

IN FOCUS: GREECE IN CRISIS

Introduction

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In her book *The Senses Still* (1994), anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis recounts memories of *rodhákino*, a peach variety whose taste had marked her childhood years and subsequent visits to Greece for summer holidays. She notes how the emergence of a new type of peach as well as a blend between the two had resulted in the gradual disappearance of *rodhákino* from the summer markets. According to Seremetakis, its displacement resulted in the simultaneous evacuation of distinctive cultural memories at the nexus of food, eroticism and history. The ‘breast of Aphrodite’, as *rodhákino* used to be known, had now given way to an array of ‘peaches’. But the evocation of *rodhákino* does not conjure up an image of mere nostalgia. As Seremetakis notes, ‘the erasure of one Greek peach poses the question: at what experiential levels are the economic and social transformations of the EEC being felt?’ (ibid.: 3). It is precisely these experiential fields which contributions in this section seek to address. In their examination of the repercussions of the Greek financial ‘crisis’ and the ensuing neo-liberal structural reforms, the authors adopt an approach which effectively challenges the proliferation of mediated narratives and stereotypical accounts. Therefore, by grounding their analyses into ethnographic fieldwork and personal experiences, they engage in sociopolitical commentary that attempts what Veena Das has elegantly phrased as ‘the descent into the ordinary’ (2007). They demonstrate how the experience of physical and symbolic violence that has been unleashed by the increasing disintegration of the social tissue through the implementation of abrupt austerity policies has given rise not only to forms of collective trauma and fantasy - essentially what it currently *means* to be Greek - but also to affective conditions pertinent to the fragmentation and re-articulation of individual identities. Most importantly, the authors show how within such turbulent and precarious social and economic circumstances people strive and eventually manage to find hope in the form of collective action.

Thus, in the first article Natalia Koutsougera attempts to elucidate notions of entertainment and popular culture in Greece through the examination of different forms of music and dance. Her ethnography discusses the cultural processes through which identities emerge and are contested. The creative appropriation of global music genres such as hip hop by the multi-ethnic Athenian youth can be perceived as a ‘unifying’ local practice which aims at neutralizing cultural differences. Far from a leisure pursuit, Koutsougera argues that the practice of street dancing and ‘breaking’ represents a strategy for social acknowledgement and survival. Her comparison between the politics and aesthetics of hip hop and night club activities in a working-class district of Athens skilfully exposes their points of convergence and the common ideas that underpin these cultural forms. Thus, while in night clubs the performance and affirmation of gender relations and social status as well as a strong sense of heterosexual eroticism seemingly contradict the competitive but largely egalitarian ethos of hip hop practice, it becomes evident that both are characterised by an underlying search for authenticity.

If urban spaces set the scene for the production of an authentic grounding through music practice, they also testify to the inherent spatialisation of political practice. Yannis Kallianos, whose fieldwork in Greek radical politics coincided with the riots of an unprecedented scale that swept Greece in the aftermath of the murder of a teenager shot by the police in December 2008, traces the trajectory of a rapidly transforming society by scrutinizing this change as a process of fusion and

disjunction. This is vividly captured in situations of public conflict and in the actions of squatting in public buildings and occupying open spaces where the exchange, confrontation and resolution of a multitude of perspectives by people from all walks of life become possible. Kallianos explains that the crisis has become an ontological predicament as well as a call for social change, albeit one which has been promoted by the Greek state as the only, non-negotiable *truth*. It is the monopolisation of the assertion of this truth by the state that the emerging forms of sociality in occupied public spaces seek to dispute. Ultimately, says Kallianos, the interpenetration of the public and private spheres reflected in these political events highlights the dissolution of the myth of a homogeneous community. But a counter-reaction and the re-invention of this myth lurks behind the cultivation of the fascist ideology and hate-based rhetoric of the Golden Dawn.

Leandros Kyriakopoulos detects in Golden Dawn's extreme and racist politics a widespread condition that involves the expression of guilt transformed into vociferous revenge. The strong denouncement of *Metapolitefsi*, a historical period introduced by the transition from the military junta to a democratic polity in 1974, is part of this revenge. Paradoxically but perhaps unsurprisingly, the sense of collective guilt that stems from the acknowledgement and recognition of a sinful political past embodied by *Metapolitefsi* simultaneously engenders and supports claims for the violent reforms currently implemented by political parties and actors that have played a crucial role in the political life of the country over the past decades. Kyriakopoulos also calls attention to the disintegration of traditionally strong familial relations brought about by the rise of opportunistic individualism. This begs for a reconsideration of the myth of the overprotective Greek family, which has currently left its offspring exposed to and unprepared to deal with the contemporary condition. By broadening the scope the author suggests that Greece's economic restructuring is not only a self-defeating challenge to be met by the country, but crucially a test for the EU's ability to enforce its punitive demands and devise a framework to be applied to the next victim of the faceless financial markets. As he puts it: 'Greece becomes now the lawless space in which the "new European country" is procreated'. If Greece's condition of crisis is not a singular event but a truthful indication of sustained European policies, soon everything will taste like 'peach'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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