

Introduction

Modern Ελλάδα (Greece) finds itself navigating a treacherous confluence of economic, social and political headwaters. In the wake of the 2008–09 global financial crisis, the Greek Parliament, struggling to cope with ballooning debt and economic contraction, enforced austerity measures demanded by the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund. Structural adjustment has been the price paid for successive bailouts and continued financial assistance. This has resulted in sharply falling real wages for a majority of Greeks, a massive increase in unemployment, and significant declines in health, education and welfare services. The impoverishment of millions of working-class and middle-class Greeks has seen the chasm between rich and poor grow wider than ever, thereby exacerbating the economic crisis and giving it a political face. Here, mainstream political parties, such as the centre-left PASOK (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα or Panhellenic Socialist Movement) and the centre-right ND (Νέα Δημοκρατία or New Democracy), formed previously unthinkable coalitions in their struggle to maintain power in a context of dwindling voter support. Meanwhile, relative newcomers SYRIZA (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς or The Coalition of the Radical Left), a left-wing political party, have been the chief electoral beneficiaries of economic and political crisis, charging into government in 2015. The Communist Party of Greece (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας (KKE)) has had its support base halved, while the explicitly fascist Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή; see Glossary) has grown alarmingly, often taking its reactionary, anti-immigrant politics onto the streets. In short, political polarisation in Greece has accompanied economic polarisation and dislocation.

Away from the parliamentary battles over votes and seats, graffiti heralding the resurgence of another actor in the drama of Greek politics similarly express political polarisation: ‘Fuck May 68’, the walls scream, ‘Fight Now!’ Discussed in detail in later chapters, this is a call to arms from the world’s most militant anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement. This book is centrally concerned with this movement and its contemporary form, dynamics and internal constitution.

The Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement has been rein-vigorated in recent years. Its public protests and battles against the Greek state, police and other capitalist institutions are prolific and highly visible, replete with rioting, barricades and Molotov cocktails. Away from the intensity of the street-protests and the glare of mainstream media, however, its militants implement an anarchist and anti-authoritarian praxis of which the outcomes are less visible. These militants are feeding the hungry and poor, protecting migrants from fascist beatings and trying to carve out an autonomous political, social and cultural space in the ancient city of Αθήνα (Athens). Activists within this milieu share an anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics broadly centred on hostility to the capitalist state and all forms of domination, hierarchy and discrimination. Yet, beneath the apparent unity of purpose are concealed tensions and fissures, which periodically reveal themselves in sharp political differences over a range of issues.

While these political ideas broadly involve a struggle against all forms of domination, questions about how best to apply them are a source of perennial conflict. Such conflicts can arise around general strategy and tactics, but also around specific questions on violence, anarchist practice with respect to the mainstream media, and female marginalisation within the movement itself. Nevertheless, the differences that give rise to these conflicts are transcended, albeit temporarily, in the moment of street mobilisation and action. When the Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement confronts neo-liberalism, fascism, hierarchical rule and the state's police in public protests and demonstrations, difference and conflict within the movement gives way to group cohesion and solidarity. Militant protest action is here more than an expression of collective grievance. Rather, these actions are, as I argue later, key elements in the ongoing construction and reconstruction of Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian collective identity. Insurrectionist street-protests become as much an aspect of identity formation as they are a tactic.

In this context, this book is concerned not so much with anarchist theory, as with examining the forces that give the Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement its specific shape. What are the historical and contemporary factors that are influencing and helping to construct what it means to be part of this vibrant milieu? How do the activists themselves understand the terms 'anarchist' and 'anti-authoritarian'? What are the conversations that they are having and what do these reveal about the movement, its dynamics and boundaries? What role do emotions such as anger, humiliation, fear and loathing play within the movement? In answering these questions, I draw on Alberto Melucci's (1995a) work on collective identity, while offering a first-hand, ethnographic account of Athenian anarchists and anti-authoritarians in action, based on my time there in 2011 and 2013, living, squatting and protesting within this milieu.

Throughout this book I have tried to balance academic obligations to the form and presentation of my ideas, with a desire to keep the work accessible

to those without experience of academic jargon. This is an important political point to which activist-engaged writing needs to be constantly attentive. Further, I have segmented the book into stand-alone chapters so they can be read somewhat independently of each other. Activists who offered feedback on early drafts suggested that I had fused too much social movement theory with the history chapters (4 and 5) and contemporary observations (6 and 7). The concern was that you had to wade through the theoretical mud to get to the 'good stuff'. As much as I personally enjoy a good theoretical wade, and this probably leaves me open to academic critique on the book's form, I want the book to be relevant and accessible to activists. As such, I disentangled a lot of the social movement theory so it now reads as its own chapter and, depending on your interests, can be skipped at will. The same goes for Chapter 4 (on the older Greek anarchist history). For some, this got in the way of the contemporary discussions of Athenian anarchists and anti-authoritarians.

