

Interrogating urban crisis: governance, contestation and critique

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Athens and the politics of the sovereign debt crisis

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Introduction

This paper examines the urban policies in Athens during the period of the crisis. We argue that these policies have a dual agenda which corresponds to two distinct, though interdependent, power configurations. The Athenian urban policies are dominated by two issues: First, a huge privatization program of public real estate assets and energy, telecommunication and transport infrastructures and companies. Second, the securitization of city space against social protest and immigration. This dual agenda corresponds with two different levels of organization of power relations: on the one hand, the privatization program is planned, decided and managed at a supranational level which involves EU institutions (European Commission, European Central Bank), interstate relations between Eurozone state-members and international institutions (notably the International Monetary Fund). On the other hand, the securitization agenda is formulated and implemented by the national and, to a lesser extent, by the local authorities and affects the local social movements and different “marginal” social groups (immigrants, prostitutes, drug-addicted).

This association of privatizations and securitization is a typical characteristic of neoliberal public policies. Under the slogan of reducing state interventionism in favor of the free market, neoliberalism has restructured state functions reducing social services and strengthening military and police activities. The austerity policies, especially in the EU countries which are under bailout programs, extend and radicalize this political rationale. Furthermore, what is probably a newer element, the crisis policies and politics promote a rescaling of power relations through this dual privatization/securitization agenda.

The paper is divided in three parts. First, we present briefly the political economy of scale theories upon which we rely in the analysis of the relation between urban policies agenda and power relations. Second, we present the impact of the bailout programs on the relations between scales in the EU and the associated power configurations. Third, we focus on the dual privatization/securitization agenda of

Athens.

The scale as a question of power

Since the 1980s in Europe and elsewhere in the world, state power has undergone significant transformations. Some of the state authorities have been transferred to supranational institutions like the EC/EU and the NAFTA, while others have been devolved towards subnational authorities. At the same time, new ways of policy-making and policy-implementation emerged at the national and the local level (public-private partnerships, quasi-governmental agencies, informal networks). Attempts of scholars in social sciences and urban studies to understand and analyze these transformations have been expressed mostly through the development of different versions of governance theories (multi-level governance, network governance, regime theory etc.) which stressed the changing relation between the levels of political power (supranational, national, subnational), as well as between the political institutions and the civil society. In a critical-marxist direction, one of the seminal approaches of the metamorphoses of political power has been the 'political economy of scale' literature (see among others Swyngedouw, 1997; Peck, 2002; Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2005). The main idea in this approach is that the simultaneous transfer of political competences upwards and downwards does not constitute merely a redistribution of social functions to some vertically differentiated institutions. On the contrary, scale theorists stressed that the redistribution of authorities is a question of reorganization of social power itself. With Peck's words scales must be understood as an 'object of and a medium for political-economic struggles' (Peck, 2002: 340). The redistribution of authorities between scales entails a formation and transformation of the related social functions, as well as the formation and reformation of scales themselves (for instance, the creation of the EU's political institutions) (Swyngedouw, 1997; Peck, 2002). In a Marxist direction, these scholars emphasized changes in social functions associated to the capital/labor relations (capital accumulation, labor regulation, monitoring of financial markets, welfare arrangements) and their preferred research objects focus on capitalist regulation as it is mediated by state rescaling (entrepreneurial city, local workfare policy experimentations, interscalar policy transfer). This power-centered approach of the re-scaling of political authorities is also a processual and relational conception. State rescaling is a dynamic process which involves interaction and struggles between political elites, social classes and social movements.

The political economy of scale literature offers a critical view of the process of weakening of the national state. Usually, the various governance theories argue that the loss of competences by the

national state led to less hierarchical and more cooperative ways of policy-making and organization of the political power in general. The national state's vertically organized, bureaucratic structure gives its place to more participative political procedures that are accessible by subnational authorities and the civil society. The political economy of scale approach shares with governance theories the idea that the role of the national state has been reduced (although scholars like Brenner and Jessop insist that the national state maintains important coordinative competencies, Brenner, 1999: 439; Jessop, 2008: 210). However, at the same time, the political economy of scale approach emphasizes the fact that state rescaling is a question of power and struggles between parties, classes and movements. State rescaling is not socially neutral; it is connected with promoting new strategies of capital accumulation and rearranging power relations between social groups. For instance, the 'collaborative' urban governance schemes of the 1990s-2000s (among which the most emblematic have been the 'public-private partnerships') have not benefited uniformly the different segments of civil society but involved mainly the fusion of economic, political and technical elites, having thus a highly exclusive character (Swyngedouw et al., 2005; Jouve, 2005: 290-2).

