A new economic and political landscape of contention has surfaced across local, national, and transnational spaces in the 21st century in reaction to the impact of hard economic times on national populations (Diani and Kousis 2014). Lucid examples include the movements of real democracy, Occupy, and the Indignados participating in urban spaces both as national and transnational contentious publics (see chapter 5 in this volume; Fuster 2014: 237-242). This contention is especially visible in the southern part of the Eurozone and in particular Greece. In order to maintain global economic flows, enormous pressure was placed by international lenders and the Troika – the European Commission (EC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Central Bank (ECB) – on southern European governments to implement harsh austerity measures and related neoliberal reforms (see chapter 2 in this volume; Diani and Kousis 2014). Given the sweeping and dramatic impact these measures had on national populations, the legislative decisions included in the Troika’s Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and the ensuing austerity policies led to intensive waves of multi-scalar mobilizations across an array of old and new spaces on Eurozone’s periphery, and especially Greece.

Since 2010, protests spread across the Eurozone’s more exposed old periphery regions (including Ireland), which are more susceptible to the global financial crisis (Lapavitsas et al. 2010). The 2007 crisis, however, also sparked demonstrations in northern as well as eastern European countries on labor rights and social welfare issues, unemployment, health, migration, violence, democracy, and extremist phenomena (Kriesi 2011; Beissinger and Sasse 2012). The new wave of Occupy, Indignados, anti-austerity, square/piazza street politics has led to an abundance of literature, most of which do not systematically apply the conceptual and methodological toolkit of the social movement approach (see chapters 1 and 12 in this volume).

This vast array of multi-scalar contention within and beyond nation-states calls for the study of “spatial agency – the ways that spatial constraints are turned to advantage in political and social struggles and the ways that
such struggles can restructure the meanings, uses, and strategic valence of space” (Sewell 2001: 52-55). Research in this area has focused on understanding spatial contexts as both resource and constraint (Ó Dochartaigh and Bosi 2010). More than two decades ago, scholars began examining the spatial dimension of social movements, with geographers such as Lefebvre (1991), Pile and Keith (1997), and Miller (2000) leading the way. The past decade also witnessed an increasing collaboration between geographers and social movement experts addressing spatiality and contention in the 21st century (e.g. Martin and Miller 2003; Nicholls et al. 2013). Martin and Miller (2003) investigate how space is involved in the operation of the mechanisms identified by McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow (2001); more recent followers include Sbicca and Perdue (2013). Nevertheless, it is still rare to find studies (e.g. Thornton 2012) with a systematic socio-historical empirical analysis illustrating how protests spread across space over time using geography tools such as ArcGIS.

Social movement scholars have examined space in relation to contention only since the early 2000s, with pioneer works by McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow (2001); Tilly (2000, 2003); Sewell (2001); and Auyero (2003, 2006). McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow (2001) offer opportunities for a more situated and context-oriented study of the mechanisms and processes of contentious politics – even though they do not specify how space and place can be analyzed (but see Tilly 2003). Without explicitly linking to these mechanisms, Tilly (2000) offers five arguments on spatial aspects of contention illustrated through the geography of policing, safe places, spatial claim-making, and the control of places as stakes of contention (Tilly 2003: 221). Subsequent research has corroborated this view. By focusing on the itinerary, selection of targets, and geography of policing involved in the 1993 public employee protests in Argentina, Auyero (2003) examines how both physical and symbolic space structure influence protest. Bosi (2013) studies how the concept of safe territory can shed light on the persistence of, and disengagement from, violence by violent political organizations. Further developing his analytic tools on a spatial approach to contentious politics, Tilly proposes a two-dimensional view of spatial variation – proximity and mobility – which leads to four extreme types of mobilization: local fixed, large-scale fixed, local mobile, and large-scale mobile (2003: 222).

According to Auyero (2006), the literature on space and contention focuses on issues pointed out by Sewell (2001) and other scholars: space as a repository of social relations; built environment as opportunity and constraint in contentious politics; spatial routines; and meaningful spaces. Recent works on contentious politics in the 21st century have
illustrated a multi-scalar reorganization of movements from the local, regional, and national to the supra-national, which use new technologies and the emergence of global publics; they respond to similar multi-scalar spatial arenas where contested decision-making occurs (Mayer 2013). The development of electronic communications has contributed to the speed with which not only social movements (McAdam et al. 2001; Rucht 2005; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005) but also the global economic crisis have spread (Hassan 2011). Studies of this period have not only pointed out the rising importance of IT and social media in spreading protest (Rucht 2005) but also the increase in networking (Diani 2011) and the emergence of ‘mega-networks’ (Goldstone 2011). The waves of defensive protests in Mediterranean regions were carried out by ‘mega-networks’ comprised of very broad cross-class coalitions which “facilitate further mobilization by creating and linking prior, tightly-linked within-group networks to each other” (Goldstone 2011: 457). These post-2010 mobilizations may be a new, broader family of anti-austerity protests with claims to representative democracy, but there are notable divergences. It is, moreover, too early to see a significant expansion of their actions unfolding, except in the case of Greece (see chapter 12 in this volume).

Given the rarity of studies that strive to understand the dynamics of space and protests in multi-scalar arenas, this chapter offers new evidence on the spatial dimensions of the Greek campaign against the Troika memoranda and austerity measures. It simultaneously aims to contribute to the wider debate on economic and political contention, which is also spreading, and to adopt an approach used by social movements. The analysis is guided by Auyero’s suggestion (2006) that future research shed light on the ways in which: a) physical space affects the origins and course of joint action, and b) particular forms of making claims and/or expressing grievances are likely to recur over time.

