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Review of 'Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis' by Costas Douzinas, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013

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Douzinias' book is that kind of work that can bring out manifold emotions. As it ventures between outright indictments of the late capitalist system in lieu of the 2008 global economic crisis to an identification of rays of optimism for a new way of doing things, these emotions appear to be very much conditioned by the time period that one reads this very engaging and insightful work. It's important to note that Douzinias moves from an exploration of the idea of 'Greece [becoming] the future of Europe', echoing that way the points raised in an article published in *The Guardian*, which was aptly titled: 'Is Greece the Eurozone's Canary in The Coalmine?'ⁱ, whereby a bleak future with a return to a Dickensian era with minimal employment rights is forecasted to a view that sees Greece as having a potential to become part of a 'future of Europe' that will 'join the age of resistance' (p. 7). This latter view is a development that Douzinias aspires to and that largely conditions the interpretation that he offers over certain events.

That becomes clear in his treatment of the 2011 indignant (Aganaktismenoi) mobilizations in central Athens (Syntagma Square) and the astounding electoral rise of the radical left party, Syriza. I'm expanding upon these later in the review. Meanwhile, it's important to point out that, in his admittance, Douzinias wrote the Greek edition of the book under review here, 'in outrage and despair' (p. 4), whilst in the English edition, written a year later (in 2012), there was still evident outrage 'but there is also hope' (ibid.). That hope has been encapsulated in what he wrote in the back cover of the Greek edition in relation to the Aganaktismenoi mobilizations: 'The meaning and limits of democracy are renegotiated in the place it was born' (p. 5). His friends told him at the time that he was 'excessively optimistic or, even worse, [that he] had lost touch with reality' (ibid.). Writing this review two years after the publication of the English edition, I will support that his friends were right. In his defence, he argues that the 'long absence from Greece and [his] academic interests and readings mean that the sociological and anthropological musings may not be fully informed' (p. 7). In the following paragraphs I am discussing points missed in his account by using some political sociology insights on the Greek case. Through that, I mainly wish that what I consider to be an excellent critical account of the challenges faced by the new international of hope that Douzinias wishes to assist would be complemented and perhaps form part of the discussion in a future edition of the book. He has done an outstanding work in structuring this book in a way that facilitates the smooth passage from one theme to another whilst simultaneously allowing the reader to select individual chapter and/or section without missing the essence of the overall argument.

Starting the review process, I believe that it's important to highlight the fact that Costas Douzinias is, as he reveals in the prologue of the book, a Greek expatriate who arrived in London in July 1974, right after the fall of the Greek dictatorship. His experience in his new home was generally positive with people generally expressing very positive views for Greece, be it because of their admiration for the legacy of the ancients or because they had a very enjoyable time in sunny Greece. He found that this attitude was completely reversed in 2010 when 'a different cold and hostile Britain emerged. Newspapers and broadcasts kept talking about the cheating corrupt lazy Greeks, a nation I [he] did not recognize. Every

aspect had failed, every Greek was immoral. The debt and deficit had metamorphosed a whole people overnight. For the first time, I felt a “racism-lite” affecting me. It was ideological not ethnic” (p. 2).

As a Greek expatriate, living in Northern Ireland, I also experienced similar hostile attitudes towards the Greeks around the same period. However, when confronted by these attitudes, I always adopted a posture that was effectively disarming them or reducing their impact. I presume that this very effective defence mechanism was to an extent armed by the different generational experience that I have as a Greek expatriate in the British Isles to that of Costas Douzinas. I was born in 1975, during the democratic transition period in Greece, when Costas Douzinas had completed his first year in the UK. As a boy I became aware of the electoral victory of PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) in the early 1980s and what the notion of *change/allaghi*/ that was employed by its charismatic leader, Andreas Papandreou, meant to many people, including my mother and many other women who realised their emancipation in the equality between the sexes message that was promoted in the discourse of *allaghi*. By 1985 it had become apparent that many of the promises of *allaghi* were just blatant populism and by 1989, the dirty/vromiko 1989 as it known in popular memory, the unblemished image of the party and its leader was tarnished by a range of economic scandals that led to legal proceedings against prominent PASOK cadres.

To cut a long story short, after an interlude taken by successive two-party, all-party coalition governments, and a government by the conservative opposition (New Democracy, ND), PASOK returned to power in 1993. During the ND administration, Greece experienced, for the first time after the democratic transition, intensive protest and school occupations by high school pupils. As Douzinas claims that the December 2008 riots or insurrection, as he prefers, were essential as a ‘propaedeutic for the resistances of 2010 and 2011’ (p. 143), I would say that the various expressions of school pupils’ contestation linked to the 2008 insurrection would not have happened without the precedent of the events linked the school pupils’ mobilizations of 1990/91.ⁱⁱ Similarly to the youth 2008, the youngsters of 1990/91 were also described as apolitical louts, “the coca cola generation”, and their experimentation with the horizontal organisation and decision-making was downplayed. Going back to the discussion of my defensive mechanism when confronted by hostile remarks, I’m continuing with my personal experience.

