Cultures of Protest in Greece

Aikaterini Andronikidou

Queen's University Belfast

Introduction

Are there commonalities between the riots that took place in Greece in 2008, in France in 2005 and in UK recently? If there are could we say that politics are returning back to the streets or is it a whole new generation of protest, that except of new technology mediums used to communicate, they share also other common characteristics? If not, what are the differences between those incidents and what are the reasons behind these differences? Interestingly, anti-systemic forces mobilize support in some liberal democracies but not in others. This paper asks why, looking primarily at Greece but using other European nations as a comparative study.

Greece and Spain have many points in common. In their recent history, both have experienced military control followed by a divisive civil war. In both countries, and almost at the same time, civil war led to a process of democratization. They entered the European Union almost simultaneously, Greece in 1981 and Spain in 1986. More recently, they have struggled with recession and increasing unemployment; they are also considered 'transit points' for immigrants seeking access to Western Europe and thus have sizeable immigrant communities. Furthermore, a strong tradition of left-wing grassroots movements is flourishing in the two societies. Despite the many similarities, in December 2008, Greece faced an intense and violent anti-systemic movement with widespread rioting; this is not the case in Spain, at least at the moment, despite the skyrocketing (youth) unemployment.

Like Greece and Spain, France and Germany invite comparison. Both are long-standing democracies with relatively strong economies and both play a leading role in the European Union. They have been destination countries for immigrants since the 16th century, but while France often experiences violent waves of contention associated with immigration, as in the French suburbs in 2005, Germany manages to absorb the grievances of immigrant communities concerning restricted access to citizenship and other rights within its political system.

UK also is a long standing democracy with a stable economy. It is a destination country for immigrants and has a big history on rioting incidents. Admittedly, the rioting incidents had different causes during the decades and they were focused in different areas. However, in August 2011 we noticed some incidents that lasted several days.

There are also main differences in the three cases of rioting incidents, however the focus in order to explain the cause, is the reaction of the public and state in these cases. While in Greece the state reaction was a passive one in fear that more people would get angry, due to reasons that will be explained following, in France a curfew was introduced and in the UK many people were arrested and a statement by Cameron was made that if the rioters are of age to commit crimes, they are also of age to be arrested.

Why are Greece and France so different from the other countries in their tendency to mobilize violence? The paper considers the reasons for anti-systemic movements, focusing on the 2008 Greek riots and seeking to generalize its findings to

the case of France with the counter example of the UK It examines the framing of the Greek riots in two daily newspapers with different ideological backgrounds in a bid to extract the primary causes. Based on the themes which emerge in the media framing, the paper provides explanations for the mobilization of protest, including economic scarcity, relative deprivation and political opportunities. Ultimately, it highlights the importance of culture to the emergence and maintenance of a culture of resistance. Focusing on how political learning from previous experiences is transformed into political institutions, the analysis identifies the mechanism through which culture affects political outcomes. More specifically, the type of transition to democracy in Greece institutionalized historical practices which enabled the cultivation of a culture of resistance.

Riots in Context

Oddly, riots have been excluded from the literature of both social movements and anti-systemic movements, even though they are considered either a means used by anti-systemic movements to specific ends or an (irrational) eruption of mass behaviour (Druri and Reicher, 1999).

Labelled "New Social Movements" (NSMs), recent riots have been studied by Johnston et al., (1994); these researchers have identified eight common characteristics that distinguish MSNs from traditional movements (1994: 5-9). First, NSM participants do not have a consistent or common class background. Second, it is difficult to track the ideological characteristics of NSMs, as they represent constituents with divergent ideological backgrounds. Third, NSMs often involve the emergence of new or formerly weak dimensions of identities which are linked with cultural and symbolic issues. Fourth, the relation between the individual and collective is not clear; many contemporary movements are 'acted out' in individual actions rather than through or among mobilized groups. Fifth, NSMs involve personal and intimate aspects of human life. Sixth, they use more radical mobilization tactics of disruption and resistance. Seventh, the credibility crisis of conventional channels for participation in Western democracies leads to the organization and proliferation of NSMs. Eighth and finally, NSM organizations are segmented, diffuse and decentralized. If this list is accurate, it would not be incongruent to include riots lie the following within anti-systemic movements.

