

'Glocal' disorder: Causes, conduct and consequences of the 2008 Greek unrest

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Abstract

This article examines the unrest that emanated in Athens and rolled out across Greek cities in December 2008 as a case through which to advance understanding of how local, national and international arenas may together shape localized episodes of disorder. We begin by addressing the proximate and structural causes of the unrest, before turning to explore the multifarious character of protest actions, including novel and derivative forms of contestation deployed by protestors, and public debate about the appropriate apportioning of blame amongst the variety of actors involved. Finally, we look at the diverse outcomes of the unrest and their impact upon extant socio-political tensions. For each stage of the life-cycle of the unrest, we evaluate the relevance of international actors, practices and discourses. Our analysis of the Greek unrest of 2008 suggests, first, that the array of intersections between global, national and local dimensions of unrest is more diverse than has heretofore been recognized by pertinent scholarship, and, second, that international or transnational factors may play a significant role in the emergence, conduct and consequences of disorder even in instances where national and local dynamics remain predominant.

Keywords

'Glocal' disorder, Greece, protest, unrest

Criminological analysis of riots and social unrest has long been dominated by single-case and comparative studies in which global or transnational dimensions of such events have featured little, if at all. Over recent years, however, as criminology has turned to

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consider transnational and global conditions, recognition has increasingly been paid to the importance of arenas beyond the state to the causes, conduct and consequences of otherwise local experiences of crime and punishment. Although a relatively nascent subject of research, international dimensions of the performance and policing of public disorder have attracted the attention of scholars both within and beyond the field. Pakes and Pritchard (2014), for example, have drawn attention to the ways in which riots are today relayed via a wide range of media to global audiences, potentially leading to the international diffusion of political messages and local practices, as well as facilitating their possible commodification, and Sheptycki (2005) has underlined the relevance of the way in which protests are policed in peripheral jurisdictions of the global system to accurately gauging emergent trends in transnational policing. In turn, the way in which pressures stemming from global actors and markets have been refracted through national and local settings has been identified as producing patterns of so-called 'glocal' contention (Auyero, 2001). Thus, for instance, the International Monetary Fund has been seen as the source of core stimuli for localized protests in peripheral economies owing to its promotion of austerity reforms (see, for example, Auyero, 2001; Walton and Ragin, 1990; Walton and Seddon, 1994; also Engels, 2015). As pointed out by O'Neill (2004), moreover, since the late 1990s many countries around the world have experienced large and often disruptive protests against globalization itself, which have embodied a form of internationally networked activism where not only discourses and tactics of contention, but also a significant body of protesting participants, travel across jurisdictions. Policing repertoires have evolved in tandem with those of protestors, with national police forces drawing on their own transnational sources of direct and indirect exchanges with colleagues abroad (see further Della Porta and Tarrow, 2012).

The unrest that emanated in Athens and rolled out across Greek cities in December 2008 might at first sight appear an unlikely case through which to advance understanding of how and the extent to which local, national and international arenas may together shape localized episodes of disorder. The Greek unrest was neither foreign induced (it was not, for example, triggered by socioeconomic hardships imposed by international institutions), nor primarily international in terms of the composition of those involved in the unrest or its policing, nor overwhelmingly international with regard to its ramifications. Yet the ubiquity of references to the international that can be found in diverse and otherwise divergent accounts of the disorder suggests that further examination of the 'glocal' credentials of the case is nevertheless merited. In this article, we pursue such an examination through consideration of the causes, conduct and consequences of the events.

In so doing, we address a range of dimensions proposed by Newburn (this issue) in his 'life-cycle' model of riots, which foregrounds not only the context, nature and dynamics of riots but also, crucially, their aftermath. With regard to the latter, Newburn's model draws attention to the subsequent framing of riots in political, media and public discourse, as well as to penal and public policy responses by the state. In this vein, we adopt a broad perspective to explore the aftermath of the Greek unrest, but extend it beyond discursive representations and the evolution and implementation of policy to encompass in addition the behaviour of non-state actors.

We begin by presenting a synopsis of the Greek unrest of December 2008 before turning to examine accounts of its proximate and structural causes. We go on to explore the

multifarious character of protest actions, including novel and derivative forms of contestation deployed by protestors, and public debate about the appropriate apportioning of blame amongst the variety of actors engaged in the unrest. Finally, we look at the diverse outcomes of the unrest and their impact upon extant socio-political tensions. For each stage of the life-cycle of the unrest, from inception, to performance, to legacy, we evaluate the relevance of international actors, practices and discourses.

Introducing the events of December 2008

For three weeks in December 2008, Greece was convulsed by unrest that swept from Athens to include all major and many minor urban centres across the country. The killing of Alexis Grigoropoulos, an unarmed 15-year-old boy, by a police officer in an apparent act of machismo on 6 December 2008, is widely acknowledged to have been the trigger for the unrest that ensued: eight consecutive days of rioting in Athens alone, and a wide range of other mobilizations that accompanied the violence and extended beyond it.

