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Practising (for) revolution: street mobilizations in Athens as political performatives

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ABSTRACT

The controversial district of Exarcheia in Athens has a long and turbulent history shaped by dissidence, persecution and marginalization that can be traced back to the Greek Civil war of 1946–1949. In this paper I focus on one of Exarcheia's quintessential characteristic, its weekly riots – colloquially referred to as 'báhala'. Political, media and vernacular discourses have seen the báhala gradually entering the realm of the criminal and the banal, often regarded as apolitical, senseless acts of vandalism. Contributing to the need for a more nuanced study of resistance, this paper takes a de-pathologizing orientation towards street mobilizations in Exarcheia by placing them under a historicizing lens. It argues that despite their loss of vigour or momentum, their frequent demonization or trivialization, their potency remains intact for it is located in their very repetition; a repetition that renders them political performatives that teach participants the partisan logic of the streets and preserve the historical and ethical legacy of the Struggles of the Greek Left.

KEYWORDS

Performativity; riots; politics; historicity; urban ethnography

Introduction

When I told friends and family that I had first-hand witnessed the infamous street riots in the district of Exarcheia, Athens, one of them jokingly said that I had received the 'baptism of fire'. Her comment intended to imply what I already knew about the neighbourhood: that its name had become a metonym for disorder and anomie that took the form of weekly clashes with the police – a phenomenon colloquially known as 'báhala'. Admittedly, my prior knowledge of the báhala was contained to TV news and newspaper articles where photos of hooded men throwing objects at the police amid a landscape of commotion usually appeared. I had a very particular perception of what these weekly riots represented; a perception that was instilled in me by outsiders, namely family, friends, media and political discourses. Exarcheia riots appeared decadent, nihilistic, repetitive. Through my ethnographic research in the neighbourhood and without overlooking this particular perception, my understanding of the báhala simply ceased to be singular. This paper is about abandoning that singularity and transcending polarised discourses that either demonise or romanticise street riots. Instead, here I propose a historicised reading of the báhala and argue that their potency lies in their very repetition; a repetition that renders them political performatives that reproduce and uphold the historical and ethical legacy of the Struggles of the Greek Left by teaching participants the partisan logic of the streets. December 6, 2016

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In an attempt to pursue what some anthropologists call 'field immersion', I decided to follow a group of protesters affiliated with the Anti-authoritarian Current (AK)[1] on the march commemorating the eighth anniversary of the death of Alexandros Grigoropoulos – a 15-year-old boy who was shot dead by a police officer in the heart of Exarcheia. My senses were attuned to everything that was happening around me, registering the route, the rhythms of the demonstration, the facial expressions of the people, the slogans shouted, and the banners held. The protest traditionally ended in Exarcheia, a district in central Athens historically known for its riots (Vradis 2012). There, the wave of demonstrators quickly dispersed right and left into the neighbourhood's narrow alleys. I was alarmed because unlike most people around me I did not know where I was supposed to go or what, in fact, was about to happen. On my right, a couple of men in balaclavas appeared. As they strode forward, their right arm was raised straight up in the air and each of them was holding a glass bottle sealed with a cloth. It took me a few seconds to realize I was looking at Molotov cocktails. Distracted by the sudden metamorphosis of previously familiar streets into unfamiliar territory, I lost sight of the AK demonstrators I had been marching with. A barricade appeared before us. Men in gas masks were already standing there instructing us to climb over quickly. A demonstrator shouted angrily at the masked men that the barricades are for the police, not the protesters and they should have waited a bit longer before entirely shutting the road. 'You had one job to do and you messed it up!' ('*Mia douleia eixate na kanete kai ta kanate skata!*') cried the man as he strove to climb over the pile of pallets, beams and bins that formed the barricade. 'Apologies, comrade!' ('*Syggnomi re syntrofe!*') responded the man in the gas mask while tapping his chest with his palm in a gesture of sincere apology. I climbed over the barricade and spotted some of the AK demonstrators. I ran towards them and we hurriedly retreated to anti-authoritarian-supporting Nosotros[2] right off the square of the neighbourhood, to avoid getting caught up in the clashes with the police that were soon to erupt.

Once inside, the door remained mostly shut, although a few protesters with gas-induced tears running down their faces would occasionally come in. Others were coughing or had faces still smeared with the white residue of *Maalox* – the antacid syrup used as teargas antidote. Somebody went behind the bar, and service resumed as normal. People with red eyes and runny noses, sat around tables drinking coffee or tea – a scene that prompted someone to joke that this looked very much like a memorial service ('*san mnimosino eimaste edo mesa*'), where friends and relatives of the departed sit around a living room tearful and quiet sipping hot beverages. The atmosphere was quite relaxed, as people shared stories and funny anecdotes from previous protests and humorously devised absurd ways in which one could distract a police officer and get through the cordon that had now formed around the heart of Exarcheia. A guy suggested he could pretend he was a frustrated neighbour who had come to complain; someone else said that he could act as if he was there to 'help' policemen beat rioters up and while doing so discreetly walk through them and escape the cordon.

After a while, I climbed up the spiral staircase leading to the terrace. With my eyes squinting and my mouth and nose covered to avoid inhaling yet more teargas, I watched the *báhala* exploding around the square of Exarcheia – scenes I had often seen on the news. *Báhala,* a colloquialism broadly defined as 'havoc' or 'chaos' (Leontidou 2012; Panourgia 2019), took the form of blazing bins, plastic, metal and wood, whose

smoke was floating through every street and alley surrounding the square. Their sound was a haphazard concoction of noises – sirens, breaking glass, banging, clunking, shouts and inaudible voices-sporadically superseded by the blast of stun grenades. Hooded individuals in balaclavas or gasmasks were running, shouting and throwing stones at the police, whose cordon was now getting tighter. I felt a tingling sensation in my nose and throat as if I just had a bite of food heavily seasoned with chilli powder. While still thinking it was not as unbearable as I had imagined, a dust cloud wafted right through me. Within seconds my eyes started burning and watering uncontrollably. Keeping them open felt almost impossible and rubbing them accentuated the burning sensation because teargas is pressurized powder that creates a mist when deployed and sticks everywhere – an interesting fact I wish I knew beforehand. With great effort, I made my way down the spiral staircase and re-joined the others on the first floor of the building.

I was advised by demonstrators to stay in Nosotros until the báhala subsided. I asked how long they usually last, and a member of AK informed me that 'this can go until 2 or 3 am'. Everything that day had happened amid a state of noise and commotion. My interactions consisted of a series of scattered, unplanned, and often interrupted conversations. However, amid those, I could discern a sense of what I can best describe as *insouciance* – a form of light-hearted unconcern. Eight years after the explosive events of December 2008, the annual demonstration seemed to have acquired a somewhat, banal, ritualistic character. Chuckling, one of the AK protesters even compared it to an 'Epitafios', the religious procession taking place on Good Friday before the Greek Orthodox Easter when a structure symbolizing Christ's tomb is escorted around neighbourhoods. Indeed, the annual march, sombre and mournful like a funeral procession contrasted the commotion and ludic nature of the riots that followed and which were compared disparagingly by some of the protesters to a *panigiri* (festival).

The comparison of the commemorative march to a funeral procession scoffs at the perceived absence of energy and enthusiasm amongst protesters. 'Panigiri', on the other hand, an event quite antithetical in nature to a funeral – since its attendees are expected to be exuberant and joyous – is also deployed in a derogative manner by discussants to denote their perception of the violent clashes with the police as acts devoid of 'true' political consciousness and 'seriousness'. Simply put, some of my interlocutors felt that the reason people took part in the báhala is very similar to the reason why people attend a panigiri: to have fun. They implied that those involved in the clashes have no real aim other than the thrill gained from the destruction of public and private property.