State rescaling and the Eurozone crisis

At a general level, the 2008 crisis revealed some structural deficiencies of the institutional system of the European Union and especially of the Eurozone. While a common currency zone exists, it was national governments that wielded power in crisis policy, from the bailing out of the banking systems to the protection of the unemployed (Fujita, 2013, 24). Things become even more difficult since 2010, as a number of Eurozone member-states with high sovereign debt and public deficit started to lose access to the international capital markets (first Greece and later Portugal and Ireland, while Italy and Spain faced also severe pressures in terms of bonds rates). The EU institutions, notably the European Central Bank, lacked the authorities and mechanisms to aid them to cope with the crisis. The policy response to the new public finance-centered phase of the crisis was delayed and some kind of unease seemed to characterize EU politics for some months. Through harsh bargaining between EU member-states, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, a model of bailout program has been established initially for Greece and then for Portugal and Ireland. Later on, the crisis management exceeded the implementation of stabilization programs and turned into an institution-building process: new European financial mechanisms were created (EFSF, ESM) to

undertake the role of some kind of ‘lender of last resort’ vis-à-vis member-states; the EU member-states, with the exception of the UK and the Czech Republic, adopted an agreement on budgetary discipline (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance) according to which national governments are engaged to keep balanced budgets under the threat of sanctions by the European Court of Justice; the European Council and the European Parliament adopted an agreement on a single supervisory mechanism for banks led by the ECB as a first step towards an integrated ‘banking union; at the same time public debates on other major reforms continue, like the issuance of “Eurobonds”, the introduction of a financial transaction tax, the implementation a Single Resolution Mechanism for managing bank failures in the Eurozone and the establishment of a EU minister of finance.

Overall, the crisis policies and politics entailed a transfer of authorities towards the supranational level. The bailout programs transferred the control of major public policy domains (public finance, fiscal policy, labour market, pension system) from the national governments of the three countries (Greece, Portugal, Ireland) to an ad hoc international power figuration composed by the EU, the ECB, the Eurogroup and the IMF. The rest of the new institutions and agreements induced during the crisis affected a much larger number of states by transferring authorities related to public finance and banking system to new or older EU institutions.

This process of state rescaling has at least three important features (Souliotis, 2013):

- a. It results to a large extent from harsh interstate bargaining among the member-states of the Eurozone. The interstate balance of power upon which this bargaining relies was shaped on the grounds of previous national economic performances within the unified European market and the single currency area. Thus, the political management of the crisis leads to the formation of a new system of domination between states, debtor states occupying dominated positions and states in surpluses occupying dominant ones. The institution-building process tends to transcribe the balance of economic power between states to the political-institutional field. These interstate tensions and struggles over the ‘institutional architecture’ of the EU are not a new element: every EC/EU Treaty has been historically a result of such tensions (Marks et al., 1996). However, what is new is that there is a clear (partly *de jure* and partly *de facto*) rollback of the non-hierarchical and collaborative elements that characterized policy-making in the EU during the last twenty years (lastly exemplified in the Open Method Coordination, Jessop, 2005),
- b. Due to their devastating socio-economic effects (extremely high unemployment, increase of poverty etc.), the crisis and the bailout programs entail a violent rupture of domestic socio-political consensus.

