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**‘LET THEM BE SCREWED BY THE TROIKA!’
BLAME, SHAME AND AMBIVALENT PRO-TROIKA SOCIAL CRITIQUE
IN GREECE.**

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Abstract

This working paper discusses pro-Troika social critiques in everyday life in Greece. Based on ethnographic fieldwork (2014-2017) conducted in the town of Volos, on the eastern shore of mainland Greece, this paper traces largely unanalysed forms of widespread critique. As literature has more extensively covered opposition and resistance to the restructuring of the Greek state and economy under the austerity regime, this focus allows for a nuanced analysis of social reactions to current processes of neoliberal restructuring. I argue that the perspective adopted must not only take into account power relations and overlapping moral frameworks but also refrain from strategic essentialisations of power and resistance. My analytical focus in this paper is on ‘ambivalence’, as a way to understand the complexity of moral orders and to capture the contradictions and dilemmas my interlocutors routinely accommodate, as they navigate economic hardship. This perspective on social critique and ambivalence is important in two ways – 1) theoretically – as it refuses power binaries and instead refocuses on hegemony and ambivalence in the analysis of moral orders in capitalism; 2) ethnographically – to complement and contrast the current emphasis on resistance and solidarity in the anthropological literature on the Greek crisis.

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Introduction

“We need to understand one thing – that we Greeks are the reason why Greece is the way it is now. It is in our culture (*koultoura*), and we messed up. Now, we have to pay for it!”

“I think the old must be destroyed to make way for something new, like a proper economy and less corruption. I understand the measures (*ta metra*) of the Troika, alright, we need to change. But why so fast and why so hard?” (Sotiris, March 2016, Volos).²

Resistance and opposition to austerity policies and to the social transformation that accompanies them are widespread in Greece and have been at the centre of anthropological interest in the present conjuncture there. Demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of protests suggest that opposition to the policy measures accompanying rounds of conditional loans to refinance the Greek government were overwhelmingly popular (Douzinas 2013). Faced with the harsh consequences of the crisis, my interlocutors in the mid-sized port city of Volos have participated in volunteer-led social pharmacies, alternative currencies, organisations without middlemen and other practical forms of direct action. Yet scholarly and media focus on the resistance and opposition to restructuring has contributed to a general disregard for other configurations of moralities, ideological preferences, and normative practices. A shift in perspective is necessary. Shifting the focus to processes that support the forced restructuring of the Greek state and economy rather than those that resist or oppose it will not only throw light on the persistence of such moralities, norms and practices but also serve to acknowledge the complex mix of political and moral orders that become significant reference points for understanding people's responses to restructuring. These claims and lines of reasoning come to the fore in a spectrum of tonalities, sometimes subtly, and sometimes more explicitly. During several exchanges when my interlocutors explained their position on what was happening in Greece, it seemed to me that my presence triggered the more explicit manifestations of support for the austerity regime – as if, as an Austrian, my presence implied an inherent ‘complicity’ with arguments of support.

Sotiris, who I quoted above, was struggling to get by after he had lost his job in the construction sector in late 2009. He took advantage of scattered work opportunities as daily labourer (*merokamatiaris*), mostly in agricultural or construction sectors. I met him as a fellow volunteer assisting a local activist who was organising clothing swaps, soup kitchens

² All names are pseudonyms.

and other solidarity actions. Even if, during our conversations, he conceded to the privations he and his family had endured due to the austerity measures, he maintained that the measures proposed by the Troika were necessary, maybe even desirable, even if they also happened to be equally wrong and unjust for the immense suffering they caused. His stance ranged from claims that the Greeks needed to change, but would not be able to achieve that change on their own, thus requiring external intervention, to angry repudiations of this intervention, defensive nationalist declarations and accounts of personal suffering that the austerity measures had inflicted upon him. His shifting positions show that support for restructuring is not straightforward, neither wholehearted consent nor outright rejection. Rather, and this is a key argument of this paper, positions are marked by ambivalence.

As an analytical concept, ambivalence foregrounds the experience of contradictory emotions and multiple frameworks for evaluation. While 'ambiguity' can connote inexactness, uncertainty or indeterminacy, the notion of ambivalence I explore in this paper is strongly linked to the situational contradictions my interlocutors endure in the contemporary political and economic moment in Greece. Their ambivalences speak of their class, gender and ethnic experiences, their aspirations and ideas about capitalism and the Greek crisis. They appear mundane, and yet point to the overlapping of moral frameworks that are key to understanding how neoliberal restructuring is justified through a complex interplay between "familiar frames of references" (Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 38) and "selective and expansive hegemonies" (Collins 2011: 41f) and is inscribed in ideas about personhood, systems of governance, and legitimisations of distribution.

On this and other occasions, when I discussed politics with Sotiris, he associated Greece with corruption, clientelism, and backwardness while also criticising the terms of the imposed austerity (for discussions of narratives of Greek backwardness as opposed to an occidentalised representation of Europe see Bakalaki 2003, Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 19ff, Herzfeld 1987).³ Also, and partly as an extension of this self-orientalisation and self-understanding as being "not quite" European (Faubion 1993: 104), Sotiris asserted the necessity of replacing some elements of the old with a new state of being and thus aligned this will to change with the need for internal reform and cultural change by restructuring Greek politics through the austerity regime.

³ The unease with which Greeks situate themselves simultaneously within and outside of European modernity (Faubion 1993: 104, Herzfeld 1987) has a long history and is a recurrent theme in the everyday life as well as in scholarship on Greece (Faubion 1993: 104f).

On many occasions during my doctoral fieldwork between 2014 and 2017 in Volos, I encountered this uncanny intertwining of narratives. I was often baffled by the self-orientalising mechanisms through which my interlocutors implicitly or explicitly expressed consent with at least some of the arguments that justified the restructuring and politico-economic interventions. My puzzlement, as I would understand later, was partly due to the fact that such opinions were often held back or silenced in the solidarity economies of Volos, essentially milieus in which I most interacted during my early fieldwork. As I began to focus more on these silences and complex worlds of consent and complicity, I became aware of the underlying critique and commentary, on which I want to expand in this working paper. A perspective on the overlapping of moralities and politico-economic relations of my interlocutors point to the coexistence of both consent and opposition, and promises a nuanced analysis of the contradictory moralities through which my interlocutors relate to the ongoing restructuring processes. They are connected with the logics of personal and social transformation that link feelings of inadequacy as economic subjects with critiques of the channels of distribution and economic relations, which have impacted on their life chances. Their exploration is conceptually important, as such moralities have often been framed to register practices and narratives that some anthropological observers consider moral in a vernacular sense, for which reason they have proven difficult to contextualise within anthropological frameworks.

