchists explained that they had decided to launch an "attack" against the police

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126 One of the three coffee shops lined up on Kallidromiou St as of the summer of 2011.

station on Kallidromiou St, apparently ‘in response’ to the police brutality during the [General Strike] demonstration of May 11th the same year, and the ongoing at the time operations of the far-right Golden Dawn party.

The unnamed anarchist group set ablaze three civilian motorcycles parked outside the police station, claiming they belonged to police personnel. “At the same time”, continues their text, “our patrolling group that was standing at the junction of Charilaou Trikoupi and Kallidromiou St, spotted a motorbike with two civilian-dressed police officers. The group flipped the motorbike and pushed [the officers] away. The bike fell on [the wayside of] Charilaou Trikoupi, beyond the margin of the market, yet very close to it. The bike was then set alight, primarily in order to prevent the police officers from chasing us — and by the way, it was them who entered the market aghast, brandishing their weapons. Our tragic mistake was that we erroneously believed the flames of the motorbike on Charilaou Trikoupi could not spread to the market stalls of Kallidromiou street, which were a good few meters away. And it would have indeed been so, if it wasn’t for the unusual event of the [motorbike’s] tank exploding.”

The event caused considerable turmoil, with extended press coverage<sup>127</sup>, and a

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127 [https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article\\_id=1292277](https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=1292277) 17.05.2011 (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

128 ‘Two of the victims of the molotov attack in Exarcheia are in intensive care’, newspaper To Vima, 14.05.2011, <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=400647> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

‘Three injured by the attack in Exarcheia’, newspaper Ta Nea, 14.05.2011, <http://www.tanea.gr/ellada/article/?aid=4630969> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)



series of statements and commentary by political groups and individuals in the wider anarchist/far-left movement in the country unanimously condemning the attack<sup>129</sup>, and the fact that some by-standers, allegedly, instead of helping one of the women stall-holders and an attack victim, robbed pots and flowers from her stall only moments after she had been taken away injured in an ambulance<sup>130</sup>.

Two more similar, ‘ambush’-style attacks took place during and after my fieldwork: one on November 4, 2011, when approximately 25 people attacked the

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‘Life of one [male] injured during the Kallidromiou street attack in danger’, web portal tvxs.gr, 15.05.2011, <http://www.tvxs.gr/node/60527> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

129 ‘No truce with actions of anti-social violence’, collective statement signed by the ‘Anti-authoritarian movement (Athens)’, ‘Autonomous haunt’, ‘Committee of initiative of citizens of Exarcheia’, ‘Initiative for self-organisation in education’, ‘Skoros’, ‘Base trade union in the NGO sector’ and ‘Comrades’, [https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article\\_id=1293571](https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=1293571) (last accessed: 04.11.2012)

‘Blood and solidarity for the ‘collateral damage’ of Kallidromiou Street’, signed by the ‘Anarchist fellowship in the South’, [https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article\\_id=1302105](https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=1302105) (last accessed: 04.11.2011)

‘Kallidromiou Street open air market lunchtime on Saturday’, posted by the blogger running the ‘Exarcheia Street’ blog, [http://odos-exarcheion.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/blog-post\\_14.html](http://odos-exarcheion.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/blog-post_14.html)

‘The two faces of Exarcheia’, web portal protagon.gr, 16.05.2011, <http://www.protagon.gr/?i=protagon.el.article&id=6856> (last accessed: 19.11.2012)

police, allegedly with ‘stones, sticks, crowbars and an axe’, without, however, injuring any<sup>131</sup>. The second such attack took place on 13.2.2012, when a group of approximately 50 people hurdled Molotov cocktails to the police station before swiftly dispersing in the side-streets<sup>132</sup> — this, on the night following the General Strike of that day, which saw extensive riots and damage across much of Athens’ city centre.

Apart from these two cases, Kallidromiou Street has also played host to violent incidents at least in a number of more times, to my knowledge: first, in the case of riots in ‘central’ Exarcheia (i.e. by the square) that would spill over to this part of the neighbourhood<sup>133</sup> and second, in the case of older violent incidents centred, once again, around the local police station. The station has been targeted at least three more times: on September 17th, 2005, when a gathering in protest to a demonstration organised by members of the far-right ‘Golden Dawn’, instances of violence all around Exarcheia

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130 [According to Dimos Moutsis, a well-known singer and apparently an eye-witness to the events; his account was published online at http://www.aixmi.gr/index.php/h-gynaika-kaigotan-oi-ellhnates-thn-klevan/ \(last accessed: 19.11.2012\)](http://www.aixmi.gr/index.php/h-gynaika-kaigotan-oi-ellhnates-thn-klevan/)

131 ‘Attack against policemen in Exarcheia’, To Vima, 04.11.2011, <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=428611> (last accessed: 19.11.2012)

132 ‘45 buildings and stores in the centre were set alight’, To Vima, 12.02.2012, <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=443272> (last accessed: 19.02.2012)

133 ‘Happening now: [violent] episodes at Exarcheia square’, Yahoo News Greece, 01.05.2012, <http://gr.news.yahoo.com/-123022975.html> (last accessed: 19.05.2012)

saw the police station targeted, with one of its external windows smashed<sup>134</sup>. Then, on April 26, 2007, when an action similar to that of May 2011 saw six police vehicles, one private vehicle and three motorcycles burnt<sup>135</sup>. And finally, on December 16th, 2008, eleven days after the death of teenager Grigoropoulos, a demonstration headed to the police station of Kallidromiou Street, called for by the local 'Citizens' Initiative of Exarcheia'<sup>136</sup>, <sup>137</sup>. This demonstration itself turned into a relatively low-intensity riot when a group of the protesters attacked the police building with stones and the police responded with tear gas<sup>138</sup>.

On November 19, 2009, finally, a pedestrian police patrol was attacked by a group of youths on the corner of Kallidromiou and Themistokleous St; one Special

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134 '[Violent] episodes and attack against the police station of Zografou', Athens News Agency, 18.09.2005, <http://news.pathfinder.gr/greece/news/235217.html> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

135 'Attack on Kallidromiou Street now', Athens Indymedia, 26.04.2007, [https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article\\_id=694825](https://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=694825) (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

136 'The front of the march, head-to-head with riot police on Kallidromiou str.', 17.12.2008, <http://www.tvxs.gr/node/1779> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

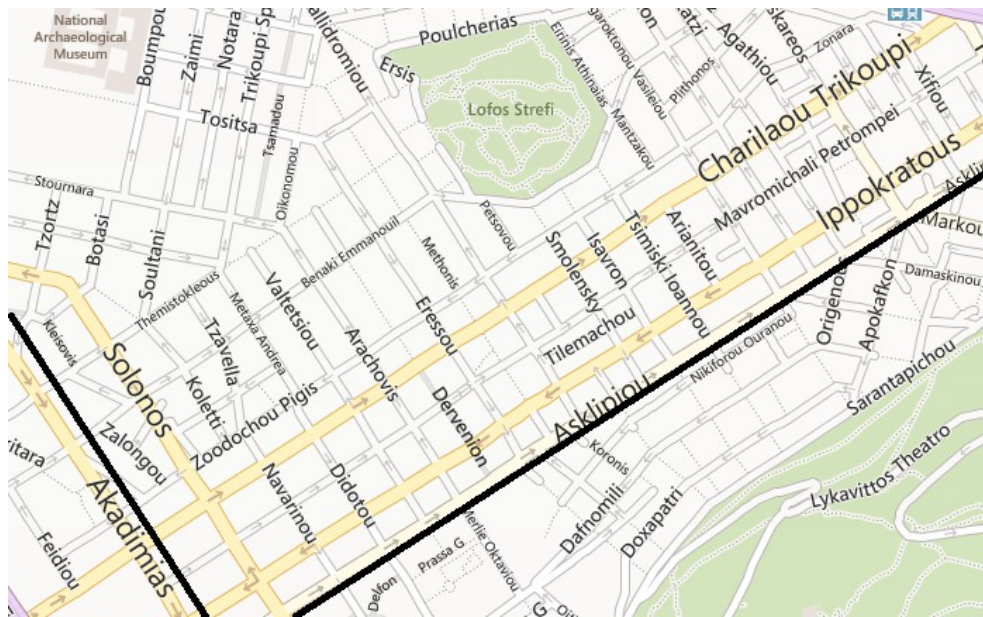
137 'Press Release', Citizens' Initiative of Exarcheia, 12.12.2008, <http://exarchia.pblogs.gr/2008/12/deltio-typoy-12-12.html> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

138 '[Violent] episodes during the Exarcheia demonstration', Naftemporiki, 16.12.2008 <http://www.naftemporiki.gr/audionews/listenstory.asp?id=1719644> (last accessed: 19.05.2011)

Forces policewoman was ‘lightly injured’<sup>139</sup>.

### 5.3.6 The two main streets outlining the borders of Exarcheia to the south (Akadimias St) and to the west (Asklepiou Street)

(Map figure 6)



*Illustration 5.6: The two main streets outlining the borders of Exarcheia to the south (Akadimias St) and to the west (Asklepiou Street)*

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139 '[Violent] episodes with the injuring of a special forces policewoman in Exarcheia', 19.11.2009,

<http://stereanews.wordpress.com/2009/11/19/%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%8C%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CE%BC%CE%B5-%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BC%CF%8C-%CE%B5%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%82-%CF%86%CF%81%CE%BF-2/> ((last accessed: 19.11.2009))

What unites some otherwise very different parts of Exarcheia is an uneasy equilibrium between tranquillity and violence: now, in this last of these ‘spatial ethnography’ reports, I have chosen two streets defining the border of Exarcheia. To its west, Exarcheia is bound by Patission Avenue and to its north by Alexandras Ave: both are wide, busy thoroughfares cutting through the urban fabric; their function as a boundary of Exarcheia (and indeed, many more areas that they run through) is therefore indisputable. At the other two ends of the neighbourhood, however, its boundaries become much more fluid, porous, open to dispute — and the occasional re-interpretation. One exercise I conducted with all my informants was to ask them to outline the area of Exarcheia on a map. While in most cases the ‘borders’ on the west and north remained the same, the result was altogether different for both the east and south end. In the first case, Exarcheia was considered to run anywhere until Charilaou Trikoupi and Asklipiou St; in the second case, the boundary was set somewhere between Panepistimiou Ave and Solonos St.

There are two points that are interesting boundary demarcation exercise. First, the fact that these boundaries are fluid, and therefore open to varying interpretations. What intrigued me in particular was the apparent negative correlation between the ‘breadth of the neighbourhood’, so to speak, and one’s age: in simpler words, younger people tended to conceive Exarcheia in its extended boundaries (reaching all the way to Asklipiou Street, and to Akadimias St) while older, primarily residents of the area conceptualised the neighbourhood being much closer to its original core. In at least three cases I was even told that the Athens Polytechnic was not itself part of the Exarcheia, instead limiting the breadth of the neighbourhood to the square and the side-streets in the immediate vicinity.

The second interesting point is that both these areas constitute, in essence, zones in which the breadth of the neighbourhood is negotiated — but along with it comes a negotiation over access to the core of the neighbourhood itself: since the summer of 2004, permanent riot police units have been stationed at the junction of Ippokratous St. and Didotou St. The official reason for their stationing there is exclusively to protect the HQ of PASOK<sup>140</sup>. It was intriguing for me to see, however, that many of my informants considered the presence of the riot police there as a sort of a human checkpoint installed at the main thoroughfare between Exarcheia and its neighbouring, yet entirely antithetical area of Kolonaki. Kolonaki ranks among the most expensive parts of central Athens, its affluence boosted by its key position between Mount Lycabettus and the Parliament. An abundance of politicians, high-ranking diplomats, and relatively affluent professionals live there; as a result, the reasoning would go between my informants, there is a need for permanent police presence that would deter the ‘delinquents’ of Exarcheia from reaching the area. There was, nevertheless, at least one case in which a group of people set off from within Exarcheia, caused extensive property damage in Kolonaki, before returning to the neighbourhood and disperse — on May 13, 2009<sup>141</sup>.

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140 PASOK — the Panhellenic Socialist Movement; the main social-democratic party in Greece, which swapped with ND (New Democracy) in power throughout the Metapolitefsi.

141 ‘Anarchists trash Kolonaki’, apn.gr (in Greek), 13.05.2009, <http://www.apn.gr/news/nea/%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%81%CF%87%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%BB%CF%89%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B9/> (last accessed: 22.06.2012)

## 5.4 In search of an equilibrium

In the opening pages of this chapter I explained that the research method I deployed while in Exarcheia was the extended case method as outlined in Burawoy (1998). In this final part I now ‘extend out’ (Burawoy 1998: 9) from the ‘micro-world’ of Exarcheia and the numerous facets of violence that I encountered, witnessed or was informed about during my fieldwork there. From these facets of everyday violence I want to begin to reach out to the sources of their formation, of their convergence and seemingly continuous concentration in Exarcheia. At a first glance, the episodes of the everyday that I have witnessed and collected from the different parts of Exarcheia might seem disconnected, even irrelevant to one another: in Tositsa St (the drug dealing), Exarcheia square (the struggle over the use of the space), Kallidromiou St (the balance between everyday tranquillity and political violence seeping through), the ‘violent flash-mobs’ of Mesologgiou St, or the situation at the borders of Exarcheia (with the struggles over control of the neighbourhood’s entrance and exit nodes). But this is far from so. Take the example of the open air drug dealing on Tositsa St. The formation of a ‘drug hangout’ [piátsa, πιάτσα] on the street appears to have come as a result of a complex tangling together of historical and social processes, eventually having political repercussions as well. First, the fact that the geographical position of Tositsa allowed for a perfectly combined element of the anonymity, hustling and bustling of Omonoia Square (only a few blocks down Patission avenue) and what was referred to me as the ‘culture of tolerance’ of Exarcheia. For hard drug users seeking a relatively safe and hospitable public space in which to have access to, and relative freedom to use their drugs, Exarcheia would appear as a sensible choice. What would happen once they established a presence in the neighbourhood, however, is a different matter: what I

witnessed was a constant and very public debate about where they would be: should it be the square? Tucked away in Tositsa street? Or in front of the Stournari gate of the Polytechnic, claiming use of a key space in the relationship between the Polytechnic and the neighbourhood? The answer to this question was never straightforwardly given by a police decision, as some of my informants would have thought it would, or should be. Neither was it exclusively down to other users of public spaces in Exarcheia (residents, visitors, shop-keepers, etc.) to decide for the fate of these users. Nor, finally, was it a matter of choice for the users themselves: physical weakness combined with their frail legal position seemed to make the question of their public presence one to be answered by others. Not by a single other, by others: the answer would lie within the equilibrium of power between social actors in Exarcheia; police, residents, shop-keepers, activists, other users active at any single time. Rather than producing a single, definite result ('the drug users will be located in space x') this equilibrium would change over time, shifting the location of this group as a result.

Exactly the same generic formula can now be applied to every single one of my other small case studies. From the residents reshaping the balance of the user control in Exarcheia square, to a violent group essentially 'negotiating' the question of access to the neighbourhood with the police (in this case, by means of extreme violence), what happened within each of these cases presented in this chapter was an 'equilibrium' between social actors in Exarcheia. It could take anything from years (to shift away drug users from the area) to a few minutes (say, for the police to enter or to be chased away). What runs as a common theme, however, is that the multiplicity of social actors per se would always allow a power equilibrium of some type. Put more simply: there were merely too many different social and political actors for Exarcheia to ever tip entirely toward one end of the spectrum (total chaos, or total order, a balancing out



through sheer multiplicity of actors). Rather, it would always spatially articulate an equilibrium — not in the sense of a ‘sum of all things unequal’, but a balance that was inherently fragile; a weight waiting to tip at the slightest shift in the power of any of the social actors involved. And so, through the post-dictatorial Greek years, and even through the year-and-a-half of my fieldwork, the added multiplicity of social actors active in Exarcheia in fact granted that the balance of power in the neighbourhood would become more complicated, but at the same time would change too rapidly for the neighbourhood itself to change: amidst a whirlwind of social, political and economic change on the national scale, Exarcheia remained this whirlwind of stability. What this term means, and how Exarcheia changed and regained many of its characteristics through the years, is the subject of the next chapter.

## 6. The Rhythms of Exarcheia

The history of time, and the time of history, should include a history of rhythms, which is missing.

Lefebvre 2004: 51

When presenting the outcome of my fieldwork in Chapter 5, I focused on the multiplicities of everyday life in Exarcheia: that is, on the diverse social experiences and realities playing out in the neighbourhood. By doing so I aimed to juxtapose elements of this lived experience to the discourse of the neighbourhood and its media portrayal, as analysed in Chapter 4 in particular.

The present chapter takes on two tasks. First, it continues and builds on this ethnographic study – only this time, by reading these diverse realities encountered in Exarcheia primarily through the lens of Henri Lefebvre’s theory of rhythms (Lefebvre 1999 and 2004), as explained in section 6.2. These diverse realities are in this way read not against, but in conjunction with one another as interweaving rhythms of social and political activity in everyday life in Exarcheia, enlarged upon in section 6.3. The same section (6.3) then raises the question of whether these seemingly diverse realities help sustain a certain social and political equilibrium in the neighbourhood. The remainder of the chapter (Sections 6.4 – 6.6) utilises the same conceptual tool of Lefebvre’s, stretching it beyond the everyday level to examine whether it can become applicable more widely: in a spiral-like reading, the chapter traces Exarcheia’s weekly rhythm of contention (6.4), and then its annual rhythm (6.5) before posing overall questions about the social and political equilibrium of the Metapolitefsi as a whole (6.6) and making

some potentially generalizable concluding comments in the final section (6.7).

