

The lost sailors of Piraeus: crisis, racism and ordinary politics in a working-class Athens suburb

Lucile Gruntz

▶ **To cite this version:**

Lucile Gruntz. The lost sailors of Piraeus: crisis, racism and ordinary politics in a working-class Athens suburb. Justice spatiale = Spatial justice, 2015, Authoritarian spaces, (un)just spaces? 8, http://www.jssj.org/article/les-marins-perdus-du-piree-crise-racisme-et-politique-ordinaire-dans-une-banlieue-ouvriere-dathenes/. halshs-01508778

HAL Id: halshs-01508778
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01508778

Submitted on 14 Apr 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

8/2015

The lost sailors of Piraeus: crisis, racism and ordinary politics in a working-class Athens suburb.

Lucile Gruntz, Anthropologist, Postdoc at LPED-MuCEM
Illustrations by **Stephanos Mangriotis** , extracts of a video record in production, more information www.stephanosmangriotis.com

Abstract

In Athens since 2011, austerity policies have been accompanied by political violence from the extreme-right and the police. Immigrants are among the main targets, especially as very strict European border control policies have turned Greece into a gateway for migrants, both legal and illegal, and have strengthened national xenophobic policies founded in an essentialist conception of identity. Constituting "migrants" as a national problem also reflects the Greek state's authoritarian legacy. This article explores these phenomena through a socio-spatial lens, focusing on Keratsini, a working-class neighborhood in the western suburbs of Athens. Its particular political and migration history influences the mix of competition and violence in the relations between its Greek residents and immigrants – many of them Egyptians working in the fish sector – but also the existence of solidarity in response to the state's authoritarian practices and economic austerity.

Keywords: Migration, Greece, Egypt, Urban Anthropology

Between European supervision and "police dump":[1] the Greek state's authoritarian practices

A quiet neighbourhood?

Keratsini, November 2013. The neighbourhood does not gel with the chaotic image associated with the Greek capital. The maisonettes or two or three floor apartment houses, surrounded by neat gardens, form a maze of streets lined with orange trees.

[1] The expression is borrowed from the journal Vacarme, 2013, p. 32.

The barking of dogs competes with the singing of the caged birds on the balconies. The houses smell of iodine, a reminder of the industrial port nearby. A few men sip coffee on the terrace, while elderly women hurry to the market. This working-class neighbourhood in the western suburbs of Athens enjoyed relative anonymity until 17 September 2013, the date when zealots from the extreme right Golden Dawn party assassinated the antifascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas. The musician's death forced A. Samaras' Conservative government to take measures against Golden Dawn, as well as against the national police, accused of encouraging the party's abuses.

The murder had been preceded by numerous acts of racist violence, which elicited no reaction from the institutions responsible for public safety (Christopoulos 2014 p. 49; Mangriotis 2013). The neoliberal restructuring of the Greek economy implemented since the 1990s by the PASOK (social-democrat) and Nea Dimokratia (right) governing parties, then the austerity imposed by the Troika after 2011, were accompanied by rising media and state xenophobia, reinforced by Europe's border control system (Tsimouris 2014; Pillant 2013, p. 145). However, in Athens immigrants were not the only targets of government vendetta, police harassment and attacks from the extreme right. The implementation of austerity policies relied on a clampdown on public spaces and freedoms: demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins led to brutal repression by the "Delta" forces or the anti-riot "MAT", whereas other police groups concentrated on rounding up illegals (Athanasiou 2014, p 75).[2]

[2] In August 2012, the Greek government launched the cynically named Zeus Xenios – "hospitable God" – operation, which assigned a section of the police force to hunting down illegal immigrants.

Figure 1. Keratsini.



Spatial injustices and urban interstices at neighbourhood scale

After 2011, successive governments were faced with a proliferation of actions in protest against tenant evictions, real estate projects with the stench of corruption, budget cuts in public services and against police or neo-fascist violence. Demands relating to spatial factors were at the heart of the protests (Arampzati and Nicholls 2012). Until the parliamentary elections of January 2015, the government's response took the form of "austerity authoritarianism", characterised in particular by the use of emergency legislation to smash the protests, to lock up marginals and chase out foreigners (Stravakakis 2013, p. 113-116). To work on Athens therefore forces one to acknowledge the "unspoken authoritarianism *of* and *in* democracy, as if democracy

could not nurture within itself freedom-destroying security mechanisms for the control of the public arena" (Dabène, Geisser and Massardier 2008 p. 11).

In the course of this article, the consequences of these authoritarian methods of governing will be explored through Keratsini, through the attitudes of its residents to the state and to otherness. The aim is to look at "the crisis" under a microscope, in its migratory and spatial aspects. This remains an exploratory enterprise, since the time spent studying the neighbourhood was short. We will sketch the shifting contents and contexts of the boundaries between Egyptians and Greeks in Keratsini. The immigration control systems generate spatial injustices, which also arise out of the history of the suburbs, out of "inequalities which predate the crisis" (Vaiou 2013, p. 218). Inequalities in status, in treatment by institutions and by the police, in access to the legal labour market, between Egyptian "illegals" and Greek citizens,[3] take spatial forms, as reflected in the stories and pictures we collected.