On December 6, 2008, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a 15-year-old schoolboy, was shot dead by a policeman in Exarchia, a bohemian district of Athens which hosts sizeable anarchist and libertarian communities. The news of the incident spread quickly among young people who used new technologies, such as blogs, websites and SMS, to call for a forceful reaction. The rioting that followed was of unprecedented magnitude. It lasted almost three weeks; hundreds of petrol bombs were thrown at the police, banks and state buildings, and there were numerous incidents of looting, violence and terrorism. The rioters even looted the shop of the parents of the schoolboy shot by the police (Kathimerini 9/12/2008). The wrath of the rioters peaked when, in a symbolic act, they burned a Christmas tree – the largest in Europe – in front of the Greek Parliament.

In the Greek government, at the executive level, the New Democracy party held a fragile majority (controlling 151 out of 300 seats). The government was facing criticism over a series of corruption scandals involving senior ministers, the mishandling of wildfires in which more than 60 people died and its inability to deliver economic reforms. After a special midnight session, the Cabinet decided that the

police should maintain a defensive position to minimize the possibility of causing any deaths that might lead to further mayhem and the collapse of the government. In brief, the Athenian riots signified the return of 'street politics' in contemporary Greek politics (Economides and Monastiriotis 2009).

This incident was reminiscent of the 2005 French riots which turned the Parisian suburbs (*banlieues*) into a battlefield. On October 27, 2005, two teenagers were electrocuted in Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb north of Paris, as they fled a police identity check. According to a third man, they ran simply because other young people were running (AFP 2005a). The two boys, Zyed Benna, aged 17, and Bouna Traore, 15, were of Arab/African origin. The news spread quickly in the suburbs and sparked riots that lasted for almost three weeks.

A growing community of *pied-noir*, French citizens from former French colonies, angry at their economic misery, unemployment, racial discrimination and provocative policing, became the main body of rioters. The youth framed the situation as a gross injustice and vocally demanded access to opportunities and better jobs. The gravity of the crisis led political elites to examine the root causes of the widespread unrest. Some attributed the violence to the provocative statements of (then) Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, about 'sweeping clean the suburbs with a *karcher*' (a high pressure washer), his reference to the rioting youth as 'scum' and his declaration of a 'war without mercy' on violence in the suburbs (AFP 2005b). Other observers linked the riots to extremist Islamist groups, the Muslim threat and polygamy (Levant 2005), unemployment and frustration, and insufficient parenting (AFP 2005c).

In the management of the crisis, local governments imposed curfews, reactivating a 1955 emergency law, in an effort to prevent the 'spill over' of the crisis to neighbouring districts/departments. Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the deployment of 9,500 police officers to keep the peace (Bawa 2005). The emergency law enabled the police to carry out raids in places where they believed weapons or other objects dangerous for public security were stored (Vucheva 2005). The Prime Minister called for long-term political measures to vindicate the unjust situation, including a five-year plan for fostering social cohesion, the appointment of commissioners to oversee equality of opportunity, apprenticeships for students 14 years and older who wanted to leave school, and one hundred million Euros to finance civic associations charged with maintaining social cohesion (Wenden 2005). Finally, the Minister of the Interior announced the expulsion of convicted foreign rioters, even though the majority of the delinquents were French nationals (ibid).

Most recently on 6th August, 2011, riots spread in several areas of the UK, mainly London and Tottenham. The initial cause of these incidents was the death of Mark Duggan, who was shot by police on 4th of August. Following family members and supporters gathered outside the local police station demanding an explanation; however when police failed to provide that, the peaceful demonstrations developed into rioting, attacks on the police and looting.

Police reacted flat-footed initially and many explanations were provided, by scholars and politicians, for the emergence of the incidents. Sunday Telegraph after the events framed the riots as an expression of the 'erosion of morality' (McCulloch 2011). Cameron was one of the first to support this theory through his speeches about mending the broken English society (Stratton 2011). Another explanation on which the media focused was the consumer identity. Many newspaper and blogs supported that the rationale behind the incident was not political or ideological, but the main rationale was consumerist (Durodie 2011). Financial crises, as many suggest, has

intensified the above two phenomena (Alex Klein 2011). Much attention, both from media and political personas, was given to the criminality of the acts. The people that rioted were considered as mob or members of gangs, who regardless of their age were worth of punishment. Last, one of the explanations highlighted from the media was the use of new technologies, such as Facebook and Twitter.