Shortly after 9pm on the evening of 6 December in the Exarcheia district of central Athens, a two-member police patrol engaged in a verbal altercation from inside their car with a group of young teenagers who were standing in an area close to cafes and bars, enjoying a night out. The policemen were ordered to withdraw from the area by the police operations centre with which they were communicating, but instead parked their car and returned to confront the youths on foot. One of the policemen drew his weapon and took aim at the group, firing several times and killing Grigoropoulos. The accusation levelled in due course by the perpetrator and his defence lawyer that the victim, a privately educated boy of middle-class parents, had manifested ‘deviant behaviour’ was widely denied and condemned (see further Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou, 2011).

Hundreds were detained by the police and dozens were injured during the unrest that swiftly followed news of Grigoropoulos’ death, and the cost of the damage caused by rioting has been estimated at over €1.5 billion (see, for example, Kalyvas, 2010). The duration, spread and intensity of the unrest were widely deemed to have been unprecedented by the standards of comparable episodes since the restoration of democracy in the country in 1974. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the disorder stimulated intense public and academic debate over the essence of the events and their broader significance. By some, the events were framed as nihilistic riots that were the culmination of a culture of permissiveness towards deviance, violence and mindless resistance to change, and were the product, in significant part, of an underdeveloped civil society. Others – and this was an interpretation supported by the majority of Greeks at the time – rather portrayed the events as a ‘social uprising’ driven by socioeconomic and political malaise as well as police violence, constituting a novel and future-oriented corpus of collective action (see further Kotronaki and Seferiades, 2012; Sotiris, 2013; Vradis, 2012).

Accordingly, in addition to acknowledging the complexity of the events of December 2008 that belies their simple labelling as ‘riots’, our treatment of the events also draws attention to the manner in which their interpretation came to illustrate important continuities in the performance of contentious politics, from street action to political, media and scholarly arenas.

Accounting for the emergence of the unrest

Explanations of the unrest of December 2008 have commonly ranged across proximate and structural factors; from the trigger or ‘flashpoint’, to the dynamics between the state and social groups, to spatial, cultural, socioeconomic and political backdrops. Many of the debates surrounding these factors have concerned the extent to which the events of 2008 presented a novel configuration by comparison with prior moments of unrest in the Greek context. A prominent theme in this regard has been the international features of the unrest in 2008, especially the approaches to contention developed by activists following exposure to international protest experiences.

It came as little surprise that the spark of the unrest was lit in Exarcheia. The commonly referenced ‘bohemian’ character of the district, densely populated by students and anarchists as it is, has played a key role in its construction as a site of frequent violent interactions between unruly youths and the police. Indeed, the banality of weekly small-scale skirmishes between local anarchists and police in this area goes some way towards explaining how, in 2008, the police officer who killed Grigoropoulos could have perceived shooting at an unarmed young teenager following a very minor altercation to be an acceptable course of action. It is also important to note that the very same district was the setting for the killing of another unarmed 15-year-old boy by a police officer back in 1985, which also provoked riots, albeit of a far lesser spread and intensity than those of 2008 (Vradis, 2012). Substantive dissimilarities between the two cases help to explain their differential outcomes. In both instances, however, an act perpetrated by a single police officer was sufficient to spark riots because of the reputation for brutality with impunity that the police have long had in the country (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2016). Indeed, despite government efforts to present Grigoropoulos’ killing in 2008 through a ‘one bad apple’ framework, whereby the actions of a particular officer were framed as having sharply deviated from the practices of an otherwise law-abiding force (see, for example, *Naftemporiki*, 7 December 2008), the case rather testified to the systemic nature of police abuses. This was not just in the eyes of the protestors who took to the streets, but also for the majority of scholarship on the unrest, in which micro-level accounts of police violence featured relatively little.

Amongst the debates about structural-level explanatory factors for the unrest of December 2008, those concerning its cultural roots have perhaps been the most fraught, split between those viewing the events as symptomatic of persistent Greek traditions that romanticize unruliness regardless of socioeconomic or political conditions, and those regarding the events as something of a point of rupture with dominant protest tropes in the country. Thus, a prominent account for the unrest of 2008, put forward predominantly by conservative commentators, has been that those involved were conditioned to do so by a national ‘culture of violence’ that has long provided substantial legitimation to resistance against the state. Political scientist Stathis Kalyvas, a key proponent of this thesis, argues that such attitudes came to prevail in Greek society with the fall of the country’s dictatorship in 1974 and the sanctification that he argues was subsequently bestowed by left-wing governments on the anti-dictatorship struggle, as well as on its values and tactics (see, for example, *Athens Plus*, 2012; Kalyvas, 2008; also Andronikidou and Kovras, 2012; Karamichas, 2009).

