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BORDERLAND

Greece and the EU's Southern Question

Reflecting on the art of war, the real motor of politics as defined in *The Prince*, Machiavelli noted that a landscape looks different when seen from the mountain, as opposed to the plain.[1] The same goes for relations between territorial political and economic configurations: the vantage point one adopts can offer a new perspective. That of one national formation in particular, Greece, may offer advantages for trying to grasp some of the larger tendencies bearing on the world we live in. Greece is certainly a small country; but, in virtue of its geopolitical, cultural and economic position, it is an outpost of Europe and thus also its border. To see it in this way is to understand it as a permanent point of delimitation and contact between 'Europe'—but also, and the distinction is significant, the European Union—and its outside: the Other against which Europe defines and constructs itself.

Greece stands at the intersection of at least three regions of broader significance: the Balkans, Southern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. All three share a common status of 'in-betweenness', sometimes considered as an advantage—as suggested by the metaphor of 'the bridge' or 'the crossroads'—but more often as a predicament.[2] European, but not quite Western; Christian, but neither Catholic nor Protestant; the alleged original site of European culture, but also, for many centuries, part of an Islamic multi-ethnic empire; peripheral and 'backward', but economically inextricable from the Western core of the continent; dependent and dominated, but never part of the modern colonized world—Greece appears as a true embodiment of those tensions. Exploding after decades

of seemingly successful European integration, the recent double 'crisis' of which it has been the epicentre—the debt crisis and the migrant crisis—confirmed its identity as Europe's 'Other within'.[3] Both marginal and central, its singularity thus revealed the cracks multiplying through the European edifice, as well as the latter's role in the increasing instability and disruption affecting the broader region.

It was thus not by chance that the 'refugee crisis' exploded with spectacular violence in Greece, bringing it to the centre of public attention throughout Europe. I put the term in inverted commas to emphasize that there is nothing neutral about its adoption. Why was it that the arrival of around a million 'refugees' or 'migrants'—again, the choice is significant—in a polity of 510 million, should have been, in and of itself, a 'crisis'? In reality, its representation as such, above all by the EU authorities and member states, powerfully seconded by media commentary, was fully a part of the problem. The spectacle of humanitarian disaster—images from the summer of 2015 of a child's body washed up on the beach, the mass arrivals on the Greek islands, the crowds at Budapest Station—briefly brought into the light of day a long-repressed reality. Its matrix lay in the lethal character of the liberal-capital 'Fortress Europe' regime which the EU has been building for decades, and its relation to the neighbouring zones of North Africa and the Middle East, where the EU powers have been major protagonists in the wave of wars and civil disruption that drove such numbers to flee.

But Greece also marks an internal border within the EU, a front line in the class struggle under way there, fought with special ferocity since the

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[1] An earlier version of this text was given as a contribution to the 4ème Rencontre d'Histoire Critique organized by the journal *Cahiers d'histoire*, Gennevilliers, November 2015. It was first published as 'La Grèce, la frontière, l'Europe', *Contretemps*, June 2017, and now appears in Marie-Claude L'Huillier and Anne Jollet, eds, *Nation(s)/Mondialisation(s)*, Paris 2018. I am grateful to Pascale Arnaud for the transcription of my talk, and to Marie-Claude L'Huillier whose friendly pressure brought the text into the light of day.

[2] As Maria Todorova puts it: 'What is symptomatic and, admittedly, disquieting is the perception that the state of transition, complexity, mixture, ambiguity is an abnormal condition. In-betweenness is rejected not only by Western observers and hurled on the Balkans as stigma, but is considered an intolerable state of existence by a majority among the observed': Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford 2009, p. 58.

[3] The term is Todorova's, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 188.

explosion of the financial crisis. For eight years now, Greece has served as the laboratory for particularly brutal austerity policies, whose application has been accompanied by an exceptional form of government through which the country is administered by its creditors—the EU and, in a second tier, the International Monetary Fund. Exceptional as such a regime may appear by the standards of a sovereign liberal-democratic state, it will be perfectly familiar to those who have experienced the structural-adjustment programmes imposed under IMF auspices in the post-Comecon countries or the global South. In Greece, these policies gave rise to a cycle of political and social resistance that extended over half a decade, ending with the capitulation of the Tsipras government, which naturalized the new model. At the same time, its experience has demonstrated that these EU borders, external and internal, are indissociable and may even, in certain conjunctures, act as one. Its position confers upon Greece a particular subaltern perspective, from which the European space appears riven by hierarchies and polarizations, by relations of domination that give rise to antagonisms which in turn require perpetual, unsustainable 'solutions' across many fronts. The vantage point of Greece may thus offer some insights into the contradictions between these fronts and the role that the national, European and international levels play within them.

Fortifications and 'openness'

European integration since the 1980s has led to the construction and expansion of a specific institutional entity, the EU, which confiscates the name of 'Europe' to conceal at the symbolic level the operation of exclusion that lies at its core. The extent to which this hybrid construct, partly inter-governmental, partly supra-national, is based upon sheer coercion is, for the most part, barely visible to the populations living 'inside' it. Relaxation of national border controls between core member states—initially just France, Germany and the Benelux countries—was agreed at Schengen, in Luxembourg, in 1985 and expanded to include a larger 'Schengen Area' in 1990. The customs posts between these historic antagonists now stood empty. Yet 1989 had also seen the arrival of a mass of refugees from Eastern Europe, as the Hungarian government dismantled its border fence with Austria and the Berlin Wall was toppled. The power to accept or reject external arrivals—immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers—remained with the nation states. Gathering at Dublin in June 1990, European Community leaders agreed to

French and British proposals that responsibility for processing asylum applications should rest with the state through which the refugee had first entered the 'European space', rather than the country where he or she hoped to live. The Dublin Convention, later toughened with surveillance and finger-printing systems, thus surrounded the free-travel Schengen Area with a vigilant ring of 'entry states'. The system was beefed up from the early 2000s by a rapid-reaction force of anti-immigration coastal patrols, operating under a new EU border-force agency, Frontex, its name a slangy abbreviation of the French *frontières extérieures*.

The upshot is far from the ideal of a smooth and homogeneous space, dedicated to the free movement of people—defined, by the 1957 Treaty of Rome, as one of the 'four freedoms' (of capital, goods, services and persons) integral to the very essence of 'European integration'. Even in the relatively uncontentious sense of legal and treaty agreements, we can distinguish at least four sub-spaces in geographic Europe. First there is the Schengen Area, which includes 22 of the EU's current 28 members; this is where the Treaty of Rome principle of 'free movement of persons' is most nearly realized, with a corresponding weakening of internal borders. Nevertheless, free-movement law only applies to EU nationals, not to migrant workers who are legal residents in one or other of the member states. It reinforces therefore the status differences between these two categories, since the latter (who constitute a significant fraction of the European working class) are excluded from a further set of rights enjoyed by EU nationals, those derived from the transferability of employment and residency rights.

Even among EU nationals, free-movement rules do not uniformly apply. Citizens of the Eastern European countries that joined the EU from 2004 onwards were subjected to derogatory rules, lasting up to seven years. The deportation from France of thousands of Roma people from Bulgaria and Romania under Sarkozy and Hollande revealed that this is still the case, even if the legal basis for it is shaky.[4] Moreover, the Schengen rules allow for the temporary re-establishment of internal border controls, a procedure than has been officially used by member states 92 times since

[4] See Stefanie Rieder, 'The EU and Its Internal Outsiders: The French Deportation of Roma in the Summer of 2010—An Infringement of the Lisbon Treaty?', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2012.