Much has been written in anthropological studies about resistance. Ethnographic work on resistance and more specifically urban resistance in the Greek context experienced a significant surge following Greece's 2010 bailout deal. The concept of solidarity as a means of forming new socialities that both reject and depart from the inherently asymmetrical structures of humanitarianism occupied central stage in studies of both the 'Greek crisis' as well as the subsequent refugee-reception crisis (Cabot 2019; Rakopoulos 2016; Rozakou 2016). Other studies focused on street art and slogans as loci of resistance (Alexandrakis 2016; Chatzidakis 2018; Knight 2015) while others looked at the ways in which certain historical epochs entered and fuelled discourse and actions surrounding Greece 'crises' (Kalantzis 2015; Kirtsoglou 2020; Knight 2012). It almost feels redundant to point out the inescapable romanticism that permeates Greece's evocation of its past

in the years of its post-bailout phase. Past individual and collective stories seemed to make it to the fore in ethnographers' accounts as national reminders of stoicism and perseverance that could sooth current experiences of suffering. Here I would also like to focus on the reproduction of a certain historical imaginary, one that is especially relevant to my area of study, Exarcheia; a historical imaginary tied to the reproduction of a particular kind of resistance – the kind that unfolds in the streets.

Recently a call has been made about the need to de-exoticize and de-pathologize resistance (Theodossopoulos 2014). In Exarcheia the exoticization of insurrection results from galloping gentrification and touristification processes that in recent years have become palpable (Pettas et al. 2021). The pathologization of riots, on the other hand, is a phenomenon that can be traced back in the 1980s as a symptom of so-called Exarcheia problem (cf. Vradis 2012). For analytical purposes, I posit a twofold narrative of pathologization of the báhala that I will discuss in the following pages. I argue that the báhala are criminalized and ridiculed etically, that is, through the terms of an existing external scheme put in place and maintained by government-led media and politicians and those who perceive Exarcheia as the hub of dissidents – the Greek state's 'dangerous citizens' (cf. Panourgia 2009). At the same time, pathologizing interpretations of the báhala also come from interlocutors who once sympathized with or even participated in them.

The majority of these interlocutors were regulars in Nosotros. In his incisive ethnography of Athenian anarchists, Nicholas Apoifis explains that due to Nosotros' frequent interactions with the mainstream media and its affiliations with the parliamentary left, insurrectionary anarchists – the anarchists that are more likely to participate in the báhala – tend to view 'Nosotrians' in a disparaging manner (2016, 97). Admittedly, Nosotros' connection with mainstream media and politicians made it a smoother entry point for me, an ethnographer who had no contact with Exarcheia prior to her research. I acknowledge that the collection of viewpoints about the báhala presented here is hence partly determined by accessibility and it is not surprising that it does not feature any pro-báhala voices. I further recognize that my ethnography on the báhala is very much an ethnography of commentators rather than physical actors. While my choice of participants was contingent I also did not actively seek to interview báhala participants due to the fact that my work did not intend to be a study of báhala per se, but of the neighbourhood as a whole. I view the báhala as a distinct topic that deserves its own analysis and argue that the 'bahalakides' cannot be reduced to a single voice obtained from a couple of token interviews.

Nevertheless, the báhala made their way recurrently into conversations and interviews with participants I encountered in Nosotros and elsewhere. These participants were predominantly middle-class individuals who lived, worked or frequented in Exarcheia but who had an elective relationship with the neighbourhood. Some of them were old anarchists who had taken part in police clashes in their younger days. Others shared a vague anarchist ethos or had leftist convictions. The members of AK I had marched with adhered to a politics that advocated the creation of social centres and organizational frameworks. These convictions meant that their opinions towards the báhala significantly differed from those of insurrectionary anarchists, who are typically hostile to permanent structures and affinities and favourable towards street conflicts. The common denominator amongst these different views was that they all came from the experience of inhabiting Exarcheia as an ideological, discursive space. It is on the basis of this shared sense of elective

belonging in this kind of space that I refer to when I use the term 'emic'. I argue that my interlocutors' dismissal of the báhala as apolitical acts of violence comes in the form of a 'domestic' critique rooted in disenchantment and intertwined with understandings of authenticity and more specifically the loss *of* in Exarcheia – a place that has been emically understood as a site of radical politicization. Though a distinctly different context, my research here mirrors visual anthropologist Konstantinos Kalantzis' exploration of Sfakian traditionalism in Crete, particularly in relation to emic understandings of authenticity and how those inform a sense of belonging. Going beyond a binary conceptualization of power as centre versus periphery, Kalantzis argues that there are several other dynamics at play that grant traditionalism its meaning and evocation. In line with his argument, I posit that performing the báhala does not 'depend on external spectatorship for legitimization' (2019, 134) – although there certainly is one. Put differently, a reading of the báhala should not be framed solely by the spectator's gaze and should go beyond etic perceptions of authenticity and external legitimization. I recognize the 'asymmetry between informants' conceptual creations and the second-order creativity advocated for anthropological purposes' (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007, 15). However, I argue for shifting away from the idea of first and second-order interpretations and allow for the possibility of parallel readings that are not mutually exclusive. In other words, my analysis of the báhala ought not to be perceived as *the reality* contra to the reality of my interlocutors. Alongside ethnographically capturing my interlocutors' disenchantment as well as government and media-led pathologizing discourses**,,**my aim here is to move beyond the de-pathologization discussion by proposing a reading of resistance that not only accepts but embraces its possible banalization and ineffectiveness and its – perhaps inevitable – loss of momentum (cf. Theodossopoulos 2014). I argue that irrespective of their trivialization and perceived ineffectiveness in the short term, the báhala as well as other kinds of mobilizations in Exarcheia (whether contentious or not) constitute through their very repetition and their almost ritualistic predictability a powerful mode of resistance whose significance can only been appreciated diachronically; a mode of resistance rooted in the expression, remembrance, teaching and therefore preservation of a very particular historical narrative, that is, the narrative of the Greek Left that can be traced as far back as the Greek Civil War of 1946-1949. Using Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity' – a reiteration of norms that 'precede[s], constrain[s] and exceed[s]' the performer (1993, 234), and drawing inspiration from James Faubion's notion of ethical subject formation (2010), I posit that collective acts of resistance in Exarcheia (báhala, protests, assemblies etc) serve to uphold and maintain the political ethic and legacy of the Greek Left in a way that 'precedes and exceeds' the individual desires and agendas of the performers. Performativity becomes here my instrument for the analysis of these repetitive, 'ritualistic' acts of resistance that my interlocutors referred to as 'revolutionary exercise' *(epanastatiki gymnastiki)* – a phrase, which, like so many others used by Greeks, was laden with sarcasm and derision (cf. Bakalaki 2016; Knight 2015) but which also carried a literal sense.

The emergence of a combative neighbourhood

On the grid, the neighbourhood of Exarcheia forms a triangle-like area in the heart of Athens. Its small size is disproportionate to its turbulent history – a history certainly too rich to

recount here. However, an overview of the key historical moments that saw Exarcheia crystallizing into a site of resistance and Athens' par excellence locus for the production of radical politics of discontent is very important. For, it is on the basis of the neighbourhood's unique historicity that the street mobilizations gain force as a political performative.