## 6.1 Rhythm-analysing Exarcheia

This chapter aims to help understand Exarcheia's unique evolution over the years. Nevertheless, I have felt compelled to set off once again – as in the previous, purely ethnographic chapter – from the neighbourhood's reality on the ground: that is, from its everyday. This seeming contradiction requires some explanation.

Here, as in Chapter 5, I examine the multiplicities of everyday life in Exarcheia; parallel, often conflicting realities that formed in the neighbourhood. Yet for all this diversity of lived experience, a single, unifying theme kept recurring in conversations and interviews with my informants and interviewees alike. Among most of them there was an apparent belief that Exarcheia had changed significantly over the years (and in some unidentified recent years in particular). As this oft-repeated aphorism would have it, the neighbourhood was “no longer what it used to be”<sup>142</sup>. I was fascinated to see that both the subject of this perceived change and its time-scope varied widely. For example, one theme that I coded in my interview transcripts was the apparent depoliticisation of Exarcheia. According to this view, the neighbourhood had lost its status as an epicentre of radical political action<sup>143</sup> at the expense of a culture that was decreasingly politically

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142 The same phrase (Ta Exárcheia den éinai étsi ópōs ítan) was repeated to me by one of my key informants, Kostas D. of Kallidromiou Street, two interviewees (Vassilis from Thymari Tou Strefi and Yorgos from Kallidromiou Str) and one focus group, with members of the NGO Nostos.

143 What comprised radical and political was also interpreted in different ways.

motivated – whether still violent or not. For others it was quite the opposite: a neighbourhood they had previously felt to be culturally thriving and politically tolerant had apparently turned into a politically homogeneous “operational base”, as it was described to me, for a small segment of its otherwise diverse population. For some, Exarcheia was more “unsafe” than it used to be; for at least two of my informants, it was just not that “special”<sup>144</sup> any more.

Whatever their grievance about Exarcheia present and whatever their image of Exarcheia past, these informants and interviewees felt that social and political change had taken place in a way that was both singular (homogeneous) and linear: there was, schematically speaking, a perceived high point in the past (whether this concerned political activity, population demographics or something else) and what they then felt as a low point in the present. In their minds Exarcheia had been *sliding* at the time of our conversation – whether into de-politicisation, over-politicisation, gentrification, or an often conceived normalisation.

There is one significant problem with these readings of Exarcheia having changed in a homogeneous and linear way: they do not quite match the neighbourhood’s actual recent history. As an example, it is difficult to accept that the neighbourhood was becoming either more violent or more peaceful during the decades that followed the transition from dictatorship to democracy given that major instances of rioting and other unrest in Exarcheia were almost evenly spread over Greece’s entire post-dictatorial era. As I discuss later in the chapter (Section 6.6) Exarcheia saw the most prominent cases of unrest in 1973, 1985, 1995 and 2008. Smaller-scale riots and skirmishes between

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144 The term used from by interviewees was *idiaíterī geitoniá*; Exarcheia was no longer a ‘special neighbourhood’, ‘special’ hereby meaning unique/ exceptional.

groups of people and police have been in the hundreds and were also evenly spread throughout the Metapolitefsi. In the same way, it is difficult to accept a reading of Exarcheia as increasingly gentrifying, devalued or unsafe: social demographics and crime statistics<sup>145</sup> for the neighbourhood shows little by way of a determinant change in either direction.

What I was therefore faced with was a puzzling mismatch: Exarcheia never changed as drastically as my fieldwork notes would imply. But at the same time Exarcheia never – quite – stayed the same either: the neighbourhood was neither a haven of tranquillity *throughout* the Metapolitefsi, nor was it a theatre of never-ending riots. In terms of its population composition it never became a bourgeois bastion, nor did it become over-saturated with students. Last but not least, it never experienced a “rent gap” (Smith 1987) that could potentially make it vulnerable to mass-scale gentrification.

In other words, there was no single population group that ever managed to become overly dominant in the neighbourhood, and as a result, no social or political condition ever established itself fully. In this sense, it would be tempting to talk of the ‘fashions’ that emerged and disappeared in Exarcheia, another keyword I coded in interviews: as I was told, riots were a fashion that kept emerging and then disappearing every few years. But reading these events in the neighbourhood in historical perspective

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145 Regarding the crime statistics in particular, there is no official crime data released by the Greek police concerning Exarcheia alone. A largely empirical tracing of crime in the neighbourhood proved that there was, indeed, an increase in petite crime in Exarcheia in the last years of the research period (2010-11) but this is on par with the rise of street and petite crime in Greece overall following the financial crisis of 2008-09.

helped me to trace another pattern: I began to trace this pattern in Chapter 4, in what I there described as the equilibrium of violence<sup>146</sup> in Exarcheia. In this chapter I now attempt to articulate this violence equilibrium in full.

The idea of a violence equilibrium is useful in two ways. First, at the neighbourhood level, it helps us to conceive and articulate better the social processes that took place in Exarcheia during the Metapolitefsi: to explain how the neighbourhood acquired and sustained its status as a container of riots, revolts and other forms of contentious politics.

On a second level, this schema of riots that were contained in Exarcheia throughout the Metapolitefsi can help us to understand some key social and political elements of the era and the Third Hellenic Republic. Sections 6.5 and 6.6 juxtapose key events in Exarcheia to national-scale events of the Metapolitefsi. The two sections aim to trace such nationwide political events (and discontent expressed against them) literally on the ground: what took place in Exarcheia was a time-delayed, spatial articulation of discontent; a rising up against a structure only after this had solidly

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146 Throughout the chapter in question and the thesis overall I have opted for the use of the term

“equilibrium” (instead of, for example, “balance”, or “evenness”) to describe how different social forces present and applied in Exarcheia have seen violence preserved, and at the same time limited within the neighbourhood after such a prolonged period of time. The term “equilibrium of violence” reflects, in my view, the coexistence of these different social forces in Exarcheia: even though *equilibrium* and *balance* partially share an etymological root (equilibrium: *equal* + *libra*, i.e. balance/scale) the former also includes *equality*, which reflects in a much more accurate way the relationship between these often conflicting social forces in Exarcheia: instead of merely creating a *balance*, they form a situation where they equally co-exist with one another *without* balancing each other out.

established itself as such.

Could it therefore be possible, asks section 6.6, to use such rhythms of riots and contention (specifically, the violence equilibrium of Exarcheia) in order to re-conceptualise the lines of rupture and continuity between past and present regimes? Could we move beyond a linear (whether positive or negative) idea of change in Exarcheia – and of social change in Greek society overall? Put simply, Exarcheia did not remain static during the Metapolitefsi, nor was its evolution linear. There must be another way, another term, and another vocabulary for us to describe the evolution of the neighbourhood.

In the pages that follow I take up the challenge posed by Henri Lefebvre in his work on *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). Lefebvre's "rhythmanalytical project" (2004)<sup>147</sup> comprised an attempt to reveal the parallels between our *biological* (individual) and *social* (collective) rhythms. Lefebvre began with a relatively simple observation: our personal lives comprise of different rhythms. The ways in which our biological rhythms (the rhythms of our body) interact with one another, argues Lefebvre, offer an accurate indicator of our well-being. He distinguishes four possible relationships between rhythms (2004: 16):

- (a) *A polyrhythmia*, meaning a co-existence between two or more rhythms.

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147 Essentially, a predecessor to rhythmanalysis in Human Geography lies in the work of Hägerstrand (1975) on time-space (also see also Pred 1982). Where does the term originate from? "It is from a Portuguese," tells Lefebvre, "dos Santos, that Bachelard, in the *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, borrows the word 'rhythmanalysis', though without developing the meaning any more than did dos Santos" (Lefebvre 2004: 9)

- (b) A *eurythmia*, meaning a constructive interaction between two or more rhythms.
- (c) An *arrhythmia*, meaning a conflict between two or more rhythms.
- (d) An *isorhythmia*, meaning an equivalence of repetition, measure and frequency of rhythms — and apparently, the rarest of all.

According to the above schema a dying patient would suffer an *arrhythmia*, while a successful, creative artist would be experiencing a *eurythmia*. As Lefebvre goes on to argue, the same is valid for everyday life. My ethnographic findings from everyday life in Exarcheia in the previous chapter have already offered examples of all the possible rhythm relationships above, with the exception of an *isorhythmia*. And yet, what may appear as co-existence of different social groups in the neighbourhood (that is, a *polyrhythmia*) has only too often, in the case of Exarcheia, turned into conflict (an *arrhythmia*) – or on the other hand to some spontaneously creative situation, (a *eurythmia*).

But what exactly is a rhythm at the first place? And where do we encounter it? For Lefebvre the answer is simple: a rhythm exists “everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy”, (Lefebvre 2004: 15). He continues:

Therefore [there exists]:

- a) repetition (of movements, gestures, action, situations, differences);
- b) interferences of linear processes and cyclical processes;
- c) birth, growth, peak, then decline and end.

(Lefebvre 2004: 15)

Despite the fact that Lefebvre was referring to biological (personal) and everyday rhythms (what happens in a small-scale social environment) some elements in



the list above can be identified in the case of Exarcheia: repetition may exist in the form of commemorative riots that take place at anniversaries of original riot events; and in interferences in terms of new, original riots breaking out. Both are discussed further in Sections 6.5 and 6.6.

When talking of an individual's arrhythmia Lefebvre uses the example of a dying person (their "internal rhythms" being in conflict), while for eurythmia he uses the example of a creative artist (their "internal rhythms" collaborating well). But it is my view that the concept of rhythmanalysis takes off the ground when applied to a greater, social scale: a theory of rhythms can help correct "Marxism's over-emphasis of the temporal dimension" (Elden in Lefebvre 2004: ix) and as a result, move beyond an understanding of history that is "the (...) teleological progression of Hegel or Marx" (ibid 2004: x-xi).

What would a rhythmanalysis of Exarcheia read like? The previous chapter illustrated how different paces of life, different forms of social and political activity co-exist in the neighbourhood. If each of them was to be understood as a rhythm, co-existence of these rhythms would fall under either of Lefebvre's rhythm relationships (an arrhythmia, polyrhythmia, eurythmia or, perhaps less likely, isorhythmia). These relationships are discussed in further depth in the next section (6.3).

However, what I conduct thereafter is an exercise that exceeds the original Lefebvrian concept. If it is possible to identify a rhythm "anywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy" (Lefebvre 2004: 15), then there are rhythms that stretch over much greater spans of time than a single day. Could we not produce a rhythmanalysis of a week, a year or an entire historical period? And how does this longer rhythm articulate itself within a certain space – the space of Exarcheia?

I set to answer these questions first by looking at the ostensible repetitions of events (what I describe as annual riot rites in Section 6.5). I then focus on possible interferences in what was otherwise considered a linear process (the linear process was the Metapolitefsi; the interferences are, of course, the major acts of rioting in its lifespan – Section 6.6). Finally, I examine whether the apparent rise and decline of Exarcheia as an exceptional space could be linked to a simultaneous rise and decline of the Metapolitefsi as a historical era.

If the neighbourhood of Exarcheia and the era of the Metapolitefsi saw such a simultaneous, similar succession of “birth, growth, peak, then decline and end” (Lefebvre 2004: 15) there would potentially be a much tighter relationship between the two – the *space* of Exarcheia at the *time* of the Metapolitefsi – that remained to be explored.

## **6.2 Rhythms of the everyday**

“The neighbourhood keeps changing all the time”: I wrote in my notebook – one of the very first things that I jotted down, only a couple of days into fieldwork. How is it even possible for a neighbourhood to change in a matter of hours or days? In this section I show how this may be so – how the function of Exarcheia changes dramatically over the course of a single day and night. To a certain extent, of course, such change is part of city life: a street lined with commercial outlets will be mostly alive during trading hours; an entertainment quarter is more likely to liven up in the later hours of the day and through the night.

So what made Exarcheia unique? As I have explained at some length (Chapter 2, Chapter 3) Exarcheia is one of the most mixed-use neighbourhoods in the city of

Athens, with intense residential use coexisting with trade functions that serve the entire city – including the computer and high-tech trade along Stournari Street, or the book-selling and publishing outlets scattered across much of the neighbourhood. At the same time, Exarcheia is also a major entertainment quarter, with cafés and bars in abundance, particularly around and off its square. Last but not least, the neighbourhood hosts drug detox clinics and (as shown in chapter 5) a major if informal drug selling spot too. In the previous chapter I outlined some function boundaries within Exarcheia – even if these are completely unmarked, I explained, they nevertheless exist: my aim was to lay out the neighbourhood's parts and to show what function was most dominant in each.

In section 5.4.5 of chapter 5 I wrote about the area around Kallidromiou Street and Strefi Hill, using six instances of rioting and other forms of contention as my examples. In this section I now adduce some of my ethnographic findings on the area as a whole. Kallidromiou Street might be one of the most typical streets in Exarcheia – typical in its heterogeneity, its intense and often conflicting everyday rhythms.

In many other European capitals Kallidromiou Street could have made for prime real estate material. Running by the slope of Strefi Hill, one of the very few open green spaces in central Athens, the tree-lined street stretches east uphill in the direction of the emblematic Lycabettus Hill. The street's relative narrowness and permission for vehicles to park on both sides make for slow traffic, adding to its often surprisingly relaxed atmosphere. As is a norm in many parts of Athens, buildings lining the Kallidromiou consist of a wild mixture, from the neoclassical to the multi-storey *polykatoikia* (literally multi-residence), the trademark housing development unit in

Greece's dictatorial and post-dictatorial years<sup>148</sup>. However, when compared to many areas of central Athens – including parts of Exarcheia – Kallidromiou has retained a larger number of its neoclassical buildings, which adds to a sense of abundance and prosperity – even if many of these were lying empty and abandoned by the time of my fieldwork. “In many ways, it is a fantastic place to live”, Yorgos, the occupant of an upper storey of one of these buildings, told me. “Above our heads we have Strefi [Hill]” he exclaimed, pointing at the greenery, “and below our feet is the hustling and bustling<sup>149</sup> of Exarcheia”. True enough, throughout the early hours of the day Kallidromiou is a most pleasant street; a strong local shopping culture includes two small shops selling local and organic produce; three bakeries; one fruit and vegetable shop; four cafés/bars; a small supermarket and Saturday's open air market (*laikí*, i.e. popular) which, as described in 5.4.5, stretches for approximately half the length of the street. These all attract Athenians from further away as much as Exarcheians – not to forget of course visitors from abroad, who have been in abundance following the death of Grigoropoulos in 2008 and the seemingly global notoriety? Exarcheia has enjoyed since.

As night fell however, I very often saw Kallidromiou transform and subsume

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148 For an overview of the discourses of modernity and development in Greece and for the swift, spontaneous urban growth that came along with them see Leontidou 1990. For an overview of the polykatoikía (multi-residence) as an elementary unit of urban growth see Maloutas 2001.

149 In his interview transcript Yorgos used the word *chamós*, literally mess, but not always used with a negative connotation – in this context he used it to refer to the frantic energy and vividness of the most central part of Exarcheia.

itself into the tenseness encountered elsewhere in Exarcheia. Strefi Hill plays host to numerous open-air parties throughout Athens' warm spring, summer and autumn nights. Hundreds of youths ascend to its plateau and music often echoes into the early morning hours. As my informants repeatedly pointed out, this may be a major factor keeping property prices down, particularly for houses overlooking the hill. The houses near Kallidromiou are in this way in a position similar to those by Mesologgiou Street (Section 5.4.4) and some of the buildings overlooking Exarcheia Square, their lower floors in particular (Section 5.4.3). Vassilis, a decades-long resident of Kallidromiou Street (and owner of an organic and local produce store on the same street), attributed the lower values to "a result of high noise levels, the skirmishes that take place at times and unhygienic conditions". The latter is a reference to the over-polluting of certain parts of Exarcheia which – as he claimed – are left in a dismal state by those using them at night-time.

On their own, Vassilis' complaints may be insufficient to substantiate any radical change in the use of certain spaces in Exarcheia. How was I to guarantee that his was not the view of a resident romanticising the past? How was I to be sure, in other words, this was not yet another reading of the history of Exarcheia as linearly declining? When I mentioned the claim made by other interviewees that "Exarcheia was no longer as it used to be", Vassilis disagreed: "we have the tendency to think of our childhood years as better than those that follow, but I do not find this logical. For sure Exarcheia has changed; it is not as it used to be. But I do not find the problem big enough for someone to leave". Even so, Vassilis claimed that the neighbourhood had changed even more radically in recent times. Talking of an ever-increasing number of robberies, thefts, street assaults and drug-dealing that took place in the streets of Exarcheia, often in broad daylight, he exclaimed: "some people are taking advantage of the tolerance of the

rest to amplify their own presence. They take advantage of the fact that they are a dynamic minority, because a minority is what they are”.

