

Trends of the contemporary social movements in Greece

Yannis Balampanidis

University Paris 8, Saint-Denis, 2003

In this paper, we attempt to describe the landscape of collective action as it is structured today in Greece. Through the elaboration of the elements acquired from the empiric research that we realized, we try to draw conclusions, to comprehend and to interpret simultaneously the tendencies, the terms and the directions of the contemporary Greek militantism and of the current social movements of the country. Which are the starting lines and the conditions of the Greek people's political engagement, which are the common frames of contention and the shared meanings that are structured, which is the morphology and the ideological content of the events of collective action? These are the fundamental questions in which we attempt to answer.

In this direction we realized a series of interviews with men and women, militants that emanate from a wide spectrum of political and social formations. We tried to form a sample as much representative as possible, though it would be of course impossible to cover with a qualitative research all the breadth of movements, parties and organizations that activate in the country. Among the 14 individuals that finally spoke to us, one can find militants of political parties, ecological organizations, feminist groups, associations for the human rights, associations defending the immigrants, trade unions, Non Governmental Organizations. The age group covered in the interviews oscillates from 24 to 35 years. We chose to discuss with active militants of the base, that is to say of relatively small age but also without a high place in the hierarchy of the political formations in which they are activated, considering that this group reflects lucidly the new characteristics of political engagement that emerge.

In the grid of questions that we included in our questionnaire, we included a number of critical parameters regarding to the people's course of politicization and political integration, to the configuration of their personal codes of political and social values, to their ideological directions, the relation between individual and collectivity, the personal placement toward the various forms of political participation and the forms of political and social action.

I. The process of politicization, the values, the integration in the collectivity

We shall develop the point of view and the conclusions of our research, following the structure and the formation of the issues that we wanted to touch in the questionnaires of the interviews that we realized. To start with, we tried to detect the political origins of the militants in their familial environment as well as the political climate that existed there. A first noticeable element, which however does not cause surprise, is that their parents, in their overwhelming majority, are situated in the political space of the Left, emanating as well from a similar political family tradition. Most of them were activated in the lines of parties of the Greek Left (PASOK, KKE, KKE esoterikou) while less where those who developed a syndicalist action at the same time with their integration in a political party. Also, those who had a more relaxed relation with the political space of their choice, progressively distanced from the political activity, maintaining a certain relation, such as participating in manifestations, keeping in contact with political information or having a lean syndical

action. Respectively, their children appear to be directed to rather «alternative» political formations, such as independent left organizations, the extraparlimentary left, feminist or ecological associations, NGOs. On the contrary, those who had a more constant relation with a party institution seem to rather maintain this kind of affinity, while in certain cases this choice appears to affect also the political orientations of their children.

However, if the contact with the political and social activity recommends a tradition that persists in the younger generations, however the ways and the logic of politicization are differentiated, very often in a very radical way. The differentiation begins in the spaces and in the structures of political action that the younger people choose. Almost for the majority of the people that participated in our research, there is a «structural divergence»: they seem more captious toward the parties, they won't accept easily any inflexible organizational structures, they seek more and more considerable margins of participation and personal implication in the reception of decisions and in the determination of the action, while their relation with the political formation in which they are activated is rather relaxed and howsoever not exclusive or for life.

Thus, a student describes as follows this “structural difference” already mentioned: «For my parents, she says, the form of politicization and the pattern of political action was the following: there was a central political line resolved a priori, and then they continued into a beforehand prescribed action». Far from it, for the majority of the interviewees, the form and the paths of their politicization are different: they seek to participate equivalently in the configuration of every point of view or political position, in processes of discussion in the base, through which the people concerned define the action and the objectives of their activity. For their parents, the political action did not pass through such processes, it had a more «partisan» character. However, the suspiciousness of the younger people toward the party mechanisms is not absolute neither involves a complete refusal. On the contrary, very often a common point in the political perception of the two generations is the idea that «one should belong to a party, in order to change things». At the same time, there is an intense disposal of differentiation from the «traditional parties». Indeed, an organizational structure «with a strict hierarchy, where diverging opinions do not exist and the members should agree with and should accomplish a political line that other people decide», a structure where exist «leaders, instructors and inviolable political lines» is not easily bearable.

The tendency that generally emerges and differentiates the newest militants from the previous generation is that they are less and less ready to «submit» to the organizational ankyloses, even to the objectives and to the ideological priorities of their own political formation, either party or not. A last element mentioned by most of the asked people as a point of diversification from the model of political engagement of their parents is the more and more relaxed, even multiple, political integration. Contrary to a tradition that «can not conceive the left people outside from a political party » or even finds «incomprehensible the passage from a political formation to another», the current militants seem more open towards different opinions and perceptions, equally inside the formation where they are activated politically and toward other political configurations and currents. The integration is not given and permanent, it appears to be under constant incertitude, while the borders and the limits between political spaces and perceptions become porous and less strictly incised.

We could examine now in a more specific way the elements that we already saw above and which introduce a rupture, not absolute but important, with a previous

experience of political integration. We asked the militants to self-determine with criterion their ideological placement and the answers were exceptionally interesting.

