

“In the struggle between yourself and the world, back the world”

to be presented at the No Border Camp, Bulgaria, August 25-29, 2011

abstract

Greece has become an experimental laboratory for policies to be applied to the rest of Europe – hence, we believe, understanding what has happened here in the last three years is of crucial importance. The country is now at a crossroads: Will people who are currently resisting the full-scale assault of the IMF realize that they must form an alliance with all the oppressed? Or will they fall victim to the oldest trick in the bosses’ book –and turn against the even more oppressed?

Below we will try to describe a process by which the State first used the attack against immigrants as a counter-insurgency technique after the December 2008 riots, and then allowed the escalation of a humanitarian crisis in certain neighborhoods of Athens, thus giving birth to fascist populism and nazi militias.

2008-2009: Immigrant participation in Greece’ social movement rises!

Let us begin with a few examples just before and immediately after the December riots, which illustrate how a growing migrant population, comprising maybe 50% of labor power in the traditional sense, was starting to claim their rights in a combative way and was posing a serious threat to dominant social relations. (To these one should also add numerous hunger strikes and suicide attempts in detention centers and police stations by refugees desperately protesting the appalling conditions.)

On April 18, 2008, East Asian immigrant workers laboring in the strawberry fields of Nea Manolada, in the South Peloponnese, where 90 percent of the country’s strawberry production is concentrated, staged a strike against the local strawberry agribusiness. The landlords responded with violent rampage. They threatened and beat workers with clubs, fired shotguns in the air, and threw dynamite at the workers’ protest rally. Gaining the support of the local communist party and some anarchists, the migrant workers stood their ground and forced the landlords to concede to 3 Euros per day rise, increasing their wages to 25 Euros.

On September 8, 2008, Afghani refugees fell victim to a port police attack in the harbor area of Patras, Greece, where a refugee settlement of boxes made of carton and plastic hosted over a thousand inhabitants, all restlessly hoping for a lucky ride to Italy hidden in some heavy duty truck. The Red Cross confirms that, as a result of the attack, at least three were taken to hospital with serious injuries. The reaction of the Afghani community to what proved to be yet another act of retribution (due to the active participation of Afghani immigrants in the Patras No Borders Actions two weeks earlier) was immediate. The clashes that ensued were severe and soon overwhelmed the police forces, which failed to block the protesters' entrance to the harbor area. 12 policemen were hospitalized

while the less-than-independent Red Cross publicly accused the police of unlawfully interrogating the injured refugees in the clinic.

On November 11, 2008, 15 immigrant workers from North African countries (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), active members of the Forum of Immigrants of Crete, began a hunger strike. The hunger strikers were all residents of Chania and they demanded residence permits, which would allow them to continue living and working in Greece legally. While the authorities repeatedly tried to break their will, local society, from students to taxi drivers, showed their full-hearted support. Their victory (papers and travel documents) came only a day before the killing of Alexis Grigoropoulos and the breakout of the December Riots.

On the night of the 23rd of December 2008, Konstantina Kuneva, a Bulgarian migrant worker in Athens, secretary of the Panattic Union of Cleaners and Domestic Personnel (PEKOP), was attacked by two men who ambushed her as she was returning from work and threw sulfuric acid to her face. Her face, head, hands and back were severely burned. She lost one eye and for days it was not certain whether she was going to survive the attack. She remained in the intensive care ward for months, suffering serious sight and respiratory problems. She had to undergo at least seven surgical procedures to merely recover. A combative social movement in solidarity with the migrant cleaner and her family was built almost from scratch, continuing the December riots and giving the struggle specific political focus, arguments and determination. On the 27th of December 2008 anarchists and leftists occupied the headquarters of ISAP (Athens Piraeus Electric Railway, where Kuneva had worked). There followed the occupation of the Labor Center in Thessaloniki on the 29th of December 2008, and of more labor centers in various Greek cities in January 2009. The offices of the company where Kuneva had worked were attacked in broad daylight. A coalition of grassroots trade unions was beginning to take shape, promising to go beyond the self-destructive compromises of institutionalized syndicalism. Three months later, in March 2009, the Rector's Office and the Administration Building of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki were occupied in protest against the subletting companies hired by the Universities. Konstantina Kuneva, a migrant worker, a mother and grassroots trade unionist, had become the most influential and emblematic figure of the social movement.

On March 2, 2009, hundreds of refugees from Afghanistan clashed with riot police for hours in the streets of Patras. The disturbances were sparked off when an Afghan man got seriously injured while trying to board a truck entering the city's port. After the accident, dozens of fellow refugees attacked the vehicle throwing rocks and other objects. Later on, the tension escalated, leading to protesters setting up barricades and blocking streets near the port. In response, the police deployed riot units and used tear gas in an effort to disperse them.