Nonetheless, the social organization of space produces both inequalities and connections, even solidarity (Dufaux and Gervais-Lambony 2009). A place of control and surveillance, "the city is also a place of multiple timeframes, temporal interstices conducive to disappearances and the double game" (Retaillaud-Bajac 2008, p. 7). Here, the boundaries between legal and illegal, between citizen and unregistered immigrant, become blurred. In Keratsini, the significance of national identities temporarily gives way to a market transaction, a lunch invitation… Social relations change from one moment and place to another: while residential spaces may be segregated, workspaces are a place where Greeks and Egyptians can connect, transforming if only partially the way they work, and even the personal relations between them (Sintès 2010, p. 304).

We studied these swings of the pendulum in Keratsini during an ethno-photographic investigation conducted from mid-November to mid-December 2013.[4] Apart from the informal discussions with Greek residents, the studies were based on daily contact with a dozen young Egyptian men sharing rented accommodation in

[3] An illegal immigrant is understood here as someone who has broken Greek and European laws on entry and residence: lack of a visa and work permit, use of a fake identity…

[4] As part of the ECOMIG, IRD-STDF research programme, https://ecomig.wordpress.com/

Keratsini, as well as with some of their workmates and friends. Eight of the housemates came from the same village on the Alexandria coast, near the town of Damiette, and were directly or indirectly related. Often without valid residence permits, they make a living through buying fish wholesale and selling it door-to-door or in the markets, a right legally restricted to fish shop owners. Their living spaces reflect the problems of racism in Greece and the economic crisis, although the two do not necessarily go together.

Athens and Keratsini: centres of migration and of conflict

From refugees (*prosfiges*) to immigrants (*metanastes*)

Despite the closed borders encouraged by European integration, Greek society has long been a crossroads. Regardless of the claims put forward by advocates of the Hellenic nation's cultural immutability, Athens has been shaped by past and present migrations (Parsanoglou 2009). "But here, by contrast with the big Western European centres of immigration, no ethnic neighbourhoods, no ghettos" (Sintès 2002): Athenian neighbourhoods remain socially diverse (Maloutas 2010). Like the rest of the capital, Keratsini is a place of transit and settlement, especially as the nearby port represents a mine of formal and informal jobs for immigrants, old and new, mostly Albanian and Egyptian.

The migratory history of Piraeus has left its traces in the walls and in memories. The current layout of the neighbourhood owes much to the massive influx of "refugees" (*prosfiges)* from Asia Minor, following the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1923. Their arrival shaped the working-class suburbs, where family and neighbours still represent more effective sources of solidarity than public social aid via the bureaucracy (Vaiou 2002). Keratsini is a former shanty town, built and improved by its residents. The *prosfiges* formed family groups there, alongside the workers attracted by the industrialisation of the port of Piraeus in the 1930s. The *prosfiges* generation was followed by the emigrant generation: in the 1960s and 1970s, many residents went to work in Western Europe, like Kostas' father, a miner in Saint-Etienne in that era (discussion, 21 November).

The shared experience of being uprooted, of getting by, and of working life in the port, contributed to the development of communist sympathies in the 1930s and dissident attitudes (Nazloglou 2014). The *prosfiges* neighbourhoods were fertile ground for the "cafés amans" with their *smyrneika* (songs from Asia Minor), whose Ottoman sounds and ribald themes ran counter to the vision of classical Greek identity promoted by successive authoritarian regimes (Anagnostou 2014). As in the capital's other red districts, the support the inhabitants of Piraeus gave to the National Popular Resistance Army (ELAS) during the Second World War, which became the Democratic Army of Greece (DES) in the Civil War (Fontaine 2012 p. 80), generated a sense of alienation from the state. Yet the crisis would seem to have turned the old leftist, immigrant neighbourhood of Keratsini, into a cradle of racist and far-right violence: the reality is that both pictures are a simplification.

Sharpened by photography, attention to local details brings a more nuanced view. As in the rest of the capital, the crisis has left a spatial mark. Shops and restaurants closed through bankruptcy, cars abandoned for lack of affordable fuel, bitter haggling over market prices, queues at the banks on the first Monday of the month, as residents wait for their pensions or salaries… All these are visible clues to the impoverishment of the neighbourhood, to the end of the consumerist dream that emerged in the 1980s and was buried after 2008 (Chatzidakis 2014). Job opportunities have been reduced by the relocation of the shipyards and the privatisation of the port. In the absence of work, young people are leaving the district to go abroad. Seen through the prism of the crisis, Keratsini gives the impression of a relentless loss of energy.

However, the apathy and despair give place to humour and memories in day-to-day conversations fuelled by *tsipouro*.[5] The past re-emerges, casting a critical or supportive light on the present. Memories go back to times even leaner than today. "It's okay, we haven't yet resorted to eating roots, like we did in the famine of 1947", jokes Marika, our landlady, during a copious lunch, reacting to her husband's anxious expression, as he worries about the shortage of money for Christmas (discussion, 30

[5] A grape-based spirit.

November)… Past and present conflicts mirror each other: the Z [from *zi,* "he lives"] pasted on the lampposts in 2013 in tribute to P. Fyssas recall those drawn on the walls of Thessaloniki after the assassination of the left-wing MP G. Lambrakis in 1963.[6] The physical spaces bear witness to the vitality of past and present struggles: the walls are daubed with Golden Dawn, Communist Party (KKE) or anti-fascist graffiti, Greek flags hang from the balconies alongside the birdcages, while in the markets bomber jacketed heavies hound the blue delivery trikes of the Egyptian fish sellers.