The section that follows offers a more focused review of the literature relevant to this chapter, which centers on the spatial features of anti-austerity contention, the space-specific contention of parliamentarization (Tilly 1997), and the contention in squares and streets at the national and transnational scales. The method, analysis, and concluding sections offer a Tillian approach to the spatial and diachronic profile of the three-year-long Greek protest campaign. Special attention is given to its multi-scalar (local, national, transnational) character and its persistent use of the parliament as the key space of contention. Relying also on secondary sources, it also makes references to the safety of spaces of contention and the new meanings/routines created in old spaces by activists of the ‘movement of the squares’.
Spatial Dimensions of Economic and Political Contention

In the last decade, we have witnessed the increasingly deep and pervasive impact of globalization in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres, reaffirming the critical importance of structural transformations and dynamics for social movement development (Kousis and Tilly 2005; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Almeida 2008, 2010). Multi-scalar contention reflects neoliberalism’s failure to deliver social protection and collective goods (Mayer 2013) on a variety of fronts ranging from the provision of health care to employment, as also seen in the more recent shift of the burden from governments and corporations to individuals far less capable of bearing them. Furthermore, regulations on businesses are being relaxed, while state power has been shifting to the private sector and transnational bodies (Sbicca and Perdue 2013).

Most of the studies on anti-austerity campaigns involving wider populations have focused on Latin American countries such as El Salvador and Costa Rica (Almeida 2010, 2012). A campaign comprises a higher level of contention involving whole populations engaged in wider struggles and is defined as sustained, organized public efforts making collective claims on target authorities, constituting one element (of three) of a social movement:

Unlike a one-time petition, declaration, or mass meeting, a campaign extends beyond any single event – although social movements often include petitions, declarations, and mass meetings. A campaign always links at least three parties: a group of self-designated claimants, some object(s) of claims, and a public of some kind. The claims may target governmental officials, but the ‘authorities’ in question can also include owners of property, religious functionaries, and others whose actions (or failures to act) significantly affect the welfare of many people. (Tilly 2004: 3-4)

Campaigns involving the population are a notable part of the new economic and political multi-scalar contention of the 21st century. Protesters use old as well as new spaces of resistance and repertoires of action. The parliamentarization of contention, the urban but simultaneously national scale of square protests and street contention, as well as the transnationalization of national campaigns are all illustrated in the recent post-financial-crisis protests, especially in the case of Greece.
The Parliamentarization of Contention

Parliament is a perennial space of contention, as seen in previous periods (Tilly 1997) as well as in more recent times (Vradis 2011; Dalakoglou 2011; Leontidou 2012; Kousis 2014). Based on the analysis of large data sets on contentious events for long periods, Tilly’s initial description of the parliamentarization of British contention from 1750 to the 1830s (1997: 249) offers insights on major elements that trigger a new period of parliamentary reforms, such as those seen since 2010 in Greece:

1. parliament became the object of ordinary people’s contention;
2. parliamentary action incited ordinary people’s claim-making, whether directed to parliament or elsewhere;
3. issues currently being considered by parliament became more central to popular contention;
4. connections with parliament became more central in a wide range of claim-making.

Even when powerful global economic and political actors, such as the Troika with Greece, exercise overwhelming pressure on the state, the persistence of parliament-directed protest (Dalakoglou 2012; Korizi and Vradis 2012; Leontidou 2012) attests to the high significance and durability of national-level institutions (Della Porta and Mattoni 2014). Protesters have targeted the Greek Parliament as the most accountable national institution for securing the social welfare of the country’s population.

Square Camps and Street Politics in Urban and National Spaces

A great deal of square camp and street contention occurs at the national level, forming national campaigns against neoliberal reforms and austerity policies. These protests appeared first in Latin America (Strawn 2005; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Almeida 2010b; Bellinger and Arce 2011) and Asia (Arce 2010; Arce and Kim 2011). Few are the systematic studies documenting the regional profile of such campaigns (Almeida 2012). With evidence on community mobilizations from El Salvador and Costa Rica, Almeida shows that “localities with greater levels of state and community infrastructure (highways, administrative offices, universities, NGOs and local chapters of oppositional parties) were associated with heightened collective action opposing the privatization of health care and public utilities” (Almeida, 2012: 1061). These instances of social infrastructure were the products of state-led development before the era of accelerated neoliberal globalization.
The global financial crisis of 2007 has led to a new set of opportunities and threats for the expression of public demands in democratic as well as authoritarian contexts (Smith 2011). Since 2008, square and street politics have been rejuvenated – initially in the Arab region, the EU, and North America, with more recent manifestations in Turkey and Brazil. This is especially visible in economic and political contention under neoliberal restructuring. The influence of a Mediterranean, urban ‘movement of the piazzas’ at the local and global level is undeniable (Leontidou 2012). Street politics since the Arab protests reflect the important role of the regional landscape across and beyond the Mediterranean. This is reflected in activist discourse (Leontidou 2012), which mirrors the importance of spatial agency and the ways in which resistance can reshape the meanings and uses of space (Sewell 2001).

