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"Forms of public sociality in 20th-century urban Greece: the project, the premises and provisional findings"

It was during the summer of 2009 that some of us started discussing the idea of drafting a common proposal for the *Research Programme* Thales, co-funded by the European *Union and Greek national funds, newly* launched at the time. Our first and main motive was to do something together; the search of a specific theme that could combine our different research interests followed. Soon a team of twenty researchers from the three partner universities and other institutions in Greece and abroad was gathered. We submitted our proposal "Forms of public sociality in 20th-century urban Greece: associations, networks of social intervention and collective subjectivities" in early 2010, but we had to wait for more than two years until it was finally accepted and the necessary bureaucratic steps were put in motion. Consequently, we had to complete in three years a research project that was designed for five. In the meantime, the economic crisis fell upon us. When in September 2012 the three research teams started to work, our salaries were already cut by forty per cent, research funds were a luxury of the past, the university was closed to young scholars, youth unemployment in Greece had exceeded fifty per cent and prospects were more than bleak. So we do not complain that in the midst of this sinister situation and until now, thirty-three researchers and technical support personnel have been associated with this project, most of whom are young scholars, with no permanent jobs. It has been a happy yet strange occurrence.

The project focuses on voluntary associations operating in specific urban centres in various periods of twentieth-century Greece and their activities. We explore how formal and informal versions of collective action formed networks and collective subjectivities. Through a bottom-up approach, we investigate the meanings that people ascribed to their participation in voluntary associations, the social relations and the common actions in which they

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participated, how they changed over time and the political dimensions of these changes; in short, the forms of public sociality that social relations in these associations generated.

I do not need to talk here about the existing literature on voluntary associations. Let me say only that international scholarly discussions about voluntary organizations and collective public action have hitherto largely neglected Greece, and we hope to contribute to filling this gap.

Our project is structured around the concept of 'public sociality.' 'Sociality' is a notion elaborated mainly by social anthropologists since the 1980s, in their attempts to go beyond the durkheimian notion of 'society.' Drawing from the work of Georg Simmel, they proposed 'sociality' as a way of thinking about social relations that takes into account their cultural dimension – the meanings people ascribe to them.[1] Historians have also criticised the notion of 'society' as a given entity, although according to Patrick Joyce, present here, "a radical rethinking of the notion of the social" is a lost opportunity in history.[2] However, there have been varied and important contributions in this respect, not least his own[3]. Be that as it may, and although they seldom interact, many anthropologists and historians would concur that people invest their world with meanings and symbols through a dynamic and contextualized process. Accordingly, the cultural categories with which they organize their relationships – 'society,' but also 'gender,' 'kinship,' 'place,' 'youth,' etc. – are not as they are usually presented, stable and fixed, but culturally, and therefore historically, constructed.[4] Lately, the

[1] Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability," in David Friby - M. Featherstone (eds), *Simmel on culture: Selected Writings*, London 1997, 120-130; Adam Kuper (ed.), *Conceptualizing Society*, London & New York 1992; Tim Ingold (ed.), *Key Debates in Anthropology*, London 1996.

[2] Patrick Joyce, "What is the social in social history?", *Past and Present* 206 (2010): 213.

[3] For example: Keith Baker, "Enlightenment and the Institution of Society: Notes for a Conceptual History", in Willem Melching – Wyger Velema (eds), *Main Trends in Cultural History: Ten Essays*, Amsterdam & Atlanta 1994; Mary Poovey, *Making a social body. British cultural formation, 1830-1864*, Chicago 1995; Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Social in Question. New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences*, London 2002; William Jr. Sewell, *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago & London, 2005.

[4] Leonore Davidoff, "Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History", in L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between. Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class*, Cambridge 1995, 227-276; Mary Poovey, *Making a social body. British cultural formation, 1830-1864*, Chicago 1995; Sonya O. Rose, "Gender and Labor History. The nineteenth-century legacy", *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993): 145-162; Sewell Jr., William H., 'Refiguring the 'social' in social science: an interpretivist manifesto', in W. H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History*, 318-372.

