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Cultures of Rioting and Anti-Systemic Politics in Southern Europe

Katia Andronikidou and Iosif Kovras

West European Politics, 35(4), 707-725.

Abstract

The article investigates why despite similar background conditions in Greece and Spain, the former country has been characterized by highly visible, fringe, anti-system politics and street riots, while similar phenomena are rare in Spain. Although the article's focal point is the eruption of the December 2008 riots in Athens, it sheds light on the two countries' diverse social reactions to the sovereign debt crisis. Deploying the tool of media framing, it argues that historical legacies and political cultures matter. In the Greek case, the transition to democracy shaped a political 'culture of sympathy' towards acts of resistance to the state, a culture that has been institutionalized since the mid-1970s.

Keywords: Riots, Greece, Spain, Political Culture, Framing,

Greek Riots

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. Schoolboys, students, migrants, anarchists and members of extra-parliamentary radical left groups were among the rioters. Riots lasted several days; hundreds of petrol bombs were thrown at the police, banks and state buildings, and there were numerous incidents of looting and violence. 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 in front of the Greek Parliament. A spill-over of the protest occurred in Greek embassies in various EU capitals, staged predominantly by Greek students studying abroad. In brief, the Athenian riots signified a 'turning point' in the

return of ‘street politics’ to contemporary Greece (Economides and Monastiriotis 2009). This has been especially noticeable since the implementation of tough austerity measures that accompanied Greece’s economic bailout by the EU and the IMF in 2010.

The Greek Puzzle

The states in the Southern periphery of the Euro-area have been greatly affected by the sovereign debt crisis. Despite the EU bailout, Greece is on the brink of default, while the Spanish government has imposed severe austerity measures to manage its enormous sovereign debt. Despite similar background conditions, Greek and Spanish governments and societies have reacted quite differently. The vocal, yet non-violent, mobilization of the Spanish ‘May 15’ (M-15) movement stands in sharp contrast to Greece’s repertoire of contention that includes rioting (El País 2011).

Understanding what causes violent riots in a consolidated democracy like Greece may help us predict when street politics and other unconventional forms of protest are likely to take centre stage in other Western European societies. To this end, the paper juxtaposes two countries with comparable background conditions, Spain and Greece, focusing on the puzzling emergence of riots in Greece and the absence of violent collective action in Spain. In their recent history, both have experienced military control preceded by a divisive civil war. In both, the conclusion of an authoritarian period was followed by stellar transitions to democracy. They entered the European Union almost simultaneously, Greece in 1981 and Spain in 1986. More recently, they have struggled with enormous sovereign debt, deep 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, evident in the long-term power of socialist parties.

Despite the similarities, in December 2008, Greece faced an intense and violent anti-systemic movement with widespread rioting; this has not yet happened in Spain, despite skyrocketing (youth) unemployment. Why is Greece so different, given the similar economic, social and political conditions?

The paper begins with a discussion of alternative explanations, including structural, institutional and electoral factors, as found in the literatures of street protest, riots and contentious politics, all of which fail to convincingly account for the Greek paradox. It then offers a two-level explanation. First, it shows how the type of the Greek transition to democracy shaped a political 'culture of sympathy' to acts of resistance against the state. Second, it notes the mechanisms through which daily practices of resistance have become institutionalized to permeate the Greek culture. It concludes that the cultivation of a political culture of sympathy has become a 'winning formula' adopted by vocal minorities who deploy unlawful protests. Equally, the early socialization into unlawful practices allows the public to turn a blind eye on the use of violence to settle conflict, unlike Spain where there is zero tolerance of violence.

Alternative explanations

A central problem in the literature of riots, reflecting a flaw in the broader study of political violence, is the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of political violence (Kalyvas et al 2008). Scholars from different disciplines approach the topic from different angles. Although seminal studies on riots have been published, they tend to be thematic, focusing, for example, on immigrant, religious, and ethnic riots (Dancygier 2009; Horowitz 2003; Wilkinson 2004). The literature offers a plethora of theories as to why collective action takes unconventional and violent forms, ranging from irrational and psychological factors to

structural and demographic factors (LeBon 1897; Gurr 1970). However, for ease of discussion, the explanations can be roughly grouped into three categories (for a comprehensive review see Wilkinson 2009).

