

## **The struggle to belong**

### ***Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.***

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### **The African immigrants in the public space of Athens**

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## **Abstract**

Athens only quite recently, since the late 1980s, has become a immigrant-receiving city. In this context Africans have a considerable visibility in the center of Athenian Metropolis. Since their first years in the destination city - Athens, they tried to belong and bond with the area that was “pointed out for them” as a neighborhood, in order to feel as comfortable as possible in a new, unfriendly environment.

The paper will demonstrate the degree and the characteristics of the relationship between African women and public spaces (squares and parks), public transportation, political and social events as ‘spaces’ of interaction and belonging. For nine months (February 2010 – October 2010) the neighborhood where most of the African community is concentrated in Athens has been studied. We were collecting evidence pertaining to the use of the public spaces and public transportation means by African immigrants. At the same time a group of African women activists were interviewed regarding their beliefs, customs, culture and their relationship with the Athenian public spaces. All these methods provided a detailed view of the public everyday life of African women in the Metropolis in certain public spaces in Athens.

In particular, the paper after demonstrating the Athenian reality regarding the placing of immigrants in certain 'strategic' central areas, presents quantitative and qualitative data for the African community in Athens and especially its female members. Also, particular familiarized areas in the metropolis are presented through the use of analytic mapping as well as with respect to their use by immigrants as interaction and recreational space. Special emphasis is placed on the commercial activities (as quasi-public spaces) that take place in and around these more 'formal' public spaces. In addition, through participant observation of the African women’s organization in Athens, another quasi-public space, the paper will deal with the political mobilization, official and undocumented, of the African community and especially of African women.

Finally, research and policy questions will be presented regarding the prospects of the Athenian cityspace as a harmonic multicultural community, utilizing both the field research presented and the recent policy measures for the 'revitalization' of the Athenian city centre.

## Introduction

In Athens, we do not find a 'typical' territorial zoning for the activities of the immigrants(Pythagoras II "Interrelated everyday lives and sociospatial changes in the city, female immigrants and local women in the neighborhoods of Athens"(2007)). A concentration of sorts arises indirectly through class and cultural state strategy. The formation of some boundaries can be attributed to the reactions of the former inhabitants and the choices of exclusion on part of the immigrants themselves. In this way, spontaneous partitioning is created. There are many areas and specific points in the vast city that have been appropriated by the immigrants as a whole or separately by ethnicities as places of gathering, entertainment and socialization. Fortunately, these areas keep multiplying, and they have acquired a much more clearly defined identity, even though cases exist where an area is hostile for the former inhabitants due to the new equilibrium. This equilibrium results from a common choice of both the parts on the conditions of their coexistence in the locality.

The class strategy that imprints on an area, a water-tight segregation of the social groups, (Lefebvre, H. (1977)) is obvious, alongside a cultural strategy, which also excludes spatially the immigrant population. It is more often the case that the places that are or are about to be appropriated by the immigrants are usually public places which are in, or close to the so-called downgraded areas.

Free spaces fulfill the need on the part of the immigrants for entertainment, socialization and connecting with the limits set by their socio-economic condition. A square or a park does not require a minimum consumption. At the same time, some recreation places which are owned by their fellow countrymen, or other immigrants and which have fairer prices and a friendlier attitude towards foreign customers, are preferred by them. Although these hangouts do not classify as part of the free spaces due to their land-planning characteristics, they still maintain a lot of their advantages, such as the not obligatory consumption. Thus, they acquire a semi free character.

The areas that immigrants choose or "are chosen for them", are socially and economically "underground" and they serve the separation of an unprivileged and exploited group away from the centers decision-making.

The Greek society “welcomes” and forces the immigrants to settle in areas which are cheaper and with immediate access to the centre of the city. Residences of questionable quality and unsafe conditions at affordable prices near to the other fellow countrymen have created the first spots of concentration, and at the same time each area has host the new social class as a “housing class” ( Karadimitriou, N., Maloutas, Th. (2001)). While, this results in a vertical social differentiation of housing distribution of groups. As a new social class appears at the lower housing class level, it will occupy the houses that besides being unreasonably deficient are also closer to the ground level, while the higher socio-economic strata resides on the top floors. The people that are still in hiding and have yet to realize their social and economic power, are placed on the lower level. This pyramid concerns the vertical dimension which also affects the social segregation proper (Arapoglou, V. , Sayas J. P. (2009)). It is likely that the immigrants will initially be placed quietly, but gradually however their presence, as well as the presence of all persons that have their own special cultural heritage and experiences, grows and ‘perturbs’ the space and status quo ante. This, in turn, creates reactions by the indigenous residents who come to realize this change. This is only the beginning of a chain of social brewing which usually result in an area, neighborhood or free space being marked, by the presence of a group of people.

*“The social characteristics tend to unite in space. The elementary principle that affects the distribution of residences in the space is the social status, whose positive expression is the preference (for people of the same status) and negative, the social distance (-rejection of the different neighbors)”, Castells (1972:219)*

So, despite their placement through discreet practices to specific areas, aiming at the social blockade of the immigrants, we observe the creation of spaces where immigrants can rest, socialize, leave their cultural mark and identity and form a distinct refugee community.