On May 22, 2009, in Athens, 1,000 immigrants holding a spontaneous demonstration turned around cars to barricade central streets and clashed with the police, who fired tear gas, stun grenades and used excessive violence against them. The protests started after a Greek policeman's defacement of a copy of the Quran, owned by an Iraqi immigrant. The

religious motive tells only half of the story, since it was actually the muftis, the religious leaders, who persistently tried to get the angry immigrants off the streets and end the riots. Besides the obvious underlying causes (bosses' exploitation, state indifference and police harassment), what sparked off the rebellion was that para-state fascist groups had started working on what was later described as "post-December counter-insurgency".

the State counterattack

Counter-insurgency seems to have been a well thought-out strategy, and it followed the realization on the part of the ruling minority that the December riots, and, after that, the movement in solidarity with Konstantina Kuneva, had gotten way out of hand¹: Local assemblies in Athens were becoming more frequent and more steady, grassroots syndicalism was starting to appear as a viable option for all, self-organized parks were cropping up where the town council had designated parking areas, and it looked like there was an antiauthoritarian social center in every small town in the country.

The strategy did not direct itself against students, young Greeks, or people working in strong sectors of the economy. Their turn was yet to come. The main target of this first phase of the attack against society was the underdog, the underpaid or completely abandoned *sans papiers*, those who had managed to become a considerable subject of struggle, and had furthermore made themselves visible in the December street clashes. We witnessed a State and media classic: Now the fighting *sans-papiers* had to become the scapegoats, so that they would cease being a potentially uncontrollable threat. Below a few exemplary moments:

On May 9, 2009, fascists attacked the squatted old Court of Appeals (Old Efeteio) building, where numerous homeless migrants found shelter. Immigrants and others in solidarity who were inside the building fought back the fascists, who, as expected, were aided and encouraged by riot police units.

May 2009: Fascist para-state groups began their reign of terror in the Athens neighborhood of Aghios Panteleimonas, where everyday thousands of homeless and jobless immigrants and refugees play the dangerous game of escape and survival. The fascists even locked the local playground so as not to let "Greek blood be contaminated by Afghanis". The local church of Aghios Panteleimonas, of which the priest was supporting the local immigrants in defiance of fascist threats, fell victim to an arson attack that destroyed its 'kitchen for migrants' resources. On May 27, the Minister of Public Order announced the launching of a mass-scale pogrom against immigrants in the center of Athens after the European Elections. He pledged to "cleanse" the center of the city from immigrants and displace them in what he called "a ghetto" at the outskirts of Athens.

¹We must note here that the December riots and immigrants' struggles forced the State and the media to suddenly present the latter as a terrible threat to society. Neither the shocking ProAsyl report revelations about tortures of refugees by the Greek port police in 2007 ("[The truth may be bitter, but it must be told](#)"), nor the hundreds of refugee deaths in the Aegean during 2007 and 2008 had managed to make the *sans papiers* part of the official public discourse.

On June 11, 2009, the Minister of Public Order announced the creation of 11 detention centers. The announcement was made only days after the European Elections of 2009, in which the ruling party of Nea Demokratia occupied second place with its percentage dropping to 32,3%, while the electoral power of the far-right party LAOS rose to 7,2%.

On July 12, 2009, the Greek police raided and burned to the ground the near 15-year-old refugee camp in the town of Patras. (The area in front of the beach was at last free, and construction plans for posh apartments and tourist facilities could now begin.) Some days later, all immigrants living at the “Old Efeteio” building in Athens were evicted.

August 2009 was the month of numerous police raids, evictions, mass arrests, clashes and a string of overt collaborative operations between police and fascist scum. In the first days of August, continuous storming of the center of Athens by various police forces took place with hundreds of immigrants arrested. Police also evicted immigrants *en masse* from two buildings in the center of Athens (which were designated by the prefecture of Athens as hazardous for public health or something) and arrested a total of 86 immigrants. During the eviction on Verantzou street, neighbors and immigrants holding flags of Somalia gathered in support of the arrested people, among whom there were also some PAME (Communist Party trade union) members and a Communist Party MP. At some point, the Somali women reacted vocally and attempted a sit-in protest, but the cops confined them again to the building in order to isolate them from the approaching journalists. In the same period, nazi scum expanded their activities from the neighborhood of Aghios Panteleimonas to Attiki square, around which many immigrants live. The fascists came to the square and began to bludgeon whatever lay ahead of them; they sprayed people’s faces with some unspecified gas. During one of these attacks, at least three refugees were transported to hospital, while many others were injured. Around the square there was a large police force, which not only did nothing to help the victims, but on the contrary chose to mass-arrest mainly Afghan refugees.

