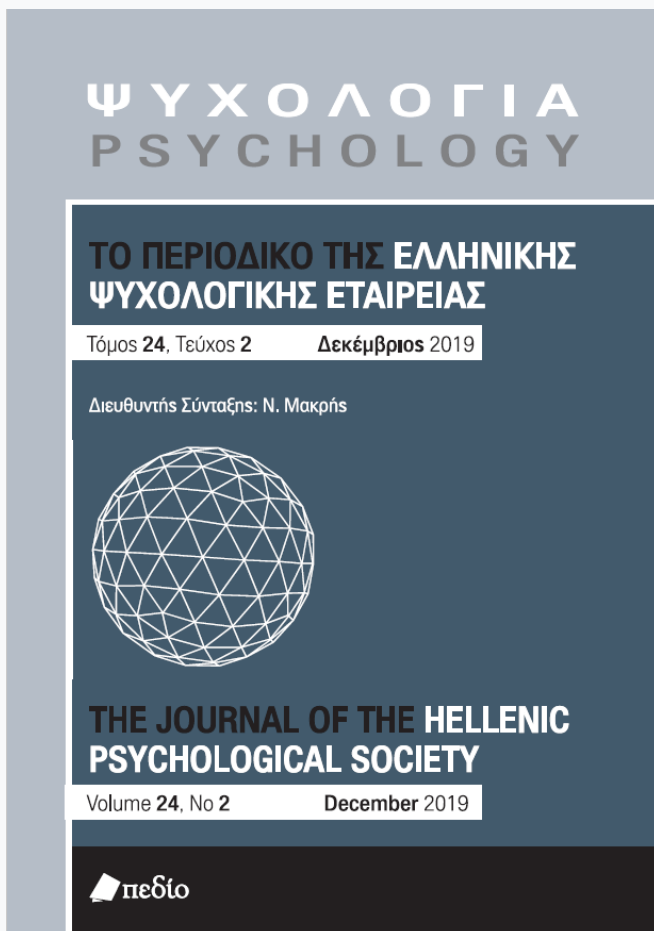


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# Talking about social change: A socio-psychological thematic analysis of citizens' interviews in Greece

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## ABSTRACT

The need for changes in crisis-ridden Greece has become a common-place imperative in public discourse both in Greece and in Europe. Focusing on interviews with Greek citizens, this study attempts to explore the ways in which laypeople discuss a) the feasibility of social change and b) construct categories of social change agents. Data were drawn from 10 semi-structured interviews with Greek citizens aged 25-45, and they were analyzed using interpretive thematic analysis. From our analysis, it appeared that in all interviews social change was constructed as a necessity. Nevertheless, while in some cases it was presented as a feasible objective, in others it was treated as unattainable. Regarding the categories of agents that either obstruct or should undertake actions for change, the analysis showed that these categories either included political leaders or the Greek people through their individual or collective action. The discussion suggests that focusing on everyday discourse can contribute to the socio-psychological debates about the agents and factors of social change and social stability.

*Keywords:* Agents of change, Greek crisis, social change, social stability

The Greek financial crisis, begun in 2010, and the implementation of austerity measures, structural reforms and privatization of government assets - demanded by the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to give Greece bailout loans- have brought about many changes in everyday life. Four general elections were conducted between 2010 and 2015. During this period, there has been a widespread debate about the institutional changes that have already been implemented and about those that should or will occur in the future. The

demand for change, mainly economic and administrative has become an almost banal issue for both elites and everyday people. Almost all politicians and political parties support the need for reforms and blame their rival parties for resisting change and maintaining the status quo. Media reproduce the dominant discourse about the necessity of reforms but also the debate about which changes are necessary and how these should be accomplished (Mylonas, 2014). People express their discomfort towards many of the changes, especially the ones that have led to the decline of their financial status, as this has been re-

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flected in the results of the last five elections and in protests and demonstrations against or in favour of the reforms.

