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# "This Marble Head in My Hands"

Green Greeks and the Question of the Parthenon

YANOULA ATHANASSAKIS

Nobel laureate George Seferis once shared his nightmare wherein the Americans win the Acropolis in an auction and replace its Doric columns with tubes of toothpaste.<sup>1</sup> In his dream, a bespectacled and clean-shaven man in a black suit holds an ivory mallet and decides on the future of the Parthenon. Seferis's fears of rampant consumerism and cultural dilution are truer in the twenty-first century than he could have imagined. Greece is in its seventh consecutive year of an economic recession underscored by deep salary and pension cuts. These days, as one walks around a country ravaged by financial depression, Seferis's nightmare of losing the Acropolis to the highest bidder on a world stage feels more like a moot point than a ghoulish dreamscape.<sup>2</sup>

The last few winters in Greece have manifested such apocalyptic visions as those of the Parthenon, its most famous monument, enveloped in smoke. Waste has a choke hold on Greece's crown jewel, the Parthenon, which serves as a constant reminder of the disenfranchisement of the poor to the benefit of the rich. Reflecting on the winter of 2013, reporter James Lewis writes, "People cut down the trees in the city parks for firewood. . . . The resulting wood smoke created the worst smog in decades, obscuring even the Parthenon."<sup>3</sup> Unable to afford heat, debt-ridden and disempowered Greeks are choosing cheaper and more toxic fuel alternatives.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 2008, wood, coal, and garbage burned by desperate Athenians has been filling the air with invisible and airborne fine particles and carcinogenic compounds that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deems extremely harmful; the small-



Smog surrounding the Acropolis. Photograph by Dimitris Aspiotis, Epoca Libera, January 2013.

er the particles, the higher the risk of illness.<sup>5</sup> Biomass, wood-burning, and coal stoves are leading not only to indoor air pollution but also to human fatalities. The traditional and economical coal stove, *μαγκάλι* (or *magali*), is the go-to alternative when heat is not otherwise available (due to power outages or discontinued service).<sup>6</sup> The numerous accounts of death by carbon monoxide poisoning, house fires (when candles are used for heating), or death by hypothermia are further examples of the extreme measures taken by the poorest and most disposable bodies. While average Greek citizens are acutely aware of their government's corruption and the ensuing irrational retrenchment measures, the people who are most afflicted are Greece's youth and marginalized populations (immigrants, women, children, and the elderly).<sup>7</sup>

In the fall of 2012, Greece's government tried to meet the demands of the 2011 EU-IMF (European Union–International Monetary Fund) bailout in part by a 450 percent heating-oil tax hike.<sup>8</sup> Due to the continued economic crisis and the high price of heating oil, air pollution levels in Athens far outpace the EU-recommended limits; in 2013 researchers from several Greek universities found that Athens's air rates fifteen times above safe levels.<sup>9</sup> The layer of brownish smog is beginning to be

read by Greece's citizens as communal poisoning that traverses class and national boundaries. Rather than incentivizing civilians against pollution, the government is not only producing it but also taking violently punitive measures to silence voices of dissent.<sup>10</sup> In this article, I argue that Athenians are on the forefront of a national movement against the continued mining of Greece's natural and cultural resources. Greeks are particularly weary of the economic depression and of its accompanying austerity plans becoming a justification for the machinations of globalized neoliberalism.

### Greek Protest and the *Koukouloforoi*

Ulrich Beck suggests that to maintain power in a global-risk society, a nation-state must “*feign control over the uncontrollable*.”<sup>11</sup> Risk, according to Beck, is now disseminated through planetary threats like nuclear war and global warming.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the government's feigning of control over the ineluctable—vis-à-vis fiscal austerity—has worked Greeks up into a frenzy; this is especially the case because the brunt of the suffering impacts the greatest number of the population, and the least empowered. As Dimitris Dalakoglou observes, in the years spanning 1995–2007, “Greece experienced one of the European Union's (EU) highest rates of economic growth” but concomitantly also witnessed a highly uneven distribution of wealth “linked to that growth.”<sup>13</sup> Neoliberalism gains traction by self-identifying as the singular solution to threats of violence and destabilization—the rational antidote to an irrational people. It becomes, in fact, the containment and eradication of risk. The vapid consumerism that ran rampant in Greece and crescendoed in the first decade of the twenty-first century came to a screeching halt with economic collapse.

In 2011 I was in Greece for the majority of the demonstrations against EU sanctions. I had worked for the University of California, Santa Barbara, for close to a decade on the Travel Study to Greece program, but only in June 2011 did I feel the absurdity of our Risk Management department's attempts to quantify risk. The safety of our students was my primary concern; but in order to ensure that safety, I had to explain to the students why they couldn't join the austerity strikes and, significantly, how their American bodies would be understood in Syntagma Square, where the demonstrations raged.

A few students wanted to film the demonstrations. But the students unknowingly held an uncanny resemblance to the *κουκουλοφόροι*, or *koukouloforoi*, slang for the “hooded” or “masked ones,” for whom dark jeans, black T-shirts, and a black or red cloth wrapped around one’s neck are standard uniform (the red, a nod to the ΚΚΕ [Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας, or Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas, the Communist Party of Greece] or an acknowledgement of previous bloodshed in the 1970s between Greek citizens and the anticommunist military dictatorship known as the junta that reigned from 1967–1974).<sup>14</sup> My students felt camaraderie with the demonstrators. They understood the demonstrations as an extension of Occupy Wall Street. This was Zuccotti Park writ large underneath the Parthenon. But this was also a misinformed gloss of events and a misreading of reality shaped by Western media.