The levels of official institutional repression of immigrants rose considerably since December, due, on the one hand, to the general strategy of counter-insurgency and the subsequent imposition of a quasi-police state by a weak and staggering government, and on the other hand, because of the participation of many immigrants in the uprising. A social laboratory, testing the creation of fascist reflexes, was gradually being allowed to develop in the center of town, not far away from areas practically dominated by the social movement. Para-state attacks on immigrants and mass propaganda in Aghios Panteleimonas formed part of an effort to create a social basis for organized fascism and the creation of semi-armed nationalist patrols. The attacks were clearly part of a parallel 'strategy of tension', used to undermine the ground gained by the December riots.

the first days of the new PASOK regime

By September 2009 all detention centers, police stations –and whatever other places were used as *sans papiers* prisons– were crammed with immigrants. In October 2009, the leader of “Socialist” Party (PASOK) and newly elected Prime Minister George Papandreou used the Global Forum on Immigration & Development proceedings in Athens to

sketch out government measures which would stand for a ‘humanitarian turn’ away from the policies of recent months. He said it was necessary “[t]o stimulate the participation of immigrants in the political life of the country, through the possibility of Greek citizenship acquisition, particularly of course for the so-called ‘second generation’, whereby [he suggested] the acquisition of citizenship by birth for every new person born on our territory.” In the same month, the then newly installed Deputy Minister of Citizen Protection Spyros Vougiaris visited Pagani, the infamous detention Centre on the island of Lesbos that had been targeted during the 2009 Lesbos NoBorder camp two months earlier. Shortly after Vougiaris’ visit, Pagani was closed. The closedown was announced officially in December, when Vougiaris also spoke of a new screening system that would replace the existing detention centers (and in effect canceling the plans for 11 detention centers that had been announced by the former government).

In this period, the strategy of “counter-insurgency” was triumphantly completed. The atrocities of police and fascists, as well as the racist political rhetoric and inhuman anti-immigrant legislation were now the best alibi for the new government. Announcing 11 detention centers and then canceling the plans, increasing the pressure of detention and torture and then closing down Pagani are the best examples of how, through the careful State and media control of political discourse, ‘public opinion’ can be manipulated into seeing amazing progress where there is only a temporary regress to a prior condition of oppression and apathy.

the Egyptian fishermen’s strike, the shift towards Evros and the involvement of the IMF

Just after Christmas 2009, around 250 Egyptian workers employed on the fishing boats of Nea Michaniona (a village near Thessaloniki, Northern Greece) went on strike to protest against the severe decrease in their income over the previous months, a decrease that followed the drastic decline in shrimp exports to Italy and Spain. The strike lasted over three months and ended when the strikers were financially exhausted. The historical significance of the strike was great, as it occurred at the beginning of the crisis in Greece and was pointing in a new direction of struggle amidst a severe social conflict: New social alliances were being built to resist the bosses’ attack, while neo-nazis came in to support the small ship-owners, thugs attacked the strikers in their homes and –on another occasion– injured an MP and members of the communist party who were supporting the strikers. Egyptian fishermen were actively supported by many antiauthoritarians and leftists, but not to the degree a real movement should (and definitely could at the time). We must also note the financial support that the Egyptian fishermen received from the 19 Filipino sailors who lived on the boat AETEA SIERRA anchored 6 nautical miles away from the port of Piraeus, “a floating prison” where they had been abandoned unpaid by the Greek boat owner.²

² The Filipino sailors had lived there under unacceptable conditions for 7 months, until they won their case in the court of law. The first thing they did after their victory was to support their Egyptian fellow-workers. The struggle also had concrete results: At different moments, Egyptian fishermen working at other Greek ports were given a pay rise, so they would be prevented from joining the strike.

During the months of the fishermen strike, there was a shift in the *sans-papiers* entry routes from the Aegean to the land border of the Evros river on the Greek-Turkish borders, with the number of people crossing the borders ranging from 100 to as high as 250 per day. Also, after the destruction of the refugee shanty town in Patras, a large number of *sans-papiers* trying to get to Italy set up a makeshift camp in the forest close to the Igoumenitsa port.

In 2009 and 2010, crossings from Spain, Malta and Italy decreased. As FRONTEX reported in its *2010 Annual Risk Analysis*: “The bilateral collaboration agreements with third countries of departure on the Central Mediterranean route (Italy with Libya) and the Western African route (which Spain signed with Senegal and Mauritania) had an impact on reducing departures of illegal migrants from Africa... In 2009, illegal border crossing on the Eastern Mediterranean route totalled 41,500, or 39% of all EU detections. Most of the detections were reported from the Aegean Sea, followed by detections along the land border between Turkey and Greece”.

In its *2011 Annual Risk Analysis*, FRONTEX stated that “in 2010 the eastern Mediterranean route became the main channel of irregular migration into the EU ... the most dramatic change of 2010 occurred at the Greek borders with Turkey (land and sea), which recorded a 45% increase between 2009 and 2010. Here, detections of illegal border crossing soared on previous years as the dominant routes used by migrant smugglers continued to shift. The Greek-Turkish land border in particular saw massive increases in migratory pressure”.

