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The emergence of the “jazz neighbourhood” of Kerameikos in recession Athens

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ABSTRACT

*This paper maps the transformations related to the work practices of jazz venue owners and professional jazz musicians as a response to the crisis, and the ways in which these practices are spatialized in the area of Kerameikos in Athens, Greece. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork, conducted in 2015-2017 as part of my ethnomusicological doctoral research regarding the Athenian jazz scene in the post-2010 era. As I argue, the financescape disruption that occurred in 2010 triggered an impressive rise of small-scale musical performances and at the same time led to the prioritization of a globally-informed locality. In Kerameikos this process has been further assisted by the decelerating rhythms of gentrification, where shifts in the work practices of musicians and venue owners alike have brought together two concepts pertaining seemingly to contradicting social imaginaries, that of jazz and kafeneio, adding further to the emergent puzzling urban crisis-scape during this tumultuous period.*

Keywords: *ethnomusicology, crisis, gentrification, Kerameikos, jazz*

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

*Το άρθρο χαρτογραφεί τις αλλαγές που σχετίζονται με τις εργασιακές πρακτικές των ιδιοκτητών τζαζ μουσικών σκηνών και των επαγγελματιών μουσικών κατά την περίοδο της κρίσης, και τους τρόπους με τους οποίους αυτές οι πρακτικές γίνονται εμφανείς στην περιοχή του Κεραμεικού στην Αθήνα. Βασίζεται σε εθνογραφική έρευνα πεδίου, η οποία διενεργήθηκε το 2015-2017 ως μέρος της εθνομουσικολογικής διδακτορικής μου έρευνας, σχετικά με την Αθηναϊκή τζαζ σκηνή στην περίοδο μετά το 2010. Όπως υποστηρίζω, η αναστάτωση που προκλήθηκε το 2010 σε αυτό που ο Appadurai ονομάζει *financescape*, προκάλεσε μία άνθιση των μουσικών συναυλιών μικρής κλίμακας και ταυτόχρονα οδήγησε στην ανάδειξη μιας παγκοσμιοποιημένης τοπικότητας. Στον Κεραμεικό αυτή η διαδικασία ενισχύθηκε περαιτέρω από τους επιβραδυνμένους ρυθμούς του εξευγενισμού και, σε συνδυασμό με τις αλλαγές στις εργασιακές πρακτικές των μουσικών και των ιδιοκτητών των τζαζ σκηνών, είχε ως αποτέλεσμα να έρθουν κοντά δύο έννοιες, οι οποίες φαινομενικά ανήκουν σε αντικρουόμενα κοινωνικά φαντασιακά, αυτή της «τζαζ» και του «καφενείου», ενισχύοντας ακόμη περισσότερο την περιπλοκότητα του αστικού τοπίου της κρίσης.*

Λέξεις κλειδιά: *εθνομουσικολογία, κρίση, εξευγενισμός, Κεραμεικός, τζαζ*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The area of Kerameikos in Athens, Greece has been at the epicentre of academic discussion particularly relating to gentrification processes. The very existence of the phenomenon in the Greek case is being questioned (Maloutas, 2007) due to the lack of state intervention. Thus, some scholars distinguish the Greek paradigm as being privately led (Leontidou et al., 2007), as opposed to gentrification in the Anglophone world which is being framed mainly as a state-led process (Watt, 2013). Gibson and Homan (2007, p.71) make a similar argument about gentrification in Sydney, which is unlike gentrification in cities in North America and Europe, due to the state's fragmented role when it comes to urban development in Australia.

Within this discussion, the two main narratives that have emerged focus on the one hand on the role of the cultural industries (Avdikos, 2014· Souliotis, 2013) and on the other hand on the displacement of vulnerable groups such as immigrants and the Roma population by the middle-class gentrifiers (Alexandri, 2015b· Tzirtzilaki and Alexandri, 2010). Avdikos (2014, p. 141) traces the early signs of the process back to the 1990s, and to the publication of a cost-benefit analysis related to the regeneration of the area of Gkazohòri by the municipality of Athens. Soon after, the first wave of gentrifiers arrived, characterised by a strong presence of the gay community, a phenomenon also observed in certain areas of US cities (Weightman, 1981). In Gkazi, the establishment of the gay community and artists in the area was followed by a boom in the entertainment sector with the opening of multiple bars and cafés.<sup>1</sup> The inauguration of the Metro station Kerameikos in 2007 signalled the further transformation of the area into what Alexandri has aptly described as “a 24hour playground of entertainment” (Alexandri, 2015b, p. 20). In her in-depth research looking into both areas of Kerameikos and Metaxourgheio, Alexandri focuses on the displacement of vulnerable groups such as immigrants and members of the Roma community by the affluent gentrifiers that started to arrive in 2000, turning the “fear of the other into the Trojan horse of gentrification” (Alexandri, 2015a, p. 1643), while arguing for the occurrence of gentrification in the Greek case “even in the case of ‘absent’ state intervention” (Alexandri, 2018, p. 36).