In my official capacity as a University of California instructor and administrator in Greece, I had difficulty cleanly pulling apart the tendrils of the issues I faced. One of the first things the *koukouloforoi* did was bomb JP Morgan Chase’s foyer in Kolonaki, arguably the ritziest neighborhood in Athens. To my students, this echoed the solidarity they felt against the wealthiest 1 percent in the United States. They conflated women’s rights, civil rights, and the Occupy Movement; but they did not speak Greek. They gleaned information from their iPhones and from US-based media outlets. Writing on the politics of violence in Athens, Dalakoglou astutely points out that the financial crisis has pushed such a large percentage of Athens’s population into various states of vulnerability that it has become a “generalized state of exception.”<sup>15</sup> Headline-making statements that echo the following from the *Guardian*’s Kat Christofer conveniently place the onus of violence on unstable Athenians: “In short, the Greek state is incapable of controlling rioters with the same corrupt policies and lax enforcement that created them.”<sup>16</sup> History has demonstrated that in times of emergency and exception, rash domestic measures are taken and justified to both foreign and domestic people as absolutely necessary with anarchy as the only alternative.<sup>17</sup>

Along loose lines, the narrative my students put together based on scenes they’d witnessed was correct: yes, Greeks were also fed up with class disparity; yes, Greeks felt cheated by their government; yes, Greeks wanted social justice. But they were blind to the conspiracy theories coming from Greek news sources: that the CIA had planted the *koukou-*

loforoi squarely in front of international media outlets like CNN and the BBC; that the United States was to blame for the austerity measures and for the financial meltdown; that Greek police had hired goons to pose as *koukouloforoi* (or were themselves dressing as *koukouloforoi*).<sup>18</sup>

A Greek colleague of mine who witnessed the 1973 student uprisings in Athens was stumped. We disagreed as to whether the students should be allowed to join the current demonstrations. Was the University of California system a fascist organization reaching its long, state-funded arm through Risk Management to crush popular protest? Were we furthering that agenda? She thought so. I disagreed. My own father's forced exile from Greece during the military junta spanning 1967–1974 figured prominently in this exchange. His exile ceased because of the bloodshed of 1973 when the law students of the Athens Polytechnic Institute protested and a tank crashed the gates. The ruling military dictatorship ended on November 17, 1973, and that date is of great importance in Greece today. Hiding behind Cold War anxieties, the United States backed the Greek military junta, and Greeks continue to be suspicious of US meddling in domestic affairs.<sup>19</sup> According to multiple sources, the junta financed Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign; and in return for campaign funding, the junta looked the other way as companies like Esso-Pappas developed multimillion-dollar businesses in Greece.<sup>20</sup> Former president Clinton's November 1999 acknowledgment of US ties to the junta was a welcome admission, if not an apology.<sup>21</sup> Something that Clinton did not outright address was the understanding that Greece has long been a strategic geopolitical springboard for the United States to Africa, Cyprus, the Balkans, and the Middle East. For the United States, it is of the utmost importance to keep Greece stable and to quell protests that head in the direction of overthrowing the current government or of questioning a historiography of US imperial designs in Greece.

## Ecoinsurgents and Anarchists

It is widely believed that the Greek government incites violence in order to justify police brutality and to fan the flames of anti-immigration rhetoric. Various police initiatives have aimed to create frenzies within demonstrations both to control the narrative and as a way to police bodies.<sup>22</sup> Crucial to this argument is that special riot-police units with

names like MAT and DELTA have used similar tactics to discipline mass rioting against austerity measures and to battle environmental groups protesting the loss of green space in Athens and, most visibly, the landfill in Keratea.<sup>23</sup> Operations by newly formed sections of the police like Operation Virtue (targeting Exarcheia in the 1980s), Operation Sweeper (a 1990s effort to “sweep” migrants from the center of Athens), Operation Xenios Zeus (a 2012 operation with the same aim) were all formed not only to control chaos but also, in part, to create it through brutality, random searches, violence, and both verbal and physical abuse.

In places like Lefkimi (on the island of Corfu) and Keratea (thirty kilometers southeast of Athens), what was viewed as guerilla warfare by foreign media is actually evidence that Greece’s economic crisis crescendoed along with an awakening to its energy crisis and wayward environmental policies. A 2012 European Commission (EC) report deemed Greece to have the least efficient waste management policies. The EC’s environment commissioner Janez Potočnik stated that “many Member States are still landfilling huge amounts of municipal waste—the worst waste management option—despite better alternatives. . . . Valuable resources are being buried, potential economic benefits are being lost . . . and human health and the environment suffer.”<sup>24</sup> In the graph accompanying the EC report, Greece earned an overall score of 3 (compared to Austria’s high score of 39) and ranked lowest of twenty-seven countries. The graph, a screening of waste management performance of EU member states, rates countries according to a range of metrics (amount of municipal waste disposed, amount recycled, compliance with EC directives, etc).<sup>25</sup> As Nikolaj Nielsen points out, “The worst overall offender is Greece, with deficits noted in all areas of waste management. Only one of its total seventy-one landfills for non-hazardous waste complies with the EU landfill directive.”<sup>26</sup> Athens accounts for almost 50 percent of Greece’s population, and it creates a sizable amount of garbage that far exceeds its size. In general, waste disposal in Greece is a recurring problem with no solution in sight.

By 2010 multiple clashes had already taken place between local residents and politicians throughout Greece over the issue of refuse dumping. For example, in Lefkimi, violent confrontations between riot police and protesters led to the death of a protester.<sup>27</sup> Among the main objections of Lefkimi’s residents was that the proposed landfill was not being designed according to the EC’s regulations, that it did not include

a recycling plant, and that it would be used for medical waste but was not equipped to safely handle it. Situated close to both a local stream and the town, the landfill posed a number of threats to the ecosystem and was flagged by Greenpeace as a grave danger to the inhabitants of Lefkimi specifically and Corfu in general.