The first group of explanations focuses on the casual relationship between structural and material factors and violent action. Arguably, social inequality is behind rioting (Bethke and Bussman 2011). Relative deprivation theory posits that the feeling of grievance and injustice resulting from the gap between anticipated gains and actual gains is the most significant determinant of violent collective action (Gurr 1970). Although relative deprivation is only one of many structuralist and materialist explanations, the core argument remains similar across this group's critical spectrum: social inequality, absence of opportunities for social integration and economic scarcity cause riots.

Basic Economic Indicators	Greece	Spain
GDP per capita (2008)	€17,505	€15,477
Unemployment rate (2008)	7,7%	11,3%
Minimum Wage (2008)	€681	€700
Inflation (Average annual percentage change 2006-08)	3,3%	3,5%
Growth (average annual percentage change of real GDP 2006-08)	3,3%	3,1%

Table 1: Basic economic indicators in comparative perspective (Sources: IMF, EUROSTAT and OECD)

This argument cuts across the t literature and is extremely popular among the public and in the media. Therefore, it calls for close scrutiny. To this end, Table 1 presents several crude economic indicators, including GDP per capita, level of unemployment and minimum wage in Greece and Spain in 2008. At first glance, the table adds little empirical evidence to the structural

argument, since basic economic indicators portray a comparable picture for the two countries. In fact, Greece had a slightly higher GDP per capita, lower unemployment and the two countries' minimum wage was almost equal. Indeed, inflation and growth rates show that in the period preceding the riots, Greeks had slightly better purchasing power. Therefore, the eruption of violent collective action in Greece undermines materialist theories. More rigorous empirical evidence depicting the socio-economic background of the rioters is needed to test the validity of the argument.

The second set of explanations argues that although material issues may be important, violent collective action is triggered by a feeling of 'injustice' linked to an overall mistrust of institutions. Briefly stated, when state institutions are weak and the state fails to perform its fundamental duties effectively, the incentives for groups to deploy less conventional methods to affect policymaking greatly increase (Machado et al 2011). When state institutions do not settle disputes (Huntington 1968) and their control mechanisms break down, citizens take more direct forms of collective action (Olzak 1992; Useem 1998). To examine the plausibility of these arguments, Table 2 shows the *perception* of the quality of the rule of law, government effectiveness and voice and accountability in Spain and Greece in the period 2006-2008. The table draws on Worldwide Governance Indicators of the World Bank which gives all countries a grade from extremely weak (-2.5) to strong (2.5). A thread linking Spain and Greece is the low levels of perception of government effectiveness and the overall lack of trust in state institutions. Corruption is the only indicator where Greece, at almost 0, is markedly different from Spain (1.1). Traditionally, corruption is linked to the sense of justice in a country. Moreover, comparative empirical evidence derived from World Values Survey of 1999 shows that 58.7% of Spaniards had little or no confidence in the justice system; in Greece, the percentage was equally

high (56.3%) (World Values Survey 1999). In other words, dysfunctional institutions and ineffective governmental policies alone do explain the eruption of collective action in Greece but not in Spain.

Institutional Indicators (2006-2008)	**Greece**	**Spain**
Rule of Law	0,8	1,1
Voice and Accountability	0.95	1,1
Government Effectiveness	0,7	0,9

Table 2: Institutional Indicators in Comparative Perspective (Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators, World Bank)

Wilkinson rightly argues that 'group calculations to engage in collective action are also shaped by the state's preventive or coercive action', namely, whether they encounter strong opposition, weak opposition, or even support (2009:336). Previous research on ethnic riots has noted the pivotal role of the state in triggering or preventing collective action (Horowitz 2003). A similar argument is proffered by the literature of contentious politics, which highlights the importance of external 'political opportunities', most notably the role of the state, in triggering collective action (Tilly 1995, Tarrow 1994). What determines the willingness of governments to intervene in certain contexts but not in others may apply here. In a study of the Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Wilkinson (2004) highlights the electoral cost and benefit calculations of governments. In the Indian case, whether rioters represented critical constituents of a party in (a coalition) government was a significant determinant in the decision to abstain from repressing protesters (ibid). Yet electoral costs and benefits are shaped by public attitudes towards the implementation of law and order. As the Spanish and Greek experiences illustrate, political cleavages take shape during periods of violence, and over time, they become embedded. Positive

or negative perceptions of these violent legacies determine the electoral costs to a government. It is highly unlikely that government will suppress collective political action if it meets with widespread public sympathy.

