

Title: Chronotopic Dilemmas: Space-Time in Consumer Movements of the Greek Crisis

Abstract

This paper explores the spatio-temporal dimensions of consumer activism during the Greek crisis. Existing work has provided valuable insights into the figure of the political consumer and the socio-spatial contexts in which consumer activism is enacted. The paper presents original six-year ethnographic work that extends current knowledge through exploring how the spatial and temporal dimensions of consumer activism are unsettled and reconfigured during an acute economic crisis. It builds on the concept of chronotopic dilemmas to illustrate the ideological tensions and contradictions between old and new spatio-temporal logics and practices. In doing so, the current study complements prior research focused on how distinct cultural and institutional settings mediate discourses and actions of consumer activism, by highlighting their inherently spatio-temporal (chronotopic) nature.

Keywords: ethical consumption; political consumption; consumer activism; Greek crisis; chronotopes; chronotopic dilemmas

Prologue

“I mean, this is Exarcheia...It is not a place to come for Frappuccinos and celebrity gossip. Most of us only buy from local co-operatives and store owners that are politically like-minded. We do things differently here...” (Female, 53)

In various quotes like this, residents of Exarcheia – a neighbourhood in Athens, Greece that is renewed for its anti-capitalist and radical left-wing ethos – express their vision of, and enacted commitment to, producing spaces that oppose the dominant values of consumer society and possessive individualism (e.g. Graeber, 2011). These include, for instance, various gifting bazaars, solidarity trading networks, no ticket cinema screenings, collective cooking events and occupations of public spaces. Although such forms of consumer mobilisation and resistance have been addressed in previous research, what is relatively more unique about Exarcheia is that they are increasingly normalised and firmly embedded within a single neighbourhood. In other words, they have become as routine and necessary as more mainstream consumption logics and practices are elsewhere (e.g. Barnett et al. 2011). Meanwhile, Exarcheia – and the rest of Athens – have been increasingly challenged by the Greek crisis, what has come to be the biggest economic contraction ever recorded in an advanced economy during peacetime (e.g. The Economist, 2015). It has since been doubled up by the 2015 European Refugee Crisis, with Exarcheia hosting, or being directly surrounded by, dozens of bottom-up refugee welcome squats and social centres (e.g. Lafazani, 2018). Inevitably, the meanings and practices of both mainstream and alternative consumption have been profoundly unsettled and increasingly challenged:

“How can I talk to the poor illegal immigrant about anti-consumerism? Whose misfortunes never come singly and he is an anti-consumerist already because he cannot be anything else?” (Female, 43)

Introduction

This paper explores the spatio-temporal dimensions of consumer activism during the Greek crisis. Current studies into consumer activism (e.g. Barnett et al. 2011) – as well as sister terms such as anti-consumption (e.g. Iyer and Muncy 2009), ethical or responsible consumption (Shaw, Carrington and Chatzidakis, 2016), political or radical consumption (Littler, 2009) – have followed two main paradigmatic traditions. Preoccupied with “who” is the ethical consumer, the first tradition has focused on their socio-demographic characteristics, ethical beliefs and attitudes, and relatively more recently, questions of geographical location, class and perceived agency (for a review, see Shaw et al. 2016). Within this stream of research, ethical consumption is conventionally defined as “having “political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives” and being “concerned with the effects that a purchasing choice has, not only on consumers themselves, but also on the external world around them” (Harrison, Shaw and Newholm, 2005, p.2). Accordingly, modes of consumer activism are often viewed as an attempt to reclaim a sense of agency vis-à-vis the social and environmental perils of contemporary consumer culture (e.g. Luetchford, 2016).

A second tradition is less interested in the figure of the ethical, political or responsible consumer per se and more in the variety of geographical and institutional settings that mediate ethical consumption both as a practice and as a discourse (Ariztia et al. 2017). For instance, much geographical literature has focused on the variety of political actors (e.g. NGOs, governmental bodies) that mobilise the “consumer” in their attempt to achieve a range of institutional outcomes (e.g. Barnett et al. 2011; Clarke et al., 2007; Evans et al. 2017). Another stream of geographical studies has focused on the spaces and contexts of ethical consumption, highlighting how different national histories, cultural customs, systems of provision and visions of the consumer affect dominant logics and practices of consumer

activism (e.g. Kjærnes et al. 2007; Varul, 2009; Wheeler, 2014). Kjærnes et al. (2007), for example, observe that Norwegian consumers are less likely to engage in consumer activism due to their trust in state institutions whereas British consumers do so more frequently due to their cultural belief in exercising “the right to choose”. Contrasting this finding, Wheeler (2014) illustrates how comparatively higher levels of trust in the state in Sweden versus England, have resulted in a more widespread and naturalised sense of responsibility to recycle.

A related, more recent, stream of studies has focused on ethical consumption practices in the global South as opposed to global North (e.g. Ariztia et al. 2016; Gregson and Ferdous, 2015; Hughes, McEwan and Ben, 2015; McEwan, Hughes and Ben, 2015; Smith, Kostelecký and Jehlička, 2015). Within the South African context, for instance, Hughes, McEwan and Ben (2015) highlight the role of intermediaries in mobilizing consumers’ concern for proximate producers and local communities whilst also acknowledging the cultural role of thrift as a habitual practice that is also an expression of care and capability (McEwan, Hughes and Ben, 2015). Focusing on the ethical consumption discourses in Chile and Brazil, Ariztia et al. (2016) identify both continuities and differences with consumption in the global North. On the one hand, their participants found it more difficult to distinguish between practices of household reproduction and those of “ethical consumption” (cf, Miller, 1995). On the other hand, there was a second discourse around the global (environmental and social) effects of late capitalism and consumerism that was akin to ethical and sustainable campaigning as observed in the global North.