In the present paper, we try to explore the ways laypeople in Greece, rather than political elites, talk about the agents of social change and the possibility to be attained with positive outcomes for the citizens. Investigating and making visible people's conceptualizations of processes of social change and in particular the ways they construct the social category of the 'agents of change' has not only theoretical but also clear social implications. Identifying themselves as 'agents of change' who are able to transform their social world by overturning existing status relations can mobilize people taking actions in pursuit of change, whereas feeling powerless to act for change leads to the maintenance of the existing status quo (Drury & Reicher, 2009). Thus, we suggest that social science must take into consideration people, the main social subjects, to better understand the ways social change does or does not happen.

### Social Psychology and Social Change

Social Psychology is very much concerned about how societies transform. Himmelweit and Gaskell (1990) suggested that socio-psychological theories that examine and attempt to explain social change taking under investigation the physical, social, historical, dynamic and ideological contexts constitute a distinct approach in social psychology, this of societal psychology. Scholars included in this approach are interested in *collective action* and *minority influence*, but they also investigate *power*, *ideology* and *leadership* as important factors for social change, sharing to a large extent some common methodological, theoretical and analytical assumptions.

Research on collective action examines the psychosocial profile of social actors and the psychosocial variables of collective action. Issues that are considered important

in this line of research are the relationship between collective action and social change (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009; Van Zomeren & Klandermans, 2011; Wright, 2001); the social identity of the social actors (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008); the ideologies involved (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & van Dijk, 2009); the motivations for collective action (Hornsey et al., 2006; van Zomeren & Spears, 2009) and the psychosocial factors that trigger collective action (Klandermans, 1997; Reicher & Haslam, 2012).

Such studies are quite often based on *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel, 1978) and focus on *social identity*, *social categories* and *inter-group relations* (Reicher, 1996). As Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins and Reicher (2005) argue, in order to study social change and to explore the way in which social actors contribute to change, one has to focus on the ways social identities are constructed in the social interaction and the ways social interactions are reformed due to social identities. Especially, the awareness of an undervalued identity of social group membership is suggested to lead to collective claims, in an attempt to improve social status (Taylor & McKirnan, 1984), whereas participation in collective action, in turn, shapes the identity of the social actors (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2005).

Ideology is also presented as crucial for the explanation of social change (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & van Dijk, 2009). Intergroup differences are often based on ideological issues such as classical political distinctions between right and left. Besides, ideological stakes are often associated with intergroup conflicts, as in the case of racial and gender discrimination. Finally, ideological transformation is usually considered as a manifestation of social change, as it is considered, for example, in the study of minority influence (Mugny, 1982).

The theory of minority influence (Moscovi-

ci, 1976) is also used to explain social change focusing on the contribution of minorities to *social change* and *innovation* and exploring the ways various social groups who possess a minority position, try to exert influence for social change (Moscovici, 1976), through their competitive relationships with power (Mugny, 1982). However, competition between minority and power often has no obvious and straightforward results, creating the impression of social stability (Mugny, 1982), since there are factors that impede and resist to change and innovation such as *psychologization* (Papastamou, 1989). This is the reason why theories of social change also recognize that society is not in a constant state of alertness to change, but often tends to stability and inertia.

Another stand of research attempts to explain the socio-psychological processes that hinder social change and reinforce social stability and the maintenance of the status quo. These theories mainly explore *ideology* as a means of legitimizing the existing status quo (Jost, Burgess & Mosso, 2001) and restraining people from acting towards social change (Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Such patterns are the *belief in a just world* (Lerner, 1965, 1980), the *right-wing authoritarianism* (Altemeyer, 1981), the *social dominance orientation* (Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993) and the *system justification theory* (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Such theories explore common assumptions about societal structure such as that society has a *hierarchical structure* (Jost, Burgess & Mosso, 2001), and explore *individual traits, intra-individual, psychological processes* (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004; Turner & Reynolds, 2003) that differentiate people as to the degree that they accept and support the social inequality and hierarchies (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993) even when these work against their interests (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004).