Exarcheia's connection with leftist resistance can be traced back to the beginning of WWII in Greece. During the war Exarcheia had become the meeting point of EAM[3] and towards its end it turned into an arena for some of the fiercest battles that took place during the 'December Events' (Dekemvriana) in Athens (Panourgia 2009, 145). The Dekemvriana was the culmination of the ideological tensions between rightists and leftists. EAM-ELAS, the KKE and OPLA on one side, the British Army, the Greek Government, the Hellenic Royal forces and Gendarmeries on the other fought each other in Athens for thirty-three days. The battles ended with the defeat of EAM-ELAS and its disarmament via the Varkiza Peace Agreement in February 1945. Yet unlike other European countries, Greece could not celebrate the defeat of the Nazis, for the end of WWII for Greeks marked the beginning of their Civil War which broke out in March 1946 and ended with the defeat of the communist forces on October 1949.

The aftermath of the Civil War was characterized by an intense 'anti-communist witchhunt' (Mouzelis and Pagoulatos 2004). Political dissidents were arrested, and heavy surveillance was set up to spy on those suspected of being affiliated with the Left. The 'Great Red Scare' observed in the US and Western Europe at the time fuelled the Greek anticommunist crusade, which climaxed with the rise of the military coup of 1967- an alliance that became known as the 'Junta of the Colonels'. The dictatorship years in Greece were a period of intense political violence. The climate of suppression, however, was unable to halt the dissemination of democratic ideas, particularly among the Greek youth. During the dictatorship, the student movement in Greece was predominantly influenced by communist and libertarian discourses. Four years into the dictatorial regime, France's May 68, the Italian autonomous Marxists and the Situationists rekindled the desire for radical change amongst revolutionary Greek circles (Glimenakis 2011; Apoifis 2016). While a large number of students embraced a communist tradition, anarchists were at the time 'minor players' (Glimenakis 2011, 37). Anarchist activity had been suppressed due to the life-threatening distractions posed by the Nazi Occupation, the Civil War and the military junta (Apoifis 2016). It was only in the years after 1973 and the fall of the dictatorship that anarchism crystallized as a political movement.

For some, the prelude to the fall of the dictatorship had come on 17 November 1973 when thousands of students and youth zealously protested against the dictatorial regime by occupying the Athens Polytechnic. The occupation ended in bloodshed when a military tank crushed down the central gate of the Polytechnic, killing 23 protesters. The Polytechnic would become an emblem of resistance against tyranny, independence from foreign rule, political freedom and freedom of expression. As if by osmosis, the adjacent neighbourhood of Exarcheia – that had already acquired a reputation as a site of rebellion during the Civil War – became, following the Polytechnic Uprising, firmly established as a site of radical politics of discontent, freedom and urban resistance to crypto-colonial and hegemonic mechanisms that rendered Greece subject to the interest of foreign powers (cf. Herzfeld 2002). The same ideologies and slogans that emerged during the events at the Polytechnic were reiterated with equal fervour in subsequent youth mobilizations that sparked within and around Exarcheia.

The dictatorship era (1964-1974) in Greece had a catalytic effect on collective Greek consciousness and left Greek society with an increased sense of politicization. The period that followed, known as Metapolitefsi (literally 'regime change') saw the gradual proliferation of numerous extra-parliamentary organizations that networked and established themselves within universities, seeking to produce politicized youth identities. Disillusioned by the politics of normalization and liberalization and remaining true to an ideal of 'revolutionary politics', multiple, different and divergent leftist sects continued their separate existence at the margins of institutionalized politics. Sometimes referred to as 'anti-establishment' and other times as 'anti- constitutionals', these publics (cf. Warner 2002) ranged from what was termed as the 'radical left' to small but influential anarchist groups who promoted a strong anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and anti-imperialist rhetoric (Apoifis 2016, 88; see also Herzfeld 2002).

Throughout the late 70s and 80s, Exarcheia became the home of these marginalized political subjectivities and established itself as a hub or anarchist activity and radical politicization. It became a meeting point for students, restless youths, low-key supporters of urban partisanism, and official representatives of left-wing organizations that set up their offices in the neighbourhood. Exarcheia would become the epicentre of university occupations and student demonstrations but also a locus for a series of infamous police 'brooming' operations and incessant clashes between police and rioters.

The 'Exarcheia problem' and the bahalákides

With Greece's entry to the EU and its subsequent neoliberalization (Vradis 2009), Exarcheia – more than any other central Athenian district – would find itself in the crosshairs of 'regenerations' projects. It was during that time that the so-called 'Exarcheia problem' first appeared in news articles across the national press featuring stories about a delinquent youth culture that caused daily havoc and rioted against the police (Vradis 2012). Along with the punks and the hippies, I argue that the youths in hoods, stripped of any political dispositions, became necessary protagonists of a state-led demonization narrative that constructed Exarcheia as an avaton – an off-limits territory. But as Herzfeld rightly points out when drawing a comparison with the village of Zoniana in Crete, the idea that a well-armed police force could not maintain law and order in Exarcheia is rather absurd (2021). The reason for claiming not to be able to do so, however, is far from absurd, for such 'claims of remoteness and impenetrability' can be very conveniently used to defend the agenda of successive governments and the loyal opposition (2021, 68). Dominant political forces have since been accused of exploiting the seemingly unending state of anomie in the neighbourhood to point fingers at respective political administrations for their incompetence in solving the 'Exarcheia problem' and paving the way for moralizing interventions that range from police raids to gentrification in the neighbourhood (Pettas et al. 2021). Amid this vicious cycle of criminalization and 'purging', the anarchist became *ipso facto* the individual underneath the hood. Feeding a pre-established narrative of apoliticization, the báhala tarnished the image of the anarchist and anti-authoritarian milieu as a whole while concurrently reaffirming and (re)constructing Exarcheia as the immoral geography of Athens on the map of popular imagination.

The terms 'báhala' and 'bahalákis' – the colloquial sobriquet attributed to the perpetrator of the báhala – were extensively used in popular rhetoric after the events of December 2008 when the death of Alexandros Grigoropoulos led to a series of unprecedented riots nationwide that cannot be looked at as a mere moment of disorder by unruly societal groups (Astrinaki 2009; Karamichas 2009; Vradis 2009). Yet, dominant political forces at the time promoted a narrative in which the youth rebellion was reduced to a havoc caused by 'a small group of "hoods"'(Astrinaki 2009, 103). It was then when 'bahalákides' came to substitute the until – then media-friendly terms 'koukouloforoi' *(the hooded-ones)* and 'gnostoi- agnostoi' (*the known-unknowns)*. The term 'hoodie' is rather self-explanatory and serves to distinguish these 'deviant' subjectivities from the body of deserving citizens- demonstrators (Koutrolikou 2018). The *gnostos-agnostos* (known-unknown) however, had multiple readings. First, it was used to indicate that these actors – in their balaclava- induced anonymity- were actually known to the police. It further suggested that they were not being arrested because allegedly some or even the majority of them remained untouchable because they were 'suburbia's children', the offspring of well-known and powerful politicians and businessmen. A frequently heard trope was that the bahalákides were 'spoiled kids who do their 'revolution' in Exarcheia and then go back to mummy and daddy in their rich homes in the northern suburbs'.[4]

The second meaning attached to the term related to the implicit allegation (usually expressed by the Right) that the 'known-unknowns' were known to the police, but never actually faced legal consequences due to their clandestine connections to official political parties on the Left. In both scenarios, the term 'gnostoi- agnostoi' was a political term. 'Bahalákides' on the other hand, is a term imbued with derisive undertones, within and outside Exarcheia. I believe that this shift in terminology is itself indicative of the change in the perceived signification and effectivity of rioting. Calling someone 'bahalákis' was not just about identifying them as the agent of the báhala. Beyond that, the mere utterance of the word itself, with its diminutive (and diminishing) suffix '*-akis',* had, in my opinion, a self-deprecating agential capacity that strips the actor of their political potency. Therefore within the 'báhala' and 'bahalákides' there is a performative statement that demarcates a space in which a discourse of criminality is reproduced that results in the marginalized representation of the rioting subjects as misguided and infantilized at best and irrational and pathological at worst. Moreover, as linguistic choices, the terms *báhala* and *bahalákides* undermined the acts by suggesting that the riots were trivial events of an almost play-like nature. This can be exemplified in phrases like, '*the daily game of the bahalákides with the police*' or '*the [city] centre has become a Disneyland for the bahalákides*' and other similar ones frequently heard on the news.

