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PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, DEMOCRACY
AND SOCIAL RIGHTS IN THE PANDEMIC.
A STUDY OF GREEK LABOR RIGHTS AND
ECOLOGICAL GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The pandemic has altered private and public life in ways previously unimaginable. Lockdowns and economic activity restrictions posed challenges for quality of democracy and social rights across the Western world. Against all odds, the pandemic gave rise to a new protest wave especially at the progressive political spectrum. This thesis will investigate the effects of the pandemic on discourse about democracy and social rights in progressive social movements' organizations (PSMOs). Findings suggest that claims for democracy and social rights in the pandemic were significantly intensified comparing to the pre covid observation period. Furthermore, PSMOs reconfigured their political agenda, moving from issue specific to a wider discourse covering themes from the whole progressive spectrum. Data sources come from interview data with activists of each organization as well as documents' access through the social media platforms and official websites of the organizations.

Introduction

The unexpected outburst of the COVID-19 virus and the official declaration of the pandemic in March 2020, has changed social life in ways previously unimaginable. What at first glance seemed like a public health crisis, quickly transformed into a social one. Under these ‘extraordinary times’, as ECB head Christine Lagarde put it, governments introduced emergency measures, such as lockdowns and economic activity suspension, often withdrawing from procedural normalcy and democratic compliance. The pandemic highlighted various social disparities related to employment, healthcare, housing and income among others, while simultaneously restricting collective action mobilization through public gathering prohibitions and strict police surveillance (Azmanova, 2021). Nevertheless, social activism assumed novel forms of mobilization regardless of political orientation. The pandemic gave rise to online campaigns, pot banging, balcony protests and petition signing, pointing towards alternative performance repertoires (Offe, 2021).

Social movement research suggests that emergencies are able to offer new opportunities of collective mobilization and form new contentious cycles (Traugott 1995; Tarrow 1998; McAdam and Rucht 1993; Della Porta 2013). Issues of democracy and social rights stand traditionally as salient issues in the agenda of Progressive Social Movement Organizations (PSMOs). In contrast to Conservative movements, PSMOs have always been sensitive in raising claims about the quality of democracy, civil liberties as well as social rights such as housing, healthcare and the environment. For this reason, Della Porta (2021) sees the COVID-19 pandemic as a political exceptionalism and its challenges to democracy as a critical juncture for PSMOs. She argues that grassroots organizations of the progressive family of movements have all the incentives to engage in contentious mobilizations, drawing from the recent past of the Global Justice and Square movements.

However, the pandemic exhibits certain unique features that are not found in crises of the past, which make the political actor behavior less predictable. First of all, the public assembly restrictions that came with the lockdowns and quarantines seemed to be the only measure available in order to contain the virus and prevent mass infections. Secondly, emergency measures including procedural circumventions, were implemented only as temporal means to deal with the unforeseen circumstances in the fastest way possible. Thirdly, most- if not all, business sectors that were suspended received reimbursements in almost every European state, and hence, the economic

consequences of the pandemic were to a certain degree alleviated by national governments. Lastly, public opinion surveys indicate wide acceptance rates of the measures taken by governments during the pandemic and in fact show an increase in government popularity compared to the pre-covid situation. In other words, citizens seemed to be willing to see their individual freedoms and democratic procedural normalcy to be restricted for the sake of public health.

On the other hand, the pandemic has disproportionately hit the poorest members of the society. Economic relief packages were not equally distributed as not all workers enjoy the same legal status. The so-called gig economy workers had far less privileges than middle-class workers who had the ability to work from home. In addition, people with insufficient savings were found unable to afford rent, healthcare, education or even sustain basic biological needs (Azmanova, 2021). Furthermore, along with democratic procedural violations, pandemic exceptionalism had severe socio-economic consequences, especially for the poorest who often had to work under conditions of unreported employment.

Consequently, PSMOs did face a number of dilemmas. Collective action mobilization in a pandemic involves the danger of mass infections. Even if organizations manage to find alternative ways to engage in protest, they might be stigmatized as irresponsible and careless by opposing actors for challenging the only available political measures to prevent the virus spread. Such framing in public discourse could hinder PSMOs gain popular support, which Tarrow (1998) deems substantive factor for the success of protest cycles. In other words, which aspects of the pandemic prevail over others when it comes to collective action? Is public health a priority when basic democratic liberties and public goods are being pervasively restricted in the name of emergency? Over which issues do PSMOs mobilize when found in such a large-scale social crisis? This thesis addresses precisely these gaps by raising the following question: *How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect progressive social movement organization discourse about democracy and social rights?*

The ambition of this research is manifold. First of all, it will add to our understanding about the way PSMOs mobilize around themes about democracy and social rights suffer from restrictions. Secondly, social movement research has not adequately analyzed PSM behavior in times of a pandemic contamination. Thirdly, this thesis will account for within case variation

among the PSM organizational spectrum, by analyzing organizations of different thematic interests. In light of these ambitions, the thesis revolves around two hypotheses:

H1: PSMOs will raise claims in defense of democratic values and social rights. Scholarly research (Della Porta, 2009; Fominaya, 2015) suggests that conditions of crisis that restrict quality of democracy and social rights leads PSMOs to engage in collective action in favor of such claims. Additionally, extraordinary measures taken in the name of emergency tend to persist even after the end of the crisis (White, 2021). Hence, I expect PSMOs to develop a discourse against a potentially long-term deterioration of the quality of democracy and social rights.

H2: the pandemic will trigger PSMOs to incorporate themes beyond their issue-specific agenda. As argued by Reiter and Diani (2009), in periods of crisis social movement organizations tend to expand on issues other than their field of expertise. The recent financial crisis showed that organizations of the progressive spectrum were simultaneously active in a number of topics such as the environment, women's issues, labor rights and democracy. Azmanova (2021) further indicates that the pandemic generates conditions of prolonged precarity for large segments of the populations, jeopardizing basic conditions of living. Therefore, I assume that PSMOs will expand their claims over non-issue specific themes.

Methodologically, this thesis will be a qualitative study of Greek PSMOs, looking into labor right and environmental organizations. A content of press releases, social media posts and event announcements will be analyzed and compared to the pre-covid situation. The preference for qualitative means is due to the abilities for in-depth and elaborate interpretation of the data offered by this methodology. In addition, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with activists from the selected organizations.

Considering the time and space constraints, it was decided to focus on organizations from two themes within the progressive social movement family, instead of analyzing the whole progressive spectrum. In spite of looking into organizations from one single country, findings could generate avenues for further research on the interaction between PSMOs with democracy and social rights, given that the political responses to the pandemic have been more or less similar across the Western world. The next section will elaborate on the theoretical framework of the thesis, while chapter three will outline the methodological aspects.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the main theoretical concepts of the thesis. Starting point is the notion of emergency politics or state of exception. Political exceptionalism was widespread in Europe during the pandemic, facilitating conditions of democratic deviations both at national and transnational level. The rest of the section looks deeper into the relations between progressive social movements, democracy and social rights.