In recent years, scholars have published systematic studies on street politics in the context of the financial crisis in France (Ancelovici 2011), Greece (Diani and Kousis 2014; Kousis and Kanellopoulos 2015), EU countries (Kriesi 2011), and Eastern European countries (Beissinger and Sasse 2012). Recent work on crisis-related contention in southern Europe offers fresh evidence of square protest camp mobilizations in Spain and Portugal (‘12M’, ‘15M’, and ‘15O’) as well as an analysis of the composition of 15M mobilizations in Spain (Baumgarten 2013; Fuster 2012; see chapter 5 in this volume). Qualitative studies focus on the urban character of 21st century protests, pointing to a revitalization of politics with a lasting impact and the engagement of high numbers of participants imagining a different world (Madden and Vradis 2012: 235-236). In their spatial ethnographic analysis of the Indignados’ protests in upper and lower Syntagma Square in June 2011, Kaika and Karaliotis (2014) point to the significance and limitations of using indignation to establish a wider democratic politics.

### Transnational Spaces of Contention

The globalization of resistance was initially marked by events such as the Seattle mobilizations against the WTO, the G-8, the IMF, the World Bank, the EU, and the World Economic Forum. This was followed by transnational activist networks of the World Social Forum and the European Social

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1 Other such events include the 1988 anti-IMF and World Bank counter summit in Berlin, the 1994 Zapatista uprisings, or the protest by the People Global Action network [I thank Marcos Ancelovici for this point].
Forum (Della Porta 2009), which focused on global justice against neoliberal globalization and neoliberal restructuring (Bringel and Munoz 2010).

Following the multi-scalar 2007 financial crisis that was triggered in the US and the spiralling banking sector or sovereign debt crises affecting populations across the US, Europe, and other regions, both transnational and national contention has risen (Goldstone 2011; Kriesi 2011; Smith 2011; Beissinger and Sasse 2012; Fuster 2012; Shepard 2012). Contenders across transnational urban spaces are against financial, economic, and political institutions at both the transnational and national level. The most recent literature focuses on significant issues related to this new phase of transnational contention visible in Occupy and real democracy movements, such as democracy and new technologies (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Della Porta and Mattoni 2014).

The sections that follow offer a systematic protest event analysis approach that highlights the spatial features of the Greek campaign against the Troika memoranda and austerity measures: its parliamentarization as well as its urban, national, and transnational topographies and the ways in which they influence, and are influenced by, the protesters.

Research Approach: Large Protest Events and the Greek Campaign against the Troika Memoranda and Austerity

The study of contentious events is especially significant for periods of ‘thickened history’ when “the pace of challenging events quickens to the point that it becomes practically impossible to comprehend them and they come to constitute an increasingly significant part of their own causal structure” (Beissinger 2002: 27). It allows for the study of compact defensive actions and frames of a mobilized public confronting austerity and memorandum policies of devastating impact imposed by a delegitimized Greek state and powerful economic and political transnational agencies during the turbulent period of 2010 to 2013.

During this ‘thickened’ period, thousands of protests\(^2\) took place mostly at the local and national level but also on a transnational scale. Choosing the Large Protest Events (LPEs) as the unit of analysis facilitates the

\(^2\) In response to inquiries by Syriza MPs, the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection announced that from May 2010 to April 2014, 20,210 protests occurred across the country, 6,266 of which took place in the Attica Region which includes Athens, based on police reports. See also, http://www.apergia.gr/ for a day-to-day calendar of protests in Greece.
systematic tracing of all key events and synchronized actions at the national level. These LPEs of the first three years of the Greek crisis were organized against the Troika’s MoU and the government’s related austerity policies. They constitute a national anti-austerity campaign sparked by neoliberal adjustment and austerity policies in Southern European countries. Mostly involving demonstration-marches and national strikes between January 2010 and January 2013 with claims against austerity and/or neoliberal policies, the 32 LPEs I look at in this chapter share the following features:

1. a high number of participants (minimum 5,000 – maximum 500,000);
2. a high number of parallel and synchronized events;
3. national-level claims challenging the Troika’s MoU and government austerity policies;
4. broad, cross-class coalitions involving a large number of groups and the general public;
5. based in Athens’ Syntagma (Constitution) Square, addressing the parliament;
6. accompanied by parallel protests in cities and towns across the country with the same claims.

Due to their potential impact, these LPEs were widely covered by national and transnational media. Thus, as with previous periods of “thickened history” (Beissinger 2002), the best strategy of analysis is a “blanketing strategy” (Beissinger 1998: 290-300) utilizing multiple available sources in order to enrich the data set of more than 450 articles. Therefore, five major sources were selected: Eleftherotypia, the leftist Rizospastis, and Avgi as well as Indymedia and real-democracy.gr. They were supplemented

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3 The crisis period in Greece witnessed a rapid rise in independent electronic news and media sites. This may be compared to the transitional period witnessing the rapid development of independent newspaper sources (Beissinger 2002).
4 This chapter draws on primary data produced in part under ‘Mediterranean Environment, Networks and Actions’ (coordinator: M. Kousis), a project stemming from ‘Mediterranean Voices: Oral History and Cultural Practices in Mediterranean Cities’ with 80 per cent funding by the European Commission (DG EuropeAid, contract no. E8/AIDCO/2000/2095-05) and 20 per cent through matched funding by the University of Crete and other sources. The work by Kostas Kanellopoulos (locating media mentions and coding), Marina Papadaki (technical assistance), and Sara Karavasili (data entry) is gratefully acknowledged.
5 Over a period of more than forty years, Eleftherotypia, an independent center-left, multi-thematic newspaper with high circulation rates offered continuous and detailed coverage on contentious issues and social mobilizations. Unfortunately, the paper stopped operating from December 2011 to mid-January 2013 due to financial problems.
6 The official newspaper of the Greek Communist Party.
7 Newspaper supporting Syriza.
by other Greek national news sources, e.g. To Vima, Ta Nea, Kathimerini, Epohi, tvxs, international news sources (The Guardian, Reuters, BBC), and blogs such as iskra.gr.