The forms of politics to which my interlocutors are referring in the cases I discuss here relate to the state of the Greek economy. An analysis of how these politics are evaluated does also contribute to understanding how hegemony works through the seemingly contradictory interplay between consent and coercion (Hann and Hart 2009: 176). Hegemony offers a way to think about power as a combination of more coercive and more seductive components of the relations between the dominant and the subordinate (Ortner 1995: 175f). This conceptual focus brings to light the complex contradictions that power relations entail - especially in the Greek crisis, where recession, coupled with the politics of austerity, has necessitated a dire confrontation with a general dependence on economic growth.

Focusing on ambivalence, as Kieran and Bell have written in a recent piece debating the value of 'ambivalence' for anthropological analysis, "prevents the anthropologist from operating according to fixed positions which can distort his or her understanding of social phenomena". (Kierans and Bell 2017: 37). It requires constantly foregrounding complexity

over polarised positions. I do so by shifting attention from resistance to ambivalence in the pro-Troika moralities.

To give readers a sense of the context, I will first turn to a discussion on restructuring and the crisis in Greece, following which I situate my argument in recent writings on the Greek crisis and in anthropological understandings of moralities entailed in economic arrangements. I will then turn to three ethnographic cases. Even as they present several perspectives, the three cases rehearse themes commonly prevalent in the pro-Troika critique – youngsters chastising the generation of their parents and grandparents, dissatisfaction of the business class with the implemented reforms and the disappointment of small businesses with rising taxes.

Greek Austerity and the Restructuring of the State and the Economy

In 2009, the newly elected Greek Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou announced that the state deficit was higher than had been reported by preceding governments. As a result, interest rates had shot up, and refinancing the Greek state on financial markets had become ever more expensive. European governments stepped in with loans and guarantees, and ever since the coalition of lenders, represented by the so-called Troika (European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Commission) are continuing to grant rounds of conditional loans to the Greek government. The conditions were agreed upon in a series of so-called Memoranda, which prescribe policy changes that use neoliberal templates of restructuring to justify measures that carry the promise of economic growth and of balancing out the state deficit.

These include privatisations, severe cuts at the left hand of the state (Bourdieu 1998: 1ff), the resultant decline of social benefits, reduction in public sector employment, and general lowering of pensions and wages. They advocate more business-friendly laws, gradual removal of restrictions for foreign business to penetrate Greek markets as well as the de-professionalization of sectors such as the pharmaceutical sector. Those measures intended to bring the capitalist economy back on track, as well as to set the modernisation of the Greek state on fast track, include some usual suspects of neoliberal restructuring. Other measures taken by Greek governments were less straightforwardly neoliberal, such as raising taxes (Markantonatou 2012: 186) and increased monitoring of the economy through state agencies

(Alexandrakis 2013: 80). As available incomes have fallen by around 40%,⁴ the provisioning crisis has left many in dire straits, personally and economically. Popular indignation at how events have unfolded and at the disappearance of life chances, employment, career and small-business opportunities led to a great number of protests, demonstrations, strikes, and a mushrooming of solidarity groups, volunteer organisations and bottom-up structures, to resist against and cope with the harsh economic climate.

After 2009, PASOK, the centre-left party, whose leader Giorgos Papandreou initially announced the correction of deficit statistics in late 2009, was left with a fraction of their former electorate. From then on, various coalitions ruled the country, with an intermezzo of a non-elected technocrat government under Prime Minister Lucas Papademos, the former head of the Greek Central Bank in 2011. The frustration with how the crisis was handled led to the election of the left SYRIZA in 2015. With the consolidation of SYRIZA into a government with the Independent Greeks⁵ (ANEL), the subsequent continuation of austerity measures and the implementation of the Memoranda, it became obvious that austerity in Greece was not being implemented along familiar party lines. Athina Athanasiou, a Greek anthropologist, points to what she calls a “critical normality” (Athanasiou 2012: 56, translation by Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 22), whereby the discourse of exceptionalism and state of emergency that is often invoked in official discourse masks the extent to which policies legitimised under these circumstances represent more an “intensification of nationalist, racist, xenophobic and sexist politics” (Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 22).

A key strategy of this legitimisation is the way Greek governments and opposition parties have managed to harness a “defensive nationalism” (Theodossopoulos 2014: 498), indicative of an antagonism between the Greek state, supranational politics and financial markets. Doing so bears elements of what Shalini Randeria has termed “cunning states (...) which capitalize on their perceived weakness in order to render themselves unaccountable both to their citizens and to international institutions” (Randeria 2003: 28) and essentially mask their own role in political decisions by pointing to their entanglement in supra-national institutions and legal pluralism, thereby effectively “passing the power” (ibid.: 29). In social science scholarship about Greece, the question as to whether exogenous or endogenous factors are more important in explaining the state of Greek culture, economy, politics and

⁴ The number is an approximation by comparing data from a household survey I conducted with 350 respondents, notes from my fieldwork diaries and secondary statistical data (e. g. ELSTAT 2017).

⁵ ANEL is a national-conservative and right-wing populist political party founded in 2012.

society is highly controversial (Diamandouros 2013: 210). My argument does not tilt the arguments in either direction. Foregrounding pro-Troika arguments as a point of departure allows for a less dichotomising perspective. Many have tended to formulate contradictory diagnoses of their predicament, and their evaluation of causes and solutions points to their contradictory views on the crisis.⁶ This fundamental ambivalence about what is going on is obscured by much of the existing analysis, in due part to their political, conceptual or theoretical perspectives.

