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## **Neo-Nazism and neoliberalism: a few comments on violence in Athens at the time of crisis**

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### ***published in***

WorkingUSA  
2013

### ***DOI (link to publisher)***

[10.1111/wusa.12044](https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12044)

### ***document version***

Other version

### ***document license***

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### ***citation for published version (APA)***

Dalakoglou, D. (2013). Neo-Nazism and neoliberalism: a few comments on violence in Athens at the time of crisis. *WorkingUSA*, 16(2), 283-292. <https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12044>

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## COMMENTARY

NEO-NAZISM AND NEOLIBERALISM:  
A FEW COMMENTS ON VIOLENCE IN  
ATHENS AT THE TIME OF CRISIS<sup>1</sup>*Dimitris Dalakoglou*

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*The so-called Greek crisis implies a rapid transition towards a regime of extreme neoliberalism, but it also implies the rise of the extreme Right. This article examines briefly the rise of Greek neo-Nazism and a genealogy of its violence. It emphasizes the links between formal and informal violent state apparatuses, focusing on the paradigmatic turn of the form of governance in Greece towards authoritarianism and extreme-Right wing discourses and practices.*

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Over the final months of 2012, Greek mainstream media stopped reporting the Neo-Nazi attacks on migrant communities that are so frequent for circa a year now. Yet, in mid-January 2013, one attack did warrant the media's attention: in the Petralona district of Athens, two Greek men on a motorbike stabbed to death a Pakistani migrant; they approached him from behind and killed him. Thanks to an eye witness, the two murderers were arrested a few minutes later. Indeed, pre-electoral flyers of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn (GD) were found in one of the murderers' houses, in addition to pictures of Michaloliakos, the leader of GD. Evidence seems to imply that at least one of the arrested was a neo-Nazi activist. After all, Michaloliakos' daughter, a prominent member of her parents' party, had been arrested for a similar racist attack earlier in 2012. She also participated in a motorbike "patrol" seriously injuring a migrant not far from Petralona district.

But it is not only the neo-Nazi violence that sees an escalation in Athens. Since August 2012, central Athens has been subjected to the fundamentally racist, pogrom-styled police operation "Xenios Zeus" (named after the ancient Greek god of hospitality[!]). Since its inauguration, the operation has stopped and searched over 60,000 migrants. Amidst the current context of vigilante attacks on migrants by neo-Nazis, police brutality and criminalization of migrant communities appear restrained: after all, stabbing people of color on the streets is worse than arresting them and detaining them without any reason.

That escalation of physical violence by the far-Right and the police can be understood as reflective of the more general mode of governance emerging in Greece during the crisis. In fact, one today observes an extensive and intensive version of that violence in comparison to the recent history. Given the novel historical and political context, one can easily talk about a complete deregulation of the repertoires of publicly performed political violence, which imply a change of paradigm of historical proportions. But at the same time, it reminds us of the close historical links that the extreme Right maintains with capitalist democracy and its violent apparatuses.

### State

A series of new types of extreme policing tactics on the streets of Athens emerged after the revolt of December 2008 (see Vradis & Dalakoglou 2011), aiming precisely to control any future popular uprising. Among such new tactics is the establishment of a new anti-protest motorcycle police unit called DELTA. Tactically, DELTA's aim is to rush through the demonstrators' crowd, disperse them and beat them up, or/and make arrests. During one of their first appearances in December 2009, in the march commemorating the first anniversary of the December 2008 revolt, DELTA rode through the demonstrators at Syntagma Piazza, seriously injuring a 61-year-old woman, who was hit and ran over by a police motorbike.<sup>2</sup> That day, over 1,000 people were detained preemptively before the demonstrations all over the country breaking any previous records. DELTA, during the peak of the anti-austerity protest so far (the general strike of June 28 and 29, 2011), undertook the main role of dispersing and injuring demonstrators around Athens center.