Considerations of cost also apply to the protesters and are shaped by previous experience; participants in collective actions often opt for familiar practices because this minimizes the likelihood of unexpected costs. This is particularly relevant in the Greek case where the perceived cost of rioting is low, not only because of police inefficiency but also because of the organizational experience of militant groups. In the aftermath of the riots in Rome in October 2011, an anonymous rioter revealed in an interview that he got an 'MSc in Rioting' in the streets of Athens, indicating that the Greek context presents a valuable training opportunity (Vima 2011).

Further ethnographic research will show how practices of resistance against the state are perpetuated and reproduced. Although this paper 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 societies set their threshold of 'injustice'. To discern the causal mechanism that transforms culture into political outcomes, we draw on studies of the transition to democracy and political institutions.

Culture of Sympathy

The literature on democratization agrees that the political culture and the design of the nascent democratic institutions of a society in transition are shaped by past experiences (Linz and Stepan 1996:5). In this case, the transition itself and the process of learning (Bermeo 1992) work

together to explain how the political cultures in Greece and Spain shape their respective 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 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 after 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 represented a 'clean break', reflected in the design of the political institutions, the low proportionality of the 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 conducive to producing desirable outcomes. Thus, in Spain, consensus became institutionalized, while in

Greece , a culture of 'resistance' emerged. 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, the murderous attacks against left-wing protesters in 1977 and the unsuccessful coup on February 23, 1981 (23-F) had a 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. The predominant narrative of the transition provides useful insights into the Greek political culture. For example, it reserves a special place for the student uprising of November 17, 1973, in the National Technical University of Athens – commonly called the 'Polytechnic'. Although accurate survey data are missing, it is not far-fetched to argue that the student uprising set in motion a series of events that led to the Cyprus debacle and the collapse of the dictatorship. 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). In short, it has become the 'Bastille Day of modern Greek democracy' (Close 2009:137).

The memory of the Polytechnic has made two overlapping contributions to the cultivation of a culture of resistance. First, *the protesting youth acquired independent agenc*y. Only the student movement overtly resisted the dictatorship. Second, the memory of the Polytechnic has institutionalized the individual's 'duty to resist the authority' (Kalyvas 2008). Since the 1970s, November 17 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. 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 – a flammable mix.

Thus, the political culture – influenced by the type of transition to democracy – explains the absence of violent collective action in Spain where ideological moderation and consensus have become central features of Spanish political culture. At the same time, in Greece, the transition has led to a culture of 'resistance'. However, this culture refers to the *origins* (transition) and the *vocabulary* (political discourse of the 1970s). What explains the persistence and reproduction of these practices?

Framing by the media

Spilerman (1970) shows the importance of media in spreading rumors about violent incidents, thereby inciting 'riot contagion'. Media analysis can shed light on how the December 2008 riots in Athens were transmitted. To this end, the paper draws upon the analytical tool of media framing. 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 specific social actors to produce, guide, and maintain meaning for their constituents (Benford and Snow 2000:613; Kovras and Loizides 2011). 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).

Framing is composed of two analytical elements. *Diagnostic framing* stems from 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). *Prognostic framing* derives from the need to change the problematic situation by designing a strategy to overcome it (Benford and Snow 2000).

Two widely distributed Greek daily newspapers are *Eleftherotipia* and *Kathimerini*. *Eleftherotipia* is a prestigious newspaper at the left of the center of the ideological spectrum; its readership ranges in age and ideology from students to policy-makers. It 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.

We searched all articles describing or commenting on the Greek riots, commencing the day after the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos (December 6, 2008), believed to be the event triggering the riots, and ending the next month (January 2009) when the violence ceased.

Two broad, but overlapping, diagnostic frames emerge from *Eleftherotipia*. First, because the murder of the schoolboy and the riots were causally and temporally linked (the violence erupted an hour after the teen died), the primary responsibility for the riots is attributed to police violence. 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 in the past, some of which resulted in the death of civilians (Marnellos 8/12/08 and Antoniadis 13/12/08). The riots are also viewed through the lens of past experiences of the civil war and the military dictatorship. An observer argues, 'We do not want this state, the deep state, the offspring of Junta….that was never purified' (Aggelopoulos 09/12/08). 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).