Although their presence is visible both in places and in interactions, the faultlines formed in nationalist myths by the settlement of generations of immigrants and the neighbourhood's political history are fragile. While it would be reductive to compare Keratsini with an urban Wild West taken over by the extreme right, the socio-spatial boundaries there are tangible. The rest of this article will look at these boundaries and their permeabilities through the contingencies of an everyday experience marked by the crisis and by racist violence.

[6] By order of the police under the Conservative government of C. Caramanlis.

Figure 2. A Golden Dawn flag flutters from a lamppost near the industrial port between Keratsini and Perama.



Figure 3. Translations of the graffiti on the neighbourhood walls (from left to right): "Immortal Golden Dawn", "Golden Dawn, tough guys", "G.D (Golden Dawn), Greece", "Foreigners out".



To live happy, live hidden: immigrant routines in Keratsini

Crossing the sea only to drown in red tape

Greece is a favourite work destination for Egyptian fishermen. One of the traces left by a long history of two-way migration is the quotas that still today favour Egyptian workers in the Greek maritime sector. While allowed to come to Greece, Egyptians are supposed to stick to seasonal work and maritime professions. However, in Egypt, the number of people wanting to leave for Europe is increasing, despite the Kafkaesque obstacles to legal travel. In Keratsini, while a number of fishermen and sailors who arrived 30 years or so ago have been able to obtain long-term residence permits and legally to become fishmongers, the more recent arrivals amongst their compatriots are obliged to stay underground.

Of the ten housemates we spent time with, only one fisherman, aged around 60, was in Greece with a valid visa as a seasonal worker. All the others were either "boat people", who crossed the Mediterranean in fishing boats or dinghies, or former sailors who swam ashore. Coming from a coastal village, they know the sea and the local people traffickers. The trip cost them "only" 15,000 Egyptian pounds (€1663), compared with the standard 50,000. Even those with close family in Greece are required to stay under cover because of the closure of Europe's Mediterranean border. Farid, for example, a 19-year-old neighbour and friend of the housemates, was refused a tourist visa by the Greek consulate in Alexandria, although his father has been a fishmonger in Athens for more than 20 years. Farid made four clandestine attempts to cross, one of which almost cost him his life at the age of 17, before managing to join his father (interview, 11 December).

Even for seasoned sailors, the trip is a challenge. The sea is the first of the spaces of migration that makes the immigrant a vulnerable body. Hadi, one of the housemates, a sad and gentle 27-year-old, tells of engine failure at sea, hunger and thirst, the closeness of death. His relationship to Greece was affected by the experience:

"As soon as I arrived, on the first day, I regretted it, regretted it… After all I saw on the journey, when we crossed the sea, I regretted it… But that's life, those were the circumstances. That's how life is, the way things have to be…" (Interview, nine December).

Having braved the sea, the next challenge is to live under cover. Photography draws the eye to the way events are translated in space. Here as elsewhere, the administrative and police control of space helps to confine immigrants to a working function and an illegitimate presence (Bristol-Rhys 2012). However, the experience of the city cannot be reduced to the boundaries between identities. The urban rhythms and practices of citydwellers divide the city into areas that are dangerous for illegals and areas where they can go, either because community privacy gives a sense of security, or because they act as a medium for social relations that break down the barrier between citizens and foreigners. Thus "living as an illegal is always a situated experience, limited to specific places, times and interrelations" (Retaillaud-Bajac 2008, p. 10).

Since the implementation of the national immigration policy in the 1990s, and even more so since the country became part of the Schengen area, possibilities for regularisation have been restricted in Greece (Sintès 2010, Chapter 2). Today, filing an asylum application seems to have become the main way of obtaining permission to stay, even in the form of a temporary receipt. Some acquire them through a grapevine of corrupt lawyers. Others file a void asylum application by paying €2500 to an official at the Central Bureau of Foreigners, called the "*allodhapone*" by the housemates, in reference to the Greek term for foreigners from outside the EU .[7] For those without money, the other option is support from activist or humanitarian organisations, limited by the various restrictive provisions of the laws. For example, while in detention at Perama police station, Ragab, one of the Egyptian housemates, a shy young man with big nervous eyes, approached an Athenian NGO, whose members told him that they could do nothing for him unless he had assassinated someone or was in danger of death in Egypt. "What kind of country is this where to get papers it is better to have killed a man then simply to have come to work?" he asked one day when we went with him to the "*allodhapone*" to try to arrange a meeting (discussion, 2 December).

For the migrants, the only access to the central office is a gate at the back of the building. The main entrance is only for people who work there. In front of the gate, a crowd jostles in the muddy street. Some squeeze under a bicycle shelter to avoid the December rain. Next to a shack serving coffee, a board displays instructions in Greek, English, Urdu and Arabic. From time to time, a policeman shouts out a mispronounced name, summoning someone inside. The others endure patiently, deaf to the approaches of a swindler offering to get them in without an appointment, within sight and hearing of the police. The whole scene gives a grimy impression of despair and arbitrariness. Legal domination and theatrical contempt go together: the law excludes, police and bureaucrats humiliate. The coercive dimension of the attribution of identity in Europe's nation states is palpable (Noiriel

[7] We retain the expression used by our interviewees to refer to the place, although it is linguistically wrong.