However, due to the economic crisis the rapid rhythm of gentrification was halted post-2010 and “provided the opportunity for alternative gentrifiers to better establish themselves in the area” (Alexandri, 2015a, p. 1636). Thus, while the process was initiated by top-down

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<sup>1</sup> Similar phenomena have occurred in many parts of the historical centre, with the more recent being in the area of the “Emporiko Trigono”. Some of the repercussions were mapped in a study by the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), “Business and professional activity in Athens’ Commercial Triangle” (2019). For a thorough description of the transformation of the area of Gkazi since the 1990s, see Avdikos (2014, p.137-159).

policies of the municipality of Athens as well as real estate companies in what could be labelled as a “back-to-the-city move by capital” (Knox and Pinch, 2010, p. 141), it was followed in post-2010 by bottom-up initiatives which are strongly culture-oriented, signalling the flowering of an alternative culture in the area strongly focused on the arts. Alexandri (2018, p. 37) refers to the phenomenon of “nightlife and culture-driven” gentrification, as being characteristic of many crisis-stricken Mediterranean cities, as it becomes evident by research conducted in Greece (Alexandri, 2014), Spain (Janoscka et al., 2014) and Italy (Semi, 2015). It was during this first period of abandonment of the area in the early 2010s and the beginning of the crisis that four of the core Athenian jazz venues were established in Kerameikos, namely Afrikana, Spiti, Kerameio and Louis.

By focusing on the emergence of a distinct jazz culture in the area, I seek to contribute to the various narratives of gentrification by suggesting that this process builds among others on imaginaries of the modernizing city nurtured during the previous decades of economic growth. Secondly, I argue that the spatialization of these imaginaries during the crisis suggests a cosmopolitanism from below and in the making, in which contradictory notions such as jazz and *kafeneio* are being merged.

## 2. JAZZ VENUES IN ATHENS: A BRIEF HISTORY

The history of jazz venues in Athens goes back to the 1970s and the jazz club Barakos in the old historical neighbourhood of Plaka, now a tourist quarter, right under the Acropolis. Barakos, established in 1974, acted as a jazz hub for international and Greek jazz musicians through the organization of live gigs and seminars, blending the global tradition of jazz with the local condition.<sup>2</sup> Half Note followed in 1977<sup>3</sup> but in a very different direction. Half Note contributed to the development of a translocal jazz presence in the Athenian capital, as it would host gigs primarily with famous international artists, with a preference towards African Americans, and thus re-enforcing further ideologies of black exoticism in relation to the genre of jazz.<sup>4</sup> “Authentic” jazz could only be black in a country like Greece that never considered jazz part of its culture, particularly during that era, when the local jazz scene consisted mainly of a handful of self-taught musicians.

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough description of the activities of Barakos club and the mentality of the era regarding jazz in Athens is available online in Ilan Solomon’s article (2019) in the Greek newspaper Avgi: <http://www.avgi.gr/article/9308590/9769378/enas-diskos-ena-klamp-mia-epoche> (in Greek).

<sup>3</sup> Half Note was initially called Braxton’s Jazz Next and was located in Plateia Amerikis, then relocated to Michalakopoulou Street, subsequently to Exarcheia and then to Ambelokipoi, before settling in its current location in Mets in 1995.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of black exoticism in jazz, particularly in France, see Fry (2007, 2011, 2014).

The following decades a few but dedicated music venues followed, supporting the local jazz scene that started to grow in the 1990s,<sup>5</sup> such as Parafono in Exarcheia (1981-2010) and later on café Asante (renamed into café Alavastron in 2002) in Pagkrati (1992-2012).<sup>6</sup> By the early 2000s, entrance fees to Half Note ranged from 30 to 40 euros and on Mondays from 15 to 25, while prices in the music venues hosting live gigs with the local jazz bands were considerably lower ranging from 10 to 15 euros.

Furthermore, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, and as bar-restaurants had become very popular in the Athenian nightlife, some of them, such as Bacaro (2007-2012) and Guru Jazz Upstairs (1997-2009), also provided new spaces for jazz performances during the week. Bar-restaurants would usually have elaborate menus both in regards to eating and drinking, with cocktails and fusion cuisine being the norm. This latter tendency, was related to the wider economic and social conditions of the mid-1990s and early 2000s, following Greece's entrance in the European Union in 1981. This has been a period of rapid economic growth and development, particularly for the city of Athens, according to Souliotis (2013, p. 62):

Since the mid 1980s it was the transfer of European Union resources through the Structural Funds and private and public borrowing (which was facilitated by banking deregulation, monetarist policies and entry to the Eurozone) that fueled the economy at all scales, from the financing of mega-projects, to the housing market and private consumption. [...] The main feature in the mutation of the city's social structure was an impressive growth of the upper and upper-middle socioprofessional segments (large employers, professional, administrative and managerial occupations).

In 2000 the much anticipated Athenian Metro was inaugurated facilitating travel within the city as well as contributing to the upgrade of certain areas, including that of Gkazi and Kerameikos. But the landmark of the 2000s was the organization of the Olympic Games in 2004. After a long period during which Athens was turned into a construction site and amidst international controversy regarding the reliability of Greece in pursuing such a huge task (Hamilakis, 2007, p. 1) the games finally took place in August 2004. Greece was living its

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<sup>5</sup> During the 1990s, apart from the venues, the magazine *Jazz&Τζαζ* was established as well as the radio station Jazz FM. For a thorough discussion of the history of jazz in the 1990s see Tsioulakis (2011) and for a historical account of jazz in Greece since the 1920s see Papadimitriou (2018). Further to the limited publications regarding jazz in Greece, the documentary *Diamonds in the sky* was released in 2019 by Meletis Miras, mapping the history of the Athenian radio station Jazz FM which was established in 1991.