Pandemic Emergency Politics

Only a decade after the Great Recession, Europe found itself in a state of emergency politics. Initially, the pandemic management was handled by national governments, but the rapid spread of the virus generated a cycle of cross-border political exceptionalism. EU institutions took drastic measures in response to the exceptional circumstances, often contradicting rules established by the previous state of exception (White, 2021). Prominent example of the European state of exception is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which is very likely to assume a permanent legal function in regulating member states' fiscal and redistribution policies (Schismenos and Tarinski, 2021; Heaney, 2021). Emergency politics is described as a situation of temporary law suspension, employed at times when the legal order in place does not account for the exceptional circumstances (Joerges, 2017). It typically involves centralization of power in the hands of executive sovereign bodies, discretionary power arbitrariness, procedural non-compliance and rule of law deviations (Honig, 2009). For Agamben (2005), political exceptionalism is a mode of politics enforced, in order to keep existing power relations in-tact, prevent cutting-edge political reforms and minimize democratic controls. In addition, he sees emergency rule as a form of modern totalitarianism and more specifically the “threshold from democracy to absolution”. Scheurman and Schurn (1983) approach the phenomenon as an inherent element of liberalism, which functions as a crisis resolution mechanism, to effectively deal with the contradictory nature of consensus politics.

This negative conception of emergency politics, however, is not shared in the entirety of the academic community. Plenty of political scientists and political philosophers prefer to see

emergency politics as an inevitable situation, in which the state needs to contravene the legal norms and do whatever is necessary to defend itself and the public good (Tingsten, 1934). In Schmitt's view, the law is designed to serve the public good and in circumstances that constitute this function impossible, the law needs to be abandoned in favor of political efficiency (Schmitt, 1928). Consequently, the normativistic dedication to legal political procedures needs to be set aside in the most critical circumstances to effectively deal with the unexpected; and only when the danger is vanished the society can return to normalcy under a new law which will prevent similar unexpected events (ibid). Furthermore, proponents of political exceptionalism proclaim that it is impossible for the law to predict all possible circumstances, consequently legal gaps emerge in unforeseen circumstances, making the application of the law impossible (Honig, 2009).

In Machiaveli's terms "For a republic... one must either observe the orders and be ruined, or break them and not be ruined" (1513, p.138). Friedrich (1941) suggests that in times of democratic crises, the state is required to act beyond the orders of the constitution to prevent its collapse. This legal annulment is not meant to threaten democracy but rather restore the status quo and improve the legal system by surpassing it. Rossiter's (1948) reading of Schmitt's *Political Theology* creates a dichotomy between two kinds of dictatorship constitutional and sovereign. In constitutional dictatorship the executive branch acquires "full powers laws," in order to suspend the law temporarily and deal with unforeseen circumstances which endanger public welfare. Nonetheless, the law and the constitution are still applicable. In sovereign dictatorship, the law is temporarily annulled and policy makers create a new constitution.

The key difference between the two is that emergency rule is compatible with liberal democratic principles, as the constitution is not annulled but rather temporarily suspended, in the effort to restore the pre-existing status quo and eventually political normality. On the contrary, in sovereign dictatorship the constitution is authoritatively replaced with another (ibid). In constitutional dictatorships as Rossiter (1948) pointed out, the sovereign signifies a figure standing outside [steht außerhalb] and at the same time belongs to the legal order [gehört], as the sovereign's aim in is to "separate the law from its application in order to make its application possible" (Aradau, 2010). For Schmitt the sovereign is an entity that represents an order between anomie and the law, acting illegally but within the legal order to restore legality (Scheurman, 2000). Temporary anomie enforcement is presented as a duty of the sovereign to ensure the survival of

the society. This way the politics of exception can be differentiated from anarchy and chaos (Chalmers, 2012).

As during the Eurocrisis, the pandemic has both nationally and trans-nationally been dealt with emergency measures, in violation of fundamental liberal principles such as the rule of law and individual freedoms (Heaney, 2021). Even though the current crisis is a public health and not economic crisis, the severe economic consequences of the lockdowns (mobility restrictions, temporary pause of business sectors and consumption decrease) raise serious viability issues for the weakest member states and their citizens (Offe, 2021). EU institutions have already anticipated the forthcoming economic recession and in the name of emergency have established the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which is very likely to assume a permanent legal function in regulating member states' fiscal and redistribution policies (Schismenos and Tarinski, 2021; Heaney, 2021). In other words, pandemic political exceptionalism will have lasting effects both in economic and social life.

In Greece conditions for democracy and social rights have long deteriorated since the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the Syriza administration managed to effectively put the country in a steady economic growth track and relief some of the hardships brought by austerity politics (Kostopoulos, 2020). After 2019 and ND's electoral victory, the government shifted the economic focus on more market-oriented strategies, implementing a strict neo-liberal agenda of privatizations and diminished public spending. At the same time police forces and defense expenditures were significantly increased, exhibiting in many instances authoritarian tendencies to deal with public dissent. The pandemic has been instrumentalized in multiple occasions by the government to introduce emergency measures completely unrelated to the struggle against the virus, such as the introduction of a university police force surveillance, environmental laws in favor of large energy corporations, anti-labor rights laws introducing 12-hour employment as well as public gathering prohibitions designed to remain effective after the pandemic (Mylonas, 2020).

Furthermore, compensations for workers whose employment was suspended received a below minimum wage compensation, jeopardizing their ability to provide for their basic needs. To elaborate more on this statement, the political responses to the pandemic by the Greek government generated an unprecedented social crisis, while democratic procedures were often surpassed in the name of emergency to promote its economic agenda. In light of the above, this thesis argues that

emergency politics as implemented in the Greek context has become the mechanism for cutting-edge reforms, which in times of constitutional normalcy would be difficult, if not impossible, to perform. Emergency politics in this case did not aim for the reinstatement of legality that was temporarily put on hold to cope with the rapidly spreading virus, but seems to have reinforced the implementation of an austerity economic strategy, similar to the policies of the crisis.

The Pandemic of Precarity

Social inequalities have received ample attention by a large strand of literature when discussing the non-biological aspects of the pandemic (Delanty, 2021; Offe, 2021; Pleyers, 2020). Inequalities related to education, income, healthcare housing, gender or even the environment have become steeper since the outburst of the pandemic. The rapidly contagious virus led governments postpone economic activities, at least until the majority of their citizens are vaccinated. Although medical science came up with a variety of vaccines and cures to deal with COVID-19, political obstacles significantly slow down the vaccination process. Consequently, more and more people have to deal with economic security, which in turns affects their access to basic goods and services. At the same time, lockdowns and movement restrictions intensify family violence against women and children, while findings show that infections are larger in environmentally degraded and poor areas. According to Eurostat (2021), Greek economy has been harshly hit by the pandemic. Unemployment increased significantly, as many business sectors were suspended for a large amount of time, public healthcare spending was diminished in the midst of the pandemic, making Greece the country with the highest covid-related deaths in Europe. In addition, millions of people had to live with 534 euros per month while rent reliefs applied only to business owners. On top of that, the government set in motion housing auctions of those who could not afford their bank loans. In short, the number of people living in conditions of poverty increased from 25 to 35% of the population during the pandemic (Eurostat, 2021).