Despite differences in focus all socio-psychological theories and studies that concen-

trate on social change, view society as a *dynamic*, perpetually transformed structure with constant transforming processes in individual, group and collective level. Change is seen as a *multi-factorial process* involving competitive social forces and mediated by both *material and ideological apparatuses* (Subašić, Reynolds, Reicher & Klandermans, 2012). They also support that no changes can be made without the participation of the social majority (Mugny, 1982), and there can be no collective claims without the participation of active parts or the entire society (Passini & Morselli, 2013). The social subject is involved, actively participates in change, and plays a leading role in shaping the social reality.

All the above theories and studies in the field of social psychology can shed light on the processes of social change and stability also in periods of recession and economic crisis. Taking the example of Greece, our aim is to explore the ways social change and the identities of agents of change are constructed in everyday accounts as well as their implications on the processes of social change (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2005)

## Method

### Participants and Interviews

For the purposes of this project, 10 semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with participants (5 men and 5 women), living in Athens, aged 25-50 years, from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The interviews were conducted by the first author of this article from January to June 2013, shortly after SYRIZA, a left-wing party, climbed the Opposition in Parliament on May 2012. Interviewees were reached through personal contacts, of the first author using her social networks, acquaintances and family ties, in order to be familiar with her. To assure the pluralism of the sample we took under consideration the gender,

age, education, working status and political preference. Four of the participants were civil servants, five were private-sector employees and one was unemployed. Half of the participants (5) had university degrees, while the other half (5) were high school graduates. Finally, participants supported different parties (from right-wing to left-wing) but none of them was an official party member, something that could reinforce the reproduction of the official political party's discourse of the issues at hand. Semi-structured interviews were chosen so that participants could talk about their personal opinion, increasing pluralism of data. The interviews were digitally recorded and lasted about 60 minutes. The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions structured in two sections: a) the possibility of future change in Greece (Do you think that there could be changes in the future? What kind of changes should be done?) and b) the agents of future change (Who could bring about change? Can you personally contribute to change?). Before starting the interview, the interviewer informed the participants about the study and asked their permission to record the discussion, after assuring them that the process was anonymous and confidential. In addition to oral information, there was a written brochure. The venue of the interview was familiar to the participant, such as their home or workplace. All interviews were fully transcribed focusing on the reproduction of content.

### **Analytic Procedure**

Interviews were analyzed using interpretive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), in order to identify specific themes that emerged in participants' accounts according to research questions. Thematic analysis was chosen for the reorganization and organization of the patterns (themes) in the social construction of the agent and means of social change (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Willig, 2013).

Themes are complete meaning entities, verbal patterns directly related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our purpose was not to record a series of verbal patterns but to identify the ideas that emerged directly or indirectly from the data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Thematic analysis is not linear and continuous. In the first phase, the researchers got familiar with the data through multiple readings. The second phase was that of coding, where the researchers applied codes in small text fragments in relation to the research questions. Then, these codes were categorized in higher-level categories. In the third phase, categories were classified in higher-level themes in accordance with our research questions. As far as possible we kept to the explicit meaning our participants gave to change and change agents (Boyatzis 1998). The process of interpretation was applied to themes; however, during categorization and interpretation, we went back and forth to all levels of analysis and the conversational interview accounts. In the analysis, we present and discuss excerpts from the interviews, which better represent the content of the themes.

### **Analysis**

Participants were asked about the possibility of social change in the future and the ways that could be accomplished. When participants constructed change as unattainable we explored the agents that were rendered responsible for the maintenance of stability, whereas when change was presented as possible the agents that would take over the responsibility of achieving change. Thematic analysis resulted in two main themes. In the first theme, change is presented as almost impossible to be accomplished and in the second theme change is presented as attainable; however, the agents of change are varied as it is presented in the respective sub-themes.

### **Future Change is Almost Impossible**

In this theme, change is presented as impossible; however, when such arguments are expressed at the same time the interviewees account for the agents of social change and the factors that intentionally or unintentionally block their actions or discourage them from joining actions for change.