The first months of 2010 were marked by never-ending staged discussions about how the government ought to take drastic measures “to save the Greek economy”. Finally, on Friday, April 23, 2010, the Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou called on the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to “activate the aid package”... For a while, it looked like a strong and experienced movement was ready to fight back.

the 5th of May events

On May 5, 2010, during the biggest workers’ demonstration since the fall of the colonels’ dictatorship in 1974, and while a huge crowd was trying to storm the Parliament, terrible news came: Three or four people dead in a burnt down bank! ... Mass media journalists and technicians who were on strike immediately went back to work to report the tragic event. The prime minister announced the news in Parliament condemning the “political irresponsibility” of those who resist the measures taken and who “lead people to death”, while the government’s “salvation measures” on the contrary “promoted life”. An aggressive operation by the riot police followed: The huge crowd was dissolved and the whole centre returned to the hands of the police. Some media went as far as to criminalize resistance and protest in general. The change in the terms of the discourse offered the government precious time, as the unions didn’t call for a general strike for the day the new bill was to be voted. The radical milieu were shaken, and there was a stream of self-critical texts by numerous anarchist, antiauthoritarian and leftist collectives and individu-

als, often containing a drastic rethinking of the cult of violence³. But the most important consequence of the terrible Marfin bank tragedy is that it made the blood in peoples' veins freeze. The traumatizing shock acted as a potent sedative.

Although there was some hope that the demos in Thessaloniki in September (during the International Fair, where the Prime Minister traditionally announces the financial plans for the following year) would trigger off a new round of resistance, and despite several 24-hour general strikes throughout the year, mass resistance was practically halted for a year.

storm troops in the humanitarian crisis

In September 2010, the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, called the asylum situation in Greece a "humanitarian crisis" and urged the Greek authorities to speed up the asylum system reforms.⁴

As we have seen, during the last months of 2009 and the first months of 2010 there was a big increase of *sans-papiers* crossing the Greek borders. Because of the Dublin II Regulation, all these people were –and still are– trapped in Greece.⁵ Even before the rise in the numbers of *sans-papiers* entering Greece there was great tension in the neighborhoods of immigrants and refugees. In the current context, it is plain to see that the government consciously and systematically encouraged the escalation of the crisis.

Far right groups started attacking immigrants on a regular basis both at Aghios Pan-teleimonas and at Attiki square, but also in other neighborhoods of Athens, like Neos Kosmos. Attacking immigrants with knives, clubs, molotov cocktails, smashing and burning their homes, stores and makeshift mosques, became common practice.

The hate campaign and the scapegoat rhetoric formed an explosive combination with the talk of the deepening crisis: In 2010, municipal elections (November 7) the Golden Dawn nazi party elected a member in the municipal council of Athens. The nazi victory was celebrated accordingly:

- On November 10, 2010, near a gas station on the national road connecting Ioannina and Igoumenitsa, a racist opened fire against a group of five immigrants. A 23-year-old Kurd from Iraq was injured in the genitals. On November 19, the police arrested as a suspect for the attack a 38-year-old Greek owner of a gas station, who was stupid enough to keep a facebook page where he uploaded photos of himself with Kalashnikov machine guns and advertised his anti-immigrant fervor!

³ Various announcements after the Marfin Bank tragedy "May 5th events: the anarchists speak out" [here](#).

⁴ "The conditions for asylum-seekers in Greece, which is among the principal entry points into the EU, are notoriously difficult. Most asylum-seekers receive no assistance. Many live on the streets, including women and children (...) This is a humanitarian crisis situation which should not exist in the European Union."

⁵ After they cross the borders, they are held at some detention center (usually for a few days, unless they apply for asylum: in this case, as a form of punishment, they are held for months), then they receive a paper by the police stating that they must leave Greece by themselves within a month. Then everybody goes to Athens, hoping to find a way to go to Italy. A small number goes to Patras or Igoumenitsa, to try to get onboard a ferry to Italy. The vast majority remains in Athens, waiting for smugglers to tell them that their lucky day has arrived. After some months they have spent all the money they have saved for the smugglers and they find themselves living on the streets or at some abandoned house or sharing a rented basement with no help from the State and no possibility to earn some money.

- On November 15, 2010, four Greeks holding hunting rifles attacked two Palestinian immigrants on Castelli beach on the island of Crete and beat them up badly. They were both brought to hospital. One had wounds in his head and received 24 stitches, the other got a broken leg and arm.

RABITs, the Evros fence and the first cracks in *Dublin II*

On October 24, 2010, FRONTEX received a request from the Greek Minister of Citizen Protection Christos Papoutsis to deploy Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs) as well as operational means to increase the control and surveillance levels at Greece's external border with Turkey. FRONTEX reported: *"This is the first time since the creation of the Agency in 2005 that Frontex has deployed the RABIT teams – a group of specialized border guards made available by 27 EU countries to deal with emergency situations at the EU's external borders. Due to the exceptionally high numbers of migrants crossing the Greek-Turkish land border illegally, Greece now accounts for 90% of all detections of illegal border crossings to the EU. In the first half of 2010, a total of 45,000 illegal border crossings were reported by the Greek authorities for all their border sectors. Greece currently estimates that up to 350 migrants attempt to cross the 12,5km area near the Greek city of Orestiada every day."*

In December 2010, the Minister of Citizen Protection Christos Papoutsis announced the construction of a barrier stretching for more than 200 kilometers along the Turkish border. By January 2011, the plan was for a 12.5-kilometer barricade fence along one section of the Turkish border in the Evros river region, in the Orestiada area.

