I'll Always Remember the 6th of December

A Report from Athens, Greece on the Ten-Year Anniversary of the Murder of Alexis

CrimethInc.

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On December 6, 2008, in Athens, Greece, police murdered 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in the neighborhood of Exarchia. In response, anarchists, young people, and other rebels from targeted populations rose in revolt, organizing countrywide riots and occupations that lasted for weeks. Arguably, this was the first of the waves of rebellion that culminated with the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. This year, as they have for a decade, people observed the murder of Alexandros and the insurrection of 2008 with a day of demonstrations and direct action. This is a report from December 6, 2018 in Athens, including some of the solidarity actions that preceded it.

An Outside Perspective

I remember the 6th of December 2008. I remember some friends of mine quit their jobs and flew to Greece to participate in what we thought of as the first anarchist insurrection in our lifetimes. I remember the beautiful images of revolt in the streets of Athens and Thessaloniki, spreading across Greece and inspiring acts of solidarity around the world.

Here, in Athens, many locals are all too familiar with the phenomenon of foreigners coming here to riot. Such visitors are called anarcho-tourists; many of them come for the *bahala* [the riots] in the same way that other tourists come here for their summer vacations. It takes a great deal of time for an anarcho-tourist to warrant respect and trust among the locals.

While I admit to my status as an anarcho-tourist, I have built close relationships and shared unforgettable experiences in this country. I feel obliged to share some thoughts and to help paint a picture of this year's much-hyped ten-year anniversary of the 2008 insurrection.

For years, when I saw photographs of demonstrators clashing with police in Greece or Chile, it was easy to feel that my own efforts at resistance were insignificant. After spending time outside the United States, however, I have lost my illusions and gained some useful perspective. The tolerance that the Greek state is compelled to exercise towards such activities is the result of a long history of resistance. As things stand today, it is impossible to imagine such conditions existing in North America.

The history that gave the neighborhood of Exarchia its character has been bloody indeed. That goes double for the university asylum laws of Greece and Chile. Pinochet in Chile and the junta in Greece slaughtered anarchists, leftists, and radical students in considerable numbers. We have to understand how those tragedies contributed to the conditions in which political movements have been able to establish annual days of action such as December 6 in Greece or March 29, the Day of the Young Combatant in Chile.

Things are different in the United States. Greece experiences brutal police violence and repression, but the repressive apparatus of the United States is far more invasive, pervasive, and complex. The sentences are not the same. The surveillance before and after actions is not the same. Above all, the society itself is completely different. People have an entirely different relationship to the state and to conflict with it.

When we set out to learn from other struggles and draw inspiration from them, we have to bear the differences in mind. We should prioritize a revolutionary introspection that takes safety and risk into account. Courage and passion are indispensable, but if we don't account for context, we might sell our own struggles short.

Ten Years of Crisis

The Greek financial crisis began in 2008. It's probably what Greece is best known for these days besides its islands. Alexis's generation has suffered severe austerity measures and poverty. Unemployment is rampant, especially among young people. For a part time job in Greece, you might make 390 euros a month. The standard for decent survival is 600 euros a month. Beyond merely economic factors, many anarchists remain imprisoned who were radicalized from the events in 2008.

In May 2010, three workers were killed in the burning of a bank; the last major countrywide rioting took place in early 2012, before the left party Syriza came to power. Some say that since then, the anti-state and anti-capitalist movements of Greece have been experiencing a slump. Many are ambivalent about the tactic of rioting. Most are over the *bahala* (the riot for the sake of riot), including even the so-called insurrectionary anarchists of the movement. The reality of 2008 is that it was one of the most remarkable uprisings in contemporary anarchist history. Cities were burning, revolt had generalized, strikes were spreading, and people were ungovernable together in the street. Today, many people wonder how we started there and ended up here.

The Greek anarchist movement has fluctuated ever since it reemerged in the 1970s. It involves a tremendous number of people, especially in relation to the population of Greece as a whole, and has developed resources and infrastructure we couldn't imagine in North America. But with fluctuation there are up and down moments.

Many here have seen the years that Syriza has been in power as a stagnant, confusing, and futile time in the Greek anarchist movement. Yet there is no shortage of anarchists, autonomists, and other rebels. The anti-state movement in Greece is a recognized part of society; it is not even considered marginal or fringe. For this reason, as someone who is generally seen to be too old for the *bahala,* I can appreciate annual days of action like December 6—not necessarily as a means of accomplishing any immediate objective, but for the role they play in reproducing the movement and preserving certain social tensions.