The primary aim of this book is to illuminate the complexities of the Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian milieu. In the course of the following chapters, I argue that varying shades of anarchic tendencies, and ensuing ideological and practical disagreements, are overcome for the most part in (often violent) street-protests. In Chapter 1, I set the scene with a sketch of Greece's contemporary economic, political and social turmoil. Chapter 2 provides a discussion of social movement theory, and outlines my own position on some key debates. I begin with a discussion of the nominally North American tradition of social movement scholarship. Although there might have been the inclination merely to mention this tradition's existence before moving to the preferred viewpoint, I have taken the time to unravel this theoretical trajectory because it is particularly problematic for the study of anarchist collectives. I argue that the North American tradition of social movement theory often focuses on factors that create a false perception of an internally homogeneous political identity. I pay particular attention to this narrative because it can produce misleading conclusions, undermining the heterogeneous nature of anarchist and anti-authoritarian collectives. Having rejected these assumptions, I explore new social movement theory and ideas about collective identity, acknowledging the pioneering work of Alberto Melucci. His work rightly problematises contentious assumptions about internal homogeneity within collectives. It also provides a set of conceptual tools for understanding the dynamic, reflexive and negotiated process through which collective identities are constructed. Finally, it sensitises us to the 'field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action' (Melucci, 1985: 793). This allows me to explore a number of important factors that give shape to the Athenian anarchist and authoritarian space. These include discussions on the way in which contemporary actors view their region's anarchist and anti-authoritarian history, the internal tensions and sources of unity within the movement, and the important role played by emotions within the space.

In pursuing these theoretical leads, I conducted intensive fieldwork in Athens from the beginning of January through to late March of 2011 and again in December 2013. Communicating directly in Greek, I participated in countless political protests, events and actions with Athenian anarchists and anti-authoritarians, while living in anarchist squats and shared housing. Furthermore, I had over 90 interviews and conversations with Greek anarchists and anti-authoritarians. These interactions are the foundations of this book. Throughout *Anarchy in Athens*, I refer to my Athenian collaborators by pseudonyms. They are as follows: Arianna, Bill, Acacia, Kyriako, Anna, Taki, Zizo, Electra, Mary, James, Deme, Aris, Sam, Pari, Dino, Georgia, Stavro, Panayiotta, Penelope, Aleko, Kosta, Vasili, Tina, Sofia, Emma, Yianni, Andreas, Helena, Christo, and Tony. Chapter 3 explores the methodological premises on which this fieldwork was based and the real-life issues that come with engaged fieldwork. My research methodology was guided by Jeffrey Juris's militant ethnographic approach (2007). This method is premised on intense, reflexive collaboration between ethnographers and activists, in which, as far as possible, researchers assume the role of active political practitioners. By focusing on the activists themselves, it brings to the fore their agency and voice. Consequently, the way in which actors in the anarchist movement interact, negotiate and share emotions, ideas and beliefs, is central. I detail some of the strengths, nuances and functional issues associated with my preferred qualitative research approach, ending the chapter with some of the fieldwork issues I encountered.

Chapters 4 and 5 move from method and theory to history, discussing Greek anarchist history and contemporary attitudes to that history. Chapter 4 gives some historical depth to contemporary attitudes on pre-World War II Greek anarchist history. I reveal that the Athenian anarchists and anti-authoritarians I spoke to had severed nearly all emotional, theoretical and practical links with the region's early anarchist history. Even when specifically asked, my interviewees were largely indifferent to the old anarcho-syndicalist history, instead clamouring to discuss the more recent insurrectionist history. I discuss the possible reasons for this towards the end of the chapter. Chapter 5 discusses the more recent Greek anarchist history. I provide a post-military-junta (1974) history that is celebrated and embraced by the collaborators of my militant ethnography. Here I show that although a plethora of political actions and events inform these contemporary historical reflections, militant and often-violent direct actions dominate the narrative presented in the chapter.

Moving beyond history and into the contemporary period, Chapter 6 details some of the more prominent tensions within the Athenian anarchist and anti-authoritarian space. I discuss tensions around gender and sexuality politics, tactics and media engagement, as well as violence and solidarity. I argue that negotiations and interactions around these issues contribute to the processes of collective identification within the space.

Whereas Chapter 6 focuses on tensions, Chapter 7 builds towards a conclusion regarding unity. Set against the backdrop of riots and street-protests, I make two claims: first, that there is nothing at all pacifist about the space; second, that a wide range of emotions are expressed, fermented and developed within acts of performative violence. Throughout the chapter, I show how experiences and elements of a street-protest contribute to the temporary unity of the often-fragmented milieu, and provide a focus for collective identity formation. I end with concluding remarks that summarise my findings regarding unity within the space, culminating with the observation that the movement's longevity stems from the unity produced within often-violent collective actions.

A final point: this book is the culmination of four years of research and throughout my study I was regularly asked by fellow scholars, family and friends why I had chosen Athens. Athenian anarchists and anti-authoritarians are a pertinent area of research because of both their politics and their geographical location. To begin with, there is the whole 'rise of anarchism throughout the activist world' phenomenon, visible from Seattle to Genoa, Quebec City to São Paulo. Anarchist and anti-authoritarian social movements are prominent actors in resistance to the current phase of capitalism in multiple, global locations (Gordon 2008; Graeber, 2009; Juris, 2007; Pallister-Wilkins 2009). Throughout Europe, North and Latin America, Asia and the Antipodes, radical resistance to neo-liberalism often has an anarchist and/or anti-authoritarian cast. If not openly waving the red and black flags of the anarchists, many of those challenging contemporary capitalism, consumerism and impending environmental catastrophe are anarchist inspired. They favour non-hierarchical decision-making processes such as those witnessed in the Occupy and *Indignados* movements, while advocating militant direct street action as an alternative means of political change to parliamentarianism. Their prominence in social movements over recent years makes understanding the anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement both a pressing political and scholarly task. As one of today's go-to destinations for anarchist-inspired activism and activist-inspired scholarship, Athens is the ideal place in which to undertake this task. That is why I chose it.