Following the 2008 upheaval in Lefkimi and multiple incidents between police and protesters in the interim, in December 2010 anarchy ruled in Keratea, a usually quiet town with a population of ten thousand. The optics of such clashes are startling: Orthodox priests in their black robes under attack by tear gas, the elderly and children alike throwing fire bombs at police, construction vehicles set on fire in the dead of night, and blockades of all varieties created to stop the construction of landfills.<sup>28</sup> On the opposing side are reports of random searches by police (both of persons and their homes) and plainclothes officers threatening protesters and residents. In pictures and video from the resistance in Keratea, one sees Molotov cocktails being lobbed at police as police are using tear gas on residents. What was striking in both Keratea and Lefkimi was the participation of older residents alongside anarchists. Over the course of multiple months, Greeks from *Εξάρχεια* (or Exarcheia)—the Athenian neighborhood infamous for its anarchists and left-wing radicals—arrived to help the resistance movement in Keratea. It was estimated that some three hundred anarchists were bused in to help train locals on civil disobedience. When asked how residents learned to make firebombs, one man responded, “We were taught.”<sup>29</sup> The civil disobedience in Keratea took place three months after Greece’s first bailout, and it took on the heavy mantle of symbolism of continued clashes between the state and its people.<sup>30</sup> The following pictures were taken in Athens’s most active days of rioting and feature both traditional police forces and MAT (riot police) units.

As a symptom of a much wider network of issues, politicians and activists used the insurgency in Keratea as a blueprint for future acts of protest against harsh austerity measures and environmental injustices. The use of water cannons against protestors appeared for the first time in the long and drawn-out war between police and demonstrators in Keratea. During the height of Greek protests against austerity measures, water cannons became a regular fixture in Parliament Square. Keratea and cities like it are being asked to shoulder the toxic offshoot of the wealthiest 1 percent; and when their residents fight back, they are deemed unruly





MAT unit members in Parliament Square knocking the camera away when they realize they are being photographed. Photograph by Yanoula Athanassakis, June 2011.



Police officers in Parliament Square awaiting an oncoming crowd of antiausterity demonstrators. Photograph by Yanoula Athanassakis, June 2011.



Police bus parked in Parliament Square housing both MAT and regular officers. Photograph by Yanoula Athanassakis, June 2011.

and are portrayed as a symptom of Greece's inability to control its people and, thus, also as the cause of Greece's economic breakdown.<sup>31</sup> The graffiti below, from October 2015 in Athens, reads, "SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE OF KERATEA / SEND THE TRASH TO EKALI." Ekali—among the wealthiest, sprawling suburbs of Athens—is invoked as symbolic of the 1 percent's conspicuous consumption and waste. The black star is a direct reference to one of Greece's most active anarchist groups, named "Black Star"; it is known for its anticolonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-government actions (its activities peaked during the years of 1999–2002).

The feedback loop of mining Greece's resources for foreign gain, contributing to unprecedented levels of pollution in Athens, and then brutally denying voices of discontent or requests for retribution (e.g., the Parthenon marbles) is the very cycle that green Greeks are trying to break.

The vastly different motivations for Greek unrest from 2008 onward complicate a monolithic understanding of national discontent. Global media has conflated a wide range of protests (against, for example, fascism, austerity measures, racism, immigration laws, gendered violence) into "antiausterity protests," but it has failed to recognize that Western economic discourse has absorbed the multiplicity of unrest into the



Graffiti in Athens. Translated, this reads, “SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE OF KERATEA / SEND THE TRASH TO EKALI.” Photograph by Yanoula Athanassakis, October 2015.

discourse of civilizing “unruly” and “savage” Greeks. Addressing various moments of Greek protest against racial and gendered violence, Athena Athanasiou points to the common vulnerability that bodies in protest share and to how that vulnerability has been mobilized to point to race, class, and gender disparities that in turn usurp the notion of a unified front of Greek *uncivil* disobedience.<sup>32</sup> The pluralities of protest that Athanasiou outlines are crucial to understanding the connection among austerity measures, a Western gaze on an exoticized Greece, and twinned movements of environmental depletion and pollution.

### Green Greeks and DIY

On November 17, 2012, marking the thirty-ninth anniversary of the original Polytechnic Student Uprising, Greeks made their annual commemorative march.<sup>33</sup> Participants in the annual march travel from the Polytechnic Institute of Athens to the US Embassy; in 1973, to underline their dissatisfaction with the United States’ tactical support of the mil-

itary dictatorship (the junta), protesters burned the American flag in front of the embassy. In 2012 the burning of the US flag was punctuated by the burning of the European Union flag on the same day in Thessaloniki.<sup>34</sup> Within this configuration of events, Greece sits at the epicenter and is once again looked to as the harbinger and “cradle of Western civilization.” Only, this time, if Greece is indeed still considered a beacon of civilization, it is pointing away from neoliberal capitalism and unbridled, toxic industrialization; instead, green and radical Greeks are asking us to reconsider the values we have used its own history to develop. To this end, they are pointing out the fact that Greece’s history has been reshaped to fit Western ideas of freedom and individuality for all, which never existed in the original architecture of Greek democracy.

Last year, I received a text message from my brother of a single, grainy image. I squinted at my phone to see what he had sent me; on first blush, it looked like ingredients for a homemade bomb. I saw powder, liquid, and a plastic container on a checkered tile floor. My brother lives in Athens, a hotbed of political activity; and he and I used to share a flat above the central square of Exarcheia. His hair had grown long. Like all Greeks, he was weary of the government, and he had recently lost one of his two jobs after not getting paid for six months. Like many Greeks, he’d negotiated his rent down, and he now engages in barter systems on a weekly basis to live off the grid of high taxes and foreign products. The text message he’d sent was, in fact, a picture of ingredients for homemade DIY laundry soap. What was the significance of the picture from my brother? Certainly, it demonstrates that Athenians have become more mindful of supporting local economies and domestic interests.