Further policing measures introduced after December 2008 include the new steel fencing that was erected next to the house of Parliament during the Syntagma Piazza uprising (2011), or the water cannons and plastic bullets that made their first appearance in the Keratea anti-landfill protests during the winter of 2010–2011. The water cannon was used at the center of Athens during the general strike of November 2012, while we saw plastic bullet weapons at the center of the city in early 2013 for the first time. Keratea's uprising and its repression is itself an indicative story of the persistent violence, with which public protest was dealt by the police after December 2008.<sup>3</sup>

But besides new "tools," the post-December counterinsurrection involves novel and extreme uses of older "apparatuses" against the enemy within; for example, shock grenades were thrown every other minute during the general strike demonstrations in June 2011 (in Syntagma), including indoor places, while (new) chemical gases were used on an unprecedented scale. For example, it was estimated that during the anti-austerity, forty-eight-hour general strike of June 28 and 29, 2011, police threw over 2,000 canisters of tear gas at the center of Athens, as opposed to a maximum of a couple of hundreds that had been used in the past during similar events (Dalakoglou 2011). Since December 2008, Athens' center has quite often been transformed into an unbearable place during protests

due to an extensive use of tear gas, making it impossible for people to rally, march, and also live in the area. In October 2011, during the general strike march, an unemployed builder who was demonstrating died due to the extensive use of chemicals. Various types of tear gas-related health damages have led several times the association and the union of medical doctors to make public statements against the use of tear (chemical) gas by the police.

As the country was reaching the elections of 2012, and especially after the elections, we saw one more escalation of explicitly political policing targeting anarchist, radical Left initiatives, and even workers union.

Out of the blue, in December 2012, the social center, Villa Amalias, was attacked and closed down by the police, who made several arrests. Villa Amalias was once a school, abandoned for almost two decades before squatters occupied it in 1990. The anarchist squatters worked to conserve the neoclassic building, and importantly opened it to the community as a self-organized social center. Villa had a small concert hall where, to a great extent, the Athenian punk scene of the 1990s was shaped. It also housed a print press run by Rotta collective. Rotta printed many of the political posters that cover the walls of central Athens. Allegedly, to stop the posters' print press was a main objective of the authorities during that operation. More recently, the antifascist squatters have comprised a protective element for the migrant communities in the neighborhood who have been attacked by the neo-Nazis. On January 9, 2013, the squatters reoccupied the building for a few hours before police special forces re-evicted the building, arresting the ninety-two occupiers and charging them with felonies for having their faces covered; allegedly none of the group had covered faces.

The law that turned covering one's face into felony came into force a few years ago, as a response to increasing public protest. One of the key anti-protest tactics of the Greek police has been the *en masse* use of strong tear gas, usually thrown into the crowd, thus requiring protestors to cover their faces when attending demonstrations. In this manner, the criminalization of covering one's face is implicitly a criminalization of all public protest. To make things worse, officers from the anti-protest units regularly gave fake testimonies about arrested demonstrators, so that almost everyone arrested during protests these days is charged with felonies based on this so-called hoody-law (*koukoulonomo*).

A few hours after the re-eviction of Villa Amalias on the afternoon of January 9, the police, in a public demonstration of power, evicted another large central Athenian squat, the Skaramanga squat a few blocks away from Villa. Skaramanga has a different story to Villa Amalias. It is a historical offspring of the December 2008 revolt. Also run by an anti-authoritarian collective, Skaramanga had a rich library, and large rooms where talks, film screenings, and other events were organized. It also housed the only artificial climbing wall in central Athens, while Yoga and martial arts classes were provided weekly, to mention but a few of the activities, all these of course *gratis*. From time to time, the squats would organize benefit events to raise money for building maintenance, but otherwise their activities were located outside the commercial nexus. Skaramanga was additionally another part of the local anti-Nazi infrastructure, as its residents and the

participants of the various activities participated actively also in the anti-racist activity in the area.

In January 2013, a few days after these police raids, 10,000 people marched at the center of Athens in solidarity with the squats and the ninety-two people arrested during the re-eviction of Villa Amalias. Two days later, police raided one more central Athenian squat, Lela Karagiannis. While “leaked” police information has recently suggested the government plans to evict forty such self-organized projects (squats) across the country, Lela was eventually taken back by the squatters.

