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FRAMING URBAN INEQUALITIES: RACIST MOBILIZATION AGAINST IMMIGRANTS IN ATHENS

ABSTRACT

In the last few years local anti-immigration actions in the Greek capital seemed to deepen the wider racist discourse against immigrants. Collective racist actions were embedded in specific narratives about place and inequality. In this article, after a brief discussion of the socio-spatial transformations in the residential area of the Athens city-centre, we apply framing analysis in order to explore the strategic linkages between the rejection of immigrants and urban inequalities. We find that the localization of racism is framed in general visions about inequalities. Racial and social dimensions of inequalities are mixed and used in various, complex and interconnected ways. For these inequalities to be strategically used, the city space as a contested spatio-temporal entity is also involved.

Keywords: *urban inequalities, racist mobilization, framing analysis, Athens city-centre*

INTRODUCTION

On November 24th 2008 about two hundred people demonstrated against what they called “the ghettoization of our area” in a gathering in Aghios Panteleimonas Square, in the midst of the vast and dense residential area of central Athens. In a petition they had launched a few days earlier, the so called “Residents’ Committee of Aghios Panteleimonas and Plateia Attikis” condemned the multiple degradation that foreign immigrants imported in their area. They argued that superfluous immigration turned out widespread insecurity and fear, hygienic deterioration in the public space

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and in residential buildings, aesthetic degradation, devaluation of housing properties, impoverishment of education services in local schools, eviction of the Greeks and the loss of local ethnic homogeneity. This territorial injustice should be removed by the authorities, through the implementation of proper measures of control and string quotas.

What could be at first glance viewed as a coincidental local manifestation of the wider racist discourse in Greece (see for example Lazaridis and Wickens, 1999; Christopoulos, 2004; Ventoura, 2004; Lawrence, 2005), proved to be both enduring and influential. In fact, we saw the emergence of a local collective actor that survived the anti-racist collective responses and confirmed its existence under changing sociopolitical circumstances. The following months brought several new texts signed by different actors that tried to play a role in framing the collective action from different points of view. What these texts had in common was that they utilized the specific characteristics of this specific place as the focal point of both the migration problem and the proposed solutions, those of rejecting the very presence of immigrants in “our” area.

Moreover, local rejection achieved to go beyond the texts and their circulation. In May 2009 those claiming to represent the Greek residents closed down the playground on Aghios Panteleimonas square, announcing that they did so in response to the incapacity of the authorities to protect the square from being a place of immigrants’ concentration. During the summer of the same year, patrol groups ensured that the square would remain free from immigrants and public anti-racist activities. Ethnic purging seemed to be imposed, often after violent confrontation with the anti-racist movement on the streets. At the same time “Aghios Panteleimonas” was gaining wider public attention in the media and by politicians who were happy in order to promote their anti-immigration agenda, especially in the 2009 European elections campaign.

After the national elections in October 2009, there have been several attempts to disperse the paradigm in other places in central Athens, by establishing other local “residents” committees’. Despite that this effort seemed not to advance in some instances and that often the same agents were involved, the neighboring Attiki square was also progressively “cleansed”, after several violent attacks against people, immigrants’ stores and the nearby unofficial mosque (UNHCR, 2010; ANTIGONE, 2010). As this introduction was written (April 2011), another ‘new’ committee under the name “Residents of the Mouseio area” emerged to attack the office of the Somali community, not more than 800 meters away from the initial point of the conflict.

This is not the place for a critical analysis of the chain of the events.¹ What we want to argue is that the urban conflict around immigration, as exemplified in this case, reveals a significant turning point of racist discourse in Greece. It involves collective racist action that is embedded in specific narratives about place and inequality and for this purpose it also constructs the place as such. To be sure, the collective actor that rejects symbiosis with immigrants is not homogeneous in terms of discourse and practices. However, if internal tensions were to be diminished, we claim that this was largely due to the capacity to construct and exploit narratives of spatial inequality and injustice, as a means to transform wider racist discourse into a basis for the justification of the collective action of rejection.

The place frames of local racism engage spatial inequality along two axes. The first one concerns the construction of an idealized local past that contradicts to the horrible present. The second concerns the comparison between the contemporary conditions in different parts of the city. Moreover, inequalities are demonstrated on two levels: one that concerns socioeconomic differences; and one that concerns ethnocultural ones. Socioeconomic inequalities refer to themes such as housing conditions, tenure, professional categories, and education skills in a way that intersects ethnocultural inequalities. The latter involve the idea that differences regarding language, religion, history, race, color, lifestyle, values, family structures and public activities form evidence for the unsurpassed cultural superiority of the natives. Difference is constituted as inequality, since those superior that belong here have the exclusive right to decide on what “here” is and how it is to be dealt with.