Common in these studies is the shift away from individualised, choice-based approaches to ethical consumption and into perspectives that acknowledge ethical consumption as part of everyday sets of routines and necessities that are culturally, institutionally and locally embedded (Barnett et al. 2011; Kleine, 2016). This paper builds on

and extends this research tradition by investigating the re-configuration of ethical consumer logics and practices in crisis-hit Exarcheia, a neighbourhood of Athens that is internationally renowned for its anti-capitalist and anti-commercial ethos. The unique characteristics of our six-year ethnographic study allow us to investigate the intertwining of space with time, as accentuated during (and due to) the Greek crisis (e.g. *The Economist*, 2015). I explore the “here and now” of consumers’ lived experience but also utopic visions of a future society and both idealized and disavowed remnants of the past. In doing so I introduce the notion of chronotopic dilemmas and call for a more nuanced view of consumer activism that acknowledges its inherently spatio-temporal (chronotopic) nature.

2. Chronotopic Analysis

Bakhtin’s (1981, 1980) notion of the “chronotope” (literally meaning time-place) is primarily developed in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), in his attempt to deal with the question of (inter)subjectivity. Drawing on a discursive model, Bakhtin argues that our image of what is human is always spatio-temporally positioned and understood within the context of dialogue with the other. Bakhtin's dialogism insists on the primacy of speech and consciousness, suggesting that language involves 'somebody talking to somebody else even when that someone else is one's own interior addressee' (Bakhtin, 1981 p. xxi). Space-time co-ordinates are in turn the key semiotic axes through which meaning becomes possible.

Literally meaning time-space, chronotope is borrowed from cutting-edge scientific thinking of Bakhtin’s day (i.e. Einstein’s theory of relativity), to capture the aforementioned inseparability – and inherent relativity - of space and time. That is, chronotopic analysis rejects the very possibility of absolute space-time co-ordinates. In the context of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, such analysis asserts that our (inter)subjective understandings of space and time are always context-specific and relative, constituted by (and constitutive of) specific

social relationships. Consequently, “every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (Bakhtin, 1981, 258). Put differently, chronotopes are not simply points in space-time or scenic backgrounds in a period of time. Instead they “shape the logic by which events unfurl, their syntax, the rhythmic quality of plausible actions and counter-action” (Lemon, 2009, p. 839).

If all our experiences and ultimately our sense of being and sociality are determined by space-time constructions, it follows that chronotopes are inherently ideological. For authors such as Wirtz (2016; see also Hanks 1990; Blommaert, 2017) chronotopes are in fact prior to ideology, in that they provide fundamental axes through which categories such “past, present, and future matter in themselves and in relation to the trajectories, disjunctures, and immanences that delineate the very possibilities for subjects” (p.344). Importantly, although chronotopes (like ideologies) can become hegemonic, they may not be totalizing and they can thus allow for a more agentic view of the subject (cf. Steinby and Klapuri. 2013). Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1981) assertion that they can compete and interact with each other, various scholars distinguish between different scales and types of chronotopes, such as major versus minor, local versus dominant, generic versus specific chronotopes (see Bemong et al. 2010).

Although Bahktin’s engagement with the chronotope is primarily metaphorical and solely applied to fictional texts, subsequent scholars have illustrated the usefulness of “extra-literary” (Preener, 2006) or “real-world” (Lawson, 2011) chronotopes, extending from literature to culture, and from art to the study of everyday social interactions (see Wirtz, 2016). In doing so, more precise forms of analyzing and contrasting chronotopes have also been proposed. For instance, Lemon (2009) builds on Goffman to propose the image of “layering”, whereby intergenerational actors do not attempt to reconcile their differences but to disarticulate their own “here and now” from the “there and then” of the other (p.845). Wirtz (2016) proposes more rigorous attention to the “poetics of chronotopic dialogue”

(p.366) with a view to sharpening the analysis of distinct epistemic, moral and affective commitments across multiple “pasts, presents and futures” (Scott, 1991, p.278). Gomersall and Madill (2015) use the notion of “chronotopic disruption” to explain how life-changing conditions, such as those exemplified during chronic illness, alter individuals’ sense of time-space in the world.

Common in the above analyses is the focus on how individuals navigate different chronotopes and, at times, negotiate their inherent tensions and contradictions. In this paper I build on, and extend this tradition by illustrating how consumer-oriented social movements collectively (re)negotiate previous chronotopic logics and practices, amidst an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. As my account shows, the ideological basis of these movements has been beset by opposing understandings of the “here and now” (e.g. prefigurative versus pragmatist), the “there and then” (e.g. utopian versus dystopian) and the “public square” (e.g. communal versus atomised). In doing so, I corroborate the concept of “chronotopic dilemmas”, understood as ideological tensions and contradictions (e.g. Billig et al. 1988) that are exacerbated by the shifting nature of time-space coordinates. Subsequently, I illustrate the applicability of chronotopic dilemmas beyond my specific site and the sphere of consumption.

3. Exarcheian Consumer Activism

“...Exarcheia, apart from being an Athenian neighbourhood, has, for a few decades, constituted a socio-political laboratory, a coming-together place for revolutionary segments of the population, a place for initiating subversive political projects, emancipatory creativity and contact with contemporary critical movements....We fight every form of nationalistic, racist and sexist logics. We are against any type of consumerist ideals that impose the individualization and homogenization of society and

its subordination to market logics...” (Call by Residents, Collectives and Social Movements of Exarcheia, Oct 2012)

Exarcheia is a central neighbourhood of Athens that is renowned for its radical intellectual and political history. Among others, this has been the birthplace of the Athens Polytechnic uprising against the military junta (November 1973), the 2008 Greek riots, as well as various more recent protests and movements of resistance against the so-called troika (EU/IMF/ECB) and the associated neoliberal attack on the Greek welfare state. The neighbourhood has now acquired a reputation that stretches far beyond the Athenian borders, attracting international media coverage and an ever-increasing number of “anarcho-tourists” and “Exarcheologists” (academics and journalists interested in Exarcheia) that come to observe the area.