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study of these relations has been extended to include not only humans, but also non-humans, objects and 'things.'[5]

We find all these approaches highly inspiring. In our project we focus on a specific type of social relations; those embedded in collective action in the public space, hence the use of the term 'public sociality.' We look for the cultural meanings that people participating in voluntary associations attached both to the activities to which they participated and to the relationships that they formed as members of a specific collectivity. The term has a number of advantages for our common research project:

- First, it allows us to overcome the limitations and ambiguities of related concepts commonly used in the study of voluntary associations, such as 'public sphere' and 'civil society.'[6] 'Public sociality' allows us to avoid a static and reifying conception of social relations since it refers to a process in the course of which the subjects involved enter extra-domestic relations in the name of a culturally defined affinity, they develop various forms of collective action, they invest those forms with cultural meanings and through them they create collective subjectivities.[7]

- Second, 'public sociality' is useful for an extended conceptualization of the political, which is not identified exclusively with demands addressed to the state, but is historically and culturally constructed through everyday practices, through the meanings with which social relations are invested, and through multifarious public interventions. In that sense, it is suitable for the study of the concrete processes through which voluntary associations become

[5] Nicholas J. Long & Henrietta L. Moore (eds), *Sociality: New Directions*, New York & Oxford 2013.

[6] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass. 1989; Jürgen Kocka, "Civil society from a historical perspective", *European Review* 12/1 (2004): 65-79; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York 2000.

[7] E. Papataxiarchis, "A Contest with Money: Gamling and the Politics of Disenterested Sociality in Aegean Greece," in S. Day, M. Stewart, E. Papataxiarchis (eds), *Lilies of the Field: Marginal People Who Live for the Moment*, Bulder 1999, 158-175; Katerina Rozakou, «'Κοινωνικότητα' και 'κοινωνία αλληλεγγύης'. Η περίπτωση ενός εθελοντικού σωματείου» ['Sociality' and 'society of solidarity.' The case of a voluntary association], *Ελληνική Επιθεώρηση Πολιτικής Επιστήμης* [Greek Review of Political Science] 33 (2008): 95-120.

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'schools of citizenship.'[8] It is rather close to what Laura Lee Downs, present here, has described as 'para-political space.'[9]

- Third, the concept of 'public sociality' is appropriate for interdisciplinary approaches. Its plasticity and comprehensiveness allows the distinct processes through which collective subjectivities are created in different historical moments and with diverse forms to be studied from a range of theoretical starting points. It also enables us to combine the study of both formal and informal collectivities, actions involving public interventions as well as localities of togetherness; to go beyond the question of what is and what is not voluntary association. To paraphrase Matthew Hilton, present here, it enables us to encompass different forms of activism and their changing meanings, from philanthropy to voluntarism and from revendication to protest.[10]

- Fourth, 'public sociality' facilitates a relational conceptualization of the state, not as a given entity, opposite to an equally reified 'society,' but as a field of relations, as the outcome of everyday contacts between individuals engaged in collective action and representatives of state institutions – be it in confrontation or in close synergy. Through the interweaving of the private and the public, it directs us towards rethinking the relations between voluntary associations and the state as outcomes of multiple fields of power and contact.[11] This is even more the case for associations related to transnational or international networks, where the local configurations differ considerably, as Anne Cova, present here, has shown.[12]

Putting the notion of public sociality at the centre of our project made possible the formation of a baseline linking the three research teams and the various case studies of our

[8] Frank Prochaska, *Schools of Citizenship: Charity and Civic Virtue*, London, 2002.

[9] Laura Lee Downs, "'And so we transform a people': Women's social action and the reconfiguration of politics on the Right in France, 1934-1947," *Past and Present* 225/1 (2014): 187-225.

[10] Matthew Hilton, "Social activism in an age of consumption: the organized consumer movement", *Social History* 32/2 (2007): 121-143.