On January 21, 2011 the European Court of Human Rights judged that Greece is not a "safe country of asylum".⁶ The Court's Grand Chamber found that Greece's broken asylum system and appalling detention conditions meant that Belgium's transfer of an Afghan asylum seeker to Greece in 2009 under the Dublin II Regulation had breached the prohibition on ill treatment and denied him an effective remedy.

the 300 immigrants' hunger strike

On January 25, 2011, 300 immigrant workers began a hunger strike in Athens and Thessaloniki, demanding equal political and social rights. 44 days later and after more than 100 strikers had been hospitalized with serious health issues, the State was forced to drop its intransigent attitude along with previous threats of deportation of the strikers and to negotiate officially with them, promising to meet a significant part of their demands:

- Decrease of the required residence time of migrants in the country in order to submit applications for residence permits to 8 years, down from 12 years before (this applies to every single migrant living in the Greek territory).

⁶ On January 19, 2011 Germany became the latest in a growing number of states to suspend returns of asylum seekers to Greece under the Dublin II regulation. That list includes Belgium, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. National courts have stepped in to halt returns, and nearly 1,000 cases are pending before the European Court. According to the Court, European governments that continue transfers to Greece are likely to fall foul of human rights law.

- Decrease of the required work credits from 200 to 120 (also for local workers).
- Decrease of the work credits required for insurance cover from 80 to 50 (this also applies to all workers, local and migrant).

For the 300 hunger strikers in particular, the allowance has been given for them to indefinitely renew their 6-month “state of tolerance” status until the time when they reach the time and conditions to receive a residence permit. During that time they will be allowed to travel twice every six months to and from their country of origin.

We have to note that this was the first big mobilization against the government and its IMF policies that was to some extent effective (it was followed by the Keratea residents opposition to a waste disposal project). Until then the government had full control and never before had backed down on any issue. The gains though were much less than they could have been, due to sectarianism in the Greek movement.⁷

(a clumsy response...)

The day after the end of the hunger strike, in an attempt to satisfy its far right audience, the Greek government announced that a special flight was to be chartered –for the first time!– to deport 54 Dominican women and 19 men who had been under arrest for two months in Greece for illegal entry. The fact that the 73 *sans-papiers* were accompanied to the Dominican Republic by 139 [!] Greek police officers and two doctors and that the cost of the whole operation exceeded € 460,000 didn’t exactly help establish its propaganda message...)

the May pogroms

After the hunger strike of the 300, the State had to regain its ground. On May 3, 2011, in Igoumenitsa, a protest was organised by an initiative of “outraged citizens”, but the call for action was joined by the mayor of the town and the president of the chamber of commerce of the Thesprotia Prefecture. While the majority of the demonstrators were busy closing the gates of the international port of Igoumenitsa, a small group of neo-nazis started throwing nautical flares towards the informal settlement of the *sans-papiers* towards the hill close to the port, crying “burn them! kill them!”. The migrants tried to defend their provisory shelters by throwing stones to the neo-nazis. Then, riot police intervened, violently hunting the *sans-papiers* up to the mountain and shooting teargas towards the forest!

In mid-May 2011, ultra-right wing groups launched heavy pogroms against migrants in downtown Athens, after a 44-year-old Greek, was killed on May 10th in a mugging for a camera. The crime was linked to immigrants, and the fact that the 44-year-old was about to get his car and take his pregnant wife to hospital to give birth, further outraged the Greek inhabitants of the area. For the nazis, this was an ideal opportunity. During the pogroms, which lasted for days, a 21-year old Bangladeshi migrant was stabbed to death in the Kato Patisia district of Athens and dozens more were hospitalized, many of them also stabbed. There was clear evidence of police collaborating with fascists – there is even a video where you can see police letting members of the nazi group Golden Dawn

⁷ A number of broader issues were brought up during the hunger strike. [Here](#) a text distributed by the *Open Solidarity Initiative of Thessaloniki*.

out of a police car in order to fill it with attacked immigrants instead. No wonder no immigrant filed charges against the fascist attackers...

In the same week, the municipality of Patras destroyed the abandoned train shelter of migrants in St. Dionysios, opposite the port of Patras. The police invaded the area of the train company due to the ‘inhuman living conditions’ of the migrants and for reasons of ‘public health’.

On May 18, 2011, the Greek Minister of Citizen Protection Christos Papoutsis announced (again) that new detention camps and screening centers would be constructed and that the existing detention camps would be renovated and expanded.

On June 11, 2011, representatives of the *Médecins du Monde* - Athens and the Greek NGO Praxis announced that in the past eight months more than 500 immigrants, victims of racist attacks, have visited the two NGOs’ medical centers in downtown Athens...