<sup>6</sup> It is not within the scope of this section to provide an exhaustive list of all the jazz venues of the era. As such, reference is made to the most representative ones.

modern myth, a rather controversial one though. On the one hand, the media and politicians celebrated the return of the Games to its homeland, and on the other hand, strong critique focused on the extremely high costs and expenses that came with the construction of the sports facilities, which were completely abandoned after the Games. As Alexandri (2015a, p. 1634) notes, academics such as Leontidou (Leontidou et al., 2007) and Kazeros (2005), have argued for the continuation of the “state of exception” that was imposed during the Games–related to neoliberal policies regarding city planning and construction–until today.

By the early 2000s, Athens finally had a Metro as every “respectable” European city should and had managed to organize successfully a major athletic event. It was a general consensus that Athens had proved it can rise up to international standards of what it means to be a modern global city. Thus, the above mentioned bar-restaurants with their exotic drinks and foods added to this imaginary of the modernizing city drawing at the same time on a multicultural ideal. And of course the concept of modernization in Greece has always been tied to its Western legacy, excluding Greece’s eastern cultural affiliations as signs of backwardness (Herzfeld, 1987).

Souliotis (2013, p. 62) talking about the transformations in the cultural markets that took place in Athens since the 1970s as being the result of “tertiarization, growth of middle classes and enhancement of cultural capital, aesthetization of consumption, [and] neoliberalization associated in Europe with European Union policies”. Within this period of upward mobility, middle and lower class youngsters would show a distaste for the vernacular culture, including taverns and clubs. It is at this moment, as he further suggests, that the cultural markets responded to this tension by inventing “modernized ways of popular entertainment [...]”, which during the 1990s was expressed through the “appropriation of symbolic goods coming from Western Europe and the US (genres of music, cuisines, garments etc.)” (Souliotis, *ibid*, p. 63).

Jazz, being “a specific type of cultural formation and constitution of habitus that is translocal in purview” (Turino, 2000, p. 7), fitted very well into this western style cosmopolitan imaginary as well as that of Athens having a cultural life equivalent to that of the rest European capitals. But what was more important at the time is that the middle-class well educated Athenians, both in Greece as well as abroad,<sup>7</sup> in their late 20s and early 30s could still afford to consume anything related and adding up to this rapidly modernizing identity. Whether be it a concert, clothing, expensive restaurants and travelling. Referring to

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<sup>7</sup> Greece has been No.1 country in student mobility in the UK from 1996 to 2001.

the transformations in the social strata starting in the 1980s Souliotis points out that, “The first important outcome regarding the cultural economy was the widening of the social base for the cultural markets” (Souliotis, 2013, p. 62). However in the post 2008 period these generations as well as the younger ones started having one of the higher unemployment rates.<sup>8</sup> What kind of modernity could they afford then?

The crisis has changed the cityscape and along with it the music venues. By 2010 most of the jazz venues, with the exception of Half-Note, closed, either due to financial issues and problems with the municipality or due to the degradation of certain areas in the historical centre. The fancy bar-restaurants of the 2000s gave way to unpretentious jazz clubs, with less elaborate menus, resembling more to regular bars and rarely including food. Nowadays, there is a small number of clubs and bars exclusively dedicated to jazz performances, hosting live gigs almost every day.

Today’s venue owners have been nurtured inside the walls of the above-mentioned jazz venues. Most of them became involved with the jazz scene, either as members of the audience or active performers during the 1990s and 2000s. However, none of them was related professionally to the live jazz scene. Their decision to do so was inextricably related to the precarity of employment in the aftermath of the crisis. As I will describe in the next section the reasons they gave for turning into micro-entrepreneurship were:

- Big employers/businesses shutdown
- Structural reforms as part of the memorandum agreement affecting various sectors - liberalization of closed professions
- Decrease of the minimum wage

### 3. JAZZ IN KERAMEIKOS

In the neighbourhood of Kerameikos, the decelerated rhythms of gentrification post-2010 allowed for the emergence of an alternative culture and a bottom-up development. As I mentioned, during the recession four jazz venues of diverse style were established in the area

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<sup>8</sup> ELSTAT [Hellenic Statistical Authority] unemployment figures 2010-2015:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Ages 15-24:</b>	32,2%	45,5%	56,6%	57,6%	49,8%	47,9%
<b>Ages 25-34:</b>	17,2%	25,5%	32,8%	36,5%	34,7%	31,3%

<<http://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/42a81f31-ef87-4014-825c-bcc6021a7032>>

and since 2011 form the core jazz venues of the Athenian scene,<sup>9</sup> leading to the emergence of a distinct jazz subculture in the area, surrounding the big avenues reserved for the superculture. These are Afrikana jazz bar, Spiti art bar, Kerameio bar<sup>10</sup> and the *kafeneio* Louis.<sup>11</sup> Afrikana and Spiti operate exclusively as live music venues, hosting live gigs almost every day for a fee, while Kerameio and Louis host gigs once or twice per week for free, as they mainly operate as regular venues.

The area of Gkazi has been primarily associated with mainstream popular musics as its main avenues Piraeus and Iera Odos host a number of big clubs pertaining to Anglo-American genres such as electronic dance music<sup>12</sup> and *pistes*<sup>13</sup> hosting live shows of the Greek pop-stars, or in what could be described as superculture according to Slobin (1993, p. 33):

The superculture provides a set of standardized styles, repertoires, and performance practices that anyone can recognize, if not like, a common coin of the musical national currency that we all carry around every day.