#### ***Lack of (collective) actions for change***

In the following extracts, participants express pessimistic arguments towards the possibility of future change. Social change can be achieved through collective actions of the low-status people, but their mobilization is either impeded by political elites or it is being insufficient.

#### **Extract 1 ‘As long as the stomach is full, you do nothing’**

Interviewer: Tell me now... do you believe things can change?

Helen: What can I say? Unfortunately for me, the future seems bleak. Very bleak. There is no way to change anything. Hey, there is no way to rebel. For example, I am thinking about the... French Revolution, when people decapitated others. People were starving. Here, now, no one is allowed to starve. Since, when you're hungry, you know that something is wrong and you have to react...you can tolerate nothing. This ... This is a lesson the French taught us, since they were the first to have experienced such a revolution. So today governments give allowances to the poor. Here, this has started with Constantine Karamanlis1... common meals and all these volunteers exist to prevent you from getting to the edges. As long as your stomach is full, you do nothing. And in such a case you might say: “we deserve it”. (Interview 2)

Helen expresses pessimism about the prospect of social change. In order to account for this pessimism, she mentions the conditions under which social change is possible and the reasons why these conditions are not met in the Greek case. The agents of social change, according to the speaker are low-status people who get involved in violent acts and rebellions. However, for the people to rebel, they should reach a point of absolute poverty. To support her argument she draws from modern history and she uses the example of the French Revolution claiming that hunger and pauperization were the reasons that led people to revolt and to act violently against the authorities.

Thus, she argues that avoiding pauperization is part of a regular policy, which the French people, as more experienced (in revolution and its obstruction), introduced and bequeathed to Greek politicians starting with Karamanlis. This policy concerns the provision of benefits, common meals and the establishment of voluntary and charitable agencies that aim to provide the necessary supplies for the socially weak to ensure their survival and therefore their tolerance. This way the existing system is not challenged and manages to maintain stability by absorbing tensions for change. However, Helen ascribes responsibility for the success of such policies to people too, as they succumb to the ‘policy of survival’ showing tolerance and passivity.

In this account, the main agents of change are people through their collective actions. However, any tension for social change is blocked by political elites who neutralize any threats for status quo, by preventing conditions that lead to massive collective actions. People are presented as prone to compliance and submission, thus incapable to react to social inequality, unless they reach the state of pauperization. This way authority remains unquestioned and stability is ensured.

In line with the previous extract the following one also supports the argument in favour



of the inability for change. However, it refers to strikes and mass demonstrations, two of the most popular forms of collective action during the period of Memorandum in Greece, as the means of social change but at the same time, it doubts their efficiency.

**Extract 2 ‘No more than 10 and 20 thousand come out every time’**

Researcher: Who or what can bring about change in our country?

Dimitris: We... we... We could bring about change.

Researcher: How?

Dimitris: In which way? By striking? Getting out to the streets and protest? There are approximately 1,000,000 unemployed and no one comes out, there are public servants who have their interests affected but they do not come out. No more than 10 and 20 thousand come out every time (Interview 9)

Dimitris uses the collective pronoun ‘we’ to define the agents of change in the present situation, referring to the unemployed and public servants (as himself) and that the means of social change is their participation in strikes and demonstrations. Specifically, the process of social change should involve all social groups which suffer the consequences of the crisis, mainly the ‘one million unemployed’ and ‘civil servants’, who are a multitudinous and seriously stricken group. According to Dimitris, collective action for social change requires intergroup cooperation and massive participation in order to be effective. However, not enough people ‘get to the streets and protest’ sufficiently, at present.

In extract 2 social change seems to be possible if some social groups cooperate in massive collective action. Dimitris constructs himself as part of this change however the outcome of that effort is not the desirable one, because collective actions are not as massive

as they should and could be although all people affected by the crisis could participate but primarily the unemployed and the civil servants.