2006 for 'security reasons', most commonly in response to announcements of social protest.[5]

The relation of the Schengen Area to EU territory, and of both to the rest of Europe, produces a more complex picture. To start with the six countries that are part of the EU but not of Schengen: while some (Bulgaria, Romania) are *en route* to joining, the UK and Ireland have demonstrated that it is possible to be a part of the EU for nearly half a century without embracing the principle of free movement. Here then is a second sub-group, inside the EU but exempt from one of its fundamental rules. On the other hand, the Schengen Area extends beyond the EU's border to include Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, and small enclaves such as Monaco, San Marino or the Vatican. Interestingly, these are also the only non-EU countries to which EU free-movement rules apply. As a result, they constitute a third space, a sort of extension of the first, which, although outside the EU territory, properly speaking, is becoming more 'internal', and therefore closer to the first of these groups than the second. To put it differently, a non-EU citizen coming from Norway or Switzerland—whether a national of these countries or not—enjoys a greater freedom of movement within the EU than a Bulgarian or a Cypriot, both EU nationals. Clearly, the Northern periphery, together with Europe's Alpine strongbox, are treated as more 'European' than the Eastern or Southern Marches.

Finally, there are the European countries that are neither in the EU nor the Schengen area: five of the Balkan states and the western zones of the former Soviet Union, including Russia and Ukraine. For those coming from these countries, no freedom of movement principle applies. But this group is not at all homogeneous, even in its subjection to cross-border procedures such as entry visas or surveillance. These are a matter of permanent tension between the EU, certain member states and the countries in question. Far from unifying Europe, therefore, the constitution of the EU's internal space and border regime has led to its fragmentation, renewing patterns familiar from before the Cold War, if not World War One. The most notable of these is the division between a 'Western' Europe and 'the East', or those countries that once belonged to the Ottoman Empire or the Russian-speaking zone. It is not by chance

[5] The full list is available on the site of the Migration and Home Affairs section of the European Commission.

that the Balkans stand out so clearly in this cluster. In reality, the shared peculiarity of the countries in this region is that their nationals are excluded, partly or entirely, from the provisions for free movement of persons, whether they belong to the EU or not. The one exception is Greece, which continues to benefit from its ambiguous status as an outpost of the West during the Cold War—although this took the form of a burning 'hot' civil war on its territory.[6]

Things get more complicated, however, for the Schengen sub-group in its turn is internally divided and hierarchized by the Dublin Convention. As we've seen, this framework, cornerstone of a still-in-the-making Common European Asylum System, stipulates that refugees seeking asylum within the EU must submit their papers in the country through which they entered, and must remain there until their request has been examined. Failing this, the applicant is liable to be returned to that country, or 'Dublinized', so becoming an outcast shunted from one country to another, according to procedures essentially designed to forestall 'asylum shopping', as EU officials cynically term it—choosing the most lenient state in which to lodge their claim—let alone any appeal to the asylum rights guaranteed by the European Convention.[7] The explosive migratory pressures of the 2010s induced the EU powers to add a relocation mechanism, which was supposed to act as a safety valve for the Dublin system, as well as requiring frontline EU member states to expand their reception and detention systems. But the functioning of these processes was predictably uneven. The majority of asylum-seekers were denied access to the relocation procedure,

[6] Hence the question of the 'Balkan route', which was the way mainly taken by refugees and migrants during the 2015 'crisis', before its narrowing and final closure the next year, following the March 2016 deal between the EU and Turkey. Take the case of a refugee who enters the EU through Greece, then goes on to Macedonia, detouring through Bulgaria because of blockage at the Greek-Macedonian border crossing, continues through Serbia, Hungary and Austria, and thence finally arrives in Germany. This refugee would thus have covered nearly the entire 'Balkan route', passing through seven states and no fewer than five different border regimes, two of them strictly national and three specifically related to the sub-groups already listed here.

[7] Susan Fratzke, *Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System*, Migration Policy Institute, 2015. In the case of Greece, 'Dublinization' came to a near halt after 2011 rulings by the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice that reception and detention conditions here put asylum seekers at risk of inhumane and degrading treatment.

and only a fraction of those selected were actually transferred to other countries.[8] At the same time, reception and detention capacities have massively increased. The aim, as one observer commented, was apparently to turn the reception systems of frontline member states into 'a border-control device'—'those entering EU territory are caught in a social sorting apparatus that, while allowing limited possibilities of movement to some, traps others in an archipelago of detention and reception facilities at Europe's territorial edges.'[9] Under the guidance of the EU, the countries of the European South—Greece, Italy and, to a lesser extent, Spain—the EU's 'natural' ports of entry, were turned into so many holding pens, charged with filtering 'migratory flows' for the benefit of the richer and more powerful countries of Europe's west and north.

Mobile borders

The metaphor of Fortress Europe thus represents a highly sophisticated construction—far more so than the fortified continent of World War Two. Its lines of fortification are mobile and teem with electronic surveillance devices, reinforcing an arsenal of repression centred round the weapons of bureaucracy and fear. Its walls are semi-permeable, designed not simply to exclude but to filter entrance in a highly restrictive way, constantly fabricating and modifying systems of hierarchical categorization, of which the distinction between 'refugees'—acceptable, but only in limited numbers—and 'economic migrants', illegitimate and thus illegalized, is only one example. It operates by establishing compacts with other states or agencies, outsourcing functions of coercion, detention, surveillance and control. By these means, a good number of the non-member states along the Mediterranean littoral and

[8] The scheme decided by the European Council in July and September 2015 initially set a target for relocating 160,000 asylum seekers as an emergency measure to alleviate pressure on Italy and Greece; this was swiftly revised down to 100,000 when EU officials found that fewer than expected met the 'eligibility' criteria. Of the 66,400 asylum seekers to be relocated from Greece, 21,731 had been transferred as of 28 January 2018. Only 11,464 out of the 39,600 to be relocated from Italy had been transferred by the end of 2017. Data from Asylum Information Database, available at asylumineurope.org.

[9] Giuseppe Campesi, 'Seeking Asylum in Times of Crisis: Reception, Confinement and Detention at Europe's Southern Border', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, March 2018, p. 69.

beyond have been transformed into buffer zones and thus annexed as an outer ring of the EU's border defences.[10] The most important of these external gatekeepers, however, are Turkey and Libya, which stand at the head of the two main routes of informal migration to the EU: that from Africa, which is mainly funnelled through Libya and across the central Mediterranean to Italy; and that from Asia and the Middle East via Turkey to the Balkans or the easternmost islands of Greece. Yet the farthest outposts of Fortress Europe now extend from the Arctic to central Africa, from the Atlantic to the Euphrates. In 2016, the Council of Ministers decided to cast the net as far as Pakistan and Bangladesh, so as to facilitate 'readmissions'—that is, the forced return of migrants and asylum-seekers.[11]

The EU 'border' is thus far more complex than a simple line of separation between sovereign territorial powers. It involves hybrid and unequal power relations, asymmetrical obligations, overlapping regimes whose boundaries do not coincide.[12] As a first approximation, we may say that relaxation of internal control over the national borders of the member states has been matched by external reinforcement of the EU's perimeter. But that needs to be further qualified, for the meanings of 'internal' and 'external' have been turned upside down, in a dual process. If security forces and prison guards in Turkey, Libya, Mali and Sudan find themselves integrated into the EU's border regime, there has also been a multiplication of 'deterritorialized' zones deep in the interior of the Union, where the rights guaranteed by the international conventions to which EU states subscribe no longer apply: detention centres close to airports and other points of passage; 'temporary' camps, where conditions recall those in a war zone. Geographers conducting research on this extensive network of detention sites describe an 'enforcement archipelago' in which asylum-seekers and migrants are subjected to 'sub-national jurisdiction and biopolitical surveillance.'[13]

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[10] On the agreements between the EU and various countries in Africa, see the report by the Italian NGO ARCI, 'Steps in the externalization of the process of border controls to Africa, from the Valletta Summit to today', available on integrationarci.it.