Within the Greek soundscape which is dominated by the genres of *laiko*, *entechno* and pop, jazz acquires the status of a subculture,<sup>14</sup> depending mostly on private initiatives of the musicians and audience members, rather than hegemonic structures such as the state or the music industry, which is a characteristic of the superculture. Contrary to the big clubs, the jazz venues in the area of Kerameikos are located in the small and dark alleys surrounding

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<sup>9</sup> Since the end of my fieldwork in 2017, other venues in the area of the historical centre and Pagkrati started hosting jazz gigs, expanding the radius of the jazz network within the city.

<sup>10</sup> In April 2018, Kerameio suspended the live gigs that were scheduled until June 2018, and has not resumed since.

<sup>11</sup> *Kafeneio* could be roughly translated as coffee shop and is a traditional type of *magazi* [shop/venue] to be found all over Greece. It serves coffee, alcoholics and *mezes* [tapas] and in its traditional form it is a male-dominated space (Cowan, 1990, p. 74). For the very similar concept of *kafana* as a particular space of socializing in the Balkans and the untranslatability of the term see Hofman (2010, 2015). This particular *kafeneio* is named after the main character of the book “Red Dyed Hair” by Kostas Mourselas, whose name was Louis.

<sup>12</sup> One of the clubs established in the area in 2016 was Lohan, named after Lindsay Lohan the American actress-singer. During an interview she claimed to have opened the club to help the refugees: <https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-celebrity-pro-refugee-migrant-nightclub-lindsay-lohan-athens-migration-crisis-europe-dennis-papageorgiou/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Pistes* [plural of *pista*] literally means stage and is used to denote the venues of Greek popular musics, particularly of the *laiko* genre. For an ethnographic account of *pistes* in relation to modes of spectatorship see Tsioulakis (2019).

<sup>14</sup> My theorization of the live jazz scene of Athens as a subculture, continues in the same vein as the work of Tsioulakis (2011), drawing on the model of Slobin regarding the “superculture, intercultural and subculture”, rather than on a notion of subculture as related to deviancy and the working classes, as is the mostly the case with studies in sociology.



the two big avenues. Thus, the hierarchy between the superculture and the subculture acquires a strong spatial dimension in the area. Furthermore, the big venues use the name Gkazi to refer to their location (in posters, online events etc.), as Gkazi is associated with mainstream entertainment, while the small alternative venues use the name Kerameikos which is the ancient name of the area once inhabited by potters.<sup>15</sup>

What is different in these jazz venues, compared to the pre-crisis ones, is that they employ performances only with local jazz musicians. Furthermore, the entrance fees are considerably lower, ranging from 3 to 5 euros in the venues exclusively dedicated to live performances, while in the bar and *kafeneio* that host live gigs once or twice per week the entrance is free. This results in sixteen to twenty jazz gigs per week only in the area of Kerameikos. The establishment of these venues came as a result of a turn to micro-entrepreneurship as an alternative to the precarious working conditions in the aftermath of the crisis as the venue owners describe:

#### **Nausika, Afrikana<sup>16</sup>**

There was the potential, a family fund that we wanted to invest in some kind of venue, to do something. I was fired from Eleftheroudakis<sup>17</sup> at that point, I worked there for seven years. [...] I really don't know how my parents got to trust me. It was a crazy endeavour, you don't know what you are doing, with no experience at all. I still can't believe it myself.

#### **Panos, Spiti**

I thought that I could do some other work simultaneously with playing music...<sup>18</sup> But then this thing [crisis] happened and I thought there is no way that I am going to work eight and nine hours for 400 euros, there is no way, because even if you had built a good CV by then, it did not matter. [...] The situation had already started to decline so we said, let's go for it, it's all or nothing.

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<sup>15</sup> Alexandri (2015a, p. 1644) mentions a similar distinction in the use of the area names of Metaxourgeio and Kerameikos interchangeably: "As Metaxourgeio is linked to the industrial past of the city, and Kerameikos to its ancient past, gentrifiers refer to it using both names (KM), but mostly prefer the ancient Greek one."

<sup>16</sup> All interviews were conducted between 2015-2017. They were transcribed in Greek and translated into English by the author.

<sup>17</sup> Nausika was fired in 2012 from Eleftheroudakis, which was one of the oldest bookstores in Athens established in 1898. It shut down in 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Panos and Yiorgos who run Spiti art bar are both musicians.

**Vangelis, Kerameio**

I was a collector in an insurance company that closed, and fortunately they compensated us. It didn't close actually, but there were cut-backs. They knew how things in the market would go, and what was about to happen in the following years, so they started reducing the personnel, the budget and they left. They went to Ukraine, to Malaysia, to countries with bigger populations. So I had this fund, this compensation, but I also didn't know what to do. Where would I go 52 years old to get a job? To be able to sustain my family. And Spyros<sup>19</sup> came up and asked me, he was in a similar position and he told me, "do you want to open a *magazi* [venue] to bring the *merokamoto* [wage] home?" I said, "I'm in. We'll roll up the sleeves and work." We found this place, it was a disaster, a disappointment only looking at it.

**Kostas, Louis**

I owned commercial vehicles. Nothing to do with the f&b sector. At some point in 2010 the liberalization of licenses took place. A lot of money was lost during that period from many motorists. I was patient for three years in case the situation changed, but it didn't. So I sell the cars, I have some money - a little - and with my [business] partner we start fixing this *magazi* [venue] from zero. We could have had double the expectations...But we fixed it with a little money and got what you see here. Which is...how did this lady call it the other day? *A very beautiful nothing*.