The words most commonly used to define báhala – and which I have also adopted at the beginning of this chapter – are 'chaos' and 'havoc' (Leontidou 2012; Panourgia 2019). However, while not incorrect, 'chaos' and 'havoc' are arguably more generic and less explicit words and, unlike the word 'vandalism', fail to sufficiently convey the elements of senseless violence, destruction and delinquency often attached to the *báhala,* not only by 'outsiders' such as conservative politicians and media, but by anarchist (as we will see) and academic circles too. Indeed, following the sense of awe regarding the unprecedented scale and political significance of the December 2008 riots reflected in the writings of many Greek scholars (Apoifis 2016; Astrinaki 2009; Karamichas 2009; Kornetis 2010; Pourgouris 2010; Vradis 2009), disenchantment and a lack of endorsement is noted in

later years, particularly after SYRIZA's[5] rise to power for the first time in 2015. The weekly báhala were then described by some academics as 'scuffles' and 'pure anti-politics' (see Apoifis 2016; Panourgia 2019 respectively). Interestingly enough, the protracted financial crisis in Greece saw the word 'báhalo' shifting between its use as a self-deprecating tool that mocked the disordered state of the country (i.e 'Greece is a báhalo!' see also Bakalaki 2016) and a jocular weapon aimed at its EU auditors that conveyed Greeks' 'ambivalent pleasure in embodying the figure of the trangressive native' (Kalantzis 2015, 1046) who fails but concurrently refuses to adjust to expectations of Europeanness.

The main semantic similarity that one can discern with certainty between riots and báhala is that just like the word 'riot', 'báhala' has 'connotations of power', whose discursive usage is 'historically shaped by those who opposed or quelled them' (Panourgia in Pourgouris 2010, 243). When used by the media, or politicians, the word 'báhala' has the potency to stigmatize and criminalize, not merely the individuals partaking in their performance but anyone identifying with the anarchist or anti-authoritarian milieu. Therefore – seen from another perspective- 'báhala' is also loaded *with political significance* despite being perceived as *apolitical* – a term which I understand as one form of doing anti-politics.

The affect exuded by the dark hoods, the molotovs and the burning bins superseded the emotions and understandings that any face to face interaction with the hooded, delinquent-looking individuals could have brought to the fore. Hoodies with molotovs at hand, destined to feature in news articles, were not credited with any political intentions. A defamation war seemed to unfold in the press were the bahalákides were pedestrianized and portrayed as hooligans whose motives never seemed to matter and would thus never make it to the mainstream narrative. As objects, hoods and molotovs carried their own agency. Yet as words, they had become connotations of an affective quality tied to 'mischief', 'fear', 'delinquency' and urban degradation in ways too powerful to overcome.

From demonization to banalization: deprecating voices from within

> In my opinion, four categories of people take part in the báhala: the fifteen- year-olds, the anarcho-tourists, those that go through a second adolescence, like myself, and the classic anarchists, those who wear the gasmasks and guard the barricades. You could easily wear a hoodie yourself, run out and throw a stone at the police. The media would capture the moment, and next thing you know, you appear on the front cover of a newspaper as the dark anarchist, the hooded, criminal element.

Themis was a 24-year-old member of AK, one of its most eloquent speakers and an aspiring lawyer who was at the time doing his traineeship. His words had a tone of sarcasm that could hardly go unnoticed and which certainly contradicted the exaltation of Exarcheia 'as an archetype of native resistance' so often encountered in tourist blogs about the neighbourhood (cf. Chatzidakis and Maclaran 2023; Kalantzis forthcoming; Pettas et al. 2021) I was trying to understand whether that intended to reflect a belief that the clashes with the police were futile, banal or ludicrous, or perhaps all three at the same time. Themis was deconstructing the riots analytically, in the Derridian sense of the word, but his comment also pointed at a different kind of de(con)struction: *one identified as political disintegration and internal fragmentation*. This time it was not the words *per se* but the blasé attitude towards the báhala that implied a normative acceptance of this disintegration but also dismissiveness and a refusal to attribute political meaning to them.

The protesters gathered at Nosotros that day, some of whom had taken part in riots in their younger years, had also expressed a sense of dismissal towards the báhala. Other younger members of AK had been actively involved in the organization of several protests and commemorative marches – including this one – and deemed them an important embodied and material expression of their political discontent. However, they too held back from participating in the clashes that typically followed, and some like Themis perceived them rather disparagingly.

A few months after Alexis' commemorative march, I was passing by the National Technical University of Athens – commonly known as the Polytechnic – with an interlocutor, Vicky. The Polytechnic had become a historical emblem of youth rebellion against state oppression and foreign rule owing to the 1973 student uprising against the military junta. My interlocutor, Vicky, was only a little girl then, still living in her hometown in northern Greece. Yet the imposing neoclassical building ignited in her mind memories from the commemorative riots of November 14, 1995 in which she had taken part as a young student. Her description of those events was quickly superseded by a comment on 'the wannabe trendiness (*modernia*) of young people (*pitsirikades*) of today who burn [police] trolleys and make confined *(periorismena) báhala* as if this is a Sunday church service, except they do theirs every Friday and Saturday'. *Modernia* is a slang word, a derogative derivative of 'moderno' (modern), used to describe something that aspires to look modern or 'trendy' but is merely pretentious. I asked what she meant by 'confined'.

> Well … they are [standing] at the entrance of the Polytechnic, they set on fire a couple of bins to the left, a couple of bins to the right; cops throw some teargas at them; they come in and out of the Polytechnic, throw a stone at them. Ok, so what? What has changed?

Vicky's derisive attitude towards the *báhala* was grounded in a perception of these incidences as pointless acts of violence. If their point once was to make a political statement, 'pointless' could, in this case, be interpreted as 'apolitical'.

> If there is going to be violence, it should be organised and have an aim, a target. [The target] shouldn't be [to burn] the trolley that students and workers take to go home. [The target] shouldn't be the society, the people […] Violence for me shouldn't be a goal in itself. I say yes to violence, but under what terms? And why? Are we just going to burn trolleys every Saturday out of the blue?