[11] Cf. Carine Fouteau, 'Le plan européen pour éloigner les demandeurs d'asile', *Mediapart*, 28 July 2016.

[12] Projet Babels, *De Lesbos à Calais: Comment l'Europe fabrique des camps*, Neuvy-en-Champagne 2017, p. 15. Babels is a research collective at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

[13] Alison Mountz, 'The Enforcement Archipelago: Detention, Haunting and Asylum on Islands', *Political Geography*, vol. 30, no. 3, March 2011, pp. 118–28.

This process of the displacement of the EU border goes unnoticed most of the time, a measure of its success in keeping the migration issue out of sight of European publics. The occasional scandalous revelation—for example, video footage shown on CNN in November 2017 of a 'slave auction' of migrants trapped in Libya—is quickly forgotten. But such glimpses see only the tip of the iceberg of an entire system of detention and abuse, cynically perpetuated—indeed, largely funded—by the EU. Led by Berlusconi, European leaders struck a deal with the Gaddafi regime in 2008 to 'combat' immigration, setting up a network of detention centres in abandoned factories and warehouses across the country, and allowing Italy to 'return' migrants to Libyan soil. After NATO's overthrow of Gaddafi in 2011, the EU helped coordinate the consolidation of these detention centres into a Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM) under the nominal control of the Ministry of the Interior, but in fact commanded by competing local militias. Amnesty International would issue a devastating report of conditions inside these centres, where officials regularly beat and tortured captive migrants to extort ransoms from their families, securing release from arbitrary, indefinite detention.[14] Funding for the 'authorities' managing the DCIM centres, as well as generous support for the Libyan Coast Guard's efforts to ram or scare off migrants' boats and deals with the warlords presiding over Libya's southern borders, were agreed at the EU's Valletta Summit on Migration in 2015, which aimed at preventing refugees and migrants crossing the central Mediterranean and arriving in Europe at any cost.[15]

Wars and walls

The conjuncture of 2015 was an effect of a far bigger regional crisis, for which the European powers share a crushing weight of responsibility,

[14] Amnesty's report stresses that Italy and other European governments and institutions chose to 'co-operate and provide assistance to Libyan authorities, not only by tolerating violations and abuses but—with regard to specific co-operation measures aimed at interceptions at sea—also by *proactively contributing* to violations and abuses, in particular by providing funds, training, equipment and other forms of assistance to enhance the capacity of Libyan security agencies to intercept and detain refugees and migrants, which has led to the arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of women, men and children': Amnesty International, *Libya's Dark Web of Collusion: Abuses against Europe-bound Refugees and Migrants*, London 2017, p. 59 [emphasis added].

[15] The Valletta Summit also earmarked $2bn in 'development funds' for Africa to be spent on border guards and detention centres in Sudan, Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali and Senegal.

for Europe is not external to the devastation of the greater Middle East. There is no need to go back over the history of colonial depredation and imperialist warfare conducted by the major European states; of London and Paris partitioning the region under their self-appointed mandates or their support for successive dictatorial regimes. In the past two decades, in various official guises, they have been party to wars and other military interventions leading to the disintegration of the Iraqi state, the break-up of Syria and implosion in Libya. The exodus of populations, of whom only a small fraction try to come to Europe, is the direct consequence of this process of state destruction, the characteristic outcome of the forms of intervention currently preferred by the imperialist powers, as strikingly different from colonial-territorial conquest as from the strategies of Cold War reconstruction pursued after 1945. The spring and summer of 2015 saw a confluence of flight paths from NATO's war zones. In Afghanistan, the drawdown of Western forces in 2014 caused further disruptions in a social landscape already turned upside down by large-scale displacements and forced recruitment to militias. In Iraq, where millions had been displaced since 2003, the US resumed bombing after the fall of Anbar Province and Mosul to ISIS in the summer of 2014. Above all, refugees fled from Syria, where multi-sided warfare—the ferocious and indiscriminate response of the regime in crushing the initial popular revolt, external flows of arms, funds and training for anti-Assad forces and the mobilization of countless local militias on clan or communal bases—had spread to densely populated urban areas. In late 2014 and early 2015 there was heavy fighting around Aleppo, where Islamist forces backed by Turkey and the West had rejected a UN ceasefire and gone onto the offensive. ISIS had swept the desert east in the first half of 2014 and NATO states—France, Germany, the UK—joined the US-led Operation Inherent Resolve that September, while Syrian Kurds were mobilized to provide US ground troops. Of those fleeing to safety in 2015, Syrians constituted around 65 per cent, the overwhelming majority.

Here is the first paradox. The 'refugee crisis' was represented by EU political leaders and media as on such a scale that it posed an existential threat to Europe. Let us look at some facts. Around one million people entered the EU in the course of 2015, four-fifths of them through Greece. The figure represents only a tiny fraction of the 50 million uprooted by the Middle East crisis in these past years.[16] For comparison,

[16] Figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Cf. Babels, *De Lesbos à Calais*, p. 8.

Lebanon, a country with fewer than 5 million inhabitants, received close to 1 million Syrians, while nearly three million have found sanctuary in Turkey. When we speak of migratory flows, we should also give the figures for 'regular' internal movements, such as for work or study, which account for up to 3.8 million individuals; or for the seasonal population movement, more massive, albeit in a different sense, that is tourism.[17] Greece congratulates itself on an exceptional year for tourism, with 25 million visitors entering the country without causing any particular crisis; quite the contrary, their arrival constitutes an essential sector of the economy. Of course, refugees and migrants don't come for tourism; they want to escape persecution and deprivation or to make a better life and help those left behind. Nevertheless, we may ask why an influx of 1 million people trying to establish themselves in a population of 510 million should supposedly trigger such a crisis.

The reality is that there was no 'refugee crisis', but rather one of the repressive apparatus of Fortress Europe. It is this regime that, faced with a crisis such as that of the Greater Middle East, combined with the long-term consequences of neoliberal policies, climate change and chronic instability in large areas of Africa and Asia, produces the 'refugee crisis' for public opinion, creating the discourse that justifies the policy supposed to resolve it. What the term 'refugee crisis' transcodes, Nicholas De Genova has argued, is 'a permanent epistemic instability within the government of transnational human migration, which itself relies upon the exercise of power over the classifying, naming and partitioning of "migrants"/"refugees".'[18] Greece's role in this new phase of Fortress Europe has been twofold. On the one hand, the country acts as the gendarme—or better, the warder—of Europe's huge south-eastern flank whose border-post it is. This is nothing new. A key move was the erection of a barbed-wire fence, bristling with electronic surveillance equipment, at the River Evros, the only land border with Turkey, which, after a partial mine clearance, had allowed for safer passage into Greece.[19]

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[17] Babels, *De Lesbos à Calais*, p. 8.

[18] Nicholas De Genova, 'The "Crisis" of the European Border Regime: Towards a Marxist Theory of Borders', *International Socialism Journal*, no. 150, 2016.

[19] The barbed wire in question was developed in the FRG in the 1970s to secure NATO military installations; its special blades are deadly to anyone caught up in them. German courts have forbidden the wire's sale to private buyers, and the company that makes it refused to sell it to the Hungarian government, which also had in mind a barrier against migrants. See Georgios Tsiakalos, 'The Evros Barrier and the Deaths in the Aegean', *Efimerida Syntakton*, 6 November 2015.

