
Introduction—Greek Crisis and Inequalities: Anthropological Views

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This Special Issue titled *Greek Crisis and Inequalities: Anthropological Views*, published as Supplement 5 to *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, springs from the Conference on ‘Urban Inequalities: Ethnographic Insights’, held in Corinth in June 2019 and organized by the International Urban Symposium in collaboration with the IUAES Commission on Urban Anthropology and the University of the Peloponnese, and endorsed by City University of London.¹

The experience of uncertainty during the economic crisis which continues under the cloak of Covid-19 is the subject of this Special Issue. Specifically, this collective effort is about the ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1977) of ordinary people who, by being caught in the whirlpool of the economic crisis, have inadvertently and unwittingly been moved from one relatively security context to a harsh, anti-social and rigid regime of constant insecurity and uncertainty. This regime includes a large number of men and women, indigenous and immigrants, who although may once have ‘somehow been successful’, currently work, mentally or manually, either under flexible terms of employment, occasionally in rotation, or seasonally, formally or informally, or are unemployed, low-income and uninsured. In the current fashionable terminology, they are classified as *precariat*; they are those whom Marx (2010) identified as a reserve labour army, emphasizing that their existence is the means of production and reproduction of the existing dominant system. In this light, the contributions that follow concern neither soulless numbers and statistical correlations nor the explanation of economic crisis on which much has been said (Amin 2013, Spyridakis 2018). They deal with agents whose life trajectories have been negatively affected by the crisis. Hence, the discussions do not concern an essentialized situation but an analytical category; they unravel a dynamic process of transition to a different mode of existence which is also a framework for those who are about to enter a similar path of social degradation. In other words, the contributions offered here focus on the lives of a social category whose emergence is not a new historical event, but whose rapid increase tragically reminds us that, ‘all that is solid melts into air’.

These dynamics take place in a context of high unemployment, of widespread social inequality and insecurity being legitimated as state of emergency (Pardo and Prato 2018), where actors do not have the opportunity to plan their future, being deprived of options for dealing with the difficult condition of their lives. In addition, they are forced to accept unstable employment regimes, inadvertently endangering the process of their social reproduction,

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forcing them to enter social programmes aimed more at appeasing their dissatisfaction than at overcoming the crisis trap.

Specific emphasis is given, here, to the way in which agents who have entered the insecurity context, perceive their position, their subjectivity and their orientation in it. In other words, at the epicentre of these articles lies an interest about the way in which reality is made conscious and understood by the actors, who in turn actively react upon it (Bruner 1986). This is of utmost significance since, as Willis and Trondman put it (2000: 7), the emphasis on lived experience provides the opportunity critically to transcend super-structural and super-theorized approaches to the human condition leading to a reflective understanding of social knowledge through the voice of actors as they experience the conditions of their existence.

In this sense, the contributions that follow focus on the facts of a perpetual condition of liminality in a post-Keynesian, post-industrial context where people have been forced to leave in symbolic and real terms their former roles and positions, following a process of destabilization characterized by feelings of ambiguity and confusion. Vulnerability is a central component of this path. As has been argued elsewhere (Spyridakis 2013), those embedded in the context of a neoliberal fundamentalism that facilitates a negative social inclusion, deregulated labour relations and easy redundancies, are gradually becoming vulnerable social beings entering fragile social relationships (Castel 2000) that threaten not only their material survival but also their identity and entire lives. Trapped into a situation determined by distant economic power structures and pedagogical political technologies supporting the lesser social protection in favour of a new ‘invisible hand’, precarious people seem powerless to defend themselves and are led into a ‘grey area’ in terms of identity and material life. This reversal of the ‘unintended’ effects of Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ brings to mind Pardo and Prato’s point (2021: 9) that, according to Smith, people’s economic choices — based on the realisation that cooperation with others is in their self-interest — can constitute ‘*an invisible hand*’ that promote the public good as an ‘unintended’ consequence of those choices. However, in their Introduction to the book that originated in the aforementioned Corinth conference, Pardo and Prato also point out another aspect of Smith’s theory which seems particularly relevant in today’s world; specifically, the danger that ‘large bureaucratic forms of government [...] would generate further poverty’ (2021:10). In such a context, they note, ‘politicians, bureaucrats, regulators, those who exercise legal force have their defined goals which they pursue through legal coercion; [...] In so doing the government affects the “invisible hand”, not the other way around [...] Contemporary neoliberalism and the attendant market deregulation do indeed need a supporting political apparatus that attempts to impose trendy, or “smart” templates to empirically different situations.’ (Pardo and Prato 2021: 11).

