



**The ambivalence of anti-austerity indignation in Greece:
Resistance, hegemony and complicity**

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5 **The ambivalence of anti-austerity indignation in Greece:**

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7 **Resistance, hegemony and complicity**

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27 This article engages with a contradiction that can help us appreciate the ambiguity
28 and complexity of indirect resistance as this is articulated in informal everyday
29 contexts: many citizens in Greece boldly challenge the antisocial austerity measures
30 that have plagued their lives, highlighting how these represent a hegemonic
31 imposition led by foreign centres of economic power. Their anti-hegemonic critique,
32 however, often recycles a dislike for foreigners and xenophobia, echoing more
33 pervasive hegemonic narratives (e.g. a crypto-colonial identification of Greece with
34 the West). To deal with this contradiction, I stress the need to (1) de-pathologise local
35 indignant discourse (avoiding the orientalisation of anti-austerity discourse as
36 emotional or inconsequential), and (2) acknowledge that indirect resistance may
37 represent an astute critique of visible inequalities, but is not isolated from overarching
38 hegemonic ideological influences that shape local interpretations of
39 historical/economic causality.

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44 **Key words: indirect resistance, indignation with austerity, financial crisis,**
45 **hegemony, defensive nationalism, Greece.**

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49 I have recently discussed indignation with austerity in Greece as a master trope of
50 protest that communicates a concern with accountability (Theodossopoulos 2013a,
51 2013b). In this article I extend this analysis beyond the figurative, interpretive or
52 exegetical dimension of indignation-discourse, to evaluate its emancipatory potential
53 and its ambivalent relationship to power (or its complicity with it). The case of anti-
54 austerity indignation in Greece allows us to evaluate the transformative potential and
55 effectiveness of indirect resistance, but also its limitations. For example, to what
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3 extent does local discontent depart from previous established hegemonic narratives?
4 What is the relationship between indirect resistance, defensive nationalism and
5 electioneering populism?
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8 I address these questions with reference to the increasing voicing of indignation with
9 austerity (as a measure of economic recovery) in Greece, focusing on local indignant
10 narratives that represent an everyday form of indirect resistance to neoliberal
11 economic priorities. This timely example of widespread popular discontent provides
12 an opportunity to explore the transformative power of indirect resistance, the
13 challenges it poses to the priorities set by the financial establishment, but also the
14 constraints of indignant discourse and its relationship with defensive nationalism. In
15 this exploration I use as a point of departure the influential work of Scott (1985,
16 1990), to analyse anti-austerity indignation as a form of indirect resistance, yet one
17 that does not represent an autonomous social field (Keesing 1992, Gledhill 1994,
18 2012, Moore 1998), untouched by pre-existing hegemonic master narratives.
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24 On the one hand I acknowledge that indirect resistance encourages a great deal of
25 critical thinking that engages with the structures of power in creative ways (including
26 irony and innovative adaptations of previous arguments and ideas). Rhetoric, irony,
27 ambiguity and metaphor play an important role in negotiating the causality and
28 eventfulness of political life (Carrithers 2009, Herzfeld 2009, Fernandez 2009), and
29 may even destabilise—as Greek indignation demonstrates—pre-existing political
30 structures. Yet, on the other hand I recognise that indirect resistance is often
31 constrained by pre-existing explanations of causality in politics—including ethno-
32 nationalist narratives—an observation that encourages us to depart from Scott's
33 (1990) vision of subaltern discontent as an a 'hidden' transcript independent of
34 power-holders. In the case of anti-austerity indignation in Greece, indirect resistance
35 often stumbles upon, and becomes confined by (or complicit to) nationalism,
36 ethnocentric interpretations of history, political party rhetoric, and electioneering
37 campaigns.
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45 These limitations pose the following analytic problem: how can a social analyst
46 reconcile the obligation to expose and deconstruct defensive nationalism (or political
47 party interests) that may figure prominently in indirect resistance, with the equally
48 important commitment to acknowledge the logic of local anti-hegemonic narratives
49 and the astute awareness of inequality among peripheralised subjects (who may also
50 be complicit in reproducing nationalism or political party lines)? Anti-austerity
51 discourse in Greece—which is anti-hegemonic in its orientation, but still partially
52 complicit to hegemonic narratives—provides us with a very good opportunity to
53 explore this challenging dilemma.
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3 The anthropological analysis that follows does not attempt to explain the causes of the
4 crisis or summarize its consequences within a single, unilinear narrative of events. I
5 privilege instead some local views—fragmented and unofficial—that capture the
6 frustration of local actors with the official policies of austerity that have been
7 presented to them as a remedy to the financial crisis. These local views come from
8 Patras, a medium size Greek town in South Greece, and for me, a site of ongoing
9 fieldwork since 1999. My indignant respondents are middle and working class
10 citizens from Patras (the *Patrinoí*); they have shared their explanations of political
11 and economic life with me during this and previous crises (see for example, Brown
12 and Theodossopoulos 2000, 2003; Theodossopoulos 2004, 2007a, 2007b; Kirtsoglou
13 and Theodossopoulos 2011a, 2011b), and recognise me as a locally born academic
14 and a mirror—the anthropological listener who occasionally provokes—through
15 which they reflect upon timely issues. Their arguments have provided me with a
16 partial but nuanced account of the local indignant discourse, the ambivalences that it
17 engenders, and the aetiology of the crisis as this is debated in everyday, unofficial
18 social contexts (see Theodossopoulos 2013a, 2013c).