Exarchia and *Bahala*

Exarchia has a reputation as an anarchist mecca, but it is no such thing, and this reputation is dangerous to everything that is beautiful about it. It is undergoing brutal gentrification as a consequence of Airbnb, the scourge of neighborhoods worldwide.

The trepidation with which police approach the neighborhood of Exarchia was earned through years of struggle and the extension of rebellious culture that erupted around the Polytechnic University as a result of the resistance to the military dictatorship. Yet in the absence of police—or, rather, as a result of police measures to concentrate dealers and junkies in rebellious neighborhoods and universities—opportunistic drug dealers have established themselves in Exarchia. They have used refugees—who are forced to sell drugs as a consequence of having no other options—in order to deter anarchist efforts to discourage dealing.

There are also undercover police everywhere. When you are standing in the center of Exarchia square, you can be sure that riot police are prepared within one kilometer of you to the north, south, east, or west.

Many people living in Exarchia are not anarchists. With the refugee crisis and the tolerance of the state due to the political calculations of Syriza, there are many squats in Exarchia; generally speaking, it is easier to defend them here than it is in other parts of the city. But they, too, are frequently evicted and, in some cases, demolished so they will not be reoccupied. Most young Greek people cannot afford the rent that it costs to live legally in Exarchia.

In short, it's a beautiful neighborhood, like nothing I've seen anywhere else in the world, but it's a huge neighborhood in a metropolis and there are plenty of locals who are not part of the movement and have little in common with the reputation many associate with Exarchia.

Finally, in looking at events in Exarchia, it's important to understand that in the movement here, there is understood to be a difference between a *bahala* and a riot. A *bahala,* literally translated, is a sort of mess or disaster. In the movement, *bahala* often refers to a worthless sort of riot, or more specifically, to the small groups of kids who come from the outskirts of Athens to throw Molotov cocktails at the police who stand guard around the borders of Exarchia. By contrast, the weeks of insurrection that followed the murder of Alexis ten years ago would be considered true riots.

December 6, 2018 in Exarchia

At this point, the actions every 6th of December serve as a reminder that not only is Alexis not forgotten, but that the generalized revolt that engulfed Greece in December 2008 lives on as well.

December 6 is a sort of traditional day of rioting. There is also November 17, which commemorates the day in 1973 when the military junta invaded the grounds of the Polytechnio (the architectural school) in Exarchia, killing at least 23 people who were occupying the grounds or otherwise resisting the dictatorship. More recently, there is also the anniversary of the killing of anti-fascist rapper Killah P (Pavlos Fyssas) in the Keratsini neighborhood of Athens on September 18, 2013. Both of those dates draw out considerable anarchist contingents and involve night-time *bahala,* but there is no other day like December 6 for the black flag anarchist. It is truly our day.

It's important that we show solidarity on December 6 because it is a celebration of anarchist insurrection. It is also an impressive demonstration of informal and borderless solidarity against the police. In some ways, it gets the extra push it needs each year from internationals; much as locals can be frustrated by anarcho-tourists, outsiders can be helpful when the Greek movement is at a lower ebb. It is also a beautiful display of contempt for the state on the part of both organized and non-organized anarchists, hooligans, students, immigrants, refugees, and teenagers. At its core, December 6 offers an opportunity to express and fortify the passions that give strength to the worldwide anarchist movement.

Usually on December 6, there are two demonstrations. In the morning, there is the student demonstration; it meets around the Propylaea, a university building located between Exarchia and Parliament. This year, the student march involved nearly a thousand people. After the police attacked the march, a conflict broke out involving some property destruction and people throwing Molotovs at police.

In the evening, from the same location, there is usually another demonstration that makes its way from the Propylaea to the memorial of Alexis near the heart of Exarchia. Ten meters in one direction from the memorial is a place that students hang out; ten meters in the other direction

is the club of AEK, a soccer team comprised primarily of anti-fascist soccer hooligans. While many who support AEK are not political, this particular club based in Exarchia is notoriously anti-fascist and opposed to police; they hung a banner in memory of Alexis this year.

This year, the demonstration was mostly peaceful. It consisted of around 2000 people, surrounded by an estimated 2500 police. It is still not clear how much of the demonstration was successfully able to reach the memorial.