Greek governments were abdicating their responsibility for implementing austerity while parties in opposition suggested that they would do otherwise. Opposition to or consent with restructuring and austerity thus was difficult to assign to left- or right-wing parties. In 2009, when Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou (from the social-democrat PASOK) announced a series of austerity measures in reaction to the spike in state deficit after 2009, the conservative Nea Dimokratia (ND) and its leader Antonis Samaras were fiercely against such restructuring and accused Prime Minister Papandreou of providing a recipe of disaster:

“The austerity measures aren't working; the sacrifices that are being made aren't paying off. The treatment is simply so strong that there is a risk we will kill the economy before we kill the deficit” (Guardian 2011).⁷

Samaras furthermore suggested that Greece could find a way out of the fiscal crisis without the austerity regime. However, once in government, in 2012, the ND and then Prime Minister Antonis Samaras changed the former stance and argued in favour of austerity and neoliberal restructuring. Again, it was the parties in opposition that argued that Greece could do without austerity and neoliberalisation. Soon after SYRIZA formed a coalition government with ANEL in 2015, they signed a new Debt Memorandum, and are now implementing a version of what they had initially opposed. A thorough investigation of these processes is not yet underway, and yet what can be said is that my interlocutors expressed an increasing sense of frustration with the actual party and state politics around austerity. The parties involved in the Greek crisis took advantage of a paradoxical narrative on state sovereignty. They stressed the possibility of fiscal sovereignty for Greece to justify their claim to power. After coming to power, however, they switched their stance and denied that there was an alternative to following the dictates of the financial markets, the Troika, or other instruments that imposed

⁶ Many thanks to the reviewers for their helpful commentary on this perspective on ambivalence.

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/05/greek-austerity-opponent-antonis-samaras> retrieved 19.10.17.

fiscal discipline (such as the Fiscal Pact). That left many of my interlocutors with a sense of frustration and betrayal, as the narrative of alternatives to austerity seemed to serve as a fictional strategy for acquiring power rather than a political programme that would allow them to survive as a government.

This frustration led to the widespread observation that some version of the austerity policies was indispensable – but not necessarily because Greece actually needed it, but more so because Greece had to meet at least some of the demands of its creditors. The justifications for legitimising austerity surface in the moral frameworks of my interlocutors. One such trope is exemplified by the famous statement of the then Deputy Prime Minister Pangalos in 2010 who had famously declared “together we ate it” (*mazi ta fagame*). Daniel Knight has pointed in this context to “Pangalos trying to sell a notion of collective responsibility for the debt” (Knight 2015, 230). The idea of a general political complicity in the mishandling of resources fits well with the self-orientalisation impulse, also manifest in Sotiris’ statement, and provides contextual legitimacy to the association of over-bureaucratisation, misuse of EU subsidies, clientelism, over-consumption, and irresponsible lending with collective accountability. Crucially, these narratives powerfully legitimise intervention and austerity, and feed on popular narratives about corrupt politicians, recklessness of corporations, and clientelist state structures.

Restructuring and Solidarity in Anthropological Accounts of the Greek Crisis

Anthropological – and neighbouring social sciences – literature has mainly focused on resistance and opposition to the forced restructuring and discussed cases of solidarity economies, the burgeoning of emancipatory movements, cooperative networks and anarchist spaces in the bigger cities, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki. Activism, so it seemed, was the generalised ‘other’ of crisis and austerity (Cabot 2016: 152, Rakopoulos 2016: 143).

Yet, on a closer look, the cracks in the narratives of the interlocutors become visible. Theodoros Rakopoulos highlights these cracks of ambivalence when he writes about the horizontalist no-middleman groups he studied in Thessaloniki: the activists “often shared mixed feelings of hope and suspicion towards what seemed like ‘a culture’ imposed on them by EU technocratic jargon”. (Rakopoulos 2016: 144). Such ambivalence, and indeed hope, towards teleologies of crisis and the EU make strange allies in struggles in ways that also pervade circles in which my activist friends and interlocutors from Volos interact.

Heath Cabot reinforces the marked ambivalence when she notes that volunteers in Athens' social clinics are uneasy with their involvement, which they perceive as being as much about solidarity as about their own entanglement in neoliberalism (Cabot: 2016, as Muehlebach notes for her volunteers in Lombardy 2012). Their ambivalence stems from their moral quest for greater solidarity, which seems to already be calculated into the austerity equation, as austerity creates the exigency for organising unpaid labour, for instance, for care services, and feeds on a politics of compassion that is intrinsic to neoliberalism, which, paradoxically, is as attuned to a politics of solidarity as it eventually produces inequality (Fassin 2012: 3). Despite these ambivalences that both Rakopoulos and Cabot encountered in their fieldwork, activists and volunteers frame their practice in terms of solidarity (*allilegii*) and the normative direction is clearly anti-austerity. Volunteer reactions to austerity do not always fit this political stance. Phaedra Douzina-Bakalaki shows how the volunteers in social clinics, soup kitchens and clothing banks in Xanthi operate through "familiar frames of reference" (Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 38) that do not share the horizontalist political ideas of Rakopoulos' and Cabot's interlocutors. She argues that her interlocutors "appeared determined to reproduce the past and, with it, to reproduce the positionalities, relationalities and socialities of the provisioning routes they replaced: that is, the household, the (labour) market and the state". (Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 29). Rather, as in her example of volunteers in a soup kitchen, they performatively relocate normative models, such as of domesticity, into the volunteer space. Instead of organising for change, they are 'yearning', in direct reference to Jansen's ethnography on Sarajevo (Jansen 2015), for a return to normalcy and to a stable order of things.

Most outspoken anti-austerity opponents include Dimitris Theodossopoulos' interlocutors. In his article 'Infuriated with the Infuriated' (Theodossopoulos 2013), he starts with a portrayal of the 'indignant' Greek 'movement of the squares' (*oi aganaktismenoi tis plantias*), a form of protest exemplified by the large-scale protests held in Athens' Syntagma square in 2011. From there on, he rhetorically and ethnographically leaves the squares and finds other 'indignants' who, instead, voice their discontent with those who protest. Far from the Greek squares, in Panama City, he finds the harshest critics of the Greek protesters, some of whom conclude that the Greeks are "lazy" and only "know how to spend money and complain" (quoted in Theodossopoulos 2013: 203). What he shows is how the popular protests are problematized and lead to contestations owing to conflicting normativities and to

the attribution of blame to those protesting rather than to those against whom such protests are being organised.