We examine the traces of these narratives on spatial inequalities following the discussion about framing in contentious politics theories. Framing is about attaching selective meanings to actions, experiences and events (McCann, 2003). Framing analysis therefore concentrates on the discursive frames in which activists strategically situate their discourse and activities in order to construct a problem as such, to propose solutions and to mobilize potential supporters (respectively the diagnostic, the prognostic and the motivational function of framing, according to Snow and Benford, 1988, 1992, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). There are important extensions to the framing approach that direct the theory toward its spatial implications. Investigating how place affects activism at various spatial scales, Martin (2003) argues that the construction of frames involves a process of attributing meanings to places. For her, place is involved in every framing func-

1. For other descriptions see Kavoulakos and Kandylis, forthcoming and Dalakoglou and Vradis, 2011.

tion, especially in the motivational one, as places provide important mobilizing discourses for collective action (cf. Larsen, 2009). Place-framing is thus introduced in order to capture the ways in which activists draw upon and at the same time constitute place-based identities.

In the next section of this paper we give a short review of the changing socio-spatial inequalities in Athens, focusing on the recent developments in the residential area of Aghios Panteleimonas. The transformations of the local socioeconomic structure, the settlement of new immigrants and the devaluation of the built environment have been considered to indicate rapid degradation, which is described in terms of a wider crisis in the centre of Athens. While these developments form the context in which racist collective action takes place, we do not claim that they provide the material conditions that are simply translated into hostility and racism. Instead, in the third section we turn to the ways inequalities are perceived and strategically used in order to mobilize against immigrants. We follow the temporal and spatial connotations that shed light on the constructed liaisons between inequalities and anti-immigration collective action.

THE SOCIO-SPATIAL DIALECTICS OF INEQUALITIES IN THE ATHENIAN URBAN CORE

Fears about social and environmental degradation have been projected on the urban core of Athens at least since the 1980s (Kalantzopoulou et al., 2011). Even comparisons with the developments in American metropolises were commonly used to delineate a dystopia of increased criminality, insecurity, alienation and pollution that were expected to bring about the social desertification of the city centre. From this perspective current discourses of anxiety and fear are hardly new, except that today they can be connected to massive international immigration that has altered the demographic composition of the city since the early 1990s, in successive waves of moral panic.

Urban growth in Athens was quite impressive during the first post-war decades, on the grounds of rapid inflows of internal migrants from the rural areas of the country. A spatially diffuse production system (Vaiou and Hadjimichalis, 1997) and an unreliable planning system (Economou, 1997) resulted in piecemeal urbanization in the urban periphery, mainly through irregular self-help construction (Leontidou, 1990; Chtouris et al., 1993). At the same time vast areas around the historical centre were built under the system of *antiparochi* that secured and reproduced the preceding pattern of small and socially widespread land property. Besides nourishing

the construction sector that was critical for the urban economy as a whole, antiparochi led to the production of sufficient housing units that made possible the access of large parts of the urban population to home-ownership (Leontidou, 1990; Maloutas, 2007; Lambropoulou, 2009).

Importantly enough, home-ownership was going to be a decisive factor as well as an indicator for social mobility. Intergenerational family strategies to promote sustainable access to private houses, often not accompanied by residential relocation (Maloutas, 2004), turned out to be an important asset, in the context of the underdeveloped welfare state (Allen et al., 2004). Moreover, widespread home-ownership contributed to relatively low rates of social segregation, in the sense that many densely populated areas around the city centre were characterized by social mix. The co-habitation pattern of home-owners from different social strata involved vertical social segregation in the buildings of antiparochi, albeit dominated by the intermediate categories (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001). Thus home-ownership in Athens was meant to absorb parts of both the social and the spatial dimension of urban inequalities. Massive exploitation of the urban land for residential purposes provided the opportunity for many to self-regulate other social mobility prospects, while mixing residents of different socioeconomic backgrounds.