This was an initiative of the 'socialist' government in 2011, and work was begun the next year under the three-party coalition led by the right and headed by Antonis Samaras. The Syriza administration made no move to dismantle this shameful construction; the party's policy was in this respect vague from the beginning, for all the talk of welcoming refugees and migrants—promises that soon went the way of the rest of the programme.[20] The drama enacted in the Aegean over the past few years was the direct result of the fact that, after the erection of that fence, the sea route, with its rackets and drownings, replaced a land route that was infinitely less dangerous but no longer available. As gate-keepers for Europe's border regime, successive Greek governments bear a heavy responsibility for what has ensued.

The second aspect of Greece's role for Fortress Europe is codified in the EU–Turkey agreement concluded in March 2016. Let us recall the sequence leading up to it. Beginning in autumn 2015, the countries on the 'Balkan route' one after another closed their borders. They did so under pressure from the Visegrad group—Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic—in close liaison with Austria and elements of the German government at odds with Merkel's abruptly declared open-door policy.[21] After the shipwreck of any thought of welcoming the refugees, Greece effectively ceased to be a transit zone, becoming instead an open-air detention camp. Tens of thousands of people found themselves stuck there from one day to the next, trapped in intolerable conditions, especially in the northern areas and on the islands nearest to Turkey. The March 2016 deal with Erdoğan definitively sealed the Balkan route.[22] Virtually every provision of this agreement, which was

[20] For a detailed balance-sheet, see the interview with Mania Barsefski and Thanassis Kourkoulas, 'Europe's Border Guards', *Jacobin,* May 2016.

[21] Germany restricted its border with Austria within a fortnight of Merkel's announcement that the country would 'show a friendly face' and allow all the refugees into Germany. See 'Mother Angela: Merkel's Refugee Policy Divides Europe', *Der Spiegel*, 21 September 2015. By January 2016, Merkel was warning Syrian refugees that their protection under the Geneva Convention only lasted three years, after which they would be expected to return to their homeland: Wolfgang Streeck, 'Scenario for a Wonderful Tomorrow: Merkel Changes Her Mind Again', *London Review of Books*, 31 March 2016.

[22] See the damning report from Amnesty International, *A Blueprint for Despair: Human Rights Impact of the EU–Turkey Deal*, London 2017; and that from the French immigrant-support group GISTI, *Accord UE–Turquie, la grande imposture: Rapport de mission dans les* hotspots *grecs de Chios et Lesbos*, Paris 2016.

greeted with relief by Tsipras and his government, constitutes a violation of the right to asylum as defined in the international conventions. Turkey agreed it would prevent 'irregular' crossings from its coast, in return for an EU promise to lift visa restrictions on Turkish nationals and open a new round of accession negotiations, along with €3bn to assist the settlement of refugees on Turkish soil. Those who managed in spite of that to reach the Greek islands would be exposed to the risk of being sent back to Turkey.

Among the most cynical provisions of the EU–Turkey deal is the rule of 'one for one' in the handling of Syrian refugees, whereby numbers admitted to the EU must be matched by an equal number of returns to Turkey, to a maximum of 72,000 persons. The agreement also marked a dramatic degradation of conditions for those trapped in Greece: the reception centres, especially those on the islands, were transformed into closed detention spaces, with thousands of Frontex employees hurried into place to reinforce Greek staff numbers and intensify the militarization of the border. As Amnesty reported, after March 2016 the Tsipras government began rejecting asylum applications at first instance, without assessment of their merits, under a fast-track procedure which assumed that Turkey was a safe country for asylum-seekers and refugees.[23] Appeals have stymied a mass return of unsuccessful asylum-seekers, but this strategy was undermined when the Greek Council of State ruled in September 2017 that Turkey was a 'safe third country', thus paving the way for the forcible return of asylum-applicants.[24] As a consequence of the EU–Turkey deal, 1,554 migrants and refugees had been sent back to Turkey as of February 2018, despite nearly non-existent access to asylum for those readmitted and a risk of further deportation to their country of origin, where they may be under threat of persecution.[25] The tightening of the legal framework has been complemented by 'pushing back' migrants and refugees on the sea and land border between Greece and Turkey, an illegal yet systematic practice of the Greek police and coastguard as reported widely by Greek and Turkish media, and confirmed by the Greek Council for Refugees in a

[23] Amnesty International, *A Blueprint for Despair*, p. 6.

[24] Amnesty International, 'Greece: Court decisions pave way for first forcible returns of asylum-seekers under EU–Turkey deal', 22 September 2017.

[25] Orçun Ulusoy, andHemme Battjes, 'Situation of Readmitted Migrants and Refugees from Greece to Turkey under the EU–Turkey Statement', Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, *Migration Law Series*, no. 15, 2017.

recent report.[26] In this case as in all the others, the capitulation of the Syriza government has been plain to see.

Living conditions remain intolerable, demonstrating the bankruptcy of the policy pursued by the EU and the Greek authorities, which consists in sub-contracting to NGOs—those favoured for their 'cooperative' attitude, that is—the functions that the enfeebled Greek state is no longer able to support. The situation in the islands, particularly in the Moria camp in Lesbos, widely known as an 'open-air prison', deteriorated to such an extent that some of the NGOs left as an expression of protest, leading to a further reduction in the provision of basic services and to violent explosions by the detained migrants and refugees.[27] With the transformation of the reception and registration 'hotspots' into places of confinement, Greece has become, like Italy, 'a field of experimentation for European policies aimed at locking the borders and deterring migration'.[28] The EU–Turkish accord is not a mistake, a departure from so-called 'European values', which have long since been swallowed up in the waters of the Mediterranean along with the tens of thousands of human beings who have perished there. It is wholly in keeping with the logic that has presided over European integration from the beginning, making the EU's external border the dividing line between the fully human, white and European, and the sub-humans destined for a 'precarious life' and an anonymous death, to which the waters of Lampedusa and Lesbos bear everlasting witness.

Live or let die

The Mediterranean has become the most lethal of the EU's external borders. Its waters are the site of interlacing sovereign powers—those of the littoral states, but also those now superimposed on them in the form of the EU and its agencies, and notably those specifically charged with border control, whose operations transform the modalities of state action on which they rely.[29] These powers manifest themselves as those

[26] Greek Council for Refugees, 'Reports and testimony of systematic pushbacks in Evros', February 2018.
[27] Helena Smith, '"Welcome to prison": Winter hits in one of Greece's worst refugee camps', *Guardian*, 22 December 2017.
[28] Babels, *De Lesbos à Calais*, p. 46.
[29] Babels, *La mort aux frontières de l'Europe: Retrouver, identifier, commémorer*, Neuvy-en-Champagne 2017, as well as Carine Fouteau's remarkable dossier on the *Mediapart* website, 'La Méditerranée, cimetière migratoire'.

of life and death; the power to make live or let die, to quote Foucault's famous definition of biopower. In other words, the objective pursued via control mechanisms of this kind is not to demonstrate some ideal impenetrability of the border, or to make crossings impossible, knowing perfectly well that they will happen anyway. It is to decide whether and by what margin this rather than that route will be taken, with this or that mortality rate depending on the choice; whether and on what condition one 'saves' (or permits saving); whether a rescue or a humane welcome is too encouraging, or not off-putting enough—like the in-draught of a fire—so that the management of the flow, including the implied decisions to let live or let drown, is judged acceptable.

