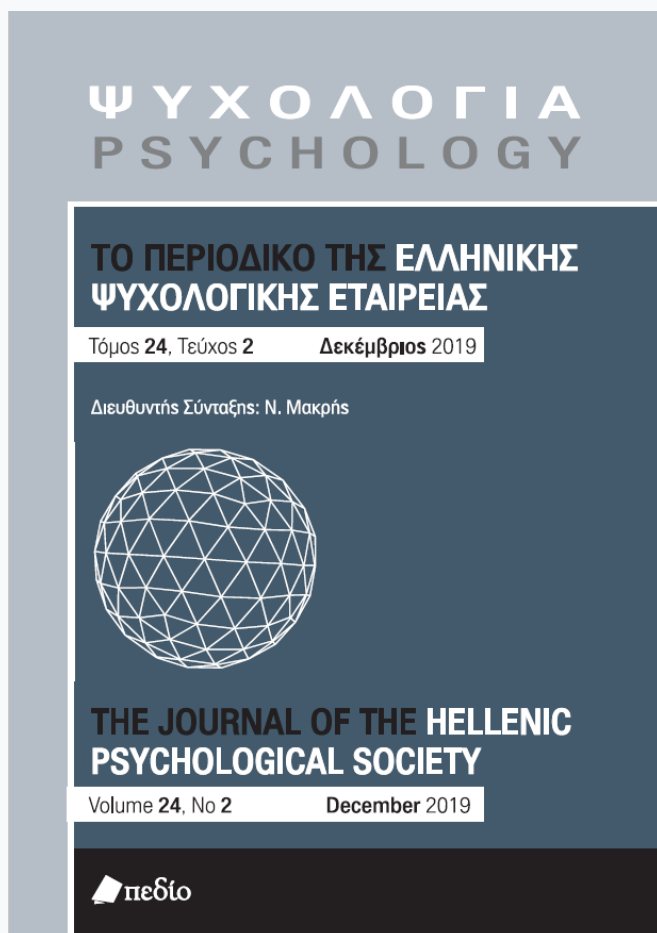


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Introduction: Political Psychology in an 'Anti'-politics Era

Lia Figgou, Xenia Chrysochoou

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Introduction: Political Psychology in an ‘Anti’-politics Era

LIA FIGGOU¹ & XENIA CHRYSOCHOOU²

Political psychology constitutes a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary field (Staerkle, 2015). In fact, being born in the decades between the First and Second World Wars, it is intrinsically characterized by the concern to study and cope with social and political crises and their implications (Nesbitt-Larking & Kinnvall, 2012). Its theoretical tools and concepts were developed in order to cast light on phenomena such as mass psychology and collective action, racism, the rise of fascism and authoritarianism. The role of psychology in the study of these phenomena was, as Moscovici (1988) argued, not only necessary but also functional.

What begs the question, however, is the ways in which political psychology can contribute to the understanding of political relations, subjectivities and actions in a historical context in which politics are severely challenged and undermined. In a contribution to the journal of the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP), almost two decades ago, Weltman and Billig (2001) suggested that political psychology ought to document the dilemmas and contradictions of this type of political ideology which, being disguised as simply common sense, attempts to deny

its ideological character. At that time the ‘rhetorical other’ of Weltman and Billig’s text was the proponents of the so-called ‘Third Way’ who argued against the parochialism of the left-right division and for the need to advance consensual politics, above right and left.

The rhetorical analysis of Weltman and Billig, apart from revealing the antinomies of the political discourse of anti-politics, it highlighted its macrosocial functions. The tendency to substitute ‘Good governance’ for political controversy, they argued, tends to exclude radical politics and to discourage challenges to powerful vested interests. More recent research has shown that people who self-identified at the centre of the political spectrum display more conservative beliefs than those who self-identified either to the left or to the right of the political spectrum, taking, thus, a position in a controversy (Mari et al. 2017).