The general picture is that we can observe an intense and diffuse difficulty of the interviewees to self-determine according to this criterion. There were of course gradations in the degree of perplexity. In one sole case there was readiness and ease of answer, which however was rather exceptional. It is also very interesting the fact that in almost no case the people we interviewed did not reproduce the official phraseology and discourse of their political group. Of course in certain answers there was an increased degree of certainty, principally in the answers of people who belong to parties of the parliamentary and extraparliamentary Left. In the rest cases, the perplexity of the interviewees in front of such a question was more obvious. Their difficulty to place themselves under a strictly defined ideological identity was expressed in a lot of cases, when for example an initial placement was accompanied by an expression of mitigation, such as «rather», “sort of”, «I don’t know, I’m still searching» or «I don’t want to have a constant ideological placement». Many of the asked persons answered that they could define their placement only by “eliminating” other positions, while the majority preferred to place themselves «near», “close” or «toward» a wider political current or tradition (such as «marxist current», «trotskist political tradition», «renovating Left», «libertary Left», «tradition of autonomy» etc). We should notice here that this lack of certainty conditions equally the answers of militants that activate in NGOs, in feminist, ecological or antiracist organizations but also in political parties. If we should summarize the perception that dominated, we believe that the formulation of a militant, who in deed emanates from a political party, condenses eminently the general spirit: «I would say that I belong to the Left, he says, however I’m not interested to placed myself somewhere, it is not this placement that would determine my political activity».

We could say that it is a refusal of incarceration in strictly determined ideological and political frames. The hermeticity of the political spaces and the corresponding collective identities, exceptionally durable up to recently in Greece, appears to disrupt today in a remarkable degree. That’s what indicates the intense mobility between political groups and currents, a very common element in the various routes of politicization of the majority of the people interviewed.

The general tendency is the search, the quest and the experimentation. We could ascertain that the militants today are seeking simultaneously a «well established» and an «open» organizational structure. Thereby, they test a lot of political spaces, without however hesitating to withdraw if the formations are not harmonized with their personal requirements and expectations. The objections usually relate to questions of internal democracy, of participation of the members, of procedures of decision-making and of open character of the organizations.

The hard organizational structure par excellence is the democratic centralism, a principle adopted by the more traditional formations of the Left (such as the KKE but also the parties of the extra-parliamentary Left). This principle, that involves a «movement from above towards the base», appears or appeared «repressive» and eventually repulsive for many militants that passed by such political configurations.

We observe that globally the militants seek those structures and formations that allow them the bigger margins possible of free and equivalent participation. The strictly entrenched spaces, the absolute and introvert perceptions, the centralized operation and the absence of tolerance toward divergences from the central ideological lines drive back rather than attract the youngest persons. Moreover, the object, but also the way of politicization, seems to be less the subjugation in a

collective aim or in a visional ideology and more the search of a discussion «that permits people to say what they think and at the same time poses new questions» and in which «you have the right to the disagreement and the disagreement is respectable and influential». Moreover, most persons are convinced to join a political organization having already experience from discussions or from participation in collective processes, such as General Assemblies, syndical mobilizations or other actions (antiracist festivals, campaigns against nationalism, contact with feminist reviews etc).

We could examine the social and political questions that are decisive for the activation and political integration of the new militants, as well as the values with which this political implication is invested. To start with, we should notice that the question of work and employment, but also the questions that are connected with them, occupy a central, if no sovereign, place in the hierarchy of the social questions for the interviewees. In the majority of answers that we received, this issue is reported fundamentally, as the most critical or one of the most critical issues that excited and continue to supply the political activity of the persons asked. Thus, the labor issues are reported as a «primordial» or «central» point. The intensity of the central position attributed to the employment is not a simple consequence of a certain traditional left rhetoric that gives the analytical primacy to the opposition capital – labor. Besides, only few of the interviewees referred directly and clearly to this opposition or to the «inequality and the conflict of the social classes», while no one referred, directly or indirectly, to a supposed avant-garde of the working class. The question of work and employment appears to engage wider dimensions, even surpassing the social classes, and that's why the answers of the interviewees reveal a wide spectrum of issues connected with the central position of the labor issues: the claim for «employment for all», the questioning on unemployment and the social exclusions that implies, the question of wages and social security, even an expansion of the discussions on employment in terms of morality, human dignity and quality of life. It is moreover critical that many of the people asked become conscious of the specific gravity of the claims concerning the work at the time of their entry in the production. «My personal opinion changed considerably after my entry in the market of employment» was a phrase that we heard from many persons. And it is in this environment that their disposal for collective claims is strengthened, and particularly concerning the «new forms of employment», such as the flexible employment, the ongoing mobility of jobs, the fluidity that implies an increased labor insecurity but also the intensifying of rhythms of work and the constant demand for higher rates of productivity. These new data in the labor market, «proliferating in european and global level», sensitize particularly the younger militants.