However, such social phenomena are not new to Western capitalist democracies. Social inequalities predate the pandemic. COVID-19 crisis accelerated only already existing conditions of precarity, which are defined by Azmanova (2021) as ‘sustained conditions of existence without predictability or security, affecting material and psychological welfare’ (p.221). Interestingly, precarity is not traceable exclusively in the poorest social strata. For Pleyers (2020), neoliberal

capitalism generates a precarious environment for all, regardless of social status, age or gender. It describes furthermore, a continuous uncertainty about living conditions, systematically implemented by the neoliberal economic doctrine through the diminishing role of public goods and social spending. Conditions of precarious living were exacerbated for large segments of the Greek population during the pandemic. In an environment of political exceptionalism, the ND administration set forward an austerity-oriented agenda that was partially abandoned when Syriza was in office. Although ND had shown its plan to implement a neoliberal economic plan already from the very first months of its election in 2019, the pandemic became an unexpected ally in its application. Multiple policies related to privatizations of public enterprises and public space, to budget cuts on healthcare, education, unemployment benefits and environmental protection were imposed in absence of democratic deliberation and constitutional compliance (Mylonas, 2021).

Therefore, the ongoing pandemic portrays an interesting paradox. On the one hand, affluent societies possess the technology to craft vaccines for deadly viruses in just a few months and send spacecrafts to far away expedition missions, while on the other hand, fail to provide basic goods and services, such as healthcare and housing, to large segments of their population. For Azmanova (2021) the intrusion of market-oriented exploitation of previously public goods has escalated the ongoing pandemic into a social crisis that can only be compared to war-time events. Precarity and not social inequality is the real affliction of contemporary developed societies (Della Porta, 2021). This can to a certain extent explain why governments invest more and more in repression mechanisms, such as the police. As the pandemic showed, public dissent was not resolved with dialogue but repressed with law-and-order tools.

In light of the accelerating precarious conditions, many social scientists deem the pandemic as a battlefield for rapid political transformations. Since the outburst of the pandemic, grassroots organizations of the progressive family had been particularly active in activities to alleviate the material impact of the pandemic across Europe. Greek PSMOs especially in large cities combined their resources to protect migrants, women and homeless people in any possible way, from providing shelter to giving free meals and medical supplies. However, the way these mobilizations were discursively framed in the pandemic environment is still unexplored. Claims for social justice and quality of democracy had always been in the agenda of progressive political forces. Given this long-lasting relation as well as the unique social circumstances generated by the pandemic, it is

the position of this thesis that the social crisis provoked by the pandemic will likely give rise to mobilizations in defense of social rights and democracy. Furthermore, the multiplicity of actors engaged in common mobilizations against the precarious reality of the pandemic, could encourage PSMOs expand their agenda over themes beyond their issue-specific identity. The next section will further elaborate on the relationship between democracy, social rights and PSMOs.

Democracy and Social Rights in Progressive Social Movements

In order to better understand why PSMOs and no other movements are expected to mobilize in defense of social rights and democracy during the pandemic, it is important to further look into this relationship. In fact, social rights and democracy are at the heart of PSMOs and consist of fundamental values for the whole progressive spectrum including political parties (Tarrow, 1998). Social movement families (Della Porta and Rucht, 1995) represent ‘an ideologically coherent social force driven by an overarching master frame’ (Dunlap, 2008, p. 825). For Kriesi social movement families depart from similar ideological presuppositions, belong to the same protest cycle (Tarrow, 1998) and share a common master frame. PSMs originate success of the civil right movements, which later gave inspired the European New Social Movements of the 60s (Dunlap, 2008). They identify with values of tolerance and inclusiveness (Della Porta, 2009) and organize collective struggles around themes of feminism, ecology, racism and exploitation among others (Reiter, 2009). Traditionally, PSMs have proven particularly sensitive in addressing democratic violations and issues of social justice, as well as reconstructing alternative democratic or counter hegemonic narratives, in contrast to conservative movement families for which democracy is not a central frame of identification (Taylor, 2017).

Social rights are universally accepted as substantive elements of individual autonomy and dignity. Few would deny that basic goods such as nutrition or access to education are items of luxury and therefore, should not be treated as public goods. In other words, social rights are basic provisions, necessary for an individual to live a good life and as indicated by Marshal (1992), preconditions for active political engagement. Typically, according to Mantouvalou (2014, p.4) social rights refer to the following entitlements:

a) a right to housing;

- b) a right to basic nutrition, including a right to water;
- c) a right to basic healthcare, because ill-health can lead to severe human suffering;
- d) a right to education;
- e) a right to social security and social assistance;
- f) a right to work and decent working conditions;
- g) a right to form and join a trade union, including a right to collective bargaining and a right to strike.
- h) right to non-discrimination
- i) right to safe natural environment

In spite of their value for human societies, social rights do not enjoy a consolidated legal status by international law. In fact, social rights seem to be of secondary importance when compared to political rights for instance. The Cold-War ideological contestation has largely determined the legal status of social rights and this disparity is portrayed at the domestic level as well. In most Western states political rights apply equally and unconditionally while in contrast social rights are weakly codified, being subjected to conditionalities of resource availability, ethnicity and various other criteria. Even in the most recent European Treaty, social rights remain undervalued and of secondary importance. The need for constitutionally guaranteed social rights is not just an old-left anachronistic argument. Instead, it is celebrated by liberal thinkers and politicians, such as Rawls and Roosevelt. The argument is that economic independence is tightly related to political participation. For Cohen (1997), individuals can independently engage in political activity when their basic needs are covered and enjoy the same opportunities as everyone else. The lack of material resources does not only limit an individual's purchase power but also their freedom to equally participate in the commons. Considering that availability choices and resources are interrelated in market economies, social rights provisions are the foundations upon which individuals freely act. Hence, democracy requires the satisfaction of essential needs that are to be found at the social rights.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the 21st century, the struggle for social rights has become more prominent in the rhetoric of PSMOs, arguing for legal consolidation of these rights.

Interestingly, what the GJ movements showed is that mobilizations and claims about social rights and democracy involve a transnational character, partly stemming from the common experiences faced by neoliberal capitalism (Della Porta, 2009). Similarly, the Square Movements featured claims for social rights protection against the austerity political agenda of the EU and national governments. Thus, social rights and democracy go hand-in-hand in the progressive social movement discourse. Under the slogan ‘Another World is Possible’ PSMs of the Global Justice mobilizations proposed a reformative democratic frame, characterized by horizontality, anti-delegation and inclusiveness (Fominaya, 2015). Borrowing from the GJ legacy, PSM activists at the Square Movements of the recent financial crisis (especially in the European South), mobilized against the democratic malaise of the austerity politics era (Armigeon and Guthmann, 2014; Della Porta, 2012, 2013, 2015; Fominaya, 2014, 2017). In Greece, progressive groups of the square movements discursively proclaimed for a new world based on direct democratic procedures and equal active participation. Nevertheless, the first signs of the Greek PSM’s democratic are traced in the 2008 uprising, where findings suggest a significant tendency for participatory democratic claims and practices (Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2014; Seferiades, 2017).

The issue of democracy and social rights is deeply rooted in the rhetoric and practice of Greek PSM, therefore the current democratic malaise circumstances along with the increased PSM activity present a unique field of research. Research suggests that emergency rule nourishes intense contentious mobilizations and anti-emergency narratives, especially for political actors concerned with quality of democracy (rule of law compliance, procedural fairness), resource redistribution and social justice (White, 2021; Della Porta, 2021, Delanty, 2021). For this reason, Della Porta (2021) identifies PSMOs as protagonist in forming anti-emergency narratives against repression, centralization of power, increased material needs and public health disparities. Azmanova (2021) raises similar expectations about the behavior of PSMOs during the pandemic, arguing that the conditions of precarity intensified by the implementation of emergency measures will lead to grassroots mobilizations in defense of social justice. Nevertheless, when it comes to political mobilization in times of economic and social crises, research suggests that political protest is hindered by these conditions of insecurity. In fear of further destabilization, social actors often retreat from active political engagement (Taylor, 2017).