This model was not without contradictions and sociospatial transformations in Athens during the last decades have altered the patterns of spatial inequalities (Maloutas, 2007; Arapoglou and Sayas, 2009). As soon as in the late 1970s, quite a few areas of what became the inner residential tissue had approached their limits in the capacity to accommodate further housing investments. The supply of housing units had left few open spaces, congestion had already arisen, the anonymity of the urban continuum had started to be condemned and the fragmented scheme of private property left poor possibilities for regeneration initiatives. The city centre as a signifier of high or at least promising residential status started to be doubted, while the possibility for self-help construction in the periphery by the poor and the working class was diminishing (Leontidou, 1990). Relocation to the suburbs became attractive for households that wished better housing conditions and were able to move. Since the early 1980s, suburbanization created more socially homogeneous residential areas in the periphery of the metropolitan area (Couch et al., 2007), while leaving behind inner areas with a more polarized social structure: those who could not move, entrapped by economic conditions in combination with the liberalization of the housing market (Emmanuel, 2004); and those who would not move,

because their socioeconomic status left them unaffected by the degradation (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001).

The relocation of middle and upper-middle strata from the city centre is often considered to bring evidence of degradation, in a process of self-fulfilling prophecy. Since the early 1990s, another aspect of the perceived degradation has been the settlement of foreign immigrants mainly from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, but progressively more and more from virtually every part of the world. In conditions of non regulation of housing integration, the lower floors and the smaller apartments in the tenements in and around the city centre have been a significant housing solution for members of most immigrant groups, after a first period of marginal housing (Psimmenos, 2004). Since the early 1990s, immigrants repopulated those housing units that otherwise would remain vacant, in areas of the urban core where they represent about 20% of the total population, i.e. double their percentage in the metropolitan area. The social mix of the residential areas has been replaced by a new form of socioethnic diversity, characterized by more severe socioeconomic and housing inequalities (Kandyliis et al., forthcoming). At the same time the filtering-down of the gradually devalued housing stock is accompanied by the alteration of tenure, as most immigrants have to reside in houses of the private rented sector. In this sense, apartments that had already become undesirable for native residents, gave their owners the opportunity to extract an otherwise impossible income.

Socio-ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the city centre are quite the opposite of what they are often considered in dominant discourses. Instead of ghettos, available data reveal a landscape of residential areas where rarely immigrants constitute the majority of local population and in no case this majority is due to the presence of a single immigrant group (Arapoglou, 2006; Arapoglou et al., 2009; cf. Vaiou et al., 2007 for a critique of the ghettoization argument based on the investigation of immigrants' everyday geographies in another neighborhood of central Athens). However, ethnic diversity should not obscure the reality of many immigrant households living in deprived housing conditions, cohabitating with natives who saw their residential space cease being an indicator of high social and their social mobility prospects stagnate.

The residential area of Aghios Panteleimonas is located very close to the CBD of Athens, crossed by major traffic axes that lead there. Possibly due to this topography that offers almost no landmarks among the continuous housing units, the area was hardly known under this specific name² before

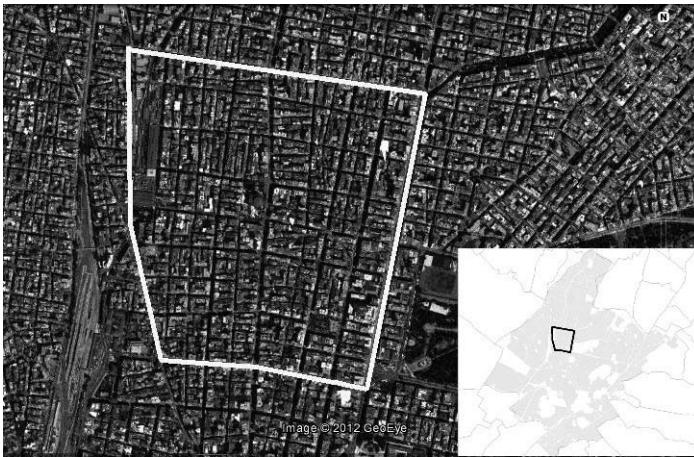
2. The most familiar name was rather Aghios Panteleimonas Acharnon, using simultaneously

it came up in the public scene in November 2008, as a battlefield “against ghettoization”. However, devaluation had started quite long before.

The main part of the total housing stock consists of 5 to 7-storey blocks of flats that were built mainly in the 1960s and no later than the 1970s.³ These blocks replaced the older tissue of independent residences, which left behind but residual units, albeit of significant architectural interest. The whole area receives a significant part of commuting flows to and from the city centre. At the same time it accommodates certain activities of metropolitan interest (especially regarding public administration) and a large number of various retail stores for local needs. Retail activities, typical of many other residential areas of the urban core, are important for the local spatial character, which is by far dissimilar to that of a commuting suburb and for the local socioeconomic composition, which comprises an important part of self-employed in small commercial and artisan activities.

