INTRODUCTION

A Place That Does Not Exist

Exarcheia does not exist in history; on the map; in life.

—Leonidas Christakis[1]

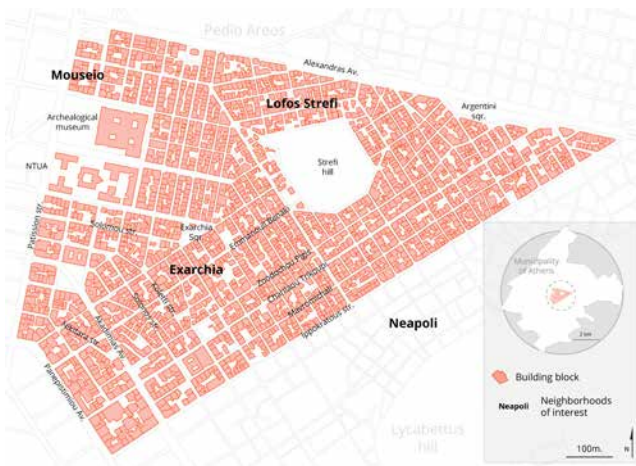
If you look up the word 'Exarcheia' on the Internet, you will be bombarded with endless information. You will come across documentaries, films, books and songs about it. You will read about it as Athens' 'self-governing community', 'Athens' neighbourhood that's gone from riots to art galleries'; you will read about Exarcheia as the bohemian district frequented by people from all walks of life: 'from punks, street musicians and extreme leftists, to students, writers and old couples'. You will find a guide on 'the best 30+ things to do in Exarcheia'; you will read about 'Exarcheia turning into a ghetto' and a 'den of criminals', and you will find out 'how Airbnb angered Greek anarchists'. You will read about squat evictions, anarchist-police clashes, crimes, arrests and the state 'attack on Exarcheia'. You will learn about its street art, alternative bookshops and solidarity initiatives; you will come across opinions about why Exarcheia is 'the most misunderstood neighbourhood in Athens'.

How do I, then, begin to write about a place that has already starred in myriad conversations, debates and texts and which has already preoccupied many before me? When I told friends and family in Athens that my research focus would be Exarcheia, one thing became apparent: everyone had an opinion about it. Reactions ranged from enthusiastic 'Wow, you are going to study Exarcheia, that is so cool!' to worrisome 'Be careful over there!' and finally to contemptuous 'Exarcheia? Really? Could you not have chosen any *other* neighbourhood?'

Months before my fieldwork officially commenced, conflicting narratives about Exarcheia had been already emerging as rumours akin to those whispered about a controversial guest at a dinner party prior to their arrival.

My mind was also preoccupied with my own opinions about Exarcheia, despite the fact that I was brought up in Cyprus and had never prior to my fieldwork set foot beyond Solonos St. – the street generally considered to be the border between Exarcheia and the district of Omonoia. My opinion about Exarcheia was not based on experiential knowledge but on a prior, experience-less kind of knowledge, what Hans Georg Gadamer (1975) calls a 'pre-understanding'(*Vorverständnis*): a kind of imagining which nonetheless carried in it particular social representations.As a teenager, this imagining and these prejudices about Exarcheia were mainly a reflection of my family's fears of what they had been referring to as *paliogeitoniá* (shabby-neighbourhood) of *alítes* and *prezákia* (punks and drug addicts). In conversations with friends, Exarcheia emerged as political metonymy for anti-authoritarian activism but also a metonym for 'chaos' and 'anomie'. In retrospect, I understood that 'anarchy', 'chaos' and 'anomie' were often synonymised and that ultimately my family's concerns reflected a wider societal perception of Exarcheia as a dangerous place: a perception that had been largely facilitated by decades-long, intense media coverage that was accentuated by the events of December 2008 and its aftermath.

I can clearly recall myself in Cyprus, at the age of fifteen, paying for the firsttime conscious attention to the name 'Exarcheia' during the days after the shooting and killing of Alexandros Grigoropoulos: a high school student, an age-mate of mine, who was shot dead by a police officer. The murder of Alexis (as he became known) by a policeman in the heart of the neighbourhood on 6 December 2008 triggered the most violent riots



Map 0.1. Zoomed in map of Exarcheia with main streets showing. © Athens Social Atlas, used with permission. Source: https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/property-transformations-in-exarcheia/ (last accessed 24 February 2021).