The national political elites are called by the bailout programs to implement particularly tight austerity policies and ‘structural reforms’ which provoke a sharp deterioration of the standard of living of their electoral basis. A crisis of representation occurs also, as the austerity policies are decided at a supranational level which is not accountable to the voters of the national states. This decomposes the established socio-political alliances of the last twenty-thirty years: for instance, in Greece the two large political parties lost the half of their voters in the last 2012 national elections. However, it would be imprecise to conclude that the rupture of the domestic socio-political consensuses in debtor countries is only an outcome of the transfer of authorities towards a non-accountable supranational political level. The political and economic elites of the debtor countries struggle to survive throughout the crisis and they attempt to use for this purpose the bailout programs (in order to save and keep control of the banks, reform the labour market, privatize public companies and real estate assets), with the cost of losing their social alliances. Overall the formation and revision of the bailout programs is a highly contradictory and competitive process, as it involves the strategies and interests of supranational institutions, national governments, and the economic elites of both lender and debtor countries. Thus the bailout programs come are products of complex interstate, political and class relations.

c. Both the bailout programs and the EU institutional reforms entail a one-way transfer of authorities upwards, towards supranational institutions. In contrast with the ‘glocalization’ which followed the previous major capitalist crisis of the 1970s (Swyngedouw, 1997), the 2008 crisis seems to lead univocally to an upward transfer of authorities. At least this is the case of the EU, where the policy response to the crisis depends upon the creation or the reform of supranational “federal” agencies. As we will see in the case of Athens, the subnational authorities (region and the city) are completely bypassed by the supranational ones in the implementation of the policies induced by the bailout program.

Athens’ urban policies during the crisis

Privatizations as the new Athens’ developmental agenda

During the two decades that preceded the 2008 crisis, the EU policies had two main effects on the Athenian urban policies: a. The accession of Greece to the single market and later to the Eurozone led to a change of the local policy agenda (Souliotis, 2013; Souliotis et al. forthcoming). On the one hand, the accession to the unified market and currency area increased pressures on the Athenian economy,

especially on the manufacturing sector. These pressures strengthened deindustrialization processes which were already taking place since the crisis of the 1970s. On the other hand, the accession to the EU/Eurozone created some new opportunities. The EU's cohesion funds put at Greek governments' disposal important financial means, while at the same time Greece was found to be the only country in the Eastern Mediterranean and the post-communist Balkans to enjoy the privilege of being EU and Eurozone member. This grid of constraints and opportunities led the Greek political and economic elites to abandon the redistributive policies of the 1980s and adopt a pro-growth strategy which focused on the transformation of Athens into an important regional centre (Economou et al. 2001; Stathakis and Hadjimichalis 2004; Souliotis 2013). This strategy has been mainly implemented through the realization of a number of transport and other infrastructural projects and the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games. b. The availability of the EU funds partly reversed a chronic deficiency of Greek urban policies: the low state capacity (Souliotis et al. forthcoming). The management of the EU funds enabled the political elites to implement in a more or less efficient way an urban strategy for Athens. At the same time, it enabled them to forge social alliances with different social groups: medium and lower strata in the period 1989-1999 when mainly small scale projects were funded (Economou 1997, 2004); the large construction companies and the banks during the period 1999-2008, when large scale construction projects came up in the agenda.

On the contrary, the institutional structure of the Athenian urban policies was less affected by the accession to the EU and the Eurozone. This is quite worthy of remark, as Greece has been since the 1980s one of the countries which performed significant administrative reforms in order to adapt its local administration system to the EU's financing schemes and multi-level governance system (Jouve, 2005; Chorianopoulos, 2012). Successive reforms in 1986, 1997 and 2010 changed profoundly the Greek local administration system, abolishing communities (*koinotites*), reducing substantially the number of municipalities (*demoi*) and establishing the elected Head and Council of the regional authorities (*peripheries*). Despite, however, these reforms, the Greek national political elites maintained traditional centralism in the Athenian urban policies by avoiding implementing a metropolitan government in the city and by keeping control over major choices concerning the urban development in Athens. This seemed to change in the last reform of 2010 which established such a metropolitan government, but, as we will see below, the crisis politics annulled this trend towards more autonomy of local Athenian authorities.