Using as basis for calculations the area between four major roads (Picture 1), the local Greek population decreased significantly from 43,013

PICTURE 1
Delineation of the “Aghios Panteleimonas area”



Map source: Google Earth, 28/7/2010. The inlaid map shows the position of the area in the Municipality of Athens.

Acharnon Av., a major traffic axis of the city centre, and the name of the local church in order to depict what the area actually is: a place quite difficult to delineate in the wider residential agglomeration of central Athens.

3. According to 2001 census data, only 3,6% of the local Greek population lived in house constructed after 1981.

inhabitants in 1991 to 31,312 in 2001, while significant immigration flows in the '90s brought 12,418 immigrant residents in 2001 that amounted to 28.4% of the local population, almost three times higher than the aggregate percentage of immigrants in the city. Between 1991 and 2001 the percentage of Greeks aged over 65 increased from 20% to 25%, while the percentage of those up to 24 decreased from 27% to 21%. The social structure of the natives also changed, as residents from the intermediate socio-professional categories relocated at much higher rates than those at both ends of the spectrum (Table 1). Accordingly, population reduction left behind a more polarized local (native) social structure. Polarization is of course more evident when the immigrants' socioeconomic stratification is also considered, as the majority of immigrants belong to the lowest echelons.

TABLE 1
*Socioeconomic classification (according Esec),
Greek and immigrant residents in Aghios Panteleimonas
and the Municipality of Athens, 1991-2001*

| | | 1991 (%) | | | | | | 2001 (%) | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|----------|------|------|------|------|------|----------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tot | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tot |
| Greeks | Aghios Panteleimon | 25,3 | 27,2 | 19,5 | 18,0 | 10,0 | 100 | 30,1 | 23,2 | 13,1 | 20,0 | 13,6 | 100 |
| | Mun. of Athens | 27,9 | 30,5 | 16,1 | 15,8 | 9,7 | 100 | 34,2 | 24,3 | 12,5 | 17,5 | 11,5 | 100 |
| Immigrants | Aghios Panteleimon | | 2,9 | 1,9 | 5,4 | 35,8 | 54,0 | 100 | | | | | |
| | Mun. of Athens | | 3,9 | 2,3 | 5,8 | 34,1 | 53,9 | 100 | | | | | |

1: Large employers, professional, administrative & managerial occupations, 2: Intermediate and lower grade administrative & professional occupations, 3: Small employers and self-employed, 4: Lower services, sales, clerical & technical occupations, 5: Routine occupations.

Data: 2001 census (EKKE-ESYE, 2005)

Inequalities between natives and immigrants are explicit regarding housing status. Immigrants enjoy generally less domestic space than natives. Almost 50% of the immigrant population possessing less than 15 square meters per head is a clear indication of housing deprivation for many. On the other hand, the percentage of immigrants in the next group (15,1-30 sq. m.) is not very different from the respective percentage for the Greek residents, reflecting the tendency for housing integration. At the same time immigrants' position in the housing market differs significantly to that of the majority of Greeks regarding tenure: 90% of the immigrant population lived in privately rented houses compared to 32,3% of

TABLE 2
Housing space per capita, Greek and immigrant residents in Aghios Panteleimonas and the Municipality of Athens, 2001

| | | Housing space (sq. m.) | | | | Tot |
|------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------|---------|--------------|-----|
| | | Up to 15 | 15,1-30 | 30,1-50 | More than 50 | |
| Greeks | Aghios Panteleimon | 6,8 | 44,5 | 29,1 | 19,6 | 100 |
| | Mun. of Athens | 7,7 | 50,9 | 28,0 | 13,4 | 100 |
| Immigrants | Aghios Panteleimon | 49,8 | 40,8 | 7,0 | 2,4 | 100 |
| | Mun. of Athens | 49,0 | 40,8 | 7,4 | 2,8 | 100 |

Data: 2001 census (EKKE-ESYE, 2005).

