

Interview with a comrade from Evangelismos Squat, Crete, Greece

Leila Al Shami

16 December 2013

Greece has a long history of anti-authoritarian struggle that has provided inspiration for anarchists across the globe. Recently, I spent time in Greece to learn from comrades there about their experiences in anti-authoritarian organization and in particular establishing squats and self-organized spaces as centers of resistance, or autonomous zones. What follows is an interview with Carpe diem, from Evangelismos squat in Heraklion, Crete.

Can you give a brief overview of the squat movement in Greece?

In the 70's, during the struggle against the dictatorship and the struggle for social justice and workers rights after it's fall, occupied university buildings were used as a centers for coordination of the struggle. At the beginning of the '80s, together with the early underground punk scene of Greece, the first squats were established. They can be seen as a continuation of the squat movement that was sweeping Europe at the time, in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and elsewhere. It was a phenomenon that did not manage to become popular, but on the other hand it contributed a great deal to the creation and spread of an underground culture, which had confrontational tendencies against the establishment and social norms. The squats, a key structure of the anti-authoritarian movement (not only in Greece), functioned as liberated spaces both for political action and housing.

The practice of liberating spaces, in which people are able to self-determine their daily lives and the conditions of fighting the system, bloomed at the beginning of the 2000 and this practice continues until today. At the beginning of 2012 there were about 20 squats throughout Greece.

How do the squats contribute to the broader struggle in Greece, such as against the current austerity measures and the rise of Golden Dawn?

As we mentioned above, the squats are not just buildings where people are housed. They are mainly places in which political actions are organized, actions that do not only include the people who live there, but a wider circles of political activists. In some cases they even constitute the core of the anti-authoritarian struggle in Greece. So we must consider the establishment of squats, not as a goal in itself, but rather as a means to self-organize. From this perspective, the contribution to the broader struggle, together with the struggle against the fascists (Golden Dawn) is major. In fact, as for the second, it is a matter of creating political hegemony over a space, a neighborhood or a town. There is no room for coexistence between fascists and anti-authoritarians, so squats

acts as a barrier against fascist influence. A great example is Villa Amalias squat in the center of Athens, which was evicted last winter, after 23 years, due to a lot of pressure by the far-right wing of the government. The squat was situated in a strategic point of the city and functioned as an anti-authoritarian stronghold in a neighborhood that was in an area with a strong fascist influence.

There has been a recent wave of evictions of squats in Greece. How do you think this will affect the anarchist movement?

The recent wave of evictions started in the autumn of 2012 and is part of a broader “law and order” operation by the recent right-wing government. This operation does not only affect the anarchist movement, but also immigrants and some other marginalized social groups including drug addicts and prostitutes. This operation has targeted the anti-authoritarian movement, through destroying our centres and social spaces and attempting to restrict our influence in social struggles. In the last six months, 9 squats have been evicted, 3 independent radio stations closed, and the main Web site (athens.indymedia.org) attacked and forced to move to a server abroad. There are also over 30 comrades in prison accused of taking part in armed urban guerrilla warfare.

There are many factors that will determine the movement in the long run: the fluid political and social situation makes it very difficult to predict the outcome. The insurrection of December 2008 and the Greek Occupy Movement of June 2011 has changed the influence, the dynamics, the characteristics and the aims of the movement to a great extent. Right now we cannot imagine that this wave of evictions and repression will be able to dismantle the movement, but the biggest threat lies more in the general downwards spiral of psychological depression throughout the population.

When was your squat established and how is life in the squat organized? What are the main activities in which you engage in your squat?

The squat of Evagelismos (an old abandoned hospital in the centre of Heraklion, Crete) was established in 2002 by around 80 students who wanted to found a cultural space. In that group there were also some anarchists who took over maintenance and organization of the space after the most of the students left the initiative. Since then, the squat has functioned as a place where immigrants and homeless people were hosted and afterwards more politically active people started to live in it. Besides providing housing, it continues to be the centre of anti-authoritarian anarchist struggle in Heraklion. The building hosts the majority of the collective processes of the anarchists here, such as assemblies, events, a bar every Friday (the money from which goes both towards the running costs of the building and the struggle, e.g. supporting political prisoners, funding a self-run newspaper), it has a gym and hosts workshops on many different issues.

How are you organizing in the face of current evictions?

On this point we have to separate the events into time periods: before and after 2010. The year 2010 marks the handover of Greece to the control of the IMF and the European Central Bank, which has completely changed the sociopolitical landscape. Before that point, the political standard was that there was asylum in university owned buildings. This means that the police needed special authorization to enter and/or evict a university and for that reason, many of the squats were/are established in university buildings. Also, it was politically costly. This means that the decision to evict squats would bring a lot of reaction, destabilization and trouble for the ones that took that decision. These kind of balances have ceased to exist in all aspects of the sociopolitical sphere (syndicates, workers’ rights, human rights etc). The final issue is the

existence of the right-wing government, which has adopted a far-right agenda because of the loss of voters to the neonazi party (Golden Dawn). The current government specifically targets the anti-authoritarian movement.

For these three reasons, including the movement's incapacity to respond to sociopolitical changes of that scale, puts us in a difficult position to confront and be able to face this large scale attack by the State. After the first evictions, at the beginning of 2013, there was a huge wave of reaction with many tactics used (big demonstrations, attacks on state and capital infrastructure, info-campaigns, re-occupations of evicted squats, mass arrests, etc) but this was not enough to prevent the ongoing repression. Now, in autumn 2013 after all these experiences, the movement is a bit numb and still searching for answers as to how to organize resistance and struggle under the given situation.

But as we say here in Greece "Nothing is over, everything goes on". We are in front of a sociopolitical breaking point, not only here in Greece, so the challenge for revolutionary forces globally is to determine the way in which history will develop. We send our solidarity greetings to all people in the Middle East and North Africa, who struggle to promote libertarian ideas and practices. Our struggle is common, so we should find ways to connect them. To do that, we should first start a way of intercommunication and we are willing to start this path here.

For the website of Evangelismos (in Greek) see: evangelismos.squat.gr

For a solidarity message from anarchists in Heraklion Crete to Egyptian comrades see: vimeo.com (in English with Arabic subtitles)

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Leila Al Shami
Interview with a comrade from Evangelismos Squat, Crete, Greece
16 December 2013

Retrieved on 13th March 2025 from leilashami.wordpress.com

usa.anarchistlibraries.net