There is a connection between these seemingly disparate movements (i.e., DIY production and protests against harsh economic sanctions) that is not being made—at least not in the international media. The picture I received from my brother offers a different narrative: one of *unnatural*, socially constructed disaster and of possible recourse. Green Greeks are coming together to barter and trade from the countryside to the city and back.<sup>35</sup> It was the people from the farm share my brother participates in that gave him the DIY laundry detergent directions, because the alternative detergent sits outside a system that pumps chemicals into Greece and funnels money out of it, à la Pappas-Nixon. More than a pastoral fantasy or empty threat to “return to the village” in order to survive the economic crisis (a frequent, escapist proposal in Greece these days),

green Greeks are reading as static on the bandwidth of an international signal that is trying to drown out such noise. Noise that in the end disrupts a seamless story of an uncooperative, temperamental, and unproductive people who leach off the state system. This movement, disparate as it might be, differs from such counterculture, gentrified hipster movements within the United States, because while the final aesthetic might be similar, US artisanal movements in large part depend on the widening inequalities produced through global neoliberalism.<sup>36</sup> In stark contrast to these gentrified purchasing practices, green Greeks politicize purchasing and barter in order to, as Andreas Chatzidakis states, “contribute to economies of solidarity and de-commodification . . . and assist in riots.”<sup>37</sup> Purchasing products off the grid, engaging in trade, and refuting unreasonable taxation are all anticapitalist activities of protest. Ecofriendly purchasing practices are creating new discourses of ethical consumption that are also radically political.<sup>38</sup>

In December 2013, while staying with my brother, I picked up his farm share for him and talked to the people from the farming cooperative. I heard the schizophrenic and eerily nationalistic voice of a return to nature and a return to Greece’s “roots.” The pastoral fantasy of country life solving all the issues of modernity is seductive and dangerous. Every nation should be weary of looking back to a fantasy of “purer times.” Greece’s far-right, neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party has a foothold in such rhetoric and uses the failings of economic reform as a platform for fear mongering.<sup>39</sup> The far-right, Nazi, opportunist party spouts hate speech but cloaks it as a part of a nationalist vision for Greece. They fuse narratives of antisemitism, racism, and nationalism with antiausterity protests, and they mutate discourses of civil unrest into those of xenophobia. What’s particularly tricky about their approach is that they are capitalizing on the anti-German sentiments of Greeks to promote their own Nazi-inspired form of fascism. They are at once glorifying both a Greek past that never existed (monolithic and peaceful) and a history that Germany hopes to forget (Nazism); in so doing, they recruit members by constructing false parallels between economic disaster and heterogeneity.

In a way, my initial understanding of my brother’s picture as a homemade bomb wasn’t off base. Seemingly less disruptive and rarely leading to arrest, homemade laundry detergent becomes a gesture in the direction of a self-sustaining Greece while sending a powerful message that Greeks are intent on dismantling a system that no longer serves



them—one that has become a toxic soup of injurious harm. While it is true that a country's resilience is tested and displayed in times of economic crisis, so too is its national ethos. Sociologist Andrew Szasz suggests that, particularly in the United States, people are privileging personal over communal risk and consuming products in a manner that ignores the fact that events such as global warming or toxic dumping are inherently communal.<sup>40</sup> The laundry detergent that my brother makes represents larger pockets of urban Athenian movements that are working to eradicate the invisible threats that have materialized as brown smog around the Parthenon and that symbolize larger socioeconomic hazards to the ecosystem.

Here you have the ultimate puncture to the balloon of an authority that has systematically undermined a country rich in natural and cultural resources that have been mined by so many foreign and domestic powers that Greece's less privileged citizens are now awakening to the notion that reclamation requires disruption. This collaborative spirit flies in the face of divisive, state-sanctioned violence and fiscal terrorism; and it is a voice that must be heard, because it is becoming thunderous and indicative of a new reality.

A January 2013 news publication screamed out, "Nightmare of Energy Poverty: Only 1 in 10 Civilians Can Easily Pay Their Heating Bills."<sup>41</sup> Andrew Simms of the New Economics Foundation, Britain's think tank on environmental justice and economic sustainability, writes that disaster reveals Greece's strength:

Ironically it is in the gaps of a broken system that the shoots of a different, new economy get a chance to grow. This is the progressive opposite to Naomi Klein's chilling account of neo-liberal economics' exploitation of disasters. . . . But while disaster reveals a society's economic and social weaknesses, it also reveals where true resilience and real value can be found—in the ability of people to cooperate at the local level to meet a community's needs.<sup>42</sup>

One recent example is a public soup kitchen that is translated into English as "Social Kitchen," because the founder insists that communal meals are meant for all levels of society, not just those that can afford it.<sup>43</sup> Cooperation at the local level is increasing, as is a consciousness over food production and consumption. This is also evidenced in the national effort to support the local green markets and stores. Simms



A sign announcing free food for the destitute. Its literal translation reads, “Social Kitchen / The Other Human.” Photograph by O Allos Anthropos.

rightly identifies an undercurrent in contemporary Greek culture: a return to nature initially motivated by a retreat from crisis. A return to a more idyllic past, inspired by such visions as the obscured Parthenon.