Within Exarcheia, consumer society has been at the heart of critique and resistance to the current socio-economic system. Nonetheless, it was not until the 2008 uprising, where a police shooting of 15 year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos sparked widespread riots across the country, that various Exarcheia-based collectives and movements began to experiment more extensively and consistently with various forms of here-and-now politics and creative forms of resistance (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011; Tsilimpounidi and Walsh, 2014). This led to new forms of activism that directly targeted the “consumer” subject and aimed at producing pre-figurative models of economic and social participation. These included, for instance, a guerrilla park that functioned on the basis of a gift economy, and various alternative trading networks that brought together politically like-minded producers and consumers without intermediaries. There were also various “anti-consumerist” spaces where people could come and give, take, or give and take goods without any norms of reciprocity. Alternative tactics of consumer resistance and modes of consumer-oriented activism were constantly tried out.

Concurrently, Exarcheian consumer activism begins to take place within the broader socio-economic context of a country that soon becomes the world's first Western economy downgraded to an emerging market status. The so-called "Greek economic crisis" (The Economist, 2015) starts in late 2009, in the aftermath of the Lehman brothers' collapse and as part of a broader Eurozone sovereign debt crisis (e.g. Lane, 2012) that affects various peripheral economies such as Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. In nearly all measures, however, Greece has been the worst affected: it was not only the first (and last) Eurozone country to be shut out of financial markets (as early as May 2010), but also the one recording the most striking signs of economic contraction. By 2015, the country had lost more than 30% of its GDP (EL. STAT 2015); general unemployment had reached 25% and youth unemployment over 50% (second only to Spain; EL. STAT 2015). Although the Greek economy returned to growth in the last quarter of 2015 (EL. STAT 2016), recovery has been anemic and is expected to be so for years, if not decades, to come (taking into account various structural and economic factors; e.g. Gourinchas, Philippon and Vayanos, 2016).

Beyond such macroeconomic indicators, the effects of the crisis have been vividly manifest on the ground, including increased viewings of homelessness, abandoned retail premises, dilapidated buildings and decaying infrastructures. At a more institutional level, a historically weak civil society (Leontidou 2010) increasingly approximates a "post-welfare" society in the sense that most institutions catering for "items of collective consumption" (Castells, 1977) and modes of social reproduction have either collapsed or are irreparably strained. Accordingly, various forms of bottom-up activism have begun to fill the gaps through initiatives addressing housing, educational and medical needs (Papataxiarchis, 2018); and more recently, welcoming and providing support to refugees (e.g. Lafazani, 2018).

Analyses of household expenditure data reveal that consumption inequality grew dramatically during the crisis (Kaplanoglou and Rapanos, 2018), with a disproportionate fall

in the consumption levels of Greece's middle classes, now understood as "nouveau poor" (Kaika, 2012). Rather inevitably, traditional flows of services and objects have been transformed radically, with various urban farms, anti-middlemen movements, solidarity initiatives, and gifting economies challenging mainstream modes of marketplace provision (e.g. Agelopoulos, 2018; Rakopoulos, 2018). This is not to say, however that forms of conspicuous and symbolic consumption – and more broadly, "consumer ideology" (e.g. Slater, 1997) – do not remain a feature of Greek society. Performances of conspicuous consumption by Greece's upper- and upper-middle classes still abound (Papataxiarchis, 2018). More profoundly, a longing for "normalcy" (Douzina-Bakalaki, 2017) has been manifest itself not only in the variety of new initiatives catering for collective reproduction needs (from food to housing) but also in alternative models of symbolic consumption, from lower-cost performances of symbolic distinction and differentiation to creative enactments of experiential consumption (Chatzidakis, 2018). As I illustrate in the subsequent analysis, it was against this backdrop, that prior critiques of consumer ideology and (over)consumption had to be radically adapted and reconfigured. This distinguishes the current research site from other enclaves of "alternative consumption" such as Berlin (e.g. Jacob, 2013) and Christiania (e.g. Amouroux, 2009; Coppola and Vanolo, 2015), and which represent areas responding to relatively more linear forces of marketization and commodification. Understanding the Greek crisis as "a moment which both creates and reveals" (Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos, 2018, p. 11), I attempt to reflect both on the parallels with such contexts but also uncover some of the ideological work that has rendered the crisis a new state of normalcy rather than simply a (spatio-)temporal "disruption".

4. Method

During my six-year ethnography, I focused on some collectives that were exemplary of consumer-oriented activism in Exarcheia, including, a) a guerrilla park (further discussed below) b) “Sporos” (Greek for ‘seed’), a collective that aimed at providing solidarity with Zapatistas through directly importing their coffee (closed in July 2012), and c) “Skoros” (Greek for ‘clothes moth’), an anti-consumerist collective that provides a permanent space for the gifting of goods and services without attached norms of reciprocity. Concurrently I observed various other forms of consumer-oriented resistance, from no ticket cinema screenings and gifting bazaars to collective cooking events to the burning down of symbolic multinationals (e.g. Starbucks) and symbols of affluent consumption (e.g. Mercedes cars).

The ethnographic study was conducted between April 2009 and May 2015, and it comprised multiple visits to Exarcheia each lasting between 1-10 weeks and in total comprising 55 weeks of fieldwork. I interacted on a daily basis with many inhabitants and members of Exarcheia-based collectives, although I remained primarily focused on Sporos, Skoros and the guerrilla park. Throughout the study, I helped as a volunteer and participated in various meetings and weekly-fortnightly assemblies of these collectives. Although brought up in a different part of Athens, I have been a regular visitor of Exarcheia throughout my adulthood. I shared common ideological beliefs and sensibilities with many participants, which helped embed myself in the area and establish relationships of trust and congeniality.