In the newspaper, frequent references to the high levels of unemployment, low salaries and poor employment conditions – also known as G700[1] -- help to explain the widespread sympathy for the mobilization of the youth, even when it turned violent (11/12/2008). Given the social conditions which evidently caused the mobilization, it is not surprising that the riots are linked to acts of resistance during the anti-dictatorial struggle. A former minister who participated in the 1973 Polytechnic uprising is quoted as saying the riots share several similarities with the anti-dictatorial mobilization (Efthymiou 28/12/2008).

Eleftherotipia's diagnostic framing also refers to the systemic roots of the riots and the structural problems created by capitalism and globalization. An observer insists that Greek riots are a symptom of a deeper systemic crisis of the 'values that uphold these institutions, namely the individualistic values of competition and egotism' (Fotopoulos 20/12/2008). Because the heart of the problem is political (globalization, capitalism, ineffective state, etc.), the newspaper adopts the term 'uprising' (εξέγερση) -- instead of riots. Almost one-third of the articles we

[1] Generation 700 Euros

examined contain a subtle reference to the political causes of the 'revolt'. Moreover, because of the common structural source of the situation, the paper 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' (Papanastasoulis 17/12/2008). It argues: 'Alexandros Grigoropoulos should be rightly considered the first victim in our country for the survival of the planet as well as the potential of the youth' (Pantelakis 9/12/2008).

Kathimerini's framing of the source of the problematic situation both agrees with 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'. Instead, it says: '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 [the youth] 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 in its explanations of the protests.

Still, there are differences in the two frames. While both identify the police as the source of the problem, *Kathimerini* focuses on the structural weaknesses of this body in maintaining law and order, both in the murder itself and in the ineffective reaction to the ensuing violence. Several articles note the decades-long structural deficiencies of the police, as well as its non-professional behavior, 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* subscribes to the general diagnostic framing used by *Eleftherotipia* to identify the role of politics. However, its political sources are primarily domestic, whereas *Eleftherotipia* directly links the 'Greek uprising' to wider phenomena of

globalization and capitalism. Remarkably, both newspapers abstain from prognostic framing. Apart from the subtle qualified tolerance of 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 to make recommendations.

In similar vein, in the television coverage of the December riots, journalists portrayed the three days as an 'uprising', subtly legitimizing social discontent. At times they almost encouraged young people to join the rioting. Although the majority of student mobilization was comprised of peaceful marches against police brutality, the focus of prime-time news was on sit-in mobilizations in front of police stations that were marked by insults, objects being thrown at guards, and attempts to occupy the police stations. These acts of resistance were presented as normal yet heroic reactions to police brutality. In several documentaries broadcast in the days following the riots, the violence was 'explained' as a reply to the 'violence of school', the 'violence of scandals,' and the 'violence of police in the streets' (Tsimas).

Greek media framing helps us understand how a culture of sympathy to resistance has been perpetuated. By and large, the Greek media are composed of journalists who came of age during the transition and who tend to reproduce the 'vocabulary' of transition. Even the most moderate media outlets subtly supported a framing that posits the riots as a normal reaction to the economic, social, political, and policing problems of the country. In short, the media's role has been to familiarize the public with the use of violence as an acceptable way to settle public disputes.

'Ritualization of resistance' in schools

This culture of sympathy is reproduced and perpetuated through the ritualization of acts of resistance in public schools. Greek students become socialized into (often unlawful) acts of resistance with the support of their teachers and parents, making participation in riots seem a rite of passage (Kalyvas 2008). A good example is the phenomenon of 'school occupation' as a form of protest. Since the consolidation of democracy, small groups of students have illegally occupied school buildings, stopping classes and preventing the entry of teachers. Students occupying the schools make a number of demands, ranging from changes in the school infrastructure to education reform; not coincidentally, waves of occupations coincide with periods of broader educational reform.