A Multi-Scalar Anti-Austerity Campaign: From Athens’ Syntagma Square to Urban Squares Within and Beyond Greece

Three major phases stand out in the campaign (Diani and Kousis 2014). The first anti-austerity year, from February 2010 to February 2011, constitutes the starting period and was marked by waves of protest against not only the Greek government’s ‘stability measures’ but more importantly the Troika’s first memorandum and its accompanying measures, which gave rise to an escalation of strikes and intense resistance. The second period, from March 2011 to February 2012, witnessed the Multi-Purpose Act and the second memorandum. During this period, parliament approved its Mid-Term Fiscal Strategy (2012-2015), which included privatizing public assets, public sector restructuring and downsizing, and more wage, personnel, and pension cuts (Markantonatou 2013). The third period took place from March 2012 to December 2012 and can be separated into two periods – one in which there were no LPEs and another in which a kind of rejuvenation of LPEs materialized. Whether the January 2013 LPE belongs to the third phase or to a new one remains to be studied based on how future protests develop.

Action and Claim Repertoires across the Country and Beyond

New networks of protesting groups were formed in Greece in reaction to harsh measures and agreements between transnational and national bodies, as illustrated in the massive protests that were organized in Syntagma Square and other squares across the country. The diachronic spread of action forms, claim-making, and new social movement actors are reflected below. Specifically, Graph 6.1 depicts the main types of action used in each LPE. These direct democratic, demonstrative, confrontational, and violent action forms escalate in the second period, that of the Greek Indignados (or the movement of the squares), from April 2011 to February 2012. It is during this period that the most notable increase took place in terms of direct democratic actions. These were carried out by very diverse groups of participants who did not claim any affiliation to political parties or other political groups. Less drastic were the changes in the pattern of demonstrative and
confrontational actions (mostly general national strikes). Police repression and violence subsided by early June.

### Graph 6.1  Main Types of Action of the 32 Large Protest Events, January 2010-January 2013

Protest claims against the Troika’s MoU and the austerity policies appeared across the entire country. The protesters opposed the drastic nationwide socio-economic impact of these policies, the aim of which was to save the Eurozone and leave the global economic arena and its financial centers unharmed. Overall, the protest claims’ primary targets were the Greek government (including the parliament and the police force), followed by the European Commission, the Troika, and foreign banks. Other groups that were challenged included financial institutions and credit agencies, the rich, and local government agencies. The least mentioned were capitalist markets and the G20/G8. At some events, Germany was considered a targeted state, especially since June 2011 (Kousis 2013).

The protesters’ main grievances were the unprecedented neoliberal, structural adjustment laws and measures that led to dramatic cuts in wages and pensions; tax increases; the privatization of public enterprises, health, and education; and other cuts to social expenditure. These grievances reflected the protesters’ serious concerns about the impact of these austerity measures on the economy, the society, and the country’s sovereignty and democracy (Diani and Kousis 2014).
Campaign protesters demanded “Taxing the Rich”, job creation, and the provision of social welfare (health and education). They also called for the resignation of responsible politicians, an immediate halt to privatizations, and the annulment of the externally imposed austerity policies. Less frequently heard were demands concerning reforms to the Eurozone and EU fiscal strategies as well as elections (Kousis 2013).8

Mobilizing Actors and Means of Communication

Participation in the LPEs was initiated and organized by major conventional actors such as political parties and unions as well as new actors: the aganaktismenoi (the Greek Indignados), also known as the movement of the squares/piazzas.

The most frequently mentioned groups of protesters are presented in Table 6.1 below. Highest in frequency were the political parties of the left, with Syriza participating more frequently (in 24 of the 32 LPEs), followed by Antarsya, the Greek Communist party (KKE), the public and private-sector union confederations, anarchist/anti-authoritarian groups, as well as students and/or their parents. Groups that participated less frequently include economic or professional associations, civil society groups, and the general public. The categories with the lowest frequency were the self-employed, pensioners, artist groups, immigrant groups, soccer fan clubs, ultra-right groups, European labor unions, communities engaged in environmental conflicts against the state (e.g. Keratea), Spitha, the political movement initiated by the internationally known composer Mikis Theodorakis, the Action Group for German remunerations, Facebook groups, and others.

There was a steady increase in the types of groups and organizations participating especially in the second pre-election period, with noticeable peaks in the May-June 2011 period (the Greek Indignados), and February 2012 (Kousis 2014). While the anti-austerity campaign began with conventional/traditional protest groups such as unions, political parties, teachers, and students, within a year, new justice-oriented groups (e.g. which had been formed in previous years to protest against paying new taxes) significantly fortified the broad coalitions of anti-austerity contention. It was also in the second year that the general public began making a stronger appearance

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8 Ongoing research focuses on attributions of responsibility related to the Euro-zone crisis by all actors in the public sphere, including claims by protestors, in Greek and German newspapers as well as Reuters: http://www.ggcrisi.info/
in the protests (Kousis 2014). Researchers have recently just begun to study the networking and linkages among major groups that played a key role in initiating and organizing the LPEs. Most of these are political parties of the left, political networks, and union organizers (Kanellopoulos et al. 2013; Kanellopoulos 2015).