28 **De-pathologizing Indignation**

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30 Far from denoting merely a sentiment, indignation in crisis-afflicted Greece is a
31 potent metaphor that links different narratives of accountability together. In local
32 conversation about austerity, indignation conveys messages and supports arguments
33 about austerity; some remain unsaid but locally understood, while other arguments
34 rely on indignation's figurative potential. In either case, the image of injustice so
35 vividly conveyed by indignation becomes an opening and closing point in many
36 conversations: 'I am indignant because ...' [argument] '... hence, we are indignant'.¹
37 In appreciation of this metaphorical rootedness, and drawing from Fernandez (1986),
38 I have previously referred to anti-austerity indignation in Greece as a trope that
39 communicates a variety of indirect, but also straightforwardly expressed messages
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47 ¹ My use of the term 'indignant' as equivalent of '*aganaktisménos/i/oi*' bears tribute to the
48 Spanish *indignados*, who started the movement that inspired the respective 'Greek indignant
49 movement' (*Kinima Aganaktismenon Politon*). This connection, as well as subsequent use by
50 protestors, protesting authors, and journalists has widely established the terms
51 indignation/indignant as the English equivalent of the Greek '*aganaktisi*' (noun) and
52 '*aganaktismenos*' (adjective), and this translation is favoured by most dictionaries.
53 Anthropologists, in an attempt to capture the polysemy of the term, have used alternative
54 terms to discuss Greek indignation: 'exasperation' (Herzfeld 2011, Kalantzis 2012),
55 'infuriation' (Theodossopoulos 2013), 'rage' (Panourgia 2011). In fact, the terms outraged,
56 exasperated and infuriated translate in Greek as *exorgismenos*, *exagriomenos*, *ekneyrismenos*,
57 a lack of definitional precision, which facilitates the figurative and all-embracing relevance of
58 indignation as trope in everyday conversation.
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3 (Theodossopoulos 2013a, n.d.). The powerful imagery of the powerless indignant
4 citizen—victim of ‘the mistakes of others’, ‘those bankers, politicians, unscrupulous
5 capitalists’, as my respondents say—validates a moral standpoint for eliciting a
6 critique of the consequences of austerity in everyday life.
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10 Therefore, indignation frames local discussions about austerity, but also invites an
11 explanation of the crisis. Indignant conversations about austerity have an interpretive
12 dimension, one that is almost existential, in the political sense. Such an exegetical
13 orientation in local conversation—especially conversation about timely developments
14 in politics—has been noticed and analyzed by anthropologists writing about Greece
15 before the debt crisis (see Herzfeld 1992, 1997; Sutton 1998, 2003; Brown and
16 Theodossopoulos 2000, 2003; Papadakis 2004; Kirtsoglou 2006; Kirtsoglou and
17 Theodossopoulos 2010a, 2010b). Herzfeld (1992) in particular, has referred to the
18 secular theodicy of the ordinary Greek citizens: their search for explanations and
19 meaning against the indifference of bureaucracy and the injustices perpetrated by
20 politicians or state officials.
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24 Evidently, as Herzfeld (1982, 1992) himself has stressed, local commentary in Greece
25 may embrace a good deal of defensive nationalism—a problem I will address later in
26 this article—especially when local actors attempt to exonerate themselves by
27 targeting more or less powerful cultural Others (see also Theodossopoulos 2003,
28 2007a). However, the anthropological emphasis given to the creative adaptations and
29 irony of blame-oriented discourse also highlights its alternative (non-hegemonic)
30 orientation (Sutton 2003) and subversive potential (Kirtsoglou 2006), and the ability
31 of peripheral subjects to cut down to size and discuss as equals those perceived as
32 more powerful than the Self, including powerful nations such as United States (see
33 Brown and Theodossopoulos 2000, 2003; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010b).
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37 In all these respects, the anthropology of informal political discourse in Greece has
38 established a tradition of studying blame without turning the study of blame into a
39 practice of blaming (Theodossopoulos n.d.). This has contributed in de-pathologising
40 vernacular political discourse, by encouraging social analysis to move beyond the
41 functional instrumentality of blaming—or its denigration as irrational or pathological
42 in ‘pseudopsychological terms’ (Sutton 2003: 197)—highlighting instead the cultural
43 worldviews that render justice and injustice meaningful on a local level. In this
44 respect, the de-pathologisation of local commentary about international politics opens
45 the way for appreciating its contribution to processes of resistance, as in the case of
46 indignation with austerity, which presents us with a good example of indirect
47 resistance.
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3 In the *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scott (1985) marked out the concept of indirect
4 resistance as a legitimate sub-topic of resistance studies; most manifestations of
5 resistance, he explains, take a less dramatic form. For example, those Greek local
6 actors who resist austerity discursively—by denigrating powerful politicians who
7 impose on them harsh economic policies—can be seen as following a tactic quite
8 similar to the Malaysian peasants studied by Scott, who subvert the power of their
9 landlords through slander and character assassination. From this perspective, ordinary
10 citizens in Greece who evaluate timely political or economic events in peripheral
11 conversational contexts, indirectly resist the imposition of undesirable measures on
12 their lives, arguing from the relative safety of—what Scott (1990) describes as—
13 autonomous contexts of social life (of subordinate groups), or what Herzfeld (1997),
14 much more aptly, calls contexts of cultural intimacy.