The crisis and the state rescaling process which is associated to the policy responses to the crisis had the following effects on Athenian urban policies: a. They rendered obsolete the internationalization strategy of the city. The Athens-based businesses (banks, construction companies, telecommunications, retailers) which expanded their activities in Eastern Mediterranean during the last 15 years started to face severe problems of viability. The Greek political elites do not dispose any more the financial means and, even more, the political autonomy to plan and implement a developmental strategy for Athens. The bailout programs reduce the developmental strategy of the city to an extended program of privatizations which includes real estate properties (notably the area of the old airport in the Hellinikon suburb), the port of Piraeus, the Athens International airport and public companies (water, gas); what is more, the privatization program is decided by an ad hoc supranational political configuration (EU, ECB, IMF and the Greek national government) and carried over by a specific purpose SA (the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund - HRADF) whose administration is appointed by the Greek national government and the 'troika' (EC, ECB, IMF), b. The reduction of the developmental strategy of Athens to an aggressive program of privatizations decomposes the alliance between Greek political elites, economic elites and middle classes. The developmental strategy of 1990s-2000s was based on the implementation of several small and large scale projects and the promotion of private consumption (retail activities, leisure etc., Souliotis et al., forthcoming, Delladetsima, 2006). The projects which were under construction before the 2008 crisis have been frozen due to the collapse of public investments and, in a second phase, of bank loans. Private consumption fell sharply, destructing an important part of the economic activity of the city. The new developmental strategy induced by the bailout program focuses on the attraction of FDIs through an aggressive privatizations program, which is associated with austerity measures aiming at lowering assets' prices through deflation. It is obvious that this strategy cannot gain the support of a local socio-political alliance - with the exception of the part of domestic business elites which can benefit from the privatization program. c. The transfer of the decision-making process at a supranational level downgraded the political role of the local authorities. The last reform of local administration in 2010 implemented for the first time a metropolitan government in Athens, which was meant to undertake (as the regional authorities in general) competences regarding the promotion of development policies on a spatial basis. However, negotiations on foreign investments and privatizations in Athens have been since the beginning of the crisis conducted exclusively by the central government and actually are being conducted by the HRADF with no participation of the metropolitan government of Athens.

Similar ambiguities are present in the field of urban planning. Involved authorities (the Ministry of Environment and the Master Plan Organization of Athens, a long established autonomous agency responsible for spatial planning at the metropolitan level) still fail to elaborate the new Master Plan for the metropolitan region of Athens (the current Master Plan dates from 1985), despite recent proclamations. Several minor regeneration projects focusing especially in specific ‘problematic’ parts of the city centre have also been proclaimed since 2010, only to be postponed or cancelled afterwards. Even in this case of lower level policy decisions, local and regional authorities’ responsibilities are constrained by decisions taken at higher levels, as in the case of the emblematic regeneration of Panepistimiou Av., in downtown Athens. Labelled under the slogan ‘Rethink Athens’ and focusing on ‘reoccupying’ the city, this is the only project that seems to proceed, based on a coalition between the Ministry of Environment and a big private Foundation.

Overall, the crisis and the bailout program decomposed the Athenian developmental strategy and the associated socio-political arrangement of the previous twenty years. A major aspect of this process is that the local and, especially, the national political elites have been disembedded from their electoral basis. As we will see in the remainder, in order to reconstruct their relation with the middle and lower social strata and keep the control over the social order under the “threat” of social protest, the national and local political elites invested in a securitization agenda which targeted on social mobilizations and immigration. The crisis politics led thus to a bifurcation of urban policies and politics, with developmental issues being managed at a supranational level and securitization issues being managed at national and local level.

The security logics of crisis governance

The three years of the implementation of the austerity program have been marked by increased anxiety for security and order in the Greek society. Fears of insecurity, disorder and their implications on economic performance, competitiveness and social cohesion are repeatedly and intensively expressed by successive governments, as well as regional and local authorities. Similar fears are echoed by the media and a wide range of other actors of the civil society, including local commercial chambers, academics, residential committees and celebrities.

Greece presents one of the higher ratios of police officers per inhabitant in Europe (453 officers per 100,000 inhabitants in 2009, compared with 337 in the EU-27, Small Arms Survey 2011). The number of police officers increased from about 50,000 until 2008 to 61,000 in 2012 (according to a statement

by the Minister of Civil Protection in November). Meanwhile, the official number of prison population presented a constant increase from 8,000 in 2000 to 10,000 in 2006 and then to more than 12,500 in 2010, not including the number of immigrants in detention centres which is estimated to exceed 5,000 detainees today).