The request for consensual politics is objectified by the dogma “TINA” (There Is No Alternative). This idea, in the context of Post Democracy (Crouch 2004), reassured individuals, busy in the quest of happiness, that there is only one way of governance and therefore they do not need to take any action themselves in relation to politics. In this

1. Lia Figgou, School of Psychology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, AUTH Campus, 54124, Greece. Email: liaggou@psy.auth.gr

2. Xenia Chrysochoou, Department of Psychology, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Syngrou 136, 17671 Athens, Greece. Email: xeniachr@panteion.gr

context, where political controversy and political action is questioned in everyday life, it seemed necessary to see how political psychology approached the issues in our side of the world.

The current special section was designed at a time when Greece witnessed some really dramatic social and political changes, related to its double bailout by its international creditors. Harsh austerity policies largely imposed by agreements between Greek governments, European institutions and the IMF led the country into an unprecedented social, political and humanitarian crisis. Therefore, although 'crisis' was not mentioned in our initial call for papers it -rather expectably- proved to be either the focus or the framework of most contributions to this special issue.

Of course, there is an already extensive volume of analyses on the ways in which 'crisis' has been represented in various genres of public discourse (both in Greece and in other contexts) and on the repercussions of these representations (e.g. Athanasiou, 2012; Bozatzis, 2016; Chrysochoou, Papastamou & Prodromitis, 2013; Douzinas, 2010; Kiooukiolis, 2013; Knight, 2013; Lampropoulou, 2014; Mylonas, 2014; Nikolopoulou & Cantera, 2016; Papastamou et al. 2018; Petkanopoulou et al. 2018; Poeschl et al. 2017; Prodromitis, Chrysochoou & Papastamou, 2017; Triandafyllidou, Gropas & Kouki, 2013). These authors have largely documented the ways in which 'Greek culture' has been essentialized and 'othered' in accounts on the etiology of crisis. According to their analyses, the rhetoric of 'crisis' pathologized Greek society by constituting Greece's financial situation as a symptom and implication of an 'abnormal' culture. Moreover, by constructing Greek cultural flaws as rather persistent and resistant to change, it advocated that quick recovery should be possible only through immediate technical changes. Emphasis on the technocratic aspects of managing the 'crisis' has gone hand in hand with another, more or

less explicit assumption, the 'failure' (or even the claim to the end) of politics. Politicians, by being depicted as corrupted and exemplary representatives of Greek cultural flaws and imperfections have been constituted a part of the problem, instead of part of its solution (Chrysochoou, 2018). Politics in general, on the other hand, have been constructed as a means of government which is less appropriate for managing an *exceptional* situation, a *state of exception* in Agaben's (2005) terms, in comparison to 'market solutions'. Newborn political parties negated any identification with the ideological left or right and advocated a 'good government' above ideological divisions (see also Mari et al., 2017). As a consequence the hegemonic mechanisms of the existing system (Chrysochoou & Iatridis, 2013) that produced the 'crisis' were reinforced and 'politics as a debate over reality' (Ranciere, 2009) were silenced.

From 2014 onwards, however, the category of 'crisis' has also been applied in another situation. It has been used to represent the movement of hundreds of thousands of people to Europe (Figgou, Sourvinou & Anagnostopoulou, 2018). In particular, since early 2015 about one million people (coming mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq) have entered Greece with the intention to move towards Northern and Western Europe (UNHCR, Global Report 2015). Nevertheless, a series of political developments in 2016 in Europe, including the sealing of borders with Greece by key Balkan countries, severely impaired the movement of refugees. EU although in the beginning enabled the relocation of (certain numbers of) refugees within member states, by the known as 'Common Statement with Turkey' it also enacted increasingly strict policies of control underpinning some already established discourses of security and risk (Figgou, Sapountzis, Bozatzis, Gardikiotis & Pantazis, 2011; Zisakou & Figgou, 2019).