2001 p. 387). It continues within the building, where police officers monitor the doings and gestures of the applicants – and of the officials handling applications. Moreover, outside the "*allodhapone*", bureaucracy hinders the renewal of residence permits, which are conditional on the payment of a social security contribution corresponding to 300 days of declared work per year. Since moonlighting and temporary contracts are endemic, the requirement is unrealistic, whether for immigrant or Greek workers. A clandestine existence becomes a shared experience, except that for foreigners it comes with the risk of arrest. All of Ragab's housemates have experienced administrative arrest, either at a detention centre or in a police station (Pillant 2013). They have often resorted to bribery to get out, €1500 per detainee, anything rather than be locked up (Del Biaggio, Campi 2013). Housemates call the prison "Switzerland", to downplay the stigma of incarceration. Like the crossing, the experience of imprisonment damages the relationship to Greek society. "When I was in 'Switzerland', I felt that everything was upside down, that life was changing around... and that's what prompted me to come back quickly, you see", explains Farès, who was locked up in Petrou Ralli detention centre for 32 days, getting out by simulating an infectious disease, with the complicity of a Greek doctor. Once freed, he applied for asylum and obtained a receipt, the much coveted "red card" (discussion, 30 November).

Work, sleep, fascist creeps: the risks of the job

When we meet the housemates for the first time at home, Muntaser, one of the most talkative of them, explains with a tired grimace that we can come to see them every day, because "[we] are always at the flat after work... Life here is work and sleep" (discussion, 22 November). There are ten of them, sharing three adjacent apartments. Sunday is the only day off they take. The decor is dark, the walls flaking, the furniture ageless. The courtyard, piled with empty polystyrene boxes, retains the dampness of winter. There are Arabic graffiti, the names of the children of the previous occupants. In the biggest of the apartments, the living room is a meeting place for neighbours and friends, with a TV tuned to the Arabic channels. A small corridor occupied by a

dirty cooker leads from the kitchen to the toilets. The housemates share the household chores and charges. The rent is quite high, the landlord a compatriot who has been in Keratsini for three decades. The house is the nucleus of the young men's lives in Greece: most only leave it to walk the ten minutes to the central fish hall in the port, before doing their daily round on the delivery trike in the streets and markets of Piraeus.

At the fish auction, the gate is very loosely guarded: following our host, we pass through it unhindered one morning before dawn. The inside of the auction hall echoes with shouts in Greek, Albanian and Arabic. Of the hundred or so sellers and buyers, Greeks, Albanians and Egyptians are present in equal numbers, wrapped in heavy work clothes. The few women present serve coffee or keep the accounts. Unloaded from the trawlers just in from a night's fishing, the boxes of fish are strewn over the floor, spreading icy water that seeps into one's shoes. The Egyptian fishmongers hand fake permits to the street sellers, including the small band of housemates, so that they can buy at wholesale prices. The bargaining is sometimes heated, although all the nationalities seem to be on an equal footing. Once the fish has been bought and packed, the buyers return to their apartment when the sky is just beginning to lighten. Hadi recites the summary of his days, similar for all the housemates:

"Um, I go down to the wholesale market at 5 am, finish there around 7, then go home for breakfast. Then I pick up the fish at around 8:30 am and go and sell in the street… I do a bit of a round with my fish, then around 1 pm I go to the market, when the people… um… when the Greeks who work with fish have finished selling. Then, I stay until the end. After that, I go home, clean my gear, have a wash. Then, I prepare lunch, I eat and I stay there… With my friends,, you know, my housemates. After that, we prepare dinner, we eat, we spend the evening and we go to bed. So that's the day, from beginning to end" (interview, nine December).

Figure 4. Hadi takes a break on the dock before going back to the hubbub of the auction hall. The Egyptian trawler crews unload the catch at night. The cold is intense, the men half asleep.



This well oiled routine is punctuated by the "game of cat and mouse" between the Egyptian fish sellers and the police, in particular on the markets, where they do not have a permit to sell (discussion, 26 November). The crisis has changed the relationship between police and street sellers: as Sarah Green notes, the comedy of "I chase you off, you come back" has become serious insofar as catching foreigners has become a government priority (2014 p. 59). The police are not the only ones to take it seriously: in Keratsini as in the rest of Athens, they are supported by and give support to Golden Dawn sympathisers. Alerted by people working in private security firms, Golden Dawn members come to the markets to force the Egyptian fish sellers

out. Even legal immigrants are targeted. Ramadan, the only one of the housemates to work officially, describes an argument with a policeman disappointed to find that his papers are in order, who threatened to call Golden Dawn to beat him up. Ramadan had replied: "I have a residence permit, and you are supposed to protect me, protect my rights!" (Discussion, 21 November).

It is not just in the places where they were work that the Egyptian fish sellers are under pressure, but also in the street and at home. Farid, for example, has several times escaped threatened attacks by Golden Dawn motorcyclists when riding his delivery trike at night. With a touch of bravado, the youngster explains that this no longer bothers him, that he is used to escaping from them, now that he has got over the trauma of the attack on his father's house in June 2012. On that occasion, a competing fish seller and Golden Dawn sympathiser had encouraged a group of militants with a fire extinguisher and crowbar to attack the house that Farid was sharing with his father, his brother, his cousin and one of his paternal uncles. Asleep on the terrace, a fisherman friend of Farid suffered the worst of the brutal attack, being beaten almost to death. The young man had survived his injuries, and continues to fish of Keratsini, though he avoids spending too much time on land (interview, 11 December).