What is striking is the vital role which IT, virtual communication, and social media played in the organizing, supporting, and spreading of anti-austerity protests in Greece in the past three years (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014; Leontidou 2012; Tsaliki 2012). This is especially discernible when examining the scale shift, the synchronized parallel actions, and also the interactions between the local, national, and transnational arenas of the anti-austerity campaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Participating Group</th>
<th>Participation in LPEs</th>
<th>No. of Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTARSYA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMAR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecologist Greens</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KKE</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>68.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYRIZA</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSEE/ADEDY (private &amp; public sector unions)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other union and employees</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>78.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other associations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLME POSDEP</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-autoritarian AK</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anarchist groups</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>justice oriented groups &amp; networks</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indignados</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occupy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students, pupils and/or their parents</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>68.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Commerce Chambers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional org/s &amp; groups (doctors, lawyers, engineers)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic interest groups (small/medium scale)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmers and agricultural organizations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist organizations and groups</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other civil society organizations and groups</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the general public (citizens, the population, the Greeks, etc)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N of LPEs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Perennial Space of Contention: The Parliament and Syntagma Square

Situated in the center of Athens, the Greek Parliament is a collection of former palace buildings that oversees Syntagma Square, which may be seen as an extension of its courtyard. It constitutes a heavily guarded environment that hosted four decades of decision-making bodies that led to huge state debts. Syntagma is a most suitable example of space as a semantically complex concept in contentious politics (Sewell 2001), as it has routinely been the square where mass demonstrations and rallies gave voice to protestors’ claims and where attempts were made to influence Greek political decision-makers.

Southern European urban squares or piazzas are the product of mixed land use, informality, and street life which are similar to the agora, a public space between the private house and the public parliament, the individual and the state (Leontidou 2012). The agora as a public space of contention has deep roots. In Athens, today’s Syntagma goes back to 1843, when the Greek public revolted and succeeded in forcing King Otto to grant them a new constitution. Since then, it has been a space of contention and negotiation between the public and the modern Greek state (Madden and Vradis 2012: 236). Some of the most significant contestations which occurred there include the ‘bloody December’ of 1944, which witnessed the killings of many communists and ignited the Greek civil war; the massive protests in 2007 against the catastrophic forest fires, which cost the lives of more than 80 people; the December 2008 protests against police violence and neoliberalism’s effects on the younger generation, which started in the neighborhood of Exarheia as a reaction to the fatal shooting of 16-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos; and, of course, the large and intense anti-austerity protests, including those by the Greek movement of the squares, which followed in the footsteps of the Spanish Indignados (Leontidou 2012; Kousis 2014).

As the mediating agency, the Greek Parliament has been responsible for implementing and facilitating structural adjustment and austerity policies imposed by national and transnational actors through drastic changes of the related legal and institutional arrangements. It has also served as the

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9 Leontidou (2012: 302) proposes the use of ‘piazzas’ instead of ‘squares’ to emphasize “the open and the nodal centre of material and virtual communication rather than an enclosed square and its defined landscape”.

10 Son of King Louis I of Bavaria.
political arena for all major governing parties whose policies and reforms shaped the national conditions directly or indirectly responsible for the crisis.

Although all of the LPEs against the MoU, austerity, and liberal restructuring include demonstrations and/or Indignados events which took place on Syntagma Square, three spatial routines can be distinguished which took place in the center of Athens. The thirteen general strikes usually began their marches at different times, from three different sites connected to their organizers, but all ended up on Syntagma Square. Participants from the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) started from Alexandras and Patision Avenue, the location of GSEE’s headquarters. The coordinating committee of the primary level unions (involving the non-parliamentary left) began from the Museum further down Patision Avenue. Finally, the communist party unions (PAME) started from Omonoia Square at the end of Patision Avenue – they adopted tight tactics that did not allow intruders to disrupt their nonviolent march. Other than the Indignados LPEs, the starting point for the rest of the LPEs was Propylaia, i.e. the entrance of the old building of the University of Athens which used to be protected by university asylum laws and which was established as the starting point of protests in the contentious decade of the 1960s and has continued to be so up to this day.11 The two main opposite routes of the marches (from Patision and Propylaia) led to the Syntagma Square demonstrations.12

New Meaningful Practices in Old Spaces: The Movement of the Square (Greek Indignados)

The first call for a meeting of Greek Indignados was uploaded on Facebook on 20 May 2011 at the White Tower in Thessaloniki. This was followed by many calls leading to meetings in 38 Greek cities on 25 May (Giovanopoulos 2011; Gazakis and Spathas 2011). It is estimated that between 25 May and 30 July 2011, the number of people visiting Syntagma Square13 may have reached 2.6 million (Leontidou 2012). It had been decades since so many Greek citizens had taken to the streets and made their views known in public