However, the reference to labor questions is not unique. In all the cases, without exceptions, the interviewees formulated also a multiplicity of other issues which determine the conditions of their integration in a political collectivity. Firstly, therefore, a question posed by many of the interviewees was that of the education, that is to say of the production and management of «knowledge». The increased importance of this question is related to the intensity of student syndicalism in Greece but also to the personal experiences of the militants, either in their own political environment generally or also in their own scientific activity. The basic components of this question seem to be the issue of access to the knowledge and simultaneously the «submission of the scientific research and education to the enterprises» and to the criteria of productivity and rentability, as well as the privatization of education.

Another question that we met almost in every interview is the question of gender. Nevertheless, it is mainly the women that discuss it, while the men, even if most of them talked about it, stay in a formal reference. For the women though, the question of gender begins from their own experiences, from «the discriminations due to gender», before it is crystallized politically, often occupying «a fundamental role in their politicization». The question of gender, together with the questions of the oppression of homosexuals and the sexist discriminations, occupy a central place in the personal range of values, but principally for those who are activated in political formations quite different from the traditional party model. On the contrary, in those political formations situated closer to a «classic marxist norm» of the left, even the women appear to subsume their feminist claims in the sovereign labor and economical questions. However, for many of them, the feminine question become autonomous in their political thought and is upgraded in their personal hierarchy of values, through and thanks to the contact with other political currents, formations and other social movements. The diffusion of the feminist matters and its expression from a number of active collectivities mark an autonomous dynamics that up to recently was rather weak in the Greek experience of social movements.

Another element that emerges recently and appears in the responses of many militants is the question of immigrants, of racism and of the minorities' rights. After the mass entry of immigrants in the country (after 1990), and parallel to a wave of intense racism and xenophobia that came up, a movement of support to the immigrants and their rights was developed, animated mainly from NGOs and associations for the human rights. This new question has been promoted through collective movements and claims and was progressively adopted, not always voluntarily, by the political parties. Thus, the increased weight of this matter is obvious today. However, as an autonomous question, it appears mainly in the cases of people activated in rather “new” and “alternative” collectivities, which besides first imported this thematic in the Greek political dialogue.

In any case, we should point out two interesting elements here: First that many persons «discover» the importance of this social question when they participate in a political party and others begin to attribute a greater importance in «questions of nationalism or minorities» after discussions or contact with militants from other political formations.

In the spectrum of values mentioned during the interviews, we should also place the ecology and the concern for the environment: rarely as an autonomous issue, more often associated to other questions, such as the immigrants, the human rights, the women.

What seems more important in this point of our research, is the ascertainment of a fluidity and interpenetration of the political and social values: the labor matters are connected to the environment, the feminism and the educational questions intersect, the social rights and the discourse on social exclusion are extended to the educational system and to the employment. The interviewees have often underlined the common origin of these interrelated questions, their common background, that is the neo-liberal economic system and ideology, wondering for example «if it is possible to speak exclusively about ecology, at the same time that it is the economic system that imposes the exhaustion of the natural resources of the planet in order to increase the productivity and to consolidate the competition in the free market».

After having examined the value investment of political engagement, we can observe a last parameter: If and up to which degree the integration into a collectivity is stable, constant and exclusive. To start with, it's remarkable that in most cases it is

precisely the personal value choices that designate the political engagement. Most persons appear to have an already developed politicization and political conscience, thanks to their personal interests or through their own experiences, already before they turn to a collectivity.

Of course, we should not overlook the practice of recruitment of new members, which in Greece is traditionally intense and today still constitutes a constant practice for a lot of political groups. Connected with this practice is also a mentality of intense collective life, a very developed sense of community for the members of the same collectivity, which establishes a compact but also extremely closed and introvert collective identity, a powerful “us”. In the interior of such formations, the members follow «with great loyalty» the manifestations, the positions and the analysis of their political organism, since the organization covers their «need for answers».

This is a certain aspect of the reality, still very intense in Greece and particularly in those political groups that have a developed internal organization (parties mainly) and have more «global» analyses and interventions. This reality however, compatible with the traditional paradigm of collective action, survives but simultaneously is also considerably converted. We indicated already that the political engagement of many militants was the result of their personal choice and not the result of external pressure or of an eventual process of political recruitment. It was their own initiative to approach a collectivity, «because they found it interesting» as they say. Even those who had an experience of political recruitment, practiced or suffered it, recognized that this practice «is not only ineffective but also repulsive», underlying that today «the people, and especially the young persons, do not need this kind of approach in order to politicize».

But what is the element that renders this practice inefficient today? What we realized while discussing with the militants is that the reject of this model of disciplined political engagement is due to the multiplicity and polytheism of values, perceptions and objectives with which the political activity is today invested. In other words, the majority of the persons questioned recognize that today it is hard to find a single political formation that could «respond to all the questions». Here lies a recent, but not yet preponderant, tendency. For example, in those political spaces that appear more disciplined and ideologically compact, such as the KKE for example, it is extremely difficult for the members to express any disagreement or divergence toward “the strategic positions of the party”. However, the general tendency for the people who spoke to us was to locate at least one critical point where their opinion deviates by the positions of the collectivity in which they participate.