**Lack of charismatic leaders**

**Extract 3 ‘lack of a leader who has a vision’**

Maria: What is missing, for example, in Greece is a leader who has a vision, who will say: I’ll take matters into my hands... I don’t think ... Tsipras<sup>2</sup> ok, his actions are consistent with what he says, he follows whatever he says but he is not a charismatic man, whom we will believe in... There is no one like that. In the past, we had Kolokotronis<sup>3</sup>, yes, but I do not know, if such a leader, will appear again (Interview 6)

Maria introduces one more argument in support of the inability of change. However this time it is not the lack of collective actions that does not facilitate social change in Greece, instead it is the lack of a charismatic leader. Such a leader should have a vision and should inspire people to trust him. She makes a reference to Alexis Tsipras, president of the opposition party of that time, as a politician who could play that role; however, she argues that he is far from the standards of such a leader. Instead, drawing from Greek history she presents Kolokotronis as the last prototypical charismatic Greek leader.

In contrast to the previous extract, where political elites were the stability agents that blocked collective actions for change, in this extract, it is the political elites, and in particular, a charismatic leader, who is expected to act as the main agent for change. It is he or she that will persuade people to support and follow the reforms he or she will undertake to implement. Thus, the lack of such a leader makes possibility of change remote. The concept of a charismatic leader, as the one who

will save the people, refers to Weberian analysis (1922/1978) of lost and alienated masses that need a leader to save them. People can only contribute to change when following a leader and perform trust and compliance with such an authority, which has the knowledge and the power to handle that difficult situation (Milgram, 1974).

However, even that top-down change, which is accomplished by a charismatic leader who will inspire people's obedience, is not possible in Greece at the present time. Consequently, no changes are foreseen for now or in the near future.

Conclusively in this theme social change is the result of collective actions or of individuals who act as charismatic leaders. However, its attainability is hindered either by the political elites that impede collective actions or by the citizens who are reluctant in joining collective actions to achieve change and the lack of leaders that are capable to inspire citizens to activate in the pursue of change. Thus collective passivity along with elite's pursuit of the maintenance of status quo hinders any possibility for future changes.

### **Future Change is Attainable.**

In the second theme, social change once again is the main issue at stake. However, in this theme change is presented as feasible and accounts concentrate on the means and the agents that are able or responsible to bring it about identifying them as the citizens who act individually or collectively.

#### ***Individual actions***

Within the theme of change as attainable one line of argument that was expressed concentrated on individuals either as leaders or as citizens who can act in ways that contribute to change. These acts either concern their behaviour as leaders or as voters or in their everyday life. Voting for the people who are able and willing to introduce and implement

changes, instead of supporting the old and corrupted regime is the main issue introduced in the following extract.

#### **Extract 4 'New leaders and vote in the right direction'**

Interviewer: Who do you think could help to change? Do you think there is someone who could take on the attempt to change?

Petros: I'm quite reluctant to believe, as I told you, that the people who are involved in the status quo for such a long time are able to bring about change... So it is new individuals, who will better represent people, individuals who are more self-conscious, who will take a step forward; these people are closer to take over responsibility for change; this is the logical response that comes into my mind.

Interviewer: What could you do to change things? In your life and in general.

Petros: e...something very basic, and I don't underestimate this at all, all my thoughts should direct me in the right way..., my vote should be in the right direction, and this is not simple, it is of great importance. Eventually, all my actions should be associated with, and correspond to all these, because it is very important and it is something that forms reality and ultimately this is what is probably missing (Interview 3)

In this abstract the issue of the leaders as the ones responsible to bring about change is presented once more. However this time it is not a charismatic individual but rather individuals who are categorized through their difference from those who have formed the existing status quo and they are unable to conduce to change. This category of 'new individuals' will 'better represent people', be 'more self-conscious' and take the initiative to participate in change. Petros however does not specifically



mention who are those new individuals who will act as leaders.