In this way, with more complex brewing, there is the chance that the immigrants will succeed in appropriating a space, creating familiar conditions, pleasant and colorful for the people of the same nation, but also for the people of other nations, even for the Greeks.

## **The African community**

In the Municipality of Athens, inside the African community males dominate but only slightly. Female immigrants are the 43.4% of the African immigrants, based on the findings of Pythagoras II “Interrelated everyday lives and sociospatial changes in the city, female immigrants and local women in the neighborhoods of Athens”(2007) project. The gender distribution of immigrants depends on the conditions of the countries of origin. The extended wars and the guerilla warfare in Africa as the main reason of emigration, allows us to argue in favor of the higher percentage of men immigrants.

From the same project, Pythagoras II, we learn that the average age of the African immigrants is relatively low, 30.7 years, because of the period of their emigrational presence. In other words, in contrast to other populations that have been in Greece for many years and have had the chance to “age”, the Africans are at most second generation immigrants in this country. The African immigrant group shows percentage of 13.2% of children, which even though is lower than those of groups like Albanians or Polish is high taking into consideration the overall presence, which is low. All this evidence leads to the conclusion that the African emigrational flow includes less one person households and more families.

As far as the educational level of the African immigrants is concerned, where the men are more than the women in the total of the immigrants, they also have and a higher level of education. African women, are characterized by high levels of illiteracy and lack of elementary school certificate close to 13.8% and 11.2% respectively. As far as unemployment is concerned, the male African immigrants demonstrate a high level of unemployment, basically because of their gender – a presence of many males that cannot be all employed – but also because of the character of their jobs which are usually informal activities like jobs related to the house keeping.

## **The daily lives of African Women**

The African women appear to be particularly active in the social events. The organizations that are formed by African immigrants are basically female organizations, in the same way it happens with other nations, from the other continents. However, since their presence in Greece is relatively recent in contrast to other ethnicities, African women face much greater problems in being incorporated, because of the “young” of their presence in this country.

African women retain much perception from their country of origin about the new communities in the countries of destination. They are women, mothers – cultural nuclei,

immigrants, black, refugees, on the verge of the social web. All these characteristics lead to the formation of a mentality, non-homogenous, but also communal for this group of immigrants.

The mother, and immigrant, takes on the great work of admonishing her children about the values and the models of the country of origin. Through her, the desirable images are directed to the children who are born in a land far away and much different from the familiar one. Being superior to men in that respect, the female immigrants maintain the traditions, the religious beliefs and the stories from the country of origin. Maternity transforms a group of immigrants into a national one, with a well-formed identity and a cultural nucleus.

This role of theirs makes them cultural nuclei since, besides their ideological background, they are also practically those who take action for materializing their customs. The identity of the nation is obscure to a great extent when women are missing. They are the bearers, but also the “active” agents of the culture. They are those who occupy themselves, almost exclusively, with the material cultural representation of the nation in the community and outside of it.

At the same time however, they are also responsible for the creation of codes of communication with the local indigenous population, through their employment position. All these besides being a debt to the community and the nation, are also the advance of the female immigrants in orienting their personal and family lives towards directions that they consider important. This position of theirs retracts them from the seemingly passive place in the newly formed society in the new country of residence. They are responsible for the interior of the community but also for its image in the new community to a far greater extent than the male immigrants.

So, the place in the labor market determines the development of the social gender of the African woman. The African woman usually works inside the house, while the African man usually works outside. The place of the African woman in the Greek household is less important in the beginning, rising to more neuralgic sections with the growth of the trust. They deal with female and not male employers, maintaining a balance that existed in their home countries as well.

Working outside the family household, also unbinds them from the traditions of the patriarchic African family and community, while at the same time it binds them to new rules,

those that exist in the Greek family. Moreover, by being accepted by a family of locals in their house creates bonds with the new country, irrespective of the success of this collaboration. The better the collaboration, the smoother their incorporation in the present time and space.

However, one can also observe business ventures on the part of the female Africans. The most common business are hair salons which are found in Patisson Street-located to a lower and middle middle class area- and comprise meeting places and culture bearers, through which traditions are externalized to the new society, apart from being an economic activity.

Lastly, the male occupation also affects the life of the African women. The problem with male employment is that in the majority of cases, they are ventures that cannot support the entire household are unstable and unsafe, because of the informal character. This fact forces the women to accept jobs with better income even it means working many hours in a household, even if it means staying in a Greek household.

### **Inside the Greek house**

An image that follows the African women is the attractiveness of their appearance for the western societies. The press contributes to the formation of this image for the African woman. In contrast to the conservative image of the average Greek woman, the African woman is presented as having a dangerous sexuality and eroticism that are irrevocably connected to the wild nature of Africa (Petronoti, M, 1998). This image of the African woman, in relation with her working place inside the Greek household, in a racist and patriarchic society, like the Greek one, can make the staying in the new place and the effort to define her position and her space very difficult. The vulnerable but not powerless receivers of male desires face a double pressure because of the dual nature of the man as an employer and a representative of the locals. It needs to be stressed that this male behaviour is a factor which shapes the social gender the unsafe nature of the authoritative, primitive sexual behavior of some uneducated Greeks, especially employers, towards the African women who, besides having to face social, economic and cultural problems, are called to face persons with vulgar fantasies.