Some data: in 2015, when the 'refugee crisis' reached its peak, an estimated 3,800 died in the Mediterranean, an increase of more than 15 per cent on the previous year, when the total reached 3,300.[30] In 2016, a year in which the number of arrivals fell dramatically to 363,000, following the accord between the EU and Turkey, the number of dead rose considerably, exceeding 5,000 for the first time—an increase of 35 per cent. That accord bears the responsibility for this terrifying outcome, for its effect was to displace the probable routes of passage from the east to the central Mediterranean, towards Italy, and a journey far more hazardous than the crossing from the Turkish coast to the Greek islands. As for 2017, the figures show 3,139 deaths for 171,000 arrivals; and for the first four months of 2018, 606 deaths and 21,591 arrivals. In other words, while the monthly death rate fell, that per arrival keeps rising, doubling since 2016.

Let us pursue this macabre accounting further. Since 2014, no fewer than 15,900 persons are reckoned to have died crossing the Mediterranean: an average of 306 a month. But what are the figures for earlier periods? Consulting sources generally considered as authoritative in the matter—NGOs or observers such as United for Intercultural Action or the International Organization for Migration—we find the following: between 1993 and 2012, according to the first, the dead numbered 17,300. Measuring from 1988 to 2014, the second gives a total of 19,800 drownings, of which 14,800 occurred in the

[30] These figures and those following are from the International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrants Project, as well as 'Migrant Deaths and Disappearances Worldwide: 2016 Analysis', IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre Data Briefing Series, no. 8, March 2017.

Mediterranean.[31] The Migrant Files project gives significantly higher figures, putting the death toll at 30,000 between 2000 and June 2016, while many migrant-aid organizations think it may be necessary to double or even triple the figures in order to count those who have vanished leaving no trace. And we should not forget the crossing of the Sahara, which for a large proportion of migrants is the preliminary to their Mediterranean journey, and even more dangerous. The conclusion is surely evident. The Mediterranean has become a mass grave, one attracting little attention or particular feeling, at least until the surge of refugees and migrants in these last years, following the intensification of warfare in the Middle East. It's understandable that the Babels team should see the Mediterranean as 'the theatre of a new kind of war, the one the European Union is waging against migrants'.[32]

The evidence of change over time is instructive. Two figures stand out: first, the relatively low level of migrant deaths pre-1990, rising only a little up till 1995, when the Schengen arrangements were fully implemented. As researchers have argued, this is undoubtedly related to the fact that it was much easier to get to Europe by regular means, even without official governmental authorization: 'The introduction of visa obligations for many countries of origin, coupled with carrier sanctions may have led to a shift from regular means of transport, such as airplanes and ferries, to irregular means of transport like fishing boats.'[33] Moreover, certain points of departure for Europe, such as the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on Moroccan soil, which until then had been hindrance-free, saw the introduction of barriers after Spain's accession to the Schengen treaty in 1991.[34] Again, the Europeanization of borders, the construction of Fortress Europe, is a major factor in this callous waste of tens of thousands of lives, a mass mortality without precedent in European history in time of 'peace'.

Another illustration of the particular responsibility incurred in this assertion of quasi-sovereign EU power is the fate of Italy's short-lived sea-rescue operation, Mare Nostrum. In 2012 the European Court

[31] For a full presentation see Tamara Last and Thomas Spijkerboer, 'Tracking Deaths in the Mediterranean', in Tara Brian and Frank Laczko, eds, *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost during Migration*, Geneva 2014. See also fortresseurope.blogspot.co.uk.
[32] Babels, *La mort aux frontières de l'Europe*, p. 18.
[33] Last and Spijkerboer, 'Tracking Deaths in the Mediterranean', p. 88.
[34] Babels, *La mort aux frontières de l'Europe*, p. 23.

of Human Rights had ruled against the Berlusconi-era programme of returning shipwrecked migrants to Libya. A tragic shipwreck off Lampedusa in October 2013, with the loss of 366 migrant lives, galvanized Italian public opinion. Enrico Letta, centre-left Prime Minister at the time, launched a large-scale naval operation aiming to help shipwrecked migrants and deter smugglers, with clear priority accorded to the first objective. Italian vessels sailed as far as Libyan waters, and in less than a year saved around 150,000 migrants, a remarkable figure given that the IOM's total number of arrivals by sea in Italy for the whole of 2014 was 170,000. However, after the EU refused to make a significant contribution to the high cost of the operation, some €9m per month, the right-wing Interior Minister, Angelino Alfano, took the lead in calling a halt, and Mare Nostrum ceased operations at the end of August 2014. Frontex, the EU's border guards, then took over. The resources of its Operation Triton were barely a third of Mare Nostrum's, but the greater change was its orientation. There was no longer any question of saving migrants: the point was to patrol EU territorial waters.

The result was a series of shipwrecks left unaided and an explosion in the mortality rate, from one in 50 in the months when Mare Nostrum was active, to one in 14 after its end. The UN High Commission for Refugees spoke of an unprecedented 'hecatomb' in the Mediterranean.[35] A new shipwreck off Lampedusa in April 2015 saw a still higher death toll—800 lives lost—forcing the EU to react with the launch of a fresh Frontex initiative, Operation Sophia. But the new mission was continuous with Triton's: 'combat smugglers' and patrol territorial waters, or in other words prevent migrants from reaching the Italian coast. A year later, Federica Mogherini, EU 'Foreign Minister' and a member of Renzi's Democratic Party, pronounced Sophia a 'success', with a record of 68 smugglers stopped, 104 boats 'neutralized and put beyond use' and 12,600 souls rescued at sea—barely a twelfth of the number saved by Mare Nostrum.[36] The episode illuminates a characteristic aspect of the European scheme of 'live or let die', of which 'humanity and security' are the two complementary faces, with coercive functions transferred

[35] Carine Fouteau, 'Morts en Méditerranée: "Les dirigeants européens n'ont plus d'excuses"', *Mediapart*, 22 April 2015; Alexandre Pouchard, 'Migrants en Méditerranée: après "Mare Nostrum", qu'est-ce que l'opération "Triton"?', *Le Monde*, 20 April 2015.

[36] Federica Mogherini, 'Nous avons sauvé en mer 12,600 personnes avec l'opération "Sophia"', interview with Cécile Ducourtieux, *Le Monde*, 16 April 2016.

from the nation states to the supranational bodies of the EU. This transfer operates at low volume, hence the difficulty of exercising democratic control over it and questioning its legitimacy. Thus 'aid and compassion are headlined, facilitating the occlusion of responsibility while reinforcing control and repression.'[37]

The temporal distribution of deaths notably reveals that the number of victims rose after 2001, and more so from 2003, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, before the wrenching increase due to the wars in Syria and the wider Middle East, there was a 'normal' rate of more than a thousand deaths a year among those trying to reach Europe. There is a striking discrepancy between the lack of feeling aroused by the deaths of tens of thousands of human beings—in their majority anonymous, unrecorded by the authorities and denied the dignity of a proper burial—with that excited by, say, the 1,000 lives lost in the crossing from East to West Germany during the Cold War. There is one obvious explanation: an African, an Arab or an Afghani who drowns in the Mediterranean, in flight from war, oppression or extreme poverty, is not seen as a human being in the same way as the Germans who were trying to flee 'communism' and were hailed as martyrs for liberty. In that sense, the border regime is an extension of the history of colonialism and domination that Europe and the West have exercised over the rest of the world, and to which 'the construction of Europe' now adds a further chapter in the form of its poisoned fruit, the EU.