Some commentators supportive of the protestors have also acknowledged the role of socialization into repertoires of contention to explain the extent and forms of protest manifested in December 2008, although interpreting these as having been fuelled by ongoing socioeconomic strains within Greek society. Thus, for instance, it has been recognized that many young Greeks already had direct experience of participating in organized protests; from recurrent school and university occupations and political assemblies, to demonstrations and ensuing clashes with the police. This meant they also had an established repertoire of contention and solidarity networks from which they were able to draw inspiration and support in reacting to the murder of Grigoropoulos in 2008 (Kanellopoulos, 2012; Kotronaki and Seferiades, 2012; Lountos, 2012). Indeed, given the high levels of contentious politics to have unfurled in Greece since the end of the dictatorship (see, for example, Gallant, 1995; Kornetis, 2013), the youth were not alone in this respect, as different generations participating in the 2008 unrest were likely to have had prior experience of contention, from which they, too, were able to draw.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding criticism of the notion that a 'lenient legacy' effect pertained at all in Greece following 1974 (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2016), a considerable swathe of discourse issued by the protestors involved in the unrest of 2008 directly rejected the presumed heritage of the Greek anti-dictatorship struggle in any case (Kornetis, 2010). Not only did the protests of 2008 manifest a more radical politics than had the struggles associated with the anti-dictatorship movement and its generation of resisters-turned-elites; that is, seeking change at the level of the system rather than merely of elites in power. They also gave voice to a critique of what was construed as the previous generation's betrayal of progressive ideals over the intervening timeframe and, as evidenced by scandal after scandal in the 2000s, their increasing involvement in political corruption (Bratsis, 2010).

Moreover, a significant segment of protestors active in December 2008 were argued to have drawn inspiration and support from experiences of contention garnered outside of what would be considered 'home-grown' cultural and social frames of reference. Many Greek anarchists, for example, shared ideas and made connections through participating in anti-globalization gatherings across Europe, such as that held during the International Monetary Fund meeting in Prague in 2000, and the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001 (Bratsis, 2010; Schwarz et al., 2010). It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the first discussion about establishing an independent media centre in Greece took place amongst demonstrators returning from the Genoa protests on board a boat in July 2001. The Independent Media Center (Indymedia) started operating in the country as of November that year, providing instantaneous recording and news of protest actions as well as of violence perpetrated by the police, and went on to play a key role in the December 2008 unrest (Metropolitan Sirens, 2011). Equally, Greek activists had the opportunity to influence and be influenced by their foreign counterparts when the latter joined in similar protests in Greece, as with that which took place around the EU summit meeting in Thessaloniki in 2003 (Schwarz et al., 2010; Sullivan, 2008), even if numbers travelling to Greece on that occasion were relatively small.¹

Accounts of the socioeconomic dimensions of the unrest proved equally controversial. One narrative prevalent at the time denied that there was a socioeconomic impetus, arguing that the youth involved in the unrest were the first of many generations to enjoy

greater affluence than their parents (see further Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou, 2011). This interpretation was challenged by many commentators, who made reference to grievances that had developed prior to the unrest amongst the country's youth about inadequate employment opportunities and the prospect of low salaries, with new university graduates widely dubbed 'the generation of 700 euros', in reference to the modest monthly wage they could hope to secure (Johnston and Seferiades, 2012: 150). At the time of the unrest, such youth were not invariably the poorest in a society with one of the highest rates of poverty in the European Union (themselves linked to stubbornly low wage levels), yet welfare structures in Greece have long neglected the young and focused on the old. With active labour market programmes practically non-existent, levels of investment in research and development very low, and rates of youth unemployment already very high, rising aspirations at that point looked particularly hard for young Greeks to meet, even if their prospects were subsequently to worsen significantly (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2010; Xenakis, 2012; Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013a).

Finally, alongside cultural and socioeconomic explanations of the unrest have been those emphasizing its political drivers. Frustrations in Greece with high rates of income inequality, as well as with repeated major corruption scandals involving networks amongst the country's power elite, have long stood at a very high level by European comparison. Whereas in prior years clientelism was deployed to shore up public support for, and mollify mass consternation over, the standard operating procedures of the political system, the retrenchment of government spending over the course of the 2000s inevitably meant that this strategy of pacification was weakened (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013a). Compounding the slow decline in the reach of clientelism, several scandals rocked the legitimacy of the power elite in the months preceding the December 2008 unrest: one tying political, media and ecclesiastical power-holders to a large-scale fraud (the Vatopedi scandal), and one implicating the two dominant political parties of the era (New Democracy and PASOK) in extensive bribery carried out by the international engineering firm Siemens. In both cases, elite denial and apparent impunity exacerbated public anger towards the political system and frustration with the absence of credible alternatives within it (see further Bratsis, 2010; Johnston and Seferiades, 2012), further propelling the appeal and logic of extra-parliamentary political mobilizations (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013a).