What this literature points to is the range of overlappings between varying spheres of morality in people's reactions to the austerity measures implemented in Greece. These ambivalences towards austerity, the Troika, and accountability for the crisis is underexplored in the treatment of crisis. Although such perspective is hinted at in various accounts, it needs further exploration, as it challenges the implicit tilt towards the notion that ordinary lives are in direct opposition to restructuring. Such a focus does not imply that the ethnographic cases presented here represent a normative endorsement of restructuring. Rather, this paper explores the multiplicity of moral frameworks that people reference and act on that defy a straightforward analytical categorisation into resistance or complicity.

Overlapping Moral Frameworks, Contradictions and Ambivalence

Recent economic anthropology literature on the moralities of economic relations revived the moral economy concept as an analytical framework. It has been used to contextualise forms of social critique firmly in political economic contexts and historical conjunctures of groups relations and thus aims to provide situational analyses of normativities. The term *moral economies* was originally introduced by E. P. Thompson in his seminal article 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd' (Thompson 1971), in which he argued that food riots in 18th-century England were primarily motivated by the moral outrage felt at the introduction of free-market patterns of economic relations by sectors of the bourgeoisie. The riots thus were about legitimate or illegitimate practices in marketing, milling or baking (Thompson 1971: 79). What was understood as legitimate was "grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community" (ibid.). This understanding of economic transformation, and the accompanying social critique, was taken up in economic and political anthropology. James Scott used it to analyse what he called the "subsistence ethic" of peasants of Burma and Vietnam (Scott 1976). Scott argued that they understood and tolerated colonial and economic systems that contributed to their oppression and unfavourable integration in these very systems. The complex moral system of obligations and entitlements in these unequal relations provided for a minimum level of their own subsistence. Peasants mobilized against violations only when

this minimum level was endangered, but not against their unequal integration into economic relations.

The structure of their argument is common to anthropological accounts of economic transformation and its moral evaluations: a powerful group effects transformative changes in economic practices and in so doing violates the social contract that a subordinate group considers the basis for their economic interdependence. As a result, the subordinate group mobilises against the dominant group. These models present linear stages: Moral frameworks once shared are no longer when divisions and differing moral frameworks became obvious, leading to contestations to regain the 'originally' shared framework (or struggle for another one). This three-phase model is commonly applied to ethnographic settings of large-scale economic rupture. Such conceptualisation of moralities as dynamic combinations of norms, meanings and practices in (historically) situated group relations serves as a useful framing for the Greek crisis as well.⁸ These group relations should be understood as embedded in particular forms of capital accumulation (Palomera and Vetta 2016). For my ethnographic examples, to which I turn in the next section, this means seeing their forms of critique as tied to but not fully determined by their own position within the political-economic relations on which they are commenting.

In that regard, Palomera and Vetta raise a crucial point (Palomera and Vetta 2016: 415), namely that a historically informed account of particular ways in which social relations are tied up with moralities needs to also provide an understanding of ambivalences and overlapping moral frameworks. Ethnographic fieldwork and theoretical work must be effectively combined to avoid theoretical determinism and empiricism. Dimitra Kofti (2016) raised this issue in her ethnography of glass factory workers in Bulgaria. She asked why workers in the cold end of the factory did not mobilise against their precarious working conditions, as many other workers had done at the time of her fieldwork. She traces the 'intertwined moral frameworks of people's actions' (ibid.: 434) on the shop floor and in the homes of workers that – through their entanglement – lead to increased dependency and precarity of the workers. Such embedding of moralities in interlinked social spheres is instructive to understand the complex forms of critique and ambivalent consent in Greece and shows how different forms of social critique are articulated in the crisis.

⁸ However, I do agree with Carrier's point that such an understanding of morality is part of almost any definition of economic practice in substantivist or political economic approaches in economic anthropology and thus does not designate any 'moral' economy as opposed to an 'immoral' one (Carrier 2017: 2).

Contradictions and ambivalence can be – as Palomera, Vetta and Kofti clearly show – part of different spheres of social action, such as differing moral frameworks that operate in the household or in the factory, or part of different social groups or classes. Yet, I want to pursue this observation further by foregrounding that these overlapping moral frameworks – and with them, often contradictory ideas, meanings and normative practices – can in principle coexist simultaneously. Acknowledging this might provide crucial insights into an analysis of pro-Troika ideas and moralities.

Ambivalence and Social Critique in Volos and Athens - Cases from Fieldwork

The ambivalent ideas and emotions towards their predicament find myriad expressions among my interlocutors, and also among political commentators and public intellectuals and are widely discussed in Greece. In my ethnographic fieldwork, they often surfaced when my interlocutors commented on accountabilities and possible solutions for their economic problems or the challenges of Greece at large. Three such cases illustrate my argument and show how these ambivalences are not arbitrary but situated in complex class, gender, and kinship arrangements and relate to ideas about personhood, merit, opportunity and distribution. Clearly, they do not exhaust the spectrum of opinions and they deliberately focus on such arguments that depart from commonly analysed narratives about the crisis. One set of arguments invokes a presumed past replete with corruption and clientelism, in order to criticise the virtual disappearance of life-chances in the present, whereas the other ascribes the blame to the Greek government for failing to implement policies deemed by my interlocutors to be beneficial.

The first section centres on criticism of the clientelist structures of the *Metapolitefsi* era after the fall of the military junta in 1974. Seen as an era of corruption, patriarchal paternalism, and political clientelism, which was ultimately responsible for crisis, these arguments stress the need for social and political reform in the present.

The second set of critiques problematizes how the Greek government implements Troika recommendations. Here, self-orientalising narratives resurface as Greeks are framed as incapable of properly organising reform and following through with it. Such arguments are rooted in positions held at least since the 19th century and stress the importance of foreign intervention as source of social and political progress in Greece. They include a criticism of the actual process of restructuring after 2009 and of Greek governments for not implementing

proper neo-liberal reforms, and instead raising taxes, protecting civil servants and forestalling the prosecution of tax fraudsters.