Although none of the above venue owners had previous experience or knew how to run a business, they were all related to the jazz scene as audience members or musicians. Thus, in this moment of decision-making, capital that was accumulated during the previous decades of economic growth, was re-invested in endeavours related to the tastes and musical affinities that were nurtured during the previous decades as they narrate:

**Nausika, Afrikana**

I love jazz, I listened to it since I was sixteen, I used to go to all the music venues around here. Parafono, Bacaro. I went to Half Note every week, mostly on Mondays because the entrance fee was 15 euros. Normally it was 25 and in order to sit at a table 35 or 45 [euros]. [...] I was fascinated by this thing and I decided to do this, very

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<sup>19</sup> Spyros is Vangelis' business partner.

timidly at the beginning regarding the live gigs, because I didn't know..., I was not in these circles. I've always been a part of the audience, but I had no experience in the f&b business. Just, out of love, I wanted to create a jazz scene that would give the opportunity to musicians who at that period..., for some reason lots of the venues had closed, and they didn't have a home. I did a couple of live gigs in the beginning to see how it goes and I run it as a bar in an effort to get into things, because it's difficult. I was also on my own, it was night and all this kind of stuff, many issues. Bureaucracy is tragic, they won't let you... I don't know what to say, even to open a *periptero*<sup>20</sup> you have to go through hell. At some point I was about to give up, because I had some problems with the city planning commission, I don't even know for how long. [...] I had decided from the beginning that I wouldn't bribe anyone and I would do everything on my own. Consider that I didn't even hire an engineer, I would go to the city planning commission all by myself.

### **Vangelis, Kerameio**

I consider myself an audience member, I mean what happens here..., the fact that there is a *skiniki parousia* [live stage], it's totally coincidental. Or let's say inevitable. When the logic and dynamics that are needed for the music are already there, then there will also be places for all this to bear fruit. You can say that I started with scarce resources, just because I had many friends who were musicians, I knew them for years, from *magazia* like Parafono which was a jazz hangout, there was music every day, mainly, well not mainly—only jazz. [...] Musicians from the whole range have played here, I have this craziness and I want everyone to play here, so they can have their cut, to take the stand because I experienced this as a listener at Parafono. It was a space that functioned as a stand for young musicians, it was for those who did not have the luxury to play at Megaro [Athens Concert Hall] or Half Note.

All of them repaired and decorated the spaces on their own, sometimes assisted by friends and parents instead of hiring crews, as a way of minimizing the costs. Their endeavours however did not always prove successful as Panos mentioned:

### **Panos, Spiti**

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<sup>20</sup> *Periptero* is a kind of small kiosk to be found all over Greece, selling products ranging from newspapers, ice-creams, drinks, and cigarettes to books, toys and painkillers.

It [the venue] was as you see it more or less. But we didn't hire any crews. It was just the two of us with our parents, we painted the walls, made repairs, this kind of stuff. [...] We opened around November 2014..., in January we shut down and reopened in March. [...] We didn't know how a venue works and that you need to have a budget in place in order to support a venue from zero. We didn't see it so much as a business, we got in it very emotionally, mostly doing it for the music. Which is true, but when you put down the numbers they don't add up.

All the above venue owners were caught up in the makings of the recession post-2010 and decided to make a turn in their professional careers towards micro-entrepreneurship. The main reasons they gave for their decisions, were related to the disruptions in traditional forms of employment. As Tsampra (2018, p. 6-7) notes:

[...] in 2014, Greece and Spain recorded the highest long-term unemployment in EU28 (followed by other peripheral countries). [...] between 2008 and 2013, youth unemployment increased 59 per cent in Greece [...]. In 2015, Greece still suffered unsustainable rates of youth unemployment (51.8%), followed by Spain (48.6%), Croatia (43.1%), and Italy (40.5%).

One of the first effects regarding the working reality in the aftermath of the crisis was the shutdown or shrinkage of local SMEs [Small and Medium-sized Enterprises] as was the case with Eleftheroudakis, the bookstore where Nausikà was employed. The closure or activity-shrinkage of multi-national companies, as the one in which Vangelis worked for the past twenty years, and their move towards other markets, is another facet of the economic crisis, inherent to capitalism and analyzed thoroughly by Harvey in his section on “uneven geographical development and the production of space”. As he eloquently points out, “[...] the search for the new, billed as the search for competitive advantage, becomes critical to capital's capacity to reproduce itself. Above all, uneven geographical development serves to move capital's systemic failings around from place to place” (Harvey, 2014, p.161).

A second facet of the ongoing transformations, was the liberalization of closed professions, a requirement of the structural reforms to be undertaken by Greece, as part of the memorandum agreements. The Greek government was obligated to take measures towards

the deregulation<sup>21</sup> of several professions including that of dentists, pharmacists, taxi drivers etc. One of the first sectors to be affected, in 2010, was that of freight and haulage causing long nationwide strikes, with several repercussions regarding gas and food distribution.<sup>22</sup> Kostas, faced with increasing losses, decided to sell the trucks he owned and invest his capital in *Louis*.

The third reason mentioned by Panos and Yiorgos, who are also the youngest among the venue owners, had to do with “the dramatic wages and pension reductions (by nearly 30%)”<sup>23</sup> (Tsampra, 2018, p. 8), as a result of the shrinking economy. The average minimum wage for a single adult ranged from 430 euros (after tax) for those aged under 25, and around 530 euros (after tax) for those over 25 years old, at the same time that youth unemployment peaked at 50%.