What is particularly striking is the support of parent associations and teacher unions. In early 2008, a few months before the riots, a wave of school occupations was underway; several district attorneys demanded the implementation of the law[2] prohibiting unlawful acts, including damage to buildings and infrastructures. The most vocal teachers' union, the Greek Federation of State School Teachers of Secondary Education (OLME) urged the government to abstain from implementing the law, framing school occupations as a means of 'social struggle' that should not be persecuted or penalized (OLME 2010). The Federation officially asked the attorney to abstain from taking any legal action against students arrested in occupied school buildings (2008). For its part, the Federation of Parents Association perceived the decision to prosecute as an effort to 'persecute' a noble struggle and 'terrorize parents, student community and the teachers' (2008). The Association refers to other – unaffiliated – parents who cooperate with the authorities as 'finks' (ibid).

Thus, students receive an early education in resistance practices. Consider the reaction to the proposal to implement CCTV cameras is schools in the aftermath of the 2004 Athens

[2] Law 2811/2000

Olympics. School chancellors were forced by student and parent associations to 'rip' the cameras down, as they were perceived to be a sign of growing state surveillance (Samatas 2008:359). It is hardly surprising, then, that during the December 2008 events, the Greek Teachers' Federation (DOE) encouraged resistance 'against the governmental policy of repression' (2008). This led to mass demonstrations in front of police stations with students throwing stones and oranges at police officers. As Kalyvas argues (2008), after intense socialization into acts of resistance and unlawful protest, riots are a continuation of a 'duty to resist the authorities', becoming a rite of passage for youth.

Resistance: 'A Winning Formula'

The practice of resistance is not limited to schools but has become a winning political formula for all sorts of interest groups formulating claims against the state. For the past three decades, all sorts of interest and civil society groups, ranging from trade unions and teachers' unions to football fans have successfully deployed unlawful repertoires of protest to formulate claims against the state. Public buildings and ministries have been occupied by professional associations; national motorways have been blocked by farmers and lorry drivers; coordinated action was taken by dockworkers to prohibit ships with thousands of passengers to disembark; taxi drivers have blocked airports and ports nationwide; garbage collectors have occupied garbage dumps for weeks triggering a major sanitation crisis. This picture of a society composed of 'spoiler groups' using unlawful practices to secure their demands/privileges should not be linked exclusively to the economic recession, since these practices were deployed before the sovereign debt crisis, albeit less frequently.

Fundamental tenets were set in the early days of *Metapolitefsi* and the emergence of 'populism' as a central ingredient in Greek politics in the early 1980s (Mavrogordatos 1983). At this time, the PASOK socialist government successfully used ideology to justify 'machine politics' (Mavrogordatos 1997). Framed within a wider call for 'change', meritocracy was perceived as an undemocratic 'authoritarian fraud' that blurred the distinction between the 'privileged' and the 'non-privileged' (Mavrogordatos 1997:18). Most Greek political parties have employed populism because the 'potential immediate beneficiaries are by definition' more than those who benefit from meritocracy (ibid:22). The 'logic of populism' has become a well-entrenched feature of the Greek political system; no party can resist its attractiveness, while civil society and labor unions have secured its perpetuation (Sotiropoulos 1995). Greek politicians have borrowed liberally and used EEC/EU funds to perpetuate the system, contributing to the bleak economic predicament of the late 2000s.

Although party penetration (and control) by civil society groups constitutes a common feature of Spanish politics as well, similar forms of collective action have been absent (Gunther and Montero 2009:177). The explanation for the deployment of the specific repertoire of contention in Greece can be attributed to the political elites who have been willing to pay the economic cost of accommodating a clientelistic system. This practice has been exercised with such success that has become a 'winning political formula'. Illegal actions, disobedience, public disturbance and even violence to protect group interests are seen as a normal extension of the right to protest (Kalyvas 2010a). There are even cases of 'state sponsored' acts of resistance. Take, for example, the decision of the president of a regional chamber of commerce in northern Greece to charge the state for printing placards and brochures for a group mobilized around the

demand for free transit on national motorways; this group has often occupied toll booths and broken the bars to facilitate free transit (Mandravelis 2011).

A stark illustration of how this winning formula has taken on a life of its own is the recent mobilization of the inhabitants of Keratea, a small city near Athens. The citizens proactively resisted the state's effort to construct a garbage dump. Perceiving the dump as degrading the environment and affecting the quality of living, protestors set fire to construction vehicles and erected massive road blocks on the highway. The state replied by sending police to guard the construction crews. Anarchist and anti-authority groups joined the protesters, using petrol bombs against the police and constructing a trench across both lanes of the highway (Bacatoros 2011). The struggle of the people of Keratea attracted significant media attention and garnered much public sympathy. A number of artistic events were organized; for example, Greek singers participated in a concert paying tribute to the struggle (Eleftherotipia 31/3/2010). For almost three months, Keratea was in a state of mini-riot. In the end, police withdrew and the construction of the dump was cancelled, showing that resistance is an effective way to express collective demands. At least in Greece, resistance, in general, and rioting, in particular, are 'low cost' activities.