## The Marble Head of Athens

In Seferis’s journal entry about the Parthenon, he recalls feeling stunned at the plasticity and nakedness of the new toothpaste pillars of the Parthenon, unsure of whether this is a dream or a nightmare. Seferis admits that he is not qualified “to analyze this here dream” but that he can comment on his own experiences with dreams versus nightmares. For Seferis, a nightmare feels just like a dream, except the nightmarish part of it hovers in its depths and breaks out at the end, making it a nightmare. In effect, he describes Freud’s uncanny, wherein the familiar becomes unfamiliar and creates the worst terror of all. The lyrical notion furthered by Seferis, that there’s a porous boundary between dream world and reality—between where “real” things begin and where

we end—echoes current research that our bodies and our surroundings cannot be easily disambiguated. One of his most famous poems reads,

I woke with this marble head in my hands;  
it exhausts my elbow and I don't know where to put it down.  
It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream  
so our life became one and it will be very difficult for it to separate  
again.<sup>44</sup>

The above excerpt, from his 1935 collection, *Mythistorima*, illustrates how the idealized glory of Greece's past weighs heavily on its citizens today more as a threat than a promise of restoration. Yet "to separate" the relatively young state's identity from its ancient roots, and the dream of its past from the reality of its present, is, as Seferis wrote, "very difficult." The speaker in the poem grapples with the dissonance between fact and fiction, myth and truth—but as we all know, there is truth in myth and fiction in fact. Is Seferis's nightmare that far off? Is either of his nightmares that far off? A disembodied marble head indicates that somewhere there's an acephalous body waiting to be reunited with its governing limb. Eerily, even early on Seferis understood the interconnectedness of unbridled capitalism as a danger to national identity, and he recognized Greece's antiquities as something extraordinary in their power to move people. Seferis's writing foreshadows the way that the aggregate of human and environmental violations traverses both human-constructed and natural frontiers.

Predictably, off-the-cuff statements by senior officials in Angela Merkel's administration that suggest Greece should sell its islands and perhaps also the Acropolis to settle its debt outraged Greeks and their supporters.<sup>45</sup> As *Kathimerini* reporter Nikos Konstandaras argues, Greece's monuments matter because Greece stands for the history of Western civilization and democracy; and in our "frail" and dislocated present, symbols such as the Parthenon "are our guide and our shield."<sup>46</sup> It's been historically proven that in times of despair, people reach for objects and myths from the past. Given the actions of the International Monetary Fund, the troika, and Greece's own government, and given the way in which selling the Acropolis has become a running joke, the Acropolis might no longer be a symbol of democracy but one of debtocracy, or as Maurizio Lazzarato terms it, "a governing by debt."<sup>47</sup> Lazzarato suggests that in Greece, democracy has been subjugated by



the state in the name of austerity measures under the guise of obedience to fiscal absolutes.<sup>48</sup>

## The Monument Woman

In October 2014 Athens was once more spotlighted on the world stage not for riots and austerity measures but for the star wattage of Amal Alamuddin-Clooney's official visit to help Greece recover the Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles. Among the many headlines that eclipsed her professional duties were questions of what she ate, her makeup, and her footwear.

Given the sustained economic downturn, it makes sense that Greek media outlets would want to focus on lighter fare. In the flurry over Alamuddin-Clooney's visit and the continued deployment of the marbles as symbols of Greece's past grandeur—and its plummeting at the hands of foreign occupation—the international public's gaze is repeatedly distracted from what should be the more pressing concern: the dirtied air around the absent marbles that directly references a genealogy of colonial violence and exploitation. The Parthenon Marbles tell a much longer history of environmental degradation and corporate greed—a history that yokes “natural” and “unnatural” phenomena.

The question of the Parthenon is a complex one: the pollution that plagues it also fans the flames of arguments against the return of its spoils. Many Greeks want to downplay the state of disrepair in which one finds the Acropolis, because it supports claims like recent ones in the *Telegraph* by Jeremy Paxman, suggesting that had Lord Elgin “not plundered his works of arts, they could have ended up in the footings of some kebab stand.”<sup>49</sup> You know what? Maybe Paxman is right. But if he is right, it is because Greece has been systematically drained of the proper resources and infrastructure to take care of its most treasured monuments. Originally removed in 1801 while Greece was under Ottoman rule, the marbles symbolize imbricated injustices. The return of the marbles would be a diplomatic and political gesture of good faith, something that Greece badly needs.

Today, Greece suffers from a youth unemployment rate of over 50 percent, economic poverty, and energy poverty.<sup>50</sup> Focusing on the 2008 December urban uprisings, Chryssanthi Petropoulou points out that Greece's youth has not only been pillaged of its past but is also facing

a future that has “already been looted.”<sup>51</sup> Such a dire yet accurate forecast reminds us of the severity of the suffering of Greece’s people. While a return of the Parthenon Marbles, or the “marble head” of Athens, would serve as an inspiration, it also recalls the thin line between fantasy and reality, dream and nightmare that Seferis explores in his journal entries. Seferis wrote that a nightmare feels just like a dream, except the terrifying part of it is suppressed until the end. While it is in the next generation of Greeks (green and otherwise) that much of the hope and fluid energy of Greece lies and while the marbles would be a step in the right direction of justice, it remains to be seen whether circumstances in Greece will improve or further degenerate. The “marble head” needs a firm body on which to rest, a body that is not the puppet of corrupt politicians and money-driven elites. The uncanny potentiality of having the marbles returned at one of the lowest moments in Greece’s history underlines that Greece is hovering on the threshold of a nightmare or is in fact already in it.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Yanoula Athanassakis** is special assistant to the deputy provost of New York University, cofounder of New York University’s *Environmental Humanities Initiative* series, and adjunct instructor in comparative literature. A former American Council of Learned Societies New Faculty Fellow (2012–2014) and Literature Fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in the College of Creative Studies, Athanassakis is currently working on her first book, *Ecocriticism and the Material Turn: Environmental Justice in Contemporary U.S. Narratives*, through Routledge’s *Environmental Humanities Series*. Her administrative and editorial experience includes serving as codirector of the Travel Study to Greece Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara (2003–2011) and serving as associate managing editor for special forums for the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (JTAS) from 2007–2012. In addition, she has worked in publishing and has written and edited for *Islands Magazine*, *Tinta Latina*, the *SB Independent*, *Ninth Letter Literary Magazine*, and the *Huffington Post*. Her academic publications include essays on transnational environmental justice, gender and identity politics in the modern American novel, and ecoterrorism. She researches and teaches in the fields of American literature, the environmental humanities, animal studies, food studies, race and ethnic studies, and gender studies. She has coorganized a number of panels and symposia on topics ranging from food studies to online editing in academic journals and is currently working with New York University’s *Animal Studies Initiative* and the Department of Environmental