When I arrived in England for my university studies in 1994, I found that the dirty 1989 was still alive in the mind of at least my academic instructors in political science who were bringing in the occasional humorous comment about the state of the Greek economy and the contribution of the Greeks in the European family. 1989 had definitely made an impact that for the “Greeks are a nation of waiters and have nothing to do with the ancients” sectors was nothing but a ratification of their pre-established views and stereotypes for the Greeks and perhaps other southern Europeans. I guess that the events of 2010 brought again hostile comments from the same sectors who usually exhibit so much naivety and ignorance on the politico-economic operations of their own countries that it’s not really worth engaging with them. For those sectors though with a genuine interest to appraise the situation away from prevalent stereotypes, the aforementioned defence mechanism was using the precedent of

1989. My argument had as follows: If all these negatives (widespread corruption in the public sector, nepotism, clientelist relations, tax evasion) were known to me since I was 14 (in 1989), surely these must have also been known by, at least, the intelligence services of the UK. If they weren't, then I personally should have been really worried about the state of the intelligence that informs UK policy-makers. The answer is clear, of course they knew and so did the policy-makers of France, Germany and of any other country having trade agreements with Greece. These countries were happy to take advantage of these exotic peculiarities of the Greek social, which have been identified and discussed in numerous sociological and anthropological studies of Mediterranean societies (p. 58), to sell their produce, be it new technological implements to modernise public utilities, chemicals improving agricultural production or military equipment in what is one of the most heavily militarised places in Europe.

In addition, as successive governments since 1989 had proclaimed their intention to tackle the perennial Greek problems but continuously failed, it was only a natural progression for the average Greek to accept them as the norm and act accordingly. After all, this is the accepted behaviour of the rational decision maker in the market economy. The overall rational of the average Greek, voters of the two major parties that have alternated in government in Greece since the democratic transition, most likely had as follows: They (Europe) know what's going on, they are not saints anyway (see p. 59) and they are happy as long as we buy their products (see above), we know what's going on and we are not communists (whose ideology has failed) anyway. It was in this context where illegality had become the accepted norm and whoever was against it was simply an eccentric. Still, there was a minority, which was not willing to take this progression of events as a *fait accompli*, albeit not necessarily for the same reasons.

For instance, it may be the case that when the Aganaktismenoi crowd at the upper section of Syntagma Square were venting the indignation to the politicians that they elected to represent them in the Greek parliament by rhythmically shouting "thieves, thieves" or "burn, burn, brothel of a parliament burn" and gesturing with *moutzas*ⁱⁱⁱ towards the parliament, one would have thought that they were not targeting all MPs. After all the representatives of the Greek Communist Party/KKE and Syriza didn't have any central government positions to accrue any blame for issues linked to the cumbersome predicament of the country. These left political forces had been always campaigning against the negativities in the Greek social complex as seen, of course, by anti-capitalist lenses. For most of the democratic transition period they political forces with small electoral leverage with more than 80% of the Greek public, giving its support to PASOK and ND. For that reason, it's possible to assume that when the Aganaktismenoi were venturing their anger towards the 300 MPs had, in fact, had the representatives of the two dominant parties in mind. Nevertheless, that was never clarified and the devaluation of the democratic political system in its entirety was promoted instead. That was a development that suited very well some characters with shaved heads that were zieg heiling in every opportunity and most definitely had little respect for parliamentary democracy anyway. That group mingled with the great variety of people, ranging from the truly disaffected by a continuous wave of austerity cuts to many youngsters

who were joining in for the fun, which was assembling at the time upper section of Syntagma square and perhaps played a key role in initiating the most abusive shouting towards the parliament.

With Douzinas using the concept of *multitude* as a way of marking the spirit that the *stasis*, the term that he cleverly labels the Aganaktismenoi protest, at Syntagma will be remembered by, it immediately becomes apparent that he is influenced by what he witnessed at the lower part of Syntagma Square. That sector of *stasis* Syntagma was occupied by committed left activists who found an opportunity to experiment with the immediate democratic procedures that they envisage for the eutopia that they aspire to.

ⁱ Wachman, R. (2010) 'Is Greece the Eurozone's Canary in the Coalmine?' *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2010/may/01/greek-crisis-threatens-eurozone>, date accessed 15 May 2010

ⁱⁱ See Karamichas, J. (2009). 'The December 2008 Riots in Greece' *Social Movement Studies*, 8/3, pp. 289-293.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moutza is a traditional gesture of insult among Greeks.