When asked by the interviewer how he could personally facilitate this process of change Petros concentrates on the importance of voting as a powerful weapon that people have, which can regulate social reality. Petros argues that rational voting can decisively contribute to social change and form social reality. In this extract, voting is presented as a main form of political participation and important civil duty for active citizens who are of great importance and efficacy for social change. People could transform present situation, individually as active citizens who participate in common to political processes like elections.

Political participation of social majority, like voting, is constructed as a determinant factor of social change. On the other hand, this kind of participation is not collective and does not presuppose the construction of a group with a common identity. In the same line of argument in the following extract people are presented as the ones who have to contribute to change individually and independently from each other.

#### **Extract 5 'Everyone from their side'**

Interviewer: What should we do for change to come?

Vicky: Everyone should do whatever he is able to do. Either through his work, or with his knowledge, or in his home, everyone, even if what they do is small, small, small, if this happen, it will have an effect...It's not a political issue or about political will; it's about what we can do all together but everyone from their side. (Interview 8)

In this extract, the participant claims that people as individuals can contribute to change through their individual actions and their abilities in everyday life. Their contribution may seem limited but it is effective and is not related to politics or political will. Vicky claims that

individuals can act for change in their everyday life, according to their personal or professional identity both in the private and public sphere. People 'all together' will strive for change but that does not mean that an agreement or cooperation or coordination is needed since 'everyone from their side' can do whatever they can or they want. Every attempt is important even if it is 'small, small, small' and 'everyone could do whatever he can' no matter what this is. Vicky illustrates that it is not 'a political issue or political will' but a personal action which in combination with other persons' actions 'will have an effect'.

In general, in this type of arguments in favour of the accomplishment of future change focus is directed to the citizens as individuals rather than to political elites or collective actions. Citizens are seen as capable to contribute to change either through their votes, that will lead to the election of an effective government, or through their individual efforts in all the fields of their work. This way change becomes the result of the sum of individual efforts rather than the result of conflicting collective actions. This type of argument seems to be in accordance to the neo-liberal rhetoric which is quite popular, as previous research on work precarity in Greece has illustrated (Kesisoglou, Figgou & Dikaiou, 2016); according to which people have an individual responsibility to be effortful and active entrepreneurs of their future regardless of the societal conditions.

#### **Collective processes of change**

In the accounts included in this section, participants argue that people can and should contribute to change collectively rather than individually.

#### **Extract 6 'Everyone should help'**

Researcher: Do you think that things can change?

Angela: Yes, but with everyone's effort...,

if we all help, from the lower status people to the higher...if we do not separate the poor from the middle class and the rich... if the rich don't have it all... for example some people do not have any wage reductions and...and the low-class people are pressed more and more. Help must be given from everywhere. Upper classes, the factory owners evade taxes. This is where we must begin. Not only by the employees (Interview 7)

Angela claims that change is possible if 'all' people contribute to it. However, this time 'all' does not refer to individuals but to social groups. She declares that 'everyone' includes all social categories, based on the socio-economic level. This way she constructs three major social categories mentioned as 'the poor', 'the middle class' and 'the rich' or two classes the 'low class' and the 'upper classes', and 'the employee' and 'the ones who own factories' that differ to the extent to which they contribute to the burdens of economic crisis. Angela criticizes the fact that, up to the present, rich hold the wealth, they do not contribute to country's recovery and avoid fulfilling their financial obligations towards the state, while the lower classes undergo constant economic pressures which deteriorate their quality of life.

On the other hand, Angela suggests that there must be inter-class collaboration and equal distribution of burdens which would ameliorate the current situation. The current system is not legitimate but that can change. The means of social change is social solidarity and equality in the allocation of burdens among all the social classes.

Social change through collective processes is not only achieved cooperatively and peacefully, as it is assumed in extract 6, but as Giannis in extract 7, claims through social competition and radical action.

### **Extract 7 'We should hit the skids'**

Researcher: What do you think must be done to ameliorate the current situation?