In keeping with standard ethnographic techniques, multiple methods were used, and the resultant data set included observational fieldnotes (about 200 pages); 82 formal interviews with residents, activists, local artists and squatters; over 1,000 photographs, extensive activist literature (hundreds of pamphlets and posters); and over a hundred ad hoc interviews and conversations. Interviews ranged from 1-2 hours and were conducted in local bars, cafes or the guerrilla park. I followed a theoretical sampling approach and many informants were selected on the basis of helping me to compare and contrast emergent

findings as the study progressed. The informants represented a broad spectrum of Exarcheian visitors and residents, ranging from a key member of the residents' association to a well-known local graffiti artist. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

I followed standard procedures for analysis and interpretation (e.g. Spiggle, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), identifying themes and sub-themes in a constant comparative manner (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I iterated between emergent findings and the literature to develop the interpretive framework which I used to compare the different elements in each of my informants' stories. As the analysis developed, I became increasingly sensitized to different dimensions of space and time, aiming to conceptualize not only the spatiotemporal embeddedness of consumer activism, but also the more experiential accounts of what it means to be a resident or visitor of Exarcheia, and the ongoing political struggles for urban space (and time) since the beginning of the 2008 crisis.

5. Findings

The key focus of my findings is on how spatio-temporal logics and practices influence consumer activism and how these are in turn negotiated and reconfigured during the Greek crisis. First, I discuss Exarcheia as a space *of* and *for* alternative (anti-) consumption. Subsequently, I explore the multiple intersections of space with time using the concept of chronotopes.

Spatial Dimensions: Consumption in and of Exarcheia

Exarcheia is a rather small neighborhood of Athens (900,000 square meters; 22,000 residents; www.statistics.gr) that has long been a meeting point for counter-cultural and alternative consumption. Surrounded by three university buildings, the area features Greece's highest number of printing shops, bookstores, music stores and music schools per capita

(Demertzi 2016). Counter-cultural aesthetics are ever-present, including political posters and the ubiquitous graffiti, making explicit an underlying discontent (Thomatos in Spyropoulos, 2013). My photographic records reveal the predominance of political colours such as black and red as well as anarchist symbols such as black flags and cats. Interspersed with other neutral colours, black and red recur frequently in posters, wall flyers and many retail outlets, providing a stark contrast to the newer cafes and restaurants that opened in the early 2000s. Some long-standing Exarcheian informants referred mockingly to the latter as “happy” cafes, deriding their attempts to attract more fashionable clientele.

A variety of other material elements and social practices distinguish Exarcheia from neighbouring areas: twenty-four hour presence of riot police at key entry and exit points (and reported instances of police harassment even within retail premises); installations of public art and table games; restaurants with names such as “Kalashnikov Garden”, “Molotov”, and “Necropolis”; and portrayals of Exarcheia as an island on restaurant tablecloths. There are almost no big multinational brands or franchised chains such as McDonald’s and Starbucks, and previous attempts to establish these types of outlets have been met with acts of vandalism. As one member of a residents’ committee succinctly expressed it: “Exarcheia is not the arena for wearing trendy clothes, ordering frapuccinos and engaging in celebrity gossip”. Despite a broader distaste for “affluent consumer stereotypes and Hollywood-like entertainment” (Papadopoulou, 2010), however, opportunities for market-mediated countercultural consumption abound. Similar to other enclaves of anti-capitalist struggle, such as Berlin’s Rauchhaus and Denmark’s Christiania (e.g. Amouroux et al. 2011), there is also widespread tolerance of drug use (particularly hash) and black market trading.

Overall, the Exarcheian space has long engendered a range of emotional and behavioral responses that include both “topophilia” (affiliation with a place) and “topophobia” (fear or

distaste of a place; see e.g. Ruan and Hogben, 2007). Although defying conventional large-scale gentrification, the area has more recently begun to witness modes of “touristification” and/or “eventification”, that is the “deliberate organization of a heightened emotional and aesthetic experience at a designated time and space” (Jacob, 2013, p. 448). Indeed, there is no “crisis tour” that does not pay due homage to Exarcheia’s emblematic features, such as the shrine in memory of the 2008 police shooting of 15 year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos or the guerrilla park (described below). Meanwhile, the area’s growing reputation, as the “world’s only anarchist neighbourhood” (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011) and “Europe’s main lab for alternative socio-economic imaginaries” (various informants), has meant that a considerable number of “anarcho-tourists” (emic term) now visit to take part in everyday activities, from guerrilla gardening to mini-rioting. This, in some ways, reproduces the so-called “myth of Exarcheia”, a term residents use to describe sensationalised and exaggerated accounts of the area. Concurrently, some residents acknowledge that the myth of Exarcheia, rather usefully, serves to communicate the neighbourhood as a “site of difference” or “heterotopia of resistance” (e.g. Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2012), consolidating itself as a utopian enclave and a meeting point for a variety of national and transnational solidarity initiatives.

As noted above, the beginning of 2009 marks a new period of consumer-oriented activism in Exarcheia. In the aftermath of the December riots, various initiatives (more) explicitly aim at cultivating subjectivities or “anthropological types” (emic term) that defy the consumption-centric social order (Miller, 2014). This is evident in the many alternative consumption practices centred on “degrowth” (Latouche, 2009) and voluntary simplicity (various posters), as well as de-commodification attempts through solidarity and alternative trading networks, including numerous gifting bazaars, daily collective cooking events, DIY projects and seminars, an Exarcheia-based time bank, regular free gigs and no-ticket cinema

screenings. Although such initiatives mirrored what has been previously described as forms of lifestyle and cultural anarchism (e.g. Portwood-Stacer, 2012), there is a co-ordinated attempt to avoid the pitfalls of market co-optation (e.g. Holt, 2002) through the creation of broader networks of resistance. For instance, diverse talks and workshops are organised by various collectives insisting on the integration of such initiatives with broader anti-capitalist struggles.