[11] Aradhana Sharma & Gupta Akhil, "Introduction: Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization," in Aradhana Sharma, Gupta Akhil (eds), *The Anthropology of the State. A Reader*, Oxford 2006, 1-41.

[12] Anne Cova, "International Feminisms in Historical Comparative Perspective: France, Italy and Portugal, 1880s-1930s," *Women's History Review* 19/4 (2010): 595-612.

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concerted interdisciplinary research efforts. What we all search in common are at least the shared cultural notions of affinity on which specific social relations formed through participation in specific formal or informal collectivities and collective activities are based. This does not exclude other perspectives that each researcher can develop in her or his case study. But it allows us to ask collectively to what extent and in which ways do both formal and informal forms of public sociality constitute a dialogical cultural field and at what point does this field acquire political expression. Choosing a bottom-up approach to voluntary associations, we try to monitor the processes through which the social body was formed in Greek urban spaces in the course of the 20th century as a plural and multileveled configuration, and as an distinct sphere of governing; how it was eventually converted into an equally plural and multileveled 'political body;' what hegemonic forms it took in different historical conjunctures and what were the porous, fluid and complex relations that it entertained with the state.

Methodologically speaking, we experimented with three research strategies. The first was the horizontal study of multiple associations covering a distinct thematic field in the same historical and spatial context. This approach was used in the study of voluntary associations around youth in the island of Syros and associations promoting local 'popular tradition' in the island of Lesvos, both for the first half of twentieth century.[13] This strategy was made possible by the existence of rich local archives. Together with the archive of Athens from the interwar years up to the ninety sixties that we unearthed, and which is currently being digitalized, these archives have greatly contributed to our database. The second strategy – adopted by most researchers – concerns the vertical study of one or two voluntary associations in specific moments in time. The collectivities in question were national with local branches, such as the Association of Shop Assistants, the Association for the Protection

[13] Case-studies: Christos Loukos, Eleni Fournaraki, and Eleni Papamakariou: "Voluntary associations for youth and by youth in Syros during the first half of the twentieth century" and Maria Stamatoyiannopoulou: "Constructions of middle-classness in Mytilini: associations and forms of public sociality (1890-1940)."

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of Minors, and the Association of Working High School Pupils;[14] local, such as the Pedagogical Centre of the post-war Jewish Community of Athens, the refugee Association Anatoli, or the neighbourhood associations of Kifissia;[15] or even transnational, such as the Zionist Maccabi Youth Club in interwar Salonica, the Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters in the Ottoman provinces of Macedonia at the turn of the century, the orthodox associations for welfare provision in late Ottoman Smyrna, or the Greek Red Cross at the turn of the twenty-first century.[16] A third strategy, adopted by our political scientists, consists of systematically recording references to voluntary associations in the daily press of the immediate post-junta years in Athens and Salonica. The relevant material is then analysed in many different, quantitative and qualitative, ways.[17]

Our bottom-up approach has depended on the availability of sources. The most common sources (statutes, minutes of proceedings) often result in discursive or symbolic analyses. For the more recent periods oral-history research has allowed a more direct focus on practices of relations; and the anthropologist among us has done detailed ethnographic research. It is also our aim to use the existing literature in order to connect, to the extent that it is possible, the cultural notions that form public sociality in our case studies with the non-associational aspects of everyday life; with other social relations and the meanings ascribed to them.

[14] Case-studies: Maria-Christina Chatziioannou and Flora Tsilaga: "The commercial world of Athens, 1900-1950. Collective representation, apprenticeship and education;" Efi Avdela and Dimitra Vassiliadou: "The Associations for the Protection of Minors (1940-1960);" Dimitra Labropoulou: "The collective action of working pupils in post-war Athens."

[15] Case-studies: Pothiti Hantzaroula: "Aspects of the sociality of Jews in post-war Thessaloniki and Athens: identities after the catastrophe of the Holocaust;" Haris Exertzoglou: "Collective subjectivity and memory. The refugee associations of Athens during the interwar period;" Yiannis Yiannitsiotis: "Spatial dimensions of public sociality: The area of Kifissia in the decades 1950-1970."