But workers’ unions have not escaped from that new type of governance in Greece either. During late January 2013, several unions were on strike with the metro workers’ industrial action lasting eight days. Their demands were not extravagant; they have been forced to accept a significant reduction to their salaries, like most civil servants and pensioners who have lost over 40 percent of their income within the last two years. This is with some exceptions, such as the anti-protest units of the police force whose salaries have so far been ring-fenced. After eight days of striking, these protected police units raided the metro depot in Sepolia at four o’clock on the morning, breaking the metro workers strike. Based on a decree issued in the very early days of post-dictatorial “democracy” in 1974, strikers may be conscripted to go back to their work if issued notices. If they refuse, they are arrested and charged. One week later, the civil conscription policy was applied in the case of the sailors’ strike, forcing the strikers to break their action and go back to work. At the beginning of February 2013, the government announced that by the end of the year, it will reform the laws concerning unions and strikes, making it much more difficult for workers to organize and act.

### Extreme Right

But aside from the official versions of the violence against various forms of resistance and potential resistance issued by the police, the crisis comes also with neo-Nazi violence targeting mainly migrants, but also Left and anarchist activists. This extreme-Right political column was re-formed anew as part of the post-December 2008 counterinsurrection. Just in spring 2009, extreme-Right groups declared the Athenian Square of Ayios Panteleimonas a no-go zone for migrants. Patrols of neo-Nazis affiliated with GD started attacking migrants in this particular area. That violence escalated further, but after the International Monetary Fund/European Union/European Central Bank (IMF/EU/ECB) loan of May 2010, this extreme-Right tendency started taking more concrete shape and coming together more firmly, multiplying and escalating even more racist attacks within and outside the particular neighborhood (see HRW 2012; Kandyliis and Kavoulakos 2011).

Historically, since the 1920s, the far-Right so-called para-state (*parakratos*) in Greece functioned as the long arm of the state violent apparatuses targeting people with Left-wing affiliations, during most of the twentieth century (see

Kostopoulos 2005; Mazower 2006, 353–4; Mouzelis and Pagoulatos 2002, 88–9; Panourgia 2009). Unsurprisingly, GD comprises a political and physical continuation of that tradition: the leader of the colonel's dictatorship (1967–1974) Papadopoulos founded in 1984 the organization EPEN from his prison cell, where he had been sentenced for the coup. The funding and current leader of GD, Michaloliakos, was the first president of EPEN Youth Sector. The colonel's dictatorship is notorious for its close links with the extreme-Right para-state apparatuses before the coup and afterwards. For example, during the dictatorship, laws honoring and providing benefits to the members of the Security Battalions for their role during the World War II came into force. The Security Battalions (*Tagmata Asfaleias*) were the Greek units of collaborators with the German Nazi occupiers during the World War II. Security Battalions, to a great extent, comprised the formalization of the prewar fascist para-state and its transformation into formal organized units. This formalization continued after World War II by the postwar state apparatus, peaking during the dictatorship (see Kostopoulos 2005). Allegedly, Papadopoulos was a member of the Patras Security Battalion during the Nazi occupation (Kloby 2004, 249). Certainly, as army officer of the postwar state, Papadopoulos served in the State Intelligence Service (SIS), in the department of internal security. The major task of this department was to tackle the “communist threat” within Greece, defining and targeting the state's enemy within (Keeley 2010). In 1981, after the electoral victory of the social-democratic PASOK, the SIS was reformed and renamed into Greek Intelligence Service. In a payroll slip leaked from the SIS during this reform appears the name of Michaloliakos as a paid employee of the intelligence service. Meanwhile, Michaloliakos was notorious for his participation in bomb attacks in cinemas that were screening Soviet movies. This was the reason he was imprisoned in the late 1970s. Eventually, Michaloliakos left EPEN and founded GD; in EPEN he was replaced by M. Vorides. Nowadays, the latter is an MP of the conservative party “New Democracy,” which leads the governmental coalition. Vorides was the minister of infrastructures in the government of technocrats ran by the unelected banker Loukas Papdemos in 2011.