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21 Those powerful politicians or institutions that do shape economic policy—for
22 example, with respect to Greece's recovery from debt—are seen by local actors as
23 choosing to ignore local indignation for being too sentimental or apparently irrational,
24 and prioritize instead what my respondents call 'the cold language of numbers'. In
25 sharp contrast to the rationality of budgeting and spreadsheets, anti-austerity
26 discourse, as this is voiced in unofficial contexts, often promotes alternative narratives
27 about the crisis that prioritize social concerns and a focus on accountability. In this
28 respect, indignation with austerity operates as an alternative 'sense-making' practice
29 (Sutton 2003: 192) that challenges dominant—presented as 'transparent' (Sanders and
30 West 2003)—discourses about economic recovery. For example, many Greek local
31 (and indignant) actors insist that austerity is not the only possible route for escaping
32 from the crisis, while austerity is probably the path that bears the most undesirable
33 social consequences. Such views often reflect an astute awareness of the systemic
34 inequalities that shape economic policies, yet their vernacular and emotion-laden
35 articulation encourages their easy dismissal by the elites.

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43 A restaurant owner in Patras, exasperated with the widespread dismissal of public
44 indignation, reflected upon this:

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46 'Who listens to what we say? Those who take the decisions about the economy do not
47 care about you and me, the [ordinary] people (*ton laoutziko*): they speak another
48 language; the language of the technocrats and say that the Greeks want to take out
49 their own eyes; the Greeks are crazy, they say... what do *you* think?'

50 51 52 53 54 **The spectre of austerity: reification, subversion, transformation**

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56 Austerity has a name in Greece: '*Mnimónio*'. The term itself means 'memorandum',
57 and when used in ordinary prose carries an overtone of de-humanizing
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3 bureaucratization. It has been used to refer to the particular memorandum that outlines
4 the Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece, a bailout aiming to save the
5 country from bankruptcy, or ideally to lead towards economic recovery. In everyday
6 discourse '*mnimónio*' is taken to signify an agreement imposed on Greece by its
7 foreign lenders, and is seen as representing a foreign imposition. As such, it is
8 detested, or at best, tolerated, at least by the overwhelming majority of Greek citizens,
9 who refer to it frequently in day-to-day conversation. Often, and especially in heated
10 debates, the *mnimónio*, is treated in a reified manner, as a societal force that haunts
11 the lives of the poorer citizens (Theodossopoulos n.d.).
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17 In its reified use, *mnimónio* is treated as the source of all evils that come with
18 austerity: the cancelation of one's dreams, the difficulties in providing for one's
19 family, the lack of employment opportunities, or the threat of losing existing jobs.
20 *Mnimónio*, the spectre of austerity, is seen by many in Greece as a perversion of the
21 natural order of things; it negates a basic expectation in post-Second World War
22 Greece: the idea that life becomes more comfortable over time, as succeeding
23 generations move further away from the difficulties of the post-war period. The young
24 adults of today, for example, expect to enjoy a life much better than their
25 grandparents (the generation of the 50s and 60s), 'even better' than that of their
26 parents (the generation of the 70s and 80s). Sadly, the unexpected arrival of
27 *mnimónio*—the spectre of austerity—has thwarted this unidirectional (and
28 naturalised) perception of improvement in one's (or everyone's) life.
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35 The effects of such a grand scale cancellation of ordinary expectations is discussed by
36 many citizens in Patras in terms of comparisons of life before and after *mnimónio*.
37 Until recently, university graduates invested in postgraduate studies abroad hoping to
38 qualify for a 'better job'; in the life after the *mnimónio*, 'there are no jobs'. Before the
39 *mnimónio* the employed expected a raise in salary, or a promotion; now 'there are
40 only salary cuts'. In the years before the *mnimónio* those who ran small or larger
41 business dreamed about expansion or new opportunities; yet now, after the imposition
42 of austerity, business are shrinking or closing down. Until a couple of years ago,
43 pensioners had a smaller income than their employed children; nowadays, the old are
44 providing for the young sharing their reduced pensions. In these and so many other
45 respects, my respondents argue, *mnimónio* has overturned 'the course of their lives'.
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52 No wonder then that austerity has inspired so much indignation. In fact, since the
53 beginning of the crisis, growing discontent with austerity has transformed a previous
54 empty and bureaucratic term, the *mnimónio*, into a concept that denotes not merely
55 austerity, but also points towards the direction of responsibility. As such, the term
56 *mnimónio*, loaded with meaning derived from the concrete experience of austerity in
57 everyday life, is used in conversation as a versatile discursive weapon to criticise the
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3 idea of austerity and its sources: politicians, political parties and foreign institutions
4 and all those responsible for unleashing the *mnimónio*-monster and its unsociable
5 consequences. Some citizens may reluctantly tolerate this newly introduced
6 austerity—in the guise of neoliberal economic rationality—but an overwhelming
7 majority question if its imposition was absolutely necessary. Many conservative and
8 left leaning respondents in Patras argue that there can be no economic recovery based
9 on austerity. So, the *mnimónio* was an unnecessary evil!