Walking around Kallidromiou and its side-streets it was hard to refute Vassilis’ reading of a neighbourhood under immense change. Some streets, and Themistokleous Street in particular (which is pedestrianised between Kallidromiou and Exarcheia Square), often hosted users of heavy drugs (primarily heroin) who were in search of a quiet, discreet spot to shoot-up. In at least five cases during my fieldwork skirmishes between youth and police spilled over from the nearby Exarcheia Square. In one case, where I was also eye-witness (September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011), a unit of the police’s Delta motorcycle unit ran after small groups of young people as far as the stairs leading from Kallidromiou to Strefi Hill. The Exarcheia Police Station at Kallidromiou Street has been a frequent point of contention: family, friends and political acquaintances would routinely gather here in solidarity with people arrested after or during rioting in Exarcheia. In another case during my fieldwork (and in at least another three during 2008-2012), the divergent rhythms of Kallidromiou – that is, its daytime tranquillity and its night-time furore – intersected dramatically. I have described those events in detail in Section 5.4.5. In brief, an anonymous anarchist group claimed responsibility for an action that targetted the police station but eventually injured two innocent bystanders; the group then issued a statement arguing their “tragic mistake” was that “[they] erroneously believed the flames of the motorbike on Charilaou Trikoupi could not spread to the market stalls of Kallidromiou street”.

I am interested in how this particular incident reflects the intersection of different rhythms (different paces of living, of being socially and politically active in the neighbourhood) to reach a dramatic crescendo. In Lefebvrian terms, this incident at Kallidromiou’s street market would comprise an *arrhythmia* of the highest order. Yorgos

however (the resident of Kallidromiou quoted earlier), who witnessed the incident from his building, thought the group's "tragic mistake" lay elsewhere. My conversations with other residents and passers-by on the day confirmed the same: putting aside both the nature of the action of the group per se and the extent to which each of my interlocutors agreed with it, a consensus was clear in that their most serious error was not the distance (or lack thereof) they had kept from the market stalls. The largest mistake was that the group had chosen to act at a time when the street market was taking place. For some of my interviewees, this was a conscious and therefore even more despicable choice: by acting then, the group were claiming this space as their own, in the most violent of ways: they were "amplifying their presence", as Vassilis put it, to an extent that it made everyone else invisible.

The Kallidromiou incident is therefore a perfectly illustrative (if tragic) example of the space-time correlation in the rhythm of cities: neither merely about space, nor simply about time, rhythm concerns precisely the intersection between the two, the informal agreement on when to occupy space. In the case of the Kallidromiou Street (and by extension, much of Exarcheia) such an agreement is naturally entirely informal, but not necessarily less rigid.

The incident is key to understanding the often conflicting rhythms of Exarcheia. The argument is not that such rhythms exist side by side, disconnected from one another. It is not, in other words, implying that the neighbourhood puts on a façade during daytime and another during night-time. These rhythms may be radically different but they are not at all separate. Together, they create an equilibrium that sustains the unique character of Kallidromiou – and Exarcheia overall.

As an example: these night-time perils surrounding and, occasionally, intruding upon the daytime of Kallidromiou are likely to have halted the neighbourhood's

upmarket potential. At the same time the tranquillity and comfort of its everyday, its daytime, may guarantee the presence of a sizeable middle class that will prevent the neighbourhood falling into disarray.

The everyday in Exarcheia therefore comprises a particular set of rhythms: serene in daytime, then often contentious as the day progresses and the night falls. What is unique in Exarcheia, of course, is that one of these rhythms (the rhythm of contention) frequently falls outside the remit of law. But otherwise, even if particularly vivid in the Exarcheia case, this shifting around of rhythms is not exclusive to the neighbourhood. We only have to think of an area such as Shoreditch in East London. Here, a similar pattern of divergent rhythms (as per Lefebvre, a polyrhythmia) reveals itself once again: more orderly flows of office workers during workdays, entertainment-seekers during the evenings and weekends. This simple comparison to Shoreditch helps to understand better some elements that make Exarcheia unique. First, Exarcheia sees *substantially different* social groups using its streets, pavements and public spaces between day and night. Second – and partially as a result of the first – the actual pace of life varies tremendously through a 24-hour period, going from a slow-paced, almost “village-like” serenity (as described to me by at least one informant<sup>150</sup>) to the furious pace of night-time contention.

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150 The village metaphor was used extensively by many informants to describe life in Exarcheia, even if intriguingly it often meant different things on different occasions: political activists used it to denote familiarity with one another but also, in one case, with the police; locals used it to denote the same familiarity but also to express their satisfaction with the more slow paced everyday life, especially when compared to the intensity of Athens’ commercial and administrative centre lying just beyond the confines of Exarcheia.



The description and analysis of the daily rhythm of Exarcheia may offer a certain insight into the elements of everyday life in the neighbourhood but it does not comprise a methodological novelty. Similar analyses of the everyday have been undertaken both by Lefebvre (2002, 2004 and 2008) and many who followed in his footsteps (Boyarin 1994, Buitrago et al 2001, Dodghson 2008, Koyrsari 2008, Middleton 2009, Prior 2011, Zayani 1999).

Exarcheia, however, offers fertile ground for a methodological novelty, for a unique rhythmanalytic reading. I quickly discovered that the disparity in rhythms in the Exarcheia case was not limited to a single day. As I recorded the instances of unrest that took place in the neighbourhood a pattern emerged, one that saw them concentrated not only toward the end of the day (and into the night), but toward the end of the week, as well.

### **6.3 A week in the life of a neighbourhood**

Already during my first week into fieldwork, in the early spring of 2010, I encountered both a large-scale riot<sup>151</sup> and an instance of smaller-scale, Exarcheia-centred unrest: on the Friday night of 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2010 five days prior to the general strike on 5<sup>th</sup> May, a group of approximately 30-40 people reached the riot police (MAT) outpost at the junction of Ippokratous and Navarinou Street, hurled a number of Molotov cocktails in the direction of the outpost and immediately moved toward the park of Charilaou Trikoupi street before dispersing in the adjacent streets.

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151 The riot that broke out during the May 5th general strike demonstration, with three people dying at the Marfin Bank building, Stadiou Ave.

I here show the two events (May 5<sup>th</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>) side-by-side, as a means of comparison. The death of three people during the General Strike demonstration on May 5<sup>th</sup> caused feelings of immense shock and disbelief. For all their spectacular violence demonstrations in Greece relatively rarely turn deadly. To see three people die during a general strike demonstration was therefore a shock strong enough to put many of the demonstrators into a soul-searching and self-questioning mode<sup>152</sup>.

At the same time my second event – the skirmishes of April 30<sup>th</sup> in Exarcheia that preceded the strike – went almost entirely unnoticed. In the days that followed I searched for any substantial coverage in national media, in vain; I asked my earlier informants for a comment, only to be confronted with shrugged shoulders and indifferent gazes. Why would I want to ask or write about this? “The usual game”, Kostas told me, “for the kids to let off steam”. I soon found out that Kostas’ reaction was typical among many of those politically active in Exarcheia. Typical in that it was not necessarily an outright rejection of this small-scale contentious action per se – much more of indifference toward something that was banal by the neighbourhood’s standards. This banalisation of violence in Exarcheia intrigued me enough to make me closely follow and chart more cases of violent skirmishes – and to record the responses of Exarcheia’s residents and users to them. It quickly became apparent that a certain threshold existed in most people’s minds, beyond which such violent confrontations were deemed unacceptable.

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152 It appears that the death of the three bank workers opened one of the most extensive of discussions on the morality of political action, particularly within Greece’s substantial anarchist/anti-authoritarian tendency. A number of the collective texts issued those days is accessible at <http://blog.occupiedlondon.org/tag/may-5th-deaths/> (last accessed: 19.12.2012)

What comprised this threshold? The level of violence, for one – most definitely and expectedly so. The death of three people at the general strike demonstration of May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010 was beyond the realm of the acceptable for nearly everyone. But apart from the level of violence and its consequences, I traced another pattern in my fieldwork notes and frequent discussions with informants and interviewees alike. A key question for many was not merely how much violence was exercised, but also *where* and, equally crucially, *when*.

As explained earlier (Chapter 5 and section 6.3 of chapter 6) I was eye-witness to an attack against the Exarcheia Police station by an unnamed anarchist group on May 14, 2011. Engaging in conversation with residents and my established informants on the day (and the days and weeks after the incident) I noticed how nearly all focused their criticism on the *timing* of the incident, which coincided with the Saturday market on Kallidromiou Street – therefore endangering shoppers and stall-holders. Among those I spoke to, some expressed disapproval of the targeting of the police station, but what seemed to concern them even more than the target (the *what* question) was the group's choice of where and when. It was as if an unwritten rule had been broken that concerned the limits and the acceptable timing for certain actions – even violent ones. In the case of the Kallidromiou Street incident it is easy to see why most thought both the where and the when were wrong: the event took place during and in the immediate vicinity of the Saturday market, eventually leading to the serious injury of a market stall-holder and a passer-by who tried to help.

The incident had disrupted the weekly rhythm of Exarcheia. In the same way that parts of the neighbourhood are used by divergent groups over the course of day and night, an equivalent public space allocation exists through the week: during the working week, Exarcheia often resembles a conventional neighbourhood, with working people

and residents roaming through its streets during day time, before the entertainment crowd replaces them in the evening. But what happens at weekends is altogether different. The vast majority of cases of mass violence in Exarcheia (primarily skirmishes between youth and the police) have taken place outside the working week. I traced, for example, a pattern: it was very common during my stay in Exarcheia for groups of youths to attack one or more of the riot police squads stationed in the periphery of the neighbourhood. The overwhelming majority of these attacks took place on Friday evenings and, almost without exception, between one a.m. and two a.m. (i.e. in the very early hours of Saturday morning).

Why would this be? I repeatedly posed the question to my informants and interviewees. For many, it signalled the beginning of the weekend. Another explanation supposed that those participating waited until they reached a drinking threshold; intoxicated enough to be confident with proceeding, but not so intoxicated as to be unable to act. What intrigued me the most was not merely when these actors chose to act, but how their actions seemed to fit inadvertently into the neighbourhood's weekly routine. Monday to Friday were workdays. Friday evenings were overtaken by this bizarrely normalised violence and then, on Saturday mornings, the neighbourhood would go back to market trading and the tranquillity of café culture.

In a way, therefore, such activity against the police had become another rhythm among the weekly rhythms of Exarcheia. Whether it created an arrhythmia (conflict) or a polyrhythmia (co-existence) with the other rhythms was an open question that I wanted to explore; either way, a riot rhythm was most definitely present.

If these rhythms can extend from their original daily span to the time-span of the week, is it not possible to trace them across even longer time intervals? Often in my interviews when a reference was made to a past uprising, something noticeable

happened: even when in sympathy or agreement with the original uprising (that of December 2008, or November 1973) the interviewees would often use dismissive terms in speaking of their annual commemoration; I have coded the words funeral-service (*poreía-kīdeía*) and remembrance service (*poreía-mnīmósyno*) in their responses. There was something intriguing here. According to Lefebvre, where there is repetition, there is rhythm — and the annual repetition of riots in Exarcheia hinted at a cyclical occurrence of contention over the course of a year — including, but not limited to these commemorative dates.

## 6.4 Annual riot rites

The period that followed my initial hectic weeks and months of fieldwork was remarkably peaceful by comparison. As I was repeatedly told, the tendency for Athenians to flee the city en masse in the summer in previous years (either for a family home or a holiday destination) was largely disrupted due to the financial hardship brought along by the financial crisis and the ensuing austerity: many, if not most, could no longer afford to leave. Still, the neighbourhood and the city of Athens overall remained largely (and of course, relatively) peaceful during summertime. The vast majority of people politically active in wintertime whom I encountered used this time as an opportunity to rest and to “plan for the new season”, as they said — half-jokingly, but evidently in the sense of academic or sports year cycles. Other urban residents simply enjoyed their much-longed for moments of peace.

It was not difficult to see why most types of political activity quietened down during the summer. The plea of Socialist Party (PASOK) leader and late PM Andreas G.

Papandreou, “not to disrupt the swims [i.e. holidays] of the People”<sup>153</sup> is legendary. By this Papandreou implied governments should refrain from taking important decisions during summertime: in a city and a country where both the Parliament and many state-run services (courthouses, tax offices and so on) enter a prolonged summer recess, it is difficult to imagine political activity not going into a hiatus as well.

If the summer is for its most part quiet, winter in Exarcheia is particularly riot-prone in comparison. The riots of 2008 broke out in December; the student uprising of 1973 (35 years earlier) took place only eighteen days earlier, on November 17<sup>th</sup>; and the events that preceded the Polytechnic had also taken place in winter-time – in February the same year<sup>154</sup>. A pattern is evident: from the winter of 1973 onward, turmoil has normally broken out between late autumn and late winter. The first significant exception to this rule was the Syntagma Square Movement of the Piazzas, in the summer of 2011, discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

How can this pattern be explained? One simple explanation would be that since the original events broke out in wintertime (Polytechnic 1973, Grigoropoulos 2008) then their commemorative events would obviously fall suit. My use of the terms original and commemorative events can be defined as follows:

(a) In labelling an event as original, I refer to events which were original and historical

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153 The quote is attributed to Andreas Papandreou in 1987: being the country’s PM at the time,

Papandreou refused to “disrupt the swims of the People”, when urged by his colleagues to declare a snap election in the summer of that year.

154 The occupation of the Law School in February 1973.

in the sense of creating a significant rupture in history, as discussed in Chapter 2. I use original to refer to the student uprising of 1973 and the uprising that followed the death of A. Grigoropoulos in 2008. The Polytechnic uprising marked (even if symbolically rather than practically) the beginning of the end of a regime — the Colonels' Junta. The 2008 events, it can be argued, similarly acted as a harbinger to the serious crisis of the Junta's successor regime — the Third Hellenic Republic.

(b) I define the annual demonstrations (often turning into riots) that were held in memory of the two original events above as commemorative events. This is, I argue, a solid way in which to define original events: they are events that are commemorated in the future. November 17<sup>th</sup> 1973 and December 6<sup>th</sup> 2008 are the only two riotous events that have seen annual commemorations of this type. When talking to participants in demonstrations I was confronted, time and time again, either with a perception of the original events as unique (“there can never be another November 17<sup>th</sup> [uprising]”) or a perception of a negative linearity: the commemorative event of November 17<sup>th</sup> 1974, for example, was a mass demonstration that both commemorated the beginning of the end of the regime (a year earlier, in 1973) *and* its actual end, taking place on the same day as the first democratic elections. But for my sceptical discussants, every commemorative event had been an ever-fading repetition of the original event at best, its caricature at worst. This dismissive attitude was reflected in the terms used by many to describe commemorative demonstrations: the self-explanatory funeral demonstration (*poreía-kīdeía*) or mouse-trap demonstration (*poreía-fāka*) denoting respectively the lack of energy and the high police presence and high probability of detention and/or arrest.

Naturally, this simplistic and largely linear conceptualisation of these demonstrations as annual commemoration rites fails to explain why fresh riots broke out

*precisely* during these events: on November 17<sup>th</sup> in 1985, 1995 and 1998 Athens saw some of its most intense rioting in the Metapolitefsi; and it was on December 6<sup>th</sup> in 2009, 2010 and 2011 that the city also bore witness to large-scale confrontation between demonstrators and police.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to conceive original events as entirely separate from their commemorative demonstrations, even if the latter have the potential to become significant events in their own right. Going back to the notion of rhythm, the original event of November 1973 then had a repeated presence (just like a note repeated in a musical tune) precisely through its commemorative events: with highs and lows — again similar to a tune — the memory of the original uprising was expressed either more mutedly (in the funeral demonstrations I was told about) or by reaching new peaks of unrest as in 1985, 1995 and 1998.

The history of riots in Exarcheia through the years is therefore non-linear. Rather than sliding down from an original riot to its ever-fading commemoration, this history has a much more complicated pattern, combining commemorative demonstrations and fresh outbursts. What, if anything, can these patterns and rhythms of rioting tell us about the social and political context in which they had taken place?

## **6.5 The rhythms of the Metapolitefsi**

This section links fieldwork observations, as presented in the previous sections, to a wider — and more theoretical — conceptualisation of social and political change that spans the period under research. In the same way as we experience repetition (the repetition that makes difference, as in Lefebvre) in the everyday, the Metapolitefsi as a historical period also witnessed the repeated occurrence of riots: analysing this



repetition can reveal much about the nature of the post-dictatorial regime. The Third Hellenic Republic, in other words, has seen a very distinct equilibrium of violence, with a very solid spatial articulation.