Vicky knew the *báhala* repertoire well, what would happen first, and what would follow. As she argued, the weekly *báhala* had now become 'like a tradition', in that they lacked *originality* and had entered the banality of the everyday. Their scale was often not significant, although it was big enough to disturb and result in a cloud of teargas wafting through the neighbourhood's residential balconies and windows, the busy café and bar- lined streets. The supposed spontaneity of *báhala* (Panourgia 2019) was also refuted every time my participants placed them within specific time frames. I remember a couple of occasions when interlocutors recommended sitting indoors to escape the teargas and smoke, for 'it's past 9pm and the *báhala* will be starting soon' *(opou na nai tha arxisoun ta báhala)*. On one of my first night strolls around Exarcheia, I recall a group of people on Themistocleous St., watching rather unconcerned and from a safe distance, *báhala* unfolding somewhere on Metaxa St. I asked one of the older bystanders what exactly was happening to which he responded, 'The same old that happens every Friday night' *(Ta idia pou ginontai kathe Paraskevi vrady)*.

For these people, the *báhala* were Exarcheia's weekly expected-unexpected micro-acts of orderly disorder. I am not suggesting that a riot or any act, for that matter, could ever follow a single, rigid pattern. Its unexpected character (Kitis and Milani 2015) and volatility are rooted in performances of unpredictability. If we are to view riots as rituals, we should remind ourselves of the unpredictability and spontaneity recorded even in the most structured, rigidly outlined, repetitive acts (cf. Geertz 1973; Grimes 2004; Mahmood 2001; Schechner 1985). Improvization as an inherent quality of performance can have a catalytic, transformative effect on the entire act itself. The fire of social change relies on such sparks of spontaneity (Dalakoglou 2012), and even if not tangible, that change could at least be implanted in society's consciousness as a *possibility*. The most indicative and recent case exemplifying the potency of spontaneity is the December 2008 riots that came to represent a trans-societal union of discontent that surpassed the singular event of Alexis' death and exposed more significant political, economic and moral issues long-simmering beneath the surface of Greek consciousness.

When the intense emotive response of the riots of December 2008 is juxtaposed to the weekly riots in Exarcheia, the significance of the unpredictability of the individual subject gets lost in the collective repetition of the act. This leads to a visible non-outcome that quite frequently triggered a 'So what?' reaction. Dalakoglou (2012), in his attempt to unravel the socio-spatial dynamics of Athens by analysing the concept of spontaneity, raises an important point about the latter: that spontaneity is, in fact, *not* the point. As he argues, the boundaries between the spontaneous and the non-spontaneous are blurred when it comes to collective and public street actions. Bearing this in mind should not prompt us to strive for a clear-cut classification of the two but rather posit the question of 'What happens after "the spectacular, spontaneous (or not) moments of revolt"' (2012, 512)? When discussing the báhala, responses from interlocutors came swiftly: *Nothing happens. They are not spontaneous; they are not spectacular; they are not revolutionary*.

Molotov cocktails and notions of (in)authenticity

Voices reprimanding the báhala as senseless, apolitical vandalisms, often came from the very people commonly associated with them. When I met him, Aris must have been 50 years old. He owned a kiosk with his brother on one of the peripheral streets of Exarcheia, and all our discussions took place with him behind the register and me on the steps beside it. Originally from a small town in southern Greece, Aris had come to Athens as a student and had been actively involved in the anti-authoritarian milieu until his late 20s, a time during which he had taken part in numerous riots and student protests. When I first introduced my research topic to Aris, his curt, Baudrillardian[6] response took me by surprise:

> Exarcheia is a pretence. (*Ta Exarcheia einai prospoiita*)

In a way that echoes the critique of modernity against a background of nostalgia and lamentation for the loss of an authentic past encountered by a number of ethnographers of Greece over the past decades (Argyrou 1996; Bakalaki 2003; Herzfeld 1982; 2005; Theodossopoulos and Kirtsoglou 2010; Kalantzis 2019; Sutton 2008), Aris then compared the Exarcheia-of-the-present with the Exarcheia of the 1990s he had

experienced as a student. With a tone of bitterness, he explained that the people he encountered back then were educated and had goals and ideals. 'Now, they are like, what should I do? Hm, I'll be an anarchist!' *(Tora sou leei ti na kano? As gino anarhikos!)*. Drawing a line between his generation of anarchists and the ''new anarchists', the bahalákides' (Panourgia 2019, 238), he insisted that 'back then, they didn't smash people's cars. At most, a molotov would be thrown against the police *(ante kamia molotov stin astynomia)*'.

The adjective 'prospoiitos' he used to describe Exarcheia is rooted in the verb *prospoioumai*, meaning 'to pretend', and when someone is pretending, they are by definition being disingenuous and inauthentic. Exarcheia's 'fakeness', according to Aris, can be evidenced in the nihilist acts of the *báhala* and the *bahalákides* who assumed the identity of the anarchist, not because of any deeply-held political ideals but because 'they didn't know what else to do'. An erstwhile 'authentic' Exarcheia is compared to Exarcheia as a present-day *pseudotopia,* a simulation (cf. Baudrillard 1994) imbued with fake and fleeting political sensitivities.

Marinos, an old-school anarchist held similar views. He was the owner of a publishing house in Exarcheia since the 1970s. I found him sitting on a chair behind a wooden desk in his bookstore that I remember thinking was too small for the number of books it hosted. On the desk was an ashtray filled with a dozen crushed cigarette butts drowned in ash and the familiar stale herbal aroma of a chain smoker's lair lingered in the room. Marinos had a calming and confident demeanour. He had the kind of reassuring calmness and grounded confidence that I have always felt (and hoped) is gifted to people as compensation for enduring the relentless and inevitable passage of time. I noticed that his calmness was only disturbed, and his tone only rose when the topic of the *báhala* came up. He spoke with contempt:

> They are so stupid that they burn bins, sit there, and inhale the smoke! They think they are doing something rebellious. They measure their authenticity by the number of molotov bottles they throw at the cops. Or they do it to see themselves later on the news and say, 'Oh look, here I am!' Violence in the past was symbolic. Now, of course, it hails from somewhere, but it leads nowhere. Anarchist doesn't mean bahalákis. Now these two have nearly become synonymous.

Marinos was defining the authenticity of these individuals, not in terms of what he believed to be authentic, but in terms of what he thought it was not: 'anarchist doesn't mean bahalákis'. Demos, another self-proclaimed anarchist and a regular in Exarcheia since the late 1970s, drew a similar argument. In our conversations, he was always explicative and elaborate. In congruence with Marinos, but in a less disparaging manner, he explained that in the 70s, the molotov cocktail was used as a 'political instrument' with the intention to provoke. 'Why was it a political instrument? Because we didn't just throw it in the air', he said, explaining that molotov cocktails were used with cognizance and in specific events, such as May 1.

> That's what a molotov means. And indeed, the next day, they were talking about us, not about May 1. That was a huge advertising campaign for us. That's how people got to know us. But in the next decades, for many anarchists [the molotov] became a role. It wasn't a political instrument anymore used for intervention but a role anyone could slip into. Nowadays, they think anarchist means throwing molotovs, and so many anarchists fall for this.

Lamenting the loss of old glories, Demos argued that the molotov had been an object-provocateur, used consciously and symbolically on specific occasions to call special attention and gesticulate the significance of particular events. Now it had become an empty signifier and the material exemplification of the apoliticization of Exarcheia. The frequency and mode of use of molotov cocktails today were for him, indicative of the performance's shifting impetus, symbolism, and intention. The 'intervention' of the anarchists on May 1 he described, was bridging past and present histories by reminding society of the role of anarchism in the establishment of workers' rights. The molotov was then the means for communicating that connection. Today, it had become itself 'the role', for its use was mistakenly conflated with being an anarchist, reducing the meaning of these street clashes to that of antipolitical performances of (un)intentional slander. Demos continued:

> [The báhala] defame and provide an alibi for the defamation of the anarchist chóros, first in the eyes of society and secondly in the eyes of the state. We are not interested in whether the state has a negative impression of us, as much as we are interested in society having a negative impression of us. And we can't reverse this thing.