Concurrently, initiatives such as Exarcheia's "Navarinou park" or "the park" (established in March 2009) aim at cultivating alternative logics and practices of public space use and consumption. Previously a parking lot, the space was reclaimed by the Exarcheia Residents Initiative (and other enthusiastic supporters) in March 2009. Overnight volunteers broke the asphalt with drills and bring truckloads of soil to plant flowers and trees. Operating on the basis of self-management, anti-hierarchical structuring and anti-commercialization, the park now abounds with greenery and seating areas, while it also supports a range of anti-consumerist activities such as gifting bazaars, DIY workshops, free talks and theatrical plays. Against the backdrop of "...atomized logics and behaviors that treat the park as yet another space of consumption...", the park's assembly tries:

"...to foreground and address the broader wants and needs of the local community and beyond. A neighbourhood garden but also a place for political dialogue and cultivation, a children's playground but also a place for the organization of political-cultural events, always on the basis of collective management and anti-commercialization..." (Leaflet by the Park's Assembly, July 2012).

Anti-consumerist logics can also be seen in the successful growth of many co-operative ventures, such as cafes, restaurants, bookstores, IT shops and courier services. These testify

to the increasing diffusion of collectivist values into the traditionally “individualized” marketplace and the increasingly blurred boundaries between public and private space.

In the following section I discuss Exarcheia in relation to the economic crisis, before attempting to capture the interconnection of spatial and temporal dimensions through my illustration of shifting consumer chronotopes.

Temporal Dimensions: Exarcheia Against and Into Crisis

Throughout my six-year long ethnography, the crisis-hit Exarcheian space was in continuous transformation, akin to a heterotopia with malleable borders, at times stretching out and others stretching in, revealing a sense of fragile porosity. A seemingly Lilliputian neighborhood was called to respond to socio-economic conditions that stretched far beyond its territorial boundaries and capacities. As a kind of first response, the December 2008 revolt arguably opened up more questions than answers (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011) but also, as noted above, sparked a series of new initiatives and experimentations with doing things differently. By the end of 2010, Exarcheia no longer seemed truly unique or exotic:

“...structures of alternative consumption and self-management are now common in various neighborhoods, it is just that in Exarcheia they are more dense due to the history of Exarcheia...but it is not a big deal anymore...in every neighbourhood you can now find a social centre, a squat, collectives etc...” (male, 43).

To a large extent, however, the mainstreaming of bottom-up movements proved elusive, opening up a battlefield focused not as much on territorial dominance but on control over their meaning. Realising their capacity to speak to people’s immediate needs before speaking to what one key informant, Yannis, described as their “imaginaries”, grassroots initiatives were introduced by a variety of groups across the political spectrum, non-

governmental bodies and marketplace actors. Even Golden Dawn for instance, a far-right political party that gained 7% in the 2012 national elections, soon introduced its own version of “Greek-Only soup kitchens”, and “solidarity trading from-Greeks-to-Greeks”. Never before were the stakes in everyday politics so high.

Concurrently, the crisis started permeating the Exarcheian borders, abruptly disrupting everyday reality and inscribing its presence in all spatial dimensions (absolute, perceived, constructed). I began to observe streets turning into “zombie” retailscapes, comprising dilapidated buildings and abandoned retail premises, widespread scavenging (entirely absent in my first year observations), increasing viewings of homelessness and begging.

The street art of Exarcheia signified the new sentiment: “...After December 2008, the graffiti multiplied. The tone of voice changed, humor and irony receded, and more agony and anger emerged. It was only natural... fear is galloping ahead and social cannibalism penetrates everywhere, even inside Exarcheia itself.” (photographic observations by Spyropoulos, 2013). In turn, wall flyers and posters communicated new logics: during 2009 I mainly observed the promotion of values such as self-management, anti-hierarchical structuring and anti-commercialization; past 2010 more prominence was given to “solidarity”; past 2011 a new term is introduced, that of “human dignity”. Finally, territorial struggles also took on different form and shape, marking the appearance of new stakeholders to the Exarcheian space:

“...Attacks in self-managed spaces and solidarity gigs. Gangs that rule public spaces. Sexist behaviors and cases of sexual abuse. Armed robberies in local shops, conflicts between football gangs, drug-dealing, protection rackets, bullying. Widespread anti-

social violence in Exarcheia, as in the rest of society, is now a reality...”(poster, Mar 2012).

More profoundly, the socio-economic crisis challenged unspoken notions of the linearity of time. By the end of 2009, Athens no longer seemed a prosperous capitalist city. The screen of “spectacular Athens”, comprising unprecedented economic growth, credit-fuelled consumer spending, development frenzy, supersized shopping malls and achievements of Olympic proportions such as the successful hosting of Athens 2004 went blank (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011). Instead came a dystopian present, where widespread poverty, the extinction of the welfare state and workers’ rights seemed all the more possible. Bankruptcy was avoided, but Greece soon became the first developed country in modern history to be downgraded to “emerging market” (Stoukas and El Madany, 2013). In people’s subjectivities, the linearity of progress (and time) became uncertain and relative, bringing feelings of insecurity and fear about the future. People had to be more attentive to “which Athens?”, “which Exarcheia?”, “what period?”, questions that began to permeate everyday conversations and future aspirations. Indeed, “even Exarcheia changed” was a recurring phrase across several interviews, highlighting the formation of spaces and subjectivities that were different from those originally envisaged. For Maria, a key informant in her fifties, and a member of various collectives, this change had a very negative impact on those around her: “People in Exarcheia have changed, the crisis has brought to surface their worst selves...self-centred, hypocritical, bad-mannered...”.

In attempting to capture the intrinsic connectedness of space with time, I identify three key Exarcheian chronotopes that enabled forms of consumer-oriented activism, the Bakhtinian *Public Square*, the normative *Here and Now* and the utopian *There and Then*; and illustrate how they were in turn undermined and negotiated against the chronotopes of the

crisis. Each original chronotope saw a different collapsing of its spatio-temporal logics and practices as Greece evolved into crisis and new chronotopic configurations emerged.