This divergence engages a lot of qualities and is expressed through various forms. But as a rule, a phrase that we heard many times during the interviews could condense very well the changing quality of the political engagement: «I am contented by the positions and the objects of the group in which I participate, for the present». This seems to be the result of the development of wider networks of communication, interaction and distribution of ideas and perceptions, which facilitates the contact with different approaches, discussions and points of view. Finally, the collectivities open, extend their repertory, forming a more relaxed relation with their members. The borders between the different political currents and configurations become more porous. However, few were the interviewees who participate in more than one collectivities. In many formations of political action, especially in the parties, the multiple political engagement constitutes a problem, affronted usually with «perplexity or strong disagreement». We should note that only in one case a militant was simultaneously member of a party and of an independent feminist association, not

without facing the mistrust of the companions of the party. In the rest cases, the multiple engagement concerned only «alternative» or autonomous groups and formations, such as feminist and ecological associations, NGOs, organizations for the human rights and the immigrants. These collectivities seem to communicate better and to be more flexible, contrary to the cumbersome and traditionally closed and inflexible political and partisan organizations. There is however an increasing eagerness of acceptance of different political attitudes and coexistence of different perceptions, however principally in the frames of a concrete, specific and thematic action, as for example in antiracist initiatives.

We could now examine another parameter, that of time density of occupation of the militants with the collectivity where they belong, but also the parameter of personal relations that they develop in there. Thus, for the most part, the political activity appears to be an integral part of their life, «traversing every aspect» of it, «diffuse» and «inseparable». This is connected to a generally «political» attitude of life. The occupation with the collective action, inside a collectivity, seems more and more autonomous. Even if it is characterized by a rather high frequency, and not limited in «2-3 weekly meetings» but extended in a daily contact, however it is not exclusive. Almost all militants declared that their personal relations are shared and balanced between the collectivity where they belong and the other social grounds where they are functioning everyday, as they try to counterbalance the immiscibly political action with their other occupations (work, studies etc), keeping an important part of their time for clearly personal activities.

Apparently, in the interior of collectivities is developed a collective life, with common codes, «with strong rapports of mutuality and solidarity». But even in those formations where an intense and hermetic collective identity is cultivated for the members, finally we see this identity rupture, at least partly. In all cases, the occupation of the interviewed persons with the collectivity presents points of discontinuity or intensity, voids, periods of intense action but also periods of withdrawal. The most important is that the activity in the cadre of collective action is not affronted as imposed or imperative, but as a rather «personal disposal, not as an obligation». The engagement is considered as a responsibility toward the personal political values of the individual and towards the collectivity, a responsibility in ethical terms, not in the sense of duty. Undoubtedly, the traces of a political or partisan duty are sometimes visible. However, it is not accidental the frequent use, from all the interviewees, of expressions like «I choose» or «it was my choice» when they referred either to their activity inside a political formation and a collective cause or to their desire to “keep a distance” and take some time “for them”.

II. The collective processes. The spaces of action, inside and outside the institutional frames.

In this point we can study the various forms of expression of the demand of direct and equal participation in the interior of the formations of collective action. We should mark preliminarily that the organizational philosophy of numerous political configurations is characterized by an intense rigidity, a characteristic quality of the traditional model of centralized organizational structures. Particularly in the political Left, the reproduction and devotion in rigid organizational forms, as constant continuance of a certain leninist tradition, marked deeply the quality of internal collective processes.

Thus, the organizational principle of democratic centralism remains fundamental, not only in the KKE but also in smaller, usually partisan configurations of the extra-parliamentary Left. Many of the interviewed militants have had or have today experience of such organizational forms, either agreeing with or criticizing the democratic centralism, describe its function in a similar way: an hierarchical, pyramidal structure, marked by a «transfer of decisions from the top of the climax toward the base», with a political «line» modulated in the superior hierarchical levels (usually in the Central Committee) while the organizations of base «have an institutional possibility of intervention, but very limited in practice».

It is therefore a pocket of archaism, traditionally important but not anymore preponderant in the contemporary landscape of collective action in Greece. If this heritage has always been intense in the Greek case, the picture seems to change considerably. We know today that the field of social movements represents the ground where the citizens, and particularly the categories of the population the most intensely excluded from the field of institutional politics, seek to re-define their attribute of citizen (*citoyenneté*), through the claim for a free and equal attendance in the administration of common things. The direct and without exclusions participation that many categories of citizens do not find in the institutional political procedures, can be claimed and found in the frames of collective action. Even in those intensely hierarchical formations that we described above, exists a dynamics of claim for more and more immediate participation of the members. Moreover, most militants, talking about their experience in the collectivities where they participate, referred to «procedures of direct democracy» resulting to the adoption of positions, collective decisions or even undertaking of action. We can also observe an emerging «culture of discussion», developing through collective processes, plenary sessions, member reunions or even General Assemblies, where all the participants have «in principle an equivalent role». Through such type of procedures, people establish a colloquial mentality, while, when it is about the reception of decisions, there is the objective of wider agreement and consent, in smaller collectivities of course, or there is an effort to always hear and freely express eventual divergences.