TABLE 3
Tenure, Greek and immigrant residents in Aghios Panteleimonas and the Municipality of Athens, 2001

| | | Tenure | | | Tot |
|------------|--------------------|---------|-------------|--------------|-----|
| | | Renters | Home-owners | Other status | |
| Greeks | Aghios Panteleimon | 32,3 | 62,3 | 5,4 | 100 |
| | Mun. of Athens | 30,6 | 65,4 | 4,0 | 100 |
| Immigrants | Aghios Panteleimon | 90,0 | 9,1 | 0,9 | 100 |
| | Mun. of Athens | 86,5 | 11,9 | 1,6 | 100 |

Data: 2001 census (EKKE-ESYE, 2005).

the Greeks. The majority of the latter are home-owners, at a percentage quite similar to that for the Greek population in the Municipality of Athens as a whole.

Newer data are not yet available but evidence allows concluding that the arrival of new immigrants from war and poverty zones around the world has intensified local inequalities. While earlier settled immigrant groups were improving their socio-economic and housing positions, at least one part of those who arrived in recent years faced marginal living conditions, often having to reside massively in abandoned buildings (rented to them at a low cost per night).

Thus, Greek home-owners and immigrant renters share the aging housing stock in unequal terms. To some extent, socio-economic inequalities are also reflected in the vertical position inside the buildings, where im-

migrants live mostly in the small and less preferable apartments of the lower floors, reproducing the vertical residential segregation pattern. However, one should keep in mind that this scheme is one of close proximity of unequal neighbours. Racist local activities are informed by the spatial proximity of socially and ethnically distant “others” and it to the process of constructing this distanciation that we now turn.

FRAMING RACIST MOBILIZATION: INEQUALITIES AS A PIVOTAL ISSUE

The localization of the racist discourse in the centre of Athens has produced various texts. These have been created by various actors that attempt to communicate their points of view about the description of the local problem, the proposed solutions and the need of collective action. In doing so, they construct meanings of what the specific place is, what it represents and how it is or should be lived. Despite that these meanings are not identical and they can even compete in some aspects,⁴ it is important to notice the achieved consensus on the unequal spatialities of the diagnostic, the prognostic and the motivational aspects of framing the racist collective action. It is this consensus between various actors that provides the ground (metaphorically as well as literally) for collective action.

Place provides an important mobilizing discourse and identity for collective action not only for local activists but also for external actors like extreme right organizations and parties that try to trigger local collective action. This is the reason why in this case study frame analysis is not restricted in texts produced by activists that claim to represent the local residents, i.e. to constitute the local movement organization (albeit under changing brand names). The texts vary also in the mode of circulation, ranging between petitions, open letters, posters, leaflets, newspaper articles, public speeches and blog posts. Moreover, the textual production

4. The co-existence of local residents, local politicians of the far right, and the neo-fascist group Chrysi Avgi raised questions about the sustainability of the collective action as such. The forceful neo-fascist involvement has been often thought, especially among anti-racist activists, to uncover the absence of a “real” local movement. Opposing this argument, we want to focus on the means by which the obvious neo-fascist component of the collective action succeeded to dominate, while presenting itself as the genuine representative of local residents’ agony. We agree with Papandreou (2009: 406) that “racist attacks (...) revealed the capacity of organized racism to obtain legitimacy from the ground of widespread xenophobic fantasies and to colligate groups that are already inspired by the ethnoracial rationale”.

has to correspond to the different phases in the development of collective action from the initial construction of the problem to the constitutive opposition to enemies and from consolidation to the effort to expand. However our goal is not to show the differences between various actors, moments and modes of circulation, but to trace the commonalities in the strategic construction of spatial inequalities. Thus the selection of texts (Table 4) is determined by the effort to include different actors, different modes of circulation and different phases in the evolution of the collective action.

A mix of social and ethnic inequalities is the core element of all three functions of framing: the construction of the problem (diagnostic framing), the construction of a collective identity (motivational framing) and the description of the solution (prognostic framing). Racist activists use inequalities not in order to demand social equality but to defend individual social mobility strategies of the local native population. Place plays a crucial role in their construction of argumentation. In the racist discourse place becomes the locus of inequalities in two perspectives: comparing this place with others and comparing its present situation with the past. The comparison reflects both material and symbolic elements (housing, security, aesthetics of public space, residential status etc.) and involves places at different scales (the neighborhood, the city, the nation). This perception of inequalities transcends and unites the three functions of framing, guiding our approach to use place as the core element.