Athens had seen in recent years. Within hours, hundreds of young people hit the streets and soon the city was quite literally 'on fire'.

It was in the days and years that followed these events that, during my visits to Athens, I recall my family advising me not to hang out anywhere near Exarcheia in order to avoid getting caught up in the so-called anarchist-police clashes, which were a frequent occurrence at the time. Whether it was circumstantial or down to obeying my parents, I, in fact, entered Exarcheia for the very first time in my life in the summer of 2016 at the age of 23. I stepped into Exarcheia with a mixture of intriguing curiosity and surprise. I was a 'third-person character' (MacIsaac et al. 2009: 3) that, albeit 'native', still had to immerse herself into this new socio-cultural setting that felt familiar in its unfamiliarity and straightforward in its complexity (see Narayan 1993).

ON MAP

Exarcheia is dense and somewhat claustrophobic – characteristics that are symptomatic of its location in the heart of Athens. Look down on the grid (Map 0.1) and you will see a little, triangle-shaped area bordered by Patission Ave., Solonos St., Ippokratous St. and Alexandra's Ave. on the west, south, east and north respectively. Although this is what Google Maps says, on the ground, people tend to mark Exarcheia's borders differently. While the width of Patission and Alexandra's makes their role as boundaries indisputable, on the other end, Exarcheia's boundaries seem to be 'much more fluid, porous, open to dispute – and the occasional reinterpretation' (Vradis 2012: 165).

Exarcheia is about 900,000m^2 and covers only 0.21% of the total metropolitan area (Cappuccini 2017: 13). Despite its size, Exarcheia hosts today approximately 22,000 people. This means that every 1000m^2 accounts for 24.4 residents, ranking it as one of the most densely populated districts of Athens. Contrary to Greece's overall ageing population, the latest data obtained also indicates that Exarcheia's population remains young. According to the census, 45.3% of its population ranges between 15 and 44 years of age, of which the largest group is between 25 and 34, while only 21.6% of the residents are over 65 (ibid.: 13). Its notable age demographics can be attributed to its location between university campuses, due to which Exarcheia still remains home and a 'haunt' for many students.

Exarcheia was one of the first neighbourhoods to form in the space where the 'political haggling between the first illegal buildings and the official city plan' of Athens unfolded (Koutsoumpos 2019: 218) in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. When Greece was established as an independent

state in 1830, plans for the urban development of Athens were swiftly put forward and thousands of craftsmen and tradesmen from all over Greece arrived to work on the construction sites of the nascent capital. That first wave of urbanisation in the late nineteenth century was followed by a long period of 'non-planning' (Hastaoglou et al. 1987) and Exarcheia found itself amid the official and unofficial spatial reconfigurations of a fast-expanding city. In Exarcheia, just like the rest of Athens, the romanticism of the European architects of that time only went as far as the construction of a few impressive neoclassical buildings. The rest of the urban fabric of Exarcheia was made up of the spontaneous dwellings of the people who worked in the construction sites of those buildings, the area that is today known as Neapolis.[2]

IN HISTORY

The most commonly iterated story on how Exarcheia got its name is one regarding a merchant called Vasilios Exarchos. When he arrived in Athens from his hometown in North Epirus at the end of the nineteenth century, he set up a grocery store at the junction of Themistocleous and Solonos St. in an area then known as Pitharadika.[3] Exarchos' shop soon became famous for its cheap yet high-quality products – especially its olive oil – and Athenians from all parts of the capital would visit it for their daily and weekly food supplies. As the popular story goes, it wasn't long before the old name of the area was forgotten and people started referring to it as Exarcheia, after the successful merchant.

The founding of the National Technical University of Athens – colloquially known as the Polytechnic – and the University of Athens further enhanced the population rise of Exarcheia and its vicinity. Their presence transformed the neighbourhood into a student and intellectual haunt and destined it to become host to the first notable student protests in Athens, dubbed Skiadika.[4] At the same time, the establishment of Greece's first School of Fine Arts in the area turned Exarcheia into a meeting point and a home for a number of known and unknown artists, whose ateliers, workshops and exhibitions, along with the emerging bookstores, publishing houses and printing shops, gave the neighbourhood its bohemian character.