Obviously the picture is not always ideal nor should we idealize the social movements and their function. Almost all the interviewees recognized that despite the intentions and the declarations of principle, always develop mechanisms that relativize the equality, the free and immediate character of the participation. Often is created a «natural and not institutional hierarchy» that elects the more «experimented ones», those who «can speak better or more». Besides, no seldom there are indirect exclusions of concrete categories, often in the form of “an indirect non-participation” related to the discourse and behavior of the mass of militants in the collective processes. Ordinarily, through such processes we see excluded principally the women, and even more intensely some «specific» categories, such as the homosexuals or the immigrants.

The tendencies we could observe are therefore two, rather complementary than oppositional. Firstly, we observe the emergence of a dynamic claim for an equal and free participation of all in direct and democratic collective processes. A demand of organizational decentralization, in order that the minor collectivities of base have their autonomy, their auto-organizational culture, with immediate participation of all the interested persons, in terms of independence and not subjugation in the central supreme organs, alienated from the base of the militants. Simultaneously, we can find also a counterbalancing tendency: the militants appear to recognize that these principles could function in an absolute way only in smaller scale procedures and

collectivities, but are inevitably relativised in larger scale. There is always a permanent struggle to preserve the equivalent participation and to confront any direct or indirect exclusions and hierarchies that result. At the same time however, it is also recognized the necessity for more representative, and consequently less direct processes, always however under the permanent control of the base. Thus, those militants belonging to political parties adopt a critic attitude toward the centralised, remote from the base structures and the hierarchical processes when “there is not a direct conjunction with the society”, a contact with the social base in terms of discourse, structure and organization, proposing at the same time «more open and more frequent procedures in the base» or even rejecting the rigid hierarchical structures, vindicating the autonomy of youth sections for example, or criticizing their party when it reposes on the members of the partisan mechanism while the party’s base remains inactive and does not have essential margins of intervention. This however does not mean that the younger militants deny to operate inside such structures: equally in minor formations, there are central and representative organs, accepted by the members, even if the question of an essential communication between members and supreme organs and the question of the possibility to express a diverging point of view remain open.

On this base appears to be formed a general mistrust of the militants vis-à-vis the institutional policy and the parties, a mistrust that has however interesting nuances. The absolute refusal, condensed in the expression «I would not participate to a political party, I do not believe in the idea of representation», reflects rather the minority of the answers given. On the other hand, those persons who are already members of parties, bigger or smaller, seem familiarized with the operation and the internal processes in a partisan context, they «are not afraid of it», often expressing however a critic point of view, both towards the internal function of their party and vis-à-vis the logic of representation.

Thus, for example, some of them consider necessary a reform of the institutions and the system of representation, because it does not express in a satisfactory way the people’s will «and the civil society that emerges through the NGOs and the social movements». Others have noticed that they would never become members of a party with «centralized structure and functions» or consider extremely critical for a party that its popular base is always active.

Those who participate in minor political and social formations and organizations show a reserve, often related with the quality of the «internal procedures» and the «structures» in the parties, in deed very intense if it is about a party «very hierarchically structured, that does not allow any deviations or divergences from its central political line». Their reserve is even more vivid regarding the margins of free participation and intervention of the party’s members in the definition of the general orientations and of the action. At the same time, a partisan formation looks «too big», inflexible, oppressive and finally remote for this category of interviewees. Nevertheless, those who are not members of a party, declared, in their majority, that «they would be eventually disposed to affiliate to a party» in order to fight, contest and claim through the partisan structures or would be prompt to make certain compromises and recessions «if it was about doing something more massive and coordinated». In general rule, the affiliation to a party is not excluded, however it is placed under permanent negotiation, according to the terms that the militants themselves wish to ensure for their political engagement. At any rate, we can ascertain an increasing communication between partisan and non-partisan configurations, often resulting into common action. In several cases, principally

militants originate from feminist organizations or from associations for the social rights and for immigrants talked about a concrete contact with parties through collaborations, short-term or permanent, on the basis of concrete questions and actions. The persons of this category appear to prefer this model of relation with the political parties: «I could contribute to a coordinated activity that seems important to me collaborating with certain parties, without however having any direct affiliation to them».

In the field of collective action, the political parties and the social movements represent the two strong poles of a reciprocally revitalized relation. Far from excluding the parties, the people often express certain reserves. Thus, the militants who are party members, consider that the parties should function in a complementary relation with the social movements. They all refused to attribute a leading role, «preponderant» or «sovereign», to the parties in the frame of collective social action, also refusing, in their majority, to adopt an idea of a certain “avant-garde” of the political and ideological current where they belong. Many have also pointed out that their parties have considerably, and often constrainedly, transmuted, through their contact with the social movements, adopting for example more radical positions, blunting the categorical and absolute character of their ideological orientations or even enriching their political repertory with new thematics, such as the antiracism or the ecology. This contact causes also an «opening» of the parties towards the dynamics represented by the social movements, not only in terms of internal participatory structures but also in terms of political discourse and contending frames. On the other hand, those militants who do not activate inside partisan formations, find the presence and the activity of parties in the field of social mobilizations positive, but under the condition that this intervention does not suppress the autonomy of collective social actors and does not appropriate or incorporate the collective contending activities. Moreover, it was rather common for all the interviewees the ascertainment that «the parties are not placed outside from or in the margin of the social movements». Besides, we should notice here that, in the Greek case, the parties have in a considerable degree operated as belts of transmission of many demands and many elements of the international movements toward the Greek reality in the recent years.