As explained earlier (Chapter 4), a linearly progressive discourse has prevailed throughout the Metapolitefsi. The original event of November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1973 has been key in this Metapolitefsi discourse: despite the fact that it did not cause the fall of the Colonels' Junta<sup>155</sup> it is widely conceived to have done so. By commemorating November 17<sup>th</sup> as a national (school) holiday the democratic Metapolitefsi regime claims a line of continuity with the uprising and, by a logical extension, it also claims a rupture with the dictatorial regime. But how is this claim different from what actually happened? As shown in Table 6.1, in the years 1973-1974 Greece saw a process of regime transition that led to its eventual democratisation:

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155 Prior to the Polytechnic uprising there had been both dispersed acts of resistance to the dictatorial regime and another long-term university occupation (the events of February 1973 at Athens' Law school; for many, a predecessor to the Polytechnic uprising). But it is mostly undisputed that November 1973 saw the first uprising to sustain itself in time and eventually to gather support from a wide social and political spectrum. The uprising was crushed by the dictatorial authorities, who conceived it as the unwanted result of their own efforts to facilitate a partial and moderate transition to a post-dictatorial regime: as a result, the events of 1973 caused a schism between the Junta Generals, which eventually saw the hard-line colonel Ioannidis topple Papadopoulos. The regime collapsed a few months later (in July 1974); the main reason for its collapse is mostly unrelated to the Polytechnic events: namely, it was the dictatorship's inability to handle the crisis and ensuing conflict in Cyprus.

| <b>Date</b>    | <b>Event</b>   |
|----------------|--|
| September 1973 | Attempted liberalization of the Junta (Papadopoulos reform). |
| 17.11.1973     | Polytechnic student uprising.                                |
| 25.11.1973     | Colonel Ioannidis topples Papadopoulos.                      |
| 24.07.1974     | Cyprus events / Fall of the Colonels.                        |
| 17.11.1974     | First democratic elections.                                  |

*Table 6.4: Key political developments during the Metapolitefsi core (1973-1974).*

Despite this evident process of transition the post-dictatorial regime traces its legacy to the November 1973 event *alone* — therefore suggesting an impression of rupture with the dictatorship. This is crucial, both in obscuring any lines of continuity between the two regimes and by extension, in legitimising the ensuing regime as purely democratic.

In a similar way to which the Metapolitefsi discourse claimed a rupture with its dictatorial predecessor, it also promoted a discourse of continuous, largely uninterrupted progress from 1974 on. In its early years the Third Hellenic Republic was indeed politically unstable (the Metapolitefsi core, 1973-1974). The following years then saw a – still heavy-handed – democratic rule (1974-1981) and the eventual rise of the social-democrat PASOK to power (1981). At that point, the state was widely conceived to be plagued with clientilism and weak social and political structures; by the time of the

2004 Olympics, a crucial moment in the Republic's history, democracy was firmly established and the political discourse of modernisation (*eksygchronismós*) had seen the replacement of clientilism by a firm state mechanism as a top priority.

In the same year that PASOK rose to power (1981), Greece also gained E.U. membership and along with it came a mainstream progress discourse that ran until the country joined the Euro currency (2002) and hosted the Olympics of 2004 in Athens, and continued beyond. This discourse of Europeanisation and seeming prosperity was, however, subsequently unable to explain either why the riots of 2008 broke out with such intensity when that they did or why Greece then found itself at the epicentre of the global financial crisis.

Such a linear progress discourse is for this reason incomplete, if not deceptive. To read the Metapolitefsi as an era of ever-increasing improvements (i.e. one peak following another) would obfuscate the contradictions, antitheses and struggles that took place in the Greek territory during this time. Moreover, this mainstream discourse about social and political change in the country fails to explain the financial, social and political crisis Greece entered from 2008, or the power shift (from national parliament to a supra-national level) and the state of exception that saw the appointment of an unelected care-taker Prime Minister (Lucas Papademos) in November 2011. The Republic's evolution was therefore not a straight upward line of unending progress, nor is it possible to talk of a mere sliding back toward totalitarianism similar to the Colonels' Junta, merely because the Republic found itself, once again, under unelected leadership.

This section proposes an alternative narration: a narration that begins once again with the events of November 1973 but that then sets off into a reading of rhythms of contention in the country's social and political level before showing how these

resonated on the ground.

Between 1974 and the summer of 2011, Greece saw eleven rounds of national parliamentary elections<sup>156</sup>. Perhaps the most significant of this period were the elections of 1974 which saw the conservative *Néa Dīmokratía* (New Democracy) win under the leadership of Konstantinos Karamanlis and those of 1981 when the social-democrat PASOK won under Andreas G. Papandreou. PASOK has dominated the political landscape of the Metapolitefsi on and off since, winning all but the elections of 1990, 2004 and 2007. With his rise to power in 1981 A. Papandreou implemented a series of social and political reforms, including arguably the closest the Third Hellenic Republic saw to the foundation of a welfare state: Papandreou's Contract with the People<sup>157</sup> established a National Health System and facilitated the return, with impunity, of civil war refugees living in exile. The same contract introduced civil marriage and abolished (legally at least) the dowry system<sup>158</sup>.

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156 In years 1974, 1997, 1981, 1985, 1990, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2007 and 2009. The elections are constitutionally set to take place every four years or sooner; the minimum number of elections over the 35-year period would have been 9, but snap-elections were called a number of times as result of political instability, bringing the grand total to 11.

157 The full text of the PASOK's Contract with the People is available at <http://www.pasok.gr/portal/resource/section/sumvolaioMenu> (last accessed: 20.11.2012)

158 An anthropological PhD thesis examining the dowry system in detail is also, coincidentally, focusing on Exarcheia – and is, to my knowledge, the only other completed PhD thesis that has the neighbourhood as its sole research focus: Zatz, Elen (1983) *Kinship, property and inter-personal relations in an urban milieu: the case of Exarchia, Athens*. London: LSE. Catalogue record available

PASOK's uninterrupted stay in power came to an end initially in 1989, when a major political crisis led to a government of national unity followed by a national election that was won by New Democracy. The party's relatively short rule ended in 1996, when PASOK rose to power once again to oversee the country's eurozone entry (2002) before losing to New Democracy only months before the Athens Olympics (2004).

But what was happening on the ground as these circles of power were consecutively opening and coming to a close?

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Political event</b>                    | <b>Riot/ contentious event</b> |
|-------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 1967        | Colonels' Junta established.              |                                |
| 1973        |   | Polytechnic uprising.          |
| 1974        | Colonels' Junta ends.                     |                                |
| 1981        | Papandreou rises to power.                |                                |
| 1985        |   | Kaltezas riots.                |
| 1989        | Major political crisis.                   |                                |
| 1995        |   | Polytechnic riots.             |
| 2004        | "Modernisation" apogee – Athens Olympics. |                                |
| 2008        |   | Grigoropoulos riots.           |

Table 6.5: *Key political developments and major riot events during the extended Metapolitefsi (1973-2011).*

Table 6.5 depicts two parallel rhythms. The first column (political event) traces the rhythm of the Metapolitefsi, listing key events of the historical period (the Metapolitefsi) and its regime (the Third Hellenic Republic). The second column (Riot/contentious event) lists key riot events in the same period. It is evident that a considerable time lag exists between the two; key political events, in other words, take place almost without exception at different times from major turmoil on the ground: the 1973 uprising took place six years after the start of the Junta in 1967; the Grigoropoulos riots occurred four years after the Olympics and overall peak of the neoliberal project in Greece.

A mainstream political view would consider the above as vindication: indeed, it could be argued, riots have no relationship to major political events — and they, by extension, are not political either. But is entirely possible to read the table above in the opposite way: riots took place in Greece once a regime (or a phase of a regime) had firmly established itself.

Is a major riot a reaction to a maturing (even rotting) regime, or is it a harbinger ahead of and against the regime's successor? Often the time-lag between the mainstream political event (i.e. regime change) and the reaction on the ground (riot) might be too long to declare it affirmatively either way. This was arguably the case with the Grigoropoulos riots and it was for this reason that they were described as standing “between a present still to pass and a future yet to come” (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011). In either case, as Table 6.5 shows, there are some evident cycles of contention in

the Greek Metapolitefsi; cycles that follow and respond to the phases (the life-cycles) of the political regime.

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Original</b> | <b>1973</b>    | <b>1973</b>    | <b>1985</b>    | <b>2008</b>            |
|-------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
|             | <b>event</b>    | <b>Commem.</b> | <b>Commem.</b> | <b>Commem.</b> | <b>Comemm.</b>         |
|             |                 | <b>demo</b>    | <b>riot</b>    | <b>riot</b>    | <b>demo &amp; riot</b> |
| 1973        | x               |                |                |                |                        |
| 1974        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1975        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1976        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1977        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1978        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1979        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1980        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1981        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1982        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1983        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1984        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1985        | x               | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1986        |                 | x              |                | x              |                        |
| 1987        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1988        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1989        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1990        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1991        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1992        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1993        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1994        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1995        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 1996        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1997        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1998        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 1999        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 2000        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 2001        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |
| 2002        |                 | x              | x              |                |                        |
| 2003        |                 | x              |                |                |                        |



|      |   |   |   |
|------|---|---|---|
| 2004 |   | x |   |
| 2005 |   | x |   |
| 2006 |   | x |   |
| 2007 |   | x |   |
| 2008 | x | x |   |
| 2009 |   | x | x |
| 2010 |   | x | x |
| 2011 |   | x | x |

Table 6.6: *Original riot events and commemorative demonstrations/riots during the extended Metapolitefsi (1973-2011).*

Tracing the pattern of occurrence of riots through the Greek Metapolitefsi has helped to place these in their wider socio-political context. By extension, this exercise has aimed to refute the prevalent argument that riots are *de facto* apolitical. Table 6.6 takes the exercise one step further. In addition to the original riots, the above table lists their commemorative events through the Metapolitefsi. Take the example of the 1973 uprising: every year there is a repetition (in Lefebvrian terms) of the original event. This repetition is in itself a historical rhythm, similar to a musical beat repeating itself in time. At certain historical moments, this rhythm has interfered (again in Lefebvrian terms) with the concurrent political process at the time; for example, in 1985, with the Kaltezas riots.

Table 6.6 then shows a more detailed breakdown of original riot events and their commemorative occurrences; as explained already, the commemorations often break out into new riots. Perhaps the most important element in the table is the considerable lack of linearity: riots neither subdue, nor do they increase during the Metapolitefsi.

This is important because – as the final part of the chapter attempts to show — it may by extension help refute a common understanding of historical progress as being overly linear. One final example from the Greek Metapolitefsi can help refute this idea of linearity.

As explained, the Metapolitefsi is an unofficial, even if largely acknowledged, term. Defining when it commenced is crucial: the first Metapolitbefsi was attempted by the dictator Papadopoulos himself, in an attempt to sustain the regime through a controlled liberalisation. Nevertheless, the post-dictatorial mainstream discourse has set the Polytechnic uprising as the moment when the Metapolitefsi began, which has the obvious advantage of giving, by extension, anti-dictatorial credential to the post-dictatorial regime.

Since it never officially commenced, it is naturally impossible to declare an official end to the Metapolitefsi. Instead, an end of the Metapolitefsi has been unofficially declared on numerous occasions (by national media, politicians or others) including in the wake of the December 2008 riots and following the signing of the first memorandum of agreement between the Greek government and the troika in May 2010.

I do not believe it is possible to declare an end to the Metapolitefsi based on a single historical event. As explained already, even though in popular discourse the fall of the dictatorial regime is positioned at an exact date (17.11.1973) this is rather imprecise. It is possible to argue that what was taking place at much the same time as my fieldwork was a similar process of transition: there was, in other words, evidence suggesting radical changes in the nature of the democratic regime. Examples include the troika loan agreement with the Greek government (and the ensuing shift in the scale of policy-making) in May 2010, or the appointment of an unelected care-taker PM in November 2011. Will a future historian consider either to mark a regime change? As a

social scientist I have no way, nor inclination to predict the future — but I do believe that some of these events will be considered landmarks in the years to come. First, the events of December 2008 acted as a harbinger to the social and political turmoil that followed them. Second, both May 5<sup>th</sup> 2010 and November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 are key: I suspect the future historian might indeed declare this historical period *as a whole* to be the Metapolitefsi's end, rather than highlighting a single historical event.

## 6.6 Some preliminary conclusions

This chapter has combined fieldwork findings in Exarcheia and a reading of Lefebvre in order to explain and contextualise the concentration of riots and other forms of contentious politics in Exarcheia during the Greek Metapolitefsi. It began by presenting Henri Lefebvre's theory of rhythms (2004). It then explained how Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis can be applied at two different levels of this study: first, at a local (neighbourhood) level it is possible to read the divergent rhythms of Exarcheia in one of four possible relationships with one another: a polyrhythmia, a eurythmia, an arrhythmia, or an isorhythmia. Section 6.6 looked at everyday rhythms of the area around Kallidromiou Street, explaining how certain events during the fieldwork pointed to the build up of an arrhythmic (conflicting) situation.

As explained, it is also possible to apply the notion of rhythms to a much larger (historical) scale. According to Lefebvre, rhythm types include (a) repetition, (b) interferences (of linear and cyclical processes), and trajectories (from birth to end via growth, peak and decline).

The chapter has therefore attempted to extend this theory by applying it to some larger time spans: from the everyday it extended to the weekly, the annual and then, to

the span of the Metapolitefsi as a whole. Why do so? The primary aim of the chapter has been to contextualise riot concentration in Exarcheia. To date, there have only been attempts — to my knowledge — to *explain* the concentration of riots in Exarcheia, not to put it in its wider context. These explanations have focused on the neighbourhood's conceived *heterotopic* status, with heterotopia understood as used by Michel Foucault (1984). Foucault spoke of “heterotopias of deviation”, by which he meant “those [spaces] in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault 1984: 5). What Foucault had primarily in mind was an enforced placement, since he spoke of “rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons” (Foucault, *ibid.*)

To use the concept of rhythms in order to explain the Exarcheia riot contention can be helpful in more ways than one. On the one hand, it can help us to conceptualise better the dynamics of a neighbourhood that has a concentration of riots, largely without outsider enforcement. In this sense, Exarcheia was not as close to the Foucauldian deviation heterotopia: less of a heterotopia defined from outside, and more of a neighbourhood whose internal, divergent rhythms had given it an exceptional status in relation to the Athenian norm. But on the other hand, to understand the Exarcheia contention as a rhythm – better even, as a multiplicity of rhythms spanning across the Metapolitefsi opens up an immense potential: by doing so, it might be possible to verge closer to what Henri Lefebvre had initially set out to do in Rhythmanalysis.

With the emphasis placed by critics on Lefebvre's work on space it might appear that what he attempted was “writing a history of space, and not a spatial history” (Elden 2004: 194). This can be “misleading” (*ibid.*); what could instead be argued is that Lefebvre was trying to “spatialize history, historicize space [and] spatialize sociology” (Elden 2004: 194) all at the same time. It is the latter that is most studied by scholars

who followed in Lefebvre's footsteps; from the work of Ed Soja (1989, 2011), to Doreen Massey (2005, 2012) such a spatialisation of sociology (and the spatialisation of social relationships in particular) lies at the very heart of a key strand of contemporary human geography.

But Lefebvre's two other aims remain under-explored. His supposed idea of prioritising space over time was read as spatial fetishism by many. For the early Castells and for Harvey, tells us Elden (2004), Lefebvre had elevated space to "the level of causal efficacy, rather than being an expression of the relations of production" (2004: 142). Similarly, his perceived prioritization of space over time appeared to these thinkers as "injurious to historical materialism, which of course marginalized space, and privileged time and history" (Elden 2004: 194).

As if in response, Henri Lefebvre was concerned (as explains Elden in Lefebvre, 2004) — "with correcting what he saw as Marxism's over-emphasis of the temporal dimension" (ibid 2004: ix) — an overemphasis coming at the expense of the spatial dimension. His rationale was that to focus on space would then help us gain a fuller understanding of history in return, an understanding not in "the linear, teleological progression of Hegel or Marx, but closer to a Nietzschean sense of change and cycles" (Elden, in Lefebvre 2004: x-xi). Lefebvre himself talked of a "simplifying evolutionism of many historians" and "the naïve continuism of many sociologists" (1996: 104), both of which have disguised the specific features of urban reality. Yet never, unfortunately, did he quite bring his thoughts to their logical conclusion, never examining the inverse process as result: how may "specific features" of urban reality help us move beyond this "simplifying evolutionism" and "naïve continuism"?

In attempting to answer the question, let me first try to explain an important specific feature of Exarcheia. As I declared earlier, I noticed immediately upon my

arrival that Exarcheia changed constantly. I have explained in this chapter how the Lefebvrian concept of rhythm helped me conceptualise this change — that is, the way in which two or more considerably different uses of Exarcheia — for example, from a tranquil market-place to a setting of intense violence — would co-exist, even if this often led to the arrhythmia described earlier. Lefebvre's schema is invaluable in explaining this alone. Those who live, or those who have had the opportunity to visit Exarcheia in recent times will have noticed a striking oxymoron in the neighbourhood's character: this is neither a bohemian enclave that occasionally turns riotous overnight nor is it the ghetto-like haven of extremism — nor, finally, is it merely the neighbourhood with an extremely high police presence. Exarcheia is none of these alone; rather, it combines elements of them all. Historical events that occurred in the neighbourhood live through to the present in the form of a rhythm — in their repeated, commemorative appearance. These rhythms, in turn, interact with new ones — often leading to a clash as a result.

Could it not be possible to read the life of a regime (in the Greek case, the Metapolitefsi) in a similar way? Rather than accepting the simplification of linearity, is not possible — indeed, desirable — to trace the different rhythms (of events past, of conflicts present) that are active at the same time? One most tangible way to trace such rhythms is — as was shown in the case of Exarcheia — in urban life and in the everyday. If these hypotheses be true, it might then be entirely possible to conceive a much more direct relationship between space and time: to read the conflicting rhythms of history in the space of our present and to elevate, in this way, our understanding of space. The next chapter makes this attempt, reading the riot concentration in Exarcheia as a spatial contract that applied to the space and the time of the Metapolitefsi as whole.