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11 I would like to thank Kostas Kanellopoulos for his input on these old and new protest routines.
12 See illustration of Syntagma Square march and demonstration of 19 October 2011 in http://alepouda.blogspot.gr/2011/10/19-2011.html; it offers the estimated number of participants of the LPE of 19 October 2011 by comparing it to the capacity of the OAKA stadium.
13 In http://xilapetres.blogspot.gr/2011_06_01_archive.html, see a panopticon view of Syntagma Square’s related LPE of 29 May 2011.
spaces, surpassing old political party identities (Stavrou 2011). Although innovative alternative actions intertwining culture and direct democratic politics were put forth during this period, a duality emerged. From May to June 2011, through Facebook and other social media calls, a new type of group began to appear in Syntagma and central squares or landmarks of most Greek cities. Known as the *aganaktismenoi*, this group was heavily influenced by the Spanish Indignados (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2011; Korizi and Vradis 2012; Leontidou 2012). Blaming political parties for the country’s critical condition and at the same time demonstrating their contempt for the parliament (Tzanelli 2011), they rejected political party affiliations and opted instead for peaceful events and actions. This prompted thousands of citizens across different classes, age groups, and political beliefs to join the two-month-long protest camp set up in front of the Greek Parliament. Similar protest camps were soon being set up across many Greek cities (Kousis 2014). Their views were reflected in the banners, posters, and placards displayed on the upper and lower parts of Syntagma Square. A related content analysis (N=178) of these views between 25 May 2011 and 30 July 2011 reveals that one-fifth (21.3 per cent) targeted the Troika (e.g. “we don’t owe, we won’t pay”, “no to world government, national independence”, “we support Syntagma Square, won’t leave until the government, Troika and the debt go” (Petropoulos 2014). This was followed by 16.2 per cent targeting the prime minister, the vice president, and governing parties, and 11.8 per cent targeting all (or almost all) MPs and parliamentary parties or party leaders (Petropoulos 2014). The remaining 42.7 per cent of the banners, posters, and placards referred to mobilization calls, platforms, tactics, links, needs, and activities of the movement of Syntagma Square (Petropoulos 2014).

Ethnographic research on Athens’ Syntagma Square camp reveals “a consensual and deeply spatialized staging of dissent ... with internally conflicting and often radically opposing political imaginaries” (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014: 2). Syntagma’s more ethnocentric, conservative and right-oriented but angrier upper square was notably different from the more progressive, left-oriented, and alternative lower square. While the upper part attracted demonstrators with more patriotic, nationalist, xenophobic, religious, and populist claims, the lower part – besides hosting the camp – established a direct-democratic-oriented *agora* of highly committed activists, many of whom derive from radical parties of the left (Stavrou 2011; Petropoulos 2014; Kaika and Karaliotas 2014; Leontidou 2012; Tsaliki 2012). The activities of the upper and lower square accordingly varied widely. The upper part hosted groups such as ‘The Greek Mothers’, the ‘300 Greeks’,
and priests. By contrast, the lower part of Syntagma was used by activists to project films/documentaries, host a first aid medical unit of volunteer doctors, connect with activists outside of Greece through the internet, distribute food offered by restaurants, and act as information point for those in need of services (Petropoulos 2014). Other collective self-organizing practices included clothes exchanges, garbage collection, and performing arts events (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014).

More importantly, lower square groups organized Open Popular Assemblies every evening with procedures that allowed an equal voice to all, aiming towards real and direct democracy (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014: 9). As a result of the above, the movement of Syntagma Square and its satellites across the country succeeded in offering a space for voicing one’s views as well as for imagining and materializing alternative ways of existing together.14 Furthermore, it transcended its spatial boundaries through steady (internet) connections with similar movements across the globe (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014; Petropoulos 2014).

The (Non-)Safety of Syntagma Square

Although Syntagma Square has been a perennial space of resistance that has for the most part been peaceful, it has not always been a safe place for protesters. Given its key location in front of the parliament and the very high numbers of protesters, it was between 2010 and 2013 the space that witnessed the highest levels of violence in the Greek anti-austerity campaign in comparison to its other spaces of contention.

This was particularly true on 28 and 29 June 2011 following the seventh national strike. Expressing their strong opposition to the Troika’s second bailout package of 21 June 2011 and the measures associated with it, the large union confederations united with the square movement and blockaded parliament using nonviolent tactics to prevent MPs from passing austerity and bailout-related legislative measures. After peaceful protests, violence erupted and mass violent confrontations occurred (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013; Petropoulos 2014) in which protesters faced high levels of police repression and tear gas.15 Amnesty International (2011) as well as the

14 Current research focuses on alternative solidarity initiatives that have surfaced especially since 2011 across the country; to some extent they have been influenced by these protests http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/?p=152.

15 A related inquiry, “The four-year chemical war against protesters”, was submitted in parliament by Syriza MPs in March 2013.
medical and hospital associations called on the Greek state to restrain police repression. Parliament’s subsequent approval of the austerity measures led to significant reductions in the number of people participating in the demonstrations (Leontidou 2012).

Similar but somewhat lower peaks in violence and types of major actions followed in the LPEs in October 2011 and February 2012 in reaction to later Troika mandates and government measures. Although fewer in number, these major protest events were very intense and well-attended, including the tenth national 48-hour strike. The February 2012 LPE resulted in an unprecedented level of intensity of action and significant property damage in the area surrounding Syntagma Square (Kousis 2014).

Throughout this period, parliament was heavily protected by the police. Indeed, since 2011 – the second phase of the campaign of the Greek Indignados – the parliament buildings were equipped with permanent protective iron railings to prevent protesters from reaching them. The railings were removed a few days after the new Syriza government took office at the end of January 2015.

Invigorating National Spaces of Contention: Squares and Streets of Cities and Towns Across the Country

Even though Syntagma Square constitutes a central and exceptional political space, synchronized, parallel, and sustained protest events were carried out across a large number of cities and towns throughout the entire country, usually in front of the city’s municipal hall and/or central square.