The attack on the fish seller's house strongly affected the Egyptian residents' relations to the different spaces in the neighbourhood. To begin with, Farid and his family moved from Perama to Keratsini, in the adjacent street to the housemates, all natives of the same village. Their former home has been abandoned. The episode left its mark on minds as well as places: first for Farid's father and uncle, who suddenly found themselves unwanted in the neighbourhood where they had lived for almost 30 years: "It was a dark [i.e. horrible] night… My father and uncle were very upset, psychologically. They wanted us to go back to Egypt…", recalls Farid. Apart from the direct victims, all the Egyptians in the neighbourhood identify "the night of Golden Dawn" as a turning point in their relationship to society. Hadi expresses it with an air of calm resignation:

"The attack, we all felt it… Afterwards we began to feel like foreigners, undesirables, to lose hope in life. Fear. Instability. A lot of things. It's a strange experience to feel all those things at the same time… Before, we didn't feel like that. We felt in exile, but only because we were far from our families, that's all… But once there is racism, once people start threatening you, then life becomes desperate, no question" (interview, 9 December).

As well as reinforcing the sense of being outsiders, racist attacks and the impossibility of relying on the public authorities support Ramadan's bitter conclusion that "Greeks have racism in their blood". Though qualifying atavism with economics, he adds that "they think that the crisis is the fault of immigrants" (discussion, 22 November). The fact is that the Greek labour market is segmented on the basis of nationality, which encourages xenophobia in a context where wage protection and job opportunities are being dismantled. In this respect, Greece in crisis differs little from other countries where neoliberalism and racism go hand in hand (Fassin and Fassin 2006).

From racism to solidarity: fragmented urban existences

"Racism in the blood": mirror-image cultural isolationism

The experience of violence cannot be ignored. The dialectic of exclusion/inclusion is striking (Barth 1995). Stigmatised as Egyptians, our contacts respond by playing up their despised nationality. Apart from the war of words, the use of fists is not ruled out, opening up cracks in a day-to-day experience smothered by concealment and racism. For example, insulted at the Friday market by a private security guard with links to Golden Dawn, Farès and Hadi are quick to bring out their scaling knives (interview, 3 December). Confrontations remain limited by the risk of police intervention. The fact that they are able to keep going in the market is because the Egyptian fish sellers have support there – of that later. Elsewhere in the city, they are exposed to spot checks.

The expectation of repression and the response to racist stigma drive community and domestic isolationism. During our stay, we sometimes went out of the neighbourhood with Hadi, Farès and Farid, who all have valid asylum request

receipts. Their less fortunate housemates refused. After a trip to the island of Salamina, Hadi enthusiastically commented:

- Yes, I've been wanting an outing for a long time. In fact, since I arrived… There are some beautiful places, but it's difficult to go there. At last, I've been!
- Why was it hard to go there?
- Well, this isn't my home… I don't know it, I don't know how to get there on my own.
- And with your Egyptian friends?
- Like… the… The atmosphere doesn't help… All my friends here have worries. If anyone is caught, he is likely to be thrown out. So we just go to work and that's all (interview, 9 December).

What makes community isolationism particularly effective as a rampart against racism, illegality and the "sword of Damocles of expulsion" (De Genova 2010) is that migration is organised with the support of village folk who have already emigrated. Social life is highly introverted. The TV is tuned to Arabic channels, the housemates cook Egyptian food, they shop for dry products from the local Egyptian grocery, go to pray with other Egyptians at the mosque set up in a nearby apartment, and only one speaks Greek. For his part, Hadi makes no effort to learn: "It has no appeal… I have no love for this country, it has no place in my heart… If I had liked it, I would have learned the language as soon as I arrived. But I didn't like it… So the words that I know in Greek have to do with work, nothing more" (interview, 9 December). As for his cousin Farès, who gets by better in Greek, he complains about the misunderstandings that he encounters with his Athenian friends:

- I'm not that keen on going out with Greeks, because their situation is different from mine and their system is different […] Their custom is to drink alcohol, so they want me to drink along with them… They say to me: "Come on, let's go and buy 10 euros worth of *mavro* (hashish), we can smoke all night…" I say that I don't want to because I have to work the next day… There is a difference, they don't work, young people here don't work… They don't work.
- Isn't that because there isn't any work?

- When it comes to it, if you want to work, you work, but they have no desire to work… Even in this country, if a person wants to work, he works (interview, 3 December).

The experience of racist violence, denunciation and police monitoring have replaced curiosity about Greece with mistrust… Or even, for Farès, with claims about the moral superiority of Egyptians: for him, Greeks are lazy.

Nonetheless, it is through work-related contacts that the immigrants we met managed to form strong social bonds in Keratsini. And conversely, it is through the refusal of this implacable work ethic that certain younger groups become estranged from their compatriots. Farid, for example, has fallen out with his father, who accuses him of not working or saving enough. Farid enjoys an evening out with friends who "see things the same way", knocking back beers and smoking joints. "I don't really think about leaving… I mean, I don't want to spend my time thinking about going back… I want to enjoy myself", the youngster argues (interview, 11 December). The conflict between Farid and his father picks up the observation made by Jean-François Bayart, that "there is a contradiction between the need to highlight the fundamental antagonism constitutive of every society (a need dictated both by the empirical observation of facts as well as by methodological or theoretical considerations), and the need to reflect the complexity of real situations" (1981 p. 76).