Replumbing the Greek state

Now to Greece as an *internal* border of Europe, a front line or field laboratory in the class struggle as conducted by the reinvigorated dominant classes. The policies applied to Greece are often described as those of 'austerity'. This is true enough, but also in a way mistaken, for that condition is found everywhere, in Greece and in France as well as the UK, and this for a simple reason. Austerity or, more generally, a deepening of neoliberal policies, combined with state support for the financial sector, is the universal strategy followed since 2008 by the metropolitan powers as their way through the manifest contradictions of a financialized regime of capitalist accumulation. However, here again, as in the case of external borders, Greece displays an important specificity,

[37] Babels, *La mort aux frontières de l'Europe*, p. 30.

as the most developed and durable instance of an exceptional political regime that is found in a less concentrated form elsewhere in the southern European periphery. This regime has been constructed step by step, and takes its institutional form in a procedural instrument from which Greeks have borrowed their name for the eight-year period they have lived through: in English, which is conventional here, Memoranda of Understanding, or MOUs.

Greece has known three of these memoranda since 2010—with uncounted intermediate agreements, review procedures and sets of measures for implementing their main provisions. What are they about? At the heart of the Greek crisis, like that of the other countries of the European periphery, is over-indebtedness, both private and public, which means powerful tendencies towards economic polarization in the EU and particularly in the Eurozone. Thus, Greece, Portugal, Ireland and, to a lesser degree, Spain all experienced over-indebtedness while Germany went on running up surpluses. In the background of the debt crisis was a European configuration that tended to deepen the divide between the centre and the periphery—or rather peripheries, plural, because the European South had been joined by a second internal periphery, that in the East, which had from the start been allocated the status of a Mezzogiorno, a supplier of cheap labour. Over-indebted, the countries of the first periphery found it impossible to borrow on the markets, as Eurozone rules required, and had to have recourse to 'rescue plans', loans made available by the EU, with the participation of the IMF. Memoranda of Understanding are nothing but the accords signed by these countries, first of all Greece, in return for fresh loans granted to cover the old, a way to assure private banks that these countries would honour their interest payments. The mechanism thus involved a new round of debt, with the result that at the end of the operation the level of indebtedness would be greater still—which is what has happened in the case of Greece.[38]

The three MOUs signed by the successive Greek governments and the Troika between 2010 and 2015 consist of the list of conditions imposed by creditors in return for their loans. These documents are thousands of pages long—1,000 or thereabouts for the text of the actual accord,

[38] See Costas Lapavitsas et al., *Crisis in the Eurozone*, London 2012; Eric Toussaint, *Le système dette: Histoire des dettes souveraines et de leur répudiation*, Paris 2017.

the rest made up of annexes. They were rammed through the Greek National Assembly in a simulacrum of parliamentary debate, no stage taking longer than 48 hours. The third Memorandum, the fruit of Tsipras's capitulation in July 2015, passed through parliament in less than 24 hours, meeting a deadline that the EU handed down, stipulating both the day and the hour. The debate proper lasted a mere seven hours, for a document of thousands of pages that deputies had received the day before at 5PM, untranslated, with its essentials expedited in English. It was the same for the packages of measures voted through after 2010—all approved by the same brisk measures in a parliament reduced to the role of recording chamber for conditions dictated by the lenders.

Humiliating as it is, the procedure is not merely symbolic. What was at stake was the dismantling of any appearance of national and popular sovereignty. The two qualifiers matter: in order to impose a course of 'shock therapy', overwhelmingly and consistently rejected by the Greek public, it was necessary to destroy democratic accountability, even in its limited, class-loaded and highly problematic representative form. During the 'era of the Memoranda', three different parliamentary majorities have alternated in power, covering the entire political spectrum, from the traditional right and social-democracy to Syriza's radical left, without this bringing the slightest change in the type of policies that have been implemented—with the six-month exception, or hiatus, of the first Syriza government between January and July 2015. To achieve this result, the machinery of the EU was deployed to remodel the depths of the Greek state itself, its administrative functioning and the material character of its means of action.

There is nothing original in the content of these MOUs: their logic is that of the 'structural adjustment' programmes long implemented by the IMF in the global South. Their basic elements are unvarying: drastic curbs on public spending, wholesale deregulation of the economy, dramatic lowering of 'labour costs' and full-scale privatization of public assets. The novelty was that these measures were being applied on this scale by the EU itself, with the IMF playing an essential auxiliary role in the so-called Troika, alongside the European Commission and European Central Bank. With the third Memorandum, the European Stability Mechanism was brought in and the Troika became the 'Quartet'; known, however, as 'the institutions', since the earlier denomination had become politically

toxic. The goal was for Greece to clear primary budget surpluses of the order of 3.5 per cent of GDP, which would be entirely devoted to repaying its creditors. Meanwhile, reduced labour costs and a deregulated economic environment were supposed to enhance competitiveness, attract investment and thus lead to sound growth.

The result, as we know, is a disaster without precedent since the 1930s, and worse than that precipitated by the Second World War. In seven years, Greece has lost more than a quarter of GDP, falling from twenty-eighth to thirty-eighth place in the world ranking. Otherwise put, in 2009 Greek per capita GDP was 71 per cent of Germany's and 69 per cent that of France. In 2016, it was estimated at 43 per cent that of Germany, 47 per cent that of France.[39] The country has been plunged into a recession in which only the tempo has eased, and this in years of exceptional tourism revenues, greatly helped by the geopolitical instability affecting most of its competitors in the region. The official unemployment rate is currently 20 per cent, above 45 per cent for the young. Over a third of the population is facing poverty, a level exceeded among EU members only by Romania and Bulgaria. The country's human resources are draining away—an infallible sign of social distress. Since 2010, more than 400,000 Greeks have left, more than 70 per cent of them university graduates, and more than half in the crucial 25–39 age-group.[40] The budget of the health sector has been reduced by half in value, and fell from 6.8 to 4.9 per cent of GDP between 2009 and 2016, the third lowest level in the EU. Public hospitals face rising mortality rates, an increase in life-threatening infections and a shortage of staff and medical equipment.[41]

Tsipras and his ministers, elected on a promise to end austerity politics, are now parading at EU summits, boasting of their success in overshooting the MOUs' budgetary-surplus targets. Having moved from a

[39] International Monetary Fund: World Economic Outlook Database.

[40] See Sofia Lazaretou, 'The Flight of Human Capital: Greek Emigration During the Crisis Years', *Bulletin of the Bank of Greece* [in Greek], 43, 2016, pp. 33–57; Lois Labrianidis and Manolis Pratsinakis, *Outward Migration from Greece during the Crisis*, LSE Hellenic Observatory, London 2014. For poverty figures, see Eurostat, 'People at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion', 28 March 2018.

[41] See the detailed study by Noëlle Burgi, 'Le démantèlement méthodique et tragique des institutions grecques de santé publique', *La Revue de l'IRES*, nos. 91–2, 2017.

public deficit consistently above 10 per cent between 2008 and 2011 to record-high primary surpluses—and even, since 2016, net surpluses—Greece can be considered as the champion in the pan-European race to the 'fiscal consolidation state', the institutional form of permanent austerity which has succeeded the 'debt state' of the pre-2008 period.[42] The other side of the coin is that this has been obtained not only via cuts in public spending of 36 per cent, but also by drastically raising fiscal pressure, with taxation up by 8.5 per cent of GDP from 2009 to 2016, a unique case among OECD countries. The resulting recessionary effect wasn't counterbalanced by another key 'success' of the Memoranda policies, the unprecedented drop of unit labour costs by nearly 30 per cent, from 67 per cent of the Eurozone average in 2008 to 48 per cent in 2017.[43] This alleged gain in competitiveness didn't prevent a collapse in investment levels, from 24 per cent to barely 10 per cent of GDP between 2008 and 2016.