Under these conditions, self-employment seemed like the only way out for those who could afford it, and this is one of the reasons that micro-businesses (of one to five employees) particularly in the food and beverage sector boomed after 2012. The turn to micro-entrepreneurship is not a new phenomenon though. Similar processes took place in another period of economic stagnation, during the 1980s and early 1990s, as Souliotis mentions: “Young people were re-oriented towards services like restaurants, bars and cafes rupturing the continuity with parental occupations. They created small entertainment businesses in the 1980s and early 1990s with minimum financial resources and based on personal work and aid from their social networks” (Souliotis, 2013, p. 64).

Most of the buildings where these jazz venues are located were previously derelict and abandoned. After the bubble of the early 2000s burst in 2008, the fancy lofts and restored neoclassicals stopped popping up, businesses started shutting down and many buildings in the area of Kerameikos were left vacant as some of the venue owners narrate:

### **Vangelis, Kerameio**

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<sup>21</sup> Regulation is related to conditions affecting market entry and market behaviour or conduct. For a detailed analysis (ordered by the European commission) of the effects of liberalization of closed professions in Greece, supporting that this led to further opening of the market see Athanassiou et al. (2015). The report is available online [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/effects-reforms-regulatory-requirements-access-professions-country-based-case-studies-0\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/effects-reforms-regulatory-requirements-access-professions-country-based-case-studies-0_en). Regarding the intensity of the reforms see Athanassiou et al. (2016).

<sup>22</sup> Knight (2015, pp. 75-80) provides an amusing description of what happened in a queue outside of a gas station in Trikala. The queue was formed due to the lack of gas in every gas station of the city, as a result of this particular strike that took place from July 26<sup>th</sup> until August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010.

<sup>23</sup> According to evidence provided by Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions), the statutory minimum wage in Greece decreased by 24% during 2010-2017. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/eu-member-states/statutory-minimum-wages-in-the-eu-2017>

- We found this place, it was a disaster, a disappointment just looking at it, you didn't have the heart to...[...] It was vacant.

- And what was it before that?

- It was a *kerameio* [pottery]. This is why we kept the name. He [previous owner] let go of the place because he couldn't afford the rent, and for two and a half years the place was vacant. So we found it, it was totally abandoned to its fate and we said that if we smarten it up we might be able to make a *merokamoto*. [...] It was one of the first in the area, so it was something new. Many others followed and there was a boom in the area, an upgrade in a manner of speaking, but on the other hand, one might say that there are lots of people coming, there is noise, disturbance... And Kerameio has its part in it, with the loud music, with jazz musics that are in a way you could say stiff..., not so easy.

### **Nausika, Afrikana**

This one was a club, an *after* [sic].<sup>24</sup> It would open at 11 pm and played techno, it would bring DJs. And by coincidence I checked the ads that day. And I see it. I went crazy, I really liked it. I called and I came to see it, it was falling apart, everything was ripped out, electric devices etc. because the previous tenant owed a lot.

Current venue owners with the help of friends and family, rather than with professional crews, managed to restore them with a relatively low budget and personal work. Only in this case they did not rupture the continuity with parental occupations as Souliotis mentioned above. They ruptured the continuity with values promoted by the neoliberal market economy, such as upward mobility and rampant consumerism; values that were prevalent in Greek society after the 1990s and until the mid2000s.

What is important in this case though, is not the well-known and thoroughly analyzed in various disciplines, worsening of the employment conditions during the recession. What is important to look into, is the kind of businesses unemployed people turned to. Means, money, objects that were being used to survive and make a living in the previous neoliberal capitalist mode were being re-appropriated through their sale and re-investment, as to materialize dreams related to leisure or professions that were not seen as worthy pursuing during the

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<sup>24</sup> The term "after" when used in relation to night life, denotes the venues that open late at night and close early in the morning.

previous years of economic growth, such as music making, or opening a bar as opposed to “real” work.

Compensations originating in the collapse of capitalism and the shutdown of businesses, trucks that could not be used to produce surpluses– all symbols of a failing capitalism–were used in order to turn dreams that were carefully nurtured during the previous decades into reality. Where capitalism could no longer give false hope in the shape of money, social recognition or upward mobility; hope had to come from within and from dreams that capitalism had rendered value-less thus far.

The jazz venues of Kerameikos contributed to the revitalization of the local jazz scene, and at the same time provided new opportunities for employment to professional jazz musicians. Furthermore, they were some of the first venues to open post-2010 in the area, and were thus established right before a new phase of gentrification started in Kerameikos, after the decline of Gkazi. All of them form part of the “jazz neighbourhood” of Kerameikos. Professional jazz musicians would spend time in Kerameio regardless of the live gigs. At Louis, I would often encounter musicians, knowing that they had a gig at Kerameio, grabbing a bite just before their live gig, or vice versa; musicians playing at Louis and when Louis closed they would go to Kerameio, which stays open until late to have a drink. The venue owners circulate as well, so it is not rare to see them attending live gigs at each other’s venues. Contrary to a number of bars in the area of Syntagma that employed music as an added value in order to attract customers during weekdays and in many cases expecting the musicians to bring the people, most of the venue owners of Kerameikos employed music as a result of their involvement with the jazz scene, and in some cases, as in Kerameio, due to long-standing relations with the musicians who would often ask themselves to play there. The large number of jazz musicians available came as a result of the collapse of the Greek popular music industry during the crisis.