All three cases, despite their differences, share a number of commonalities. They can be considered New Social Movements, according to the definition provided above: they sparked spontaneously; they included violent repertoires and were a reaction to action of state agents; they seemed unorganized and lacking in resources; the participants politically identified themselves as outside the political system.

The common explanations of these incidents point to economic and social causes. But if this is the case, why have similar phenomena not occurred in other countries with similar background (economic, social, political) conditions?

Framing the Greek Riots

To frame an event is to 'select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations' (Entman 1993:52). Framing is not a reflection of reality, but a simplification of a 'perceived reality' (Loizides 2009). In essence, it represents a deliberate effort by social actors to produce, guide and maintain meaning for their constituents (Benford and Snow 2000:613). As policy-makers, media and even ordinary people deploy simplified mental images to interpret complex social and political events and choose among alternative courses of action (Tetlock 1998:876), the study of these mental images (frames) can provide useful insights.

Framing is composed of two analytical elements. *Diagnostic framing* refers to the need to identify the cause(s) of the problematic situation and to apportion responsibility/blame. In essence, the present situation is perceived to be unjust and grievances are attributed to the actions/omissions of another agent, or more generally, conditions outside the control of the 'in-group' (Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997). *Prognostic framing* derives from the need to change the problematic situation by designing a strategy to overcome it (Benford and Snow 2000). In what follows, the main thrust of the analysis is reserved for diagnostic framing, since the objective is to identify the most popular explanations of the causes of the 2008 Greek riots.

Two widely distributed Greek daily newspapers are *Eleftherotipia* and *Kathimerini*. *Eleftherotipia* is a prestigious newspaper at the left of the centre of the ideological spectrum; its readership ranges in age and ideology from students to policy-makers. *Eleftherotipia* also covers the activities of new social movements, such as the anti-globalization movement and the global anti-war campaign. For its part, *Kathimerini* is a well-respected conservative newspaper. Even so, *Kathimerini* is read by many centrist readers, and it publishes articles with divergent ideological points of view.

Three broad, but overlapping, diagnostic frames emerge from the study of *Eleftherotipia*. First, because the murder of the schoolboy and the riots were causally and temporally linked (the violence erupted just an hour after the teen died), the primary responsibility for the riots is attributed to the police use of violence. It should be noted that the incident is not presented as the act of an individual; rather, the police are held accountable as a *repressive institution*, and this diagnosis is linked to past historical experiences. For example, in the first days of rioting, several articles draw

parallels with similar incidents of police brutality, some of which resulted in the death of civilians (Marnellos 8/12/08 and Antoniadis 13/12/08). The riots are also analyzed through the lens of past experiences of the civil war and the military dictatorship. People confronting complex social-political phenomena often look to the past to draw parallels and make sense of these phenomena. Thus, the newspaper characterizes the riots of 2008 as the 'December of the youth' – a direct reference to the events of December 1944 in Athens which paved the way for civil war (20/12/08).

An overlapping diagnosis points to the delimited legitimacy of state authorities which subtly legitimizes the resistance. In fact, the failure of state institutions to prevent acts of police violence against young people in the period preceding the riots contributed to growing distrust of state institutions. It is unjust when problematic institutions, *primus inter pares* the police, exceed the rule of law. This 'reality' legitimizes people to defend themselves from this arbitrary use of power (or injustice, depending on the institution under examination), including the right to resist authority. A causal thread therefore links the sources of the riot (social injustice, absence of effective political institutions and the state's decreasing legitimacy), and the self-defensive reaction of young people. More explicitly, the grievances of the youth, coupled with dysfunctional institutions, force young people to resist the (repressive) state. In the newspaper, frequent references to the high levels of unemployment, low salaries and burdensome conditions of employment – also known as G700[i] -- explain the widespread sympathy for the mobilization of the youth, even when this is violent (11/12/2008). Given the social conditions which cause youth to mobilize, it is not surprising that the riots are also linked to acts of resistance during the anti-dictatorial struggle. A former minister who participated in the 1973 Polytechnic uprising says these riots share several similarities with the anti-dictatorial mobilization (Efthymiou 28/12/2008). Second, *Eleftherotipia*'s diagnostic framing makes reference to the systemic roots of the riots and the structural problems created by capitalism and globalization. Because the heart of the problem is political (globalization, capitalism, ineffective state, etc.), the newspaper adopts the term 'uprising' (εξέγερση) -- instead of riots. Moreover, because of the common structural source of the situation, it estimates that the uprising will spill over to other European societies with similar challenges: 'The Greek uprising is considered a precursor. Europe lives in fear of a widespread uprising' (18/12/2008).