As depicted in Graph 6.2, for each of the 32 LPEs that took place in Athens, the protest campaign was also carried out across a majority of Greek towns and cities.

Thus the 32 major events, most of which ended in demonstrations facing the Greek Parliament in Athens’ Syntagma Square, were accompanied by a total number of 1,069 parallel protest events across the country, all with the same repertoire of claims. The graph illustrates the national character of an anti-austerity campaign linked to the 32 LPEs over the three-year period.

How protest events spread across space over time is a subject that has not been studied using geographic information system maps, as evidenced by the few works on this subject matter (Thornton 2012). The map that follows is constructed with the dataset of LPEs from January 2010 to December 2012.

Map 6.1 below illustrates the participation of Greek cities and towns across the three major phases of the campaign. It should be noted that the
map only depicts the minority of cases for which the articles mentioned the names of the cities or towns. It does not include the majority, i.e. the unnamed cities and towns which were only mentioned in numbers. Although local level data were not available for this analysis, according to police records, some 20,210 protests were carried out in Greece from May 2010 to April 2014.

The first phase of protests, from February 2010 to February 2011, was sparked across the country following the Troika’s first MoU and the accompanying measures. These began as general strikes and rallies against the Greek government’s stability measures carried out in Athens and other cities. The protestors were initially public sector employees but in March they were joined by trade union confederations of both private and public sector employees. A third national strike and demonstrations across the country took place on 5 May 2010 following the downgrading of Greece’s main debt rating to junk status (BB+) by Standard and Poor’s and the first Greek bailout package (110 billion euros, the highest ever given to a country). The protesters demonstrated against the Greek government’s pledges to implement the Troika’s first MoU. This day was marked by the death of three employees of a bank when petrol bombs were thrown into the building they were working in. Politicians were harshly criticized in public. Violence was clearly escalating.

The second phase witnessed the most important increase in the participation of towns and cities across the country. This was in reaction to the Multi-Purpose Act and the second Troika MoU that included privatizing public assets, public sector restructuring and downsizing, and more cuts
in wages, personnel and pensions (Markantonatou 2012). Following the Facebook call of 20 May 2011, squares in 38 cities took on a new function – that of a protest camp. Tens of thousands signed to attend protests in the squares of Greek cities. Protesters also organized events in Athenian neighborhood squares (Mpresta 2011: 91-93). During the second phase in the summer of 2011, square protests reached a peak, especially on 28 and 29 June. A similar peak was reached at LPEs that took place on 5, 19, and 20 October 2011 in protest against the Troika’s third Greek bailout package of ‘hard restructuring’ (27 October 2011).

Greek cities and towns continued to participate in the campaign in the winter of 2011 (see also Graph 6.3) following more austerity conditions set by the Eurogroup and the Troika. As Map 6.1 illustrates, there was a notable decrease in the participation of Greek cities and towns in the third phase (in green), i.e. from March 2012 to December 2012. This is in part due to a drop in the number of protest events surrounding the first national elections.
held since the outbreak of the economic crisis. In these elections, the two ruling parties that had dominated Greece’s postdictatorial period suffered significant losses, especially the incumbent Pasok, with many votes going to new parties such as Syriza (Coalition of the Left) and the extreme-right Golden Dawn (Kousis and Kanellopoulos 2014).

Cities and towns across the country continued to participate in parallel LPEs against further austerity and neoliberal packages in September and in October against measures related to the release of funds by creditors under the second bailout agreement (Monastiriotis 2013). The new measures included more cuts to social benefits, pensions, and salaries as well as further increases in fuel taxes and new taxes for all income categories (immensely impairing the poor and the self-employed) including businesses (Monastiriotis 2013). In response to the above, seven large protest events took place: three national general strikes by public and private sector workers, one workers’ rally, two national general work stoppages (one of which was part of the European Trade Union Confederation’s first strike against austerity) and one march commemorating the university student uprising against the military junta.

For the first time in Greece’s postwar history, individual citizens who were not linked to the major organizations leading the protests (e.g. trade unions or left-wing political parties) were heavily represented in the ‘occupation’ of squares across the country. In most of these squares, coordinating groups were formed that met on a daily or weekly basis, discussing local issues of grave concern such as the selling of ports or gold mines, or the degradation of health services. Minutes were taken at such meetings. Musical and cultural events took place, following the blueprints of happenings and the operating style of Syntagma’s groups. Syntagma’s websites (real-democracy.gr and amesi-dimokratia.org) were linked to the public assemblies of Greek cities and towns via Facebook and blogs. On occasion, non-Athenian activists visited Syntagma (Mpresta 2011: 94-100). Older memories were revived, as reflected in the slogan ‘bread, education, liberty: the [military] junta did not end in 1973’ (Axelos 2011: 203).

New Global Cities of Contention: Transnationalizing the Greek Campaign

The campaign against the Troika’s MoU and neoliberal policies eventually moved beyond Greece’s borders (Tsomou 2011; Kousis 2013). Five of the 32 LPEs examined here were part of mega-transnational protest events
carried out in cities across Europe, North America and other regions. This transnationalization began in the second phase of the campaign in 2011, when Greek protesters joined the European Revolution of 29 May across numerous European cities and the ‘United for Global Change’ event by Occupy movements across 951 cities on 15 October (Kousis 2014). This was followed by a day of transnational solidarity for Greece on 18 February 2012, with 19 European and North American cities participating. Solidarity actions targeted Greek embassies and IMF offices (Kousis 2014). And on 14 November, Greek protesters on Syntagma Square and in 25 Greek cities participated in the European Trade Union Confederation’s first strike against austerity, which took place across 250 cities.