According to National Statistical Agency data there was also a remarkable increase in the turnover of the private security sector between 2005 and 2010. Using 2005 as base year, the 2010 annual turnover reached 157, not only being almost unaffected by the economic crisis but also showing the second best performance between all other service sectors. This figure is even more impressive if one takes into account that with the same base gear the annual turnover was not higher than 32.7 in 2000. Moreover, according to the CoESS reports, the ratio of private security force in the population increased from 1/428 in 2008 to 1/376 in 2011.

According to the theory of securitization, as coined by the Copenhagen school (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al, 1998), what we have to look for when examining the security logics, is the ways in which elites persuade the national audiences that various issues are in fact security problems and thus call for irregular measures. The work of the Copenhagen school has received wide criticism (Bigo, 2002; Balzacq, 2005 & 2011; Van Dijk, 2006; Charette, 2009), especially for a. its preoccupation with analyzing the discursive means of securitization and its failure to recognize the (strategic) importance of non-discursive means, especially in the field of security practices and b. its failure to see securitization as an intersubjective process rather than a unidirectional communication of a message.

In a sense, securitization is a reasonable response of the political elites to the increased people's intolerance and resistance against austerity measures. The governance of the economic crisis since 2010 has been marked by massive protests and unrest, general strikes, the massive movement that occupied the squares in the cities of almost every city in Greece in the spring of 2011 and the collapse of two governments so far. More specifically, securitization might thus be seen as a continuous effort by the governing elites (and supporting agents) to achieve three interconnected goals:

- a. obscure their political agenda by importing urgent security issues in the public field and refocusing the public dialogue.
- b. present economic crisis and its implications as problems originating from insecurity and disorder, i.e. as abnormal threats rather than as results of long-term socioeconomic and political processes.
- c. illegitimate any opposition and contention against their economic and social policies, by illegitimizing oppositional and contesting actors, including not only social movements (political groups

and other grassroots collectives, independent media) but even institutional bodies such as political parties and trade unions that altogether endanger security.

Although all these goals might be of great interest for the elites, the whole picture is much more complex for two reasons. First because once securitization of a social issue is established it may obtain dynamics that go far beyond the supposedly rational choices of the securitizing agents and even contradict their interests. Second because securitization is not necessarily a rational choice, but may instead emerge on the old grounds of ideology and irrational motivations. This has also to do with the fact that, despite the unequal power structure in which it is played out, securitization is a stake between different and competing actors who construct different meanings of security based on interests and preoccupations.

We claim that securitization in Greece in the period of crisis is exploiting specific security issues but goes beyond them, in order to establish an across-the-board security crisis. In other words, specific social issues such as immigration and protest are securitized both in discourse and in practice, but in a way that tends to present the contemporary Greek society in conditions of security crisis. We further claim that this is indicated by the transfer of the security logic from identifiable visible threats such as those imposed by immigrants and protesters to the securitized governance of specific areas where threats are dispersed in various fields of the social life and thus less identifiable or even invisible. The other side of invisibility is the normalization of threat: if the enemy is simply everywhere around, then we have to live with that and the protection of security becomes a crucial component of governance.

Securitization of immigration

Securitization of immigration today is by no means any break with the past. Two relatively recent papers (Karyotis 2012, Swarts and Karakatsanis 2012) present the rapid securitization of immigration since the early 90's, that is since the first massive inflow of people from Albania and the Balkans. Albanians were frequently demonized in the mass media, police operations were organized in order to arrest and deportate some hundreds of people each time and politicians expressed their fears with terms such as *invasion*, *flood*, *hungry hordes* or *siege and occupation*. The Immigration Act in 1991, the first after almost 70 years, was characteristic for its strict preconditions for legal residence, while leaving no room for social integration measures. The police or even the army were the basic foundations of the emerging migration regime, as the national borders began not to dissolve but to get dispersed in the streets and the neighborhoods of Athens.