A subtle causal explanation linking the murder of a student, the structural problems of globalization and capitalism, and the repressive apparatus of the state (police) comprise the diagnostic framing of *Eleftherotipia*. In the first days of the riots (7-15 December), the emphasis is on the shortcomings of the police (as the causal and moral perpetrators of the murder); as the events unfold, the diagnostic framing is expanded to encompass broader political issues.

Kathimerini's identification of the source of the problematic situation both overlaps and diverges from *Eleftherotipia*. It subscribes to the linkage between the shooting that triggered the riots and the wider political problems (dysfunctional political institutions, corrupt political system and grievances of the youth) but abstains from referring to the phenomenon as an 'uprising'. The reading of the problem is obvious in the following: 'the unfortunate death of their age-mate, armed the hand of the 15-year old with the stone-aka-vote of the wrath for a society that does not give them a passport to study, to employment or a better life' (Bistika 11/12/2008). The paper also cites high rates of unemployment, low income and miserable prospects for youth in its explanations of the protests.

Still, there is a major difference in the two frames. *Kathimerini* identifies the police as the source of the problematic situation, but focuses on the structural weaknesses of this body in maintaining public order, more precisely, its problematic way of maintaining law and order, both in the murder itself and the ineffective reaction to the ensuing violence. Several articles note the decades-long structural deficiencies of the police as well as its non-professional behaviour, with special emphasis on examples of police brutality in the preceding months (Antoniou 9/12/2008; Magklinis 17/12/2008; Zoulas 9/12/2008).

The conservative *Kathimerini* also subscribes to the general diagnostic framing used by *Eleftherotipia* which identifies the role of politics. In this case, however, the political sources are primarily domestic, whereas *Eleftherotipia* directly links the 'Greek uprising' with wider phenomena of globalization and capitalism.

Remarkably, both newspapers abstain from prognostic framing. Apart from the subtle support for the protests, and obvious consensus on the need to reform the police, there is little mention of what should be done. Because of the complexity, intensity and duration of the riots, commentators seem reluctant make recommendations.

Alternative Explanations

Established theories of conflict can shed light on the reasons why anti-systemic movements and rioting emerge in some countries and not in others. While none specifically addresses the issue at hand, a number offer some useful insights.

According to relative deprivation theory, radical organizations emerge when social groups are frustrated by a gap between their expectations and their capabilities. They are driven to participate in a movement by their feeling that circumstances imposed by the state do not allow them to improve their conditions. As Davies says: 'Political stability and instability are ultimately dependent on a state of mind, a mood, in a society' (Davies 1962). It is not the scarcity of food, equality, or liberty that produce the reaction but the fear of scarcity (Ibid). Frustration is always subjective; the same imposed circumstances lead to rioting in some societies but not in others.

'Resource mobilization' theory argues that there are always enough people in society to fill a protest movement (Turner and Killian 1987). While frustration is always present, the resources available to nourish it vary over time. Resource mobilization theorists emphasize the organization of movements. They ignore the spontaneity of grassroots movements and emphasize rationality, saying that protest is a regular part of politics. In order to emerge, a movement needs the support or acceptance of the larger society: 'Society provides the infrastructure which social movement industries and other industries utilize. The aspects utilized include communication media and expense, levels of affluence, degree of access to institutional centers, pre-existing networks, and occupational structure and growth' (McCarthy and Zald 1977). This theory focuses on how a movement is organized and neglects how public sympathy is established, especially in cases where the movement uses violent repertoires.