The partisan formations maintain a key role but also ambivalent: acceptable as an essential component of the field of collective action and under reserve when threatening the autonomy of social movements. Ultimately, the relation between parties and social actors is not one-way but it is marked by a vivid interaction.

On the contrary, the picture is much simpler regarding the syndicalism in Greece. Apparently, we cannot place the syndicalism in the field of institutional policy. However, the Greek trade-union experience is particular. The intense bureaucratization of trade unions, the alienation of syndicalists from the workers' base, the intense dependence of syndicalism from the state and its lack of autonomy, recommend a heritage that determines today decisively the attitude of the militants, especially the younger ones, vis-à-vis the syndicalist action.

Thus, although the questioned persons, without exceptions, recognized the necessity of syndicalist action, in autonomous way but also inside the larger social movements, however no one expressed any satisfaction from the current trade-union model in Greece. The common argument was the interlace, if not the identification of the trade unions with political parties: «the parties have a very intense intervention in the syndicates» and «the trade unions have a limited degree of autonomy». A phenomenon underlined also by the three interviewed militants who belong to the three big parties of the Greek Left [parties that have corresponding syndicalist

groups]. Another frequent argument was the intense bureaucratization of syndicalist processes, what is often called «bureaucratic syndicalism», but also the interpenetration, and consequently the interdependence, of syndicalism and state.

This repulsive picture of syndicalism is not however synonym with a pure and simple scorn of the syndicalist action en bloc. On the contrary, all the persons that we interviewed described their desire to develop syndicalist action, but always posing the question of independence. Here, the independence is perceived either as autonomy of the syndicalist groups that have references to certain political parties or in the sense of organization of «totally independent trade-unions, of independent centers of workers», with autonomous action and without any concrete connection with parties. The general spirit has been rather the desire of reappropriation of the trade-unions and the implication in the syndicalist activities of all the immediately interested persons.

The elements described here could perhaps also interpret the desire or disposal of the militants to participate in various emerging alternative forms of political and social intervention, as the NGOs or the collectivities and initiatives in local level, in the neighborhood or in the municipality. Indeed, many of the asked persons participated in the past or participate today, parallel to their principal political engagement, in NGOs, and the majority would be ready to participate in councils of citizens in the neighborhood or in the region where they live. However, in order to define the quality of this general desire, we should observe under which conditions it is expressed.

Thereby, many persons could participate or engage into an NGO, such as the International Amnesty or NGOs for the human rights and the immigrants, but only if its independence and autonomous action was ensured. Similar were the opinions expressed regarding the collectivities of citizens in local level. Others pose as an essential presupposition «the direct democracy and immediate participation» of the citizens, while others would accept a model combining «the local General Assemblies with the already existent local institutions» as the elected municipal councils. The common point however is always that these collective forms should be initiated and animated by the citizens and ensure the direct implication of every interested citizen, in a spirit of auto-organization. Opposite the absence and the «more and more intense exclusion of citizens from the field of institutional politics» and from the management of the common questions, the militants consider more and more essential the establishment of «nucleus of participatory democracy» in local level, in the places of education and work.

III. Qualitative elements of a new radicalism and the forms of action

When we posed the question of the rapport between direct claims and long-term objectives, the fixed answer was that «these two elements are inseparably associated». Of course, for the majority of the interviewees, the political and social activation is inscribed in wider ideological frames. At the same time however, the individuals seek an equilibrium between their visions and the direct concretization of partial, and immediate, demands. So, everyone recognized that the greatest part of the collective action concerns immediate and short-term claims. Many even described to us analytically their personal experience of cases, successful or not, of such actions, either in their social ambience, as the university, or in labor spaces, especially in cases of flexible employment, where the mobilizations are limited to “the demand of the minimum”.

In deed, we should notice in this point the impressive repetition, in a lot of different cases and all along the duration of the interviews, of terms as “direct”, «immediate» or «concrete». Very frequent was also the reference in immediate objectives «realizable today». This preoccupation with the “concrete” is related with a desire of visible results of the action, of materialization, realization and compensation for the activity that the militants assume. That is the reason why many interviewees related the short-term objectives with the positive element of «efficacy».

The search of the “concrete” is connected to an awareness of the limited possibilities of political action and intervention, considering either the general social conditions or the potentiality of the collectivities. The great narrations and the long-range visions may still exist, as a general frame, however what determines henceforth the action and the social intervention is the search of results, not only because there is a conscience of limits but also because of the need of the militants «to achieve things in order to convince themselves but also to persuade other people». It is firstly a personal need for the militants, since their political engagement is not exhausted to neither satisfied by the adoption and reproduction of arguments of global social transformation. What convinces the militants is less a transcendent narration for an alternative model of society and more the realization of concrete objectives through their immediate action. Of course, the action is always registered in a more general orientation, however the critical element appears to be not the deposition of expectations in an oncoming future but rather the materialization of the plans, even in minor degree, in the immediate time horizon.