## **7. Making sense of riot concentration in Exarcheia: the ‘spatial contract’**

In this chapter I bring together and expand on the empirical findings presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6. These chapters helped establish the concentration of riots in Exarcheia and examined the portrayal of this concentration in public discourse and its continuation (what I termed the neighbourhood’s ‘violence equilibrium’) during Greece’s Metapolitefsi. The question now posed in this chapter — through a synthesis of these findings — is ‘who’ may have benefited from riot concentration in Exarcheia.

### **7.1 Explaining riot concentration: three bodies of literature**

In chapter 3 I presented the key bodies of literature that have tried to explain the occurrence of urban riots per se; to answer the question of ‘why’ riots happen. These included works on riots as ‘events’; on past and present spontaneous acts of collective violence; on riots in the context of urban social movements/the right to the city and on crowd control through urban design.

However, as became evident through my fieldwork, the repeated occurrence of riots in Exarcheia was even more important than the occurrence of riots per se. This realisation left me confronted with another question: what body of work in geographical literature could help explain this continued riot concentration? And — perhaps more importantly — what could this continued concentration signify about the role of Exarcheia in the Greek political equilibrium as a whole?

Prior to my arrival in the field I thought of Exarcheia as a neighbourhood that was heterotopic in its nature: a site, in other words, that would fall under the description by Foucault as “being in relation with all the other sites [in this case the city of Athens], but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (1986: 48). Foucault goes on to define this as a heterotopia: “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia” (1986: 48). It was not necessarily a utopian image that sprang to mind when thinking of Exarcheia, but nevertheless an image of an area that was sufficiently different; where certain rules were withheld, if not altogether neutralized, even inverted. After all, the fact that the neighbourhood was capable of such a continued riot concentration would indeed point in the direction of a ‘heterotopia’. Though such a view is widely held inside and outside the neighbourhood, a ‘heterotopic’ schema does not suffice for us to understand the Exarcheia condition. When fieldwork findings showed up the inadequacy of this model and raised fresh questions, I conducted a fresh review of the literature, seeking explanations for how spaces such as Exarcheia have emerged historically and of their overall social and political function. In the following pages I present three bodies of work that offer such viable explanations: I then draw on limitations and potential contributions of each in order to help us understand the beneficiaries of riot concentration in Exarcheia.

### **7.1.1 The ‘ghetto’ explanation**

Earlier on I highlighted the ways in which Exarcheia has been conceived on the everyday level: in chapter 5, I explained that the majority of residents and users of the neighbourhood have largely seen it as a safe and comfortable neighbourhood to live and



work in. Chapter 4, on the other hand (riot-related media discourse), showed how media coverage largely painted Exarcheia in a negative light; often as a “ghetto” or an epicentre for “anomie”.

But of course, as outlined in chapter 4, this description would have to be rejected as not fitting the facts on the ground. Exarcheia is too prosperous, too diverse, too available and permeable, too much a part of the lives of middle class Greeks who may have “fled” residence there but still comfortably work, recreate, and express their politics there. Moreover, as the serious literature studying actual ghettos emphasizes, hijacking the notion of the ghetto is extremely problematic.

Speaking in the North American context Loïc Wacquant (2007) pointed at the danger of the “dilution of the notion of ghetto” (2007: 341) to “designate an urban area of widespread and intense poverty, which obfuscates the racial basis and character of this poverty and divests the term of both historical meaning and sociological content” (ibid: 341). In the case of Exarcheia, of course, there is neither any racial basis nor widespread poverty.

If we temporarily disregard Wacquant’s political and material warnings, bend the definition of ghetto to the breaking point, and put the most generous construction on the popular media’s use of the term – substituting widespread politicisation and intense delinquent activity for the economic and racial realities of a true ghetto – we can imagine an area degenerated or excluded enough to become prone to riotous activity. We can even entertain the notion of calling this a ‘political ghetto’. However, we gain little if anything by such a characterization. What we can do, with great caution, is mine Wacquant for particular dynamics that may apply to Exarcheia, and place them in a wider context of spatially-based mechanisms of social control.

For example, Wacquant suggests ways in which either an accurate or ‘diluted’ use of the term ghetto serves rhetorical purposes: the ghetto represents a “‘disorganized’ social formation” (Wacquant 2007: 341) which invites a tendency “to exoticize the ghetto and its residents” by “highlight[ing] the most extreme and unusual aspects of ghetto life as seen from outside and above” (2007: 342). “The ghetto”, elaborates Wacquant elsewhere, “is characteristically represented as a place of disorder and lack, a repository of concentrated unruliness, deviance, anomie and atomization” (1991: 345). Wacquant points out that a ghetto is “not simply a topographic entity or an aggregation of poor families and individuals” — rather, it is “an institutional form, a historically determinate, spatially-based concatenation of mechanisms of ethnoracial closure and control” (Wacquant 1991: 345). The understanding of the ghetto – or an even tenuously analogous space – as such a spatially-based mechanism of control is key here.

Mining Hughes with equal caution, we find he has included ghettos in what he termed “bastard institutions” (1971: 99), arguing that “[they] should be studied not merely as pathological departures from what is good and right, but as part of the total complex of human activities and enterprises” (ibid:99). In our case we study a neighbourhood in relation to its ‘total complex’ of both the city of Athens and the Greek society as a whole.

Gilles Deleuze (1992) has an understanding of spaces that are less isolated than the ghetto but much more widespread: for him, our existence in such “closed environments” is not an exception but a rule. The individual, continues Deleuze, nowadays

never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws: first the family; then the school (“you are no longer in your family”);

then the barracks (“you are no longer at school”); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the pre-eminent instance of the enclosed environment.

(Deleuze 1992: 3)

For Deleuze, the role of such an environment of enclosure is “to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces” (1992:3). Deleuze calls these societies (that is, our contemporary societies) “societies of control” (ibid: 3) and he claims that they have replaced disciplinary societies in history. Regardless of whether this process is by now complete or not, its description can help us understand the role of Exarcheia as a spatially defined, and rhetorically and socially ‘enclosed’, environment.

### **7.1.2 The ‘urban segregation’ explanation**

Where can we find models of environments of spatial and behavioural ‘enclosure’ that may not be demarcated by the strictly imposed determinism of the ghetto or the clearly recognizable (if often unrecognised) boundaries of the broad-reaching institutions of control adduced by Deleuze? A strand of literature exists on urban spaces that are segregated both positively<sup>159</sup> (gated communities) and negatively: areas that, while still separated into zones of affluence and at least relative deprivation, do not experience the tight enclosure or exclusion of the ghetto.

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159 ‘Positive’ is hereby meant in the sense of the proactive choice and practice of the neighbourhood’s users and residents themselves — i.e. without outside intervention.

Let me begin with the first strand of literature, on gated communities. The proliferation of such communities, i.e. “secured enclaves with walls, gates and guards” (Low 2001:45) has created a self-imposed segregation of higher social and economic classes in urban areas across the world<sup>160</sup>.

Positive segregation of the middle classes (the fortification of their communities within the urban space) leaves ‘behind’ a more ‘uncontrollable’ urban population: the middle classes — almost literally — subtract themselves from the urban sum. This process, explains Duda, is how

Privileged populations possessing greater access to capital marginalize the inhabitants of the least prosperous areas of a city, decreasing the latter’s access to capital (and to adequate schooling and other social services) while increasing their exposure to the predictable corollaries of poor urban life (crime and drug addiction)

(Duda 2008: 62)

One of these “corollaries” is rioting and other forms of violent in the face of inequality and the destructive effects of urban poverty, in “a vicious cycle in which civic and economic marginalization and segregation reinforces itself” (ibid 2008: 62).

Primarily, of course, the urban segregation phenomenon has been observed and studied in North American cities<sup>161</sup>. Similar trends have also started appearing — to a

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160 Indicative case studies include Landman (2000) on South Africa; Abu-Lughod (1980) on Morocco; Caldeira (1996, 2001) and Holston (1989) on Brazil; Dick and Rimmer (1998) and Connell (1999) on cities of South East Asia

161 Case studies here include Andreas and Bersteker (2003); Blakely and Snyder (1997); Davis (1990);

lesser extent — in Western Europe, where welfare and distributive policies and the legacies of democratically organised public street systems retain most power (Keil and Ronnenberg in Graham and Marvin 2001: 227). The spread of the gated community model has been even more limited in the case of Greece. If such a process has ever emerged in the Greek case, it would be in most recent years, following the 2008/09 crisis. As we shall soon discuss, a number of the dynamics we are considering underwent a transformation beginning in those years.

Positive segregation tends to appear more in cities where state intervention and control is weaker; whether in the case of US/North American urban development – driven by private investment buttressed by an ideology of the sanctity of the rights of private property – or in the less centrally planned cities of the Global South. Where does Athens lie in this axis? A clearly hybrid model between centralised government planning commonly encountered in Northern European states and the more impromptu (spontaneous) planning apparatuses of the Global South. Athens' urban development is in this sense exceptional. I found closer analogues to Exarcheia in city parts in Brazil (Caldeira 1996, 2001) or Morocco (Abu-Lughod 1980) than in comparable European cities.

It has been pointed out already that the Mediterranean city follows a model of development that is distinctly different from the cities of Northern Europe (Leontidou 1990); one where class segregation and social polarisation were still central (ibid 1990: 130) but where public space also held central stage and where so-called 'thresholds',

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Katznelson (1981); Low (1997, 2001); Massey and Denton (1988); McKenzie (1994); Merry (1982, 1993), and Zukin (1991).

finally, between different parts of the urban subdivisions were more of a rule, less of an exception (Stavrides 2010). As a result, Arampatzi and Nicholls (2012) show how nation-wide social movements have been particularly rooted in this relatively porous urban fabric. In other words, the Mediterranean city has largely averted the formation of segregated or otherwise separated parts within it (at least in comparison to its Northern European counterparts) via its emphasis on the public and the commons, which came to the fore particularly in the Athenian “movement of the piazzas” (Leontidou 2012) of the summer of 2011, during which the city’s main square, Syntagma, became turned into “an agora, a ‘public’ realm” (ibid 2012: 306), a re-encountered “space of commoning” (Stavrides 2012).

Particularly in the case of Athens and Exarcheia, there are additional reasons why the ‘positive segregation model’ would not suffice in explaining the area’s riot concentration. First, Exarcheia lies in the centre of Athens. The centre has obviously held a key role in the development and operation of the city through history, even if recent times have seen a process of middle class flight from the city centre: culminating years after an uneasy co-existence with a new and rapidly growing recent migrant population, a large part of the Athenian middle classes fled the centre as a place of residence, joining the middle classes of the suburbs that were already living “left and right along a line from Phaleron Bay” and “toward the northeast fringe” (Crueger 1973: 297 quoted in Leontidou 1990: 128). Even when moving to the suburbs, the Athenian middle class still largely used the city centre both for cultural activities and for employment.

Since the middle class ‘flight’ was neither complete nor anywhere as widespread as in cities of the European North, a ‘positive segregation’ explanation does not in itself

suffice in explaining the Exarcheia case in full: Athenian middle classes continued to use the city centre, as did the city's working classes, new migrant populations and everyone else who continued to reside there — whether out of necessity, or choice.

### **7.1.3 The function-specific urban quarter explanation**

A third body of literature that can aid in understanding the broader social uses of riot concentration concerns itself with the compartmentalisation of urban functions: how function-specific urban 'quarters' develop within cities. Perhaps the most prominent body of work here is the one concerned with cultural clustering as created by the creative class (Pratt 2008) in creative cities (Scott 2006).

While traversing through the literature I kept my focus on the spatial division of social functions: a key qualifier in dividing the three bodies of work discussed was how tightly these spatial divisions were defined and enforced: the chapter opened with the tightest such division possible (the literal or metaphorical 'ghetto'), then moved on to cases of urban segregation (whether voluntary or enforced) before now arriving at the body of work that examines the spatial compartmentalisation of social functions — the specialisation of urban quarters. A growing body of literature exists here that stands at the crossroads of geography, cultural and urban studies and that focuses on the spatial conglomeration of economic, media, cultural and other functions<sup>162</sup>. This body is in turn connected to literature on 'place branding' — in particular, ways in which there is a tendency for places to "market themselves" (Kotler 2002), a "brand management"

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162 See Karlsson and Picard (2011) for media clustering; Eeckhout and Jovanovic (2002) for firm knowledge clustering; Mommas (2004) and Pratt (2009) for cultural clustering.

paradigm (Anholt 2006) that once again conceptualises such single-use of urban areas, as in the case of ‘cultural quarters’ (Montgomery 2003, Roodhouse 2006) — with an ensuing skewed vision.

Functional specialisation of urban areas could plausibly explain the concentration of riots — should we, of course, understand riots as yet another urban function. Perhaps not coincidentally, a strategy of urban counterinsurgency that was deployed against African-American communities in the inner cities after the 1960s wave of riots was termed “spatial deconcentration” (Duda 2008).

Did Exarcheia become ‘riot-specific’ over the years? Is it possible to add riots next to its known specialisations already discussed, such as book publishing and trading, or high-tech commerce? This model would feasibly work to an extent — and we could also turn, for example, to the notion of firm knowledge clustering (Jovanovic 2002) or cultural clustering (Mommas 2004, Pratt 2009) and project some key underlying principles of these on the case of continued riot concentration in Exarcheia.

The idea may appear peculiar, yet the practice of rioting is not that much unlike many other urban functions that require organisation: it may require a setting prone to the practice (in other words, a neighbourhood receptive to it); a capacity for “knowledge transfer” (i.e. an adequate number of people with the knowledge of how to act and the willingness to transfer such knowledge, even if this happens tacitly — see Howells 2002); a critical mass of willing parties (culprits in the undertaking of the riot); and individuals and social groups that agree — whether explicitly or not — to come together at a specific time and place, in order to act.

It would therefore be plausible to create a model explaining riot concentration based on similar models used to explain the conglomeration of media, cultural and



economic functions — or even, the basic idea behind ‘place branding’. Many underlying principles behind these are indeed common. Knowledge transfer, a pool of actors and institution conglomeration (‘institution’ hereby understood in its loosest of definitions) are prerequisites in all cases. Needless to say, even if the above are logically correct, there is one significant leap in drawing such parallels: even if models of conglomeration of other social functions may in fact help us understand the conglomeration and the concentration of rioting, we still need more in order to fully understand the latter: first, because rioting is a social act that lies outside the confines of the Law — beyond what is deemed legally and (usually) socially acceptable as a practice. Second, because in order to understand the continued riot concentration in Exarcheia, one would inevitably have to take into account the specific historical, social and political conditions of Exarcheia, Athens and Greece as a whole.

## **7.2 Greek political spatialities**

A brief perambulation of some key social and political struggles in Greece’s recent history is in order: the partisans (antártes) of the Second World War and those of the succeeding Civil War would “take to the mountain” (“vgíkan sto voynó”) to join the struggle<sup>163</sup>: in this sense, their participation in a struggle was inherently spatial, connected to their physical relocation and to their taking advantage of the country’s particular landscape. The punishment of the Junta’s dissidents was also inherently

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163 For a detailed articulation of the inherent spatiality of contemporary Greek politics see Yannis

Kallianos, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of St Andrews, UK (2012).

spatial: those fighting the regime — or suspected of so doing — would quickly find themselves outside the limits (quite literally: in *ex'oría* i.e. beyond the limits) of society, yet evidently at the very centre of the regime's jurisdiction, its zone of control.

Of course, the existence of such paradigmatic spaces of exception such as the Greek *xeronísia*<sup>164</sup> is not exclusive to the Greek paradigm. Carl Schmitt (1985) and Giorgio Agamben (2005) have both shown how the seemingly exceptional and isolated space that lies outside sovereignty's normally applicable site of jurisdiction is in fact the one that constitutes the paradigm, the norm: by sending dissidents beyond the normal boundaries, the Greek Junta regime was vividly showing everyone else precisely where these boundaries were drawn.

The spatiality of power therefore extends way beyond paradigmatic, exceptional sites. The spatiality of social organisation, production and reproduction has of course already been documented by Michel Foucault<sup>165</sup>: from the school to the prison, from the clinic to the factory, key aspects of social reality (the production and reproduction of labour, education and so on) is rigidly organised, compartmentalised and contained into task-specific sites. Spatiality is not a mere backdrop; to the contrary, it is the backbone of contemporary social organisation and reproduction.

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164 Literally desert islands, the remote Greek islands used by the Colonels' regime for the exile of its political dissidents.

165 There is an inherent spatiality in the seminal institutions of norm production and social reproduction that Foucault engages with, including the prison (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975) or the clinic (*The birth of the Clinic*, 1973); for a more complete articulation of spatiality in Foucault's thought also see Foucault, M. "The Language of Space" in Crampton and Elden (eds, 2007).