The past of Aghios Panteleimonas is idealized and constructed in a nostalgic way. The history of this residential area is identified with prosperity, avoiding any reference to the social transformations, during the time before the arrival of immigrants. The central point of the construction of the narrative of the past life in the area is the high level of social status of its residents (I1). This was the main criterion for those who decided to move here. Settlement and especially home-ownership in this area was not only a symbol but also a material proof of social success, embedding social status in a built environment characterized by middle class apartments and shops that attracted people from the entire city (LT4). Aghios Penteleimonas occupied a high position in the social hierarchy of places in the city.

Importantly enough, this history of social success implies ethnic and social homogeneity at the local level. Social inequalities and especially social conflicts are ignored. The residents of Aghios Panteleimonas share a common history of social success that secured the social homogeneity of this area (PB5). Social homogeneity is also connected with nostalgic references of a lost community of tight personal relations between neighbors

TABLE 4
Selected texts about localized racist discourse in Athens

| Abb. ^a | Title/description | Date | Editor ^b | Mode of circulation | Moment of collective action |
|-------------------|---|-----------------|---|---|--|
| LT1 | “Big number of immigrants in the greater area and the tragic consequences on the local society” | Nov. 2008 | <i>Aghios Panteleimonas</i> Residents’ Committee (LMO) | Open letter addressed to authorities, parties etc. Propagated as a petition signed by 1.000 residents / Posted on web blogs | Organizing the first demonstration against “ghettoization” (26/11/2008) |
| P1 | Poster inviting to the first demonstration | Nov. 2008 | Residents of <i>Aghios Panteleimonas</i> and <i>Plateia Attikis</i> (LMO) | Poster / Reproduced in web blogs | Organizing the first demonstration against “ghettoization” (24/11/2008) |
| PB1 | “Aghios Panteleimonas was only the beginning” | Dec. 6th, 2008 | Ch. Charitos (ext.) | Article in <i>Eleftheros Kosmos</i> far right newspaper | After the conflict with antiracists in the first demonstration, opposing parts try to define themselves |
| LT2 | Residents’ Response to <i>Eleftherotypia</i> newspaper | Jan. 20th, 2009 | Residents of <i>Aghios Panteleimonas</i> (LMO) | Open letter / Posted on web blogs | “Residents” reply to a publication about the second demonstration (19/1/2009) that ended up at new tension with antiracist activists |
| P2 | “Stop illegal immigrants that smother us” | Feb. 2009 | Movement for Greek Fatherland (ext.) | Poster / Reproduced in web blogs | The “residents” and antiracist activists confront each other on the square, organizing competitive events |
| LT3 | Letter to the Ministry for Public Order | Mar. 6th, 2009 | Residents of <i>Aghios Panteleimonas</i> (LMO) | Letter to the Minister/ Reproduced in web blogs | The Minister for Public Order meets the “Residents”. The latter insist that their claims remain unresolved |

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| II | Activists' interview | Jun. 2nd, 2009 | Local activists (LMO/ext) | Interview given to Kavoulakos | "Residents" close down the municipal playground. Patrol groups surveille the square |
| PB2 | "Aghios Panteleimon: a symbol of self-organization" | Jul. 18th, 2009 | Y. Piliouras (ext.) | Posted on the blog of <i>Ellinikes Grammes</i> (Greek Lines), political organization participating in LAOS. | New conflicts with antiracists. The police support "Residents'" occupation of the square |
| PB3 | "The history of our area" | Feb. 2010 | Z.B. | Article in the "Voice of the Residents", issue 1, p.8 | "Residents" organize events to celebrate their occupation of the square |
| PB4 | "What Aghios Panteleimonas means to me" | Feb. 2010 | K.N. | Article in the "Voice of the Residents", issue 1, p.2 | |
| PB5 | "Aghios Panteleimonas, yesterday and today" | Apr. 2010 | I.L. | Article in the "Voice of the Residents", issue 2, p.5 | |
| PS1 | Activist's public speech | Sept. 20th, 2010 | Local activist | Public speech | The gathering turns to overt support for <i>Chrysi Avgi</i> in the following local elections |
| PB6 | "Illegal immigrants' square!" | Oct. 2nd, 2010 | Nikos Chidiroglou | Article in <i>Eleftheri Ora</i> , far right newspaper | Ethnic cleansing is imposed in <i>Plateia Attikis</i> . Informal mosque is attacked |
| PS2 | Activist's public speech | Jan. 15th, 2011 | Local activist | Public speech | "Residents" prevent antiracist concert in the square |

a. LT: Local texts written by collective local actors and addressed to the residents and the authorities. P: Posters. PB: Texts eponymously published in newspapers.