“Let Them be Screwed by the Troika” - Meritocracy and Metapolitefsi

On a November day in 2014, I was going through my fieldnotes in the living room of 23-year-old Spiros, my first host in Volos during my fieldwork. He was often consumed by a multi-player online game organising virtual raids with his friends. Without warning, he shot up from his desk, dragging the laptop along with the cable of his earphones. I hear him shout “*Malakes!*” (‘idiots’), as the headphone cable wiped Plato’s *Politeia* (‘Republic’) from the table.

He ran to the worn-out couch in the studio apartment his parents had rented for him and lighted a cigarette. That was when I regained my composure and understood that, once again, the internet connection had had a hick-up and he was disconnected from his friends, in the midst of their campaign. He was furious:

“Fucked up country! I spent all my damn youth over at school, terrified, horrified about my future. And when I finished school, the country was in ruins! No jobs, no money, no opportunities, not even a proper internet connection. Meanwhile, the elders have eaten up all the money, and now nothing is left. Have you ever asked OSE [formerly a public, now private railway company] people how much they earned and now take home as pension? I live for a year on their monthly money! And who will be unemployed all his life? Not them, that is for sure! And why, because I worked hard and they just had connections. Wrong world, crazy Greece. Let them be screwed by the Troika, all of them. I will go and come back when the Troika is done and people working hard actually get a chance here” (Fieldnotes, Volos, November 2014).

Spiros is among the many young people studying in Volos. He depends on his parents’ support for his studies and looks up to his father, a lawyer, and his grandfather, MP under the conservative government of Konstantinos Karamanlis, the first Prime Minister after the military Junta. I stayed at his student apartment, and we shared many an afternoon talking about his attempts at channelling his energy into work or university, his gendered expectations of merit and virtue, and his frustration at being young in a country in crisis. This frustration was sometimes sparked by seemingly minor issues, such as the occasional hick-up in the internet connection, and sometimes by the news he received through Facebook or read online. A key feature of the frustration he had with his life chances were because he could not, at that

time, channel this almost violent desire to work and get recognition through it. He had several times tried to get a job at one of the coffeehouses on the promenade facing the white sailing yachts, or as a motorcycle delivery service for pizzas, souvlakia and other food, as an increasing number of restaurants were trying to expand their sales to survive economically. At several points, he was approached by his father or grandfather, who offered to ask some of their friends if they “knew anything”.

This was a sensitive topic and it contextualises his outburst of fury. He often brought up his relationship with his father and grandfather in our conversations and also in the conversation that followed on that November day after he calmed down again (and could not make the internet connection work). Often, Spiros mentioned his father and grandfather, when pointing to their accomplishments through their democratic virtues, discipline or ethics. But when it came to the question of finding employment, they were cast in a different light. Spiros fervently refused to accept their support in finding a job or a professor who might employ him, and blamed his father and grandfather, instead, for being partly responsible for ruining the country. They had made their careers as party cadres of the conservative ND party and Spiros refused to be integrated into these networks.

Spiros tells the story of growing up in a milieu in which hard work was demanded in the name of meritocracy. He did not have a naive understanding of meritocracy or of his own situation and possible futures that he might have had without the crisis. What he bemoans in the above situation is the breach of expectations. At times, he shared his awareness of what Smith called “selective hegemony” (Smith 2011, also Collins 2011), as a mode of hegemony directed not at the inclusion of an ever-expanding number of people into the realm of those that would benefit from certain forms of capitalism but rather a chosen few. Growing up in a relatively wealthy family with connections and success in school and university education were supposed to be sure entry tickets to ‘win’. His indignation is thus less with the general inequality but directed more against his own inability to profit from his background. Susana Narotzky has pointed to such narratives of indignation in the Spanish crisis – and that they rely on a critique of injustice that “points to the feeling that the grounds on which certain principles of inequality were tolerated are no longer there” (Narotzky 2016: 82). Spiros felt that the crisis brought with it a violation of a relatively steady arrangement of power and inequality.

Spiros himself leaned towards a more conservative ideology, but had voted for SYRIZA in 2015, another sign of his ambivalence towards the old clientelist structures of the

Metapolitefsi era. After 1974, the political landscape was dominated primarily by the centre-right party ND and centre-left PASOK. Both sought to install a large number of officials and civil servants from their respective party books in the state apparatus. Recently, affirmative discourses that frame the 1980s as the golden era (Zestanakis 2016) have emerged and a large number of websites have sprouted – such as the infamous satirical Facebook page ‘Old PASOK - the Orthodox’ (*Palio PASOK – to Orthodoxo*,⁹ my translation) which features satirical juxtapositions of life under PASOK and under SYRIZA-ANEL and has more followers than any of the political parties on Facebook.

The critique or affirmation of clientelism as a mode of political and economic participation represents a complex set of discourses. Most obviously, it was directed against the centre-left PASOK by the ND in the early 1990s, where a selective form of neo-liberalisation met with clientelist politics of each of the parties. In the crisis years, a liberal discourse about merit and deservingness has resurfaced in the quest for accountability (Knight 2013: 147). In his outburst, Spiros accuses the former state employees of OSE, the railway company, and OTE, the former state telecommunication provider, also his internet provider. They, he said, secured privileges because of their connections rather than their skills or their will to work. Consequently, they cannot make anything work because they lack the (coercive) incentive that might come with a system that more closely surveys their performance. This combination of attributing passivation to non-merit based employment versus activation through meritocracy is a common dimension of social critique of clientelism in Greece and elsewhere. It echoes the criticism voiced by Theodossopoulos’ interlocutors against privileged civil servants. And, it meets with the ascription of responsibility for whatever people understand as crisis – as one of Stanley’s interlocutors in the UK put it: “We reaped what we sowed” (Stanley 2014: 897), legitimising punishment and intervention. Theodossopoulos presents a similar critique:

“You know very well, as I do, how life is in Greece. One works for every ten who laze around. This is not the Greece of our fathers. This is the Greece of plenty, the Greece of Euro and privilege. But it couldn’t last forever. What do you think? Someone has to pay for all this. It is payment time!” (62-year-old Greek migrant in Panama City, Theodossopoulos 2013: 204).