In light of these theoretical ambiguities, this dissertation will investigate the how discourse on democracy and social right develops in progressive social movement organizations at a time of a pandemic. As already mentioned, the pandemic extends beyond its notable public health implications, creating conditions of uncertainty for large segments of the society, while simultaneously putting limits on democratic proceduralism and civil liberties. In other words, it is still unknown how PSMOs mobilize for democracy and social rights when these are suspended. The basic arguments of this thesis are two. First of all, PSMOs are likely to be triggered to engage in collective action in defense of social rights and democracy, in spite of the public health risk, since these values have been at the core of the progressive spectrum for decades. Secondly, PSMOs will extend their claims to issues that transcend their issue specific agenda, as in times of crises, evidence suggests that PSMOs occupy with themes and topics beyond their specific organizational interests.

Data and Methods

This research will be a qualitative content analysis, looking into discourse on democracy as expressed by four Greek PSM organizations. There will be a comparison between the pre and the pandemic period, in order to find out in what manner has the discourse on social rights and democracy developed by the organizations. Furthermore, for effective data triangulation and more in-depth analytical data generation, I will conduct four semi-structured interviews with members active in the sampled organizations. Interviews are considered to be a valuable methodological tool in social movement research, as they offer an ‘insider perspective’, often unattainable from conventional data collection techniques (Turner, 2010). Semi-structured design, offers to researchers considerable flexibility to adapt to the particularities of every interviewee, while simultaneously being committed to the ambitions of the research questions

There are several reasons why Greek organizations were sampled for this thesis. First of all, Greece like almost every other European member state was equally affected by the European emergency politics strategy to deal with the crisis. More specifically, a large portion of the funds diffused by the Greek government to keep the economy on track, come from the European Resilience Facility, which in turn produces future fiscal commitments that might require a prolonged retrenchment in social rights. Secondly, the Greek government imposed similar emergency measures as most European states to deal with the pandemic, although each case comes with certain unique features of exceptionalism. Lastly, Greek PSMOs have exhibited an intense activity throughout the last decades, starting from the Global Justice mobilizations to the student movement of 2008 and later on the Square Movements of the financial crisis. In other words, Greece has been a laboratory of grassroots contentious action.

Methodologically, a qualitative strategy was chosen, to offer the necessary interpretative dimension required to study discourse about democracy and social rights. In addition, qualitative content analysis is a commonly used practice in social movement research (Della Porta, 2009). There is plenty of disagreement regarding whether content analysis is a qualitative or quantitative research method. In truth there is no single way for a researcher to do content analysis. As Kalyvas (2008) notes, the method always depends on what the researcher wants to find out. Classical content analysis was indeed a quantitative process, with categories and codes being its central elements. In essence, the researcher would extract meaning from a text by counting the occurrence

in which certain words or phrases would appear. The more these words or phrases appear in the text, the greater the researcher's confidence in drawing correlations between the hypotheses and the data (Turner, 2010). Hence, the main strength of qualitative content analysis is the ability to merge two opposing methodological values: openness and theory-guided investigation (p.3). In this thesis, in order to effectively analyze all data within the time limits, I chose to combine a semi-automated text analysis with software assistance (MAXQDA), applying keywords to compare how frequently claims for democracy and social rights occurred in the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. As a next step, the data will be qualitatively analyzed to better explain the dynamics of change (if any).

Organizations consist of two thematic units within the progressive PSMO family; namely the ecological and labor rights. Covering the whole issue specific spectrum of PSMOs would significantly increase the possibility of ending up with a vast amount of non-categorizable data. Therefore, I chose to follow a structured and targeted data collection method, looking into organizations indicative of the PSMO family. Research suggests that ecological and labor rights organizations have always been active in raising issues of democracy and social rights and hence, I expect organizations from these thematic areas to generate data relevant to the research question (Tarinski and Schismenos, 2021). Two organizations will be chosen from each thematic unit. This sample size will allow for an in-depth analysis of the data. Moreover, since the ambition of this thesis is to analyze grassroots organizations, special emphasis will be placed on choosing a sample unrelated to political parties. As Rucht (2009) shows, organizations with strong party affiliations tend to reproduce the rhetoric of the parties they identify with.

Regarding the data, I will use publicly available documents, found at the websites of the organizations. The documents will consist of: mission statements, social media posts, event announcements, online events and protest (physical or virtual) banners. The observation period will start in January 2019 and end in May 2021. The data will be then categorized and analytically interpreted. In order to avoid the abstract inductive categorization, but also keep a distance from the strict deductive coding which has very little to say about the nature of the categories (Marrying, 2004), I chose to combine the two coding strategies. On the one hand, I will be using a theory guided coding method with pre-define codes, to establish guidelines for the data analysis. On the other hand, the codes will be continuously revised throughout the data analyzing process, which

will allow me to keep my analysis open to interpretation. According to Eidenhardt (1989), linking the coding process to the extant literature improves the internal validity, generalizability and the theoretical quality of the argumentation. Democracy is operationalized according to the methodological model of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). This model effectively captures all aspects of democracy from quality of representative government to civil liberties and constitutional checks and balances¹. Social rights are operationalized as defined in the previous section by Mantouvalou (2010). All documents for this thesis will be available upon request.

¹ https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/COVID19_Global-Monitor-Methodology-and-Codebook.pdf

Analysis

This section of the thesis will outline the main findings. It starts with the pre-covid period and the way discourse about democracy and social rights were shaped by the sampled PSMOs, while the second part focuses on the pandemic period. Overall, findings indicate an intensification of claims for more social rights and democracy in the pandemic. The pre-covid observations point towards issue specific public goods, namely ecology and labor rights. Democracy stands as a vital issue in the pre-covid period, focusing on alternative democratic visions beyond the liberal ones. The pandemic has brought notable changes to the extent PSMOs mobilize over non-issue specific topics in favor of social rights such as housing and employment. Furthermore, democracy became a focal point of mobilization as a response to the democratic violations enforced by the ND administration in an environment of political exceptionalism. Evidence suggests that expectations raised by the two hypotheses in this thesis are confirmed. First of all, PSMOs intensify struggles over democracy in the pandemic. Secondly, PSMOs reconfigure their agenda in the pandemic, incorporating issues and claims beyond their issue specific identity.

Pre-Covid Democracy

Indicators	Occurrences
Representative Government	27
Civil Liberties	130
Checks and Balances/Monitoring of the executive	67
Impartial Administration	42
Participation	96

In all four organizations democracy is a prevalent objective even in the pre-covid period. Interestingly, the goal of reforming representative democracy is tightly associated with the recent financial crisis. ‘...picking up from where the Squares of Indignados left us we remain devoted to the struggle for a true democratic society, of equal citizens....against the representative decision making system we demand direct representation, in order to become equal stakeholders of our political future (Trise, 2019). Respondent 2 from Attack stated that ‘we have learned our lessons from the past (meaning the crisis) and here at Attack we deem democracy to be a pillar in reaching justice for workers. We realize that no one will fight for us, since governments side with the large capital owners and corporations. We want to shape our own futures without imposing on anyone and democracy is the only way to do that’. The most frequently appearing codes regarding democracy in the pre-covid period were related to the ‘input’ side of democracy namely: participation, inclusiveness, non-delegation and monitoring of the executive. For LSS ‘we do not ethically and politically identify with the governmental authorities that attempt, with the assistance of the police, to destroy our natural habitat and land. The current government has no legitimacy, it is a product of a small minority of voters, not citizens, who know nothing else except for casting their vote once every four years. OUR democracy comes through citizen assemblies, direct participation and non-representation (2019).