I: Interviews. PS: public speech. F: Flyers.

b. Editors claiming to represent the "Residents" are denoted as Local Movement Organization (LMO). The rest are denoted as external actors.

TABLE 5
Framing racist mobilization in Aghios Panteleimonas by type

| Type | Main points |
|---|--|
| Diagnostic Frames (Describe problems and assign cause/blame) | The disproportional concentration of immigrants in the area. New immigrant groups (that differ socially, culturally and racially) are responsible for: -The degradation of the residential area. - The loss of the high position in the social hierarchy amongst the areas of Athens. - The 'flight' of upper and middle classes. |
| | - The government is unable or unwilling to protect the rights of the native residents. - There is an international "conspiracy" against the Greek nation |
| Prognostic Frames (Solutions and specific actions) | - The removal of immigrants from the area |
| | - Violent occupation of the square as a symbolic local solution and paradigmatic action for the whole nation |
| Motivational Frames (Exhort action and define/describe the community) | - The incapacity of the authorities to protect native residents makes collective action necessary |
| | - The community is consisted not only by those who belong here (native residents) but also by external actors that share "our" vision |

(PB3, PB4). This community was also reflected in the built environment of the area; the architecture of the small buildings (PB3); the "scent of trees"; and the "open doors" of the houses (PB5). For that reason, the loss of the community implies the demand to return to times of simplicity and purity.

This glamorous past of Aghios Panteleimonas is intensively contrasted to the present degradation. However, degradation is not the main point of the diagnosis of the problem of the area. The problem is the over-representation of immigrants, in comparison with other residential areas of the city (LT1, PB6, P2, I1). Immigrants' concentration is described as "ghettoization" (P1, P2, PS1, PB2), a process that threatens the social status of the native residents.

Nevertheless, not all immigrants are considered as equal threat, for the guilt falls upon those that are not integrated in the Greek society. New immigrant groups from Asia and Africa that came to Athens in the last 4-5 years are mainly targeted. Although these groups are ethnically diverse, they are perceived as homogenous because they share some common characteristics (LT1, I1). They differ from the natives in social, racial and cul-

tural terms (LT1, PB1, PB3). Their social exclusion is considered as social failure that is attributed to their race and culture. Their everyday life that is not inscribed in the normal triad “work – home – family” (I1), their incomprehensible language and religion, their color and their immoral behavior that makes their difference always visible are factors that prevent their social inclusion (I1, LT1, PB3, PB6). On the contrary, immigrant groups that came earlier, like Polish and Albanians, tend to be accepted and are sometimes considered as allies (I1), because they do not differ racially and they are integrated in the “normal” way of life.

New immigrant groups are considered responsible for all the problems of the area, although most of these preceded their arrival. They are responsible for lack of security and hygiene, the degradation of the social infrastructure, the quality of life and the deteriorating moral profile of the area, the devaluation of the housing properties, the degradation of the social profile of the area and unpleasant aesthetics of the public space, where immigrants are concentrated (LT1, LT4, PB2, PB6, PS1, P1, I1).

The present condition of the area is portrayed in contrast to the social success and the homogeneity of the past. The formerly proud residents feel shame for their neighborhood (PB4, I1). They are frightened and locked in their homes (PB6). Aghios Panteleimonas lost its high position in the hierarchy amongst the areas of Athens. Sharing this area with so many immigrants is a social stigma for natives (LT1, P1). The racist discourse emphasizes the growing distance of the social status of the residents between this area and other wealthy areas of the city (PB4, I1). Young couples, artists, members of the middle class move systematically to other areas (I1, PB2, LT1). Those who remain are only those who cannot move (LT1, PB2, PB6, I1).

The responsibility for the disproportional concentration of immigrants in Aghios Panteleimonas falls to the authorities of all geographical scales. The Municipality of Athens council is responsible for the conditions and the image of the public space and the control of immigrants’s shops (PS1, I1). The Prefecture of Athens is responsible for the hygienic conditions (PS1, I1). Politicians and political parties are criticized for ignoring the native population (PS1, PB1). Nevertheless the main responsibility is attributed to the state and especially to the government (LT1, LT4, PB5, PB6, P1, P2, I1), the Ministry of Public Order and the police that are unable or unwilling to protect the rights of the native population (LT1, LT3, LT4, PB6, PS1, P2) and to stop the inflow of immigrants that enter the borders illegally (I1, P2). This argumentation legitimates the use of violence against immigrants and the occupation of the square.