Conducting the unrest

For a people with a reputation for unruliness and a country that over recent years has seen large-scale unrest resurface in response, at least in part, to the imposition of financial austerity measures, the events of December 2008 were nonetheless to prove unparalleled in terms of their duration, geographical spread (within and beyond the country) and violent intensity. Meanwhile, the heterogeneity of the protests, both with regard to the range of acts carried out and the composition of the protestors (in terms of their class, ethnicity and political affiliation), meant that the character of the unrest and the overarching message of the protestors would elude simple definition.

As news of the killing spread via mobile phones and web-based social media on the evening of Saturday, 6 December, crowds took to the streets in cities throughout the

country. Some began clashing with police, as well as attacking police stations and banks and smashing and burning luxury stores, while others – primarily anarchists and leftists – started university occupations. It was also predominantly leftist and anarchist groups that, by the following day, had organized meetings to plan strategic responses to the killing. On Sunday, 7 December, a demonstration held in Athens against the killing, attended by thousands, descended into violence, with many banks and other commercial properties being subjected to attack. Protestors across Greece continued to mobilize outside police stations and to attack them, and street barricades were also set up (see further Johnston and Seferiades, 2012; Schwarz et al., 2010).

The highpoint of unrest was on Monday, 8 December. Pupils occupied schools and joined marches on the streets (some estimates of the numbers marching in Athens placed them at over 10,000), protestors engaged in violent clashes with the police, and looting and attacks on state buildings, police stations and business properties continued across the country, including food ‘expropriations’ from supermarkets by anarchists for redistribution. As protests and riots persisted the following day, thousands of prisoners in Greece joined in by refusing food. On 10 December, a long-scheduled general strike was called off with a view to avoiding an escalation of the unrest, but thousands gathered to march anyway. Rallies, university and school occupations, strikes of university staff, school teachers and other workers, as well as rioting and clashes with police, continued in cities across Greece, gradually dissipating over the next couple of weeks (see further Johnston and Seferiades, 2012; Schwarz et al., 2010).

The relatively recent growth of social media technologies played a key role in the rise of simultaneous and subsequent acts of protest in diffuse locations. Athens Indymedia, for instance, was reportedly the first outlet to break news of the killing of Grigoropoulos, via a phone call to the site, just eight minutes after the shooting, news that then dispersed through other social media forums. By contrast with the swiftness and accuracy of the Indymedia accounts, it was 40 minutes before the first news bulletin was relayed from a mainstream TV channel and, even then, with a partial and distorted account of the story (Metropolitan Sirens, 2011).

More traditional forms of media also played a prominent and important role in the December unrest, however, providing leadership and serving to mobilize potential protestors. In particular, the period saw a wave of pamphlets being produced and political texts being distributed, and graffiti was drawn to spread protest slogans and imagery. These modes of communication nevertheless assumed a novel dimension in December 2008 in that messages were extensively expressed in foreign languages as well: the degree to which French and English were used in leaflets and graffiti was without precedent in the contemporary Greek context and demonstrated the exceptional effort by organized protestors to communicate with audiences beyond the nation’s borders (see further Kornetis, 2010). As unrest spread, it was the use of both new and traditional media that thus made possible the intimate intertwining of local, national and international acts of protest, helping to shape an episode of ‘glocal’ contentious politics (Kornetis, 2010; Kotronaki and Seferiades, 2012), a point to which we return further below.

Other forms of contestation during the unrest of December 2008 also went beyond longstanding protest repertoires in the country, including several highly symbolic acts.

Two innovative protest acts gained exceptional prominence. First, the enormous, record-high Christmas tree in Syntagma Square, opposite parliament in the centre of Athens, was burned down, leading the state to station riot police around the tree. Second, the public television station NET was occupied by a group of artists and anarchists who used it to broadcast a call for all citizens to join them on the streets for a general uprising (see further Schwarz et al., 2010).

The geographical reach of the unrest of December 2008 was also unprecedented in the repertoires of contemporary Greek protest. Although pre-existing networks of solidarity, as developed through shared and repeated experience of protests, undoubtedly facilitated swift and extensive mobilizations across the country (Johnston and Seferiades, 2012; Kanellopoulos, 2012; Lountos, 2012), the protests stretched beyond such networks, not only within Greece (for example, to include prisoners, as mentioned above) but outside the country too. As the unrest continued, mobilizations arose in a striking number of countries, with foreigners, as well as expatriates, seeking to express their solidarity with those protesting against Grigoropoulos' death in Greece. From banner drops and demonstrations to university occupations and attacks on banks, acts of solidarity took place in cities across the UK and the European continent, North America, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand, and foreign anarchists intent on participating directly in the Greek protests reportedly converged on Greece 'in droves' (Kalyvas, 2010; Trocchi, 2011).²