When it comes to defending liberal democracy and the rule of law, or freedom of press Viome argues that ‘our goal goes beyond liberal democracy. We want to reform democracy by empowering the workers. Our collective puts the power to the people, to the worker, unmediated by the institutions of the middle class.’ (2019).None of the respondents expressed any negative sentiments against liberal democracy. ‘We are not supportive of any illiberal measures, we just want to reform democracy, widen in for everyone and reclaim democracy from the corporations, media and politicians’ (Respondent 1, Trise). Attack was generally skeptical about the ability of liberal institutions to deliver policies friendly to the less privileged segments of the society. ‘Attack aims to introduce an alternative democratic vision, one that is not confined to the closed gates of ministerial meetings or the agendas of the rich....a democratic vision that is open to all workers’. Respondent 4 from LSS argued that ‘to recreate a sustainable world and fulfill our ecological plan we need to recreate democracy first, to open up the debate for those who are truly affected by

climate change, who don't see themselves represented by parties and politicians, we need to become the co-authors of our laws. Only then we can be equally bound to the rule of law.'

Least frequently occurring codes had to do with the quality of representative government and the performance of the administration. When asked about the condition for civil liberties in Greece, respondent 1 said that 'it is a paradox the issue of civil liberties in the West, on the one hand we have the illusion of being free to do pretty much anything we want, on the other hand when this liberty threatens the ruling class or the interests of the state then these freedoms are significantly limited.... You have the right to protest the government tells you but if I tell my employer that I won't go to work to strike he will fire me'. We are completely unprotected as workers although constitutionally Greece seems fully democratic.' On similar lines respondent from LSS said that 'liberal democracy allows you to enjoy some freedoms as long as you comply with the lifestyle it dictates, when alternative ways of life challenge the dominant paradigm of living then your liberties don't have an equal standing as anyone else's'. Respondent from Viome said that 'you are free to consume as much as you want, stroll along the markets buy clothes, eat your dinner in expensive restaurants, but when this gathering especially in Greece, delivers a political message you end up beaten by the police'.

Pre-Covid Social Rights

Social Rights	Occurrences
Right to Housing	37
Right to basic nutrition, including a right to water	26
Right to basic healthcare, because ill-health can lead to severe human suffering	42
Right to education	64
Right to work and descent working conditions	72

Right to form and join a trade union, right to collective bargaining and right to strike	58
Right to non-discrimination	39
Right to a safe natural environment	69

The case for social rights in the pre-covid period among the four organizations is strong nevertheless remains bound to issue specific topics. Labor rights organizations prioritize the need for legal consolidation of the right to employment, while ecologists regularly refer to the right for a sustainable environment. Social rights beyond employment, social security and environmental quality did not occur regularly, although all organizations defend the need for public provisions such as housing, education and healthcare. For Attack ‘the constant insecurity of unemployment that diminishes our rights to social security and healthcare calls for radical reform of this exploitative economic system’. ‘We defend our rights to collective bargaining, descent minimum wage and humane working conditions. Respondent 2 from Attack mentioned that ‘since the crisis we have to fight for what was previously common sense, we consider steady secure employment to be a right and not a privilege...of course securing social rights such as employment and social security has effects on all aspects of life’. When asked about social provisions unrelated to labor rights, the respondent mentioned that ‘we believe that everything starts from employment, it is not that other progressive politics themes don’t concern us, on the contrary... we think our life is regulated by the conditions of production and our goal is to reconfigure those in order to reform the rest’.

Viome, in contrast saw the sustainable development going hand in hand with labor rights. ‘Our basic objective is to defend the right to employment along with the right to a safe environment....A different way of life is only possible if we secure the right to a sustainable ecosystem against the barbarism of human and natural overexploitation. Respondent 3 argued that the crisis has increased insecurity about the environment and labor rights in Greece. ‘To overcome the ecological and employment barbarism we inherited from the crisis we promote a different economic model based on ecological justice and human dignity...it is our right to live in harmony with our natural environment and we promote ecology through a production model that puts the

worker first....social security, descent working conditions should be common sense’. After the ND government shut down the power supply of the Viome factory, the organization responded by arguing that ‘energy is a social good that belongs to all of us....we demand energy to constitutionally become public good, energy restrictions in modern societies are criminal acts’.

When it came to public goods, respondent from LSS mentioned that ‘we consider water, electricity and heat as necessary requirements for humans to exist and develop in modern societies, they are rights and not commodities’. ‘Against the governmental plans for privatizing the energy sector, we demand that all energy sources to be managed locally by popular assemblies as energy is a public good it is not for trade. Respondent 4 from LSS argued that conditions for social rights provision are becoming more and more hostile...we consider natural resources to belong to all of us, the water the forests the underground are property to none but to all’ ‘As residents of Pelion Mountain we regard our rivers, our hills our soil to be our home, they don’t belong to us they belong to all, it is our right to keep them clean and unspoiled by commercial use...our project is to legally defend our right to a clean and accessible environment’. When asked about other social rights such as education or healthcare the respondent said that ‘here at LSS we promote an alternative lifestyle in harmony with our natural environment, we think that humans can flourish only when essential needs such as energy, food and water are given by the community for free...education is definitely one of them that’s why we have our own public library and offer a number of courses to children of all school units’. Overall, what becomes clear from the text analysis, is that for LSS social rights are targeted towards environmental issues in the pre-covid observation period.

Trise had the most complete agenda regarding social rights among the four organizations. ‘Trise sees social ecology as a right that incorporates all aspects of human existence, from education to working relations and democracy...our goal is to contribute towards a self-instituting society where access to a clean environment, healthcare, employment and education are taken for granted. Respondent 1 said that our project is to go beyond ecology, show an alternative way of coexistence that doesn’t exploit basic human needs...it should be our right to work in descent living conditions, have access to higher education and be able to defend our ecosystems’. Social ecology, a radical social theory by Murray Bookchin, is the main ideological frame of identification among Trise activists. When asked about the project of social ecology, respondent 1

said that ‘social ecology extends beyond ecology, having sustainability and degrowth as its pillars it imagines a lifestyle where wealth and resources are managed by local communities and distributed with fairness among its members, education, housing and basic goods are for us essential for a profit-free culture, detached from the market economy’. Elsewhere in the interview, respondent argued that ‘neoliberal governments in Greece have left little room for social rights in Greece, especially after the crisis everything follows a market-oriented logic of profit, widening the gap between classes...we claim that social justice is possible when political institutions secure basic social rights for everyone’. In sum, Trise showed evidence of a well-elaborated discourse in favor of social rights before the pandemic. Once again, the links with the recent financial crisis are vivid, indicating that social rights became an important issue after the Recession.