#### 4. PROFESSIONAL JAZZ MUSICIANS

Although the jazz scene in Athens goes back to the 1970s, the relatively small audience consisting mainly of the musicians and a few aficionados explained the lack of an economically sustainable local scene. As a result, local jazz musicians had to look elsewhere in order to secure their income, namely working in the Greek popular music industry as session musicians supporting the local stars of the *laiko* [urban-folk], *entechno* [art-song], or *laiko-pop* genres. Big live shows provided extremely high incomes, in some cases rising up to 400 euros per night, but were nonetheless devalued by the majority of the musicians as

“low-quality” music. These evaluations were not solely style-related, but signified two very different ontologies, as performing for the music industry was conceptualized as “work” while performing jazz was conceptualized as “play” (Tsioulakis, 2011). This phenomenon is not exclusive to the Greek jazz scene but has been also discussed in relation to the London jazz scene, as musicians in their effort to retain their creative autonomy have to deal with poor working conditions, signalling another distinction between “work” and “creativity” (Umney and Kretsos, 2014).<sup>25</sup> In the Greek case, jobs in the music industry were the ones to provide their basic income and jazz was kept as a side-project for the nights they would not be working in the big shows.

However, the crisis shifted the dynamics between the superculture and the subculture. The music industry, in particular *entechno* and to a lesser extent *laiko*, has been severely affected by the crisis as the highly paid stars were faced with cancellations of their costly shows due to low attendance. Furthermore, the remaining ones would operate only two days per week instead of four, accompanied by a reduction in the musicians’ compensations.

But even though the mainstream receded it did not disappear completely, nor has it lost its primary role in the Greek soundscape. The subsequent transformations came in terms of scale. Less “big names” were able to maintain a show, thus limiting the available jobs for session musicians. Apart from this, most of the shows would not last for a whole season<sup>26</sup> as was the case until the mid-2000s, but rather for a consecutive period of two to three months or during periods of increased consumption such as Christmas, for two to three days per week instead of four or five as was the case prior to the crisis. The decrease in days as well as the decrease in the compensations resulted in professional musicians being reluctant to work for crumbs in the music industry, a job they seemed to hate anyway. Contrary to the local stars who were dependent on businessmen to sponsor their shows and thus secure their employment, jazz musicians were capable of booking their own gigs in a number of small bars around Athens. With plenty of time in their hands now they turned to music genres, such as jazz and funk, in which they were highly-trained and enjoyed playing, making jazz their fundamental form of employment either through performance or teaching. As Michalis, a professional jazz musician suggested:

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the issue of the “musician as worker” see Cloonan (2014), and regarding “live music performance as a form of labour” see Sakakeeny (2015).

<sup>26</sup> Before the crisis a whole winter season for the big clubs would last approximately from October/November until March/April, and it would be followed by the summer season, with the big stars performing at clubs in the Athenian coastline or touring around Greece.



I prefer it a million times to do this thing [teaching] and all the other small gigs. Rather than be with a big name and wait until they'll have a live [show], to be on standby and cancel classes. Also [I like] playing live gigs and projects with good musicians that I like and help me evolve musically. It is healthier. It's between us, the musicians, we don't have *firmes* [stars]. Or producers who don't know what they want exactly and I don't know why they even call them producers. It's like we got rid of all the sickness and only the healthy part has remained, but the price of all this is that it does not pay well. So there is tremendous musical development. But not economic. It's all up in the air. Because one month can go great, another month lousy. Nothing is stable and certain, and you live in this agony, but there is more health. In terms of psychological health and physical, in terms of having more time to see my children. And when I'm fed up, I'm fed up regarding things that I'm interested in. I have played with musicians that I admired since I was a child.

Evidently it was not only fees for the big shows that were reduced, but also for the jazz gigs. The question is why musicians kept playing jazz for 30 euros while rejecting jobs in the industry for 100? One might be tempted to answer this question by depicting a romantic view of this era, as one when people were set free from the restraints of capitalism, finally having the time to do what they loved. Indeed, this is an image constantly promoted lately by local and international media, constructing a narrative of how Greece re-emerges from its ashes and focusing particularly on the cultural and artistic boom in Athens.<sup>27</sup> Michalis's narrative above reminds us that this is not exactly the case. The recurrent use of words such as *agony*, *health* and *sickness* interchangeably, to describe both playing in the music industry and playing jazz, suggests that both worlds are related to conditions of precarity. We need to be reminded then that this artistic boom has come as an answer to a "pick your poison" kind of question.

## 5. CONCLUDING

As ancient Greece serves the imaginaries of greatness pertaining to the past—being represented via the material culture of the city and its ancient monuments—modern Greece is being represented by the fetishization of drama related to the crisis. Where one once had tours of the Acropolis, one now also has an "educational and informative tour of modern

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<sup>27</sup> The New York times published an article related to the emergence of Athens as a cultural capital after the crisis: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/travel/athens-after-the-economic-crisis.html>.

Greece, exploring the lessons learned from Greece's financial crisis" organized by the Guardian for 2,500 GBP.<sup>28</sup> Anything that falls in between the glorious past and the shameful present is silenced by the dominant narrative and the structures of the superculture. In a similar way, the superculture denies jazz a place in the Greek soundscape through official state and educational policies according to which Jazz Diplomas offered by conservatories are not officially recognized by the Ministry of Culture, and thus cannot secure work in the public sector for any of these musicians, contrary to the Diplomas in Classical music.<sup>29</sup>

However, transformations in the Athenian live music scene during the recession indicate the prioritization of a globally-informed locality and a reversal of power relations between the superculture and the subculture in multiple levels. The jazz music culture that developed during the 1990s and 2000s and considered of lower quality or less authentic in comparison to international jazz artists, during the crisis served as the main tank from where bar owners drew their musicians when they needed to create an affordable cosmopolitan imaginary. Jazz in the *kafeneio* is the perfect example of this process and a turn towards a vernacular cosmopolitanism as described by Werbner: "an oxymoron that joins contradictory notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment" (2006, p. 496).<sup>30</sup>