Although acts of protest involving property damage constituted a small fraction of the Greek unrest and dropped markedly after peaking on 8 December (see Papanikolopoulos, 2009, cited in Johnston and Seferiades, 2012), the unprecedented material destruction inevitably led public attention to focus on the violent dimensions of the protests and the identities of those responsible. Of all the damage wrought, that perpetrated against small independent businesses attracted the greatest public consternation. To the extent that the primary actors of the unrest were identified as middle-class youths, whether anarchists and leftists or otherwise unaffiliated, many mainstream commentators decried the rioting as frivolous attacks by the rich against the poor (Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou, 2011). Assumptions that anarchist groups were primarily responsible for the high levels of property damage were challenged by some accounts from anarchists themselves, who suggested that high-school students and immigrants actually performed more brazenly and randomly in wielding violence during the unrest (see, for example, Schwarz et al., 2010: 98–100; also Kanellopoulos, 2012).

Evidence that emerged of children acting as protagonists of violence certainly complicated the efforts of mainstream discourses to divide the protestors into 'peaceful, innocent schoolchildren', on the one hand, and 'brainless, nihilistic' anti-state groups perpetrating their 'familiar blind violence', on the other (see, for example, Mouzelis, 2009). Assertions concerning violence perpetrated by foreigners, meanwhile, appeared to have some resonance in police arrests for criminal offences associated with the unrest. A total of 284 arrests were estimated to have been carried out in relation to the disorder in 16 cities and towns across Greece between 6 December 2008 and 14 January 2009, and figures released by ministerial authorities in January 2009 showed that 130 foreign nationals (whether foreign anarchists or immigrants residing in the country) had been arrested in association with the unrest between 6 and 17 December 2008. Given,

however, the tentative nature of the total number of arrests, combined with longstanding vulnerabilities of immigrants to biased practices by the Greek police, questions remain as to the reason for the seeming overrepresentation of foreigners in arrests over this period (see further Amnesty International, 2009; Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2011). Nevertheless, immigrant involvement in the unrest was widely reported by mainstream media outlets, reinforcing popular stereotypes of immigrants as criminals (see further Cheliotis, 2016). Not all took this view; the role of immigrants was also strikingly interpreted as a form of civic participation in an episode of inclusive solidarity and heralded by radicals as a point of critical rupture for the making of political life in the country (Kalyvas, 2010; see further Michalis, 2011; Sotiris, 2010). Indeed, in this sense the foreign was deemed by some to be ‘the decisive factor, the central signifier’ of the unrest (Kalyvas, 2010: 356).

In mainstream discourses, however, considerable criticism was also levied against the government itself, for having failed to ensure timely and effective police intervention so as to prevent the looting and destruction from spreading in the first few days of the unrest. In an effort to avoid inflaming the unrest, the government had reportedly restrained police actions at the outset of the protests. Thereafter, however, following the considerable damage wrought as well as growing pressure from the parliamentary opposition, the strategy was reversed. The government unleashed maximum force short of putting troops on the street; an option allegedly considered during an emergency cabinet meeting on Monday, 8 December, but rejected both because it might be counter-productive and because it might undermine Greece’s democratic credentials (see further *Athens News*, 17 December 2010).

A few days later, on 12 December, it was widely reported that Greece had issued an international appeal for tear gas supplies since the country’s police had used so much after just one week of efforts to quell the protests. This was against the background of multiple reports and media testimonies of riot police not only training their guns on protestors and firing shots into the air during demonstrations, but also using excessive force against or otherwise ill-treating peaceful demonstrators, journalists and random bystanders. Numerous allegations emerged of the police arresting peaceful protestors, bystanders, lawyers and parents of detained children, both with and without charge, and detaining them for several hours; indeed, in several locations across Greece, there were media reports of parents of detained children having themselves been charged with child neglect.³ In the city of Larissa, moreover, the police used legislative provisions on organized crime (for which any convictions would be met with particularly harsh punishment) to arrest and charge 17 minors, who were detained overnight on 8 December without contact with their families or lawyers, and several were also allegedly beaten by police officers. All of the children were accused on near-identical charge sheets of ‘forming a criminal organization’, despite having been arrested in different locations and at different times (Amnesty International, 2009). The charges were dropped only after thousands marched in protest in January 2009 (Schwarz et al., 2010).

Undercover police officers and far-right groups additionally attracted considerable controversy and criticism over their part in the violence of December 2008, with the media awash with footage and photos of anarchist-styled men armed with steel bars mingling collegially with uniformed officers in Athens (see, for example, *Ta Nea*, 11

December 2008). Public debate about the identities of hooded protestors bent on violence was also stoked by incidents such as the attempt of five hooded protestors carrying rocks to join a trade union rally in Athens before fleeing when unionists asked them to produce their identity cards, as well as by allegations that far-right sympathizers had infiltrated demonstrations in the city of Patra and had engaged in vandalism against shops while portraying themselves as ‘anarchists’ (see further Schwarz et al., 2010). Views of the magnitude of the role potentially played by agents provocateurs in fomenting the violence of December 2008 ranged widely (see further Kotronaki and Seferiades, 2012). In any case, such concerns were by no means new or out of place for a country with long traditions of so-called ‘para-state’ activity against leftists (see further Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2016).