Figure 5. In the auction hall, Farès negotiates the price of a box of fish with a Greek wholesaler.



In other words, despite the brutality of the antagonism between police, fascists and immigrants, there is also dissension between younger and older Egyptians. In addition, the connections that develop between the inhabitants of Keratsini also need to be emphasised. Places acquire different meanings. While day-to-day or institutional racism reinforces identity boundaries, in the auction house, in the markets or in the houses, relations develop between Egyptian street sellers and impoverished Greek customers.

Learning to handle authority: neighbourhood solidarities

The confrontation with "austerity authoritarianism" generates responses from the Keratsini immigrants which the prism of domination cannot fully account for (Brekke 2014). These responses take different forms: the development of street smarts to deal with the need to stay under cover; relations of solidarity with the other residents; joint mobilisation against the racist and repressive practices of the Greek state.

In the course of their day-to-day wanderings, our interlocutors develop specific "spatial resources" (Ma Mung 1999), i.e. capacities to form lasting relations with colleagues and customers in their workplaces, which give them some protection from attacks and spot checks. For example, Farès is very fond of one of his elderly customers, a woman who frequently invites him to lunch. When her husband died, Farès had gone to offer his condolences, and she had hugged him "like a mother" (discussion, 30 November). Another of his customers had saved him from the police one day when he was in a violent fight with far-right activists at the market. At ten against one, even with the help of an Albanian colleague, Farès was in trouble. Aware that he had no papers, his customer drove him to his own house and looked after him, before the police could arrest him (in two, 3 December).

Figure 6. On the markets, elderly women are the Egyptian fish sellers' best customers.



Figure 7. Back at the flat after the morning's buying, two of the housemates sort through the boxes of fish in the courtyard.



The solidarity shown to the Egyptian sellers by their Greek customers is not a one-way street: the Egyptians also offer credit to their elderly customers, whose pensions fall with every budget cut. In this neighbourhood of former fishermen and sailors, having no fish to eat is a lack that is met by the role the immigrants play. Solidarity comes all the more easily in that estrangement from authority is a feature of their different histories. For the Egyptians, illegal activities are a habit they acquired before coming to Greece. Many were involved in maritime smuggling before crossing the Mediterranean. In Athens, drawing on effective community networks, they quickly learn other illegal practices, such as bribery, bypassing procedures, or even falsifying documents, in order to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles to settlement.

For the other residents, practices of solidarity are linked with services rendered, but also with the neighbourhood's working-class, migrant and political identity. Many locals respect the Egyptian immigrants' capacity for hard work, especially as they know the problems of working with fish, the restrictive hours and the permanent grime. Past migrations are also referred to: when we explain the subject of our research to Kostas, husband of our landlady Marika, he observes that "the Egyptians come to work here in the same way as our fathers went to work in France" (discussion, 26 November). Work creates bonds not only as a space of multinational social relations (Sintès 2010, Vaiou 2013), but also because of the representations associated with it, the histories it revives. For example, the memory of the decades of hounding of political opponents plays a role in the loathing the old residents feel towards the police and contemporary fascists (Athanassoupoulou 2005 p. 270). The crisis has resuscitated alienation from the state in urban or rural areas where it was the rule until the 1980s "democratic transition".

When "the state collapses, the neighbourhoods organise", according to the analysis by Orestis Chryssikopoulos, member of a residents collective in an Athenian neighbourhood with the past as "red" as Keratsini. In the ruins of a social state that never fully emerged, "grey areas develop, other methods of organisation and relations become possible" (2013 p.98). Without being formalised, the relations between Greeks and immigrants around the markets of Keratsini act as a political crucible. The precarious living conditions that Greek and foreign inhabitants share, and the violence they face, generate an oppositional attitude to the state, a shared recourse to illegal practices, or even collective action (Kotronaki and Seferiades 2013 p. 156). Alongside the unions, the left-wing parties KKE and Syriza, the few far-left collectives in Piraeus, and humanitarian organisations combating impoverishment and racism, Keratsini's Egyptian immigrants demonstrated several times in 2013 against racist attacks, in solidarity with the Syrian refugees, and then in memory of P. Fyssas.

The fact that the people of the area participate in these demonstrations does not mean that politics is beginning to dominate their existence. As regards the Egyptians

we met, it legitimises their presence in the city, but also allows them to enjoy a moment of leisure. The photos taken by Farid at a demonstration in support of Syrian refugees in April 2013 paint a clear picture: there are more shots of the group of housemates posing as crooners in front of Monastiraki fountain than of the march itself (discussion, 12 December). In any case, the moment of mobilisation does not erase the ambivalences of a day-to-day experience in which ordinary racism mixes with defence of immigrants, concern for impoverished pensioners with cultural isolationism. Politics lies in history, encounters, shared suffering and repression, in what Choukri Hmed identifies as a "radicalisation of day-to-day life and local relations" (2013 p. 803).