Democracy in the Pandemic

Indicators	Occurrences (pre Covid)	Occurrences (Pandemic)
Representative Government	27	36
Civil Liberties	130	226
Checks and Balances/Monitoring of the executive	67	103
Impartial Administration	79	119
Participation	96	173

Evidence shows that democracy became an issue of contestation next to the organizational political agenda, as the pandemic has according to the organizations provoked a democratic recession. All organizations expressed a critical discourse about the way democracy and especially civil liberties were retrenched during the pandemic. Interestingly, evidence suggests that PSMOs were more likely to defend liberal democratic principles such as constitutional checks and balances and monitoring of the executive during the pandemic. Most frequently occurring codes were civil liberty violations, rule of law manipulation, executive power arbitrariness and protest repression. Furthermore, all organizations argue that the pandemic has been politically manipulated by the government so as to overcome legal constraints and promote its agenda.

Respondent 1 from Trise mentioned that ‘it would take at least twice the time for a government to pass the legislation ND passed during the pandemic, we witness an unprecedented wave of authoritarianism which we can only parallel to the military Junta’. For Trise ‘the pandemic is the opportunity for the authoritarian ND to violently apply its neoliberal economic plan...using the ‘shock doctrine’ of the virus the government puts democracy on hold’. Responded 1 specifically described the state of democracy in Greece during the pandemic as ‘a parliamentary dictatorship, where the government does literally whatever they want by instrumentalizing the virus as the excuse’. In May 6th/2021, during the general strike Trise made the following statement ‘As Trise we fight against the illiberal regime of ND...the pandemic has put our freedoms and the rule of law at stake...we cannot pretend this does not happen’. When asked whether it would be safer to mobilize after the pandemic was over, respondent 1 said that ‘if we wait until then, ND will destroy everything...it is our right to defend democracy and more importantly to reform it... all civil liberties were taken away not because of the virus but to deactivate us as citizens’. The virus will disappear at some point but if we don’t fight now this authoritarian reality will carry on’.

Respondent 4 from LSS mentioned that ‘we need to perceive democracy as an ideal beyond legal constitutionalism, it is also about the free movement of ideas and narratives about the social world. By buying the most popular mass media with the excuse of advertising covid-related advertisements ND imposed a very specific narrative about the pandemic, the economy and life in general, at the same time alternative media were wither censored or rejected any financial assistance’. During the pandemic, the radio station of LSS was temporarily suspended, because according to the police it did not meet public health requirements. LSS argue that ‘once again the pandemic is politically used to contain alternative sources of information for the people. Freedom of press and democracy are under attack’. When asked about the radio station suspension, respondent 4 mentioned that it was a politically driven choice, because we were calling for mobilizations against the privatization of water sources...not only the police made arrests at a peaceful demonstration with the pretext of the pandemic, but fined most organizational members...they recently implemented a legislation that prohibits public gatherings, which will stay even after the end of the pandemic it is not temporary’.

Freedom of press was a frequently debated topic by all PSMOs during the pandemic. According to the organizations as well as the respondents, freedom of press was severely

suppressed by the government during the pandemic. Criticizing the way the government disproportionately funded certain media owners with 1000 million Euros in the midst of the pandemic while excluding others, PSMOs organized events and actions in favor of freedom of press. The basic argument PSMOs proclaimed was that in a democratic society, citizens need free access to information. With the exclusive way ND funded government friendly media this democratic principle is being violated. For Viome 'Media owners want us to believe that lockdowns and restrictions are good for us, but they received a generous gift for this propaganda'. Attack argued that 'in the democracy of media oligarchy we respond with boycotts of the stations funded by the government in the pandemic'. Trise also argued for boycotts of government friendly media because 'they spread fake news and government propaganda faster than the virus itself...freedom of press is a right'.

When LSS interview was asked whether he thinks collective action mobilizations jeopardize public health, he said that 'here at LSS we comply with all necessary precautions, we can't just sit back and endure this undemocratic disaster...other countries imposed lockdowns and certain restrictions but in Greece the pandemic unfolds beyond our worst nightmares, we don't live in a democracy anymore, the pandemic has triggered a political crisis it is not a public health issue anymore'. According to the interviewee conditions for democracy deteriorated for civil liberties and rule of law worse than any other indicator.

According to Viome the way civil liberties and democracy were manipulated during the pandemic indicates the fragility of liberal democratic institutions. In texts criticizing power centralization of the executive in the covid period, Viome repeatedly mentioned that the pandemic is an instrument for democratic deviations. 'Liberal democracy has proven unable to contain executive power, as in the economic crisis the pandemic becomes the tool for suspending democracy, the rule of law and our freedoms, we won't stay home we won't comply'. Respondent 3 mentioned that 'the government cultivates an environment of fear, we are not afraid but most people are, now is the time the reclaim our democratic rights and act as citizens...I was dragged to the police station in the middle of the night for questioning like a criminal and I faced charges for participating in terrorist organization...when we protested against the environmental bill in Thessaloniki we were told by the police that they will put us in jail forever we won't see our kids again. I want my kids to be able to speak their minds and not be afraid of the government'. In April

2021 Viome stated that ‘we won’t tolerate the suspension of our civil liberties, enough with the lockdowns democracy has been put on hold for way too long, this ends now’.

For Attack democratic claims intensified in contrast to the pre-covid period. Special emphasis was given to the rule of law, executive power arbitrariness and civil liberty retrenchment. For the organization the lockdown is not enough to justify a prolonged period of democratic normalcy suspension, nevertheless criticism was directed at liberal democratic institutions as well for being non-permissive to minorities and working-class citizens. In the pandemic period, Attack was active in issues beyond labor rights claims, some of which will be analyzed in detail in the following section. By mobilizing on issues other than labor-related, Attack addressed multiple times the incompatibility of the pandemic political landscape with democratic norms. For instance, Attack organized events against the environmental bill that significantly diminished natural inhabitants in favor of large energy corporations, arguing that ‘the environmental bill is another indication of the authoritarian manner which the government implements legislation. Using fast track procedures, ND sells out our natural resources to large corporations disregarding overcoming procedures of public deliberation and constitutional compliance’.

Respondent 2 mentioned that ‘we don’t ask people to ignore the pandemic and get out on the street, quite the contrary, we demand our members to follow all public health protocols but this doesn’t mean that they will deprive of our rights to protest and ask what is common sense...we ask the government to follow procedures, open up public dialogue and respect the constitution...the pandemic has made democracy a hot debate among the progressive space, we can’t allow democracy to derail any further’. In response to the introduction of a university police force, Attack argue that ‘universities have long been places of democratic deliberation and mobilization. We protest against the authoritarian transformation of universities to spaces of police surveillance’. The case for civil liberties was also intensified during the pandemic for Attack. In many instances the organization criticized the strictness of the lockdowns for posing threats in the freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression among others. These claims were always framed in a way to show that the government excessively violates civil liberties using the pandemic as an excuse. ‘Mobilizing emergency measures ND uses lockdowns and violence to suppress anything that challenges its success story’.

Social Rights in the Pandemic

Social Rights	Occurrences (Pre-Covid)	Occurrences (Post-Covid)
Right to Housing	37	62
Right to basic nutrition, including a right to water	26	48
Right to basic healthcare, because ill-health can lead to severe human suffering	42	97
Right to education	37	83
Right to work and descent working conditions	42	80
Right to form and join a trade union, right to collective bargaining and right to strike	34	56
Right to non-discrimination	41	57
Right to a safe natural environment	69	92

In contrast to the pre-covid period, the pandemic has given rise to a systematic discourse in favor of social rights beyond the issue specific topics of each organization. As explained earlier, PSMOs organizations rarely proclaimed for unrelated to their core ideology social rights. However, the pandemic has radically changed discourse for social rights. Evidence suggests that PSMOs expand their discursive claims over topics related to social rights. Most debated codes were healthcare, right to housing, right to work and social security. In contrast to the pre-covid period phrases describing social rights doubled in frequency. As became clear by the interview data, the pandemic has deteriorated the quality of social rights in Greece, triggering an intensification of mobilization among PSMOs.