Consequences of the unrest

Interpretations and expectations of the legacies of the unrest of December 2008 were to prove as diverse and divergent as had been the protests themselves. Once again, the significance of the unrest was commonly to be conceived – whether in positive or negative terms – by reference both to international and to domestic arenas. Some commentators speculated, with trepidation, that the disorder might be internationally contagious given the concurrent global economic downturn. In much the same vein, others later claimed triumphantly that the events in Greece had indeed been a ‘harbinger of things to come’, whether by reference to the many contemporaneous acts of protest that sprang up around the world in solidarity (Kotronaki and Seferiades, 2012; Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2011) or to the subsequent staggered eruption of unrest in countries across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East (Johnston and Seferiades, 2012). Yet, for others, the fleeting nature of acts of empathy and emulation abroad was a source of disappointment. From this perspective, for instance, some anarchists sought to account for the failure of the unrest to spread to other countries in any sustained fashion (Schwarz, 2010).

Similar debates were directed at the national arena. Whereas numerous political, media and scholarly commentators posited expectations of cumulative unrest inside Greece itself, some going so far as to speak of the potential of major socio-political destabilization as the country’s economy slid into sustained recession and harsh austerity measures were imposed (see further Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013a), others questioned why the unrest had dissipated rather than continued at the end of 2008 (Johnston and Seferiades, 2012). Indeed, notwithstanding successive episodes of urban disorder in the years that followed, none to date have matched the span, duration or intensity of December 2008 (Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013b).⁴

In any case, far from being a fundamentally anomic event or one limited in its expression to nihilistic destruction, December 2008 not only drew on an array of established social networks, including mainstream associations (Sotiris, 2013), but even proved to be a wellspring for civil society in the country. Across Greece, the unrest gave rise to a flourishing array of ‘free’ public spaces (for example, squats and occupied squares) and independently organized assemblies and media. Indeed, many of these functioned as an increasingly important means of support to a society facing mounting hardships, for example through the provision of soup kitchens, barter economies and free healthcare

(see further Dalakoglou, 2012; Kotronaki and Seferiades, 2012; Schwarz et al., 2010; Sotiris, 2013; Vradis, 2012).

Any 'progressive', socially beneficial outcomes were more than matched, however, by the stimulus the events of December 2008 gave to 'dark' forms of social capital (Putzel, 1997). On the one hand, a domestic covert armed group, Epanastatikos Agonas ('EA', or 'Revolutionary Struggle'), sought to take advantage of what it saw as a powerful new momentum towards destabilization of the political system that had been opened up by the unrest. Notably, one month after Grigoropoulos' killing and avowedly in response to it, EA shot at a police patrol outside the Greek Ministry of Culture in Exarcheia, leaving one victim critically injured. Over the course of 2009, EA placed two large car bombs in Athens, one of which detonated causing minor injuries to a bystander (Kassimeris, 2011).

On the other hand, both covert and overt violence by the far right saw a dramatic escalation in 2009, dubbed the 'year of the black terror' by one mainstream newspaper in allusion to the colours of the far-right organization Chrysi Avyi ('Golden Dawn'), which at that point had not yet entered parliament (Xenakis, 2012). With a view, at least in part, to counterbalancing the degree of agency demonstrated by anarchists and leftists during and after the unrest of December 2008, far-right groups were emboldened to assert their own management of public spaces, establish regular armed patrols in some Athenian neighbourhoods, and step up their violent attacks on foreigners, minorities, anarchists and leftists (Dalakoglou, 2012; Vradis, 2012; Xenakis and Cheliotis, 2013a, 2013b). In what has been convincingly explained as a reaction to the crisis of legitimacy the state was perceived to be facing after having lost control of the streets in December 2008, the centre-right media displayed a strikingly high degree of tolerance and support towards far-right violence, implicitly treating it as a necessary corrective to what they portrayed as the preceding anarchist-infused disorder (Psarras, 2012).

Beyond the hopes and concerns that came to surround non-state actors in the wake of December 2008, the consequences of the unrest were also to be charted by reference to state policies and practices. The state's response to the unrest went little towards addressing protestors' demands and, to the extent that state coercion was if anything intensified, in many respects surpassed a simple gesture of rejection. As concerns specifically the manner in which the criminal justice system responded to the events of December 2008, an assessment of the treatment of protestors is hard to make in the absence of any public report – official or otherwise – on the numbers of those convicted or the sentences passed by courts. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some convictions were relatively light, even though the judicial process was subject to the lengthy delays for which the Greek criminal justice system is well known.