Institutionalization of practice of resistance

A final mechanism explaining the persistence and perpetuation of resistance practices, including riots, is their *de jure* and *de facto* institutionalization. The law on university and academic freedom constitutes the most obvious example of *de jure* institutionalization. The memories of the 1973 Polytechnic events have acquired strong symbolic/emotional salience because they are widely considered to have destabilized the authoritarian regime. And the students' mobilization

was possible because the Greek universities are protected by asylum law; in other words, universities are safe havens where police intervention is prohibited. Hence, the 'legitimizing moment' for democracy is directly linked to this institution.

The heroic view of the Polytechnic, coupled with the previous experience of violations of fundamental rights and liberties during the dictatorship has resulted in the (re)establishment of a very liberal institution with provisions safeguarding individual and collective rights: university asylum. In the early period following the transition, efforts to *de facto* abolish university asylum were fiercely resisted by militant student groups (Psacharopoulos and Kazamias 1980:130). Ultimately, in 1982 the new socialist government of PASOK, perceived to be the inheritor of the anti-dictatorship tradition, further institutionalized university asylum by legislating it into law n.1268 (art.2).

In the post-authoritarian period, the institutionalization of the academic asylum law facilitated the reproduction and perpetuation of rioting as a means of expression. Although the Greek constitution, following EU trends, explicitly refers to 'academic expression', a very expansive interpretation has been adopted which extends academic expression to include the freedom of action within university areas (Panousis 2009).The safe haven offered by the university buildings explains the eruption of riots close to university buildings. It also explains the obvious pattern whereby violent protests follow calls for education reform. Participants take refuge in university buildings in Athens and Salonika which are located within walking distance of riot hot–spots. This creates a steady and predictable link between violent protests and protesters who hide in university buildings.

Greece is not the only country in Southern Europe with a vibrant student movement that resists authoritarianism. In fact, in the late 1950s a vocal student movement spread in Spanish

universities -- especially in Madrid -- composed of the children of both the defeated and the winners of the civil war (Morales 1980). Although academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Spain are constitutionally secured (Art.27(10)), there is no institution similar to the Greek asylum law (Karran 2007). The difference in approach should be attributed to the individual discursive legacies of transition; while in Spain, most parties, including the socialist PSOE, were committed to a 'pact of silence' about the past (Aguilar 2002), in Greece the majority of political parties (especially the Left) sought to capitalize on the past, leading to the institutionalization of 'acts of resistance'.

This should be coupled with the fact that violent collective action is a low-cost activity, since few are arrested and even fewer are tried (Kalyvas 2010b). For example, according to the Greek police, between December 2008 and January 2008, there were 420 demonstrations/ protests and 602 incidents when public or private property was damaged, but there were only 188 arrests. Even most striking is the violent reaction to the economic bailout package in early May 2010. A few hooded protestors threw petrol bombs into a bank which was open despite the general strike, causing the death of three clerks; to this day, no one has been held accountable. This points to the (failed) central role of the Greek police to handle violent protests by arresting those responsible.

As noted, the Greek public perceives the police negatively. According to the 1999 World Values Survey, only 28.1% of Greeks trust the police. Meanwhile, the Spaniards who had an equally repressive *Guardia Civil* (Civil Guard) during the Francoist years have remarkable confidence in the police (54.9%). These findings pose a puzzle to the transitional justice literature, especially as the transition in Greece offered better prospects for reforming the police.