Respectively, the female employers with low education tend to envy the African women for their exotic looks and feel rivalry because of the acceptance of these women by men, even as receivers of their fantasies. Due to social norms, even today, the Greek housewife is has to demonstrate a flawless household. The keeping of the household is no longer their sole

responsibility of the Greek housewife. Female immigrants and especially Africans take part in the affairs of the household and shoulder the anxiety of the Greek women about the image of their homes. This anxiety might also be expressed by being scornful towards the African woman, who besides being their assistant, constitute also the lower rank of the household in the small domestic society of the housewife. The odds for the existence of a friendship through this collaboration are small taking into consideration the arrogant attitude of the Greeks towards their foreign collaborators, especially when these belong to a lower social rank. The trust is extorted since the female employers have the security that if a secret is betrayed, the employee will have to face the consequences. The first contact with Greek women through employment is anything but encouraging and can prove to be disappointing for the new female immigrant. Besides, working in the household does not come with specific rights, or legislation, to secure for the African woman specific relations and working conditions. Only a small percentage of Greek female employers do not take advantage of this impunity.

However, some female employers, irrespectively of the rate at which they take advantage of the household employee, also function as intermediates between the African women and the bureaucracy and other legal obligations of the immigrants. Also, material gifts that are no longer useful for the Greek household is a common practice and significantly important emotionally and practically for the African immigrant.

### **Outside the house**

Analyzing the business activities of the African women, especially the women, one can also understand the socio-economic importance of these activities. The services and the goods they trade with are usually connected to the household economy of the country of origin and perhaps of the whole continent. These activities connect the cultural heritage of the African woman with the national indigenous market. The more the intimacy with the African elements of the country of settlement increases, the more services by the locals, typical and exotic, are demanded. This, besides being an economically rewarding activity, also constitutes a way of creating a network with the locals and a means of accepting the African culture. So, the African women are the business minds that combine the personal elements with a business spirit and thus once more constitute the cultural bearer in the new country.



## The African neighborhood in Athens

The vertical social segregation has already been discussed and concerns housing distribution in the different storey of a building according to the social class of the tenant. So, the apartments of the immigrants are usually change hands between immigrants who, with the passing of time, have accomplished to evolve to the next level of the building. The new immigrants now constitute the lower class and so take the lower apartments (a Burger's model in a single building). The owners prefer this succession of tenants in order to avoid the trouble of finding new ones.

Besides passing "hand-to-hand" the apartments, the former immigrants also advise to the newer ones the same country and so an initial social network is created for the new Africans (Petronoti, M., 1998). This reception process of hosting the new immigrant creates moreover spatial distinct nuclei. In this way the African neighborhoods are created in Athens.

The African neighborhoods in Athens are small compared to the ones of other ethnicities. They are spatially distinct areas, because of the importance of the neighborhood and the intra-group communication that has already been stressed, without however forming a ghetto. The areas to which the African neighborhoods are located, in their majority, are "neighborhoods of national diversity". As such, according to Arapoglou, V. Kandyli, G., Kavoulakos, K.I., Maloutas, Th, are characterized as areas that maintain *a percentage of immigrants twice higher than the metropolitan average and whose presence begins to mark the everyday life*. These areas, as far as Athens is concerned, are characterized as we have already said by a high ethnic diversity.

In these areas, therefore, as for example the one alongside of Patisision Street, even if they are more in numbers, Africans share them with Polls, Russians, but also Albanians and Greeks.

However, these neighborhoods are not even homogenous as to the African country of origin. Another differentiation attitude of these people, concerning Greece. Based on each person or family's migratory plans, Greece might be an intermediate stop or the final destination, qualities that frame the actions of each person in his/her attempt to appropriate the new neighborhood and to create networks. Obviously, the migratory schemes mainly define the expectations of each person for the host country and, therefore, the way in which he/she acts, rather constituting a blueprint for his/her future.

In the same way that the house and the personal space do, the neighborhoods also offer privacy and freedom in the mind of the person that belongs to it. Even protection, a shelter, is identified with this neighborhood and even more with the residence.