With regard to the treatment of the police officers whose actions triggered the unrest, although the criminal justice response proved more severe than expected, it was to some extent mitigated by the actions of the Hellenic Police in support of the officers in question (not to mention it may yet be subject to revision as such). Following the killing, both Epaminondas Korkoneas, the policeman who shot and killed Grigoropoulos, and his patrol partner, Vassilios Saraliotis, were held in pre-trial detention for the maximum 18-month period until June 2010. Following a protracted trial, Korkoneas was convicted of murder in October 2010 and sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of

a reduction in term, which was a harsher sentence than initially sought by the prosecution. The decision of the court was not unanimous, with three of the seven-member mixed panel of judges and jurors advocating a lesser verdict of manslaughter with possible intent. Saraliotis, meanwhile, was given a 10-year prison sentence as an accomplice, but was released a year later, in October 2011. Following newspaper revelations in 2013 that both men were still employees of the Hellenic Police and were continuing regularly to receive one-third of their monthly salary, the force's disciplinary council finally convened (having five times postponed meeting to discuss the cases), and ordered that the officers be dismissed but continue receiving their salaries until their appeals to have their convictions overturned were heard (*Ekathimerini*, 20 March 2013). The appeals have been delayed and were expected to take place in 2015, since the statute of limitations for certain of the charges relating to misdemeanours will be exceeded in 2016 (*To Vima*, 2015a).

Notwithstanding the vagaries of the treatment accorded to the police officers specifically responsible for triggering the protests of 2008, patterns of policing over successive years thereafter clearly indicate a further softening of official attitudes towards excessive police violence in disregard of the high social costs the latter was shown to have in December 2008. As repeatedly documented in reports from bodies such as Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, excessive police violence against peaceful protestors, reporters and bystanders during and after protests has seen a significant increase in Greece over recent years (Amnesty International, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Basille and Kourounis, 2011). There has also been an abundance of reports about police abuses in a range of other contexts, from arbitrary arrests, to detentions on false charges or without any charges at all, to beatings meted out to bystanders complaining about police abuse and to suspected anarchists and members of domestic armed groups, to torture and mistreatment of Roma, migrants and asylum seekers, to complicity and impunity towards violence perpetrated by far-right groups (see further Cheliotis, 2016).

Sustaining the escalation in police abuses have been new police staff, tactics and strategies. In 2009, for example, the newly inaugurated DELTA force, a motorcycle squad officially tasked with combating vandalism but used to break up demonstrations, swiftly gathered a reputation for uninhibited use of violence as a result of widely disseminated footage of their standard tactic of driving at protestors at speed to disperse crowds (see further Amnesty International, 2012). The following two years saw the addition of water cannon and plastic bullets to the police's armoury in dealing with public protest, supplementing the continuing liberal misuse of tear gas and stun grenades. In 2012, moreover, the Hellenic Police launched the infamous Orwellian-named operation Xenios Dias ('Hospitable Zeus'), representing the culmination of years of so-called 'sweep' operations by the police, in which individuals presumed to be foreigners were detained while their residency paperwork was checked (Cheliotis, 2013, 2016). Compounding police abuses, meanwhile, have been continuing efforts on the part of police authorities to distort accountability by obstructing or otherwise failing to pursue the identification, investigation, prosecution and effective punishment of perpetrators (Amnesty International, 2014b; Dalakoglou, 2012).

Excessive police violence nevertheless constituted but one element of the spectrum of heightened state coercion that emerged, in large part, as a reaction to the events of

December 2008. In this vein, a number of important criminal justice reforms contributed to the restriction of legally enshrined civil liberties in the country. One key reform to stem from the December 2008 unrest was the abolition in 2011 of so-called ‘university asylum’; that is, Law 1268/1982, which prohibited police from entering university campuses without the permission of the Rector. Albeit having long provoked consternation amongst conservative commentators, the impact of university asylum was thought to be particularly egregious in December 2008 given the magnitude of destruction caused during the protests, having purportedly allowed perpetrators of destructive violence to evade capture and even re-arm themselves unencumbered by police controls.

Another important reform to have been unveiled in response to the unrest was that targeting the so-called ‘Hooded-ones’, also referred to as the ‘known-unknowns’, who engaged in violence during protests. Although, as Pourgouris (2010) has pointed out, there were actually multiple constituencies of hooded or otherwise facially obscured participants engaged in violence in the unrest of December 2008 (protestors, uniformed and plain-clothed police officers, and far-right actors operating alongside the police), the term was associated only with protestors, or those appearing to be protestors, committing violence with their faces hidden. Face masks of one sort or another had become an increasingly necessary accoutrement of protest in the country over prior decades owing to the copious use of tear gas regularly made by the police at such events. In tandem, however, political concerns had grown about the impediments to protestor identification posed by the use of masks. Five months after the December 2008 unrest, in May 2009, the conservative New Democracy government succeeded where it had failed previously, in 2007, to enact a law criminalizing hoodies. According to Law 3772/2009, wearing a hood or a mask would be considered an aggravating factor in public order offences and incur a harsher sentence. The measure remained in force and in use after the centre-left PASOK party assumed office in October 2009, despite the new government issuing proclamations to the contrary shortly after its election. It was not until April 2015 that, under pressure from left-wing SYRIZA members of parliament, the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition government (ANEL being a party of the nationalist right) passed an amendment to the law, making the wearing of a hoodie an aggravating factor only in cases where a robbery had been committed (*Kathimerini*, 18 April 2015).