It was only six years later when the reality of massive arrivals and the acceptance of the positive role of immigrants in the then developing Greek economy, led to the implementation of the first 'legalization' process, which was followed by two more waves in 2001 and 2005-2007. The central idea was the recognition of immigration as an economic reality and the recognition of immigrants' rights on the basis of their participation in the labor market. In fact, the strong linkage between the right to stay and employment was an indication of the perception of immigration as a possibly temporary necessary evil. In any case, it was a first step towards a more comprehensive immigration policy, one that treated immigration as a normal socioeconomic condition rather than an abnormal threat. This very step was already highly contested at the level of representations, due to the previous wave of securitization.

A few years before and after 2004 one could see the moral panic in mass media giving hesitantly some space to articles and news celebrating Athens' multiculturalism and the co-existence of people of different origin enriching the local social and economic life. At the same time though legalization procedures ceased for new immigrants, in a new migratory landscape, now characterized by arrivals from war and poverty zones in remote parts of the world. The Dublin Convention and the Dublin II Regulation meant that many immigrants wishing to move to other European countries were literally entrapped in Greece, having as the only (if any) legal basis for social integration the ambiguous status of the asylum seeker. In the second half of the 00's (and for the first time in the period of parliamentary democracy), an extreme-right party gained a political career on the ground of its anti-immigration agenda.

However it is in the most recent period that an up to then marginal neo-nazi party achieves high support and representation in the Parliament, based on an openly racist agenda. Moreover, it is during this period that racism extends beyond the formal institutional practices of discrimination into the streets of Athens, where racist attacks multiply against individuals, properties and spaces where immigrants concentrate. Some of these attacks take an open public character that resembles local movements' actions, going beyond the shadow attacks of the past.

Importantly enough, it is also in this period that elites grasp once again the string of securitizing migration. An immense fence aimed at discouraging immigrants from crossing the border with Turkey at the Region of Thrace is proposed in 2011 and finally constructed in 2013. New 'sweeping' police operations start during the summer of 2012 in the city centre of Athens and close to the Turkish border, under the oxymoronic name *Xenios Zeus*. The innovative element of the new operation is that, after an initial period of wide publication, police controls are performed at a regular basis, followed by a daily

press release on the results of the previous day. New detention centres are constructed or planned, in order, according to the Minister of Civil Protection, to double the current detention capacity of 5,000. Living conditions are more than hard in terms of congestion, hygienic, communication with the exterior, access to legal advice and even nutrition. But being there even for a period of one year (the official maximum period of detention increased from 3 to 6 and then to 12 months) may be quite preferred in comparison with the living conditions in irregular detention centres in almost every local police station in Athens and other cities (Lafazani 2013).

Recent riots in various detention centres in Attiki and other parts of the country gained less publicity than news about crimes committed by illegal immigrants. Perhaps this is because the detention centre, embodying a security doctrine of removal and detention of dangerous population, is seen in the security logic as the solution to security problems. Immigrants imprisoned there are found in a space external to the normal social space and in this way they are no longer a security threat. After the most recent riot in the detention centre of Amygdaleza in the periphery of Athens in early August (which bursted when the police cut the electricity supply in the containers in order to prevent the detainees from using the air-condition), the statement by the Minister of Civil Protection mentioned that the message to recipients in Greece and abroad is that they intend to imprison all illegal immigrants until they return to their countries.

Securitization of protest

In a sense, the crisis of political representation in Greece started before the sovereign debt crisis. The outbreak of the crisis of political representation was marked by the riots in December 2008, after the murder of a 15 year old boy by a police special guard in the downtown Athenian neighborhood of Exarheia. The violent manifestations that followed can be seen as a spontaneous response to both the specific incidence of police brutality and to the security logics of law and order that seemed to collapse for a few weeks in the streets and squares of Athens and elsewhere, at least in the minds of especially young people who participated massively in the events.

Generally speaking, the several protests against successive austerity measures since 2010 were handled by the police as if December 2008 had never ended. To be sure some violent events occurred again, with one exceptional case in May 5th 2010, when three bank workers were entrapped and killed in the wildfire of Marfin Bank. But even peaceful massive demonstrations, as those in front of the Parliament in Syntagma Square in June 2011 were confronted by severe police violence which aimed obviously at

dissolving the massive gatherings. Massive beforehand apprehensions, undercover police operations, great use of tear gas and physical violence were common even in general strikes organized by the formal trade unions. Several protesters and journalists were heavily injured.