Giannis: What do I think must be done? It's clear to me. We must bottom out. We must be pauperized, yes. I don't think that we have been pauperized yet, or only a specific group has been pauperized, which is harrowed now and can't react; but I believe that as long as this situation continues existing, that part of the population will expand and will begin rising gradually and I consider that only through that kind of conflict, the majority of the people will realize that they don't belong to those who possess wealth or that just a few possess wealth; they will realize that their interests are not common with those few who still manage status quo. We should hit the skids and we have not hit the skids yet. (Interview 10)

In this account two social categories are introduced to account for change and its agents: these are 'we', which includes the majority of citizens, and those who 'possess the wealth'. According to this type of argument, the majority will bring about change when they decide to act collectively against the wealthy. However, as in extract 1, 'pauperization' of the majority is presented as the main prerequisite of collective action. Giannis claims that 'we must bottom out' so as to 'begin rising' against 'those few who still manage status quo'. He does not believe that there could be an active reaction for the time being, as long as those who are now impoverished are not enough and they are not emotionally capable of joining such actions, but he declares that it is inevitable to happen in the future.

In contrast to the previous extract, the social classes, the poor and the rich are not constructed as collaborators but as adver-

saries as 'their interests are not common'. In addition, social change would be radical, violent and collective and in favour of those who have 'hit the skids'. Social change will be accomplished by the great majority of people when they will lose everything and perceive that they have the opposite interest with the current status quo. The means of that change will be the rebellion against them.

Summing up, in this theme, change is presented both as desirable and feasible in the future; citizens are presented as the main agents of change. However, in the first sub-theme citizens are constructed as individuals who can contribute to change by their own individual acts, whereas in the second it is through identification with their social groups and collective actions that will bring about social change.

## CONCLUSIONS

Participants' discourse bears some resemblances with socio-psychological theories about social change and social stability. It is obvious in our analysis that social change is presented either as attainable or as a utopia that cannot be reached due to specific constraints. The agents that are constructed as culpable of obstructing social change are a) the political leaders that hinder possesses of change or who are incompetent to walk people through change and b) the people who are passive and reluctant to join collective actions. Conversational accounts for social stability claim that the present situation can't change and consequently there are no expectations for any effort or political action for transformation.

However, in contrast with what is suggested by socio-psychological theories, the lack of actions toward social change are not attributed to the acknowledgement of the status quo legitimacy. In all accounts, in which elites are mentioned, these are denounced for their practices and interviewees are critical and dis-

approve of them. At the same time, however, in these accounts, the speakers present the other people as conforming to authorities, despite their disapproval, and as easily manipulated by power, or able to bring about change only if a charismatic leader leads their way. Thus, we are faced with a paradox that although participants acknowledge dynamics of legitimizing ideologies (Altemeyer, 1981; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1965, 1980; Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993) and compliance to authority (Milgram 1963, 1974), at the same time they present themselves as aware and critical of these dynamics. This way, despite the fact that they acknowledge the need for collective action to achieve change and resist to political elites, at the same time they present people as unable to join action due to their submissiveness and passivity and render social change a utopian pursue.

When social change is presented as attainable, the agents are either a) individuals directly as voters- by electing new people in power- and in their everyday practices or b) people as a whole who will contribute through collectivities to country recovery or riot for their interests. In the first subtheme, social change is constructed as an individual concern which has either direct, through voting, or indirect impact on public affairs. Change is related to individuals' self-improvement or everyday practices in personal or interpersonal level which combined with other persons' effort can contribute to future change. Thus, social change is presented as resulting from the accumulation of individual transformations rather than from collective actions. Only in the second sub-theme intergroup conflicts and collective actions are constructed as a means of change, as socio-psychological theories also suggest (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Mugny, 1982; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984; Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009; Van Zomeren & Klandermans, 2011; Wright, 2001). In this sub-theme, social inferiors are presented as the ones who will react against those who hold the wealth

and in these conversational accounts, social groups and social identities are the important elements and crucial presuppositions for social transformation.