Shifting Chronotopes and Consumer Subjectivities

“...these are the moments in which Exarcheia will count those that loved it truly, those that hated it and those that were simply passing by...” (leaflet produced by the park’s assembly, May 2012)

“...Four years on, there are still flowers and fresh, angry paintings at the intersection where Alexis was gunned down by police... This is no quiet, respectful shrine. This is neither the time or the place for silent grief. This is Exarcheia” (Penny and Crabbable, 2012)

From the Chronotope of the Public Square to Spatial Cannibalism

The chronotope of the public square is a particular type of chronotope that Bakhtin nostalgically identifies as the basis from which contemporary understandings of self-consciousness emerged. Bakhtin (1981, p.133) locates the origin of public square in ancient Greece, where the notion of esoteric selves and individualized lifestyles was as yet unknown: “...there was as yet no internal man, no ‘man for himself’ (I for myself), nor any individualized approach to one’s own self...”. Contrasting with twentieth-century Western modernity, which foregrounded the private over the civic sphere (e.g. Zaretsky, 2004), the Bakhtinian public square is also reminiscent of the Athenian agora, a place-time where politics, markets and consumer-citizen culture were fundamentally intertwined. Within Exarcheia, echoes of the public square are evident in informants’ pride in their communal spaces where many of the anti-consumption practices take place, and the numerous alternative marketplaces run by various collectives and workers’ co-operatives. For instance,

in talking about the guerrilla park (mentioned above), various older informants mentioned how it reminded them the spirit of past Athens, a period in which community living and social interaction around squares was common. Perhaps more evidently, it is reflected in the existing logics and practices of space consumption: “Exarcheia carries historical and cultural weight that works to our benefit. We can transform space as we wish and we can make spatial interventions in line with our aims...” (female, key informant, 56). In places such as the guerrilla park, the notion of “public” is in turn problematized, echoing the evolution of the term throughout modernity:

“There is a problem with the term public, how public is understood and defined... That is why we prefer the term communal space, which captures elements that are more aligned with our beliefs. Public can also be understood as space owned by governmental actors or the state or someone else despite the fact that public space also can and should be communal.” (male, resident and park volunteer, 36).

Nonetheless, alternative ideologies and practices of space consumption began to undermine a public square ethos. From 2011 onwards, “atomized logics and behaviors” (leaflet by the park’s assembly, Jul 2011) are observed more widely than before. “Neither in Exarcheia nor anywhere else” becomes a political slogan (in various talks, posters, announcements etc) and a cry against those that:

“Taking advantage of the social antagonist and autonomous history of the area, gangs with mafia-style characteristics threaten and undermine the residents and visitors of the area and are close to colonising it; close to demolishing all its nice idiosyncrasies as well as its social and political achievements...” (poster, Mar 2012).

Yet, “this time it feels far beyond us” said Nikos, a local resident in his forties, as he referred to previous instances where they had managed to intimidate and effectively kick out drug dealers from the area without the intervention of the police (May 2010). Organised crime and drug trafficking have now penetrated Exarcheia in far greater magnitude and scale:

“You cannot respond to this on the basis of the idiosyncrasy of Exarcheia. The neighbourhood is changing because the whole centre of Athens is changing under these conditions. Many people say we are not going to let this happen here because here is Exarcheia, and no, just because it is Exarcheia it doesn’t mean that if the state decides tomorrow, to say move 5,000 illegal immigrants here that have no work to do and nowhere to stay the conditions for the rise of racism and fascism won’t apply.” (Yiannis, political activist and writer, 43).

From the Normative to the Pragmatist Here and Now

The normative *here and now* chronotope related to experimentations with doing things differently, of producing “cracks” in capitalist logics and practices (Holloway, 2010), as opposed to waiting for mass insurrection and/or more traditional forms of political participation. It is mainly this chronotopic logic that fed into various forms consumer activism such as gifting bazaars and solidarity trading in Exarcheia:

“I grew up in a family that has always been involved in politics but in a very traditional way...so I was delighted when I came across Sporos because it insisted on bringing politics into everyday praxis and I hadn’t come across anything like that before...Sporos is about the here and the now, politics are not outside our everyday choices and practices...” (female, 33, member of Sporos).

As modes of prefigurative politics they are aiming to “put ideas into the tough test of praxis, because if not embedded within the here and now they will remain nice yet increasingly elusive dreams...” (leaflet of Sporos, May 2009).

However, alternative trading and consumption practices were soon subjected to a different type of chronotope, one focused less on ideological imperatives and more on here and now pragmatism, an urge to attend to people’s immediate needs. As a consequence, various Exarcheia-based collectives found they had to re-define their priorities and mission. Hara, a member of Skoros in her forties asked: “How can I talk to the poor illegal immigrant about anti-consumerism? Whose misfortunes never come singly and he is an anti-consumerist already because he cannot be anything else?” By choosing to provide solidarity to all, however, Skoros also evolved into a space of over-consumption for hundreds of recently “failed consumers” (Bauman 2007). As another Skoros volunteer revealed:

“We get people that come to this place and once again, or perhaps for the first time in their lives, they have the chance to try out new clothes, try different combinations, check themselves in the mirror...they like it so much that they keep coming back every day for more and more....”.

Similarly, the mainstreaming of alternative and solidarity-based economies began to compromise the ideological imperative for “fair” and “transparent” over “low” prices. As many informants remarked, their “here and now” was very much about satisfying immediate needs at affordable prices as opposed to building alternative economies based on ideals of socio-economic and environmental justice.

From the Utopian to the Dystopian There and Then

The *there and then* chronotope includes residents' utopic visions of an ideal society that makes them continuously question the current socio-economic system. For instance, a key political slogan across various movements of consumer-oriented activism, was "de-growth" (Latouche, 2009), an imperative to abandon the belief in the necessity for GDP-increase as the ultimate goal of the economy and society. During my ethnographic fieldwork, various intellectuals (e.g. Latouche visiting various Exarcheia venues, May 2011) and participants in de-growth initiatives took part in talks where the "fetishism of growth" (Castoriadis and Murphy, 1985) was heavily problematised, counter-proposing the downscaling of production and consumption, ecological equilibrium and measures of socio-economic wellbeing centred on human cooperation and happiness. Degrowth was viewed as an underpinning, longer-term agenda which was directly linked with micro-level, everyday consumption practices:

"...As an antilogue to a commercialized and consumerist society, Skoros suggests practices of a solidarity-based economy. An economy which does not produce needs for the benefit of the few, independently of broader social and environmental costs. An economy which aims at degrowth in the longer term and more directly gives value to practices of gifting, sharing, exchanging and solidarity. An economy which is not based on exploiting people and nature." (Leaflet produced by Skoros, April 2011).