Neoliberal ideas have become the mainstream policy model across the E.U. The economy is increasingly cut off from social needs and citizenship and is gradually being integrated into a myopic, cost-benefit set-up where the main philosophy of ‘corrective’ interventions is guided by a theological belief that unhindered markets distribute goods, services and happiness more efficiently (Kwak 2017). Pardo and Prato (2021: 6-7) suggest that in ‘a global scenario vastly

marred by the gap between citizens and governance' it has become particularly relevant and urgent to address empirically the diverse forms of 'inequalities, their production and entrenchment, and the legislative and executive performances that go with them', asking what 'necessary (Lukes 1991: 31-32) balance between ideological interventionism and indiscriminate liberalism' (Pardo and Prato 2021:7) could be achieved for the benefit of society. Precarious entities are not only placed in the middle of the complex relationship between the local and the global but are also experience the catastrophic effects associated with structural adjustment programmes and restrictions on public spending. From an anthropological point of view, the work of Paul Durrenberger and Judith Martí (2006: 12-16) showed the negative burdens that the philosophy of this model has placed on the underprivileged's backs. Following this line of argument, the ethnographies in this Special Issue show that agents have been deprived of alternatives that could 're-insert' them in society, ironically recalling similar 'interventions' in eighteenth century England in the form of Enclosure Acts.

Being that as it may, this condition needs to be read against the awkward relationship between dominant political decisions and the management by those affected by them, which depends on the gradual revision and rearrangement of both social rights and the notion of citizenship. In this view, it is important to keep in mind that citizenship takes place in a context where, as Pardo and Prato aptly noted (2010: 12-18), people experience the structural transformations of power and welfare state in the western world. This process influences national public policies aiming at implementing and reproducing specific ideological visions for the world through their decisions. For Comaroff and Comaroff (2000: 302), this situation stems from a global process of de-nationalization and internationalization of production, which: 1) undermines the ability of states to maintain their economic systems, rendering obsolete wages and their negotiation; 2) undermines domestic production by encouraging the reduction of labour costs through the flexibility of labour relations and the recruitment of cheap labour; 3) broadens the gap between poor and prosperous regions; and 4) pushes workers to compete with each other in a context of minimal protection. At the same time, the state is gradually losing its power by becoming involved in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, it must support and protect the logic of the market on which it depends; on the other hand, it must prove that it shields democracy by protecting the principles of equality and participation in the democratic process. However, this seems to be both a difficult equation and the main reason for the exercise of smart social regulations through the art of governing precarious bodies (Shore and Wright 1997). Recent anthropological reflection on state sovereignty and the 'dangers of processes that make the nation-state a secondary player under outside forces' (Pardo and Prato 2010: 3) recognizes that in the European context 'this problematic is complicated by national political establishments' implementing ever-increasing casuistic regulation in the context of a bureaucratically-minded EU centralizing strategy.' (Pardo and Prato 2010: 3; see also Prato 2010: 133 n.2 and 141).

Yet, this picture is not totally black. As the ethnographic material on the Greek crisis suggests, agents strive to expand the scope of their action in order to improve their position.

Hence, the articles converge to capture people's actions in 'managing their existence' — in the sense originally defined by Pardo (1996) — in a very anti-social context. Pardo's analysis of 'the relationship between objective conditions of restriction and inequality and actors' ability to negotiate these conditions' (1996: 18) has shown how people's 'modes of behaviour and thought draws on *strong continuous interaction* between tangible aspects of existence and symbolic, moral and spiritual aspects', arguing that 'this interaction marks people's ability to explain their own lives, negotiate "risky" choices [...], and construct a sense of fulfilment and self-worth.' (1966: 11). This concept lies at the heart of anthropological scrutiny, taking into account that people are not structurally defined puppets but entities with ideas, dreams and actions orientations.

In this light, Theodoros Fouskas and George Koulierakis' focus on the social discourse on the repercussions of migration in Greek society in an attempt to demystify negative perceptions, stereotypes and myths regarding immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in urban localities. The perceptions of, and practices towards, migrants and refugees in Greece have been characterized by a strong contradiction. On the one hand, as in other European countries, the social discourse on solidarity, support and humanitarianism is widespread; on the other hand, often described as 'scruffy and dirty', migrants and refugees have often been seen as 'unwanted individuals or a threat', as a 'health time-bomb', 'criminals', 'dangerous', 'terrorists' — individuals who 'alter the homogeneity of the host country', who are 'uneducated, uncultured not wanting to attend schools', who 'take the jobs of native-born workers', who are 'responsible for the downgrading of various urban areas'. The social discourse in Europe and Greece ignores the role and contributions of third country nationals to the advancement of the receiving societies. In addition, the literature focuses almost exclusively on the social effects of migration in receiving countries and societies, disregarding the repercussions of migration on the migrant and the refugee.