Furthermore, the pandemic resulted in reconfigurations of activist and organizational political agenda. All respondents agreed that mobilizing over specific issues is not enough to achieve a radical social transformation. One of the reasons why this is the case is because people were generally disappointed by the outcome of the Squares of the recent financial crisis.

Consequently, interviewees mentioned that less people mobilize after the crisis (including the pandemic period), however those who do engage in actions over multiple issues. Another reason why organizations expand their agenda to issues other than their ‘field of expertise’ at times of crises, has to do with the common experiences shared among their members. All interviews highlighted that the virus is not the true cause of the current crisis, but neoliberal capitalism. Although each organization placed emphasis on how neoliberal capitalism threatens either the environment or conditions of labor, it was argued that more and more people live in fear of poverty, pointing to the need for a response that captures all aspects of life. In addition, evidence gathered by the text analysis, showed that the pandemic touches upon issues other than the environment or labor rights. Special emphasis by PSMOs was given in differentiating between the pandemic itself and the government’s response to the pandemic. All organizations expressed claims against the government’s emergency politics strategy of using the pandemic to promote cutbacks on social goods or privatize them.

For Attack, ‘the authoritarianism enforced by the government with the excuse of covid limits our ability to employment, to pay our rent and feed our family’. When prime minister Mitsotakis publicly opposed the waiver of covid vaccine patents, attack argued that ‘healthcare is not a commodity for profit, our right to healthcare is non-negotiable, release the vaccine patents immediately’. Furthermore, being largely based on restaurant and catering services the Greek economy was severely hit by the prolonged lockdowns. Naturally large segments of the population were unable to work for months and had to live with a monthly stipend of 534 Euros. Respondent 3 from Attack said that ‘most people are unable to pay their rent and feed their families this is a social catastrophe, we are being deprived of our right to housing, to employment, to healthcare...the pandemic makes us reconsider our own agenda and I think this is the case for the progressive space in general...we can’t ignore the degradation of the environment for instance or violence against women we need to come up with a holistic plan about the world’.

Viome when criticizing the fast-track implemented environmental bill said that ‘we can’t sell out our rivers and forests we can’t allow covid to become the excuse to every governmental abuse...we fight for our right to a healthy environment’. Few months later, when minister of education announced the decrease of newly entering university students by 25%, Viome argued for the right to education, criticizing the government for using the pandemic to demolish public

education. Respondent 3 from Viome suggested that progressive social movements need to escape the Greek reality and see the big picture. For the respondent ‘we are witnessing a trend that started in the 80s with Thatcherism...the pandemic only accelerates the destruction of social goods globally not only in Greece’. When asked whether activism should be issue specific focused the respondent mentioned that ‘we live in times of radical reconfigurations of human existence, our natural environment is changing, our social environment too...covid made myself but I can speak for the organization as well that we need to show solidarity to other ideas and movements keen to ours...we need to secure our biological existence and then proceed’.

According to Trise ‘the neoliberal order of things exploits the crises at its best interest and the interest is to commodify what was previously commonly owned...that’s what happens now when you can’t work, go to school or sustain a shelter you are naked to the employer...for us covid is not a crisis the crisis is social and we need to do something about it’. Trise was particularly active in organizing online events around various themes such as working conditions, free speech and the right to housing. ‘Trise acknowledges the deprivation of basic goods during the pandemic...it is our duty to stop this social degradation and reclaim a society where basic needs are covered by social institutions’. When asked whether activism should be issue specific or wider, respondent said that you can’t simultaneously be everywhere, fight for the environment today, women’s rights tomorrow...but we realize that covid gives us opportunities to mobilize virtually, be present in many places at the same time and cover a wide spectrum of issues, I see this as an opportunity to fight for other claims like education, housing collective bargaining, working conditions’.

LSS showed similar tendencies regarding social rights. Being an organization mostly concerned about environmental quality and free natural resource access, its pandemic discourse incorporates alternative themes. Most occurring references among the social rights category (except for ecological rights) were related to healthcare, housing, social security and right to employment. According to respondent 4 from LSS, the political framing of the pandemic picks up where the economic Recession left it, introducing policies that significantly shrink social rights and public goods in an accelerating manner. ‘Except for the natural resources the pandemic has so far been the best excuse to minimize what was previously considered public property, public space and in general property of the community...we see it from the higher education, to healthcare even

to culture who can ignore the way Acropolis was cemented by private actors'. Furthermore, in multiple occasions respondent mentioned that the pandemic poses opportunities for movements of the progressive space to mobilize over issues in which they were previously inactive. 'I see a lot of potential in the way people mobilize today, especially the younger generations have a holistic worldview that involves multiple values. However, I am pessimistic when it comes to the scale of the actual mobilization'. Overall, LSS organized events and published solidarity release for a number of organizations and themes during the pandemic, something that did rarely occur in the pre-pandemic observation period.

Discussion

As explained in earlier sections, the primary ambition of this thesis was to explore how the pandemic affected PSMO discourse on social rights and democracy. In light of this research question, two hypotheses were formed. The first one was aiming to find out more about the discursive messages about democracy and social rights in the pandemic, while the second one had to do with the effects of the pandemic on the issues over which PSMOs mobilize. Findings offer valuable insights about the performance of PSMOs during the pandemic but also regarding the way PSMOs mobilize at times of social crisis, whether this is an economic recession or a public health crisis such as the current pandemic. This section will critically reflect on the findings. First, the discussion will elaborate on the question of democracy and social rights at the time of the pandemic. The second part of this chapter will further investigate the topic of issue mobilization and the third will explore the implications of this thesis in the general context of PSMs.

When it comes to democracy it is important to say that democracy has been a topic deeply rooted in the discourse of PSMOs even before the pandemic period. Pre-pandemic observations, suggest that claims in defense of liberal democratic principles were regularly raised by the organizations. PSMOs further elaborated on claims for direct participation, non-representation, non-hierarchy and power de-centralization, pointing towards reformative models of democracy. This is not to mention that liberal democracy was rejected as a model of democracy; on the contrary, its fundamental values such as the rule of law, civil liberties, checks and balances among others were seen as pillars of democracy and as a basis on which alternative democratic narratives can build upon. Overall, as theory suggests (Della Porta, 2009), democracy stands as a common frame of identification for PSMOs regardless of the organizational thematic identity.

The pandemic discourse on democracy differs significantly in volume and scope than the pre-pandemic discourse. In terms of frequency, democracy became a focal point of discussion for PSMOs. As expected, the democratic recession caused by the emergency politics environment of the pandemic was intensively criticized by PSMOs. In every indicator of democracy, frequencies were almost doubled, linking the pandemic to the ongoing crisis of democracy. Although one could argue that at a time when democratic normalcy is being challenged it is expected for PSMOs to mobilize in its defense, since the pandemic is not a social crisis like all the others. The risk of mass

contamination could to a certain extent legitimize the retrenchment of civil liberties and rule of law compliance, in order to mitigate the pandemic.