The 'political process' approach posits that economic and political shifts usually occur independently of protestors' efforts and these open up a space for a social movement. Three causal factors of this 'political opportunity structure' (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1997) open the door for movements to mobilize: 'changing opportunities in the political environment, especially state responses to protest; the existing level of organization in the aggrieved community; and the population's

assessment of its chances for success' (Jasper 1997). Whenever there is a collective action, there must be a favourable opportunity structure. Opportunities are context-dependent. They can be created from within the movements; movements or the members of a movement can perceive a specific event as an opportunity for action. As McCarthy and Zald note 'grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Bringing together elements of these theories, we focus on the importance of culture on the emergence of anti-systemic movements and rioting, setting Greece within the context of other European nations with similar political and economic situations.

Explanation

Despite the strong explanatory value of the economic or political approaches to the analysis of the 2008 Greek riots, important issues are unaddressed. At the most fundamental level, economic theories fail to explain the inconsistency between Greece and Spain. Greece is currently facing the bleakest economic prospects in the EU – along with the Republic of Ireland, and Portugal -- including IMF supervision and the enormous public deficit. Yet Spain has a shoddy 'real economy' which affects the daily life of Spaniards. For example, although the unemployment rate in Greece is high (12.9% in September 2010), it is much higher in Spain (20.6% in December 2010).[ii] In fact, high unemployment rates are a structural and persistent problem of the Spanish economy,[iii] which in combination with the slightly lower minimum wage in Spain, should have resulted in violent protests if we listen solely to economic theories of conflict. Further, this school of thought fails to account for the substantial yet non-violent expression of grievances triggered by economic scarcity in Spain. Perhaps the most striking illustration of the vocal, yet non-violent, expression of discontent in Spain has been the mobilization of 'indignados'.[iv] Briefly stated, it is difficult to argue that economic scarcity is the sole causal factor of the Greek riots, while a society that faces more pressing economic problems abstains from rioting.

Equally, the 'political approach' of social movements, although offering insights into the Greek riots, leaves certain things unexplained. For example, as will be shown in the following pages, it does not take into account the broad public sympathy towards the rioters. In an opinion poll of the time, almost 60% of respondents characterized the riots as an 'authentic expression of social uprising' (Public issue 2008). So too, the literature on contentious politics highlights the role of the police in fuelling/de-escalating riots, but falls short of explaining why in certain countries the police contain authoritarian and uncontrollable elements, while in other countries they are better trained and more efficient. As culture 'provides the resources for political organization and mobilization' (Ross 2009:164), we argue that culture is pivotal in explanation of public sympathy for riots and their distaste for the institutions charged with upholding law and order, namely the police.

The study of contentious politics recognizes that repertoires 'are learned cultural creations' (Tilly 1995), meaning that specific (contentious) actions have power because they carry a meaning within a shared culture. By setting a reward 'for getting it right' and a cost for not doing so, culture defines the boundaries of permissible and non-permissible social behaviour (ibid). Social movements have the capacity to produce new meanings within a common cultural 'imagined community' (Tarrow 1998:17).

The analysis seeks to pinpoint the causal mechanism through which specific institutions reproduce the 'culture of resistance' that leads to riots. Although it

acknowledges the importance of other contextual (economic, political, social) factors, it highlights the central role of culture in the adoption of specific repertoires of actions over others, (high/low) levels of public sympathy, and how specific societies set the threshold of 'injustice' which provokes riots.

To discern the causal mechanism through which culture is transformed into political outcomes, we draw on studies of the transition to democracy and political institutions.

(a) The Construction of a 'Culture of Voices'

Consensus has been reached in the literature on democratization that both the political culture and the design of the nascent democratic institutions of a society in transition are shaped by the experiences of the past (Linz and Stepan 1996:5). The study of the transition and the process of learning from past experiences (Bermeo 1992) are the twin elements that explain the political cultures in Greece and Spain which shape the repertoire of the countries' collective action.