In conjunction, different elements of intensified state coercion have proved to play a vital role in fuelling social antagonisms since and in response to the events of December 2008. One case, above all, has encapsulated these complex and tragic dynamics. In February 2013, four men aged 20–25 were arrested during an attempted armed bank robbery. Photos of the detained suspects issued by the police had been heavily and clumsily photoshopped to erase bruising and cuts to their faces that had already been publicized by the media. Public furore erupted, with three of the men reporting they had been tortured while detained by the police, and the police counter-claiming that the injuries were inflicted during the arrest of the men. The Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, meanwhile, justified the photoshopping as necessary in order for the defendants to be recognizable by the public (MPO, 2013). One of the men, who was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, was Nikos Romanos. In December 2008, Romanos was a 15-year-old close friend of Alexis Grigoropoulos and was beside Grigoropoulos when the latter was killed. In 2014, Romanos began a prolonged hunger and thirst strike in protest at the

arbitrary refusal of the authorities to grant him the educational leave to which he was entitled. With Romanos close to becoming a martyr of the left after a month of striking, with thousands mobilized in his support across Greece in demonstrations, strikes and occupations, and with the country once again seemingly at risk of a larger social conflagration, the Greek parliament ratified an amendment strengthening access to educational furlough for prisoners through electronic tagging. Romanos' subsequent efforts to secure educational leave have nevertheless failed, despite the election to government in January 2015 of the left-wing SYRIZA party, which had campaigned in his support (SYRIZA, 2014; *To Vima*, 2015b). His case has continued to reach media headlines and to spark solidarity actions amongst the public.

Conclusion

The Greek case reaffirms the principle that the international arena can add to, yet rarely supplants, local and national actors and messages embroiled in instances of contentious political engagement such as riots (Auyero, 2001; Tarrow, 2005). Although not predominant over 'home-grown' aspects of social disorder, international factors proved to be interwoven in important ways at each stage of the life-cycle of the Greek unrest of 2008, helping to shape its emergence, conduct and consequences.

Hence in Greece, *before* the unrest took place, some activist participants had developed repertoires of action not only within the country but also at protests abroad. *During* the upheavals, the participation of foreigners – activists and immigrants – was accorded particular significance by both protestors and the state. At the same time, protesting performances incorporated clear efforts to communicate with foreign audiences in addition to domestic ones. In turn, there were responses from abroad, with solidarity actions taking place in dozens of sites across the world by foreigners and expatriates. These were accorded divergent interpretations as evidence either of the potential international contagiousness of the Greek unrest, of its successful international diffusion, or – given their short-lived character – of its failure to be transplanted effectively elsewhere. Finally, *after* the unrest subsided, much ink was spilt expounding the broader ramifications of the events in terms of social and political stability, both within Greece itself and, once again, internationally.

With regard to Greece's domestic arena in particular, we also find that, once the intense unrest concluded, violent contentious politics continued to ebb and flow and in some respects even escalated. Notwithstanding some relatively harmonious outcomes for civil society, far-right and police violence saw a particularly dramatic increase, helping to maintain and cultivate social tensions that have on several occasions since developed into further episodes of unrest. Our study also thereby underscores the value of exploring the aftermath of unrest in order to appreciate trends in violent contentious politics, especially through consideration of the legacy of disorder for the range of actors involved.

At a more general level, two main implications flow from our study. First, the array of intersections between global, national and local dimensions of unrest is more diverse than has heretofore been recognized by pertinent scholarship. And, second, significant 'glocal' properties can be found in instances of disorder beyond those in which

international or transnational factors are either preponderant or combine in equal weight with national and local dynamics. The extent to which ‘glocality’ may be an emergent feature of all local or national unrest, or is likely to occur in particular contexts more so than in others, is a question yet to be answered.

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Notes

1. For a sceptical assessment of the degree to which there was cross-fertilization of ideas and practices between Greek and foreign anarchists during this period, see Trocchi (2011).
2. An unofficial listing and map of these solidarity protest events is available at: <http://greeksolidaritymap.blogspot.co.uk/2008/12/blog-post.html> (accessed 19 February 2016).
3. See, for example, the Clandestina blog at: <https://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com/2008/12/30/arrests-in-greece-during-the-rebellion-from-061208-to-211208/#more-330> (accessed 19 February 2016).
4. Correct at the time of writing (December 2015).

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