Reconciling with or seeking the support and approval of the state was nonetheless a paradoxical pursuit. The purpose of anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics is to maintain an antithetical position towards their 'constitutive outside' (State 1984; cited in Howarth 2006), namely the state and its institutions. It was, therefore, the acceptance of society that Demos contended to be of foremost importance to the movement. In his opinion, the *báhala* had severed the relationship between anarchists and society and, consequently with Exarcheia. According to Demos, the báhala were continuously reproduced and sensationalized by the media, tainting the image of the anarchist and anti-authoritarian chóros and obscuring other issues that the neighbourhood was facing. More worryingly so, the báhala were normalized by those causing them, who either did not care or did not fully comprehend the repercussions of their actions. The báhala participants, Demos maintained had fallen 'in a trap', exemplified in their role in perpetuating the widespread native perception that, any street action, any riot that occurred was an anti-social, apolitical, purposeless act of violence. At the same time, the natives' own disdain towards the báhala ironically juxtaposes their valorization by the so-called anarchotourists or western backpackers who bored of the canonically attractive in their own homelands pace excitedly through the graffiti-infested alleys of Exarcheia, consuming the seedy and the unkempt (cf. Zukin et al. 2009) waiting to catch a glimpse of the rioting indigenous subaltern (cf. Kalantzis forthcoming).

On the other hand, as a political act, the báhala could mean many things to different people. Therefore, dismissing báhala as apolitical can undermine the agency and individual intention and affirm the *homogeneity* ascribed to them by the media with all- inclusive phrases such as 'anarchist-police clashes'. Therefore, it is important to ask *who* is 'the anarchist' in these so-called 'anarchist-police clashes'? Put differently, what prompts each individual to engage in the báhala could have been the result of 'variable and nuanced motivations'. For instance, the riots of 2008 had been viewed as a novel performance that formed a new, 'multiple subject' (Gavriilidis 2009) and one that could not be exclusively attributed to a single status or impetus.

Taking cue from Othon Alexandrakis' recent ethnography on radical resilience in Athens, I argue that framing the báhala in 'absolute terms as a phenomenon of total disintegration' (2022, 8) ignores the possibility that disinterest in political processes and debates might not be the unfortunate result of debt crisis, austerity measures and an overall crisis of representation but rather a reaction to it – a statement laden with intentionality. Consequently, even though the weekly *báhala* meet neither the size nor the historical significance of the riots of 2008, they, too, deserve a qualitative analysis (Apoifis 2016) to allow us to better understand the desires, ideas and motivations of the actors who choose to engage in them. Until then, the motives and rationales of those partaking in what feels like a senseless act can only be a matter of subjective interpretation. In the following section I propose another interpretation of the báhala; one that shifts attention away from the individual intentions of rioting subjects and which places báhala under the lens as a *collective* act whose potency and effectivity rests not in the moment but in repetition.

A 'revolutionary work-out' and its historical legacy

The báhala undoubtedly appear futile and banal if we view them as a means; if we think of their immediate repercussions or try to locate their importance in a kind of long-term political impact on wider society. They also appear 'ordinary' if we think of 'the extraordinary' and 'the unknown' as only possible within the realm of the transcendent. Indeed, for James Faubion, the extra-ordinary is that which lies outside the realm of orderly production, 'marking moments of sheer and original departure' (2010, 30). If, following Veena Das however, we decide to 'descent into the ordinary' we can unpick the báhala in their very existence as banal, everyday neighbourhood rhythms (Das 2007; 2020), recognizing what philosopher Stanley Cavell called 'the extraordinariness of what we accept as ordinary' (2010, 61 cited in Veena Das 2020). With this in mind and through the lens of performativity theory, I propose here a different reading of the báhala. Namely, one that sees them as complete projects whose very 'ordinariness' makes them 'performative accomplishments' (Butler 1988) in themselves, for ordinariness and the everyday is where meaning and habitus are produced. Their accomplishment is to be found in the way mild acts of revolutionary violence succeed in anchoring themselves in the site of the everyday. Their political meaning and usefulness lies in their very execution and not in their spontaneity, vigour or desired outcome. My argument here goes beyond the dichotomy of restrictive formalization versus improvization situated at the heart of classic anthropological work (see Bloch 1974). The case of the báhala shows us that one does not need to always seek for radicality in *extra*-ordinary acts or words. An oxymoron emerges here; a kind of *formalized radicality*, whose potency (re)lies in ritualistic repetition.

I now turn to Judith Butler to suggest that the báhala and the commemorative march for Alexis (or others like those of the Polytechnic Uprising on 17.11.1973) are not simply a performance but a *performative*. In her work on gender performativity, Butler used the notion of the performative to explore how linguistic constructions create a reality that we subsequently reinforce not only through speaking about it (i.e. verbally expressing our ideologies) but also by enacting it with our bodies. In her words 'performance as bounded act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists of a

reiteration of norms that 'precede, constrain and exceed' the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as 'the fabrication of the performer's 'will or choice'' (1993, 234). Following the Butlerian logic, repetitiveness here is key, for it is precisely what makes certain performances – riots in this case- appear natural and necessary. Like seasonal phenomena – to evoke the words of anthropologist Victor Turner – the annual march and the Friday báhala reiterate themselves cyclically and steadily (1974). I have previously cited a protester's reference to the yearly demonstration as a 'reminder for the state and society' that they (the protesters) haven't forgotten. I argue that marches and regularized báhala as reminders are *corporeal*, *performative utterances*, or in local slang *epanastatiki gymnastiki*. While the former can be easily translated to 'revolutionary', the latter, 'gymnastiki' is subject to more than one interpretation. 'Gymnastiki' could either be 'exercise', which is a more general term for physical activity, without any particular goal other than maintaining fitness. Yet 'gymnastiki' could also be referring to a 'workout' or 'training', which have a meaning tied to a sense of preparation and improvement while 'working towards a goal'. And finally, 'gymnastiki' could be translated to 'practice', which connotes an achievement of proficiency through repetition.

My interpretation of 'gymnastiki' here is also akin to the notion of 'askesis' discussed by Faubion in his development of Foucault's analysis of 'ethical field' and 'ethical subject formation'. According to Faubion, the ethical field has two dimensions: the themitical and the ethical. The former, a neologism derived from the Greek word 'themito' – meaning 'that which is revered by the gods and men' – pertains to the subject's relations to values and norms. Conversely, the ethical is situated outside the realm of the normative and involves a dynamic process of self-making (autopoiesis) in which the subject through innovation, charisma and askesis (exercise) comes to occupy different ethical positions. This process of autopoiesis can be applied to the political subject too. I agree with Faubion that the themitical and ethical should not be mutually contradictory for that 'would render the former an unthinking habit and the latter a moment of reflection' (Stavrianakis 2012, 670). If we follow that rationale we disregard the subject's agency and its relation to itself. I argue that Exarcheia have their own themitical dimension in the sense that that which elsewhere might be perceived as extra-ordinary (i.e. the báhala), in this neighbourhood has entered the realm of the ordinary. Almost ten years after December 2008, there does not seem to be any kind of 'sheer and original departure' when it comes to the weekly street riots, for the latter have come to belong in the order of reproduction. And it is this state of banality that my interlocutors frown upon.