Here we should note that this tremendous rise in fascist violence and anti-immigrant rhetoric occurred in the first half of 2011, namely in a period during which, according to data published (but never reproduced or discussed) by the police in July 2011, there was a decrease by 45% in the so-called “migrant influx” into Greece! Remarkably, the only areas where the numbers of the two previous years continue to rise are where the FRONTEX land forces are deployed – in Alexandroupolis, the increase has exceeded 200%. So while the number of *sans papiers* entering the country is falling, their devaluation reaches a new high, as is evident in the following examples.

On May 17, 2011, the police announced that a 23-year-old Albanian Roma, was arrested for the murder of a 50-year-old father from Pakistan and his 24-year-old son. The killings happened one month before, during fights inside a waste disposal site in Athens for access to garbage. And there is more to the human landfill story: Since December 2010, six dismembered bodies of immigrants have been found on 6 different occasions at various garbage bins and dump sites in Athens. Nobody asked for them... Their identity and the conditions of their death remain unknown.⁸

the *indignados* movement

The 25th of May was marked by the birth of the so-called movement of the “indignados” in Athens.⁹ An anonymous call for a Spanish-style gathering in Syntagma square appeared on facebook and was largely reproduced by the mass media. The call was against political parties and in favor of a peaceful protest against the government’s management of the debt crisis and “all those responsible for the mess where we are in now”. The main slogan was initially a call for a “real democracy”, quickly replaced by a call for “direct democracy”.

⁸ The police offered many scenarios: The immigrants were killed by smugglers; they died during a smuggling operation and the smugglers got rid of them; they were kidnapped by people who unsuccessfully demanded ransom money from their families...In most cases, the dismembered corpses were accidentally discovered by other immigrants searching the garbage for food.

⁹ For a description and commentary of the Syntagma square movement: *Preliminary notes towards an account of the “movement of popular assemblies”* by TPTG (full text [here](#)).

The Syntagma square “indignados” were quickly divided into those gathered in the “upper square” (near the Parliament) and those gathered in the “lower square”. In the “upper square” you could find nationalist and extreme right-wing groups among the “indignados”. In the “lower square” you could find members of the traditional left parties, often posing as “simple citizens”.

Both the “upper” and the “lower” squares never had more than some hundreds or something more than a thousand people in their assemblies. The big crowds you can see in the photos were not really interested in the assemblies’ procedure. They wanted to gather outside the Parliament to shout “traitors!” and “thieves!” to the MPs and give them the insulting open palm gesture. In these gatherings you could see many people waving Greek flags and singing the national anthem. The demonstrations peaked on Sunday 5th of June 2011, when hundreds of thousands gathered in front of the parliament. For many, this was the first time they were taking part in a demonstration. Then the number started to decline rapidly.

The June 15th general strike demo looked much more like the usual general strike demos that had taken place the months previous to the “indignados” gatherings, save for the fact that to the usual participants of general strike demonstrations were added some thousands of “indignados” of the Syntagma square. When the grassroots trade unions and the anarchist/antiauthoritarian blocks reached Syntagma square, some fascists from the “upper square” tried to attack them, but instead it was the fascists who got beaten up and kicked off Syntagma square. At this moment, the riot police attacked the demonstrators and it was the first time that many of the “indignados” faced police brutality. So when the police tried to reoccupy Syntagma, thousands of people participated in the conflicts, experiencing a feeling of real solidarity.

Along with this radicalization of the people participating at the Syntagma square movement came a further decline of their numbers. On the first day of the 48-hour general strike of June 28/29, the number of demonstrators at Syntagma did not exceed 20.000. On the second day, the mobilization was pretty massive and faced extreme, and many say unforeseen, police brutality. Tens of thousands of people remained in or around the square, while thousands of demonstrators were clashing with the police. During the clashes that lasted for 17 whole hours, the riot police used 2,860 tear gas cans (!), and attacked demonstrators indiscriminately, even in the temporary medical centre inside the metro station of Syntagma. The Syntagma square medical team recorded more than 700 demonstrators in urgent need of first aid and 100 transferred to hospitals. According to the police, there were 131 injured policemen, 75 demonstrators were brought to police stations and 38 of them were charged.

The blind attack by the police destroyed the media-manufactured division between “violent” and “non violent” demonstrators. It also revealed the true face of the repressive forces of power – and also scared a lot of people away.

This day had something of the December 2008 “mixture” (black block, students, young proletarians) with the addition of working class folks and “common people” clashing with the police – and was also reminiscent of the 5th of May 2010 demonstration, before the tragic events at Marfin bank. Amidst the general chaos you could see cool immigrant street vendors selling scarves and goggles for protection from tear gas!

After the June 29 events and the voting by the parliament of the new IMF-imposed bill, the “indignados” movement gradually faded, with many of its protagonists promising that it will reappear in September, at the Thessaloniki International Trade Fair.

Early on the morning of Saturday the 30th of July 2011, riot police evicted the few people remaining camped on Syntagma square.