Around the time that the nighttime actions begin, there are usually hundreds of black-clad folks wandering the streets of Exarchia, working together to erect barricades in anticipation of the return of the final night demonstration, so as to be prepared to fight the police as they enter the neighborhood. Imagine entering a city center and seeing hundreds upon hundreds of people dressed in black casually preparing to defend the area. How beautiful and exciting it is to walk through the neighborhood then! Breathing the pungent scent of petrol, hearing voices and languages from across the world and the constant clacking of hammers breaking up the sidewalk to make huge piles of projectiles with which to greet the riot police. There is no elaborate concrete objective, simply to erect huge barricades around the perimeter of the central square of Exarchia and keep the authorities away from every entrance for as long as possible.

As simple as this sounds, it is not simple to accomplish. The tear gas used in Greece is like nowhere else in the world except Palestine; it is asphyxiating tear gas that comes from Israel and the US. It is the most asphyxiating and debilitating tear gas you could imagine. You cannot participate in the festivities unless you have a gas mask; and unless you spend real money on your equipment, the gas can still inflict significant effects on you through even a decent mask.

This year, the barricades were sizeable and our numbers grew quite fast. As we waited, hoping for the demonstration to return, we had roughly four hours to prepare for the fight. When it seemed that the demonstration might not return, the *behalakis* (the children of the *bahala*) lost patience and sent an invitation of fire to the riot police.

Several hours of intense fighting ensued. A thousand or more people roamed the neighborhood hurling Molotovs, rocks, and everything else necessary to keep the police at bay. This involves considerable risk, giving a literal meaning to the term friendly fire. The police are equipped with gear that protects them from fire, but it is horrifying to see a human being beside you injured by flames. The police throw rocks no less than the demonstrators. If they catch you, they will beat you, especially if the situation makes it too difficult for them to arrest you.

This year, cops also brought in new equipment I've never seen before. There were rumors of plastic bullets and strange dispersal missiles like some kind of fireworks. Even though it's not the United States, and the police are less likely to shoot you, it's still terrifying and dangerous. It's an intense, chaotic battle that requires quick decision-making within mingling clouds of burning debris and unbearable tear gas.

The barricades lasted a couple of hours. Considering how aggressively the police attacked, this is remarkable. In light of all the measures taken by the state to contain it, it was a proper celebration of the anarchist spark that lit the prairie fire of 2008.

Consequences

Between the scuffles during the morning student demonstration and the nighttime fight in Exarchia, about 66 people were detained in Athens, with 13 receiving formal charges. The ar-

restees, some of whom are international, are facing charges of arson, possession of explosives, weapons possession, disturbing the peace, and resisting arrest.

People organize parties at universities and an array of local fundraising efforts in order to maintain a constant war chest to offer financial support to arrested anarchist fighters. One of the most trusted and consistent prisoner support projects here is called *Tameio*: fund for imprisoned and persecuted fighters. The literal translation of *Tameio* is cash register. This group maintains donation boxes at bars across Athens; it functions in a similar way to the Anarchist Black Cross elsewhere in the world

Beyond Exarchia

In Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece, a massive demonstration also took place, which also concluded in rioting. Two construction sites for new subway projects in the city were completely destroyed. People occupied the theological department at Aristotle university. Despite the asylum almost unconditionally observed by the state in Greece, which forbids police from entering universities, a request was made to evacuate the occupation. In retaliation for this threat, the occupiers almost completely destroyed the theological department's facilities. Scuffles with the police took place throughout the city streets. In the course of the day, approximately 52 people were detained in Thessaloniki, with 13 charged with offenses similar to those in Athens.

In both cities, people have reported large numbers of injuries. It's important to note that it is difficult to know the extent of injuries because not all of the participants are formally involved in the movement; some likely do not choose to use public forums related to the movement. Likewise, most people are hesitant to go to the hospital and formally request treatment for wounds inflicted by the police—especially on December 6—lest they face reprisals or be arrested inside of the hospitals.