Apart from massive events, there are other discursive and material instances that indicate the upgrading of the police oppression of political protest. For example the new law on tertiary education in 2011 made no references to the academic asylum. It thus abolished the prohibition of police operations in the universities, an institutional provision dated back in the end of the dictatorship in 1974 and highly supported by the academic communities in previous attempts to transform its application. Ex-Minister of Education considers the abolition of academic asylum as one of her major achievementsⁱ. Recently students' demonstrations in university buildings were attacked by police forces.

Not paradoxically the demonization of civil protest targets at first the anarchist, anti-authoritarian and leftist political groups and collectives. Individuals participating in an anti-fascist demonstration that ended up with a clash with supporters of the Golden Dawn in September 2012 were tortured in the General Police Directorate after their arrestⁱⁱ. During the last year, three squats in the city centre were evicted by the police, while other operations turned against the operation of autonomous media. Autonomous collective undertakings were repeatedly presented by the mass media, the Minister of Civil Protection and even the Prime-Minister as places of *anomie*, an all-encompassing term used to connect political competition with crime. What is more, in many instances similar accusations are made against the parties of the parliamentary Left, a practice that seems to contradict the regular rules of party competition in the period of parliamentary democracy since 1974. Usual accusations about the parochialism of the Left and its commitment to narrow-minded trade unionism are now accompanied by a rhetoric on the similarities between the "edges of the political spectrum", arguing that with their practices they both endanger the democratic order.

Material and discursive delegitimization of opposition goes hand in hand with the penalization of political struggles. Exceptional penal treatment has been applied since years to members of terrorist groups, but recently there are signs of some normalization of penal exceptions, as in the provision that civil employees are dismissed in advance when they are charged with criminal offences, a direct violation of the presumption of innocence. No similar penal treatment is regularly applied to cases of police abuse of authority.

A recent Presidential Decree about the preconditions that should be put on the right to protest introduced the right of the police to limit the surface of the road that gatherings judged by them as

'small' can occupy. Among the values that the Decree prioritizes, one finds the traffic and tourist circulation and, more generally, the commercial and economic activities and the socioeconomic life as such. In the government's discourse and practice we see civil protest being progressively identified with security risks that include a wide range of high and low intensity threats to the normality of city life.

Securitization of the city

Fears about degradation, criminality and disorder in specific parts of the metropolitan area of Athens, among which the city centre usually gets the highest, albeit not exclusive, attention, are not new. Even comparisons with the developments in American metropolises were commonly used already in the 80s to delineate an Athenian dystopia of increased criminality, insecurity, alienation and pollution that were expected to bring about the social desertification of the city centre. However it is in the last years that the reframing of the social and spatial transformations in central Athens under the term 'ghettoization' started to dominate political, administrative and media discourses (Kalantzopoulou et al. 2011). The popularity gained by the ghettoization argument (which is present in turn in political speeches of Ministers and politicians of the extreme and the neo-nazi Right, newspaper and magazine articles, TV news and talk shows, manifestos of local residential committees rejecting the presence of immigrants in their neighborhoods, municipal and private regeneration plans and academic texts) reveals the securitization of the urban life as an intersubjective process.

To be sure, the term 'ghetto' is connected with racism against immigrants in the city. The securitization of immigration brings about security anxieties in places where immigrants reside and concentrate, while at the same time generating the intention to defend other places from potential invasion. Immigrants are blamed not only for criminal offences but also for their cultural difference and material practices that are altogether threats to public health, morals, quality of life and image of the city.

In various instances immigrants' presence has been described as an impediment to the desired 'return' of residents in the (perceived as) deserted inner city residential areas. Apart from the fact that some inner city areas were abandoned by their local populations decades before the settlement on new immigrants (if they ever had any residents at all), this reflection fails to recognize immigrants as residents. It produces instead the picture of an alien population living in anomie and unable to be anything else than a danger, thus bringing whole urban areas in a status of continuous risk. As mentioned before, massive arrests and imprisonment in detention centres far away are seen as the proper solution, in that they

externalize the 'problem' and restore law and order in the urban desert.