Thus, these instances of social critique in Greece responding to the financial crisis ascribe internal blame to the political system of clientelism in the *Metapolitefsi* era and beyond. It is

⁹ <https://el-gr.facebook.com/paliopasok/> retrieved 28.9.2017.

not restricted to any generation, yet I found it most fervently represented by those who had grown up in the 1990s with the promise of expanding possibilities, and the promise of European integration. They are internet savvy and rapidly switch between YouTube videos of the US political satirist Stephen Colbert, of documentaries about the German occupation of Greece, and of mass events organised either by ND or PASOK.

Spiros' sense of unease combines his understanding of Greeks as 'deficient' economic subjects prone to clientelism and the yearning for meritocracy, privilege and lateral recognition. Also, Spiros seems to be acting according to "familiar frames of reference" (Douzina-Bakalaki 2017: 38) and – rather than longing for radical alternatives – seeks recognition as a hard-working young man. His case is an example of a much wider process that finds a specific context in Greece, but can be extended to a large number of other settings. It is the decoupling of a privileged social background with recognition and redistribution (Fraser & Honneth 2003: 2f) that once came with it that spurs his critique. Although Spiros did not refer to it as such, his white, heterosexual, educated, non-migrant background, paired with a wealthy family background, means being part of a privileged social group that felt – also through their political affiliations – entitled to a privileged status and occupation. With the dissipation of the entitlement, Spiros blamed political clientelism as having been a key factor in the depleting life-chances that he thought he deserved, but owing to the efforts that he had put in and not because of a presumed sense of entitlement.

In other words, in not having let his father or grandfather organise a job for him, he had rejected a part of his privilege, but only the part associated with the party contacts of his male kin. He could not even secure short-term jobs in occupations that were so 'low-level' that he could not tell his family about them, and this only frustrated him further and provoked more fervent attacks on clientelism and 'the elders' that had destroyed the country. In terms of destruction, he rhetorically seeks an awkward alliance with the Troika, as exemplifying those outside forces of intervention that, on the one hand, pave the way for the next chapter on Euro-occidentalism and, on the other, as a set of palatable arguments that attempt to make sense of the situation.

Plato's *Politeia* was the first thing he had picked up from the floor after his outburst of rage. He dusted it off and started another conversation, about ancient Greek philosophy and how Plato was imagining an ideal state.

“That Would Have Been a Good Thing, to Listen to the Troika this Time!” - Selective Neoliberalisation, Redistributive Justice and Intervention

In late October 2014, when I was visiting Athens for a few days, before heading off to Volos to begin my fieldwork there, I was climbing up the stairs of an elegant business centre in South Athens. An acquaintance from a former job in Vienna had linked me up with his cousin Giannis, who was the CEO of a specialised print company in Athens. Giannis, I was told, could say quite a bit about the economic situation in Greece. Giannis awaited me at the door in a blue suit and greeted me with a firm handshake before guiding me into the modernist office rooms and asked his secretary to bring me coffee. When we sat down at the heavy glass table in his office, he looked me over, then said: “I am not going to talk about politics, ok?”. He introduced me to what the company was producing – printed products of all kinds – and the general situation of their business – good but improvable. I asked if he thought that the recipes of the Troika were the right mix for a better business environment and he started talking politics. “Look”, he said, “I know many Greeks would tell you that this is not true what I am telling you. But to tell you the truth, it is our people that messed up all this. If the government only implemented what the Troika proposed, we would be way better off”. At that time, the government was led by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras (ND), considered a symbol of neoliberalism and anticipatory obedience to Troika demands amongst most people I knew. But Giannis thought otherwise:

“Our guys are slowing the whole thing down, and they are drying up the economy. We (as businesspeople) want to get things going again but we can't because of our government”.

He told me about an order that was causing him trouble. The elegant businessman in his forties seemed desperate. He had been trying for a few years to become a supplier for an international beverage company, specifically a bottling plant north of Athens, to print the sleeves for water bottles. A few months before that late October day, he finally managed to get the order. It was a big job – several million sleeves for a well-known brand, but Giannis' company could not deliver the order. The bank that he had worked with for several years refused to give him credit due to the bad economic prospects for Greece. Consequently, he could not buy the materials, print the sleeves or deliver. As he talked about those sleeves, Giannis was furious.

“The Troika is right. Taxes down! Get rid of corruption! We will not manage to pull this off without the Europeans, our government is too caught up in this mess that is our politics”.

Our conversation continued in a similar fashion, until he looked at his Breitling watch and steered the conversations towards my further plans in Athens, suggesting that I should leave him to do his work.

Giannis is among those that had welcomed the successive Memoranda signed by the Troika and Greek governments early on. He told me he was in favour of overruling the constitution for these Memoranda, and that another technocrat government should be brought in. His agreement with the principal ideas of neoliberal restructuring is not surprising, for, in fact, the support is widespread among business-owners on both sides of the political spectrum. What is less self-evident is that they do not see neoliberalism as hegemonic ideology. For them, it is the clientelist state that hinders growth and entrepreneurship. Such critique needs to be contextualised in a liberal pro-European yet conservative political spectrum that is suspicious of the welfare reforms introduced by PASOK in the 1980s and beyond. These are seen as having fostered a corrupt state overblown with bureaucracy and redistribution gone havoc.

Yet Giannis was not outright pro-Troika and raised several other issues that concern him that seem to contrast his hard stance. Having grown up in the 1980s, he had enjoyed many of the social reforms that had been introduced then and although the parent generation of his milieu was conservative and – like Spiros’ parents and grandparents – close to the ND party, they had profited from the social investments of that era. Also, and similar to Sotiris in the beginning of the working paper, he thought that the restructuring was being poorly executed and that the Troika as well as the Greek governments should have been savvy enough to know that Greeks would resist such wide-reaching reform.

Several layers of critique overlap here – as a businessman who seeks easy access to credit and competitive business environments, he commends outside intervention and puts blame on Greek politicians, who messed up this ‘chance’. On the other hand, Giannis seems proud of the resistance of the Greeks who are protective of the same reforms he finds necessary. He confessed to the unease he felt, as his family had profited from social reforms that allowed his generation to enjoy higher education and to be able to start businesses, and yet he now believed that these reforms should not have been implemented in the first place. During our conversation, I had pressed him several times on his call for a more wide-reaching

neoliberalisation – more privatisations, less public employees, and so forth – and I thought he would consider me an annoyance. And yet the farewell was warmer than I had thought – Giannis said he had a good time talking to me. “After all, things are very complicated in Greece”, he offered to meet me again in a few days and to help me with all I needed for my dissertation. I was a bit puzzled at the warm farewell at the end of our conversation, which I had experienced as quite antagonistic. The ambivalence persisted here as well.