Based on the theories of social change that emphasize the importance of collective actions for change, either by minority (Moscovici, 1976) or majority groups, and stress that shared common social identities are important for collective action to take place (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009; Van Zomeren & Klandermans, 2011; Wright, 2001), the most prominent accounts, in our interviews, about the agents of social change are those that advocate the necessity of individual actions to achieve social change, whether these are political leaders or individual citizens. Collective actions, on the other hand, are presented as actions of minority groups with no power to exert influence, far from massive, and, ineffective. Thus although participants seem aware and denounce processes that preserve the existing status quo in their discourse, at the same time they do not seem to perceive themselves as part of a community that lives and acts together in order to secure a better life, but as individuals that decide for their own future.

The data presented in this paper were obviously derived from a rather limited sample, and as such their generalizability to other contexts is clearly open to question. Besides, it would be interesting to repeat the research today to explore if and how accounts on social change and social change agents have changed after four years of left-wing party (SYRIZA)-led government. Nevertheless, our analysis attempts to register the variety of in constructions of the categories of agents of social change and to make some assumptions about the connection between those categorisations with social practices. Future research might define the subject position of people talking about social change as well as the connection between accounts for change

with political and social action to this direction.

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**Notes**

1. Constantine Karamanlis (1907-1998): Greek politician, four-time Prime Minister and twice President of the Third Hellenic Republic
2. Tsipras Alexis (1974- ): Greek politician. Prime Minister of Greek Democracy (25/01/2015-20/08/2015 & 23/09/2015- now). Leader of the Opposition (06/05/2012- 24/01/2015)
3. Kolokotronis Theodoros (1770-1843): Greek general and the pre-eminent leader of the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829) against the Ottoman Empire



# Μιλώντας για την κοινωνική αλλαγή: Μια ψυχοκοινωνική θεματική ανάλυση συνεντεύξεων με πολίτες στην Ελλάδα

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΑ ΚΟΥΤΣΗ<sup>1</sup> & ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ ΜΠΑΚΑ<sup>1</sup>

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η ανάγκη αλλαγών στην Ελλάδα της κρίσης έχει καταστεί κοινός τόπος στο δημόσιο λόγο τόσο στην Ελλάδα όσο και στην Ευρώπη. Η παρούσα έρευνα επικεντρώνεται σε συνεντεύξεις με Έλληνες πολίτες και επιδιώκει να διερευνήσει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους αυτοί συζητούν για α) την εφικτότητα της κοινωνικής αλλαγής και β) κατασκευάζουν κατηγορίες φορέων κοινωνικής αλλαγής. Τα δεδομένα προέρχονται από 10 ημιδομημένες συνεντεύξεις με Έλληνες πολίτες ηλικίας 25-45 ετών, οι οποίες αναλύθηκαν με ερμηνευτική θεματική ανάλυση. Η ανάλυσή μας έδειξε ότι σε όλες τις συνεντεύξεις η κοινωνική αλλαγή κατασκευάστηκε ως απαραίτητη. Ωστόσο, ενώ σε κάποιες περιπτώσεις παρουσιαζόταν ως ένας εφικτός στόχος, σε ορισμένες άλλες αντιμετωπιζόταν ως ανέφικτος. Ως προς τις κατηγορίες των φορέων της αλλαγής, η ανάλυση έδειξε ότι αυτές οι κατηγορίες περιλάμβαναν είτε τους πολιτικούς αρχηγούς είτε τους Έλληνες πολίτες που δρουν ατομικά ή συλλογικά. Στη συζήτηση των αποτελεσμάτων υποστηρίζεται ότι η επικέντρωση στον καθημερινό λόγο, μπορεί να συμβάλει στον διάλογο που αναπτύσσεται στο χώρο της κοινωνικής ψυχολογίας για τους φορείς και τους παράγοντες της κοινωνικής αλλαγής και της κοινωνικής σταθερότητας.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Ελληνική κρίση, κοινωνική αλλαγή, κοινωνική σταθερότητα, φορείς αλλαγής

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