Despite its rapid increase in population, late nineteenth-century Athens resembled the disorderly, crowded metropolis that we know today. Photos from the late nineteenth century show that the areas beyond Strefi and Lycabettus, as well as those beyond the Polytechnic, remained uninhabited. The now busy Alexandra's Ave. used to be a ravine and Tzavella St. in Exarcheia marked at the time the border of the city (Nakos 2016). Soon,

however, incessant demographic and infrastructural changes would expand the limits of Athens and blur Exarcheia's boundaries and those of its nearby neighbourhoods of Neapoli and Kolonaki.[5]

The most significant alterations in the urban landscape of Athens took place in the early twentieth century when the Building Regulation of 1929 and the possibility of horizontal ownership saw the sudden and fast-paced construction of blocks of flats in the centre of the city (Marmaras 1989). In Exarcheia, the junction of Solomou, Metaxa, Trikoupi, Stournari and Themistocleous St., that today forms its 'triangular' square, was at the time surrounded by houses, which in subsequent decades were demolished and substituted with apartment blocks.

Today, the neighbourhood's built environment is a mixed and uneven landscape of old and older condominiums. Between them, there is the occasional melancholic sight of a neoclassical house, that once stood proud and magnificent, but which is now left abandoned with its wooden shutters peeling off and its interior caving in. Exarcheia's roads are narrow and lined with cars and motorbikes. Indeed, when you first walk into the neighbourhood, it might not strike you as distinctly different to other central Athenian districts. Except, as it has been rightly pointed out, Exarcheia is a place you 'cannot stray into accidentally' (Chatzidakis et al. 2012: 494). That is partly because you walk in it already looking for 'exceptionalities' and expecting it to be different. At the same time, if you look around you start to notice that in some ways it actually *is* different.

There are certain features and configurations in Exarcheia's materiality that you do not encounter in other parts of the city centre. Walls are covered in murals, posters, banners and graffiti bearing anarchist slogans denouncing capitalism, patriarchy, consumerism and state violence. With the exception of the sandwich shop Gregory's and the electronics' shop Plaisio on Stournari St. just off the square, you will not find any other chain stores in Exarcheia. You will not find boutiques or jewellery shops. If you need to withdraw cash, you will realise that there are no banks in the vicinity and the nearest ATM is about a ten-minute walk away on Panepistimiou St. in Omonoia. Bars and cafés around you bear names such as 'Molotof', 'Underground' and 'Decadence'. You might notice that for its small size Exarcheia hosts an impressive number of independent bookstores, publishing houses and printing shops. In other words, even without any prior knowledge, you might sense that Exarcheia is a 'loaded signifier' (Benson and Jackson 2012: 798), a legacy it owes to its rich and turbulent political history that can be traced as far back as the Second World War and the Greek Civil War. As we will see throughout this book, various historical events placed Exarcheia at the epicentre of the ideological tensions between various political groups and gradually established it as a hub of radical leftism.

IN LIFE

Today Exarcheia holds more than one reputation. For every article that condemns Exarcheia's ghettoisation, increased criminality, frequent riots, wretchedness and lack of security, an equal number of articles praise its ethos of autonomy, freedom, resistance and solidarity towards marginalised groups. An even larger number of online articles promote Exarcheia as a hip tourist destination with bohemian cafés, bars and restaurants, 'cool' street art and an 'authentic insight' into 'real Greece' – a promotion that signifies its ongoing gentrification and touristification.

Exarcheia's plural existence in popular imagination is rooted in its long and turbulent history. Conflict civil unrest and the socio-economic transitions in Greece throughout the twentieth century were mapped onto the neighbourhood, transforming it into a district that is quintessentially Athenian but concurrently 'exceptional' in the sense that is identified as a 'space of exception' (Vradis 2012).[6] Its exceptionality here does not pertain merely to the historical and political contingencies that rendered it Athens' radical political district par excellence. Exarcheia is treated as 'exceptional' in its emergence as the stage upon which the state performs itself as legitimate and successful. As I discuss, the state exceptionalises Exarcheia by constructing and maintaining its reputation as a 'problem area' and an off-limits topography of immorality (see Weszkalnys 2010). It does so by withdrawing itself from or using the neighbourhood as a zone of tolerance for the city's unwanted and dangerous citizens and non-citizens (cf. Panourgia 2009) and, at the same time, by launching zealous 'brooming' operations when election time approaches.