Soon however, visions of cultivated degrowth and voluntary simplicity were juxtaposed against "forced degrowth" and "involuntary simplicity" (cf. Vannini and Taggart, 2013). The debate had to be redefined in terms of what model of economic "degrowth" was desirable versus that which was unavoidably applicable. For many, fragments of a utopian there and then were better relocated in the past, a period that celebrated consumer agency and

higher living standards. For others, it was the seemingly dystopian present that further inspired utopian thinking and imagination:

“...We are definitely not mourning the loss of our spending powerWe believe in solidarity, social support and collaboration and not in charitable giving. We are part of society, not its rescuers. Our suggestion is simple. We produce and share goods, services, knowledge. We become independent of the old structures and develop new ones. These new structures will cultivate an environment that will allow a way out of the current economic, social and cultural crisis. A way out on the basis of equality and justice.” (Leaflet produced by Skoros, Dec 2011).

Ultimately, although the socio-economic crisis provided the material conditions needed for the mainstreaming of various forms of consumer-oriented activism, it also undermined it in so far as ideological imperatives were bracketed off from everyday action centred on immediate social needs. New subjectivities or “anthropological types” (emic term) began to emerge, yet the fight against “idiotism, inertia, ego-centrism and alienation” could not be taken for granted (notes from seminar on solidarity and collaborative economies; Oct 2012). Concurrently, various grassroots collectives and movements were stretched to their limits. “Rupture or integration” (re)surfaced as a pertinent debate (in various talks, posters etc), acknowledging the possibility that they had ended up fire-fighting the gaps left by the demise of the welfare state and widespread unemployment. The debate became increasingly sophisticated, problematizing rupture/integration as a static dualism and outlining broader principles for a variety of initiatives that were still hoping to serve a decidedly radical rather than reformist role (meeting on collaborative and solidarity-based economies, Apr 2013). Along the way, some collectives disintegrated, including Sporos (Jul

2012). Their “seeds” for socio-political and cultural change however remained, as Panagoulis, a member of Sporos, emphasized:

“Despite Sporos’s inglorious – and inconsistent with its remarkable achievements – disintegration, it gave birth to various other initiatives...that along with numerous movements of solidarity-based economies, they carry on seeking practices that will reflect an autonomous, self-managed and equal society, that will be bringing into today’s reality, routines of the aspired tomorrow...” (Panagoulis 2013, member of Sporos).

This message was further reinforced a few weeks after Sporos’s closing down, by graffiti on a nearby claiming that: “What didn’t you do to bury me. But you forgot that I am a seed!”. The phrase has a long and highly symbolic history in both Greek and international activism; being originally attributed to a 1978 poem by Ntinios Christianopoulos (see e.g. Xiao, 2018) and having being used widely across the different fragments and fractions of the broader social antagonist movement.

Chronotopic Dilemmas: Ideological Reconfigurations in (Chronic) Crisis

During my ethnographic fieldwork, chronotopic contradictions intensified. After all, what was meant to be a disruptive situation, akin to the Bakhtinian “chronotope of the threshold” (Bakhtin, 2001), soon turned into a prolonged stated of being (Agamben, 2004). Increasingly understood as persistent and chronic, the crisis became the “new context” (Vigh, 2008) of all everyday activity, not least consumer activism. In this sense, it began to be experienced as profoundly ideological: not as an interruption of “normal” life but the new normal life. Through the use of the term “chronotopic dilemmas” I distinguish myself from previous understandings of chronotopic inconsistencies or contradictions as “disruptions” brought by new events or critical situations (cf. Gomersall and Madill, 2015). Instead, “chronotopic

dilemmas” capture how simultaneous, opposing spatio-temporalities are negotiated and accounted for in everyday ideological thinking. The chronic nature of the crisis accentuated a “culture where more than one possible ideal world, more than one absolute hierarchical power, value and interest are constructed” (Billig et al., 1988, p. 163).

Consider, for instance, the evolution of spatio-temporal logics and practices within Skoros. What started as a “here and now” attempt to cultivate anti-consumerist subjectivities evolved into a last resort for over-consumerism, an “alternative Zara” (in participants’ words) for Greece’s nouveau-poor and underclasses. Although the collective carried on, its ideological basis remained ambivalent and contested. This was evident, for instance, in multiple failures to update the 2009 leaflets and communication material. Ultimately there was no consensus as to whether the original anti-consumerist ethos of the collective remained relevant. For Heracles, founding member of both Sporos and Skoros, critique had to re-focus on cultivating anti-consumerist subjectivities, ones based on alternative social imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1997), as opposed to questioning individual consumption levels. Yet, for other members, the collective had already failed: “For me, the realisation of the original ideas has failed. We now resemble a charity shop.” (Vera, member of Skoros). In between these two positions lied more sympathetic, if not ambivalent, views that acknowledged Skoros’s increasingly contradictory nature: “It is not a philanthropic organisation, it’s not the church, we didn’t make it for the poor....Right now, thousands of migrants are entering Greece....They will find out about Skoros and they will come here. You cannot exclude them, and we’ve never done this. It is just that this is not what we wanted to do.” (Nancy, founding member of Skoros).

More broadly, dilemmas along the axes of philanthropy versus solidarity, perfigurative versus pragmatist action, bottom-up volunteerism versus top-down welfarism, became firmly embedded in everyday conversations. They were only bound to, given the

multiple senses of “urgency” brought by the crisis, longings for (or disavowals of) what was previously known as a relatively prosperous society, and ideals of a public square that never came. Chronotopic dilemmas extended to all mobilisations in Exarcheia and beyond.