The bankruptcy of current policy is measured not only by its destructive effects but also by its complete incapacity to deal with Greece's public debt, the starting point for the so-called 'bailout' plans. These have benefited only the country's creditors, Greek and European banks and the EU institutions that have taken charge.[44] Standing at 120 per cent of GDP in 2010, when Greece completed the work of the first Memorandum, public debt has risen by half, to 180 per cent, notwithstanding a partial cleaning of the slate in 2012—to the considerable advantage of a majority of creditors. This is the heart of the contradiction: although the rationale of the 'European consolidation state' consists in giving debt service priority over every other political obligation, thus making the state entirely responsive to financial-market pressures and immune to citizen control and popular demands, its Troika-led Greek version ends up in an endless spiral of state indebtedness, amplifying the very problem of the 'debt state' it was supposed to solve. Pronounced 'highly unsustainable' by the IMF itself, this increased debt burden has come to symbolize the

[42] Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*, London and New York 2014.

[43] 'Labour Costs in the EU', Eurostat News release, 9 April 2018.

[44] Indispensable in this context is the work of the Commission for the Truth about the Greek Debt, set up in spring 2015 by Zoé Konstantopoulou, then president of the Greek parliament, and coordinated by the spokesperson for the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt, Eric Toussaint. See CADTM, *La vérité sur la dette grecque*, Paris 2015.

complete failure of this policy of unchecked subjugation and pillage of the last decade.

Subaltern integration

The institutionalization of Memoranda, their transformation into a protracted mode of rule, rests on certain mechanisms that have altered the very substance of the Greek state. First, as an immediate consequence of the macroeconomic objectives exhaustively listed in the MoUs—affecting every level, from central government to the smallest local administration—budgetary policy was switched to automatic. The Memorandum provisions detail the measures that the government undertakes to apply and include precise deadlines, fixed to the nearest month. But the essential element is the scheme for monitoring the measures. A 'review' is scheduled to take place every three months. The Troika's famous 'men in black suits' descend on Athens, where they dissect the accounts of the entire administration. At first, they used to disperse to the various ministries to pry there, but since the advent of the Syriza government they have billeted in the Hilton Hotel, and Athenians now speak of 'the Hilton government'. More importantly, the Troika has parachuted people it trusts into strategic positions in the state apparatus, with the mission of furnishing Brussels and Frankfurt with the required information. One of the things the first Syriza government discovered on taking office was that the Troika knew far more than any Greek government about even the smallest item of expense in the smallest office of public administration in the country.

It is only when the Troika's inspectors conclude that the assigned objectives have been met that the review can be judged complete and the Eurogroup greenlights payment of the tranche of loans, as agreed in the schedule of the Memorandum. Without that authorization there is no payment, and that means certain bankruptcy, since Greece is in no position to finance the bulk of its debt repayment by borrowing on the markets—and obstinately refuses to take the step of suspending repayments, which, as historical experience demonstrates, is the indispensable point of departure for any negotiation in favour of the debtor. At each stage, it has opted to submit to the letter of the creditors' demands, which at every review have included further austerity measures rendered 'necessary' by the government's inability to secure ever more unrealistic objectives as it comes up against the recessionary effects of the austerity

programme. This is the infernal mechanism that has been at work since the first Memorandum.

The third Memorandum, after Tsipras's capitulation in July 2015, represented a qualitative development in the work of dismembering the state apparatus. Budgetary autonomy is out of the question, thanks to the operation of Memoranda and reviews—the latter set to continue even after Greece exits the MOU. Monetary policy has long since moved to Frankfurt, where it rests in the hands of the European Central Bank and its 'independent' authorities. The liquidity supply was the weapon with which the ECB menaced any state suspected of deviation from EU policy—Greece, Ireland and Cyprus. But the Tsipras Memorandum goes much farther. Now it is the turn of the General Secretariat for Public Revenues to become an 'independent' authority, whose head is named by the government only with the assent of the Troika. The principle here is the same as that invoked in the creation of 'independent' central banks—bodies not subject to political control but directly linked to supranational authorities, in this case those representing the interest of the creditors.

This 'independent' tax-collecting agency is accompanied by a 'fiscal council', made up of five members whose nomination, again, must be approved by the Troika—which, at the slightest hint of deviation from budgetary-surplus targets, can decide on public-spending cuts to be automatically effected, without the need for parliamentary approval. In addition, all state assets are sequestered with a view to their privatization by another 'independent' body, clearly German in inspiration, modelled on the famous Treuhand created to liquidate the public inheritance of the GDR. Business has been brisk, with cut-price sales of regional airports, the port of Piraeus, the site of the former Athens airport, picturesque stretches of coastline and the utility companies.[45] To top it all, the banking system, whose recapitalization had cost €40 billion, covered entirely by borrowing at Greek tax-payers' expense, has been flogged to speculators for one-tenth of that amount. We might add here that under Syriza's rule Greek military policy maintains total alignment with the US and NATO, with Athens becoming Israel's closest ally in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is now whispered in Greek diplomatic circles that

[45] See the illuminating text by Eleni Portaliou, 'Greece, a Country for Sale', *Jacobin*, September 2016.

Tsipras's aim is to make Greece itself 'the Israel of the Balkans', the main pillar of the West in an area of growing instability, taking advantage of cooling relations between Washington and Ankara.[46]

In sum: Greece has been turned into a neo-colony: its national government, whatever its political colouration, is no different in function from a colonially appointed administrator, and the simulated negotiations to which the parties lend themselves at the interminable series of Eurogroup meetings or EU summits barely serve to disguise the fact. This neo-colonialism must be grasped in its specificity, nonetheless. It not only differs from classic colonialism, which was based on military conquest and territorial occupation. It is equally distinct from the post-colonial model, which sustains multiform relations of dependence between the former colonial power and the newly independent nations, although there are shared features, notably the predatory appropriation of resources. Greece's subjugation is part of the long history of debt as a 'weapon of dispossession' against the popular classes and dominated nations, predating the advent of capitalism.[47] The country is not a German colony, even if Germany is hegemonic in Europe and the undisputed leader in the political management of the Greek crisis. It is difficult, besides, to speak of a 'European imperialism' in the sense of a unified entity of which the EU would be the political expression, although, as already suggested, the Union's structure makes for polarization and an increasing fragmentation of the economic and political space over which its authority extends. The neo-colonial regime is better understood as a form of 'internal colonialism', an advanced case of a regime of subordination born out of the basic contradictions of EU integration, an enterprise of which the Greek bourgeoisie is fully a part. Facing a major crisis which, beginning in the economy, became generalized to the political system, that class preferred, once again, to accept the partial destruction of its economic base and the vassalization of its national state in order to counter the destabilizing potential of a popular revolt.

The scheme resembles that of the subaltern integration of the Italian South in the national state created by the Risorgimento, whose structural bases Gramsci elucidated: the fruit of a compromise between the landed

[46] Thanos Kamilalis, 'L'"affaire macédonienne" et l'"Israël des Balkans"', *Tlaxcala*, 9 February 2018.
[47] See Toussaint, *Le système dette*.

elites of the South and the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie in the North.[48] It was this compromise, reached at the expense of the peasantry and the agrarian reform that would have allowed its emancipation, which explained why the Mezzogiorno was condemned to 'underdevelopment', to the subaltern position that became its own in the new national state. In spite of its limits—for the EU is precisely not a unitary entity on the pattern of a national state, the expression of a 'European people' in the sense of a *demos*, a sovereign subject—this parallel with internal colonialism in the Italian South helps us to understand the resurgence of racist imagery at the time of the Greek crisis. Orientalist, or rather 'Balkanist', stereotypes made a remarkable come-back, stigmatizing the lazy, corrupt Southern 'crickets' who hoped to exploit the generosity of the virtuous North to keep them in their accustomed lifestyle. But while this racist outbreak reactivated a pre-existing repertoire of pejorative representations, it was neither a survival nor a regression towards a past that had supposedly been surmounted; rather, it was the product of the new contradictions arising from European integration. The very structures of the key EU institutions—typically taking the form of opaque, if not entirely secretive, and highly asymmetrical inter-governmental negotiations—operate to 'redefine class conflicts as international conflicts'.[49] It is because that process is founded on a permanent disavowal of the polarizing divisions it fosters—and because it refuses, no less vigorously, a critical examination of the tropes that underpin the dominant version of 'Europeanness', products of a long history of colonial and imperialist domination—that it feeds the flames of racism today.[50] This racism targets the Europeans of the second internal periphery—the 'lazy Greek' now joined by 'the industrious (and cheap) Pole who has come to steal your job', in a sort of unity of opposites—as much as it attacks, with far greater violence, the non-European, non-white, 'Muslim' Other.