Such ambivalent pro-Troika stances are more straightforward among the likes of Spiros and Giannis, who are close to the conservative ND party environments that stress meritocracy, discipline, and restrained entrepreneurial masculinity. However, it was also quite prevalent among small entrepreneurs who were involved in the activist circles that I was spending much time with. A common critique related to taxation. Among them were Stefania and Christos from Volos, who had closed their small business for installing and repairing heating systems in 2015, after another tax hike proposed by the coalition government of SYRIZA-ANEL was pushed through the parliament. For several years, their business was not going well; they had hoped that a left government led by SYRIZA would ameliorate their challenging economic situation. Fewer people used the central heating systems installed in the apartment complexes. As central heating systems were often a source of fierce conflict amongst neighbours and house-owners in light of the division of utility and fuel bills, people turned to low-cost electrical heaters or oil radiators, which were easily dumped and replaced by new ones. Both had taken on several side-jobs in services or maintenance, especially during summer. In the summer of 2015, when new tax laws were proposed, the business had been barely profitable. They were expected to pay income tax for estimated returns for that and the next year. Stefania told me several times that she could not believe how such measures would help the Greek economy recover and was convinced that it would push small businesses into informality or default. Certainly, it was not the kind of tax policy that she had hoped for. Alexis Tsipras, at several points in the election campaign leading up to their electoral victory in 2015, had criticised governments for failing to tax Greek ship owners and other elite groups who enjoyed considerable tax breaks.

While driving home to Volos after helping at a volunteer action in summer 2015, Stefania told me about her decision to close their business. She was furious:

“This is class war by our government! You know what, the Troika asked the Greek government several times how they plan to tax the ship owners?¹⁰ This Christine Lagarde¹¹ – she gave a list with tax evaders to our government! And what did our beloved government do? They did not do anything about it. That would have been a good thing, to listen to the Troika this time! Oh no, they (the government) actually did something - propose that we pay for the hole in the budget. It is enough now, we quit this. Our clients don't care whether they get a receipt or not. Why should we pay the debt and not those that actually have money? We Greeks, I tell you, are ourselves to blame for that mess”.

Stefania was an active member of several activist and left organisations and very critical of the forced restructuring of the Greek state. She was anxious about the future of her two children who still had some years in school, but she was unsure as to how they would be able to sustain themselves after leaving school. Stefania herself commented on her ambivalence towards the Greek crisis. “After all”, she said, as we sat in her kitchen for lunch with Christos and the children in early 2017, “we live in a capitalist system. That is dire enough. But we Greeks have done our best to make that even worse”. She argued that Greek politics was deeply corrupt and that Greeks were generally prone to mismanagement. “We had our chance to reform, slower and easier. But that is done. In a way, I understand the Europeans. Why should they pay for our mess?” she said and Christos nodded, while the children seemed to zone out. Her moral critique of capitalism combines with the above-mentioned reflexive impulse to self-orientalise. As Rakopoulos' comment on his activist interlocutors above suggests, there is a deep ambivalence here about the forced imposition of what “seemed like ‘a culture’ imposed on them by EU technocratic jargon” (Rakopoulos 2016: 144), while showing understanding for doing so – as the cultural change seemed necessary to Stefania, yet the Greeks had not managed to achieve it on their own. Similar to the interplay of ‘hope and suspicion’ towards this culture among Rakopoulos' interlocutors, Stefania was switching between stressing the ‘foreign’ nature of such culture, which she attributed to Western and Northern European countries, and the promise of such culture change, a promise of less corruption and inequality.

¹⁰ Greek shipowners are widely discussed. For several decades, they have been enjoying constitutional rights to exemption from income or property tax related to their shipping activities.

¹¹ Head of the IMF and therefore influential executive in negotiating the Memoranda, as the IMF was one of three institutional partners in the Troika. Famous in Greece also for the ‘Lagarde List’, a CD with information about possible tax evaders she gave to the Greek government in her former position as French finance minister. For the insightful story of what happened next with the CD, see Lauth Bacas 2015.

Stefania's ambivalence was the kind I often encountered among left-leaning Greeks – deeply ambivalent about capitalism, and especially about the way its development had been handled in Greek politics. With tax reform, she hinted in her car, she was in favour of foreign intervention and sometimes suggested that tax laws should be changed directly by the Troika, without further discussion in the Greek parliament. As her narrative shows, agreement with some features of European interventions and capitalist development is often fraught with tensions, necessarily selective, and points to great ambivalence about the political and economic changes of recent years in Greece (see also Theodossopoulos 2013, Kalantzani 2016: 9).

These examples are instructive in that they add complexity to the conception of the dimension of morality in narratives about austerity in Greece. First, there is a higher degree of ambivalence among my interlocutors than what is generally reported in literature. Pro-Troika narratives are situational, and point to my interlocutors' assessment of responsibility and the moral evaluations of relations between Greek party politics, the Troika and several groups of Greek society. This paper focuses on the ethnographic cases where ambivalent pro-Troika narratives surfaced – namely where agreement with the austerity regime of the Debt Memoranda, with self-orientalising discourses about 'Greekness', and with the call or wish for outside intervention is declared. My intention for doing so was to arrive at a more thorough understanding of consent, and resistance with respect to specific and selective understandings of austerity and neoliberalisation in the Greek crisis.

Conclusion

The global financial crisis in general and the Greek economic crisis in particular have been accompanied with a renewed interest in the interplay between economic relations and moralities in anthropology. In the anthropological literature on the Greek crisis, such moralities are often found in groups, organisations and activist networks that take a critical stance on austerity and the Troika. Such ethnographic focus has many advantages and shows the extraordinary effort that Greeks put into organising compassionate forms of social care and demonstrating solidarity under the conditions of a crumbling welfare state and harsh austerity measures. Yet the privileging of resistance and opposition too often conveys an impression of a binary, top-down view of technocratic forces versus popular opposition. Such

view leaves us without an explanation for the widespread pro-Troika stance and narratives that I encountered during my own fieldwork in Volos from 2014 to 2017.