It is with all this in mind that this chapter introduces the notion of the spatial contract. This ‘contract’ was first juxtaposed to the social contract: the largely implicit agreement between the state and its subjects about the way in which the former will exercise its power over the latter in exchange for “social order and the common good” (Perrons 2004: 240) as explained and argued throughout western political theory, from Aristotle, and later Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jacques Rousseau” (ibid). Perhaps the most significant radical rewriting of this social contract came in the case of post-World War II countries in Europe, where the atrocities of the war gave rise to a social agreement much in favour of the states’ subjects. At the time of writing (2011-12) Europe had most evidently entered a transitory period, if not an altogether new chapter in its history: many of the post-WWII rules of the ‘social contract’ seemed to be rewritten on the national level, while “problems of [economic and social] cohesion” (Perrons in Hudson and Williams 1999: 186) that had been diagnosed in the continent over a decade ago were reaching an unprecedented peak.

It is important, therefore, to keep in mind that the time after the completion of the thesis is likely to bring along important changes in the spatialities and geographical scale of power across the continent: questions of the geographical scale at which government is exercised, or specifically questions of national versus supra-national sovereignty are now wide open.

Speculating about the future is both futile and outside the realm of social science. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that this thesis is written through a transitory period: important because the main period of research (1973-2008) coincides with the life course of the post-dictatorial state in Greece. Through this historical period — and in the early post-dictatorial years in particular — an evident

need existed for a new ‘social contract’ in a country recovering from divisions the dictatorial regime had not only fostered and exacerbated but left as a legacy. In the post-dictatorial era, the country’s broad consensus for parliamentary democracy was inscribed in its spatiality: in post-dictatorial Greece, street protests became a central and most important form of political manifestation. As a political form of action, the protest is quintessentially public and visible (in stark opposition to the invisibility of the Junta’s dissidents, for example); it is ephemeral (again, in contrast to the fate of the previous regime’s opponents) and it acted as a barometer for any given political tendency or specific demand driving protests, which were measured both by the protest’s size and its character (for example, by how confrontational it might be). And yet even the most confrontational of protests would not escape the ephemeral nature of their action: they were bound to cease to exist only hours after they have first occurred; the disruption of order took an obligatory form that ended in some form of order – perhaps a new form – being restored. Taken together, these repeated appropriations of public space for political purpose became a series of clauses in Greek society’s social contract.

The moment when a social contract is nullified invariably produces discontent. Has this moment arrived for Greek society? Even though it is difficult to decide with certainty on concurrent events, it most definitely seems so. The youth uprising of December 2008 seems, in hindsight, to have acted as a harbinger for the turbulent moments that the country was to follow soon thereafter. Then, the signing of the first Memorandum of Agreement between the Greek government and the IMF/EU/ECB, in May 2010, marked the entry proper of the country into a new era: an era that has been so far marked by substantial changes concerning the scale of governance (the national to supranational scalar shift just referred to). In popular movements that took forms both

familiar and new, Greek society asserted its social cohesion and expressed its discontent — perhaps most vividly and spatially during the events of the summer of 2011, with the “movement of the squares”<sup>166</sup>.

As explained in chapter 2, this historical transition also divides the fieldwork findings in two, according to historical period: first is the period spanning from the Polytechnic uprising of 1973 to the events of December 2008 and then, the transitory period that followed the events up to and inclusive of the completion of fieldwork in the summer of 2011<sup>167</sup>.

### **7.3 Fieldwork findings on riot concentration**

What do fieldwork findings establish about the concentration of riots in Exarcheia in each of these historical periods? Chapter 6 (and sections 6.5 and 6.6 in particular) showed how riots were concentrated in Exarcheia throughout much of the Metapolitefsi, whether in the form of original or commemorative riots. Chapter 4 also showed that the Exarcheia discourse during much of that period also pointed at a concentration of riots in the neighbourhood. Coding my own interviews and transcripts of conversations with key informants, I gradually encountered a narrative that went

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166 Perhaps more accurately even, “the movement of the piazzas” as per Leontidou (2012: 302) who uses the term “piazza” instead of “square” in order to “denote the open and the nodal centre of material and virtual communication rather than an enclosed square and its defined landscape”.

167 This is the reason why the period under research can also be stated as 1973-2008/11 — denoting that that the time between 2008 and 2011 comprises a transitory period.

much beyond a mere ‘tolerance’ of riots and uprisings in Exarcheia: instead, this narrative comprised what I termed an ‘equilibrium of violence’.

In interviews during fieldwork I asked all interviewees (i) whether they believed urban riots in were any way concentrated in Exarcheia; upon receiving affirmative responses to question (i), I asked respondents (ii) whether they saw any historical continuity in this concentration. In addition, my main fieldwork questionnaire included an open question on the ‘word, term or concept’ that came to my respondents’ mind when they thought of Exarcheia.

Starting with the latter then, there were 57 out of the 82 fieldwork questionnaires filled out in total where this word, term or concept directly related to rioting — including variations and adjunct words to riot: *mpáchala* (lit. ‘riot’, nine times), *exégersī* (‘revolt/uprising’, twenty-six times), *katastrofēs* or *spasímata* (‘destruction’/‘property destruction’, eight times) and simply *fōtiá* (‘fire’, five times). In addition, seventeen respondents chose the word *astynomía* (‘police’) and another five simply opted for the word *cháos*. An understanding of Exarcheia as a neighbourhood prone to violence was therefore predominant among my respondents and largely so regardless of their age, sex or residential status. What these responses revealed was a perceived concentration of riots in Exarcheia, yet they still offered little explanation as to why. In response, I asked these ‘riot citers’ this precise question: Why did riots concentrate in Exarcheia? I have grouped my interviewees’ and informants’ responses in the three following categories.

First, one group used terms that resembled a military condition. According to them, the neighbourhood was “under siege”, “under occupation” or “under attack”<sup>168</sup>.

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168 The term echoes the statement by Alexis Tsipras, the young leader of the leftist SYRIZA coalition,

The respondents who used such ‘language of war’ largely described themselves as political activists, leftists or anarchists. It is worth keeping this in mind, namely that they conceived something of a ‘war’ to be taking place in Greek society — and Exarcheia to be an ‘operational base’ for this war.

Second, a significantly smaller proportion of my respondents questioned whether the concentration of riots in Exarcheia was as prominent as presented in media discourse. Not a single one of these respondents questioned the actual occurrence of riots in the neighbourhood; what they questioned, instead, was the extent to which these took place. In other words, these respondents argued that this concentration was grossly exaggerated in the media lens. When asked why such an ‘exaggeration’ had taken place, eleven argued it was because it justified the neighbourhood’s policing and another seven that such depiction gave the neighbourhood a bad name: the implication of both subgroups being that Exarcheia is conceived by the state and media apparatus as a potentially threatening force that needs to be dealt with, and that its defaming in media deals with it by weakening the neighbourhood’s appeal.

A third theme that emerged from the interviews was that the concentration of riots in Exarcheia does not merely exist but is in fact somehow “allowed”, “tolerated” or even, “encouraged” by the Greek authorities. Perhaps the most elaborate claim in this category is the one by Spiros Tsagaratos, architect and lead urban planner in the attempted regeneration that preceded the Virtue Operations (1984-86). In our interview Tsagaratos claimed that the regeneration of the area was left incomplete after and due to

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who likened Exarcheia’s policing to the Gaza strip occupation (October 22, 2009), following an extensive police operation in the area on the eve of the national elections of October 4th, 2009.

a large-scale police operation that obstructed his attempt to hold a public forum on the regeneration plans. “The police”, told me Tsagaratos, “did not want to see the regeneration take place”. He then added: “a possible regeneration of Exarcheia” [which would have theoretically led to a change in the neighbourhood’s land use and eventually, the argument goes, its character] “would have left the police with little of a role or influence in the neighbourhood”.

If Tsagaratos’ argument is in any way valid, the continued concentration of riots in Exarcheia should be read in a different light. When the first group of my respondents described a “police occupation” in the neighbourhood, they most certainly used this as an exaggeration; an exaggeration, nevertheless, that derived from the concrete reality of high police presence that the neighbourhood was faced with. In a similar manner, the second group of respondents also referred to a real condition that, even if at the level of discourse (the exaggerated media discourse) still had a tangible effect on the ground. A claim of a situation being out of control would not always stay in the newspaper headlines, that is to say, at the level of discourse. Often it has preceded or even translated into increased police presence. Such police presence in turn offers a tangible target to those arriving in the area with the intention to riot. The riot triggers heavier policing and more negative publicity, in what quickly becomes a vicious circle. Tsagaratos argued that despite claims otherwise, neither side wants to break through this circle: a controllable riotous condition in Exarcheia, his argument would go, might not pose a major obstacle to police — let alone, of course, the political “status quo”. To build on this argument, it may even be quite the opposite — in that such concentration (a low-intensity, spatially enclosed rioting zone) might allow police an excuse to keep a grip on the neighbourhood and to intensify their operation in the area if and when they



deem appropriate. More importantly, it might very well be that such riot concentration facilitates higher levels of social peace across the rest of Athens.

In chapter 5 I discussed the everyday reality of Exarcheia; there I argued that an ‘equilibrium’ existed between the neighbourhood’s social actors (and largely because of their multiplicity, the sheer fact of how many of them there are). This ‘equilibrium’, I argued, made Exarcheia a ‘whirlwind of stability’ during the Metapolitefsi (chapter 5, section 5.5). I now wish to extend this notion of an ‘equilibrium’ to include acts of rioting and contention.

According to the claim by Tsagaratos above, there must be a strong (even if largely undeclared) reliance of rioters on their targets (primarily the police) and vice versa. Simply put, this is an implicit understanding that neither of the two main actors in a riot — the police and the rioters — may exist without one another. Furthermore, the ostensible prevalence of one at the expense of the other over brief periods of time might in fact safeguard a longer-term presence for both. For instance, the extended police control over Exarcheia during the Virtue Operations of 1984-1986 seemingly aimed at the elimination of the ‘riotous subject’ from the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the operations themselves offered this ‘riotous subject’ an ideal opportunity to group against the policing operations. The revolt of December 2008 was followed by large-scale police operations in Exarcheia, particularly in the succeeding year (in the autumn of 2009 and in December 2009, on the first anniversary of the revolt). These operations were conducted primarily in order to prevent the repetition of violence. And so, events that could at first seem to shift the balance of power in either direction, may in fact have contributed to the perpetuation of this equilibrium within Exarcheia. Three decades on, the neighbourhood has neither become any kind of ‘lawless zone’ nor has it been

‘tamed’ by a seemingly ever-increasing police presence.

What I describe above is the ‘violence equilibrium’ of Exarcheia discussed in chapter 6. But this equilibrium does not exist in a vacuum: the remaining part of the chapter therefore comprises an exercise in reading this equilibrium from a different perspective, effectively lifting the geographical scale. So far, the chapter has shown how the co-existence of a multitude of (conflicting) social actors and forces in Exarcheia has ensured that the balance of power could never quite tip completely in either direction: a ‘violence equilibrium’ allowed for the repeated occurrence of riots inside Exarcheia throughout the Metapolitefsi — both at regular and irregular intervals. The task now at hand is to understand the ‘violence equilibrium’ of Exarcheia in the broader Athenian and Greek political context; to seek the role it has played in the social and political condition of the Metapolitefsi as a whole.

It is a great paradox that the condition of riot concentration within Exarcheia during the Metapolitefsi became most evident at the time of its dissolution. The December 2008 uprising was instigated and still centred in Exarcheia, yet it evidently spread much beyond the confines of the neighbourhood and even the city of Athens and Greece as a whole. In the years that followed, the entire social and political condition of the Metapolitefsi has been questioned; and social unrest has spilled outside the streets of Exarcheia in plenty of instances (including, as explained, in the summer of 2011).

What I experienced during the time of my fieldwork, in this sense, was a shifting condition — from riot and contention concentration inside Exarcheia to what was a much more generalised acting out of discontent across the country. Experiencing and documenting this moment of transition first-hand allowed a unique opportunity to better comprehend the historical function of riot concentration inside Exarcheia.

## 7.4 Introducing the spatial contract

As the socio-political conditions in the country shifted from 2008 to 2011, the concentration of riots and contentious politics overall inside Exarcheia also faded — yet this concentration up to that time was a unique historical condition that had to be explained and accounted for. For this reason, I here introduce an intellectual device intended to explain the wider implications of what I have so far termed an ‘equilibrium of violence’ in Exarcheia through the Metapolitefsi. I call this intellectual device the spatial contract and I define it in the present instance as follows:

the spatial contract is a largely consensual and implicit agreement under which a certain level of rioting and other forms of street-based political contention became possible in Exarcheia during the Metapolitefsi, under a mutual but muted understanding that such contention would rarely, if at all, spill over to other parts of the city.

The spatial contract as an intellectual device is inspired from the notion of a “social contract”, as is explained earlier and further on — yet it is far from a mere projection of the social contract on space. The relationship between the two is neither absolute, nor unchangeable. In what ways, then, might the idea of a spatial contract reflect the social and political transformations Greek society went through during the Metapolitefsi?

This was a society that was evidently not stalemated during this period and to an

extent, the “spatial contract” of the Metapolitefsi reflected these changes. As an example, the rise of the social-democrat PASOK to power in the early eighties (1981) was accompanied by a promise for a new “contract with the people”<sup>169</sup> — if we were to translate this in terms of the spatial contract, this “contract with the people” was soon accompanied by the introduction of the Academic Asylum Law (AAL, 1982) which is discussed in section 7.4.2.iv. What exactly, then, is the relationship between social and spatial contract in the Greek example? And how might we use this intellectual device to explain cases outside this time (Metapolitefsi) and place (Greece)?

#### **7.4.1 From the social to the spatial contract**

By introducing the notion of the spatial contract I strive to contribute to our more general understanding of how a long-standing social equilibrium in a particular area (in the case of this thesis: the ‘equilibrium of violence’ in Exarcheia) can affect the wider socio-political condition of the urban or national entity in which it takes place. This is the essence of the spatial contract: an intellectual device that can help us understand how a particular convention, an unwritten rule concerning a particular area fits into the urban and even the national fabric.

What I was not looking for when conceiving the spatial contract was any schema for a rigid, clearly demarcated space of ‘deviance’, as encountered elsewhere<sup>170</sup>. This,

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169 The renowned “symvólaio me to laó” (contract with the people) was declared by Andreas G. Papandreou in the same year.

170 Examples of rigid spatial demarcations of deviance include the well-documented ‘skid row’ area in

despite the fact that when I entered the field in the early summer of 2010 I held what was a fairly common understanding of Exarcheia as an exceptional, peculiar, or even abnormal part of the city of Athens; one of those urban sites that are “linked with all the others, [yet] contradict all the other sites” (Foucault 1984: 46). These sites, which Foucault termed “heterotopias”, are “counter-sites (...) in which the real sites, all the other sites that can be found within [every] culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (1984: 47). After my fieldwork research, I still hold little doubt that for some period during Greece’s post-dictatorial years Exarcheia did edge close to this heterotopic status described by Foucault, without ever quite achieving it<sup>171</sup>.

The idea of a “ghetto” or in other words, an area that was rigidly demarcated spatially, was incompatible with my case study. The literature on gated communities adduced earlier on edges closer to explaining the Exarcheia condition, centred as it is around a more voluntary segregation of urban space (the idea of ‘positive segregation’). Then, the literature on urban quarters edged even closer to what I read to be a mutual,

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Vancouver, CA or certain French banlieues: formalised spaces of ‘exception’, in other words, where such deviance is channelled into, and tolerated.

171 I have consciously chosen to claim that the neighbourhood ‘edged close’ to this status rather than ever ‘achieving’ it since I am aware that Foucault refers to a condition of absolute separation from the remainder of the urban entity — and neither my fieldwork findings nor, therefore, my conclusions can point at any such absolute level of separation. There are certain moments in the neighbourhood’s history (including but not limited to the Virtue Operations of 1984-1986 and the events of December 2008) when Exarcheia did edge very close to a heterotopic status in its relationship to the city of Athens.

‘unwritten’ specialisation of urban space. Yet to my knowledge, neither of these bodies of literature has questioned social action that lies outside the confines of the law: in this sense, they have been unable to explain the continued concentration of the riotous condition that I encountered in the Exarcheia example.

What I needed was a theory that would explain a social condition as deviant as the ghetto, as informal as the spatialisation of urban functions and — most crucially — as influential upon the urban entity as ‘positive segregation’ has been elsewhere. I needed a synthesis of the bodies of literature that I had drawn on before and after fieldwork — but further even, a schema that would explain how this particular unwritten rule (the equilibrium of violence) helped sustain the wider social/spatial equilibrium that was the Greek Metapolitefsi.

The notion of the social contract has been most often associated with the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) and his attempt to outline a theory for regulation of the relationship between sovereignty (or authority) and the people — a relationship regulated largely on an implicit level. Similar to the social contract, the ‘spatial contract’ as introduced in this chapter does not, for its largest part, involve any literal exchange of signed paperwork: there is no explicit demarcation of spaces in which dissent may be tolerated. Instead, it is an implicit and largely mute agreement based on tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1966) of where the rules/demarcation of the ‘spatial equilibrium’ lie for both sides. The original concept of the social contract explains the social dynamic between a state and its citizens. In an equivalent way, the concept of the spatial contract explains the social dynamic between state and citizens as this is articulated in space.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the social and the spatial contract is not entirely straightforward: it should not be assumed that the spatial contract is merely the

projection of the social contract in space. For example, the youth of the French banlieues/suburbs (specifically the largely migrant-populated banlieues) are faced with an official discourse that tells them they are in ‘fraternity’ with their fellow French citizens living in the urban centres. These youths nevertheless face a reality in which they are largely expected to live in the strict confines of their banlieues, with all the social and political limitations and stigma attached to them.