*Studies to think through the formation of a field: the environmental humanities.*  
For more information, see [yanoulaathanassakis.com](http://yanoulaathanassakis.com).

#### NOTES

1. George Seferis, *Dokimes*, 3rd ed. (Athens: Ikaros, 1974), vol. B, 326–27.
2. In 2010 Greece began its heavy borrowing of both German and IMF-backed (International Monetary Fund) high-interest loans.
3. James Lewis, “Dangerous Times: Milton Friedman Just Won His Euro Bet,” *American Thinker*, May 11, 2013, [http://www.americanthinker.com/2013/05/dangerous\\_times\\_milton\\_friedman\\_just\\_won\\_his\\_euro\\_bet.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2013/05/dangerous_times_milton_friedman_just_won_his_euro_bet.html).
4. Suzanne Daley, “Rise in Oil Tax Forces Greeks to Face Cold as Ancients Did,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/04/world/europe/oil-tax-forces-greeks-to-fight-winter-with-fire.html?pagewanted=all&r=1&>.
5. The EPA-funded study links particle size to potential for harm: “The size of particles is directly linked to their potential for causing health problems. Small particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter pose the greatest problems, because they can get deep into your lungs, and some may even get into your bloodstream.” See “Health,” Environmental Protection Agency, accessed July 14, 2014, <http://www.epa.gov/pm/health.html>.
6. There are numerous Greek reports on the death of students, pensioners, migrant workers, the elderly, and the young due to lack of access to proper heat. Among the numerous newspaper and television reports on the subject, perhaps none is as interesting as the online brochure from “left.gr” about heating. The piece published on December 12, 2013, demands that “the people” stand by Syriza, Greece’s current ruling party; and they deftly politicize the deaths of students and the youth as the fault of past administrations. While propagandistic in tone, it reveals the real connections between tax hikes, pension cuts, economic disparity, and death. See “Στο βαρύ χειμώνα του μνημονίου οι άνθρωποι παγώνουν και η φύση καταστρέφεται” [In the heavy winter of memoranda people are freezing and nature is destroyed], LEFT.GR, December 12, 2012, <https://left.gr/news/sto-vary-heimona-toy-mnimoniou-oi-anthropoi-pagonoy-n-kai-i-fysi-katastrefetai> (in Greek).
7. For more on the unequal ways in which the debt crisis has impacted different segments of Athens’s population, see George Kandyliis, Thomas Maloutas, and John Sayas, “Immigration, Inequality, and Diversity: Socio-Ethnic Hierarchy and Spatial Organization in Athens, Greece,” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 19, no. 3 (2012): 267–86. See also Athena Athanasiou, “Precarious Intensities: Gendered Bodies in the Streets and Squares of Greece,” *Signs* 40, no. 1 (2014): 1–9.
8. Arian Saffari et al., “Increased Biomass Burning Due to the Economic Crisis in Greece and Its Adverse Impact on Wintertime Air Quality in Thessaloniki,” *Environmental Science and Technology* 47, no. 23 (2013): 13313–20.
9. Seemingly counterintuitive, research has proven that in lean economic times there is greater energy inefficiency and waste. For Greece, specifically, see Harry van Versendaal, “In Debt-Hit Greece, Much-Craved Development Is No Longer Green,” *Kathimerini*, October 22, 2012, [http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_ws1e1\\_1\\_22/10/2012\\_466697](http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_ws1e1_1_22/10/2012_466697). See

also “Athens Air Pollution Found at 15 Times above EU Alert Level,” *Kathimerini*, February 28, 2013, [http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_wsate1\\_1\\_28/02/2013\\_485136](http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsate1_1_28/02/2013_485136).

10. The connection between the economic crisis and the “browning” of Athens’s air is well publicized. See Nikolia Apostolou, “How Greece’s Economic Crisis Filled the Athens Sky with Smog,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 12, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0212/How-Greece-s-economic-crisis-filled-the-Athens-sky-with-smog>. For further reading on the impact of smog on Greece and its anthropogenic causes, see the following article by two Greek experts on ecology and health from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: Ioannis D. Pandis and Alexi Mbenos, “Οι σοβαρές επιπτώσεις της αθαλομίχλης” [The grave effects of smog], *AlfaVita*, December 26, 2013, <http://www.alfavita.gr/arhron/oi-sovarēs-epiptōseis-tēs-αθαλομίχλης> (in Greek).