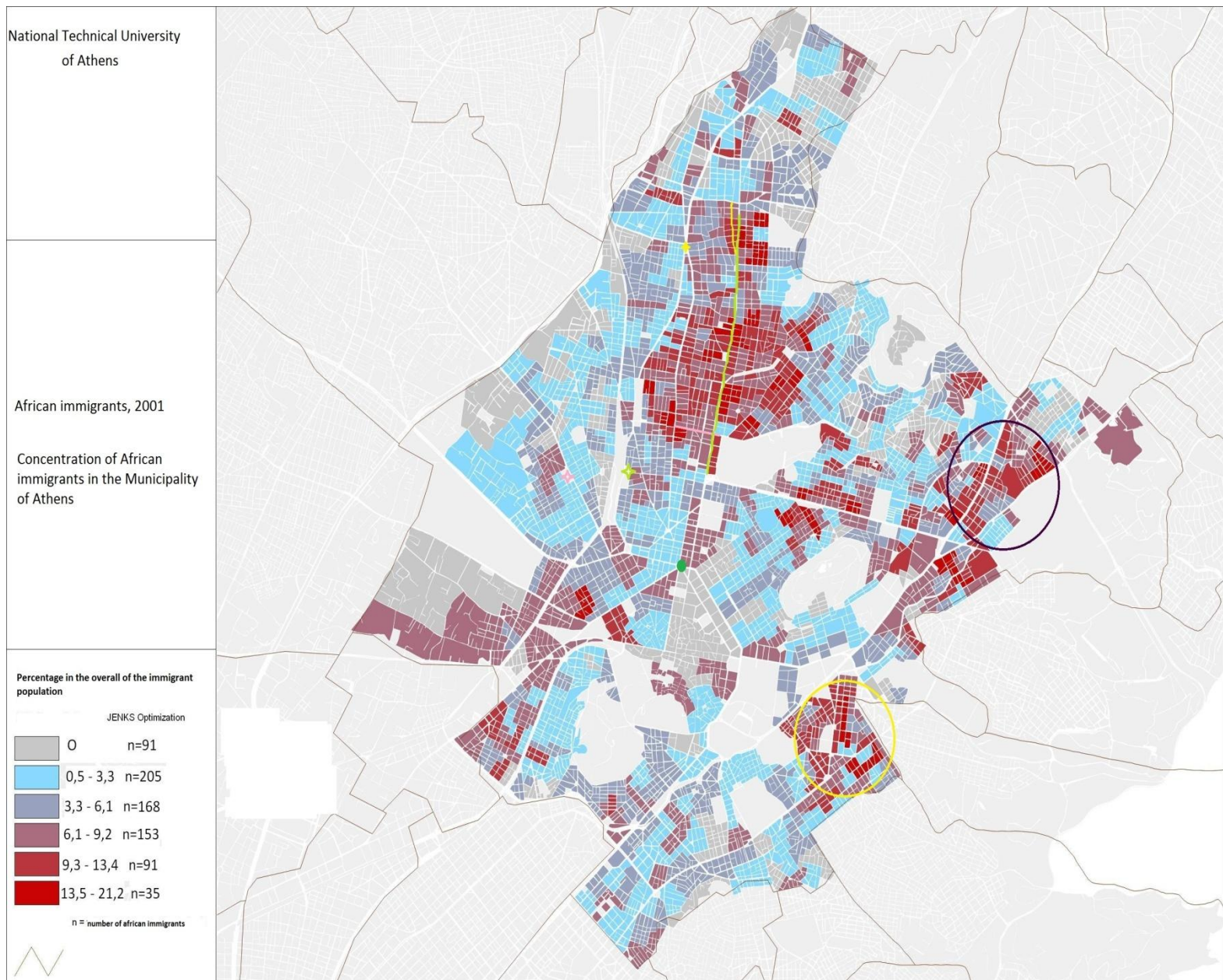
One of the main factors of the research presented here, which try to connect the female African immigrant with her personal space and public space, is the specific complexity of the Greek, Mediterranean metropolis.

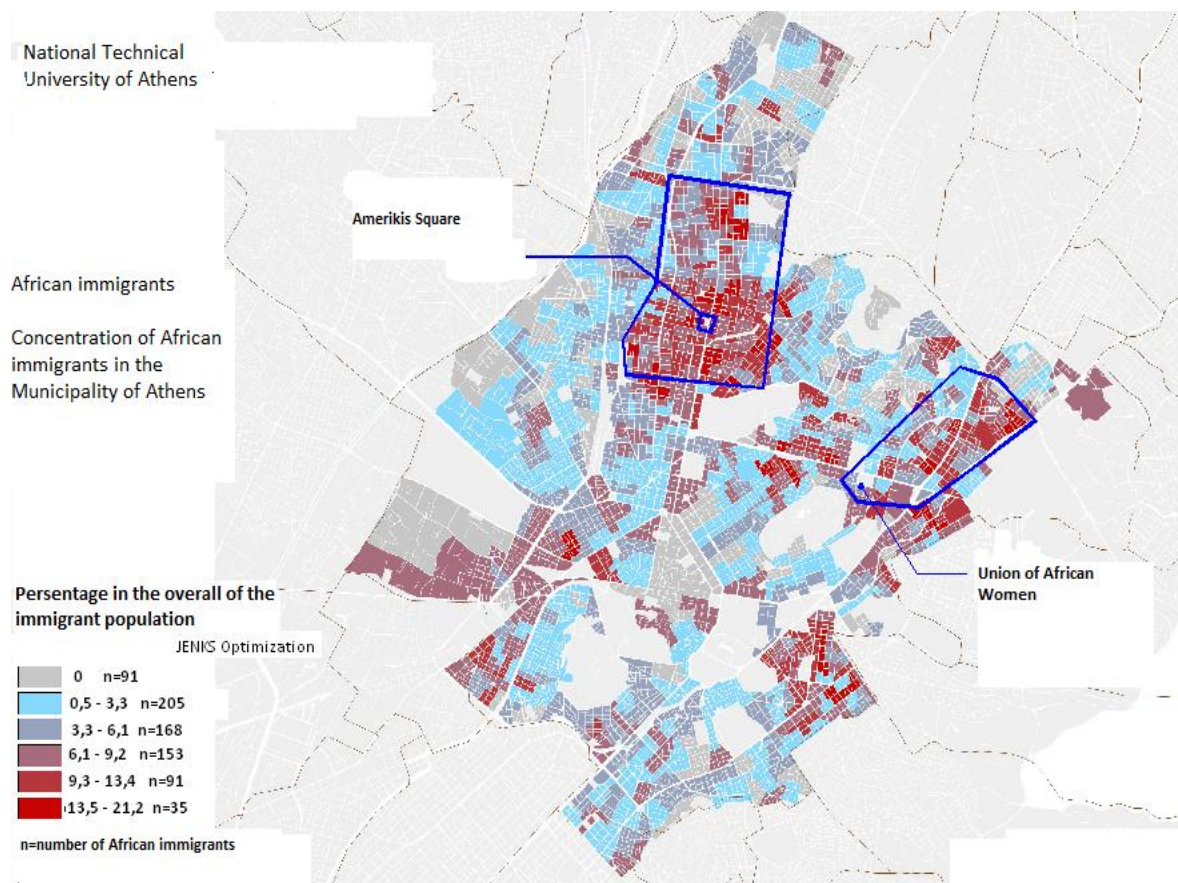
The bonds which are created and the balances that are subverted and reformed away from the native home of the African women, who maintained a specific land planning in order to protect the given social balances, are very complex (Katerelos, J. (2007)). The access to public and visible places of the house during the expansion of the city is now differentiated from the one of the country of origin. The new spatial relations despite the fact that are far from being feminist or egalitarian, constitute radical factors of change for the African women who used to live in smaller towns and villages of Africa. Obviously, a similar cultural subversion would have been created for locals from villages of Greece as well.