Likewise, the direct and short-term victories function positively regarding the access to wider categories of the society. «The immediate objects operate very positively towards the citizens because they are easier to conquer», the concrete seems to persuade more easily the citizens, facilitating the way to address to those people who have a lean contact with the social issues or a less intense politicization. The immediate claims constitute therefore a means of communication, a way to activate people and finally persuade them to participate in wider contending mobilizations. In other words: the big narrations of the traditional paradigm of collective action perhaps remain always charming, it is however the articulation and concretization of short-term demands that activate, animate and put in movement the collective action.

Thus, we can observe, equally in the frame of the Greek experience, the emergence of an intense pragmatism, not always voluntary but often forced or compulsory. However, the key element in order to detect the extensions of this pragmatism is the global picture composed by the multiplicity of immediate, direct and concrete social struggles. Perhaps today, and contrary to the traditional models, there is no longer a sovereign, overall, compact and visional narration, but there is instead a plurality of claims and propositions that compose an alternative orientation, diffuse and multiform, of social transformation. Or, in the words of an interviewed militant: «all these struggles and claims, separately and together, for example the ecological question, the feminine question, the claims of immigrants, the demands on education and on employment, represent a way to create a totally different society».

In this same context, of radical pragmatism as we described it and of the complexity of social and political values, arguments and demands, we find inscribed a new morphological and semiotic paradigm of the collective action. Thus, the traditional and time-tested forms of action, that is to say principally the manifestation and the strike, do not lose their importance but they are not sufficient in the actual situations. Similarly, regarding to the ways of addressing to the citizens, the

traditional forms of political discourse, the so-called «wooden speech», with its particular phraseology, cliché and stereotype idiom, is henceforth at least ineffective.

«The actual conditions are sensibly different than 20 years before, says a militant. Today we address to people with variant political points of view, multiple and rarely identical». It is this increased complexity that imposes a respective variety in the ways of intervention in the various social spaces. Of course the heritage of traditional forms of action remains intense and present. However, as many interviewees notate, «next to the traditional forms and frames of action, new forms emerge, differentiating the character» of the social intervention. It is not a vertical rupture with the previous practices, it is more a renewal that incorporates the previous elements, revealing, next to them, new patterns.

The emergence of new forms of collective struggle is quite difficult in Greece, where the traditional paradigm, «the firm practice, typical of the Left» is still very puissant. Indeed, almost the totality of the interviewees declared open in every form of action, however not few were those who expressed their reserves towards alternative forms of action (such as the campaigns, the happenings, the feasts in the street, the symbolic activism) or admitted that they would not be ready to participate in similar activities, manifesting an incarceration in more traditional forms that characterize the collectivities in which they belong. Moreover, it is not accidental that principally the militants of feminist, ecological and social rights organizations presented a real experience from alternative forms of action and less the members of partisan formations. Nevertheless, all militants admitted the importance of the articulation of the traditional forms of collective action with new or alternative ones, which include the elements of «efficacy», «spontaneous», «immediate» that can easily stimulate and activate the people, thanks to an increased degree of «reflexion and effect» to the social body.

The new forms of action are imposed not only by the social reality but also by the necessity of communication, generating a new and widely adopted tendency in Greece henceforth, even from those groups that persist in more traditional norms. Important for the expansion of this trend is also the extending contact with social movements of abroad, many elements of which have been incorporated in the Greek collective experience.

We could observe a similar tendency regarding the political discourse of the social actors. The long tradition of a certain public idiom, of stereotype texture, has deeply stigmatized the discourse of numerous collective political formations. The elements of an inflexible language, [unicite, opacite and fixite] opacity, fixity and absolute homogeneity, according to the eminent analysis of Jacques Ion, survive in many of cases today. But, at the same time, the limits and the insufficiency of this communicative pattern in a multifunctional and diversified social field are obvious. Consequently, the public language and the political discourse are relativised, become more «temperate», open, avoiding the hermetic communicative codes. When this approach is adopted, the collective actors produce a discourse with high capacity of infiltration, penetration and diffusion in the society.

A last question is the role attributed to the massivity and to the symbolic action. In this point, all the interviewed persons converged to a common position: «Today, they say, the role of the image is critical, it is fundamental in order to inform the people and create a social climate». The central role of the crowd and the compact mass seem to recede, this formerly sovereign logic is partly reversed. «We cannot disesteem the question of massivity, but it shouldn't be the first and preponderant element», this is a new developing approach. As the result of a philosophy that

emerges, according to which «creating an organization with a legion of members is not the principal objective», respectively in the practice of collective action the massivity is desirable but no longer indispensable.