GD, until recently, was attacking mainly Left-wing activists and antifascists rather than migrants.<sup>4</sup> Although the redetermination of the Nazis' target, in fact that part of the para-state apparatus never forgot of its old target. For example, in a previous article (Dalakoglou and Vradis 2011), it was explained that although the new rule over Ayios Panteleimonas targets mostly migrants, it was in fact initially shaped as a spatial-political response by the extreme Right to the December revolt's spatial-political legacies. Neo-Nazis aimed to control an open-air public space, and promote their racist and anti-Left agenda in anti-thetic reference to open-air spaces, which hosted the spontaneous political offspring of the December revolt. The difference is that neo-Nazis often operate openly in collaboration with formal state apparatuses. For example, the government vice minister, Markoyiannakis, who was responsible for the police—in an unprecedented act—personally visited one of the anti-migratory rallies of Ayios Panteleimonas in July 2009 to chat with the “enraged local residents.” After that

meeting, neo-Nazis left Ayios Panteleimonas Square and attacked one of the oldest anarchist social centers in the city: Villa Amalias. As it was mentioned above, Nazis these days can concentrate on the rest of their activities since the police replaced them in the attacks against Villa Amalias.

Today, that migrants are targeted so often by gang-style neo-Nazi attacks, police stations seem to systemically refuse to record or examine racist attacks, in fact providing a mute protection to such actions (see HRW 2012). But things often go well beyond mute protection in late September 2012 during an anti-fascist motorcycle rally in central Athens; close to Ayios Panteleimonas, there were clashes with neo-Nazis, and the police immediately intervened, arresting fifteen antifascists and torturing them in the police headquarter.<sup>5</sup> Back in 2009, a father who dared to challenge the neo-Nazi rule over the square of Ayios Panteleimonas was detained by the police (Dalakoglou 2012). Certainly, within the picture, one has to mention that Ayios Panteleimonas was already notorious since 2004 for racist attacks by police officers serving in the local station (Lebesopoulou 2010). Indeed, the close links between police and GD are not a local problem of Ayios Panteleimonas; this became apparent in the elections of May and June 2012, when approximately half of police officers on duty in the headquarters of Athens police voted for GD.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of these explicit and conspicuous links between the state apparatus and the para-state apparatus of GD, historically and currently there is a desperate effort for para-state actions to be presented as spontaneous. Such effort goes back a long time and can be seen in the historical use of the term “indignant citizens” (*aganaktismenoi polites*), which was used by the police and government-friendly mass media in order to label the para-state aid against protests. For example, that was the label employed in November 1995 in order to name the group of neo-Nazis who joined the police forces who were surrounding the occupied, by Anarchists, Athens Polytechnic. Eventually, the political life of the term “indignant” in Greek changed since the Syntagma movement of the summer 2011. In Syntagma, the demonstrators directly translated the word *indignados* from Spanish. So today, the respective Greek word, *aganaktismenoi*, stands for the people who occupied Syntagma Piazza to protest against austerity, the political establishment of the country and IMF.

The extreme-Right groups escalated their activity in May 2011, just a few days before the Syntagma movement. In Ipirou Street, at the center of Athens, an armed robbery—the victim of which was a Greek man who was stabbed to death by robbers of foreign origin—triggered a series of organized group attacks against migrants and anti-Nazis. This lasted for several days, and included the beating of migrants and stabbings, along with attacks against some of Athens anarchist squats (Dalakoglou 2011; HRW 2012). Some of the participants in the rally on the ground where the assassination had taken place were suggesting that this is “our December.” So the implication was that since December 2008 was a spontaneous revolt triggered by the assassination of Alexis Grigoropoulos by the police, the murder of Manolis Kantaris in Ipirou Street was expected by the far-Right to be the event triggering a massive

xenophobic semi-pogrom, attracting neo-Nazis from other cities who came to Athens for the big day. The masses did not come, but still, the attacks happened (HRW 2012).