Refusing to make any quick predictions, we feel we have to point out that:

- a) Direct democracy has been more of a slogan than a reality...
- b) ...since often well-meaning, sometimes slightly patronizing, “specialists” from the traditional leftist parties took up crucial positions in the various committees created and in the end discouraged the creation of new structures and encouraged suspicion
- c) ...and, more crucially, since nationalist populists understood that Greek flags and hate against “sell-out” politicians and trade union leaders could easily be channeled towards a far right agenda, especially as crisis-ridden middle-class Greeks were willing to hide their fears in some sense of national identity.
- d) On the other hand, many people had a long lasting experience of self-organizing and participation...
- e) ...and the June 29 clashes helped destroy many myths.

Even if the hundreds of thousands of Syntagma in the first two weeks were excessively encouraged by the media and proved to be easily manipulable and open to far right populism, there are truly hopeful aspects to the squares movement. Thousands of people across the country rose from their passivity and joined an experience of social and political struggle. This was much more true of mobilizations and assemblies in decentralized neighborhoods in Athens and smaller towns, where there was room for real discussion and direct personal exchange.

The squares movement had a spectacular side, worshiped on prime time TV. Its foundations in real struggle, on the other hand, paved the way for a future movement. Before that could develop, a strategy of terror was set in motion. A minister stated that if the severe austerity measures are not voted through, the country will sink in chaos and the military will have to take over. The June 29 clashes were attributed to anarchist *provocateurs*. (We wish that were true: However, the anarchists and antiauthoritarians, through quite numerous and strong, could not have kept going for 17 hours non-stop – not to mention that many anarchists refused to participate in the squares proceedings...) “Anarchist violence” was compared to the nazi pogroms a month earlier, so that, in this new atmosphere of “fear of extremism”, the government could plausibly proclaim the necessity of water canons, rubber bullets, police dogs, and military exercises for crowd control and riot prevention.

It seems that the latest strategy of the State is to “create two extremes and let democracy thrive in the middle”, by presenting the anarchists and the anti-authoritarian left on the one hand, and the fascists on the other, as equally deplorable social trends. According to this idea, crisis and immigrants “arm the extremes”, and all we need is a sense of law and order only the government can guarantee.

Perhaps this strategy has not been adequately criticized and annihilated by the Greek squares movement. Slowly it is becoming a dominant ideology.

connecting the dots

*Propaganda should be popular, not intellectually pleasing.
It is not the task of propaganda to discover intellectual truths.
Propaganda must facilitate the displacement of aggression
by specifying the targets for hatred.
(Joseph Goebbels, 1928)*

*From the true antagonist illimitable courage is transmitted to you.
(Franz Kafka, Aphorisms, 1918)*

Spontaneous movements are nice but they are not necessarily direct-democratic. On the contrary, spontaneous movements can be easily controlled by the mass media and self-appointed leaders. To make direct democracy more than a slogan requires a lot of effort. Honest interpersonal relations, horizontal structures and assemblies that help develop political consciousness are indispensable if we are to construct a lasting and effective movement that can fight for and through direct democracy and social justice.

Even at its best moments, the “indignados” movement had little reference to migrants’ issues. Even people with the best intentions were reluctant to speak about solidarity with the *sans papiers*, fearing that this way they could jeopardize their “contact to the crowds”. The fears that had been expressed during the hunger strike of the 300 (that “the crisis is not the time to speak about immigrants”) reemerged. But even when there was mention of immigrants, people reproduced “humanitarian” and victimizing “antiracist” stereotypes, or abstract (and never vocal) references to “common struggles”.¹⁰

In the “upper square” there was lots of national anthem singing, calls to “defend national sovereignty”, “exit the Euro-zone and the EU”, “save of the country”, “get rid of foreign bankers and illegal immigrants together” – all these mixed with conspiracy theories about evil Jewish bankers. The “lower square” would insist on the “refusal to pay the odious debt”, the need for an “Audit Commission on the Greek public debt (ELE)”, many supported the demand for an “exit from the Euro-zone and the EU” and there were calls for “anti-racism” and “social change”. The dominant analysis on the crisis of the “lower square” was the one expressed in the documentary *Debtocracy*– whose Greek description (=“a documentary produced by the spectator” – in the English version they use the word “audience” but the Greek is “θεατής” – spectator) is quite revealing. Indeed. Maybe the

¹⁰ The slogans and demands that were popular among the Syntagma square “indignados” are characteristic here. The general slogans and demands that everybody agreed on or considered reasonable: (“all” being the huge crowds plus both the “upper square” and the “lower square”) were: “Down with the sold out government, the Troika (= *European Commission + European Central Bank + International Monetary Fund*) and the Memorandum (*Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies –MEFP– that was signed by the Greek government and the “troika”*)”; “Take the memorandum and go away!”; “[Bastards politicians] we didn’t ate them (the money) together” (referring to a government member statement -- actually instead of “bastards” the word used was the one diminishingly used to describe gays); “Take the helicopter and go away!” (referring to Argentina’s president De la Rúa helicopter escape); “Even the maid resisted” (referring to Strauss-Kahn); “we don’t owe, we won’t pay”; “we don’t owe, we won’t give away public goods / national property”; “burn the parliament”; “traitors!”, “thieves!” (towards the politicians); “we should hang them (the politicians)”; “direct –or real– democracy now”

majority of the “indignados” were actually spectators of the “discussions” on the crisis and the debt that were conducted by “experts”, left-liberal and left political economists who gave speeches on the progressive management of the “national debt”. Let’s see what happens next.