Focusing on such pro-Troika narratives in this working paper stems from two aims – on the one hand, to add to the ethnographic literature on how Greeks are making sense of the far-reaching transformation of Greek society and, second, to use these insights to push the study of moralities of economic relations further. This requires leaving a narrower empirical or even analytical focus on contexts where the criticism of interlocutors is more congruent with the moral views of the analyst.

I have presented three ethnographic cases and introduced a Voliot student from a family of lawyers close to the conservative ND party, an Athenian businessman who argues that the implementation of the Memoranda is hindering business, and a couple operating a small business who argue that the government is waging a class-war against them. The three cases address issues of personhood, desired models of distribution and systems of governance. The interlocutors raise issues of autonomy and dependence, clientelism, corruption and taxation. In their narratives, they de- and reconstruct distinctions between self/ other, friend/ enemy, local/ foreign in very differing ways. Crucially, the cases show that these forms of criticism – of political decisions in the past, current governments, the Troika, earlier generations or political and economic elites – vary not only between groups and but also within them. Rather, and this is a key insight of the working paper, they are present simultaneously in my interlocutors' social critique. This foregrounding of ambivalence as theme for analysis supports understanding the complex overlap of moral frameworks and social relations.

A stronger analytical focus on ambivalence foregrounds the complexities my interlocutors face in light of competing and sometimes contradictory moral frameworks and demands. Economic and political conditions, declining incomes, empathy for those suffering and criticism of elites coalesce in contradictory diagnoses of the Greek predicament. In a recent discussion on the concept of ambivalence in anthropology, Kieran and Bell have argued for ambivalence “as valuable heuristic device” (2017) and cite, among others, Alena Ledeneva's (1998) analysis of Russia's economy of favours where multiplex social roles connecting officials and other citizens lead to ambivalence about how to transact favours with one another. Kieran and Bell stress that analysts should resist the temptation to iron out inconsistencies and ambivalences in favour of a smooth narrative about social lives and moral frameworks. Deana Jovanovic proposed studying “dispositions” rather than “utterances”

(2016: 1) when analysing ambivalence. In doing so, she proposed a shift in attention from an anthropological focus on logical inconsistencies to “embodied contradictions” and thus a shift from a focus on questions of cognition to social structures when approaching ambivalence as a topic. Her approach shows how power relations are constituted in contradictory ways in everyday practice (Jovanovic 2016: 2). Such an approach is fruitful for the analysis of pro-Troika ambivalence in Greece, as it supports an understanding of my interlocutors, who not only reflect on political affiliations or preferences but also on their own location in, and, in part, consent to, processes with which they are discontent, and yet have to confront on a daily basis. Such a perspective on political and economic power provides a nuanced and fine-grained understanding of power, complicity, contestation and legitimacy because it refuses what Janet Roitman has called “binary thinking about power; that is, the incapacity to think ambivalence” (Roitman 2004: 45), which obscures that fact that “the exercise of power can be detested and yet considered logical, normal or even justifiable – and simultaneity or contradiction as stable conditions” (ibid.).

Moreover, such focus on ambivalence brings to the fore the interactions between dominant and alternative narratives about accountability, crisis and possible solutions. The ethnographic examples show how neoliberal ideas about pro-business policy collide with attempts of Greek governments to selectively implement the Memoranda, how the self-orientalisation of Greeks as messy and undisciplined is mobilised to attribute blame to elites and to oneself and how my interlocutors’ critique of inefficient state bureaucracy and unjust distribution breeds ambivalent consent with political intervention. I have argued that such an approach allows the inclusion of a more nuanced analysis of the Greek crisis, moralities of discontent and indeed hope and merits anthropological attention. These forms of social critique are moralities of discontent in response to the quickly evaporating life chances that criticise the selective austerity and clientelism and point to the feeling of injustice for being expelled from selective hegemonies and European modernity. The investigation of such moralities, as not necessarily tied to groups sharing a common political background nor common interests, force us to incorporate a perspective on ambivalence and overlapping normativities in the analysis of moral orders in capitalism.

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Zusammenfassung

Das vorliegende Arbeitspapier diskutiert Pro-Troika-Sozialkritik im griechischen Alltagsleben. Basierend auf ethnographischer Feldforschung (2014-2017) in der Stadt Volos an der Ostküste des griechischen Festlandes, werden bisher wenig analysierte Formen weitverbreiteter Kritik in den Blick genommen. In der Literatur über die griechische Krise wurden bisher vor allem die Opposition und der Widerstand gegen die Restrukturierung des griechischen Staates und der griechischen Wirtschaft hervorgehoben. Der Perspektivenwechsel erlaubt eine genauere Analyse sozialer Reaktionen auf gegenwärtige Prozesse neoliberaler Restrukturierung. Die eingenommene Perspektive betont neben den Machtverhältnissen und sich überlappenden moralischen Ordnungen auch die Notwendigkeit, strategische Essentialisierungen von Macht und Widerstand zu vermeiden. Der analytische Fokus des Aufsatzes liegt auf "Ambivalenz" als Zugang zur Komplexität moralischer Ordnungen. Dies hilft uns zu verstehen, wie die Erforschten mit zahlreichen Widersprüchen und Dilemmata umgehen, während sie schwierige wirtschaftliche Situationen meistern. Eine solche Perspektive auf soziale Kritik ist in doppelter Hinsicht notwendig: zum einen aus theoretischer Sicht, da sie ein dualistisches Verständnis von Macht ablehnt und stattdessen auf Hegemonie und Ambivalenz in der Analyse moralischer Ordnungen des Kapitalismus abstellt; zum anderen aus ethnographischer Sicht, um die derzeitige Betonung von Widerstand und Solidarität in der anthropologischen Literatur über die griechische Krise zu komplementieren und einen Kontrast dazu zu bieten.

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Andreas Streinzer

'Let them be screwed by the Troika!' Blame, shame and ambivalent pro-Troika social critique in Greece.

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