A few days after these incidents, the Syntagma Piazza movement started. In Syntagma, members of GD tried to get involved, but were attacked by anti-Nazis on several occasions. Some of the most characteristic examples were clashes between anti-Nazis and Nazis during the general strikes of June 15 and 28–29, 2011. Despite their efforts to appear as part of the mass spontaneous collective action, on June 28, neo-Nazis were videotaped fleeing behind the riot police lines when they were chased by anti-Nazi demonstrators. A video showing prominent members of the far-Right chatting with officers and passing behind the police cordon toward the police-protected zone of the house of parliament caused a scandal. A potential attempt by demonstrators to go close to the police officers during that day would be unimaginable. The unprecedented police brutality during the forty-eight-hour general strike of June 28 and 29 resulted to several hundreds of demonstrators ending up in the hospital. The minister of development at the time, Skandalidis, was forced to admit publicly that there is an old relationship between the extreme Right and the police that needs to be examined (Eleutherotypia 30/06/2011). A few years ago, another similar scandal broke out when on February 2, 2008, during an antifascist demonstration in Athens, members of GD and riot police operated together against the antifascist demonstrators, being again recorded on camera.

### **Taking the State/Para-State Paradigm Forward?**

Since May 2010, when the loan agreement between the Greek Government and IMF/EU/ECB was signed, the previous political configurations have been altered radically. One of the main changes is the empowerment of the extreme Right. GD from 0.29 percent (circa 20,000 votes) in the parliamentary elections of 2009, in the elections of 2012 received circa 7 percent of votes (over 400,000). Within the same period, GD from a party of a couple offices and a couple of hundreds of activists grew physically in a party of over fifty local branches/offices and several thousand active members. Meanwhile, GD started offering foodstuff and clothing to poor Greeks (only), while the rest of the group's activities, including patrols in certain areas, beating up, stabbing and threatening migrants, breaking migrants' shops, etc. were also carried on. In the past when the leader of GD, Nicos Michaloliakos, was asked what are the financial sources of GD, he claimed that an anonymous member had somehow mysteriously won the money, offering it to the party (Psarras 2012).

But the rise to prominence of GD as a political force benefits the Greek government in a number of ways. This often happens in collaboration with other institutions. Two of the country's largest newspapers, on the very same day of September 2012, published two articles with very similar titles, making an almost identical argument, about the opportunity that GD provides the Greek state.<sup>7</sup> In sum, the articles suggest that the emergence of GD provides an



opportunity for the state to eliminate the “two extremes” of Greek politics. One might suggest that those which the pro-government media label “extremist” are any who criticize or oppose government policy. So naming GD an “extreme” is misleading, since government and GD share several objectives. Yet the rather simplistic “theory of the two extremes” enables authorities to target the radical Left and anti-authoritarian groups, which—among others—undertake anti-Nazi activity. In seamless response to the newspaper articles, the police launched a large-scale operation targeting such social movements across the country, an operation that opened up space both politically and physically for neo-Nazi groups like GD to prosper.

It is not a coincidence that all the three Athenian social centers evicted by the police in late 2012–early 2013 have been targeted physically and verbally by GD several times since the party appeared on the streets of the city in early 1990s. The Minister of Police Nicos Dendias in early 2013 made explicit remarks to suggest that from now on, police will focus their activities on political operations. So the government, in taking down key antifascist strongholds in the city—while chasing and detaining migrants—in a sense is directly adopting GD’s agenda, normalizing authoritarianism and legitimizing racist attacks in the city.

Within this climate of political tension, on Sunday, January 20, 2013, a bomb exploded in The Mall, one of the largest shopping centers in the county, while a few days earlier unknown persons had opened fire at the headquarter of “New Democracy,” the main party of the governmental coalition. The Mall, according to local residents who have campaigned against its construction for a number of years, is one of the largest pre-Olympic scandals. Its construction belied planning regulation, and while the legal case is still pending in the courts, The Mall has functioned for almost a decade now.