The Spanish civil war (1936-1939) was followed by the victory of the Nationalist forces and the prolonged dictatorship of General Franco (1939-1975). An established body of research has shown how the traumatic experiences of the civil war party informed the priorities of the political leaders who carried out the transition to democracy in the mid-1970s (Aguilar 2002). The diagnosis that the primary cause of the civil war – and the ensuing 40-year dictatorship -- was the inability of the Second Republic (1931-1936) to maintain stability convinced political elites of the virtues of consensus. Therefore, Spain experienced a 'paradigmatic' transition founded on consensus among political leaders. It has been argued that the 'pacted' nature of the transition shaped the basic features of Spanish political culture, especially its propensity for consensus and ideological moderation (Martín 2005). These elements – believed to safeguard the success of the transition – became integral to Spanish political life, from nascent institutions, to electoral engineering (promoting coalition governments), to accommodating the Nationalities (Field and Hamman 2008).

While Spain cultivated 'consensus', the Greek transition was considerably different. The Greek junta (1967-1974) collapsed its forceful intervention into the domestic politics of the Republic of Cyprus, followed by a short-lived coup and the invasion of the Turkish army into the island. Hence, the transition was something of a 'clean break', reflected in the design of the political institutions, the majoritarian electoral system, and the unilateral decisions of Prime Minister Karamanlis on issues of transitional justice (Sotiropoulos 2010).

Every society institutionalizes and reproduces those practices perceived to be conducive to producing desirable outcomes. Thus, in Spain, consensus gradually became institutionalized, while in Greece (as a result of revolutionary change), a culture of 'resistance' was created. The Spanish political elites quickly realized that the deployment of a 'vocal' repertoire of protest by social, political or professional groups would endanger overarching priorities during democratic consolidation,. In fact, although mobilization was quite high during the early days of the transition (Bermeo 1999), the murderous attacks against left-wing protesters in 1977 and the unsuccessful coup on 23 February 1981 had moderating effect on the demands of all groups. It should be noted that the terrorist activities of the Basque ETA also posed a considerable challenge to the stability of the regime.

Meanwhile, in Greece, protesting, rioting, and resisting authority is part of a deep-rooted culture of 'resistance', leading to a winning formula based on the vocal expression of demands. The predominant narrative of the transition provides useful

insights into the study of the Greek political culture. For example, it reserves a special place for the student uprising of 17 November 1973 in the Polytechnic School at the University of Athens – commonly called the 'Polytechnic'. Although accurate survey data are missing, it is not far-fetched to argue that the student uprising in the Polytechnic is considered to be the causal factor that triggered the collapse of the junta – rather than the defeat of the military in Cyprus. In fact, in a 1997 public survey, the Polytechnic (although an academic institution and not a movement) and the 'student movement' (in general) were included in the list of resistance organizations (cited by Sotiropoulos 2010).

The memory of the Polytechnic made two overlapping contributions to the cultivation of a culture of resistance. First, *the youth acquired independent agency*. It was only the student movement that overtly resisted the dictatorship; the act becomes even more heroic when one considers that they were sacrificing their prospects of a better life for a noble cause. Second, the memory of the Polytechnic has institutionalized one's 'duty to resist the authority' (Kalyvas 2008). Since the 1970s 17 November has been a day of remembrance and a school holiday, and an annual memorial is conducted in the Polytechnic to pay tribute to the casualties, the number of whom remains unknown.

The ritualization of the Polytechnic and its perceived causal role in overturning the military junta is merely one indication of how this culture of 'resistance' has become a winning formula. These cultural elements help explain why the public was so sensitive to the 2008 event that triggered rioting. The victim was a teenager, and the murder occurred in Exarheia, an Athenian suburb where anarchist, libertarian, and other anti-authority groups are located – an immediately flammable mix.

Another explanation of the construction of the culture of resistance, and the public sympathy during the rioting points to the central role of 'revolution' in Greek history. A brief glance at Greek history textbooks reveals that changes in Greek history tend to result from abrupt transformations: war (Greek war of independence; defeat in the war of 1897; Balkan wars; world war II, the civil war; the defeat in Cyprus that led to the collapse of the junta); popular mobilizations (the movement of 1909; the Polytechnic) or major disasters (Asia Minor). Little attention is paid to bloodless and well-coordinated changes, such as accession to the EU. In Kuhnian terms, Greek public history is presented as a series of 'paradigm' shifts. This is not to challenge that abrupt changes have been important in shaping Greece's history, but rather to note that public history tends to romanticize revolutionary changes, while downplaying other equally important non-revolutionary events. Thus, a visible youth anarchist culture is reproduced in the 'homeletic schools' (κατηχητικά; so named by their opponents) as well as in coffee shops in Exarcheia. In brief, children are socialized in revolutionary practices, learning to celebrate the Greek war of independence ('the Revolution') and 17 November (the Polytechnic).