Exarcheia's 'exceptionality' in comparison to other Athenian districts is also anchored in its ability to place interlocutors in an antagonistic frame of mind and stir controversy, both in public and private forums of discussion. When I eventually started to present snapshots of my field research at conferences, added to the encouragement, enthusiasm and curiosity of fellow conferees about my topic were also instances when a (usually) Greek member of the audience would challenge me with remarks such as 'I think you're reproducing stereotypes about Exarcheia' and 'you should not romanticise the neighbourhood', or 'Exarcheia is not exceptional, people there just want to *live*'.

Such remarks used to puzzle me. Is the role of ethnography to challenge or refute stereotypes? If I indeed reproduce them, then is my study 'unoriginal'? At the beginning of my fieldwork, when I was thinking of ways to describe what my research is about, I always found it easier to explain what it is not about. Anxious to step away from clichés, I would defensively contend that my work is not an ethnography of anarchist and solidarity politics,

that it is not a study of Exarcheia's 'counterculture', its riots, its criminality and stigmatisation, or its commodification per se. Then as I began to write, I realise that this book is about all and none of these representations. I can finally confidently say that this book does not aim to 'go beyond' stereotypes in the sense of debunking them. As the reader will soon realise, this book is not an atonement of Exarcheia's representational exoticism. Instead, just like the people that helped bring it to life, it both negates and affirms Exarcheia's (non)existence as Athens' anarchist neighbourhood, heterotopia of resistance, intellectual hub, abandoned district, dangerous ghetto and gentrified middle-class utopia. Its pages will concurrently avert and place their focus on all of these 'trite' representations.

AFFECT AND AUTHENTICITY

More than stereotypes, Exarcheia's representations also reflect conflicting neighbourhood visions and constitute pieces of a fragmented and ever-incomplete reality. This study is ultimately a collection of 'partial truths' (Clifford 1986).

My interviews with people who frequented, lived or worked in Exarcheia often revealed utterly different neighbourhood experiences. 'This is the place where I can breathe!' exclaimed one informant, while another exasperatedly told me 'I feel I'm suffocating here!' Through these first interactions, a rather straightforward question arose: how can a place be both loved and despised with equal intensity?

I conceptualised these emotive intensities not simply as feelings or emotions but as 'affects'. My theoretical approach to understanding the connection between people and place draws and builds upon affect theory (Navaro-Yashin 2012; Brennan 2005; Bennett 2010). Affect is conceptualised as both human experience and as the energy or aura discharged by dwellings and environments that can be felt by individuals. In the course of my fieldwork, interpreting but also misinterpreting Exarcheia became a process of identifying and recording affectivities, which allowed me to look deeper into the relational connections between people and place and to transcend the one-sided and rigid associations that 'belonging to' and 'attachment to' imply.

Affect, as we will see, was located in words both spoken and written. Indeed, I spent a lot of time hearing about Exarcheia in long interviews and documentaries. I learned about its history and significance through people, books, articles, songs and poems that were in themselves loci for the (re)production of an Exarcheia-in-the-mind (cf. Benson and Jackson 2012). Similarly to the life histories of my interlocutors, the history of

Exarcheia was also studied through tangibilities and captured corporeally and intersubjectively (Husserl 1989; Duranti 2010) by the use of walking (Yi'En 2013; Wunderlich 2008). In addition to 'sedentary' interviews, walking with my interlocutors allowed for a better insight into the experience of the dailiness of urban life in Exarcheia. Walking ethnographies also enabled me to see and thus present in this book the macro- and micro-materialities of Exarcheia not simply as the background setting upon which 'real' events unfold but as true protagonists in themselves. Posters, murals, graffiti, banners, social centres, bookstores, resident initiatives, squats, Molotov cocktails, barricades, street names, hoods, gas masks, cracked pavements, broken streetlamps, memorials, absent buildings, defaced monuments all construct different and conflicting neighbourhood visions and authenticities. Authenticity's polysemic character (Theodossopoulos 2013) was reaffirmed in my fieldwork through an ethnographically-driven reconceptualisation of 'the authentic' as something more than an aesthetic quality or an individual attainment (see Handler 1986). As I demonstrate throughout my study, place authenticity and notions of the 'authentic self' were deeply intertwined and laden with political significations. More than a game of distinction, the quest for authenticity in Exarcheia emerged as a political tool with rich material expressions that this ethnographic study endeavours to present.