The quality of mass changes too: while in the traditional paradigm there was an omnipotent, compact mass, which incorporated absolutely the individuals, an ultimately militarist perception that the most experienced among the interviewees could recognize, now the crowd is «various, multicolor and joyful» and the massivity is desirable principally in the sense of citizens' participation, of permanent implication. The measurement of forces is often a preponderant logic, however many of the interviewees consider that «it is the individual, the unit in the collectivity that is very important, it's not a question of numbers». And if the crowd and the combative spirit are always necessary, it is the symbolic impact and intervention that create massivity, that can create a social climate of peoples' participation. Particularly in the case of minor organizations, that cannot operate in massive way, the familiarization with symbolic interventions is greater, since it is more effective to select forms of action «strongly influential». In any case, the conscience of the importance of interventions in the symbolic and media field facilitates and extends similar initiatives. Another new emerging element is also a dynamics of creation of independent poles of information, as for example the network of Indymedia sites on internet. However, people and collectivities always search a certain balance in this kind of action, since even if the symbolic action operates as a «stimulus for social mobilization», however there is always the danger that the same intervention could be transformed into neutral spectacle, provoking consequently social passivity instead of mobilizing the citizens».

Finally, an interesting element is also the relation between symbolic intervention and violence. Thus, most of the interviewees consider that «the social movements are always a conflictual situation». However the conflict is reduced mainly in the symbolic level, trying to differentiate it from the simple physical violence. The violence is not an aim, it is simply a means», it is not the basic way of intervention in the society. In general lines, it is considered that the violence in a conflictual situation is ineffective and often deters the people. Precisely for this reason the militants try to pose explicit presuppositions concerning the use of violence: «an eventual violent action should be initiated by the base of the mobilized people», should be democratically decided, «concerted from a wide part of them» and should be mainly «defensive», «comprehensible» and «justified». During the mobilizations, the people try to engrave certain limits in a possible conflictual action, in order that the desirable combative spirit is ensured, promoting the claims, but also in order to avoid the degeneration of conflictual action into a pure and simple physical violence, because in that case the political content of the conflict disappears. These conditions define a relatively new, especially for the Greek case, perception of the conflicts, in a more symbolic content, codified in the term of «civil disobedience». A term adopted through the contact with movements of abroad and seems incorporated today by the majority of the formations of collective action in Greece, promoting a new model of conflictual logic, more compatible with the morphological elements of collective action that we described already.

IV. Open character of the collectivities, heterogeneity and synthesis

Concerning the Greek experience, the borders between the political formations and the organizations of social intervention were traditionally extremely explicit and

impenetrable. This heritage survives today, limiting the possibilities of contact and communication between the various political spaces, particularly in the case of those configurations with a more powerful and more explicit ideological identity. A certain «rigidity» mentioned by the interviewees, related with the weakness or unwillingness of the different groups to proceed to collaboration with others, even in the level of common action, to include themselves in wider formations that coordinate different collectivities and perceptions. Or even a certain «perplexity» or often «prejudice» towards the international movement, because of its heterogeneous composition.

It is however noticeable that the majority of the interviewed persons that belong to political parties wanted to differentiate personally from this «rigidity» that they recognized in their political space or tried to show that personally they are more open to the contact with persons of different currents and perceptions. On the contrary, the militants of minor collectivities, associations or organizations, demonstrated an intense culture of collaboration, underlining simultaneously the problem of collaborations in the Greek political space of Left: «most of the formations search to maintain the purity and integrity of their positions». Nevertheless, it is equally obvious a dynamics of forming wider collaborations or networks of communication and co-ordination, primarily in the level of common action. It is of course a dynamics dictated also by the social and political reality, by the complexity and multiplicity of the social questions. An interviewed person expressed it in a very characteristic way: «the fronts are today multiple... 20 years ago people talked about workers and bosses... now the economy has changed, multiple questions of scientific research, knowledge and information emerge». This same reality forces even the most hermetic collective spaces to open «even beyond their firm perceptions, their analytic biases».

In this new trend contributes considerably the opening to the international movements being formed today and the contact with the multiplicity of questions and claims that these movements pose. What changes is also «the way of discussion», through the creation of networks of communication and exchange of opinions. In the level of practice, many militants marked that today seems to emerge a culture of coordination, quite seldom in the past. This tendency seems enforced by two other elements: firstly by the enlargement of socio-politic questions in supranational level, via the process of european unification and the processes of world unification that we conventionally name “globalization”, but also by the corresponding enlargement of social movements, in both ideological and geographic terms.

Thus, the political formations that have maintained a certain contact with corresponding movements of abroad, relatively feeble in Greece, such as the ecological, the feminist movement or the movement for the immigrants, today develop or participate in international networks of communication and common action, often participating in initiatives in the institutional level, as the initiative for the European Party of the Left.

As «the E.U. transposes the centre of gravity in other levels and opens multiple social and political fronts» or «as the capitalism operates in networks in the global level», even the most hermetic political formations tend to open, in order to correspond to the multiplicity of social questions, and participate in wider collective structures of contentious action, in order to avoid the isolation. This opening also involves the adoption and incorporation of new elements in the Greek culture of collective action, such as an increasing unionist disposal.