Therefore, every new movement/protest/riot elicits legitimacy and public sympathy based on the long history of revolutionary change. Although all societies have experienced similarly violent events, *in Greece the culture of resistance has become a 'winning formula'*, that is a cultural-historical way to express discontent. Needless to say, this is not limited to rioting. Interest groups, students, and professionals, have deployed resistance to promote their interests, ranging from workers blocking national motorways, to students marching to protest reforms/laws in public universities. A recent movement is unhappy with the price of public transportation; its actions owe a debt to the culture of resistance: denial to issue tickets

in using all means of public transportation; exchanging used tickets; and mobilizing to break the bars in toll roads in an effort to promote free transit (Linardou and Poluxroniadis 20/06/2010).v Most of the time, action has been rewarded, and the culture of resistance is a well-entrenched feature of the political culture of contemporary Greece.

Thus, the political culture – influenced by the type of transition to democracy – explains the absence of riots in Spain where ideological moderation and consensus have become central features of Spanish political culture. Meanwhile, in Greece, the transition has led to a culture of 'resistance'.

(b) Institutionalization of Resistance: The Police and University Asylum

Greek public history reserves a special position for the 'people' because the Greek state resulted from the struggle of the Greek nation/people (Veremis 2003). The Greek state is more problematic; on the one hand, it is important in the expansion of the Greek community, but on the other hand, it is an obstacle to the community (nation/people) that established the state. This study argues that the role of the people has become institutionalized. During the transition, the painful experiences of the past were transformed into policy outcomes. Most importantly, the realization that the frequent intervention of deep-state actors suppressed the popular will during both the post-civil war period and the military junta informed the design of institutions during the transition (Voulgaris 2008:149). In other words, this experience was transformed into a political lesson that facilitated a political consensus to establish a legal and constitutional framework protecting the free expression of the people and diminish the institutional provisions for coercive state actors to suppress human rights.

The centrality of the people (as opposed to the state which can restrict the will of the people) combined with the revolutionary 'reading' of history, explains the public sympathy for the riots. In the opinion poll mentioned previously, conducted immediately after the Athenian riots, approximately 60% of the respondents characterized the phenomenon as a 'social uprising' and a 'mass social phenomenon' (Public Issue 2008). Even more strikingly, a recent study of the subculture artifacts (such as graffiti) showed that despite its unique features, there is a linkage with the revolutionary past, predominantly the December 1944 events (Dekemvriana) in Athens, May 1963 events, and the Polytechnic (Kornetis 2010).

The media framing reveals clear consensus in its linkage of the ineffective stance of the police with the riots. There are cultural and historical reasons for this. In the post-civil war period, the police were primarily nationalists (εθνικόφρονες, whose primary objective was the suppression of the 'communist threat'. Almost two decades after the conclusion of the civil war, enormous archives continued to be maintained and the personal lives of thousands of citizens were scrutinized (Clogg 2003:173). Then, throughout the military junta, the police deployed extra-judicial means to facilitate the regime and suppress the popular will. As a result, the public was justifiably suspicious of the role of the police. In addition, during the transition, the police were seen as potentially dangerous; thus, they were not considered part of the nascent state apparatus and were not provided with resources or training, thereby exacerbating the public's long-standing suspicion (Kalyvas 2010).

As a result, the police recklessly mismanaged mass protests. More precisely, the insufficient training and lack of political backing, led to an idiosyncratic 'prevailing strategy' which at times resembled a personal vendetta against the protesters for failing to remain within the provisions of the rule of law, and at other

times was unpredictably defensive. This reinforces a cycle of violence involving rioters and the police.

According to Donatella Della Porta, 'since meanings are produced through direct experiences, in particular during episodes of collective action….the policing of protest is likely to be in the activists' perceptions an accurate indicator of the state attitude' (1995:11). In 2008, the combination of the lack of trust in the police and the police inability to handle the riots within the rule of law, led the conservative government to adopt a defensive position; it abstained from ordering a forceful implementation of the law, fearing that additional casualties would have resulted in further mayhem.