11. Ulrich Beck, “The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 19, no. 4 (2002): 41; emphasis in original.

12. For more on risk, activism, and civil disobedience, see Rita Raley, *Tactical Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

13. Dimitris Dalakoglou, “The Crisis before ‘The Crisis’: Violence and Urban Neoliberalization in Athens,” *Social Justice* 39, no. 1 (2013): 24–42. See also Anestis Tapagos on the capitalist boom from 1995–2004, or as Tapagos terms it, a “golden decade of capitalist growth.” Anestis Tapagos, “ΤΕΧΝΙΚΕΣ ΚΑΤΑΣΚΕΥΕΣ: ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ‘ΧΡΥΣΗ 10ΕΤΙΑ’ (1995–2004) ΣΤΗΝ ΚΡΙΣΗ ΥΠΕΡΣΥΣΣΩΡΕΥΣΗΣ (2004–2008) ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑΡΡΕΥΣΗ (2008–2010)” [Constructions: From the ‘Golden Decade’ (1995–2004) to the Crisis of Over-Accumulation (2004–2008) and to the Collapse (2008–2010)], *Theses* 113 (1–2): 133–44 (in Greek).

14. The neck cloth could be instantly used as a shield against tear gas and pepper spray and as a disguise for one’s identity from the police. Interestingly, in the summer of 2011 the police also did not want their identities known; and as I walked around Syntagma Square that summer with my phone, I was forced to stop taking pictures by a Special Forces officer.

15. Dalakoglou furthermore cites a “paradigmatic shift toward a new type of neoliberal governance in Western Europe” that has resulted in decreased general health of the population and in an increased suicide rate. Dalakoglou, “Crisis before ‘The Crisis,’” 35–36.

16. Kat Christofer, “Athenian Democracy in Ruins,” *Guardian*, December 8, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/dec/08/Greece>.

17. In her interview with Naomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto, ON: Knopf Canada, 2007), Katie Rooney asks Klein to historicize disaster capitalism, and Klein describes it as a “fundamentalist version of capitalism” that thrives at an exponential rate only when preceded by, in her words, “some kind of shock.” The shock is accompanied by a swift manipulation of the area’s crippled state for economic, capitalistic gain. Moreover, capitalism is wedded to the ideology of democracy, and the two are portrayed as inseparable. “Naomi Klein on Disaster Capitalism,” by Katie Rooney, *Time Entertainment*, September 27, 2007, <http://ti.me/21vrlHf>.

18. There are endless examples of sources (both popular and scholarly) that theorize and trace the roots of the “hooded” and “masked” ones to various police operations, with titles like, “Operation Information.” Basilis Lambropoulos, “Ποιοι είναι οι κουκουλοφόροι της ΕΛΑΣ: Η ομάδα των 50 μυστικών αστυνομικών που παρακολουθούν διαδηλώσεις” [Who

are the masked men of Greece? The group of 50 undercover officers following the demonstrations], *To Vima*, October 25, 2011, <http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=426754> (in Greek).

19. Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour M. Hersh has long argued that US ties to Greece have been motivated by imperial designs to the detriment of Greece's people. First these were rumors; but after Henry J. Tasca's 1976 testimony in front of the House Intelligence Committee, rumor became fact. Tasca served as ambassador to Greece under Nixon, and he admitted in sworn but sealed testimony that the junta had sent millions to Nixon through Thomas A. Pappas. Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power, Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983). See also George Lardner Jr. and Walter Pincus, "Contributor Got Oval Office Thank-You for Watergate Funds," *Washington Post*, October 30, 1997, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/nixon/103097pappas.htm>.

20. Esso-Pappas is a Greek American oil and gas company founded by Tom Pappas. It was originally valued at \$125 million. In partnership with Standard Oil of New Jersey, it produced steel, oil, and chemicals. Esso-Pappas, a derivative of ExxonMobil is synonymous with Richard Nixon and the GOP. For a fuller profile on Tom Pappas and his industrial-military complex near Thessalonika, Greece, see Markos Karasarinis, "Ο άνθρωπος που λεγόταν «Εσσο»" [The man who was called "Esso"], *To Vima*, July 30, 2012, <http://www.tovima.gr/vimamen/guys/article/?aid=468973> (in Greek).

21. James Gerstenzang and Richard Boudreaux, "Clinton Says US Regrets Aid to Junta in Cold War," *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1999, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/nov/21/news/mn-35991>.

22. Dalakoglou does an excellent job of tracing and historicizing different police units aimed at quelling protests.

23. Dalakoglou, "Crisis before 'The Crisis,'" 33–35.

24. Janez Potočnik, qtd. in European Commission, "Environment: A New Medals Table for Waste Management," press release, August 7, 2012, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-12-888\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-888_en.htm).

25. See the graph on page 5 of European Commission, "Screening of Waste Management Performance of EU Member States," report (final version), July 2, 2012, [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/Screening\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/Screening_report.pdf).

26. Nikolaj Nielsen, "Brussels Names EU Waste Management Villains," *EU Observer*, August 8, 2012, <https://euobserver.com/environment/117186>.

27. Comment on Corfu clashes and death of forty-three-year-old female, taxikipali, "Corfu Garbage-Dump Protest Followup: Renewed Barricades Met with Plastic Bullets by Greek Riot-Police," *Libcom* (blog), June 17, 2008, <http://libcom.org/news/corfu-garbage-dump-protest-followup-renewed-barricades-met-with-plastic-bullets-greek-riot->.

28. Niki Kitsantonis, "Greek Town Rises Up against Planned Landfill," *New York Times*, March 16, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/world/europe/17greece.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/world/europe/17greece.html?_r=0).

29. Kitsantonis, "Greek Town Rises Up against Planned Landfill."

30. Yannis Palaiologos does a superb job of summing up the issues at stake in Keratea, see "Greece's Garbage Crisis: A Stinky Metaphor for an Economy in the Dumps," *TIME* (blog), May 28, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/05/28/greeces-garbage-crisis-a-stinky-metaphor-for-a-country-in-the-dumps/>.