The government rushed to exploit the two hits and suggested publicly that the second largest parliamentary party (The Coalition of the Radical Left) due to their previous criticism of the mall’s construction, were indirectly linked to the attack. Similar claims were made in reference to the attacks on the New Democracy offices. Thus after migrants and anarchists the institutional Left has become the new “extreme” targeted by an increasingly authoritarian Greek ruling coalition.

Today the crisis has provided the state with the ideal opportunity to rid society of the right to industrial action, rights to public protest, rights to a decent income, and even the right to voice opposition to the government! Moreover, a coalition of state apparatuses and neo-Nazi street gangs routinely target migrant communities, antifascists, social centers, and the Left. However, at the same time, all this violence may also imply a political dead end of the regime, which due to austerity cannot provide anything else but state terror and violence in order to make itself present to the residents of the country.

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### Notes

1. A version of this text will be published in French in May 2013 in the book *En finir avec l'Europe*, edited by C. Durand (Paris: La Fabrique, 2013).
2. On December 6, 2009, the DELTA bikes ran through the crowd of demonstrators, dispersing them; during that police operation, many demonstrators were hit and ran over by DELTA bikes, among them demonstrator Angeliki Koutsoubou was ran over during that operation by a DELTA biker who then hit her, causing her brain damage. Koutsoubou's case was featured in Amnesty International's report on police brutality in Greece (Amnesty International 2012).
3. The inhabitants of Keratea town and the surrounding villages in the south of Athens revolted against the government's plans to construct a new landfill in their area. This was one of the first major acts of resistance against the government since the loan agreement with IMF/EU/ECB (May 2010), and so the authorities demonstrated a profound commitment to enforcing the governmental decision and the interests of the corporation contracted to construct the landfill. This led to a four-month-long conflict carried out on the highways, fields, and villages at the southern outskirts of Athens. This little civil war ended with the physical and political victory of the Keratea people, exposing the potentialities of long, persistent public violence against both police and the state. Keratea was an extraordinary case, not only because of its long duration and its intensity but mostly given the timing. It also was a valuable experience for the authorities, as police got the chance to inaugurate a new type of repression that would expand the limits of publicly performed violence. In fact, Keratea resembled a soft-core war where none of the two sides were ready to back down and the escalation from both sides reached unprecedented levels.
4. Two of the most notorious attacks of GD against Left activists were the attempted murder of the Left student Dimitris Kousouris on June 16, 1998 by the member of GD's Political Committee, Andritsopoulos, who was convicted many years later, and the stabbing of the Leftist student Paris Chrysos close to the GD offices. The list of attacks attributed to GD is endless; most Left organizations of the country have demanded for many decades now for the organization to be classified as illegal. GD in the past has changed its name in order to cope with the legal consequences of its members' acts (IOSPRESS 13/05/2006 [<http://www.iospress.gr/mikro2006/mikro20060513.htm>]; IOSPRESS 16/9/2006 [<http://www.iospress.gr/mikro2006/mikro20060916.htm>]). For a genealogy of the youth movements in Greece after the dictatorship and some of their antifascist actions see Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou (2011).
5. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/09/greek-antifascist-protesters-torture-police>.
6. Police officers on duty in Athens on the election days in May and June 2012 voted in specific electoral centers, so the calculation was apparent (see *Russia Today* 16/06/2012 [<http://rt.com/news/greek-police-vote-nazis-350>]; *To Vima* 11/05/2012 [at <http://www.tovima.gr/afteromata/elections2012/article/?aid=457088>]).
7. Pretenteris, G. “Golden opportunity” in *To Vima* September 16, 2012. <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=475049>; Kasimatis, S. “The opportunity of Golden Dawn for democracy” in *Kathimerini* September 16, 2012. [http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_columns\\_1\\_16/09/2012\\_495776](http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_columns_1_16/09/2012_495776).

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