Although interlocutors who dismissed the báhala used 'epanastatiki gymnastiki' disparagingly, I believe that their words did at the same time carry a literal, twofold meaning. First, a meaning in which 'gymnastiki' referred to the training and physical effort demanded in the planning and execution of demonstrations, especially for the weekly báhala. *Practising* revolution therefore denotes the repetitive undertaking of 'diverse tactics of activist corporeality' that aims to grant their executors a particular set of skills, knowledge or responses: retreating, escaping or enduring teargas, escaping arrest, 'chanting, raising their voices, standing or sitting silently, forming and breaking blockades, and, above all, persisting together in public, in the urban street' (cf. Athanasiou 2014, 2; Butler 1993). Within the concept of a 'revolutionary workout', whether the Molotov cocktail is an empty signifier or a 'meaningful political tool' is irrelevant here. In fact, emphasis should be rather placed on Demos' remark that the Molotov cocktail

is now just 'a *role* anyone could slip into'. Although I understand that both Marinos and Demos' words, imbued with disenchantment as they were, intended to make a distinction between past purposeful times and current times of senseless apolitical violence, I argue that throwing Molotov cocktails at riot policemen in Exarcheia, has always been an element of a constructed identity – a role. These acts, performed by discontented or bored 15-year-olds or in fact any of the groups that according to Themis constitute the bahalákides, are – to use Butler's words – 'a stylized repetition acts' (Butler 1988, 519), borne out of imitation, and this is where their potency lies. Just like the gun, the black beard and attire constitute the material culture in the Sfakian performance of ruggedness discussed by Kalantzis (2019), the Molotov cocktails, the gasmasks, the balaclavas and the barricades, are here the performative objects which through their very act of appearance in the narrow streets of Exarcheia generate a 'performative reorganisation' (Butler & Athanasiou 2013, 126) transforming the urban landscape into an arena for the fleeting partisan revolution. Their performative success lies in their ability to be still remembered, made and used throughout the decades and by many generations of young people irrespective of their aim or outcome or in fact, their audience's perception of them. I argue that here the báhala's 'epanastatiki gymnastiki' is carried out for a specific purpose: the preparation for and therefore invocation of an *absent–present* revolution 'against the system' that might or might never come.

Riots and demonstrations are surrounded in Greece by an aura of mythification and heroization, sometimes also reflected in the accounts of Greek academics (see Athanasiou's excerpt on page 19). Participating in collective street action – irrespectively of scale – is deemed in Greece to be a political and ethical imperative. Partaking in the struggles of the Left *('Agones tis Aristeras')*, has historically acquired a very particular political aesthetic. Every new action that can be seen as part of the long history of 'struggles', provides participants with a sense of virtue and connects them to a particular political genealogy and collective memory. The importance of these acts, need to be thus appreciated not solely in their relation to whether they manage to bring about some obvious political result. Every new 'struggle', every new opportunity to 'take the streets' (*na vgoume sto dromo*), attaches the present to the past, solidifies history and produces more history ensuring the continuity of the Left.

To explain this, it is necessary to revert briefly to the events of the Greek Civil War. The feeling following the defeat of the Communist Party of Greece at the third and final phase of the Civil War was encapsulated in the words of Nikos Zachariadis, the General Secretary of the KKE and leader of the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE). Despite the defeat of the DSE and the expulsion of major figures to Albania, during a radio broadcast, Zachariadis would utter the now famous phrase 'The DSE did not lay down its arms, it placed them on standby' *(O DSE den katethese ta opla, monaha ta ethese para poda)*. The phrase 'to oplo para poda' (that I have here translated as 'standby') refers to the military command 'order arms', where the rifle is lowered and held vertically next to the right leg of the soldier with its handle resting on the ground. 'To oplo para poda' commands the soldier to be in a state of readiness. Its use by Zachariadis during the broadcast is pretty self-explanatory: the Left has not let go off its arms; it will always be alert and prepared to pick them up again and fight. Brutal acts of political persecution against communists and their sympathizers continued throughout the Cold War and until the end of the 1967–1974 dictatorship, but despite Zachariadis' suggestive speech, October 16, 1949, was indeed the

official end of the military hostilities of the Greek Civil War. The phrase 'to oplo para poda', however, with its command to maintain alertness and preparedness left its own mark on Greek post-WWII history. As much as it was used as a false pretext for the incessant persecution of the Left, it also shaped the political subjectivity of many Greek leftists who felt compelled to keep engaging in forms of revolutionary action. 'To oplo para poda' is where I can trace the political significance of what my interlocutors called 'revolutionary exercise'. I thus see Exarcheian riots – even the weekly street 'scuffles' – as a form of exercise in revolutionary practice. I also argue that the *báhala* reflect the intimate relationship between local narratives and the road and exemplify how roads can be both spaces and products 'open to social manipulations' (Dalakoglou and Poulimenakos 2017, 13). In the case of Exarcheian riots, taking into the streets is an act of evocation that served to prepare, to keep in shape, to transmit and to *archive* in collective memory a particular partisan know-how, but mostly to symbolize that a certain alertness is being indeed maintained. The báhala are embodied temporalities whose archival properties lie in their ability to teach actors how to manipulate the streets and preserve their relevance not as spaces of consumption but of revolutionary practice. They are, to use Daniel Knight's words, 'historically and culturally proximate' (2012) to the partisan use of public space as seen in the Greek Civil War events in Athens. Unlike Knight's interlocutors who made direct references to the Great Famine of 1941–1943 when explaining their experience of the economic crisis, my own interlocutors rarely brought up the Civil War in their interviews. Instead the conscious recognition of past events in Exarcheia was located in temporally disobedient chronotopes (cf. Kirtsoglou 2020) of the neighbourhood itself, such as posters discussing the Civil War or graffiti referencing the Varkiza agreement and partisan warfare that I noticed during my walks around the neighbourhood.[7]

To return to the matter of agency, I also maintain that agentic capacity and performativity ought not to be perceived as mutually exclusive (pace Butler 1993), particularly in the case of rioters. Instead, I locate a sense of *reduced agency* in a particular lack of political and historical knowledge that might disallow subjects from seeing beyond their individual intentions and desires. The báhala, as attractively delinquent acts against the eternal 'enemy in blue' (the police), might allow youngsters to feel that they *too* are partaking in the ongoing *Struggles*. At the same time, the political signification of báhala as performatives *precedes and exceeds the performer*; it spans across generations of 'fifteen-year-olds' and 'second-time' adolescents (to recall Themis' words), who might often not be fully aware of the broader meaning and intention of these secular rituals but who participate in them, nonetheless. These acts of participation establish an intergenerational continuity that is not only discursive, but also practical.

In this context, agency may be indeed beside the point. What I posit here contributes to the de-pathologization discussion by moving passed it. In an inspiring introductory essay, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2014) calls for attention to the dialectical relationship between resistance and hegemony and encourages a de-pathologizig and de-exoticizig orientation in resistance studies that could potentially reveal the complexities and compromizig ambivalence of resistance. Towards the end of his essay he asks 'How do local actors deal with the unfinished status of resistance?' I argue that the case of Exarcheia introduces a kind of resistance whose very aim is to remain unfinished and whose point is therefore not momentum but repetition. I acknowledge the danger of

romanticizing street riots when interrogating them within an already romanticized resistance past. Yet at the same time, I argue that the risk is worth taking, for it would have been ethnographically negligent to view báhala as isolated, ahistorical phenomena. Báhala and the 'revolutionary workout' they provide, ought to be studied through their historical specificities and local particularities.