EXARCHEIOTS AND EXARCHEIANS

In my research I was interested in the affective relationships that emerge through the interaction of different individuals with and within Exarcheia. I did not engage primarily with one group of individuals bound together through adherence to a social movement or cause (cf. Apoifis 2017). My interlocutors were people from all walks of life and often did not have much in common. Ultimately, their single common denominator was Exarcheia – the place that had been for years and for different reasons the 'centre of their universe' (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 6). For this reason, creating intersubjective realities (see Husserl 1989; Duranti 2010) in my fieldwork was not – and could not have been – always about coming to a mutual understanding. Sometimes intersubjective realities were formed through mis-translations, productive misunderstandings and conflicting interpretations.

My interlocutors expressed conflicting feelings about Exarcheia and occasionally disregarded opposing views as 'wrong', 'ignorant' and 'naïve' or simply as 'partial truths' (Clifford 1986). As a result, I came to believe that a 'thick' account (Geertz 1973) of Exarcheia can only be achieved by accepting these different and conflicting interpretations that reflect the

multivalence of my interlocutors' experiences. Recognising the heterogeneity of Exarcheia required treating all my participants who lived, frequented or worked in Exarcheia as experts.

The different situated knowledges that will be accounted for in this book are the result of my interlocutors' respective 'embodied capital' (Bourdieu 1987), accumulated through their individual neighbourhood experiences, which, albeit diverse and divergent, all had one thing in common: they were voiced with unabashed confidence.

For analytical reasons and in an attempt to conceptualise my interlocutors' different and often conflicting realities, I formulated two etic participant categories: Exarcheiots and Exarcheians. The former is a demonym that I use to refer to the long-term residents of Exarcheia. Nevertheless, since residency in Exarcheia was not a stamp that guaranteed belonging to the local community, I also propose the category of Exarcheians – a demonym that relates to Exarcheia not as an administrative residential district but as an ideological, discursive space. The distinction I am making does not intend to imply the existence of two homogenised categories, where each holds a shared vision of Exarcheia. Exarcheians just like Exarcheiots were idiosyncratically different, polythetic individuals. I argue that what binds Exarcheians together is their elective relationship with the neighbourhood as a politico-historical *tópos*[7] and their self-identification through that relationship.

I see Exarcheians as the 'exogenous locals' (Bousiou 2008), true topophilics (Tuan 1990), whose subjectivity is defined by their attraction to and emotional investment in Exarcheia. Exarcheian is therefore an etic term that needs to be understood as a fluid and provisional category of identification with a place where subjects could express themselves.

THE 'EXCEPTIONAL', PERFORMATIVITY AND ARCHIVES

My opinionated interlocutors (in and out of Exarcheia), and the controversies surrounding Exarcheia, made me revisit my own understandings of what is ordinary and what is exceptional. I learned that just as the exceptional can eventually be neutralised, generalised or understated, the ordinary can also be exceptionalised, singularised and studied. I realised that mundane, everyday elements can reveal an exceptionality, which arises through their very repetitiveness. Ridding myself of the suspicions about the ordinary as something unworthy of academic attention (see Das 2007), I began, through my ethnographic engagements, to understand the way in which everyday social and material details are embedded in and constitute the 'eventful' in the lives of ordinary people. In Exarcheia, I came across a

complexity that would appear counterintuitive to those that think from the top-down, namely governments, institutions and the elite.

As my fieldwork progressed, I became interested in the banal, the repetitive and the inconspicuous elements of the urban environment that surrounded me. In Exarcheia the mundane consisted of moments of ordinary violence (Das 2007) embodied in weekly riots, as well as moments of political effervescence like protests and commemorative marches. As I demonstrate throughout this book, the interactions, micro-dynamics and micro-eruptions that take place during these seemingly mundane, uneventful moments of quotidian life can be as potent and telling as one of those big 'explosive' moments that 'make history'. I argue that repetitive street acts in Exarcheia acquire through their very reiteration a theatrical quality. This theatrical quality is either ridiculed in popular and media discourses or literally treated as a spectacle by an emergent wave of tourism fascinated with urban insurrection (Pettas et al. 2021). Yet to recall the words of Judith Butler, the 'apparent theatricality [in this case, of Exarcheia's street-acts] is produced to the extent that [their] historicity remains dissimulated (and conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of historicity)' (1993: xxi).