At the end of the third phase of the campaign, economic contention took a new twist. The largest anti-fascist protest event in recent decades in Greece was organized on 19 January 2013, two days following the killing of a Pakistani immigrant. The protest spread to 26 non-Greek cities. Another very significant transnational event took place on 14 June 2013 after the prime minister announced that the government would be shutting down the historical public broadcasting service (ERT) as a direct result of the Troika’s MoU and the government’s austerity policies.

Graph 6.3  Number of Non-Greek Cities (in red) Participating in the 32 LPEs, January 2010-January 2013

Note: The 15 October 2011 LPE is not depicted here, given the very large number of participating cities (951).
According to the data at hand, there was only one transnational event (in London) during the first phase of the campaign, as can be seen in Graph 6.3. In the second and third phases, however, there was an increase in the number of participating cities in southern Europe (Rome, Bologna, Milan, Genoa, Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon, and Nicosia), northern Europe (Paris, Bastille, Lyon, La Roche, Marseille, Berlin, Brussels, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, London, and Edinburgh) and other cities (Bangkok, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles) (Kousis 2014).

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This chapter has applied a social movement’s approach to examining the spatial dimension of the Greek campaign that surfaced following multi-scalar decision-making on the Greek crisis in the Eurozone. The analysis of large protest events, or LPEs, documents a nationwide, multi-scalar struggle (Mayer 2013) against the harsh neoliberal reforms and austerity measures, which eventually led to transnational protests. The data examined in this chapter feature the three-year-long anti-austerity campaign involving higher levels of contention and whole populations engaged in wider struggles by very diverse protest groups making collective claims on target authorities (Tilly 2004).

The analysis offers a preliminary exploration of space as ‘a semantically complex concept’ (Sewell 2001). It does so by highlighting: a) the parliamentarization of contention (Tilly 1997); b) the new meanings and practices attached to Syntagma Square and its satellites across the country; c) the (non-)safety of spaces of contention (Tilly 2003; Bosi 2013); and d) the multi-scalar character (Mayer 2013) of the campaign against austerity-inducing economic policies by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund as well as by three consecutive Greek governments creating and implementing the related policy instruments.

Following Auyero’s suggestion for future research (2006), the analysis at hand addressed ways in which physical space affects the origins and course of joint action, especially through the parliamentarization of anti-austerity contention. As a space where protesters can directly address the parliament, Syntagma Square is an exemplary and durable space of resistance that offers opportunities for peaceful protests and the creation of new meanings and new spatial routines. Yet it is also transformed into a constraint for resistance, decreasing protest participation due to high levels of police repression and tear gas on dates of critical parliamentary decisions.
The data illustrates a three-tier spatial arena: 1) a perennial arena at Syntagma Square documenting a sustained yet continuously adjusting parliamentarization of contention (Tilly 1997); 2) a nationwide spatial arena visible in cities and towns across the country’s regions; and 3) a transnational arena across the European Union and, eventually, across the globe. In the first two spatial arenas, resource-poor protesters offered alternative meanings and strategic uses of spaces available to them. In this manner, they produced new meanings of space (Sewell 2001; Auyero 2006) across the nation’s streets and squares, as best illustrated in the second phase of the campaign with the movement of the squares visible across urban and rural regions. The urban character of the 21st century protests is apparent in all three spatial arenas, attesting to a revitalization of politics and the engagement of greater numbers of participants with different visions of how the world should be (Leontidou 2012; Madden and Vradis 2012).

The multi-scalar protests have been facilitated by communication through IT and social media technologies, which may affect the centrality of proximity (Tilly 2003) to a much greater extent than in the past. They were also enhanced through ‘mega-networks’, comprised of very broad cross-class coalitions facilitating, creating, and linking groups and networks (Goldstone 2011) not only across Greek cities and towns but also beyond national borders. More importantly, however, the nationwide protests were supported by social linking and networking of political groups acting at the national level, especially political parties of the left and trade unions. This was evident in Syriza’s steady participation in 24 of the 32 LPEs (75 per cent), its rising importance in the 2012 elections, and its electoral victory in January 2015. As Dufour, Nez, and Ancelovici posit in this volume, as in other crisis-related protest waves, the political is no longer autonomous from the economy, and economic policy is a significant factor influencing social movements. Further study is needed, however, on the relationship between space, the Greek economy, and contention. While economic conditions for the general population are worsening, since February 2013, the multi-scalar campaign has subsided, while smaller and more specialized protests are carried out with considerably fewer participants in local spaces.

The economic and political contention in Greece may be considered as belonging to the family of national anti-austerity protests (see chapters 1 and 12 in this volume) which took place in Latin America (Auyero 2003; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Almeida 2007, 2010, 2012; Arce 2010; Arce and Kim 2011). However, in contrast to these, the contention arising in the Greek case and the global political attention it has received move above and beyond the EU as a transnational space of opportunities and threats which has mostly
referred to liberalization policies (Imig and Tarrow 2001). It illustrates a shift towards the importance of the financial sector and the impacts of the financial crisis of an ever more interdependent multi-scalar global economic and political arena, eventually involving most economies of the globe. The significance of national and regional spaces as durable spaces of contention due to multi-scalar policies affecting whole populations is therefore enhanced. Whether these spaces will maintain their contentious features vis-à-vis an increasingly empowered transnational spatial arena remains a question for future research (Tilly 2004).

Bibliography


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