Participation in the báhala is what affords the bodies of young rioters intimacy with the street and familiarization with insurrectional politics. The 'arms' remain by their 'feet' (whether they see them or not) through the repetition of riots, protests, commemorative marches, committee gatherings, the know-how of molotov-making, squatting, social centres and horizontal forms of organization that, in their united whole constitute the material and technical substructure of a potential revolution that brews and simmers in Exarcheia.

I further suggest that the use of the word 'Epitafios' by my interlocutors in a secular non-Christian context, although aimed to signify the lack of fervour during the commemorative march for Alexis and likely reflected some of my discussants scorn towards Christian Orthodox religious practices, it also carried in its religious denotation an element of 'sacredness'. Its annual repetition that seeks to remind, (re)produces 'the sacred', namely the movement's iconic heroes, who had become increasingly scarce after the fall of the dictatorship. It maintains a sense of community and belonging – albeit ephemeral – and creates a sense of continuity where the names of past generations are preserved in the social and spatial landscape (cf. Kenna 2015). Post-1974 the unknown 'laughing boy' *(to gelasto paidi)* at the crushed gate of the Polytechnic came to represent all the heroic students who took part in the rebellion against the Junta. Just over a decade later, Michalis Kaltezas would be shot by a policeman in Exarcheia during a demonstration, but his death did not precipitate large-scale riots and his name remained relatively unknown outside leftist and anti-authoritarian circles. As Loukas recalled:

> The reaction to the death of Kaltezas is incomparable to what happened after Grigoropoulos was killed. The response to Kaltezas' killing was much more isolated, and the rioters did not have any specific demands. People saw that something terrible happened, and yes, there were some marches, conflicts, and building occupations … What happened to Kaltezas produced a politicised generation of leftists, but things were different back then. 1985 had a different political climate. There were some dominant leftist organisations; the youth was politicised, and anarchists were more politicised and less nihilistic.

It was the large-scale and violent nature of the riots of December 6 that saw Alexandros Grigoropoulos acquiring a place as *the* dead of the movement *(O nekros tou kinimatos)*. His death lifted the veil of disillusionment, ignited anew the anger and disenchantment towards the socio-economic and political status quo and resurrected the memories of other heroes of the Left, like Kaltezas, who then became more widely known. Like the Epitafios, Alexis's commemorative march is a ritual, albeit a secular one. Its repetition emanates an aura of spectrality, reviving ghosts that break the country's blissful forgetfulness. Thus, as political performatives, these commemorative marches-as- processions (litanies) and the báhala, function as the connective elements that allow for cohesion and continuity within the Left and its offshoot movements. Their reiteration enables participating actors to faithfully pursue and sustain the ethic of the struggles.

Beyond the báhala: a matter of authenticity or a matter of practice?

In this paper I have looked at a twofold pathologization of the street riots in Exarcheia. The first one, put forward by mainstream media and consecutive governments, has since the 1980s defined báhala and bahalákides as a symptom of the so-called Exarcheia problem – that is, Exarcheia's stubborn existence on the Athenian grid as an immoral topography that harbours crime and dissidence. At the same time, pathologizig discourses took the form of trivialization and came from interlocutors who had once embraced Exarcheia as an ideological space and who now feel disenchanted. These discussants locate the neighbourhood's 'malady' in a sense of inauthenticity emerging from the banal repetition of street mobilizations. The majority of my interlocutors perceived the báhala as meaningless street acts, void of political purpose and, by consequence, counterproductive. The báhala were deemed apolitical and apoliticizig, for they had the potency to diminish Exarcheia's political affectivity and incite feelings of discontent and disenchantment that often spilt over into scorn. Discussions regarding the apolitical nature of the báhala signified the general apoliticization of Exarcheia, a once emically defined meaningful political space.

Yet, I argue that despite its rapid gentrification, Exarcheia still manages to preserve its leftist legacy. Today, the neighbourhood's history is still imprinted on its urban landscape. Its walls are covered in murals, posters, banners and graffiti bearing anarchist slogans evoking the Civil War, the Polytechnic Uprising, denouncing capitalism, patriarchy, consumerism and state violence. Its materiality still succeeds in narrating and *reiterating* pedestrians a particular historical narrative. Along with these material mnemonic devices, I argue that street mobilizations constitute the corporeal dimension of a multidimensional process of remembering.

Without disregarding my discussants' perceptions, I proposed a parallel reading of the báhala: one that contributes to and exceeds the de-pathologization discussion and one that does not contradict but simply puts aside the importance of the authenticity of political subjectivities. My argument in this paper centres on the deeper historical and political signification of the báhala that in my opinion transcends the individual intentions of the rioting subject. In other words, whether the latter is or isn't aware of these historical and political significations is not what is at stake here for it does not negate the fact that the báhala as a collective askesis engage participants in a process of subjectivization tied to a particular historical epoch I have argued that rather than performances, the báhala and the commemorative marches are political performatives that in their ritualistic, banal repetition, teach performers how to enact the partisan logic of the streets whilst preserving the historical and ethical legacy of the Struggles of the Greek Left.

When viewed as forms of revolutionary practice, the 'staged' quality of protests is not to be assessed according to their perceived 'degree' of authenticity but rather with reference to their instructive and preparatory nature. From this perspective, their 'authenticity', lack of vigour or outcome is deemed irrelevant, for their potency lies in their recurring execution. In turn, their reiteration affirms the archival properties of Exarcheia. As modes of revolutionary exercise, báhala and other collective modes of mobilization constitute part of the Exarcheian archival politics, for they are potent in their evocation of an unforgotten civil war, whose lingering emotive quality continues to imbue and inform the collective political identity of leftists in Greece. They are part of a politics of anticipation

and reflect a shared sentiment born out of an unconsummated political desire, the harbour of which is Exarcheia.

Notes

1. Acronym for *Antiexousiastiki Kinisi* (Anti-Authoritarian Current). AK is a political network of anarchists and anti-authoritarians dispersed throughout Greece who advocate and operate upon the principles of direct democracy and horizontal organization. They tend to advocate permanent forms of resistance and anarchist praxis. For more see Apoifis (2016).
2. A quite well-known autonomous social centre that was at the time the main meeting point of the Anti-Authoritarian Current.
3. Acronym for *Ethnikó Apeleftherotikó Métopo* (National Liberation Front). EAM was the main resistance organization during Greece's Nazi occupation. Although its main driving force was the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) it was in fact an alliance of several leftist and republican groups.
4. Such totalizig tropes presenting protesters as adolescents whose rebellious acts are not to be taken seriously have also been noted by Kalantzis (2015) when he discusses the anti-austerity protests outside the Greek Parliament in February 2012, although in that context the infantilizig assistance acquires a literal sense in the presence a protester's mother who is handing him a T-shirt as he is fervently demonstrating in front of the police.
5. Radical leftist SYRIZA was the only party in parliament that supported the youth rebellion of 2008 following the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos and was therefore openly accused by parties across the political spectrum for 'patting rioters on the back'. When SYRIZA came to power it was accused by the loyal opposition of protecting and nurturing criminals'.
6. A reference to philosopher Jean Baudrillard whose life's work assesses how a traditional world has been gradually substituted by a simulation. In this case, Aris' pessimism converses with Kalantzis' Sfakians whose accounts the author also describes as Baudrillardian to denote their intense criticism of modernity's shallowness and their nostalgia for a simpler, more authentic past.
7. For instance: 'Once partisans, always partisans', 'End to Varkiza'. In Greek: 'Κάποτε αντάρτες, πάντοτε αντάρτες', 'Τέλος στη Βάρκιζα'.

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