These are persons who had learnt to maintain bonds with the communal life through the traditional residence. Respectively, the public spaces had features which were destined to be used only by male inhabitants, according to the dominant social models.

The African population in Athens appears in Kipseli and Patisia from the point of Kordigtonos Street (pink line in map 1) as far as K.Patisia (yellow star in map 1). The higher concentrations appear in Kipseli near to Ag.Dimitrios, but also at Patision Street (light green line in map 1) and in the area of Ag.Louka (yellow line in map 1). Moreover, high concentrations, in specific spatial nuclei, are observed at Larisa's Station (light green star in map 1), in Proph.Daniil, alongside Iera Odos (pink star in map 1), in Omonia (green circle in map 1), around the building blocks of the central food market. Immigrants can also be spotted in Ampelokipous (black circle in map 1) and in Pagrati (yellow circle in map 1). The Union of African Women is in fact lodged in a building in the area of Ampelokipoi, a fact which shows its immediacy with areas which are used by the Africans. Finally, we can locate parts of this migrant population at Exarchia, near Strefi Hill, as well as near Alexandra's Avenue.

Map 1: The concentrations of African immigrants in the municipality of Athens, according to 2001 census data, source: Map-case of EKKE





*Map 2: Concentration of African immigrants in the Municipality of Athens, pointing out two important points, source: Map case of EKKE*

In the second map, the areas which are mentioned in the research literature (Pythagoras II, 2007) as African concentration spots are circled. The two blue spots depict: the first one, Amerikis Square, which also constitutes the space of the case study presented below and the second one, Union of African Women that chose its headquarters according to the concentration of the Africans in the area.

The African community with the highest population is that of Nigerians. However, immigrants from all the countries of Africa are present, but in lower concentrations. Not all the national groups that come from Africa communicate or collaborate.

The African community in Greece, due to a variety of historic and social events, maintains a particularly good reputation among the indigenous residents. This might be attributed to the

cultural and religious origins of the two populations which serve for a relatively positive attitudes towards the immigrants by the “natives”. Apparently, the good relations or prejudices are dynamic and can be reversed by isolated incidents or more generally changed, by both sides and this is varies in the different neighborhoods.

### **Ameriki's Square and the immigrants**

Ameriki's square, has acquired for some years now a color of its own, with the arrival of Africans. The first migratory waves of Africans, after having settled in Kipseli and Ampelokipoi, started to appropriate other spaces. The square has been appropriated by this community now (2010) and constitutes up until today a free space for the African of both the main nuclei Kypseli - Ampelokipoi. Obviously, despite the difference in accessibility by the two main neighborhoods, the particular cultural and social conditions make it a spot for the whole of the community, as can be seen in the map 2.



*Satellite photo of Amerikis Square, source: Google Earth, with A is presented Sparti street*

This square's boundaries are determined by Patisision Street, Mithimnis Street and Sparti's Street.

In the densely build up area of Kipseli, Ameriki's square constitutes the closer and more accessible open space for the residents. Besides being an open space to socialize, create networks and entertain themselves, Africans have also created trading bonds with the area, providing specialized services, initially only for the Africans, but now for a wider clientele as well.

### **African population in the square's time-space**

The crowd at the square is changing, as is expected, during the week and the hours of the day, but not according to gender.