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13 Having closely studied local discontent with neoliberal politics in Greece in the
14 period preceding the financial crisis (Theodossopoulos 2010; Kirtsoglou and
15 Theodossopoulos 2010a), I was accustomed to the critical spirit of local political
16 discourse, but I had also underestimated its potential for stimulating direct political
17 change. Before the financial crisis, local discontent appeared to offer only ephemeral
18 and rhetorical empowerment. Independently of how critically local actors discussed
19 neoliberalism and Westernisation in peripheral contexts, the political party landscape
20 in Greece remained fairly static for at least 30 years: two major political parties, the
21 conservatives (New Democracy) and the socialists (PASOK), dominated official
22 politics, and took turns in exercising the power to govern and provide their supporters
23 with favours (which further cemented their electorate support).

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Anti-austerity indignation has challenged this constellation of political power, leading
to the partial restructuring of official political representation in the parliament, as this
emerged from the elections of May 6 and June 17 2012. The subversive potential of
massive popular indignation led to the collapse of one of the two political parties,
PASOK, which happened to be the party on power when the truth about the dire
financial situation of Greece was announced to the (unaware) Greek public, and the
first austerity measures were introduced. Thus, we may say that the monster called
mnimónio crashed this mighty political party, which has not yet recovered from its
association with the first wave of salary cuts and unpopular reductions in Greek social
infrastructure. Another political party, SYRIZA, has absorbed a substantiate
proportion of PASOK's electoral support and has become the official opposition in
the Greek parliament. A central feature in SYRIZA's political campaign is its firm
anti-austerity (anti-*mnimónio*) stance, which has captured (and benefited from) the
public's growing indignation with the consequences of the crisis.

SYRIZA's sudden and spectacular rise to power (from 4.6% to 26.8%), representing
primarily indignant voters oriented towards the left or centre-left, was paralleled by
the unexpected electorate success of two anti-austerity political parties from the right
wing: a politically conservative-*cum*-nationalist party ('Independent Greeks') and an
unashamedly fascist political formation (the infamous, 'Golden Dawn'). Golden
Dawn, in particular, 'soared from 0.29 per cent in the 2009 elections 6.9 per cent'

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3 (and 18 seats in the parliament), while most recent opinion poles show a further
4 increase in the party's projected popularity (Kirtsoglou 2013). Interestingly, the
5 results of the 2012 elections demonstrate that the build up of public discontent can
6 subvert existing political structures, and bring about change in politics that might
7 affect anti-austerity politics. Indignation, in this respect, is a transformative political
8 'weapon' for crisis-afflicted local (and peripheralised) actors in Greece.
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11 Yet, to complicate this picture further, I will briefly reflect on the commentary of my
12 respondents in Patras, who maintain that the electorate transformations outlined above
13 partly mirror the previous political landscape, with SYRIZA, as they say merely
14 replacing PASOK, to restore a two party political structure. A communist supporter
15 summarised this position by stating that 'the new SYRIZA is the old PASOK'.
16 Critical evaluations such as this, which are also shared by conservative citizens
17 (arguing from an opposite, but equally critical angle), allude to the history of PASOK,
18 which entered the Greek political scene as a radical political party, critical of Western
19 hegemony (Verney 2011), but after its first electorate success, shiftily transformed to
20 a moderate social-democratic party (unable to challenge, as my communist
21 respondents argue, the neoliberal status quo).
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25 Local critical commentary of this sort, had led me to argue in a recent article
26 (Theodossopoulos n.d.) that the spontaneous and anti-structural spirit of the first wave
27 of Greek anti-austerity indignation, has now become appropriated by (and complicit
28 to) political-party politics. The 'officialisation' of indignation via parliamentary
29 representation (following the 2012 elections) sharply contrasts with the public protest
30 of summer 2011 (mostly in front of the Greek parliament), which was, as with the
31 Spanish indignant movement (Postill n.d), initiated by social media (Papailias 2011,
32 Theodossopoulos 2013) and communicated indignation in dialogical form, mostly
33 beyond the narrow constraints of political-party priorities (Gourgouris 2011,
34 Panourgia 2012, Dalagoklou 2012, Theodossopoulos 2013).
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38 The original anti-structural spirit of anti-austerity protest may now contrast sharply
39 with formalised political party indignation, a contrast that is most visible in the case
40 of the fascist party, which has appropriated public discontent to promote sinister anti-
41 migrant provocation (a topic I will discuss in the following section). However, several
42 respondents in Patras do not see the emergence of the new political parties as the
43 replication of one structure by another. Those who support SYRIZA, for example,
44 explained that their new party represents a new dynamic that will bring into power a
45 new generation of politicians (*néa prósofa*) who will subvert or cancel the *mnimónio*.
46 Some even admitted that they hope that SYRIZA will transformed itself into a less
47 'radical' party—as did PASOK in the 1980s—but one strong enough to deliver them
48 for the plague of austerity (Theodossopoulos 2013b). 'We don't care if SYRIZA is
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3 the old PASOK’, said the owner of a small commercial business, ‘we want SYRIZA
4 to take power and stop austerity for ever!’
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8 **Anti-hegemonic indignation meets defensive nationalism**