The objective of Spanish politicians to reform and democratize the police was a herculean task; it was not vetted by Francoist elements, and the pacted nature of the transition mentioned above meant that any successful reforms depended on the proactive consensus of members of the ancient regime. In sharp contrast to Greece, the socialist PSOE 'took care not to make the entire police force responsible for mischief. Instead it chose to voice its support of the police mobilizing the themes of "Law-and-Order' frame"' (Cerezales 2010:438). The path was not easy, and it should be highlighted that the brutality of the Spanish police in the early democratic period far surpassed Greece's experience. From 1970 to 1995, 94 persons were killed by the police during demonstrations or protests (Cerezales 2010:441). Furthermore, in the 1980s, a secret anti-terrorist group (GAL – Antiterrorist Liberation Groups) was organized by the police, in close coordination with several PSOE members, to tackle Basque terrorism. During its campaign, GAL killed, extra-judicially executed and tortured several individuals, some of whom were innocent (Encarnación2007). If police brutality was the causal factor for violent collective action, one would expect more riots in Spain.

Greek political elites representing parties that suffered severe persecution during authoritarianism only hesitantly accepted the Greek police as part of the state apparatus, clearly doubting their loyalty to the new democratic game. As a result, the police were put under close political scrutiny. This is evident from the orientation of the police reforms: the unification of the two police bodies (Gendarmerie and Urban Police) in 1984 and the dependence of the Chief of Police on the designated Minister (Zianikas 1995). Both developments diminished the autonomy of the police and, consequently, its effectiveness. The Minister of Public Order gives the general orders and provides guidelines for the riot police. Politicians prefer to adopt a defensive position even if this means minimal arrests. This lack of trust in the police (as an institution) is reflected

in the persistent denial of the right of the police to establish unions until the mid-1990s, making Greece the only country in the EU where this democratic right was prohibited (Stergioulis 2001:231). It is not an overstatement to argue that the political elites' stranglehold led to the growing organizational incompetence of the Greek police.

In this context, rioting is seen as a low risk activity, firstly, because of the low number of arrests, but secondly and more significantly, because of the public sympathy towards protesters and open hostility towards the police, attitudes frequently shared by the politicians who lead the police. An illustrative example appears in the parliamentary debates on the day after the December 2008 riots when an MP of the socialist opposition 'ordered' the 'police forces to abstain from using the parliament's backyard to exercise acts of brutal behavior (against protesters) on the part of police similar to those we watched previously on TV. Today there is a public mobilization – justified mobilization – reaction to the brutality that police showed over the last few days' (8/12/2008:2947). Interestingly, this politician became the Minister mandated to lead the police.

Conclusion

Most theories of violent collective action focus on the nexus between motivation and cost. Although people tend to pursue actions that maximize gains and minimize costs before they act violently, the literature downplays the fact that the concepts of cost/gain are often mediated through culture. In effect, individuals opt for practices with which they are familiar; a formula that was 'winning' in the past is thought to secure positive outcomes in the future. The paper shows how a Greek 'culture of sympathy' towards acts of resistance to the state has been institutionalized and reproduced.

Surprisingly, the concept of 'public sympathy' has received scant attention, even though it affects political outcomes by facilitating or preventing state intervention. Consider the difference between the UK and Greece. In the aftermath of the 2011 London riots, David Cameron stressed, 'If you are old enough to commit these crimes, you are old enough to face the punishment' (Guardian 2011). In Greece, meanwhile, the Minister of the Interior, said, 'We prefer a police in defence that protects human rights, even when scoffed, than any aggressive stance that could harm any individual or, even worse, lead to the loss of another life'.

South European societies have often been treated as identical cases in the face of the sovereign debt crisis. Yet a comparative study of Greece and Spain shows that despite their similar background conditions, the two societies deal with these issues in quite different ways. With deep economic recession and severe austerity measures, will protests wax or wane in Greece? It is not overstating the matter to say that Greece is experiencing a traumatic and uncertain 'second' transition. In times of crises (or disasters), societies usually look to the past to explain the (institutional, political and social) failure to prevent disaster. This process of political learning depends on the ability of political elites to adapt to new conditions (Bermeo 1992). Arguably, because of the need to reach the twin objectives of debt reduction and broader state reforms, the ability of Greek politicians to distribute resources to accommodate an elite system will shrink. Vocal minority groups will gradually cease to perceive unlawful collective action as a winning political formula, because public sympathy towards, and tolerance of, acts of resistance will plummet. Ethnographic evidence of 'critical constituents', such as shopkeepers in central Athens, could substantiate this argument. Finally, but equally importantly, the fact that politicians have been the target of violent attacks is also expected to strengthen the credibility of the law and order frame.

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