[16] Case-studies: Paris Papamichos Chronakis: "The Christian Brotherhood Youth of Salonica and Maccabi. Youth, ethnicity and gender in post-ottoman and inter-war Thessaloniki, 1912-1935;" Maria Preka: "Versions of 'youth' and action for youth in the national discourse. The case of the Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters;" Vaggelis Kechriotis: "The associations and institutions of Smyrna (1860-1922). The social representations of the Greek-orthodox middle class;" Katerina Rozakou, "Voluntary associations for relief to immigrants: an ethnographic approach to public sociality in early 21st-century Athens."

[17] Case studies: Christos Lyrintzis and Yiannis Karayiannis: "Aspects of social and political demand (1974-1981);" Dimitris A. Sotiropoulos and Katerina Loukidou: "Relationships between the Greek State and 'civil society' (1974-1981);" Yiannis Karayiannis and Katerina Loukidou: "'Civil society' in the daily press, 1974-1981."

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The bi-annual common seminars of the three research teams were extremely helpful in fostering methodological, theoretical and factual common ground. They allowed us to detect affinities and to pinpoint common or similar findings in very different case studies in respect to their thematic and chronological references and their research methodology. Given the variety of subjects and the diversification of approaches we do not aspire to general conclusions. Here I will refer only to a few points.

Let me say at the outset that our findings point to a much more extensive associational activity in twentieth-century urban Greece than indicated by the oft-repeated claim of weak civil society in this country. In all cases collective public action proves to be a meaning-producing process through which boundaries are drawn and subjectivities forged, gender, ethnic or local identities are negotiated and new areas of rights emerge.

1) Associations programmatically oriented toward benefiting third parties constituted an important part of Greek associational life throughout the twentieth century. The nineteenth-century 'culture of philanthropy' showed remarkable persistence, especially in periods of collective distress, recurrent in this country throughout the century, not least given the insistently fragmented and inadequate state provision. However, collectivities of this kind also underwent considerable transformations. Those aiming at changing the attitudes and behaviours of others – paupers, juveniles, mothers, refugees, etc. – co-existed with those that proposed and organized interventions in new social issues, from the national education of disputed populations, to child health and social welfare, juvenile delinquency or the mental health of children and youth. Only in a few cases were voluntary associations gradually transformed into state institutions, as with the Foundation for Social Protection and Welfare.[18] Of particular interest are the changes in the use of certain notions such as those of 'offer,' 'philanthropy,' 'voluntarism,' or 'solidarity' and the extent to which these schemes of disinterested sociality are linked with alternative visions of social relations or with classic models of social hierarchy.

[18] Case study: Vasso Theodorou, "Associations aiming at the health of children and youth, and the social welfare of childhood and motherhood (1890-1940)"

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2) The 'scientification of the social' through the increasing participation of a wide range of professionals' in associational life is evident, yet is neither linear nor clear-cut. It can take the form of new scientific expertise claiming recognition, as in the case of the postwar Association for the Mental Hygiene and Neuropsychiatry of the Child;[19] or of specialized diversification of interventional activities, as with the increasing presence of doctors in the Foundation for Social Protection and Welfare. Of interest is the persistent co-existence of volunteers and state (or ecclesiastical) officials, of 'charitable ladies' and scientific experts, many of whom were also women. However, in the course of the century the content of voluntary work changed as some sort of training became a prerequisite for even the more basic duties. At the same time, expertise of any degree denoted hierarchical relations, both with the recipients of interventions and between associational fellow-members. In these cases, public sociality can be rooted in a wide range of meanings, from 'sacrifice' and 'love' to prestige and distinction.