The *kafeneio*-type venue, a predominantly local space of socializing initially to be found in rural Greece, became very popular during the crisis as it provided a cheap alternative to the expensive bars and restaurants of the 2000s. *Kafeneia*, in their neo-traditional form, set up either as private businesses or as cooperatives, started to mushroom all over the city since 2008. Kokkinidis, in his thorough discussion of cooperative *kafeneia* and their self-organizing practices, suggests that these autonomous spaces fashion "'rule-creating' rather than 'rule-following' subjectivities" (Kokkinidis, 2015, p. 848). As far as music is concerned, *kafeneio* is associated primarily with Greek traditional musics or rebètiko and it is very common for small groups of two to three musicians—usually guitar and bouzouki, or oud—to be playing there. Therefore, although Louis is not set up as a cooperative, its particularity lies

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<sup>28</sup> The tour, advertised by the Guardian and organized under the lead of the newspaper's Greece correspondent Helena Smith was withdrawn after public outcry. For more information, see the following articles in online news media:

<https://www.rt.com/news/422572-guardian-refugee-tourism-greece/>

<http://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/03/29/guardians-greek-crisis-holiday-package-causes-outcry-gets-retracted/>

<sup>29</sup> The only recognized Bachelor Degree in Jazz performance is issued by the Music Department of the Ionian University.

<sup>30</sup> Jazz in the *kafeneio* is a phenomenon that had occurred also during the 1920s in Athens. For more information, see Krisila (2017, p.70-71).

in the fact that it plays jazz music not only during the live gigs but all-day long, as Kostas narrates:

**Kostas, Louis**

We only listen to jazz and nothing else. I like it, this purely folk American music, I really like this music with its sounds, with all this muddle and the freedom contained in it. [...] I've been to Paris to some jazz venues and I liked the sound that was coming out of them. So, I have chosen to listen only to this music here. It is a bit tiring for the morning audience but... And we have live gigs once per week. As long as the conditions allow us to, because in the summer it's a bit difficult with the doors being open and all the noise [...] This area is a bit jazz if you think about it. It has its freedom. A very alternative crowd. Many artists. It has this free spirit. It is an urban scenery but it has a particularity. I see this from the people coming to the *magazi*..., it has everything. Here, within a distance of 25 metres, there is an alley which is a real neighbourhood. I grew up in Nikaia in a settlement, we come from Asia Minor, and I grew up in a real neighbourhood, with derelict low-storey houses, this kind of stuff. I couldn't believe that in an urban spot at the centre of Athens, there would be a place like this.

Considering the current transformation of Kerameikos by 2019 and the multiple bars and *kafeneia* that have opened in the area since 2010, we realize that gentrification is a process that is realized in two phases. The first, includes the degradation of certain areas in the city centre, making them appealing to artists and low-cost businesses due to availability of low-rent spaces, who in turn raise the symbolic value of the area, only to be followed by big real estate and a boom in the food and beverage sector turning these areas into playgrounds of entertainment. In Gkazi, this happened during the 1990s and in Kerameikos it started slowly after 2010 and peaked by 2019, resulting in the area today being full of *kafeneia* and bars. However, the jazz venues of Kerameikos—being some of the first in the area before the entertainment sector boomed—signalled the emergence of a new ethos in the Athenian jazz scene.

In post-2010 Athens, jazz at times still evokes an elite cosmopolitanism accompanied by exotic cocktails, as is the case in some bars in the touristic area of Syntagma, and at times a

“low-budget cosmopolitanism”<sup>31</sup> as in the area of Kerameikos, where the decelerated rhythm of gentrification in the aftermath of the crisis has allowed for the emergence of a world betwixt and between. Jazz in the space of *kafeneio* appears as being constituent and part of the discrepancies that form modern day Greece. Within this space two very different and contradicting social imaginaries are being merged. On the one hand jazz—that had attained the status of a prestige good during the 1990s, often related to elitism and considered to be foreign to the local culture until today—and on the other hand *kafeneio*, a predominantly local way of socializing associated primarily with traditional Greek music or *rebetiko*. *Kafeneio* challenges further narratives about lack of mixing between the lifelong residents with the gentrifier population, as its morning clientele is mainly comprised of the elderly neighbors in their 60s or 70s who spend time there playing backgammon, drinking their coffee or just gazing—the most prominent activity of *kafeneio*—while they complain about the jazz music playing through the speakers. Kerameikos then emerges as a space where jazz venue owners and musicians in their renegotiation of their work practices in the aftermath of the crisis, are collectively creating a “low-budget cosmopolitanism” embracing contradiction, not to resolve it in a celebratory way (Tragaki, 2015, p. 247) but as a way to make ends meet when everything is about to collapse; and at the same time they are invoking past intimacies of the modernizing city in their effort to re-engage with a world that they no longer recognise. Kostas, when I asked him why he chose jazz, for a venue that has been exclusively associated with traditional Greek music or *rebetiko*, replied:

I like contradictions. Listening to Nina Simone and at the same time eating a picante sujuk [spicy sausage]... With an egg on top of it. It doesn't match, but this is what jazz music is about. I think.

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<sup>31</sup> For a thorough theoretical discussion of the term “low-budget cosmopolitanism” see Vavva (2019).

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