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10 Having already outlined some layers of cultural meaning negotiated by anti-austerity
11 indignation, I will now confront an analytical problem that has troubled me from the
12 first moment I attempted to write about the social consequences of the debt crisis in
13 Greece. This relates to the relationship between (a) anti-hegemonic discourses that
14 expose inequality and (b) defensive nationalism, including populist narratives that
15 exploit anti-hegemonic sentiments for electioneering purposes. While hegemonic
16 power is perceived as representative of foreign tutelage, anti-hegemonic discourse
17 may incite nationalist sentiments, including ideological associations or arguments
18 representing ‘patriotic’ or deeply conservative ideological positions. The latter can be
19 easily unearthed and introduced in current conversations that criticize the role of
20 foreign powers. This etiology of blame, as Herzfeld (1982, 1992) has perceptively
21 observed, can be manipulated in local conversation to exonerate the ethnic self and
22 transfer responsibility by blaming ethnic Others.
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29 The problem I have sketch out poses serious challenges for the social analyst, who is
30 often called to walk the thin line that separates two contrasting features of indirect
31 resistance: (a) a critically predisposed local awareness of inequality (expressed as a
32 desire to challenge a world of post-colonial relationships) and (b) a uncritical
33 recirculation of nationalist arguments and xenophobic tendencies. In everyday
34 discourse, and especially within the context of anti-austerity indignation in Greece,
35 these two tendencies co-exist, and manifest themselves simultaneously in unofficial
36 narratives and dialogues articulated in informal contexts. In fact, the two features of
37 indirect resistance mentioned above articulate with each other, as very often the
38 visible power inequalities in international politics fuel defensive nationalism.
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44 One of the central causes of exacerbation for my crisis-afflicted respondents in Patras
45 is the realization that austerity is imposed hegemonically by foreign centres of
46 power—for example, the European commission and the IMF—and implemented in a
47 top down manner by Greek government bureaucracy. The overwhelming majority of
48 the indignant narratives I witnessed in Greece implicitly or explicitly challenge
49 hegemony. Yet, this predisposition towards indirect resistance—which reflects an
50 awareness of the systemic inequalities of international politics—communicates and
51 often articulates with blatant manifestations of defensive nationalism, or even, as in
52 the case of ultra-right discourse, with a generalized mistrust for both powerful and
53 powerless ethnic Others.
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3 To complicate this problem further, indignation with foreign hegemony in Greece has
4 been adopted and used as a political agenda by anti-austerity political parties that
5 represent leftist, but also rightist (and extreme right) positions. In fact, some ultra-
6 right voices protest against the patronizing interventions of EU or the IMF (or
7 German and French politicians) in a manner that resembles—and borrows from—the
8 analytic sharpness of a leftist critique. Such narratives are often manipulated to fit the
9 purposes of political party rhetoric, but inspire, in turn, through the circulation of
10 political party views in the media, local adaptations of anti-hegemonic (but also
11 xenophobic) arguments. These are creatively adjusted to fit the purposes of particular
12 discussions in the everyday, and are voiced by citizens that may not be closely
13 affiliated with extreme rightist parties.

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‘I am not racist’ many citizens would say before blaming directly or indirectly the
foreign migrants, who are now ubiquitous in Greece, and often become a convenient
scapegoat for the ills of the economic crisis (see also Herzfeld 2011). I have heard
many times the ‘I am not a racist, but ..’ construction during fieldwork in Patras, a
town which attracts great numbers of illegal migrants hoping to embark on ferries
departing for Italy. These desperate migrants, whom I have seen running behind lorry
tracks so that they can cling onto the undercarriage (and thus pass the border control
at the port undetected), live in deplorable conditions in segregated areas and derelict
buildings. The overwhelming majority of my respondents in Patras—independently of
their political affiliation—are threatened by the presence of so many destitute people
in their hometown, and would not hesitate to accuse them of contributing to (what the
Patrinoi perceive as) a generalized ‘feeling of insecurity’. Even Patrinoi involved in
charitable activity in support of the migrants, would not hesitate to charge the latter
for all sorts of misbehaviour or petty crimes. ‘Our town has changed’, they argue, due
to this ‘serious problem’, ‘the problem of the migrants’.