The rhetoric of the 'refugee crisis' has also been intrinsically linked to the rhetoric of

anti-politics. Populist right-wing, xenophobic arguments favoring exclusion and violation of citizenship rights are often expressed by an anti-systemic language and proclaim the failure of 'existing politics' (Andreouli & Figgou, 2018; Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018; Chrysochoou, 2018; Figgou, 2016a; Lueck, Due & Augoustinos, 2015). Paradoxically, arguments supposedly oriented against the far-right also advocate strict immigration policies. Immigration control is constituted as the only effective and hence inevitable response to the pressure derived from the increasing rise of the political far-right (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2018). Therefore, supposedly contradictory goals are accounted for, through recourse to the same means (Figgou, 2016b; Iatridis, 2019). These constructions and contradictions, along with the ideological underpinnings of diverse societies in times of 'crisis', are evoked in the papers of the current issue.

Portraying the current situation as a *state of exception* pre-supposes, somehow, that the return to *normality* is not associated with social change to reverse inequalities and causes that produced this 'crisis'. However, even in this situation, there is no absence of actions aiming to bring social change. The prerequisites of political participation have been studied extensively by social psychologists who evidenced the role of identities, emotions, ideology, sense of efficacy and instrumental concerns in guiding actions (see as an indication Chrysochoou et al. 2013; Klandermans, 2004; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren, Leach & Spears, 2012; van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008). The framing of the situation and the way people (especially young people) give meaning to their social environment and their position in it, seem to play an important role in guiding participation in social movements and in political actions (Barkas & Chrysochoou, 2017; Chrysochoou & Barrett, 2017). Papers in this

issue address questions of identity construction and political participation in an attempt to understand the interplay between meaning-making and action in current societies.

In fact, the studies presented in this special issue can contribute to the understanding of politics in an 'anti'-politics era in at least two ways. Firstly, they attempt to unpack the meaning attached to major political concepts by social actors per se. Sourvinou and Figgou explore the social construction of ideology in lay discourse. Considering the context of contemporary Greece as ideal for the study of this issue, the authors document the rhetorical functions of various representations of ideology (either as a reified social object, used in 'theory' or as a category used in practice to account for political/voting behavior) and reflect on their implications. The study by Iatridis also attempts to unpack the implications of specific ideological constructions. Extending a previous study (Iatridis, 2017), this contribution shows that Individual Diversity ideas may paradoxically correlate positively with both acknowledging racism as a major problem worldwide and denying the importance of racism altogether. He proposes that such controversial findings may be due to an inherent ambivalence of Individual Diversity ideology on the issues of difference and hierarchy. Koutsi and Baka, also focusing on lay constructions of ideological concepts, document the ways in which Greek citizens discuss the feasibility of social change and construct the potential agents of it in an interview context. In a different methodological approach, Chrysochoou and Anagnostou test in a 'paper and pencil' experimental study the representations of common ingroups that would be more inclusive of immigrants and the role of competition in these constructions. Secondly, contributions cast light on political and politicized identities and explore the prerequisites of participation. Sapountzis and Hatzopoulou examine the way in which students mobilize time and space as argumenta-

tive lines in order to construct minority identity in Thrace and to disclaim racism. Pavlopoulos, Kostoglou and Motti-Stefanidi explore different forms and predictors of youth's civic engagement and political participation on EU-related issues and document the multiple connotations of youth's political participation. Finally, the study by Gardikiotis, Alexandri and Apostolidis examines the influence of the framing of the economic situation by the mass media on people's perceptions of political action and confirm the importance of social psychological processes as well as of media framing on people's intention to get involved in collective action.

The current issue on 'Political Psychology in an 'Anti'-politics era' aims to open a discussion about the way political psychology can involve and capture an era of 'anti'-politics both at a theoretical level and an epistemological, methodological level. Different theoretical and methodological approaches are presented in the papers that follow. It constitutes also an attempt to capture the way Greek social and political psychologists study the social environment in which they evolve.

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