For now, let us just repeat: We do not insist on the central importance of migration in the crisis/debt analysis out of some political *idée fixe*, neither for reasons of philanthropy, nor because we are desperately seeking some new “revolutionary subject”.

The reasons we insist to speak about immigrants and their struggles are simply:

1) **dignity** – not only because it is insulting to think, with many “new opportunists”, that in order to gain support from the *povres nuevos* you must be silent about the more oppressed, but also in order to be able to proclaim that “we didn’t spend it together”, in other words, in order to have the dignity to be “indignado”. Everybody is speaking against the debt, but after all, who owes to whom? We don’t owe the banks and the multinationals. But we do owe the people exploited in the global South, we do owe the immigrants exploited in the so-called first world. We were accomplices in a system that used the banality of consumerism to hide its crimes against the poor of the world. The beast feeding on their blood got so strong it can now feed on ours. If we realize this, then we will also realize that we owe it to ourselves and to our children to rage a struggle with and not against the most oppressed, together against all oppression.

2) **analytical clarity**

There is no way to understand mobility of capital and financialization without focussing on the mobility of people and dehumanization. The destruction of production in the West and the dismantlement of the welfare state were made possible exactly because we allowed the pillage and plundering of the global South.

That’s another reason why immigrants and refugees are crucial: Their lived experience of land and resource seizures and of endless war in the capitalist periphery makes them the best experts in IMF policies.

Understanding this will help us avoid falling into the trap of fighting for the return to a condition where the happiness of few depends on the misery of many. The fight against capitalist globalization is not “de-globalization”¹¹, but the globalization of the struggles and the “new” (and also very old...) way of politics and organizing, i.e. horizontality, self-organization and direct democracy. De-globalization is not only unethical. It is pointless.

3) **self-defense**

Actually, de-globalization is a slogan that perfectly suits the far right. Fascism, though, is not rising *because* of capitalist globalization but *in support* of capitalist globalization. In the same way, fascism is not rising *because of the existence* of immigrants but *thanks to the attacks* on immigrants. They are being handed their power by the State.

¹¹ As proposed, for instance, by Ignacio Ramonet in his “Esclaves en Europe”, in *Mémoire des Luites*, June 28, 2011.

This was made possible only because the Western tolerance limit to severe injustice was horrendously stretched: It was only because of the total denial of immigrants' rights that the attack on Western citizens' rights could be made possible.

We have described how Aghios Panteleimonas has been used as a social laboratory for the creation of fascist reflexes and groups. But this can get even worse. Last May, citizens of Athens lived for some days the dystopia of a society ruled by mad violence (something like the ongoing "drug war" in Mexico which, according to subcomandante Marcos, aims at getting people "to accept everyday horror as something that cannot be changed").

more than a cliché: solidarity is our weapon

Solidarity to immigrants and refugees is a prerequisite for the next step, the political and social recomposition necessary for overcoming confusion, far-right populism and nihilist despair. Only then will we be able to resist barbarism and fight back!

*clandestina,
August 2011*

P.S. 1: Information from:

-the English section of clandestina <<http://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com/>>

-Welcome to Europe <<http://w2eu.net/>>,

-Infomobile <<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/>>,

-Contra-info <<http://en.contrainfo.espiv.net/>>

-posts by the user taxikipali at libcom.org.

P.S. 2: On the myth of the debt crisis as an exclusively or primarily "Greek problem", see S. Erlanger's cynical May 22, 2010 article in the *New York Times*: "[A]cross Western Europe, the 'lifestyle superpower', the assumptions and gains of a lifetime are suddenly in doubt ... Europeans have boasted about their social model, with its generous vacations and early retirements, its national health care systems and extensive welfare benefits, contrasting it with the comparative harshness of American capitalism ... Europeans have benefited from low military spending, protected by NATO and the American nuclear umbrella ... **Europe can no longer afford its comfortable lifestyle**".

P.S. 3: On the enduring myth, even in leftist activists' heads, that "we can't take any more immigrants", see the simple stats: "Greece's population has shrunk by more than 1 percent over the last 10 years, according to the preliminary results from the census carried out earlier this year, thereby bucking the trend of the last few decades. Officials from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) said that the first count of the figures collected indicate that Greece's population is 10,787,690 (49.2 percent men and 50.8 percent women) compared to 10,934,097 in 2001, when the last census was carried out. This is a decline of 1.34 percent. Greece has an aging population, which has put a strain on its social security system. **This has been somewhat counterbalanced by the influx of immigrants into Greece since the early 1990s.**" (Newspaper *Kathimerini*, "Census shows population decline", Monday July 25, 2011)