A caveat should be underlined. It is not only the objective incidents of the past that are implicated in the distrust of the police; it is also public perception. For example, in Spain, although the police were a similarly repressive apparatus during the dictatorship, in the 1970s they were reformed and became a democratic institution. In the 1980s a secret anti-terrorist group (GAL – Antiterrorist Liberation Groups) was organized by the police to tackle Basque terrorism. During its campaign, GAL killed, extra-judicially executed and tortured several individuals --- some of whom were innocent. That incident temporarily diminished trust in the police, but did not lead to a situation anywhere close to what we find in Greece.

An institution that reflects the power of culture is the university and academic freedom. Again, the previous experience of violations of fundamental rights and liberties during the dictatorship resulted in the establishment of a very liberal institution with provisions safeguarding individual and collective rights.

Especially this latter constitutes a better example of the institutionalization of this culture of resistance. As the previous media framing illustrated, frequent references were made to the university asylum, primarily as an outdated institution which cultivates unlawful practices. Paradoxically, asylum was institutionalized well before the transition to democracy. In fact it was a customary law that was firstly used in 1897 by students at the University of Athens. Paradoxically, even the military junta was originally constrained by this provision in the first days of the Polytechnic uprising in 1973. In the period following the transition, the efforts to 'de facto' abolish the university asylum were resisted fiercely. Ultimately, in 1982 the new socialist government of PASOK, perceived to be the inheritor of the legacy of the anti-dictatorship tradition, further institutionalized the university asylum by legislating the law n.1268 (art.2).

In the predominant discourse, it was the university asylum that enabled mobilization in the universities in 1973 the eventually overturned the junta. Hence, the 'legitimizing moment' for democracy is directly linked to this institution. In the post-authoritarian period, several protesters have found shelter in several university buildings at the city center of Athens. It is precisely because the vast majority of the protests take place in the streets close to the University of Athens, that for the past two decades a continual relationship between the violent protests and the hiding to these buildings has been developed. Even more interestingly, the legal framework that rules the protests remains vague. For example, the only legal provision that sets the basic parameters for protesting is the decree 794 that was legislated during the dictatorship (1971), and was not revised since then (Kathimerini 21/12/2008).

Conclusion

The article seeks to explain the persistence of rioting in the repertoire of certain societies, such as Greece, and its absence from other societies with similar

features, such as Spain. It notes the development of a 'culture of resistance' in Greece due to historical experiences and the centrality of political learning in transforming these experiences into political outcomes. It is not only economic scarcity or relative deprivation that explains riots, but the presence of a culture of resistance that lowers the threshold of injustice, thereby fuelling violent reactions. While the article focuses on the Greek case, the results could be tested further to the cases of France and Great Britain described on the introduction, in order to trace similarities and differences on the reactions and further test the theory..

The culture of resistance is not limited to the protests, but is expressed in daily life; for example the anti-smoking campaign in public spaces in Greece had failed. In 2008, a new strict law was passed that forbids smoking in cafes, restaurants and clubs. Despite heavy penalties, owners and customers resist the law. In fact, a movement – predominantly café-owners – has been formed to overturn the law. The argument is simple: the law goes against the will of the customers (the people) and should not be implemented. The same kind of reaction emerged in France. As the owner of a Parisian café put it: 'Our motto in France is liberty, equality, fraternity…The café is the place that represents that. You are free to smoke, everyone pays the same price for a beer and different kinds of people converse with one another'. At the same time, in Madrid, the new anti-smoking campaign was remarkably successful; most places respected the law. Meanwhile, customers smoked in the streets – the culture of resistance revives in the oddest places.

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i Generation 700 Euros

ii Data available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home, last accessed 22 January 2011.

iii Spain has had the highest unemployment rates in the Euro-zone since late 2008.

iv 'Los indignados' (the indignants) is a grassroots movement organized by young people using social networks. It sparkled on the 15th of May at the Plaza del Sol, where thousands of people of different backgrounds mobilized to address a wide range of demands ranging from electoral reform to unemployment.