Conclusion: a sporadic presence

19 September 2014: a demonstration in memory of Pavlos Fyssas in Keratsini is violently repressed by the MAT and Delta forces, while black clothed agitators with shaven heads harass the crowd. 22 September 2014, a further racist attack takes place in Athens city centre.[8] The televised rhetoric of the Conservative government after the rapper's murder and the lull in civilian and police xenophobia in the winter of 2013-2014 (Vradis 2013) were over in Keratsini and in the rest of the city. Will Syriza's arrival in government signal reductions in police and far-right violence? For the moment, the jury is still out.

While racism increases the sense of exclusion and fear amongst the immigrants we met in winter 2013, working or neighbourly relations can give rise to solidarities which mitigate their emotional impact. As Nicolas Puig and Kamel Doraï note with regard to the experiences of immigrants and refugees relegated to the margins of near-eastern cities, "the practice of spatial boundaries also remodels the territories of the private sphere" (2011, p. 21). Farès sums it up admirably:

"In these last two years, I have changed, the difference is like between sky and earth. Sure you know what I mean… When you travel, you experience completely new stuff, you enter another society, you adapt to that system, I mean I've forgotten how to behave in Egypt,

[8] See the blog at http://atenecalling.org which references articles in Greek and Italian on these two events.

with whoever, about whatever, work, whatever… People need… People who leave need to understand…" (Interview, 3 December).

Between race and solidarity, the Egyptians of Keratsini live in the in-between world of *ghorba*, the feeling poorly conveyed by the word "exile", which expresses the emotional difficulty of "being here while thinking about there".

But *ghorba* is reversible: living and working in Keratsini, sharing a critical attitude to the authoritarian practices of the Greek state with the other residents of the neighbourhood, enjoying moments of day-to-day solidarity against the crisis… The experience leaves a lasting mark on bodies and minds. The spaces of life are a medium for encounters that generate changes that are private yet collectively experienced. From work to the street, spatialisation brings a more complex lens to bear on the representations of the Greek crisis and its impact on immigrants, one that reflects the ambivalences of city existences.

About the author : Lucile Gruntz Anthropologist, Postdoc at LPED-MuCEM

To quote this article: Lucile Gruntz, « The lost sailors of Piraeus: crisis, racism and ordinary politics in a working-class Athens suburb. » *justice spatiale | spatial justice*, n° 8 juillet 2015, http://www.jssj.org

Bibliography

Anagnostou, P., « Définir le peuple et sa musique : les débats sur le *rebetiko* dans la presse de gauche pendant et après la guerre civile grecque (1946-1961) », *Transposition*, n° 4, 2014, en ligne sur http://transposition.revues.org/969

Arampzati, A., Nicholls, W., "The urban roots of anti-neoliberal social movements: the case of Athens, Greece", *Environment and Planning*, vol. 44, n°11, 2591 – 2610, 2012.

Athanasiou, A., « Governing for the market : emergencies and emergences in power and subjectivity », Brekke Jaya, Dimitris Dalakoglou et alii. (eds.), *Crisis-scapes : Athens and beyond*, Athènes, Synthesi, 72-77, 2014.

Athanassoupoulou, A., « Nos Albanais à nous : travailleurs émigrés dans une communauté arvanite du Péloponnèse », *Ethnologie française*, vol. 35, n° 2, 2005, pp. 267-278.

Barth, F., « Les groupes ethniques et leurs frontières », in Poutignat, Philippe, Streiff-Fénart, Jocelyne (éds.), *Théories de l'ethnicité*, Paris, PUF, 203-249, 1995.

Bayart, J-F., « Le politique par le bas en Afrique noire : questions de méthode », *Politique africaine*, n°1, 53-82, 1981.

Brekke, J., « Strange encounters », *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, volume 18, numéros 4-5, 538-544

Bristol-Rhys, J., « Socio-spatial boundaries in Abu-Dhabi », in Kamrava Mehran, Babar, Zahra (eds.), *Migrant labor in the Persian Gulf*, Londres, Hurst, 59-84, 2012.

Chatzidakis, A., « Athens as a failed city for consumption », in Brekke Jaya, Dimitris Dalakoglou et alii. (eds.), *Crisis-scapes : Athens and beyond*, Athènes, Synthesi, 33-41, 2014.

Christopoulos, D., « Very unhappy to say that some point is true: fascist intrusion within Greek police », in Brekke Jaya, Dimitris Dalakoglou et alii. (eds.), *Crisis-scapes : Athens and beyond*, Athènes, Synthesi, 47-50, 2014.

Chryssikopoulos, O., « L'Etat s'effondre, les quartiers s'organisent : retour sur le mouvement des assemblées de quartier », *Z : revue itinérante d'enquête et de critique sociale*, n° 7, 94-99, 2013.

Dabène, O., Geisser, V., Massardier, G., « La démocratisation contre la démocratie », in *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires au 21ème siècle*, Paris, La découverte, 7-25, 2008.

De Genova, N., "Theoretical overview", in De Genova, Nicolas, Peutz, Nathalie (dir.), *The Deportation regime: sovereignty, space and the freedom of movement*, Durham, Duke University Press, 33-65, 2010.

Del Biaggio, C., Campi, A., « Regards sur les migrants de longue distance en Grèce », *L'Espace Politique*, n° 20, 2013, en ligne sur http://espacepolitique.revues.org/2675

Doraï, K., Puig, N., « Insertions urbaines et espaces relationnels des migrants et réfugiés au Proche-Orient », in *L'urbanité des marges : migrants et réfugiés dans les villes du Proche-Orient*, Paris, Tétraèdre, 11-24, 2011.