What is the relationship between social and spatial contract in the French case? The explicit, official discourse for these populations is that they share the same obligations and hold the same rights as the populations outside the banlieues. They are partners in the social contract; French citizens, with the same rights to education, welfare, voting, and the like. In terms of the social contract they are equal. At the same time the implicit, muted agreement is near-completely inverse: the rights of these citizens seldom exceed the confines of the banlieue. Worse even, it is their very attachment and confinement to the banlieue that guarantees their inequality. In terms of the spatial contract, they are extremely unequal.

When arguing for the idea of a social contract Rousseau famously argued that “man must be forced to be free”, by which he mean that since popular sovereignty (the people) decide what is good for everyone, if one person lapses back into egoism they should be forced to follow what they themselves had decided as citizens. In the case of Athens “man” (understood of course as the individual member of the populace, regardless of gender) has been “free to exercise force”, but only as long as this force is exercised inside a particular area: Exarcheia. Let me now turn to the neighbourhood once again, then, in order to elaborate on four key elements of the spatial contract that I have identified there.

#### **7.4.2 Three (plus one) key elements of the spatial contract in Exarcheia**

This section presents four key elements of the spatial contract as it existed in Exarcheia between 1974 and 2008 (with the additional transitory period of 2008-2011). The first three of these elements point at the implicit — the tacit — part of this ‘contract’ and they include (i) the role of media/popular discourse in riot concentration (ii) the role of historical and popular memory in the ritualistic repetition and the outbreak of fresh instances of rioting and (iii) the concentration (clustering) of counter-cultural consumption and its relationship to riot concentration. The fourth is the only element of the spatial contract that is explicit in the Exarcheia case: the ‘Academic Asylum Law’ (AAL), established in 1982 and abolished in the summer of 2010.

##### **7.4.2.i Media/popular discourse and riot concentration**

Chapter 4 focused on a number of prevalent media discourses on Exarcheia, specifically regarding the portrayal of the neighbourhood in national newspapers in Greece during the period of research. Key discursive themes, as identified there, included a conceived ‘occupation’ of the neighbourhood (by anti-social elements, as was implied in much of the reporting); a generalised condition of ‘violence’ and a need, by extension, for policing operations that would ‘sweep clean’ the neighbourhood. Another prominent, key discursive theme conceived the area as an ‘ávon’ (a no-entry – literally no-go – zone) for police and authorities overall. The following chapter (5) then juxtaposed these discursive themes to the everyday reality in the neighbourhood, particularly in terms of the policing operations that had followed long strings of unfavourable coverage: reports of an upsurge of violence were swiftly followed by



large-scale police operations (the Virtue Operations of 1984-1986 being a prime example). Yet, I would like to argue, there is another plausible (side) effect of media discourse that describes the area as a ‘haven of violence’. When trying to understand why the events of 2008 were sparked off once again in the area, I was quickly pointed at the inverse effect of negative media discourse: the neighbourhood, in fact, had built much of an allure for the youth and other populations inclined to participate in this violence precisely because of it. Simply put, a crucial element ensuring riot concentration in Exarcheia is the reputation that the neighbourhood has built through its media discourse on the one hand, and its popular discourse (the word on the street) on the other. In this way media coverage — and negative coverage in particular — makes up a major, even if perhaps inadvertent, clause of the spatial contract.

#### **7.4.2.ii Historical and popular memory/ ritualistic repetition of riots**

The ‘spatial contract’ does not linger exclusively in the abstraction of discourse. Tangible, concrete events that took place in the neighbourhood of Exarcheia have undoubtedly contributed to solidification of the neighbourhood in popular memory as an area that is prone to and perhaps largely tolerant toward rioting. In Chapter 6 I identified and termed as ‘commemorative’ those riots that had taken place in Exarcheia in memory of events past. Key historical events have taken place in the neighbourhood — most notably the student uprising of November 17th 1973. These ritualistic commemorations, often turned violent, of the original 1973 uprising are key here: most of my informants participated in the commemorative demonstrations of November 17th and often described policing of the demonstrations and academic sites as relatively relaxed. Indeed, it was not until recent years (most notably from 2006 on) that the Athens

Polytechnic campus would be locked up by university authorities in anticipation of troubles that would follow the commemorative demonstration. For the years before, it was implicitly understood that trouble was likely to flare during and after the demonstration. Yet it was also implicitly — but very rigidly — understood that such trouble was not to break through to other parts of the city centre.

This fact alone might best explain how the events of December 2008 were liminal events, very likely to have marked a passage from one historical period into another. On the one hand, the events themselves comprised, I argue, a breaching of the ‘spatial contract’ — a major instance at which this implicit agreement was overlooked and perhaps, one of the first instances at which it was altogether nullified.

#### **7.4.2.iii Counter-cultural consumption and concentration of rioting and political upheaval**

Before I turn to the breaching of the spatial contract (or even, as I will argue, its possible termination) it is necessary to comprehend how this contract was formed and perpetuated through the practice of everyday life. Over the years, Exarcheia built a solid reputation as a ‘haven for deviance’ — a neighbourhood where the law could be potentially broken with little or no repercussions. One key element for building this reputation was the formation of a counter-culture, which was built largely around consumption<sup>172</sup>. This counter-cultural consumption was evidently based on the

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172 Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw (2012) have discussed the relationship between alternative consumption (ethical green consumption in particular) and the heterotopia of Exarcheia. Chatzidakis (forthcoming, 2013) also discusses the relationship between commodities and ideologies in the

neighbourhood's reputation, but it has itself in turn contributed to the perpetuation of Exarcheia's myth, role and function. In other words, even if the student uprising of 1973 did happen in the neighbourhood, the event in itself may not have been able to sustain Exarcheia's 'capacity to revolt'. Such capacity was built through the repeated consumption and production of Exarcheia: as I was repeatedly told, it was 'cool' to drink, eat or otherwise consume in the neighbourhood for the youth that were feeling rebellious. The assumption was that this was due to the legacy of the 1973 uprising and all succeeding riots that took place there. The Athenian youth therefore consumed Exarcheia (drinking and eating in the neighbourhood, or purchasing and consuming paraphernalia with reference to the area) but it then re-produced Exarcheia in return through its presence in the neighbourhood: there was a critical mass of people attracted by riotous activity, such that the outbreak of another riot in the neighbourhood seemed to be a matter of time. In hindsight, it appears that the events of December 2008 simply meant that time had come.

#### **7.4.2.iv The 'Academic Asylum Law' (AAL)**

The previous three sections presented the implicit elements of the spatial contract in Exarcheia: its formation and perpetuation through discourse, historical memory and the circle of the area's consumption and production as a 'riot neighbourhood'. In addition to these there is also at least one explicit, solid element in this spatial contract and in the neighbourhood's capacity to riot: Exarcheia is adjacent — or, as many of my respondents argued, it hosts — the Athens Polytechnic and the

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contemporary Greek political landscape.

Law School of the University of Athens, and is in close proximity to the Athens School of Economics (ASOEE). On the one hand, this proximity/hosting of three main university campuses has contributed to the evolution of the area as student-friendly, even student-dominated. Of course, the uprising of November 1973 was key in its subsequent evolution. Yet in addition, it can be argued, the neighbourhood has been influenced significantly by the introduction of the so-called Academic Asylum Law (AAL) in 1982. The Law came as an ostensible response to the violent images of the repression of the 1973 anti-dictatorial student uprising at the Athens Polytechnic. Established by the social-democrat government of PASOK, the AAL prohibited police or army from entering academic campuses — with extremely rare and bureaucratic exceptions granted exclusively by university authorities themselves. The law was key in the non-intervention policy of police at ‘commemorative riots’ of November 17th through the eighties and nineties, while also contributing significantly to the days-long occupation of all three university campuses during the events of December 2008.

In this way, the AAL is the only tangible and explicit element of the ‘spatial contract’: it is the insertion of this contract into Law. It is not by coincidence, I believe, that the abolition of the AAL came in the summer of 2010; it is indeed likely that it came at a time marking the eventual abolition of the spatial contract as a whole. With the arrival of the IMF/EU/ECB in the country only three months prior (May 2010), the structure of governance in Greece changed dramatically. This shift in governance, it has been argued by many, marks the end of the country’s *Metapolitefsi*<sup>173</sup>. It is entirely

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173 For an overview of these discussions on a possible “end of the *Metapolitefsi*” see Maniatakis 2012,

Voglis 2011, Papadatos-Anagnostopoulos 2011 and 2012, Spourdalakis 2010.

possible, as will be discussed in the final part of the chapter, that the end of the Metapolitefsi will bring a demise of the ‘spatial contract’ as well. What conclusions can we draw in regard to the role of the spatial contract in the Metapolitefsi? How can this intellectual device help us better comprehend the relationship between governance and its spatial articulation as a whole?

## **7.5 Some preliminary conclusions**

This chapter showed how the intellectual device of the spatial contract can help explain the continued concentration of riots in Exarcheia during the Metapolitefsi. The spatial contract, in other words, helps us understand the Exarcheia-based string of riots not as being socially disconnected or fringe events but as an inseparable, key part of Athens’ recent turbulent history. Perhaps paradoxically, this riot concentration has become most evident at the time of its dissolution: at the time, that is, of the economic and governance restructuring initiated by the bailout agreement between the Greek government and the so-called ‘troika’ in May 2010. As I have discussed already (Vradis in Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2011) the events of the summer of 2011, with the “movement of the squares” spreading across Greece — beyond the confines not only of Exarcheia but of its surrounding metropolis — may very well comprise a first “breaching of the spatial contract” (ibid). As indicated above, the events of December 2008 could themselves be read as an early precursor to this “breaching” of the spatial contract — since they were centred in Exarcheia, but spread far outside the neighbourhood. As for the era that followed — and the arrival of the ‘troika’ after May 2010 in particular, it might be very well be that contention no longer has as strong a spatial reference. Indeed,

the riots of February 2012 in central Athens were extremely severe, yet scattered outside the Athenian centre, including the side streets around Syntagma and even, in some cases, the middle class neighbourhood of Kolonaki and much beyond. Was the spatial contract being diluted, or “terminated” (Vradis 2012) even?

It definitely appears that the spatial contract in the Greek case is fast reaching such termination. Regardless of when the future geographer will be able to declare this “termination” with absolute certainty, the fact remains: the case of the spatial contract as articulated in Exarcheia during the Greek Metapolitefsi is an important, even foundational, example, but an example nevertheless. As a notion, the spatial contract can indeed be applied across spatialities, across cities and countries. The spatial contract would of course come with its local variations: In the French example discussed in section 7.4.1, the citizen-subjects of the French Empire were met with a discourse of *liberté* (liberty) and *égalité* (equality) — a social contract that was equal in its face value but inherently uneven in its spatial articulation.

What we think of as the social contract does on the one hand have some very concrete, tangible articulations: universal — or near-universal — healthcare is part of this social contract<sup>174</sup> and so is unemployment allowance or housing benefits. In short: clauses that are inscribed to paper, rigidly facilitating the reproduction of the working class which, as per the Marxist theory of value, in turn ensures the continuation and the ever-increasing intensification of capitalist production and the creation of surplus as a

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174 Here, one only has to think of the case of the National Health System in Britain — both for a tangible example of the social contract and at the same time, for a lucid example of ways in which this contract is altered; some would say breached, if not altogether terminated.

result. In a way, schematically, the “social benefits” included in the social contract are part of the capitalist production “re-invested” in the good maintenance and reproduction of human capital. These are therefore some of the rigid clauses of the social contract, yet not all of its clauses are visible, set in stone as the expression goes; what happens, in fact, is quite the opposite: for its largest part, the social contract comprises an implicit agreement; very much more an understanding than a legally binding agreement.

This chapter has introduced the notion of the spatial contract and it has explained how it functioned in a near-equivalent manner: in Exarcheia, the spatial contract also included a limited number of concrete, tangible articulations. The Academic Asylum Law (AAL) stands as one such articulation; the near-permanent stationing of riot police units at key sections of the perimeter of the neighbourhood is another such example. On the one hand, there is a tangible, visible presence; on the other, a formal clause in law reflecting a much more widespread, implicit agreement. How can we use this implicit agreement and its spatial articulation to reassert the role of space in recent Greek history — and the country’s Metapolitefsi in particular? And what are the potential applications of the “spatial contract” as an intellectual device in social settings outside the Exarcheia case? The concluding part of the thesis now synthesizes the research findings so far to answer these questions and to propose pathways for future research.

## **8. Conclusion**

The concluding chapter is divided in four parts. Its first part (8.1) reflects on the research question as it was outlined in the thesis introduction, before then explaining (8.2) how this question was inextricably connected to questions of positionality, ethics, distance from the subject and the consequent impact in social science research. In its third part (8.3) the chapter outlines key practical and ethical limitations faced by the study — partially as a result of the aforementioned ethical issues — while the fourth part (8.4) elaborates on the contribution made by the thesis to existing geographical knowledge. Based on this contribution, the chapter ends (8.5) with an outline of personal plans as well as overall recommendations for future research on the spatial contract and riot concentration in Greece and beyond.

### **8.1 Posing questions and undertaking riot research: some reflections**

The thesis set out to research riot concentration in the neighbourhood of Exarcheia during Greece's Metapolitefsi (1974-2011); to understand how such concentration was conceived in popular and media discourse during this period and in turn to understand how this discourse impacted upon the neighbourhood's everyday reality. The thesis also set out to understand how riot concentration was sustained in the neighbourhood and what this concentration can reveal both about the role of Exarcheia in the Metapolitefsi and about the character of the latter overall. The thesis' subject,



therefore, was sensitive — dealing as it did with action that lies outside the confines of the law. In response to this sensitivity, I used an extensive part of chapter 3 to address the overarching moral questions that arise (or at least, should arise) from researching urban riots.

As explained in that chapter, addressing the question of researchers' distance from their subject of research is imperative. In my attempt to handle this question I conducted a study of Exarcheia that cut across historical and more concurrent events; most crucially, however, it was a study that shifted across different discourses — including as it did both readings of Exarcheia “from above” (the professional discourse on the neighbourhood) and from “below” (its everyday reality). This effort may have gotten me closer to a multiple reading of Exarcheia, a more spherical representation of the neighbourhood's reality. But did it tackle the moral questions behind researching riots in the first place?

The research question opened by asking “How can *we* explain riot concentration in Exarcheia during Greece's Metapolitefsi?” (In this context, I emphasise “we”.) As explained in chapter 3, I believe that a question we ought to ask ourselves, as social scientists undertaking social research, concerns our own position — a question often-times verging on the existential: who are we conducting the research and who will potentially benefit from this research in return? Essentially, why are we doing this? In the same chapter I elaborated on these questions of positionality and reflexivity that I was faced with prior to and during the study. I now elaborate further on these questions in light of the research findings as presented in the empirical chapters (4, 5) and in those chapters (6, 7) that have attempted a synthesis of the research findings to offer a theoretical contribution that applies beyond the Exarcheia example.

My initial and most formidable challenge throughout the study was to determine how I was to *see* Exarcheia. For John Berger, seeing comes before words — “it is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world” (1977: 7). Too far away and we run the risk of mystifying what then becomes the distant Other — whether our distance from them is chronological or spatial. Too close and we run another risk, a risk often enough associated with a “lack of objectivity”: Too much proximity to our research subjects casts a shadow over our capacity to take an objective enough stance on our research matter. Our perspective would be biased, as the conventional conception would have it. But the convention of perspective, as per Berger once again, is not something that should be taken for granted: it “is unique to European art (...) [and] centres everything on the eye of the beholder” (1977: 16). According to this convention, “there is no visual reciprocity” (ibid: 16). Can a critique of perspective in artworks be applied to the social sciences? In reflection, after completion of this thesis I can say: very much so. The question of perspective inextricably includes both our own vantage point (where we see things *from*) and our positionality (who *we*, the ones who see, are). Similarly, the “visual reciprocity” that Berger referred to in the world of art is very fitting for the social sciences: Where we see things from, our perspective in undertaking social science research, simultaneously implies, presupposes and dictates the level of reciprocity that exists in our study.

The direction of this study was in essence dictated by a similar concern about reciprocity: or to be more precise, it dictated what pathway the study was *not* to take. Let us imagine, for a second, what form the study might had taken should it have opted for a more “conventional”, fieldwork-based study. It is plausible to assume that it would have comprised a purer ethnography of rioters in Exarcheia; perhaps an attempt to

“demystify” the “tribes” that professional discourse had previously identified in the neighbourhood, as shown in chapter 4. And yet, this ethnographic exercise would have been grossly unequal by default: it would have been carried out by someone coming from outside the neighbourhood yet not even entirely so — knowing, as I explained in chapter 5, both “too much” and at the same time “too little” about Exarcheia. What is more, this would have been an exercise conducted for its largest part from afar, by a partial outsider to the neighbourhood. In a way, then, it would have edged close to a Greek equivalent of the “Reading the Riots” study. Why do that? What would be the incentive in this exercise, and what position would this reading put me in as a researcher?