One of my aims in this book is to disclose the historicity of Exarcheia by 'descending into the ordinary' (Das 2007). In Exarcheia, history was 'made' and maintained through the everyday. Reiterations, or performatives (Austin 1975; Butler 1992), were discursive, corporeal and material, reproducing the past in the present and in multiple presents all at once, creating provisional spatiotemporal knots (Kirtsoglou 2021). While the moment widely accepted as 'eventful' tend to comprise part of the official historical narrative of the state, Exarcheia's political discourses and materialities incessantly and obsessively memorialise those other moments that the state chooses to understate, omit or erase. These are the moments and stories at the margins of official history: moments that constitute part of the peripheral narrative of the Greek Left, born out of persecution, resistance and marginalisation. They are stories muted, absented and left unsaid. My ethnographic walks captured those absences and silences but also those visibilities and voices in Exarcheia that reproduce and maintain this narrative as well as a largely univocal counterculture that exposes and decries our late, mutant capitalism.

The 'ethnographic place' (Pink 2009) of this study was obsessive and affective, but, above all, archival. Exarcheia's archival politics were articulated through the neighbourhood's ability to collect, retain, express, remind and preserve this particular historicity. Its spaces did not merely exude 'hazy and atmospheric' intensities (Guattari 1990) but articulated with haunting pertinacity very specific political demands, stories and reminiscences of marginalised others within and beyond Greece. My conceptualisation of

Exarcheia as an archival space thus incited another set of questions: how do urban spaces morph themselves into potent political topographies? How do they preserve history and memory and what is the significance of doing so?

By understanding the properties of the archive through the work of historians, philosophers and anthropologists (Steedman 2002; Derrida 1994; Stoler 2002; Trouillot 1995) and using it as a metaphor in my urban ethnographic study of Exarcheia, I located Exarcheia's idiosyncrasies as a space that had the ability to deliberately resist erasure and ruination (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Stoler 2008): a ruination that is both material, affective, historical and memorial, that is malleable and resilient and that takes the form of moral and material decadence, stigmatisation, beautification and commodification.

I argue that amid and against these processes Exarcheia remains an archival space and a 'lieu de memoire' (Nora 1989) that files in its (in)tangible world layers of history and memory. If Exarcheia was a person, it would be a hoarder with an incredible ability to collect and recollect. But then Exarcheia is also its people, and it is those people's attachment to and conservation of materialities and narratives that maintain the Exarcheia-as-archive.

(MIS)UNDERSTANDINGS AND (MIS)INTERPRETATIONS

'Exarcheia is all of the things and none of the things you'll hear', was Leonidas' opening statement during our walk.

'Meaning?', I asked eagerly.

He stopped and looked at me. Darting his eyes from side to side in a playful, conspiratorial manner, he whispered:

'I'm going to tell you something that might come as a shock to you: Exarcheia does not exist'.

Cryptic statements of this sort were typical with Leonidas and amusingly frustrating for my younger, impatient self during those early fieldwork days. When I asked him to explain, he did so, as usual, with a story:

> I once visited my village in south-western Greece. I was talking to one of the old men, telling him that I was there for the summer. He told me, 'You love this village don't you?' 'Of course I do', I responded, 'It is our village'. Then the old man said 'it is indeed, when we love it. But sometimes we hate it. Then it is not our village anymore'. This made me wonder what actually makes a place. Is it the landscape? Is it the people? If the landscape changes or if the people leave or die, does that place still feel like yours? It does not, does it? So it depends on how you look at it. If you see something that you like, that you admire, that attracts you –whether that's called anarchy, political movement or neighbourhood – if you see it, then it exists. If you do not see it or if you think its attributes are superficial, then maybe it does not exist.

At the time, preoccupied as I was with the idea of an ethnographically accurate representation of Exarcheia, I did not think much of Leonidas' story. It was only later that his words echoed meaningfully in my thoughts. 'What makes a place our own?' Although an overused and ordinary question, it can precipitate 'extraordinary' insights into the processes of place-making and belonging.

The story of Exarcheia is one such story of extraordinary ordinariness that this book will, throughout its pages, endeavour to recount. It is a story of place, of materialities and spaces that have been sculpted on Exarcheia literally and metaphorically through use, performance and memory. As the cliché goes, 'people make a place'; for this reason, this book is also inevitably a study of people and their stories (*istoríes*). Its pages wish to draw attention to individual characters, aspirations, memories, ideological views and preconceptions but above all sentiments. With 'affect', 'archive' and 'authenticity' as its main theoretical apparatuses, this book examines Exarcheia as a resilient affective ecology and an archival space whose historicity is composed of feelings, meanings and recollections diachronically circulating between the human and the nonhuman world.