Nevertheless, beyond and above the local and national authorities, international institutions and especially those of the European Union (I1) are perceived as distant and uncontrollable decision makers that aim the erosion of the Greek nation (P2). Aghios Panteleimonas is thus presented as a place under attack or invasion of illegal immigrants (PB2, LT3, PB6, PS2, P1, P2) that are supported by foreign authorities. However this is not merely a problem of an isolated community living in a restricted residential area. What is happening now in Aghios Panteleimonas is also indicative for the future of the Greek nation (PB3, PB4, PS2, P2).

The shift of the geographical scale is accompanied by a shift from socioeconomic to ethno-cultural inequalities. In this point an “external” ethnic hierarchy replaces the “internal” socioeconomic hierarchy of the city. Thus the struggle against immigrants is crucial not only for the survival of the local native population but also for the future of the whole nation. Consequently the proposed solutions and the related actions have not only a realistic but also a paradigmatic character (PB2, PB3, PB4, PS1). The occupation of the square is only a partial symbolic solution that could be followed in many other areas. It should show the way for the whole nation.

The shift of the geographical scale is also used to cover a contradiction in the question about who has the right to speak and act in Aghios Panteleimonas. Immigrants, communists, anarchists or antiracists are not legitimate actors as they do not belong in this residential area (LT2, LT3, PB2, PS2, I1). On the contrary, other external actors who share our vision about inequalities and support our struggle are recognized as people who belong here (PS2). It is their expression of solidarity that gives them the right to speak and act.

CONCLUSIONS

If racism is about “promoting exclusions (...) of people in virtue of their being deemed members of different racial groups, however racial groups are taken to be constituted” (Goldberg, 1993: 98), our reading of localized racism in Athens reveals that the exclusion of immigrants is crucially framed in general visions about inequalities. Different notions of inequalities are simultaneously constructed and employed in various, complex and interconnected ways. And for these inequalities to be strategically used, the city space as a contested spatio-temporal entity is also employed.

Inequalities concern the racialization of the immigrant others, whereby ethnic differences are perceived as generators of unequal social roles. The

insurmountable ethnic distance between “us” and “them” is associated with social distance which is in turn both empirically ascertained and normatively accepted. Moreover, it is not only ethnic difference that justifies social inequality, as the opposite is just as true: social inequalities are used to naturalize ethno-racial categorization. In terms of place this linkage is constructed on the basis of ‘their’ spatial practices that are opposed to “ours”. “They” crowd in public spaces; “they” live in overfull apartments with no normal family relations; “they” breach hygienic conventions. In terms of time, “they” are newcomers here, while “we” belong here for centuries as nationals or for decades as respectable residents.

On the other hand, inequalities concern social divisions within the national body. “We” residents used to occupy an elevated position in the social ladder and this was reflected in the qualities of our privileged residential area. But it is once again ‘them’ foreigners that disturbed “our” social status. In terms of place, this new position in the structure of internal inequalities is attributed to the invasion of those who brought with them crime, dirtiness and immorality. In terms of time, there is the reference to a nostalgia of a middle-class, peaceful and closely-knit community.

Inequalities are also a matter of politics. Corrupted politicians and agents of the administration are blamed for the abandonment of “our” area to the invaders and the loss of “our” previous status. At first, inequalities are politicized in the quite banal form of those in power (at different levels, from the local to the supranational) conspiring against “us” who have no power. But then, the degradation of “our” way of life calls for collective action. Moreover, the struggle against degradation exposes those that, while of Greek origin, do not belong here. Interestingly enough politicians as well as anti-racists do not understand the aggravation of the inequalities because they are not affected by them. In terms of place, the collective action is meant to solve the immediate problem of immigrants’ overrepresentation in our area and at the same time to give the example to the national community. In terms of time, the urgent character of ‘our’ losses calls for an urgent response.

In the second part of this chapter we presented a brief summary of the complicated transformations of the structure of inequalities at the local level of Aghios Panteleimonas. In the third part we described the strategic use of multiple inequalities in order to mobilize racist campaigns against immigrants and immigration. The easiness with which the racist discourse invokes different aspects of inequality and confuses social inequalities with ethno-racial classifications is far from surprising. Similarly it is quite

obvious that the racist discourse is able to make linkages between different spatial and temporal scales, from the neighborhood to the national and from the glorious history to the emergent situation. We find more important that, through these linkages, the construction of inequalities as a pivotal issue for the exclusion of the “others” is effectively embedded in the ground of the city space as the place of everyday life.

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