## **8.2 On the question of positionality and impact**

Who do we conduct research *as* and who does our research then talk *to*? These are far from rhetorical questions; in chapter 2, I outlined my own incentives for the research. I explained how I strove to give riots a historical agency they appeared to have lost at the moment of our passage into the Age of Reason: Post-Enlightenment, riots turned from mediating acts, means of holding authorities accountable, into somewhat irrational, largely unexplainable acts. Acts, that is, that were unexplainable and unfitting in the context of the Enlightenment’s discourse of consensus and reason. In essence, therefore, an underlying aim of the present study has been to reinsert riots in the historical process — but riots as a whole, as a collective act that comprises the sum of individual action. In this sense, the study did not comprise an exercise in unveiling the motives of individual riot participants, nor in translating potentially unarticulated

demands towards the authorities. At the same time, the study has not attempted to explain “why” riots happen, to potentially prepare authorities for the next time, to ensure they would be accurately prepared — or even, perhaps to prevent riots from recurring.

Rather, the study has shown that just because riots lie beyond the confines of the law, it does not mean to say that they lie outside social confines nor, much more so, that they do not potentially hold historical agency. Just because rioters might not articulate demands does not mean to say that their acts cannot become part of much wider — and legitimate — social and political processes. It has used, perhaps uniquely so, the *spatial confinement* of riots to explain that both the acts and their spatiality can and should be read in their wider context. The study has therefore purposefully largely subsumed the question of “who acts” in favour of “where”: prioritising spatial concentration over individual motivation. With the question of “who acts” or, indeed, “why” largely subsumed in favour of questions of historical perspective and spatiality, what might the research impact of the study be?

At a time when the direction of social science research — its funding and, by extension, its viability — seems to be ever-increasingly determined by the question of research “impact”, the questions above become critical: the matter of “impact” in social sciences research has been brought to the fore<sup>175</sup> — yet only too often, it seems, in a largely uncritical manner. The rule is not without its exceptions: scholars of gentrification, to offer one well-researched example from urban studies, have discussed

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175 In the UK, perhaps primarily so via the question of “impact” for social research as articulated by the country’s Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

at considerable length the moral issues that lie behind their research. Tom Slater triggered this discussion by asking for focus to be placed on “the experiences of non-gentrifying groups living in the neighbourhoods in which the much-researched cosmopolitan middle classes are arriving en masse” (2006: 743) — a plea, in other words, to give a voice to the voiceless of the gentrification process. The question is crucial — and it is not only about “who” we are but also on “whose” behalf we ask our questions.

On the other hand, a recently conducted study on London’s urban riots of 2011<sup>176</sup> seems to have placed lesser emphasis on these questions: even where no explicit proposition was made, the implicit proposition was that the research was conducted from a position entirely external to the riot subject. The unveiling of the initial research findings of this study (a) in the *Guardian* (mainstream UK newspaper and research partner) indicated one such beneficiary would be the newspapers’ readers — and yet, the research findings were also presented to (b) senior politicians present at the conference presenting the project findings, who then proceeded to comment on the results and announce future plans for tackling the delinquent behaviour of the rioters. In short, if this particular study had the proposition “we” anywhere in its research question, this would be a “we” including the academics conducting the research, policy-makers, the police and — perhaps only last — members of the public that happen to read the sponsor publication. Under no circumstances did the research claim to read the riots through the eyes of their participants, nor was it sharing the results with them — even

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176 Perhaps the most prominent example here is once again the “Reading the Riots” study referred to earlier on, by Lewis, Newburn et al 2011.

though the participants were included as subjects of the study.

How does this conceptualisation of positionality compare to the present study? Who, in other words, are the “we” in the main research question of this study, who are invited to understand riot concentration in Exarcheia? It is neither policy-makers, nor police, the rioters themselves nor social scientists alone — it is anyone from the above categories who is interested in understanding what the impact of riot concentration can be in a longer-term, historical perspective.

The juxtaposition between the two studies on urban riots has been used to illustrate how the sensitivity of the topic calls for some careful thinking on choosing appropriate research methods — and further, on our choice of both the geographical scale and the historical span at which we might wish to conduct our research. The present study has comprised a study on riots, not rioters. Its aim was not to judge individual motives but rather, to shift the geographical scale of the subject enquiry and to cover a period of research purposefully spanning a long period of time — an entire historical period. In this way, the study has attempted to conceive the role of riots as potentially historical events: to reposition them in the historical process, a process that academic discourse has by and large expelled them from as explained in chapter 2.

Would that mean that riots are historical events? As explained in the same chapter, this question, too, can yield some rather intriguing results when placed in a broader context. What I have tried to show is that even smaller, seemingly minuscule events<sup>177</sup> (that would rarely be recognised as political, let alone historical) may

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177 By this “seemingly minuscule” I refer to the “everyday” confrontations and skirmishes between youth and police, as outlined in chapters 5 and 6 in particular.

potentially play a crucial role in the social and political equilibrium of the society in which they occur — perhaps largely regardless, even, of the motives, the intentions and aspirations of those who participate in them.

This is where both the importance and the difficulty of the exercise conducted in this study lie. On the one hand, it is important in that the “defacing” of the actors of the study (their anonymity) may have in fact contributed in offering them a role in a historical period and a political process that would otherwise far exceed the time and the place in which they themselves act. But on the other hand, this exercise and its chosen perspective pose a question. How might we be able to measure the impact of the research? The study has been purposefully vague in identifying potential “beneficiaries” of the research — indeed, I do not believe it to always necessary or for that matter, moral for social science to have a *direct* impact: particularly in those cases where the subject of the research concerns acts that lie outside the confines of the law.

In this sense, the study was not conducted in order to pass judgement on rioters, on the reasons why they might take to the streets. Rather, via its focus on Exarcheia, the study has aimed to understand what this spatially concentrated, repeated occurrence of riots signals on a broader level. This is an exercise that could only come from within the field of human geography. For two reasons: first, because it was precisely the multi-scalar reading of Exarcheia that allowed us to better comprehend riots in their (urban and national) context. This comprehension has become possible through a toggling of perspective, looking at Exarcheia from afar and then from the ground, in a historical perspective and then in its everyday reality. Second, because it was of course the spatiality of riot occurrence — that is, their spatial concentration in Exarcheia — that allowed us to then conceive them in a broader historical context; in a context that

exceeded the individual act of rioting per se.

### **8.3 Obstacles in the research**

A study that has chosen to employ a multitude of perspectives would unavoidably be faced with a number of obstacles concerning its methodology; it was for this reason that chapter 3 turned to the methodological limitations and challenges posed by my own research ethics and my position in the field. In essence, the major challenge that the research was faced with derived not from the subject of the research inasmuch as the angle from which the research was to be conducted, in order to ensure that there would be as little a chance as possible to produce a voyeuristic reading of riot activity. How was this to be done? Had this thesis comprised a purely ethnographic study, the moral questions would have been, for me, insurmountable: merely knowing “too much” about Exarcheia, as stated in chapter 5, would make in turn impossible to keep enough distance from the research subject to study it.

This obstacle was countered through utilising multiple research methods and angles: it was precisely for this reason that the ethnographic study of chapter 5 was juxtaposed to a reading of the professional (media) discourse on Exarcheia (chapter 4), then to a longer-term, historical reading of the cycles of contention in the neighbourhood (chapter 6) — while a synthesis of these was used in order to formulate the “spatial contract” as an intellectual device, in chapter 7.

Each of these research methods came with its own challenges and limitations. For the ethnographic section of the study (chapter 5 and part of chapter 6) I entered the field aware that I was studying events that fell outside the confines of the law —



meaning that the voices of those participating in riot activity were not to be articulated in the thesis in a directly explicit form. On the other hand, it often-times proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to access key individuals willing to talk on particular subject matter from the side of governmental authorities and of the police. As reflected upon in chapter 3, individuals in the higher echelons of power were largely unwilling to be interviewed for the research, with a single — but crucial — exception in the person of Spiros Tsagaratos, urban planner and key individual behind the Virtue Operations of 1984-1986.

Potential participants, then, comprised on the one hand those largely unwilling to talk and on the other, those whose talking could not but raise the above-mentioned issues of positionality. As an implementation of the study's defined ethics, its ethnographic element purposefully keeps focus on the spatial characteristics of Exarcheia, avoiding focus on people or situations that could be conceived in any way as voyeuristic — this was the “spatial ethnography” exercise conducted in chapter 5. But as explained already, the study has not been about people — at least, not about people in their individual capacity, but rather in their potential to be understood as active historical agents, if looked at from an adequate perspective: in essence, a contribution to existing knowledge through a tilting of our perspective. So where exactly lies the contribution of the study to existing geographical knowledge?

## **8.4 Contribution to existing knowledge**

The study has used the example of Exarcheia in the Greek Metapolitefsi to argue that riots, even when seemingly inarticulate or “issueless”, can indeed make up part of

the wider social and political equilibrium in which they take place. On a local level, the study has shown how the different *rhythms* (chapter 6) in the everyday activity of the neighbourhood have in turn helped form what was termed its “equilibrium of violence”: a sustained balancing out of conflicting social forces, in other words, articulated in the space of Exarcheia. As explained in chapter 6, this was not a claim that Exarcheia became in any way stalled during the Metapolitefsi; the notion of the equilibrium of violence most definitely includes change, some that is on par with changes on the wider social and political level — most often matching the socio-political developments at hand.

On the local level then the study has established that riots were concentrated in Exarcheia in the Greek Metapolitefsi. Why does this finding matter? The study has built on from Leontidou et al. who have studied the Mediterranean model of urban development: it has shown that there is an alternative, a distinctly Mediterranean model not only for urban development<sup>178</sup> but for urban consensus (and by extension, social consensus) as well.

Yet the study has also attempted to contribute to the geographical field as a whole — to make a contribution, that is, extending beyond the confines of the Exarcheia and the Greek example. Before articulating this contribution, the study has called for two separate bodies of work to come together: on the one hand contentious politics — and riots in particular — have to be taken seriously in human geographical research. The potential clustering together of these events (or, as it has been repeatedly articulated

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178 Meaning the Mediterranean’s fluctuating rhythms of development, instead of the linearity of gentrification, for example, in the Global west.

throughout the study, the spatial concentration of riots) is a phenomenon that is geographical by default: human geography, with its emphasis on space, is most adequate in explaining this concentration.

On the other hand, the study has argued for the need to introduce a spatial element in the literature on contentious politics. The field, so far largely confined within sociology, would benefit from a spatial reading; from a reading of the locational clustering of these instances through time.

What is the incentive in bringing together these two bodies of work and what has the study contributed in so doing? The answer is the introduction of the spatial contract as a conceptual tool: a tool that holds the promise of enriching our understanding of riot outbreak and concentration. An enriched understanding would help us better position social acts that our present understanding – as much of our present social and political equilibrium as of processes of social change in history – largely places in the margins. It can help, in other words, to reinstate the mediating position of these acts and therefore move away from a discourse that had deemed them “issueless”, that saw them as an anomaly in the discourse of modernity, an anachronism in its positively linear progress discourse.

Last but not least, the spatial contract has helped resolve a seeming contradiction running through much of the present study. In short, the study has been concerned with contentious acts (riots) and explained them through a schema that was largely consensual (inherent in the idea of a “contract” as presented here). This apparent contradiction, between contention and consensus, has been resolved in purely spatial terms: the spatial concentration of contention, as shown, may very well contribute to a wider equilibrium, a consensual (though of course, still uneven) balance of power. Even

if the juxtaposition of consensus to the ferocity of riots might appear as contradictory and unbalanced, it should not go unnoticed that for all its ferocious visual imagery, the concentration of riots in Exarcheia resulted in a — relatively speaking, of course — low number of lethal casualties caused by the police (not including the 1973 Polytechnic massacre) and virtually no lethal casualties caused by the demonstrators and rioters; and this, during a period that stretched over nearly three decades.

This thesis has argued for the need to firmly bring contentious politics into human geography. I also have argued for the necessity to bring a spatial reading (in particular: a reading of spatial concentration) into our study of contentious politics, of social and political equilibria and of social change alike. What do these conclusions and these findings suggest as areas for future research?

## 8.5 Recommendations for future research

The notion of the social contract by far precedes one of its most well-known variants — that is, the postwar welfare state that arose throughout much of Europe after World War II. As it was explained in chapter 7, the social contract as an intellectual device dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>179</sup> and so, even if the social contract in its *current* form appears to be under a significant process of reconfiguration, this would not necessarily mean that it would cease to exist in its entirety: it would be difficult to conceive what a dissolution of the social contract as a whole would bring along, most certainly involving

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179 Of course, examples of consensual but implicit agreements between the ruled and their rulers trace even further back in history.

an unprecedented level of anomie as per the classics of sociological thought.

By a near equivalent thought process, the current study has been concerned with a variant of the spatial contract that was specific to a given time and a given place: Exarcheia during the Greek Metapolitefsi. Indeed, as shown at last section of chapter 7, the Greek spatial contract as encountered *in its specific form* during the Metapolitefsi seems to be coming to an end; its termination appears to be imminent. One immediate challenge that opens up for the future researcher, then, is to trace the alteration of the spatial contract in the Athenian example. If Exarcheia ceases to be an exceptional site where violent anti-state action is tolerated (to whichever degree this had happened so far), then what will the future spatial articulation of dissent appear like in the city of Athens and in the Greek territory overall? During fieldwork, a process of transformation was highlighted under which violent episodes of unrest started breaking out in other parts of Athens. Then, by the time of writing up the study, it had become evident that contention and dissent were spreading far outside Exarcheia — with the Greek authorities setting as a high priority the curtailing of such unrest in return. The “breaching” and the “terminating” of the Greek spatial contract as referred to in chapter 7 both concern the existent form of this contract: an immediate challenge would therefore be to trace and to analyse the future form that the spatial contract will then take.

But the spatial contract can be used as a conceptual tool to help us understand an abundance of case studies that exceed the Exarcheia example. First, and obviously enough, the spatial contract can be used in similar cases of riot concentration around the world — and in cases, overall, where social and political contention is spatially concentrated and contained. An example here would include the French banlieues

referred to earlier in the study (in chapters 2 and 7). But could the spatial contract also be used for cases where contention is neither concentrated nor repeated? Here, the example of the London riots (of the summer of 2011) quickly comes to mind — a case where rioting was much more diffused across Britain's capital city, and further beyond. In order to answer this question a final disclaimer on the spatial contract would be in order.

As explained earlier on (chapter 7) the spatial contract is on the one hand, a spatial articulation of the social contract. The latter concerns the regulation — however implicit — of the relationship — however consensual — between the ruled and their rulers. “However” is key here: in a certain historical period (that is, post-World War II) and in a certain geographical region (that is, Europe) the social contract was rather consensual and explicit, for some very specific historical reasons. Yet this is neither a historical precedent nor does it necessarily mean that its successor will have a similar form.

Respectively, then, the spatial contracts that exist elsewhere in the world may be much more explicit (demarcated by concrete structures: walls, fences and the like) and much less consensual, even though we should not presuppose a correlation, positive or negative, between the two. A study of the spatial contract in other settings and other time-spans can yield fascinating results. Not least, this could also be a study that has an entirely different geographical scale and perspective: indeed, even in societies where contention is not as visible in the everyday as it is in the Greek case, it does not mean to say that it does not exist. In other words, the diffusion of power through the social body does not mean this power is somewhat lost. It is therefore fascinating to trace both where this power struggle lies in the social body and the ways in which it is negotiated

and contained; to trace, in other words, the present and future forms of the spatial contract. In this capacity, this chapter and the thesis conclude by proposing two different directions for future research.

First, it is important to research both the current and the future form of the spatial contract in Greece. What happens when a key shift occurs in the governance of a finite, geographical space such as the Greek state territory? What are the explicit and the implicit elements of spatial contract through this process and how may this change along? Chapter 7 showed how the spatial contract, just like the social contract, is largely implicit but has some very concrete articulations at the same time. In the case of Exarcheia, it was the example of the AAL, as were the squads of riot police that were stationed around the neighbourhood. What are the present (and what may be the future) articulations of the spatial contract in the Athenian and the Greek case overall?

Second, it is indeed possible to trace the spatial contract in other geographical settings and historical periods. At the present conjuncture, tracing the amendments to this contract would be a fascinating project — for example, an attempt to trace the spatial contract at the time prior, and then during the financial crisis of 2008/09 in the European continent. What may this contract look like at the time that these lines are written — and what may it then change into in the near future? In our attempt to trace this spatial articulation of consensus through concentrated contention, the current historical conjuncture offers some unique challenges. Living through this turbulent period of change (during and following, that is, the current financial crisis) means that the events prior and following to it are significantly different: the spatial contract of riot concentration in Paris (as mentioned, specifically at its margins) would be largely incomparable to the geography of contention of London in 2011. During the entire time

of researching and writing up this study, major cities of the Global West and beyond were witnessing an upsurge — often-times a resurgence — in urban riots. As stated in the introduction to this study, this was a moment when focus was largely on our accelerated historical time; a moment when time had been prioritised over space. And yet, it is at this particular conjuncture that it now becomes imperative for us to turn once again to space; to understand spatial patterns of turbulence and contention and how these may shift at this or any moment: at such turbulent times — at these times in particular — space matters.\_



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180 Unless stated otherwise, these are postgraduate dissertations written by students of the NTUA (civil engineering or architecture).

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