On workdays, from early in the afternoon until the evening the crowd is comprised of a strikingly high level of adult males. The women are few and usually accompanied by a child. Also, the percentage of Africans is strikingly high compared to that of other ethnicities. These observations concerning the population of the square are also true for the surrounding areas of the square. Looking for an explanation about this sexist constitution of the population, we could mention that as far as the African immigrants are concerned, the percentage of males is quite higher than the one of the females, something that is not true for the other populations, like the ones of the former eastern bloc. At the same time, finding a job for the female immigrant, whose qualifications and training from the country of origin do not count any more, is easier because she is considered more trustworthy for taking care of old people or children, or for helping in the household. These characteristics of her explain to a great extent why the male Africans have more free time to "hang" and socialize in the square, even in hours when it would be culturally acceptable even for women to enjoy a walk out. Moreover, a coffee shop that is located inside the square is empty early in the afternoon because it is mostly preferred by elders, who are resting at that time. Furthermore, the tables outdoors are usually chosen by few people in the afternoon, usually by Greek women or middle-aged Greek couples. Even during the hours of the afternoon, there are few people in the restaurant of the square, mainly of Greek origin, in contrast to the fast food restaurants of Patisision Street, which constitute places for eating for the immigrants, something which is understandable since the restaurant requires a considerable expenditure that the African families cannot afford.

Moving on to the rest of the day, in the evenings a differentiation of the composition of the crowd, occurs a fact which enforces the hypothesis about the impact of the demographic

data that have been mentioned previously-more men than women. Men remain the obvious majority of the crowd, but Africans are no longer the only people there. Among the males of the square, after the great number of Africans, one can also observe elder Greeks and younger immigrants from other continents (mainly Albanians). Children and women –almost exclusively mothers- make their presence felt mainly on the playground of the square, but also in the free space in the middle of it. Moreover, few elders, mainly Greek, or of other origin other than African, play with their children or grandchildren in the middle of the square. Although men are more in numbers, as in the afternoon, the groups of people are smaller and move around the square. The majority of the Greeks of the square, who are relatively few as a percentage of the population, prefer the coffee shop in the inner road of the square. Inside the coffee shop there are exclusively elders while outside there might be a few women. The outdoors tables of the coffee shop are also preferred by immigrants, but only to a small extent. The Greek restaurant is empty while the second one, at Patisson Street is mainly a place to have coffee, mostly for the immigrants, but to a smaller extent. There is crowd on the whole square and the surrounding area as well as at the bus stops alongside Patisson Street. It should be stressed that in the evening the square constitutes a more dynamic situation because the crowd keeps changing constantly, mainly due to the persons that accompany the children. Moreover, the feeling one gets during the evening is that because there are children, and therefore women, the square feels less like a ghetto.

At nights, there are only men on the square. As it is expected, the Greek elders that are the usual users of the square, and the few women and children, return to their homes. So, during the night hours the square has mainly male groups, however without an obvious will to socialize and exploit their free time. In other words, during the night, Patisson Street plays host to activities that prevent part of the population from “hanging” in its public places. The police, on the other hand, is usually there, just observing important social problems which are neither caused by nor concealed by the immigrants, but by the regime of the metropolis.

During all those months of participant observation, sadly, very few times did groups of African women above the age of thirty actually appear on the square. The mothers were more common –but not on a daily basis- frequenters with the excuse of the entertainment of their children. So, even Ameriki’s square, which attracts demographically, but also culturally, because of the services that surround it, the African element, does not constitute

a spot for the women, even though it is characterized by them as such-as was pointed out in the interviews with African immigrant.

### **Immigrants and public means of transportation, Tunnel 14**

The importance of the public means of transportation in the appropriation of the new country/town by the immigrants as well as for the formation of their spatial borders is crucial. The public means of transportation connecting areas that constitute their nuclei or areas with great demand for work create traces in space as well as in the time. The parameter of time has to do with the changes in the use of space, due to the appropriation of the new town, as well as with the changes that come about in the route of the means of transportation which in its turn affects the routes of the immigrants.

The means of transportation comprise a tool for the immigrants in order to process and appropriate urban space. The cheap and without distinctions –even though this equality is questioned daily by the rest of the users and by the employees in the means- movement serves as means of connecting and areas where they can find jobs, people from the same country as well as places of gathering and entertainment. Public and free spaces exist along the routes of the public transportation means which are used by the immigrants.

The route in question is the specific transportation Papdiamanti Square – Neo Psychiko trolley line and, respectively, the route Patisia – Ampelokipoi. During the 80's it served the new immigrants in making their everyday activities in the two areas where the majority of the African population was concentrated.

The trolley line 14 is particularly important for the African immigrants because it constitutes the means of transportation which served their transportation between two “familiar” areas. As it becomes obvious by the maps 1 and 2, the two nuclei of the Africans are placed along Patisia, mainly in the areas of Kipseli and Patisia. The next area with the highest concentration is located in Ampelokipoi. The same Africans that have been for over two decades in Greece can remember the route of this trolley as transportation through a tunnel. An activist act in 2007, from Union of African Women brought to the foreground the memories and images of the first African immigrants and offered valuable information about the relation of space appropriation and the metropolis in general. This act included a festival in Amerikis Square with ethnic music, ethnic food and using the specific trolley line for “anti-information” about the problems that second generation immigrants from Africa are facing.



The only accessible and interesting areas for the immigrants in the early stage of migration were Ampelokipoi and a part of Patision Street; the rest of the stops along the line remained indifferent and unexplored, even dark, for many years. The intermediate stops were the unknown, the tunnel as they very graphically called it themselves.