However, as pointed out by the organizations, democracy is instrumentally by-passed in aspects of life unrelated to the pandemic, from labor market deregulation, to mass media control and anti-environmental law implementation. Hence, all PSMOs called for collective action in defense of democracy, despite the increased public health risk. More importantly, from the pandemic democratic backlash PSMOs formed new alliances with organizations of different issue specific identity. Trise for instance, called for protest action against media censorship when LSS radio station was shut down. Accordingly, Trise joined the protest call of Viome, against the labor market deregulation, which was implemented ignoring EU law directives. During the pandemic period democratic deviations performed by the ND administration became a vehicle for PSMOs to join forces over topics they previously were less concerned about. These findings come as a response to the question Della Porta raised in May 2020, when Europe was first exposed to the pandemic in May 2020 asking whether PSMOs can save democracy. In her essay she argued that emergency politics around Europe will likely trigger a democratic recession, which gives PSMOs the opportunity to form new strategic alliances and expand their discourse on topics they were previously not active, under the master frame of democracy.

Social rights was another topic elaborated on this thesis. Pre pandemic discourse of PSMOs on social rights suggests continuity with the recent financial crisis period. Generally, the pre pandemic discourse was largely associated with how social rights such as education, healthcare and environmental quality were deprived by austerity politics. This connection was vividly portrayed by the interviewees who directly associated the deteriorating quality of social rights to the financial crisis. Despite its strong presence, discourse on social rights remains within the limits of the organizational issue specific agenda. In contrast, the pandemic has revitalized discourse on social rights. PSMOs emphasized the increasingly precarious conditions of living manifested by the pandemic. Consequently, they adopted a richer discourse on social rights incorporating issues related to housing, social security and most of all healthcare. Combined with the democratic recession mentioned earlier, PSMOs stood critically against the manipulation of the pandemic to promote further cutbacks in public services and public provisions. Special emphasis was placed on the way neoliberalism interferes with access of the less privileged to social goods, arguing that

the pandemic is the excuse for the continuation of a neoliberal economic agenda. As anticipated by Azmanova (2021), PSMOs highlighted the prolonged precarity caused by the pandemic, intensifying their claims over social rights during the pandemic.

As discussed in the theory section of this thesis, scholarly research on social movement mobilization suggests that organizations of the progressive spectrum tend to expand their political agenda at times of crisis (Reiter and Diani, 2009). Findings regarding this question at the pandemic, indicate that PSMOs transcend their issue specific agenda and adopt topics over diverse policy objectives. The two observation periods suggest that the pandemic has reconfigured the agenda of PSMOs, making them reconsider their strategic goals and construct a discourse that incorporates more topics of the progressive political spectrum. Interview data reveal that the pandemic gave activists and organizations incentives to mobilize over non-issue specific topics, as the pandemic touches upon multiple aspects of human existence. Furthermore, it was argued that the decreasing numbers of mobilization after the crisis, make issue specific organizations less influential in affecting policy making. Hence, the pandemic became an opportunity for PSMOs to make alliances with other organizations over a diverse political agenda. In other words, the pandemic resulted in significant reorientation of the PSM spectrum, giving birth to organizational identities.

Another implication of this thesis applies to the way social movements respond to the social reality. As Tarrow (1998) argued, social movements are living organisms as their identity is constantly reconfigured according to the way societies evolve. Findings suggest that the pandemic has resulted in rapid reorientation of PSMO identity, implementing practices and frames of the recent financial crisis. The linkages drawn in the rhetoric of PSMOs between the pandemic and the financial crisis are prime example of continuity with the past. More importantly, PSMOs seem to have engaged in a reflective phase, reconfiguring their organizational identity in light of the pandemic's implications on everyday life. Social rights became more prominent in their agenda while democracy stood as a priority next to their specific policy objectives. Furthermore, PSMOs revolutionized their repertoire of action, using social media platforms to mobilize and decrease the chances of mass infection from physical contact. Nevertheless, the extent to which PSMOs are susceptible to changes is determined by many indicators, one of them being organizational age (Fominaya, 2015). Considering that all organizations analyzed in this research belong to the Millennial generation of movements (established after 2000), make them more reflexive to

changes in social reality. This is a possible limitation of this thesis and further research needs to elaborate on the way the pandemic has affected organizational and agenda structures of different generations of movements.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis has investigated the manner in which discourse of Greek PSMOs on democracy and social rights was affected by the pandemic. Social movement research has still not adequately addressed the way social movements react in times of pandemic, and hence, it was the ambition of this thesis; to fill this empirical gap. Social movement organizations of the progressive political spectrum were chosen specifically, because their historical ties with issues of democracy and social rights make them more likely to produce relevant findings in contrast to right wing movements, which are not particularly sensitive over these issues. Scholarly research suggests that pandemics come with certain unique features that distinguish them from ‘typical’ social crises, as collective action mobilization at times of a pandemic entails considerable biological risks.

Evidence suggests that the pandemic has been framed by PSMOs in a way that highlights its socioeconomic aspects more than its public health implications. Two reasons were crucial for this discursive framing. First, PSMOs argued that conditions of emergency politics tend to produce permanent results and hence, acceptance of a poor democratic performance during the pandemic would result in its normalization. Secondly, the prolonged precarity caused by the suspension of economic activity, provoked mobilizations in favor of social rights and equal wealth distribution. Consequently, the pandemic as a public health crisis became a secondary concern, while the crisis of democracy and descent conditions of living were the most crucial determinants of action.

As originally hypothesized, discourse on democracy and social rights was significantly intensified compared to the pre-pandemic period. Claims for accountability, transparency and participation were prominent in the pandemic for PSMOs. Similarly, social rights such as housing, healthcare and social security that were largely affected by the political management of the crisis gained popularity among PSMOs. Furthermore, PSMOs reconfigured their political agenda during the pandemic, adopting issues beyond their issue specific identities. Except for the implications of this research on explaining how discourse on democracy and social rights developed during the pandemic by PSMOs, this thesis provides us with several other contributions.

First, it adds to our understanding of how different ways of framing social reality triggers different outcomes in collective action. If, for instance, PSMOs portrayed the pandemic as purely

a public health crisis, it is very likely that contentious action against other aspects, such as unemployment or democratic malfunction, would not take place. Secondly, as became apparent from the interviews, social movement organizations reflect on their identities and policy objectives. Contentious action during the pandemic took innovative forms, making use of online platforms to overcome the restrictions of public gatherings. As for the themes of mobilization, the conditions generated by the pandemic made activists and organizations reflect their ambitions and form alliances with actors of different thematic family. Overall, the social aspects of the pandemic indicate that periods of political transformations and fluidity give birth to new repertoires of action and new strategic alliances for social movement organizations.

Like every research this thesis comes with its limitations. Considering that data was only gathered by Greek PSMOs limits the generalizability of the findings to the general population. Hence, future research should focus on adding a comparative aspect to this research question. Another valuable addition to this research would be a comparison between progressive and conservative social movements, since the pandemic has triggered contentious action from the conservative spectrum as well. Under no circumstances, should we forget to mention that organizational age is another aspect that needs to be considered in future research. Social movement generations respond differently to questions of democracy. As already mentioned in earlier sections, the organizations used for this thesis belonged to the youngest generation of movements. Lastly, social movement research concerning the pandemic needs to investigate how discourses on democracy and social rights developed after the peak of this contentious wave.

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