More recently, solutions on a similar path have been applied against other 'traditional' disruptive social groups, like drug addicted persons and prostitutes. Since April 2013 a new operation under the unofficial name *Thetis* started to collect drug addicted person from the streets of central Athens and transport them to the detention centre of Amygdaleza, where they are forced to take medical exams and do cleaning work, to be left alone to go back to the city usually a few hours laterⁱⁱⁱ. The expansion of the removal and detention doctrine to social groups other than those for which detention centres were designed is quite impressive, together with the collaboration between the Ministry for Civil Protection and the Ministry of Public Health that brings medical issues in the security agenda. It can be said that detention centres are being extended using materials from the demolition of the welfare state.

One year earlier and a few days before the national elections of May 2012, several prostitutes were arrested in central Athens and forced to take HIV tests^{iv}. Those found positive (most of them being Greek citizens) were charged with bodily harm and put into the prison where many suffered withdrawal syndrome. The decision was taken on the legal basis of a ministerial decision about obligatory medical exams, a decree that was annulled later, only to be validated again last June by the new Minister of Public Health, a famous extreme-right politician. Moreover the police posted the names and photos of the women online, as a measure to warn their potential "victims" and protect public health. Compared with this exceeding case of human rights' violation, the *Thetis* operation, gaining much less attention and not publishing impressive photos and videos, seems to be a kind of normalization of the removal and detention doctrine. A video uploaded on the official police web site^v, showing a central pedestrian street after the 'control' of drug addicted persons, is quite indicative of the expected image of security: three policemen walking slowly on a totally empty street, while a vehicle of the municipal authority cleans the surface.

Setting security problems as areal problems is also a discursive and material tactics in the field of the securitization of protest. Riot police forces develop on a daily basis in the city centre of Athens, not only guarding specific buildings of the administration but also creating a security zone around the neighborhood of Exarheia, which is well-known as the place of political movements, youth culture and alternative thinking. The recent visits of the German Chancellor and the German Federal Minister of Finance were marked by police operations to block a wide area around the Parliament and along the traffic axis that leads to the airport, in order to implement the decision to forbid any demonstrations in the same areas during the visits. At least for some hours even pedestrians' access to Syntagma square

was limited, interrupting the circulation of consumers and tourists and thus symbolizing the contradictions of a security logic aimed at normalizing the city life against any hindering threat. In Foucaultian terms this might be an instance in which the security paradigm fails to manage circulation and turns back to pure disciplinary methods.

Furthermore, the fact that area-based security problems are often described with a terminology thick with war metaphors should bring into the discussion the position of Athens in what Stephen Graham calls new military urbanism. Graham talks about the dispersal of warfare in every aspect of the urban life, defining military urbanism as: the colonization of urban thinking and practice by militarized ideas of security.

Conclusion

Neoliberal restructuring in Athens in the period marked by the sovereign debt crisis not only deepens urban inequalities and hollows out the political capacity to provide social services to most affected social groups, but also, in doing so, alters the institutional arrangements of decision making. Major political decisions about the future of Athens are now largely directly subordinated to supranational level politics through intergovernmental bargaining, the coordinative role of the European Commission and the participation of international organizations like the IMF. This dynamic challenges the supposedly non-hierarchical and collaborative policy-making procedures of EU's "multi-level" governance system. Moreover, it is a one-sided accumulation strategy consisting of scarcely anything than transferring public assets to private investors. On the other hand, urban policy making is progressively restricted to security issues that are considered of absolute priority in the national and local political agenda. Planning initiatives and regeneration projects are usually implicitly or explicitly governed by security anxieties but, even so, they still fail to be implemented, leaving security issues in the city to be handled by the harsh means of the police authorities.

One question for future research concerns the extent to which this rescaling process is going to be permanent, thus regularizing governance arrangements that are considered of exceptional character. In this case one would remark that capital accumulation strategies tend to be transferred upwards at the spatial-political hierarchy, rendering obsolete the idea of multi-scalar governance, while lower level urban politics hardly go beyond the policies of the revanchist city.

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 - v <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaepfS8v3po>