Today, luckily, the use and the diversity of the public means of transportation that the immigrants use has been differentiated and increased, as the unknown for them parts of the metropolis have decreased. This can obviously be attributed to the spread of the immigrants in it. As far as the Africans are concerned, the urban spread concerns the centre of the town, even though at first they might have moved to the suburbs of Athens, looking for jobs. Ampelokipoi and Patisia are today only two of the areas where the Africans are concentrated, mainly because Africans choose their residence based on the rent price and the accessibility by the public means, maintain residences (Interviews with African immigrants) .

The means of transportation constituted, after the first contact with the city, a cheap tool for the immigrants to explore it. It can now be a choice and not just a necessity in moving in the chaotic metropolis. However, the “older” immigrants that have gained financial power tend to satisfy their need for transportation, to a certain extent, with private vehicles. This offers them access to better jobs and services in a shorter amount of time. Nevertheless, statistic data that concern other countries, in Greece there does not exist such a research yet- show the preference of immigrants of every category of income for public transport is greater than the one of the indigenous population (*Modarres, A. (2009)*).

There exists today, globally, the view that the immigrants comprise the “most ecological entities in the city”, *Modarres, A. (2009)*. The research on the means of transportation of the immigrants to the areas of their interest are, sadly, very limited, even though the use they make is widespread and in certain routes they are the majority of the passengers. In a way, the immigrants achieve the aspirations of the “green” traffic experts, which aim at a more ecological solution in the mobility for the whole society (*Modarres, A., 2009*).

## **Politics and immigrants..**

Politics is expressed in many levels for the female immigrants; an expression of it can be seen in the space and its use.

Generally, the female immigrants and mainly the Africans have demonstrated rich activist action during the last decade. Having the knowledge that the isolation tends to intensify the stereotypes and the segregations, the female immigrants usually obey selectively to social conventions while they oppose others strategically in order to make their lives easier. This activism though does not dictate a concise political ideology, the way it is defined by the interest groups, as they mentioned in the interviews.

However this activism is considered a political choice and so its social tone will be examined. It concerns the way in which people socialize and struggle for their needs and desires, even their ideas and dreams. It is not however a concise political ideology which would be applied homogenously to all the aspects of the life of the activist. So, the political representation in the African community is very small, apart from some mobilizations during the last years on the initiative of some left-wing groups and anarchists who have created bonds with particular groups of immigrants. Such mobilizations started 3 years ago (2007) and have been increasing at a small rate ever since, due to the new racist incidents that have intensified in central areas but also in other areas with a great ethnic mixture. However, mainly African men and particularly vendors take part in these political mobilizations; in fact it is them that constitute the initial group with which anarchist groups of the universities have collaborated in order to resist collectively against the cruel practices of the municipal police regarding the illegal, outdoors selling.

Moreover, marches and protests have taken place, in collaboration with radical political groups, after the assassination at Kalamaria of Thessaloniki by the Greek police of the Nigerian Tony Onoua. Obviously one cannot come to the conclusion that by taking part in this movement, the Africans have been identified with the Anarchist ideology or the libertarian culture. A minimum will to collaborate to deal with the everyday African problems was what contributed to this political action by the political groups and the Africans.

Contrary, the female immigrants who are intensely active in their new spaces, have as their priority the acquisition of some basic rights that are the base minimum for a decent way of living. Their basic concern is the fulfillment of some basic needs and the accomplishment of good relations with the native group. At the same time, they think about their place of birth,

and of their relatives, as a “maternal” memory, without however varnishing it or being blind to the negative side of that place (Petronoti, M., 1998). However, handling the difficulties of the everyday life as well as remembering the beautiful moments, especially of the familiar ones, from the country of origin, creates a psychological situation that cannot be expressed with a single political ideology of the old school-anarchy, Marxism etc.

There were immigrants that preferred a particular political idiom from the country of origin, but in the new circumstances everything loses the shades they had in the previous conditions. They seem unable to realize that one of their basic problems is the class antagonism in the capitalist regime of the host country, since the survival problems are still particularly intense. So, no particular political school can cover all of the actions, thoughts even secret desires. One more reason is the need for a cultural coherence in the African communities of Athens. More intense political disputes can be created among immigrants from countries with everlasting rival regimes, but because the priorities about struggles in this country are different, they usually focus on them. Their balanced interpersonal relations come in contrast with the unfair conditions of the Greek society. As far as particular countries like Eritrea are concerned, it is still true that the persons that emigrated were usually related to the turbulent political climate of their country and of Ethiopia, during the period that the later collaborated with the Soviet Union. This example stresses the importance of the politics on the choice or even the necessity of emigration.

Here we must observe that political choice is behind every aspect of the everyday life of the African woman and cannot be fitted in the frames of the classical political science. In conditions which concern the female immigrants, who accept many and multi-leveled pressures and rejections, there is no stylized and homogenous political thought, because there is not a stable and psychologically calm situation that will promote the deeper philosophical and political quest. In such extreme situations such as these, the solutions are more spontaneous and directly externalized.