At the same time, this is a story about a place that does not exist. It does not exist in the sense that each of its visions and reputations cancel each other out in an incessant process of self-negation. Its many over- and under-representations examined in this book will ultimately say everything and nothing about Exarcheia because there is no 'Exarcheia' and because, ultimately, Exarcheia exists in history, in life and even on the map, only in the way you imagine it to.

BOOK OUTLINE

In the following chapter, Chapter 1, I present and examine the 'mobile' narratives of three interlocutors, Vicky, Katerina and Leonidas. By 'walking' the reader around Exarcheia through the eyes of three different people, I aim to draw attention to the neighbourhood's remarkable and unremarkable histories and materialities. Walking as a discursive method, a corporeal and sensorial experience allowed me to map Exarcheia as an affective geography while introducing the reader to its potent archival properties.

In Chapter 2 I focus on one of Exarcheia's quintessential characteristics: its weekly so-called anarchist-police clashes (also known as '*báhala*'). The banality and destructive nature of these repetitive clashes incited feelings of frustration and disenchantment among many interlocutors who referred to them to highlight a sense of apoliticisation and consequently a loss of authenticity. On the other hand, with Exarcheia's historicity always

in mind, I came to reconceptualise the *báhala* as important performative articulations that despite their perceived banality constitute an element of Exarcheia's archival politics that upholds the legacy of the Greek Left and the partisan logic of the streets. The last sections of the chapter continue to examine notions of (in)authenticity and different points of contention within the anarchist and anti-authoritarian milieu.

In Chapter 3 I outline narratives of what is referred to as the 'moral wretchedness' of Exarcheia and provide a nuanced discussion on the impact of crime, fear and insecurity on residents and anarchists. I then draw attention to the neighbourhood's tangibilities of neglect as encountered by interlocutors through their lived experiences of the neighbourhood. I conceptualise those as the 'material wretchedness' of Exarcheia. I discuss the different uses of urban space and the conflicting neighbourhood visions that those denote. I posit that the state benefits from and contributes to Exarcheia's devaluation through a politics of neglect and I explore this argument further in Chapter 4 where I examine Exarcheia's role and emergence as a 'problem area', its stigmatisation and its relationship with the state. In my concluding sections, I discuss vernacular conceptualisations of the state and the role of the 'absent-present' state in the backdrop of an increasingly neoliberalised urban landscape.

NOTES

1. This is the title of a book written about Exarcheia and its people by Leonidas Christakis. Christakis was a Greek author, painter, actor and publisher from Thessaloniki who lived and worked in Exarcheia. He was a prominent and eccentric figure in the neighbourhood and well-remembered by some of my older interlocutors. For many years after the Greek Civil War, the state targeted him because of his leftist and anarchistic ideologies, as well as the themes of his work that were largely concerned with the urban marginals such as artists, poets, robbers, drug addicts and prostitutes. He died in Athens in 2009.
2. Literally, 'New Town'.
3. From Greek 'pithari', meaning 'pot'. The area was named after its many pottery workshops, for which the quarry on the rocky hill behind it provided the necessary raw materials. Later, the quarry became what is today the forested hill of Streffi.
4. In Greek: *Σκιαδικά*. In 1859, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandros Ragkavis, contended that Greek consumers should only purchase locally produced goods. As an example, he suggested that Greeks should wear straw hats (*skiádia*) made on the island of Sifnos, rather than imported ones from Europe. On 10 May 1859, university and high school students wearing locally made *skiádia* gathered at Pedion tou Areos to listen to the military band – an event attended by the royal couple. Hat importers from abroad who were affected by this initiative reacted by sending employees wearing either ragged hats – to ridicule the students – or

imported hats, which had become the symbols of royalism. The police attacked those wearing *skiadia* and made arrests. The Skiadika protests implicated Exarcheia in a political strife that marked Greek modernity, highlighting the tensions between the west, nationalism and royalism. For more on Skiadika, see Tarrou 1969; Dimitrakopoulos 1977; Dimaras 1977.

5. To this day, there is general indecision as to where the borders of Exarcheia end and where those of Neapoli and Kolonaki begin – an ambiguity that is reflected in property sales ads and business addresses in which the districts are often hyphenated as Neapoli-Exarcheia or Exarcheia-Kolonaki.
6. Vradis here is adopting and adapting the philosophical concept 'state of exception' originally coined by Carl Schmit (1998) and further expanded by Giorgio Agamben (2003).
7. Literally, 'place'.