‘It is a problem created by the powerful of Europe’, commented a forty-year-old
woman, who is a SYRIZA supporter: ‘the rich countries in the North have left Greece
unsupported to deal with the consequences of the illegal migration’; and after a brief
moment of reflection she added: ‘this is how the powerful perpetuate inequality’. Her
interlocutor, a moderately socialist woman, in her thirties, added: ‘I am not a racist,
but the migrants are an unbearable problem; the Europeans expect us to support them
with the very little we have.’ Citizens of conservative predilections would share this
generalized view, but switch it to serve a more nationalist agenda: they focus on the
perceived ‘injustice’ of seeing Greeks being unemployed or suffering from severe
cuts in their salaries, while government bureaucrats (and the rich nations of Europe)
‘keep the migrants on their doorstep’. ‘They do so to destabilize our nation’, said a
Golden Dawn sympathizer, ‘it is all part of larger plan’.

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3 Citizens inclined towards the Left dissociate themselves from Golden Dawn with
4 principled and confident disdain, but they also use the ‘destabilization argument’ to
5 explain the crisis, and the insistence of Northern politicians to promote austerity—
6 although evidently austerity withholds economic recovery. As a communist friend
7 confided in me, ‘the Golden Dawn supporters (*oi hrysaygítes*) have twisted some of
8 our arguments to serve their sinister purpose; the problem is not the migrants, but
9 capitalism’. ‘The stronger nations of the North create problems for the South’, said a
10 sixty year old doctor sympathizing with the left, ‘they brought the austerity measures
11 to cripple our economy, to colonize us, for ever! How do they expect us to recover
12 when we face so many austerity measures!’ Even Patrinoi with conservative views
13 will not completely disagree with the idea that austerity is a foreign imposition; many
14 of them maintain that ‘Europe’, and in particular German politicians, are imposing on
15 Greece ‘harsh’ measures, that partly serve Northern or German interests; ‘we have not
16 seen Germany suffering’, said a committed Conservative Party supporter, ‘they get
17 stronger and stronger’.



39 Carnavalesque caricatures of Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble.

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41 When my respondents search for a convenient joke to relax the tone of conversations
42 about austerity, or a concrete image to punctuate their arguments, they frequently
43 employ familiarly mediated figures of foreign politicians, such as the German
44 Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the IMF director, Christine Lagarde, or the German
45 Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble. Enormous wax caricatures of the
46 aforementioned figured prominently in the carnival of Patras (in 2013), paraded as
47 satirical representations of the harshness and unsociable nature of neoliberal
48 economics: ‘the monsters of austerity!’ (see photograph above). ‘Merkel and
49 Schäuble are indifferent to the sufferings of the ordinary people’ remarked a couple of
50 bystanders. In the context of everyday conversation, Angela Merkel in particular, has
51 been the recipient of an avalanche of ironic remarks, mostly used as punch lines of
52 critical arguments focusing on the unrelenting economic policies pursued by the
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German Chancellor. Many Patrinoi, from both leftist and rightist political affiliations, regularly refer to Merkel as 'Hitler' or 'the godmother' (alluding to a female version of a mafia leader).



Impersonations of the Greek prime minister and the German Chancellor in Nazi uniform in the Carnival parade; the sign 'DIAPLOKI' can be translated as 'intertwining interests'.

On other occasions, associations are drawn between foreign politicians, and their Greek counterparts. In most cases, local commentary criticizes, often with humorous but pointed remarks, the subordinate position (*shesi ypotélias*) of Greek politicians and their perceived lack of power to challenge externally imposed dictums of austerity. The current and previous prime ministers of Greece (Antonis Samaras and George Papandreou, respectively) have been the targets of such criticism (the latter even by disaffected supporters of his own party!). Nevertheless, shrewd local commentary that unravels systemic inequalities and patterns of hegemony is not solely expressed by citizens affiliated with the left. An increasing number of right wing crisis-afflicted citizens articulate a critical predisposition towards Western hegemony, one that does not target neoliberal policies, but rather the historical role of Germany and other Western nations in shaping the fate of Greece.