The female immigrants envisage even multi-leveled changes and radical solutions regarding cultural and social issues, such as the release from the patriarchic society, their power to negotiate, respect in the community and in the working place. It must be mentioned that many, inactive now, but also active organizations have been discovered during the bibliographic research and concern the “political” action of the Africans from the early stage of their in-migration. Besides the organizations of the immigrants, many groups without political direction or NGO have been recorded, and also agencies which deals the

immigrants. Some of them are the: Union of African Women, Union of the Reds of Greece, International Catholic Immigrants' Service, Greek Council of Refugees, Catholic African Union, Greek-Sudan Connector of Friendship.

### **The trails of the African woman**

Through the observations that have been made and the interviews with African women, an image about their traces has been created and about what these traces represent in the society in which they try to be incorporated, or that they have already been incorporated. Every move, every change, every color in space comprises a mosaic which projects the way of perception of the African woman, of the structure of the society and its morality in combination with the ones of the country of origin.

Again, it appears that the place of the woman, apart from the wage earning employment that is necessary in the country of settlement for survival reasons, also maintains the exclusiveness in materializing the household's duties. The patriarchic structure of the African community-and of the Greek and of the European- existing in the country of origin co-exists with the new duties and obligations. So, even if they are the only bread-winner of a family that does include a wife, it is necessary that they are subdued to the social rules that want the place of the woman more composed and focused on the children and the husband, with very limited personal time. Of course, as has already been mentioned, the male Africans do not constitute a lazy group, but a group of skilled people who usually cannot find a stable job to support financially their families. However, despite the devictimization of the male Africans it is certain that the stereotypes concerning the social gender that come from the societies of origin, are also maintained resulting in burdening the psychological and sometimes the corporal health of the African women.

Sadly, the results of a research field show that the relation of the African woman with the public space is quite limited. The more private spots, like shops, houses or the bases of the female organizations constitute the more common places of socialization and networking of the African woman. The neighborhood as a concept is particularly loaded for the woman even if it is considerably away from the public places it contains.

## **A multicultural neighborhood..**

The social politics combined with the manipulation of public opinion through the mass media and also with the “propaganda through action” (Kropotkin, P., 2005), and the intense policing aims at preventing conflicts, as they are understood by the regime. The social conflict seen as creative and unifying process in multinational society of Athens must not be underestimated. The meeting with the Africans might not bring about politically important changes, but it sure upsets the fixed way of thinking of a conservative society, creating cleavages and fermentations. Mixing civilizations can be neither smooth nor effortless. It does result however in the re-assessment or the establishment of the images concerning the natives and the immigrants. It can also result in the realization that all the conditions are dynamic and the future is common.

When the immigrants are referred to as cut off and isolated, they are not considered at the same time weak personalities. On the contrary, they are persons with their own customs, civilization and personal experiences that try to cope with the new conditions with the supplies they have. With their actions they become integral parts of the community, necessary for the smooth survival of the natives.

The presence of a new culture in the Greek society creates curiosity and occasions for interaction with the new elements that have been given form by the immigrants. The projection of the new elements affects the locals as subjects with many roles, based on gender, the employment hierarchy, the social position and conscience. Older views and new experiences have a role in the formation of the new situation, even if this is dynamic and of essence for the new society. So, one can come to the conclusion that the immigrants are still obscure and invisible as social policy is concerned, but that at the same time they create conflicts, arguing and questioning. This double nature concerning the images of the natives, must show the oxymoron of the matter and constitute an incentive for understanding reality and formatting a multicultural one.

The boundaries that are set in the new society allow the immigrants to maintain the necessary space in order to act based on their habits and customs. The handling of these “borders” covers their cultural and social needs, resisting the cultural demands of the natives. Each immigrant group maintains some elements of differentiation which serve the strategic process of incorporating them in the new society without changing them

historically and culturally. The promotion of their difference but also of the common elements with the host country comprises strategies of survival in the new country.

All these conditions are dynamic and can change at any moment or can even be disrupted. The relations between the natives and the locals but also between the emigrational groups themselves are specific but also fluid.

However, Athens is not yet a space that accommodates a multicultural society. The only thing that has been eliminated these past few years are the physical distances between different cultures but not the actual social distance. Even though semantically the many cultures, the different incoming elements and the conflicts that co-existence brings about, comprise a multi-cultural whole, this is not enough to achieve the model of the multi-cultural society. The distances and the balances that the state maintains for the immigrants, segregates them from the centers where decisions, even decisions that concern them, are made. (Petronoti, M., 1992). To bring about the multicultural society, all the citizens must become politically active. The right of electing and being elected is the basic right of every citizen who has the obligation to benefit and form the society with his/her presence.

The academic community, despite its effort to investigate the migration issue in Greece and to provide solutions appropriately adapted to the ethnic and other sub-groups of the immigrants, does not attract the necessary resources and support by the state. Due to a lack of data and analyses (Kasimati K., Mousourou L., 2007), the appropriate solutions are impossible to be found and be implemented in order to improve the co-existence of so many cultures in a single space with these particular, unique characteristics.

The prompt to the society and the citizens themselves is the creation of favorable conditions, particularly in the areas of the centre of the city, for the creation of a multi-cultural society. This new society will be possible only if the local ethnic involvement is exploited at its maximum.

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