Returning to Gramsci, the notion of passive revolution, of which the Risorgimento furnishes a paradigm case, is appropriate for analysing the process currently in train under the aegis of the EU's 'bureaucratic caesarism'.[51] Syriza's capitulation and rapid absorption by the neo-colonial

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[48] Antonio Gramsci, 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', in Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1921–26*, London 1978.

[49] Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*, London and New York 2016, p. 159.

[50] See Céline Cantat, 'Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Europe: Constructing and Contesting Europeanity', *Cahiers Mémoire et Politique*, no. 3, 2015, pp. 5–30.

[51] Cédric Durand and Razmig Keucheyan, 'Bureaucratic Caesarism: A Gramscian Outlook on the Crisis of Europe', *Historical Materialism*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015.

regime, whose principal—but fragile—political pillar the party now is, appears as a typical case of *trasformismo*, the skimming and cooptation of leading elements emerging from subaltern groups into the existing pattern of domination. For Gramsci, 'transformism', of which corruption is a constitutive component, is precisely a substitute for a genuine social compromise, which would imply concessions to the subaltern classes and their integration as an active force into the mechanisms of civil society, be it only within a limiting framework consistent with the maintenance of their subordinate position. Transformism is thus an index of 'dominance without hegemony', which is an apt designation for the 'organic composition of power' exemplified by the EU.[52]

The Greek case shows that the exceptional regime installed at the time of the debt crisis has created a new line of fracture. The finality with which that internal border asserted itself at a time of crisis—it had been there all along, but concealed by economic growth—has to do with a phenomenon that is more than simply economic. Internal and external borders have come together in a neo-colonial regime charged with administering neoliberal shock therapy to a wayward country, as well as controlling an inflow of migrants that tests the EU's border regime. The Greek perspective allows us to see with utmost clarity the reality of the 'security state' that is emerging inside the EU, insofar as that body is giving neoliberal policies constitutional status by means of a mechanism released from any form of democratic control.[53] The proliferation at every level of bodies exempt from democratic oversight, to which a growing number of state functions are transferred, the mutual interpenetration of the higher bureaucracies of the EU, the national states and the major industrial and financial groups, and the growing reliance on repressive methods: these are prominent features of the 'authoritarian statism' whose rise Nicos Poulantzas diagnosed at the end of the 1970s.[54]

The Southerners of Europe's internal periphery are not only called upon to consent to a regime of dispossession, but also to play the role of fortress gate-keeper, so as to spare the countries of the centre the disagreeable

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[52] See Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

[53] Tony Bunyan, 'Just Over the Horizon: The Surveillance Society and the State in the EU', *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2010.

[54] Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London 1978. For the links between Brussels agencies and the multinationals, see the dossiers assembled by the Corporate Europe Observatory.

spectacle of needy, persecuted hordes run aground on the shores of Lampedusa or Lesbos. In Greece, the Troika regime has succeeded in institutionalizing itself, beyond the writ of the Memoranda, and in creating a kind of 'normality', all the more remarkable given the manifest failure of the economic policies that have been pursued. The key to success has been the demonstrated capacity to pass the test of a political force presenting itself at first as an adversary, then, by a process combining (economic) coercion with persuasion, becoming an effective servitor. This experience of political transformism, so extreme in its terms, has had a stunning—and lasting—effect on the political capacities of the subaltern classes, curbing the will to resist and, for some time at least, blocking the possibility of creating a subaltern counter-hegemony.

The regime's second success lies in its laboratory role for radicalized neoliberal policies, whose sphere of application, in varying forms, is not limited to Greece or even the peripheral countries as a whole. It is clear that the policy of 'structural reforms' pursued by Macron in France is in line with the Memoranda that have been visited upon the South. Listening to Macron praising the necessity of 'disruption', a Greek ear is quick to discern the music of the Memoranda-type 'shock therapy', and a lot of the words as well. From a *longue durée* perspective, Greece isn't an anomaly, or a pathological case, but a radical version of the 'European consolidation state', the form of authoritarian neoliberalism that lies at the heart of the EU project. There is a difference, however, between Greece, along with the other 'bailout' countries of the periphery, and the core countries, even the most indebted ones, such as Italy: the absence of the Troika proper. Of course, European pacts—that for 'stability and governance', the 'Euro plus', the Six- and Two-pack—have tightened the neoliberal corset for all countries. Yet the room for manoeuvre is not unvarying from Athens to Paris or Amsterdam. As Schäuble famously declared 'it would be better for France to be compelled to introduce reforms . . . but this is difficult, such is the nature of democracy.'[55] In France, the appearance at least of self-government has to be respected. In other terms, the neo-colonial regime cannot be generalized, or transposed to a country in the European centre. It remains the distinguishing sign of an internal periphery, which the centre needs if it wishes to save what credibility remains in the project of 'European integration'. Otherwise, this regime serves a very useful ideological and disciplinary purpose for the dominant classes. The way

[55] Quoted in Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*, p. 171.

in which turbulent Greece was taken in hand, its supposedly rebellious leaders turned into docile—though hardly more dependable—servitors, is a textbook case. The way to avoid repeating the Greek experience is to watch your step and go along with Brussels, whose injunctions are going to be imposed anyway.

This is the heart of the matter. The Greek case discloses the impotence and the illusions of the 'radical' European left. It is because of their inability to understand the powerful mechanisms at work in this polarized, hierarchized space, abstracted from any possibility of democratic control, that left-wing attempts, however partial, to break with this regime have been doomed to failure. This incomprehension is not the result of simple intellectual oversight. It is at bottom political, arising from the refusal of real confrontation with the dominant forces, which in turn derives from the left's internalization of its historic defeat. Europeanist blindness has made a damaging contribution here: the rallying cries of the dominant discourse, which represents EU membership as a commitment to 'internationalism' and the 'values of openness', forestalled thinking about the need for a 'plan B'—exit from the Eurozone as an indispensable measure of resistance to the Troika's blackmail.[56] This is Greece's bitter lesson for the forces of social transformation. Those who are not prepared to fight to the finish to break free from the iron cage called the European Union are doomed to capitulate. The vain search for a 'third course', or a 'decent compromise', has done no more than prepare the way for that crushing outcome, for Greeks certainly but also for the people of Europe. There can be no serious strategic thinking that does not pose from the outset the question of a necessary confrontation with the EU's institutional structure, as a concentrated expression of the violence of neoliberal and imperial policies that condemn whole populations to dehumanizing precariousness and a state of permanent political minority today.

[56] On this alternative approach see Heiner Flassbeck and Costas Lapavitsas, *Against the Troika: Crisis and Austerity in the Eurozone*, London and New York 2015.