3) Associations catering to the needs of their own members proliferated throughout the century. They were organized along various axes of difference: ethnic, class, local, professional, recreational and the like, through which collective subjectivities were constructed. The Zionist Maccabi athletes in interwar Salonica, the working pupils in post-civil-war Athens or the surviving Jewish children in post-war Salonica, are telling cases. Often collective subjectivities were forged through the formulation of demands. Demands were educational, as with the Association of Shop Assistants during the interwar years or the Association of Working High School Pupils in the nineteen sixties; welfare oriented, as with the various refugee associations or the postwar Association of Parents and Guardians of Mentally Retarded Children; or contesting government decisions, as was often the case in the post-junta years. They could also be specifically local, as with the Neighbourhood Associations of post-war Kifissia. Locality is also related to peripheral identities, as in the case of associations in Syros and Lesvos. Furthermore, sociality can be produced through

[19] Case study: Despo Kritsotaki, "Associations and institutions for the mental health of children and youths in post-war Greece (1950-1980)"

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common memory, especially of a traumatic past, as indicated in the cases of refugee and Jewish associations. 'Friendship' seems to be a recurrent notion of cultural affinity between members in this kind of associational common action.

4) The relations between voluntary associations and the state were shifting, varied and complex throughout the twentieth century in spite of the formal prescription of independence. Given that the Greek state has been for a very long time far from the classic liberal paradigm, these relations were characterized by even more pronounced fluidity and permeability than it is usually accepted today, even in cases of demands or moments of confrontation. While this holds for all associations, it is more easily detected in respect of the extensive field of provisional collective interventions. Government officials and volunteers, of varied degrees of expertise or simply motivated by the wish to contribute, undertook at different times (mainly in the postwar period), a wide range of concerted initiatives aiming at circumventing the inadequacies of the shadowy Greek welfare state. These initiatives constitute a highly idiosyncratic Greek version of the mixed economy of welfare.

Finally, in spite of the dense and varied associational activity in twentieth-century Greece, which has been underlined even in a fragmented and partial way, it seems that the relationship between associational life and democracy is more complex than is usually admitted. Voluntary associations may constitute 'laboratories or schools of citizenship,' spaces where the 'relational constitution of citizenship' and 'transformations of affinity' are performed[20], but they can also be vectors of segmentation, of fragmented and confrontational subjectivities. Whether they aim at preserving or changing social relations, at fulfilling individualized needs or intervening in the name of 'society,' they give multiple and varied meanings to internal affinities and external differences. In that sense their study contributes to

[20] Katerina Rozakou, «Κοινωνικότητα και παραγωγή του πολίτη: Οι περιπτώσεις δύο εθελοντικών σωματείων» [Sociality and the production of the citizen: the cases of two voluntary associations], working paper, Third Joint Seminar, Public Sociality Thalis Project, 28 November 2013, Athens, http://www.public-sociality.gr/KEIMENA_ERGASIAS/13_Rozakou_Athina_2013.pdf.

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an understanding of the political as "the analysis of the ways of acquiring and transmitting power".[21]

Be that as it may, during the years of our concerted research efforts we were able to create our own forms of public sociality, our own space of stimulating exchange and mutual trust. I would call it a mixed and scholarly version of *adda*, the urban social practice of Bengali men analysed by Dipesh Chakrabarty.[22] I believe that I can claim on behalf of all participants in our project that we enjoyed working together; that our heated debates were extremely productive; that in spite of the burdens of bureaucracy we had fun and we gained very much indeed. Once this project is completed I am sure that we will all miss being together.

In the meantime, we look forward to the exchanges and conviviality of our two-day conference and to the fruitful outcomes that we all anticipate.

[21] Christos Lyrintzis – Evthymios Papataxiarchis, «(Ανα)θεωρήσεις του πολιτικού. Συγκλίσεις και αποκλίσεις στην ανθρωπολογία και την πολιτική επιστήμη» [(Re)visions of the political. Convergences and divergences in anthropology and political science], in Katerina Rozakou & Eleni Gara (eds), *Ελληνικά παράδοξα. Πατρωνία, κοινωνία πολιτών και βία* [Greek paradoxes. Patronage, civil society and violence], Athens 2013, 93-94

[22] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "*Adda*: A History of Sociality", in his book, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000, 180-213.