Dufaux, F., Gervais-Lambony, P. « Justice… Spatiale ! », *Annales de géographie*, n°665-666, 3-15, 2009.

Fassin, D., Fassin, E., « Eloge de la complexité », in *De la question sociale à la question raciale*, Paris, La Découverte, 249-259, 2006.

Fontaine, J., *De la résistance à la guerre civile en Grèce 1941-1946*, Paris, La fabrique, 2012.

Green, S., « Migration knots : crisis within a crisis », in Brekke Jaya, Dimitris Dalakoglou et alii. (eds.), *Crisis-scapes : Athens and beyond*, Athènes, Synthesi, 55-61, 2014.

Hmed, C., « Réseaux dormants, contingence et structures : genèses de la révolution tunisienne », *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 62, n°5-6, 797-820, 2012.

Kaika, M., "The Economic Crisis Seen from the Everyday", *City*, vol. 16, n° 4, 422-430, 2012.

Kotronaki, L., Seferiades, S., « Sur les sentiers de la colère : L'espace-temps d'une révolte (Athènes, décembre 2008) », *Actuel Marx*, numéro 48, 2010, pp. 152-165.

Köylü, L., Bulbari, J., « L'œuf du serpent : dans la matrice du parti Aube dorée », *Z : Revue itinérante d'enquête et de critique sociale*, n° 7,116-123, 2013.

Maloutas, T., « Mobilité sociale et ségrégation à Athènes : formes de séparatisme social dans un contexte de mobilité spatiale réduite », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 4, n° 184, 2-21, 2010.

Ma Mung, E., « La dispersion comme ressource », *Cultures et Conflits*, n° 33-34, 1999, en ligne sur http://conflits.revues.org/225.

Mangriotis, S., « Les autres victimes de la crise », *La Chronique-Amnesty International*, 18-19, mai 2013.

Nazloglou, K., « Problèmes d'intégration et de quête identitaire des réfugiés grecs de Turquie en milieu urbain (Athènes-Le Pirée) de 1922 au début des années 1930 : quelques exemples », *Cahiers balkaniques*, n° 42, 2014, en ligne sur http://ceb.revues.org/

Noiriel, G., *Etat, nation et immigration*, Paris, Belin, 2001.

Önçü, A., Weyland, P., *Space, culture and power: new identities in globalizing cities*, Londres, Paperback, 1997.

Parsanoglou, D., *Grèce, pays d'immigration : perspectives historiques et sociologiques*, Thèse de sociologie, Ecoles des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2009.

Pillant, L., « Entre quatre murs : un parcours migratoire en Grèce », *Z : Revue itinérante d'enquête et de critique sociale*, n° 7,136-137, 2013.

Pillant, L., « Emergence des lieux du contrôle migratoire en Grèce : lecture des nouveaux marqueurs frontaliers », in Bardhoshi Nebi, de Rapper Gilles, Sintès Pierre (éds.), *Social practices and local configurations in the Balkans*, Tirana, Presses de l'Université de Tirana, 143-163, 2013.

Retaillaud-Bajac, E., « Introduction », in Aprile Sylvie, Retaillaud-Bajac Emmanuelle (dir.), *Clandestinités urbaines : les citadins et les territoires du secret (XVIème-XXème siècles)*, Rennes, PUR, 7-19, 2008.

Rodier, C., *Xénophobie business : à quoi servent les contrôles migratoires*, Paris, La Découverte, 2012.

Sintès, P., « Les travailleurs balkaniques en Grèce : Migration de travail ou circulation régionale ? », *L'Espace géographique*, vol. 4, n° 36, 353- 365, 2007.

Sintès, P., *La raison du mouvement : territoires et réseaux de migrants albanais en Grèce*, Paris, Karthala, 2010.

Stavrakakis, Y., « Peuple, populisme et anti-populisme : le discours politique grec à l'ombre de la crise européenne », *Actuel Marx*, numéro 54, 107-123, 2013.

Tsimouris, G., « From invisibility to the centre of the Athenian media spectacle : governmentality and immigration in the era of crisis », in Brekke Jaya, Dimitris Dalakoglou *et alii*. (eds.), *Crisis-scapes : Athens and beyond*, Athènes, Synthesi, 78-81, 2014.

Vacarme, n° 63, printemps 2013.

Vaiou, D., « Milestones in the urban history of Athens », *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia*, n° 53-54, 2002, en ligne sur http://www.raco.cat/index.php/TreballsSCGeografia/

Vaiou, D., « In the interstices of the city: Albanian women in Athens », *Espace, Populations, Sociétés*, volume 3, 373-385, 2002.

Vaiou, D., « Transnational patterns of everyday life : practices of care and neighbouring in Athens », in Bardhoshi Nebi, de Rapper Gilles, Sintès Pierre (éds.), *Social practices and local configurations in the Balkans*, Tirana, Presses de l'Université de Tirana, 277-295, 2013.

Vradis, A., « The arrest of Golden Dawn leader will do little to counter institutional racism », *The Guardian Weekly*, 29 septembre 2013, en ligne sur www.readability.com/articles/cwk2dshb