Conveniently, the German occupation of Greece during World War II provides ample opportunity for drawing metaphors or 'lessons from history', a practice to which David Sutton (1998) refers as 'analogic thinking'. In this particular version, the German military invasion in the past is compared to the imposition of austerity in the present, 'an invasion of harsh economic measures'. These are implemented, some of my respondents argue, with 'characteristic German harshness', 'just as in the war', without consideration for 'the non-combatant civilians', that is, the poor, the old and the underprivileged. "Germany destroyed Greece during the war", argued a respondent who is moderate conservative, 'they took the nation's gold, and never paid the war reparations'. I have recorded similar variations of this argument in the

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3 narratives of respondents from literally all political affiliations, but also in the rhetoric
4 of politicians from most Greek political parties.
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6 Remarks with nationalistic overtones—that frequently rely on ‘naturalised’
7 stereotypes (for example, the ‘harshness’ of the Germans) or lessons from history (for
8 example, the ‘unjust’ treatment of Greece by foreign nations in previous eras)—
9 provide a platform for the convergence of leftist and rightist arguments, allowing
10 interlocutors from different political affiliations to draw a more amicable closure to a
11 discussion; one that may underline the perceived hegemony of the West, and the
12 interference of foreigners in the attempts of Greece to achieve economic recovery.
13 Citizens leaning towards the left might use arguments with nationalist overtones to
14 conclude on the unscrupulousness of Western capitalism,² while citizens from most
15 political affiliations do not hesitate to highlight a perceived sense of loss of
16 sovereignty in Greek economic policy. Finally, those who appear to be partially
17 sympathetic to ultra-rightist rhetoric issue patriotic warnings against all foreigners:
18 the economically powerful Westerners, but also the destitute migrants who live next
19 door.
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29 **Conclusion: anti-hegemonic indignation confined by hegemony**

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31 In my first accounts of the Greek anti-austerity indignation I attempted to shed some
32 light on the ambivalence of local discontent and its many contradictions
33 (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 2013c). These become apparent in the ambivalent—and, in
34 Herzfeld’s (1987, 1997) words, *disemic*—desire of so many Greeks to remain in the
35 Eurozone (and in the consumerist sphere of the West) but defy the constraints
36 imposed by the EU, the IMF, and the international financial establishment. To capture
37 ethnographically this ambivalence, I engaged with the complexity of the emerging
38 indignation—the internal politics and fragmented (often self-critical) views of those
39 afflicted by austerity—‘filling in the black hole’ (Ortner 1995: 190), the interpretative
40 vacuum created by homogenising depictions of the crisis. An anthropological
41 approach, with its attention on the local diversity of views, can contribute to the de-
42 orientalisation (and de-pathologisation) of indirect resistance, by moving beyond its
43 easy dismissal as irrational, incoherent, or inconsequential.
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50 In this article I have argued for the need to explicitly de-pathologise local discontent
51 with the financial crisis. Far from representing an inchoate, emotional or irrational
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55 ² Even supporters of the communist party (which has retained an honest and steady anti-
56 neoliberal orientation for decades) use nationalist arguments to the dismay of a few older
57 fellow-communists who have been indoctrinated to an internationalist (class-based) vision of
58 comradeship.
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3 discourse, indignation with austerity promotes a sustained critique of visible
4 inequalities in the World economic order. Thus, moving one step further from my
5 initial interpretative analysis,³ I am now—two years after the first wave of popular
6 mobilisation against austerity—in a better position to fully acknowledge the
7 transformative potential of local anti-austerity discourse, and its ability to unite
8 diverse (even international) social groups in discontent with the World economic
9 order (see Theodossopoulos 2010). Indignation with austerity is not merely a trope, a
10 figurative communication of meaning, but also a guiding principle of emancipatory
11 imagination (Appadurai 1996, 2001) leading towards (or requesting) change in social
12 life. Testaments of its transformative power are the dramatic shifts in political-party
13 politics in Greece that I have outlined earlier.

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15 Considerations such as this allow us to appreciate that anti-austerity discourse does
16 not only offer discursive empowerment in peripheral conversational contexts, but also
17 frames local anti-hegemonic narratives within an everyday pursuit of accountability.
18 This persistent search for meaning may provide alternative readings of causality—e.g.
19 via the exploration of recurring patterns in history (cf. Sutton 1998, 2003; Stewart
20 2012; Knight 2012a, 2012b)—which lead to explanations of the crisis that differ from
21 hegemonic narratives; for example, ‘the powerless should not pay for the mistakes of
22 bankers or politicians’, ‘austerity is not the only way out of the crisis’. In this
23 emancipatory role, indignation with austerity represents a very timely example of
24 indirect resistance: it proliferates in unofficial, everyday contexts of social life,
25 sometimes beyond the direct observation of power-holders (Scott 1985, 1990).
26 However, unlike Scott’s view of indirect resistance, anti-austerity indignation in
27 Greece directly aspires to communicate a message to power-holders (critically
28 engaging with the exercise of power, especially with regard to economic policies).