31. For more on the Keratea uprising in popular media, see Alain Salles and agencies, "Greek Protest over Planned Landfill Site," *Guardian*, April 19, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/apr/19/keratea-greece-protests-landfill-salles>.
32. Athena Athanasiou, "Precarious Intensities: Gendered Bodies in the Streets and Squares of Greece," *Signs* 40, no. 1 (2014): 1–9.
33. Andy Dabilis, "Greeks March to Commemorate 1973 Student Uprising against Former Dictatorship," *Greek Reporter*, November 17, 2012, <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2012/11/17/greeks-march-to-commemorate-1973-student-uprising-against-the-former-dictatorship/>.
34. Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain (or P.I.G.S.) were blamed for the capsizing of the European Union.
35. Rachel Donadio, "Battered by Economic Crisis, Greeks Turn to Barter Networks," *New York Times*, October 1, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/world/europe/in-greece-barter-networks-surge.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/world/europe/in-greece-barter-networks-surge.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).
36. I would like to acknowledge my colleague in human ecology at Rutgers University, Heidi Hausermann, for pushing me to solidify my ideas and work on DIY and green Greeks.
37. Chatzidakis argues that the zeitgeist of Exarcheia is its spirit of birthing political and collective movements. Since 2008 (as it did in the past) it has strongly influenced areas outside its confines and community members. Exarcheia constantly question their own anti-hierarchical and anticapitalist machinations. Andreas Chatzidakis, "Commodity Fights in Post-2008 Athens: Zapatistas Coffee, Kropotkinian Drinks and Fascist Rice," *ephemera* 13, no. 2 (2013): 459–68.
38. For more on the relationship between urban green consumption, Exarcheia, and politicized space, see Andreas Chatzidakis, Pauline Maclaran, and Alan Bradshaw, "Heterotopian Space and the Utopics of Ethical and Green Consumption," *Journal of Marketing Management* 28, nos. 3–4 (2012): 494–515.
39. For a quick and good read on the connection among Greece's economic crisis, the rise of Golden Dawn, and the prevalence of it in rural areas of agricultural production, see Matthaios Tsimitakis, "Golden Dawn Is a Product of Greece's Crisis," *Al Jazeera*, August 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/08/20138794312724889.html>.
40. Andrew Szasz, *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
41. These combined forces have encouraged people to use more public transportation and fewer utilities, resulting in a sizable (15 percent) emission reduction from 2005 to 2011. Ntina Karatzou, "Εφιάλτης από την ενεργειακή φτώχεια" [Nightmare of energy poverty: Only 1 in 10 civilians can easily pay their heating bills], *Eleftherotipia*, November 19, 2014, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=337001> (in Greek, author's translation). As experts from Germany's Ecological Institute point out, this is more of a result of reduced emissions because of the economic crisis, not deep changes in climate policies, or as it is stated in the 2013 Climate Country Report: "This is mainly due to a drastic decrease of emissions in almost every sector resulting from the economic crisis, and not the effect of ambitious climate policies." Eike Dreblow et al., "Assessment of Climate Change Policies in the Context of the European Semester; Country Report: Greece," February 2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/progress/reporting/docs/gr\\_2013\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/progress/reporting/docs/gr_2013_en.pdf).
42. Andrew Simms, "Alternatives Emerging from the Greek Crisis," *New Econom-*

ics Foundation (blog), February 16, 2012, <http://www.neweconomics.org/blog/entry/alternatives-emerging-from-the-greek-crisis>.

43. The group's blog, named *The Other Human*, shares pictures and postings about their Social Kitchen (in Greek), see <http://oallosanthropos.blogspot.gr>.

44. George Seferis, *Mythistorima and Gymnopaidia*, trans. Mary Cooper Walton (Athens: Lycabettus Press, 1977), 13.

45. Oana Lungescu, "Greece Should Sell Islands to Cut Debt—Merkel Allies," *BBC Online*, March 4, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8549793.stm>.

46. Nikos Konstandaras, "Why Our Monuments Matter," *New York Times*, August 19, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/opinion/nikos-konstandaras-freud-why-our-monuments-matter.html>.

47. See especially "Critique of Governmentality I" and "The American University" in Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt*, trans. Joshua David Jordan, Semiotext(e) Intervention Series (Pasadena, CA: Semiotexte(e) / MIT Press: 2015).

48. Lazzarato, "Critique of Governmentality I," 118–20.

49. Jeremy Paxman, "The Elgin Marbles Belong in Britain, Mrs Clooney," *Telegraph*, October 25, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/museums/11185897/The-Elgin-Marbles-belong-in-Britain-Mrs-Clooney.html>.

50. For more on the energy-poverty crisis in Greece, see Greenpeace Greece, "Μισό 'εξοικονομώ κατ' οίκον' θυσιάζεται κάθε χρόνο στο . . . πετρέλαιο," [Half of tax program sacrificed to oil subsidiaries], press release, October 15, 2013, <http://www.greenpeace.org/greece/el/news/118508/118517/2013/oktovrios/oil-subsidies/> (in Greek). See also the erudite and thorough report by the head of statistics at the University of Athens, Epaminondas Panas, "Ερευνα για την Ενεργειακή Φτώχεια στην Ελλάδα" [Research on Energy Poverty in Greece], Economic University of Athens, Department of Statistics, 2012, [http://library.tee.gr/digital/m2600/m2600\\_panas.pdf](http://library.tee.gr/digital/m2600/m2600_panas.pdf) (in Greek).

51. Chryssanthi Petropoulou, "From the December Youth Uprising to the Rebirth of Urban Social Movements: A Space-Time Approach," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 1 (2010): 217.