Konstantina Bada examines the social dimensions of the museum as a cultural institution. In the context of modern cities and of major social inequalities and exclusions, her article considers the extent to which museums can contribute to building democratic and progressive societies. Indeed, numerous museums either make promises of, or directly engage in, practices that promote respect for diversity, equality, accessibility and the idea of social inclusion. In this, they appear to contradict the rationale that develops cities as places dedicated to the exclusive cultivation of relations of power, inequality and social exclusion. At the same time, the tendency towards the commercialization of museum collections and activities, as well as the growth of the cultural economy, are becoming increasingly visible. This results in the exclusion of many social groups from access to and participation in museum activities. It is, however worth noting that a new tendency is emerging, coming from people who experience social exclusion, inequality and marginalization (the homeless, the immigrants and the poor). This tendency is about developing 'alternative museum sites', hangouts and projects where material items, experiences and oral testimonies are gathered and exhibited. Taken together, these activities

cultivate a feeling of belonging and community, particularly in multi-ethnic and economically marginalized regions.

Georgios Kouzas' contribution is about women street vendors working in the centre of Athens, where they sell products, usually of their own production, like food or crafts, including aprons, socks and knitted sweaters. Most of these street vendors are in a borderline state, as they lack a formal trader license. This is why they either sell their products alone on street corners, so that they can run away if needed, or at the 'fringes' of street markets, including the central market in Athens, so that their presence does not 'bother' licensed traders. Kouzas focuses, a) on the problems with which women street vendors deal daily, selling products 'informally'; b) on their strategies; and c) on the significance of their gender in this context.

Panayiotis Gouveris addresses the ways by which divorced parents manage their children's health. He looks at examples of high-conflict divorces in the context of the current debt crisis in Greece. He concludes with a description of medical child abuse: parents who neglect the real needs of their children in order to acquire or maintain parental authority. At the same time, Gouveris describes the inability of the Greek courts to accept a model of joint custody that would eliminate gender and family inequalities.

Maria Panteleou suggests that the labour and economic precarity that plagues the majority of migrants in the modern globalized world should be seen in the light of past cultural strategies. She argues that the strategies that migrants have employed in order to face similar challenges during their initial movement in countries of destination should be examined in conjunction with current strategies. This approach highlights the continuities and the transformations in the ways of responding to diverse 'crises'. The case study of Albanian migrants who work 'seasonally' in Corinth and live in the wider region of Corinth shows how they handle their social networks. They currently shun the Albanian social networks that have helped them to find a job in Greece in the 1990s because they see them as potential competitors. They still use the logic of networking in relationships but now they engage with Greek regional employers using the connections that they have developed among these employers. The latter activate their own network of 'acquaintances' with other employers, thus allowing Albanian migrants to work in a variety of spatial contexts. So, migrants face modern economic and labour challenges by transforming their own cultural strategies.

Giorgos Bithymitris and Orestis Papadopoulos address liminality in the making, as manifested by traineeships in the Greek tourism sector. Drawing on a body of ethnographic material collected between 2016 and 2017, they examine the experiences of young trainees in tourism-related enterprises in a national context of mild economic recovery. Their primary focus is on the impact of the selected training scheme on the trainees' self-image and their perceptions of work, occupation and careers in the tourism sector, the so-called heavy industry of the Greek economy. Their findings suggest that instead of enjoying a meaningful and inspiring career path, the actors learn to live in and in-between transient states for long periods of time as they prepare to navigate a deregulated labour market. Through the lens of liminality, they aim to develop a complex understanding of the unsettling and disruptive condition that

pertains to the threshold position of informants, to the transient spatial-temporal characteristics of Continuing Education and to aspects of the transformations and transitions that have shaken Greek society and economy during the last decade.

Dimitris Yannakopoulos's article is about the rural area of Agrinio in western Greece, where monuments and infrastructures reveal the deep connection between land, people and the cultivation of tobacco. Although this cultivation has decreased since 2006, the uncertainty brought about by the economic crisis has now led people to turn, once again, to tobacco. Based on traditional economic practices, many tobacco-farmers sell their product by-passing both state intervention — that is, avoiding taxes — and the middlemen, who usually benefit the most. Using family ties, they produce and create networks through which they sell great amounts of raw tobacco maximizing profit. Field research conducted from 2015 to 2017 indicates that these people take advantage of a large culturally and socially informed consensus in the region regarding informality. Gaps between legality and legitimacy appear as a consequence of the absence of the state as a regulatory agency. The result is a livelihood based on the revalidation of old practices and the production of new local views of legitimacy, morality and value.

Finally, Maria Drakaki et al. address the hot issue of NEETs in the context of EU and of Greece especially. The paper initially focuses on the definitional issues and the theoretical insights concerning the socially vulnerable group of NEETs and the potential parameters of ending up a NEET. Further, the paper aims at bringing to the fore the regional dimension of the issue and focusing on the relation between youth unemployment and NEET rates. Additionally, based on a recent EEA-funded large-scale Project entitled “NEETs2”, it proceeds to the analysis of some of the key quantitative and qualitative findings regarding the impact of the multi-parametric economic recession on NEETs' and, in general, Youth's employability and life course in Greece, including evidence-based insights on their survival strategies and public trust.

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