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30 It is also important to acknowledge that indirect resistance to austerity may realise its
31 most creative and original forms in informal contexts, but it is not merely an ‘off-
32 stage’ discourse, confined to—what Scott (1990) perceives as—autonomous contexts
33 of subordinate sociality; in fact it is doubtful if such isolated social contexts really
34 exist (Gledhill 2012). On the contrary, anti-austerity indignation (so far) has been
35 informed by, and has also inspired political party rhetoric; it has been voiced in public
36 protest and championed by elected politicians; it has numerous advocates among left
37 leaning highly educated elites; and, far from being independent (or autonomous) from
38 wider ideological, political or economic visions, it plays a formative role in the
39 imagination and reproduction of such visions, often moving—via social networks—
40 beyond national borders (Postill 2013, n.d.; Papailias 2011).

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58 ³ See, Theodossopoulos 2013a, 2003c.
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3 In all these respects, anti-austerity resistance provides us with scope to reflect upon
4 the pervasiveness of hegemonic narratives, even within anti-hegemonic critique; an
5 issue underestimated by Scott in *Hidden Transcripts* (1990). Even though indignant
6 (anti-austerity) discourse consciously confronts hegemonic master narratives, it
7 remains constrained by overarching ideological influences, which are not
8 uncontaminated by hegemony. For example, anti-austerity indignation in Greece,
9 despite its explicit critique of Western imperialism, is confined to a nationalist (and
10 hegemonic) conceptualisation of history, which, as many anthropologists have
11 pointed out, has been originally inspired by a Western vision of classical Greece, and
12 imported to Greece as a nation-building construct (Herzfeld 1982, 1987; Just 1989,
13 1995; Faubion 1993; Stewart 1994; Hirschon 2000, 2003; Brown and Hamilakis
14 2003; Theodossopoulos 2007a). The resulting idealisation of classical antiquity in
15 Greek nationalism represents a good example of colonised historical consciousness—
16 an example of what Herzfeld calls crypto-colonialism⁴ (Herzfeld 2002). Crypto-
17 colonial narratives, ‘appear to resist domination, but do so at the cost of effective
18 complicity’, often through ‘the aggressive promotion of their claims to civilizational
19 superiority or antiquity’ (Herzfeld 2002: 902-903).

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22 In consequence, Western hegemony is deeply embedded in the identification of the
23 West with classical Greece, an identification adopted and reproduced uncritically by
24 Greek national narratives. Trapped within such a persistent (and pervasive)
25 conceptual framework, Greek anti-austerity narratives, although critical to Western
26 power, do not completely escape from Western hegemony (which has so effectively
27 colonised Greek national consciousness). The unconstrained xenophobia of the Greek
28 ultra right provides the most unattractive example of how nationalism springs from
29 indignation with foreign intervention, yet nationalist undertones are also hidden in the
30 anti-hegemonic critique of left leaning indignant citizens. Anti-austerity political
31 parties (from the left and right) have capitalised upon this fusion of nationalism with
32 anti-hegemonic critique, and have adapted their rhetoric accordingly, to fit
33 electioneering purposes.

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36 The analytical trajectory I have outlined so far opens the way for resolving a dilemma
37 I posed earlier in this article. This emerges from the contradictions inherent in indirect
38 resistance, and in particular our commitment (as social analysts) to acknowledge the
39 critically astute (non-pathological, and often radical) nature of indignant narratives,
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⁴ Herzfeld has used the notion of ‘crypto-colonialism’ to refer to countries whose national ideologies and ‘modalities of independence have been defined by outsiders’ (Herzfeld in Byrne 2011: 147), often by placing such countries and national cultures ‘on high cultural pedestals that effectively isolate them from other, more brutally material forms of power’ (Herzfeld 2002: 902).

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3 while simultaneously confronting the proliferation of nationalism (old-fashioned,
4 banal and hegemonic) within the same narratives. Clearly, the solution lies in
5 acknowledging that indirect resistance, even in its most creative form, is not
6 completely isolated from overarching ideological influences and culturally established
7 patterns of explaining causality. In vernacular political discourse, pre-existing
8 interpretations provide the building blocks for new challenging explanations of timely
9 events (and their relationship with power).
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14 In his earlier work, Scott (1990) attempted to isolate the narratives of discontent
15 within 'hidden transcripts' and autonomous context of subaltern sociality. The
16 example of anti-austerity indignation in Greece shows that this compartmentalisation
17 is not a wise analytic strategy, a point that echoes previous critiques (Keesing 1992;
18 Gledhill 1994; Moore 1998). Indirect resistance is not immune to the recycling of
19 wider (and occasionally hegemonic) ideological narratives (Keesing 1992), as does
20 not exist in a power vacuum (see Gledhill 2012). For this reason, it would be wise to
21 complement our analytic de-pathologisation of resistance with an equal commitment
22 to avoiding its idealisation (Abu-Lughod's 1990, Keesing 1992, Ortner 1995), an
23 approach to which I refer to the introduction to this issue, as the de-exoticisation of
24 resistance. The ambivalence of anti-austerity discourse in Greece lies within the very
25 conditions that make it meaningful and persuasive at the local level: its embedded-
26 ness in social relations, cultural expectations and previous ideological narratives.
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