In Athens, there is a volunteer medical crew called the Solidarity Health Workers. They have written a statement regarding injuries inflicted by the police:

> "Ten years after the murder of the 15-year-old anarchist student, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, things remain the same. The repression is an objective scale of application of the doctrine of order of submission and security that does not vary between left and right governance. Once again, we witnessed a lasting and merciless chemical war by the police forces… In addition to carrying out provocative attacks and using chemical projectiles, civil protection forces have prevented people from receiving medical assistance several times by refusing access to Exarchia Square, blocking members of Solidarity Health Workers in order to prevent them from witnessing the incredible barbarity.
>
> During the night, due to the extensive use of chemicals, there were dozens of cases of people with respiratory problems and a multitude of minor injuries, while, more severely, there were 16 cases of head and face injuries with hematomas, bruises and scratches on the scalp, all of which we treated directly and effectively. To convey the seriousness of the situation, it is worth mentioning the case of a young person with left foot trauma from a shot from a high-energy firearm that inflicted a large permanent cavity and extensive damage to the soft tissues. After we stabilized the

> wounded person's condition, an ambulance was called and the injured person was transported to a hospital. We want to draw attention once again to the fact that when the police aim directly at people, this not only poses the risk of severe injuries but can also cause death.
>
> The fact that people were not killed or more seriously injured by the number of direct shots the police took yesterday night is the result of good luck and not of police accountability."
>
> December 7, 2018 / Solidarity Health Workers

Actions also took place in small towns across the country. Student walkouts, occupations, and street battles erupted on much smaller levels outside the major cities. It's not easy to learn the details about subsequent injuries and arrests, but it's important to emphasize that the events were not confined to Athens and Thessaloniki. The name of Alexis is still known to youth throughout Greece.

It is worth noting some actions in addition to the demonstrations and *bahala.*

In the Elliniko suburb of Athens on the night of December 6, an anonymous crew of anarchists blockaded a central street. The windows and ATMs of three major banks were all destroyed, as was the office façade belonging to the right-wing mayor.

Some days prior, on the evening of December 2, a group of approximately twenty dressed in black attacked the headquarters of the MAT (the riot police force) in the Kesariani neighborhood of Athens. Cars and motorcycles belonging to the police were set ablaze as the guards were taken by surprise. Participants withdrew to the asylum of a nearby university, according to corporate media; unfortunately, the police claim to have arrested two. Corporate news sources claim that flyers were scattered at the scene of the attack claiming solidarity with Alexis on the 10-year anniversary of his murder. Here is an excerpt from the communiqué claiming the attack:

> "The 2008 Greek uprising was one of the strongest in the modern world. It has demonstrated the magnitude of the power and creativity that can arise against state mechanisms and how small and weak they looked like in those days. The murder of the anarchist student Grigoropoulos by the Greek police will always be a part of memory and will feed our actions. However, we want to note that this murder caused a rebellion from society and the political spectrum of the left—and because it was a 15-year-old white-Greek student (while attempting to silence his political identity). But we, from our own position, see the state murder various subjects on a daily basis, as well as seeing prisons and domination on the ground. That is why our struggles are violent and lasting. Our insurgency does not depend on social legitimacy. Society is an abstract concept that probably has more to do with what is visible and has the approval to exist. Our struggles are linked to our experiences. We do not struggle to save people, we fight to survive and give solidarity to them and those who resist in order to draw closer to more individuals and groups who want to join this honest anarchist struggle.
>
> Let's create a rebellious movement without frontiers, capable of spreading anarchist ideas and practices.

> Our attack is a contribution to the internationalist call and a fiery signal to the comrades and comrades from Chile for a black December. A message to the insurgents and insurgents around the world. In the battered memory of all the friends, companions of companions, and unknown murder victims and prisoners of the state."
>
> -Anarchists / Anarchists Against Oblivion

Two more actions in Athens that happened during the month preceding December 6 were finally claimed in solidarity online shortly before that day. In the gaudily wealthy neighborhood of Kolonaki, all the windows of a jewelry store were smashed in the night, leaving the goods on display for anyone walking by to take. People also attacked a bank in the Ilisia neighborhood of Athens. This is an excerpt from the communiqué:

> "During the early hours of Tuesday, November 6, we attacked by hit-and-run the Tahidromiko Tamieftirio of Eurobank, in Afxentiou street in Ilisia, destroying the cameras, breaking all of the windows and the ATM.
>
> Also, during the early hours of Sunday, November 11, we attacked by hit-and-run a jewelry shop in Kolonaki, at the corner of Skoufa and Massalias street, breaking the windows and the entrance to the store.
>
> All these gems and golden jewelry that were not meant for any of us were exposed to the night in the metropolitan center. They reminded us of the exposure we feel when we walk alone in the streets, they reminded us of the exposure that each one of us feels towards the social prescriptions and proscriptions. That is for all of you—fathers, bosses, pimps, Greeks, and those of your people. We collected our pains, our suppressions, our angers, our complaints, our sex drive, and here we are; we acted out. If only time were always as unimportant yet at the same time as extremely important as it was during the moment in which the windows of the bank were melodiously and chaotically broken. We synchronized the one for the other to steal back some seconds of life. Let's take back our joy—even for a little bit—for those hands that were vigorously laid on us, for those stares that still hunt us, for those university desks and the labor-hours that suck us dry, for the skirts that we would like to wear but never dared to, for our perverted thoughts, for our unfulfilled desires, for our unexpressed values.
>
> We live in the rat race, in the disgusting smell of the metropolitan gutter that sucks us in and throws us out as machines, as roles, as executions of those that were inflicted on us from the day we were born. And, according to ethical norms, we chose the total submission to the aggressive barking of those who dominate this world. With some exceptions, these are the choices of those faced with suppression, violence, and death. To reinforce the anti-authoritarian struggle, we would like to mention some who have fallen in the social war, to dedicate to them the lines above and the action. Not to honor them as holy totems, as untouchable memories, only as historical saints, but as living howlings of war, as those who overcame social and personal doubt, as points of rising and expansion of insurrectional consciousness, as the starting point of the creation and strengthening of relations, and also as the production of radical forms and content.

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Alexis Grigoropoulos, killed by a cop's bullet in Exarchia, on December 6, 2008.

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Sebastian Oversluij, killed by security guard's bullets during a robbery of a bank in Chile, on December 11, 2013.

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Zack Kostopoulos / Zackie Oh, lynched to death by a crowd of bosses, Greek property owners and cops, on September 21, 2018.

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Mikhail Zhlobitskiy, who ended his life in a bombing attack in the Secret Agencies of Russia (FSB), on October 31, 2018.

PS: Comrade Dimitris, have a nice journey. You will live forever in our struggles."

The comrade Dimitris referred to in this piece is a comrade who recently passed away while hanging a banner in solidarity with political prisoner Marios Seisidis.

Finally, two days before December 6, an anonymous group claimed responsibility for an attack on a MAT police checkpoint on the border of Exarchia. Here are two excerpts from their published communiqué:

> On the evening of December 4, we made our attack upon the police border control of Exarchia on Voulgaroktonou street. We arrived with sticks and bottles flaming, and when they saw us they immediately started to panic and run shouting for help. We struck fear into their hearts and sticks onto their heads, fire engulfed at least two policemen and at least one patrol car was burned. We hunted them and made sure it was a night to remember. We also stole some of their equipment (clubs, shields, helmets). When we left, the street had changed its character, transformed from a quiet suburban street with a police checkpoint to a battleground, a site of victory. They also bleed, and we can make them.
>
> We are everywhere there is a fight against authority, we are the seed in the burning forest. In our hearts are the insurrections that followed the revolt of Alexis, which spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East. These revolts were subdued by dictatorships, theocracy, and the military power of capital, but we still feel their pulse every time we take revolt into our hands.
>
> In our hearts are those who fight in the USA, revolting inside and outside of the mass prison system. In our hearts are those who combat the rise of fascism globally (US, Europe, Brazil, etc.). In our hearts are the migrants and those in solidarity who destroy these recent national lines which attempt to divide our struggle in Greece and everywhere. In our hearts are the anarchists fighting the state in Russia, including Mikhail Zhlobitsky, who bombed the FSB office in Archangelsk on October 31. In our hearts are those building and defending the free spaces in France. In our hearts is the Algerian woman murdered in Paris by a gas grenade. In our hearts are the indigenous struggles and assassinated comrades in Latin America.

Alexis lives in all these struggles, as long as we fight he will never die. We humbly add one more attack to the list.

Death to the bosses, death to the police, death to capital.

Anarchy lives."

-From some of those who participated in the attack

Further Reading

- The Exarcheia Commune Rises and Defends Itself, a Review of the Battle—A personal account of the events of December 6, 2016 in Athens recorded by Paul Z. Simons (RIP). Although it, too, is an account by a foreigner, and less informed than the above, it is valuable above all as a document illustrating the character and enthusiasm of Paul Simons, a longtime participant in the anarchist movement who passed away earlier this year.

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