Focusing on Greece’s anti-middlemen and solidarity initiatives, for instance, Rakopoulous (2018) mentions how the urge for immediate and “lower” prices, as opposed to “fair” and transparent ones, undermined their original ideological emphasis on building alternative economic institutions “for tomorrow”. Likewise, Rozakou (2016) notes how the “gift taboo” of Greek social movements, insisting on egalitarian relationships underpinned by an ethic of solidarity, collapsed entirely in the face of receiving and effectively responding to refugee needs. Relatedly, Papataxiarchis (2018) notes the ideological split in Platanos (an anarchist refugee centre) between “idealists and pragmatists”. As he puts it, “...the harsh realities gave birth to challenging dilemmas. In some instances, horizontality turned against anthropia (humanism), autonomy against cooperation” (p.242). This, in turn, is interpreted as the struggle between “two programmatically opposed temporal dispositions: between recapturing a *glorious past* of economic security, employment and consumption and pursuing an *alternative utopian future*” (p. 244). Put differently, chronotopic dilemmas in post-welfare, crisis-ridden Greece abound. Increasingly, there is indication that they apply across Southern Europe (and beyond), in so far as implicit understandings of modern linear time (Knight and Stewart, 2016) are no longer tenable.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Most of the current literature on ethical and political consumerism continues to portray alternative consumption choices primarily as rational, instrumental, and ultimately disembedded from space and time (Shaw et al. 2016). Against this backdrop, an emerging stream of studies have begun to develop more nuanced and contextualized understandings

that are sensitized to the cultural, institutional, and discursive co-ordinates of everyday consumption (e.g. Ariztia et al. 2016; McEwan et al. 2015). I extend this tradition by illustrating that any form of anti- and ethical consumerism is already embedded in time and place (Goodman and Goodman, 2016). I argue that consumption activities are not only intertwined with present (chronological) time and (physical) space but also spatio-temporal configurations of the past and future. The chronotope of the public square for instance, a logic centred on recreating idealized notions of past spaces and times in the present, is manifest in various studies focusing on consumer attempts to revive communal and nostalgic ideals (e.g. Christiania; Amouroux et al. 2011). Such spaces can be viewed as derivatives of cities that are increasingly commoditised and individualized (Miles, 2010), making the Bakhtinian public square all the more elusive. Similarly, the logic of the “here and now”, centred on actualising utopian visions in the present, is often manifest in consumer attempts to recreate more egalitarian, fair and sustainable societies, e.g. by using public transport, buying Fair Trade products and linking directly with producers (e.g. Allen et al. 2013; Renting, Marsden and Banks, 2003). Finally, the chronotope of “there and then” centres on utopian processes that are future oriented and although impossible to actualize in the here and now, guide everyday action in enabling a critique of the present (Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Zukin, 2010).

Furthermore, this study highlights that chronotopes are not stable but constantly evolving, a possibility that has been hinted at in previous research. For example, Macleod and Ward (2002) observe that the urban studies literature is replete with stories of utopian places that have turned dystopian, where public and private places increasingly surrender to the forces of marketization and commoditisation. As a consequence, utopia in the contemporary city is often found less in the future and more in the past, as dwellers remember and romanticize the ambience of traditional public squares and marketplaces (Maclaran and

Brown, 2005). This collapse in linear time, in the sense of time leading somewhere, strongly resonates with the utopian and dystopian reconfigurations noted in this study, due to a constantly deepening economic crisis. Indeed, focusing on crisis-hit Southern Europe more broadly, Knight and Stewart (2016) observe how time (and space?) have become far more elastic. People experience, and try to cope with, multiple pasts and temporalities, ultimately “showing that in crises, not only time, but history itself as an organizing structure and set of expectations, is up for grabs.” (p.1). Concurrently, a recent stream of consumer studies has begun to explore the factors that affect consumers’ spatio-temporal frames, from the impact of new mobile technologies (Dholakia, Reyes and Bonoff, 2015) to consumers’ own attempts to decelerate (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). This study complements these by showing that people’s experience of time and space is not only subject to individual lifestyle changes or interventions in their immediate environment but also – and more fundamentally – to broader ideological and socioeconomic conditions.

More generally then, this study contributes to prior research into the spaces and contexts of ethical consumption (e.g. Kjarnes et al. 2007; Varul, 2009; Wheeler, 2014) by offering a more explicitly “temporally integrated” (Kwan, 2013) perspective. I show that everyday consumption (ethical or otherwise) is not only constitutive of – and constituted by – the various physical, mental and social dimensions of urban space (Goodman and Goodman, 2016), but also subject to non-linear notions of time that inspire everyday praxis. In doing so, I also complement prior research into the spatio-temporal dimensions of post-industrial city life (Muliček, Osmanand Seidenglanz, 2016; Schwanen et al. 2012; Karrholm, 2007); showing that everyday (ethical) consumption is embedded both in local chronotopes and those that are super-imposed by large-scale, socio-economic transformations.

Epilogue

At the time of writing (July 2019), Greece is still in crisis and so is Exarcheia, whereby unprecedented levels of drug-related crime, vandalism and infrastructural decay are reported in mainstream media. For many, the rise of Syriza to power (Jan 2015), its capitulation and subsequent fall from power (July 2019), proved to be a deathblow to any hope for a radical left-wing, socially just and progressive government. Within Exarcheia, this is commonly interpreted as the ultimate testament that there can only be space for here and now politics, outside (and against) the state. Meanwhile, however, a new kind of utopian impulse is increasingly prevalent, one based on the lessons learned through community politics, commoning and the cultivation of more inclusive models of solidarity, irrevocably aided by the refugee crisis. Fragments of a new politics of hope are once again visible on the horizon: “What didn’t you do to bury me. But you forgot that I was a seed!”.

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