Title:

**Implicit feminist solidarity(ies)? The role of gender in the social movements of the Greek crisis**

**Abstract**

This article explores the role of gender in the social movements of the Greek crisis. Building on extensive fieldwork, we observe a gradual shift from claim-based, street mobilizations to locally embedded solidarity initiatives that addressed social reproduction needs in relation to food, health, education and housing. We illustrate how this foregrounded social reproductive practices; challenged traditional divisions of labour and the temporalities and spatialities of movement organizing; and brought forward the value of building intersectional coalitions and of embracing affect and radical care. Despite the lack of explicitly articulated feminist values and principles, we argue that many social movements of the crisis therefore have cultivated situated and implicit modes of feminist solidarity that warrant further attention. Accordingly, we discuss the implications for feminist organizing and radical social movements more broadly.

**Keywords:**

social reproduction, care, social movements, Athens, feminist solidarity

1. **Introduction**

Feminist solidarities have proliferated dynamically in different parts of the world, often as dynamic, bottom-up responses to multiple crises of care, institutional misogyny and neoliberal attacks on vulnerable populations. In both theory and praxis, feminist solidarities often draw on explicit notions of ‘sisterhood’ and broader radical politics (e.g., Hooks, 1986; Dean, 1996; Mohanty, 2003). They can range from more to less coalitional (Reagon, 2000; Lyshaug, 2006), local to transnational (Scholz, 2014) and can be informed by diverse intellectual traditions. Commonly, as in notions of solidarity more broadly (Stjernø, 2009), feminist variants imply common ground, to a certain extent, and ongoing commitment to collective action. Yet, what distinguishes feminist solidarity from other forms of solidarity activism is the explicit articulation of – broadly speaking – feminist ideals and/or visions as to how these may be materialized. Accordingly, prior literature on feminist mobilizations has provided rich insights in relation to solidarity movements that express gender consciousness in their demands (e.g., Mendes, 2015; Larsen, 2018; Fisher, 2019). However, what happens when gender issues are not explicitly articulated? What should we make of social movements that are not self-described as feminist yet end up embracing feminist principles in praxis?

Instead of focusing on how feminist ideology and discourse have translated into particular notions of movement activism and solidarity, we observe the formation of a solidarity culture that, through everyday praxis and experimentation, developed distinct feminist characteristics. As we illustrate, the social movements that emerged in Athens over the past decade – although not explicitly articulated as feminist – foregrounded women’s collective knowledge, skills and experiences as a grassroots response to the devastating effects of a prolonged crisis. By doing so, they represented a far-reaching rupture with previously dominant modes of masculine militant organizing and normalized gender-related inequalities. More broadly, then, we trace the formation of more situated and implicit modes of feminist solidarity that – even if not preconfigured as struggles against patriarchy and women’s oppression – opened up new territory for women’s participation and the adoption of feminist political principles and emancipatory practices.

In what follows, we first introduce prior research to the intersection between gender and social movements, especially in what concerns the most recent anti-austerity mobilizations. Subsequently we provide a brief genealogical exploration of Greek social movement culture and its more recent reorientation towards social reproduction. Using social movement theory as an enabling framework, we present our findings from extensive ethnographic fieldwork that took place in Athens between April 2010 and June 2018. We conclude by reflecting on some of the key elements of Greek solidarity movement culture and how they may contribute to our understanding of broader feminist solidarities and anti-capitalist struggles.

**2. Gender, Social Movements and Austerity**

The relationship between gender and social movements has been the focus of a growing number of studies since the 1990s (e.g., Taylor & Whittier, 1998; 1999). Research has focused mainly on gender-related movements, especially women’s movements, and how they have organized their action, crafted their own agendas and developed feminist collective identities so as to achieve the transformation of gender issues and injustices (e.g., Lotz, 2003; Moghadam, 2000; Grosser & McCarthy, 2019). This has often come as a counter-response to widespread assumptions that feminism has become confined to individualism or institutionalized lobbying and incorporated into neoliberalism (Fraser, 2009). Scholars have highlighted how feminist mobilizations have aimed, through a variety of means across different times, to address gender issues (e.g., Einwohner, Hollander, & Olson, 2000) while drawing on broader genealogies of solidarity at the intersection of gender with race, class and sexuality (e.g., hooks, 1986; Dean, 1996; Mohanty, 2003). Accordingly, more recent studies on feminist social movements range from Slutwalk (Mendes, 2015) to #Metoo (e.g., Larsen, 2018) to women’s marches (e.g., Fisher et al., 2019). Several studies have also foregrounded the fundamental role of affect, emotion and embodiment in organizing resistance to everyday sexism and patriarchal oppression (Hemmings, 2012; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019; cf. Signs, 2017).

Bringing together gender and social movements, some studies have empirically challenged deeply embedded assumptions concerning bottom-up resistance and who is, or can be thought as an activist (Taylor & Whittier, 1998; 1999; Kuumba, 2001). In doing so, they have highlighted structural barriers that impede many women’s participation in politics (Fraser, 1992), including the so-called ‘apolitical’ women in Hanisch’s (1970) famous formulation of the personal as political. Other studies have highlighted the ways through which men’s activist labour has been more visible and thus valued (Bobel, 2007), with women often performing ‘shitwork’ or undervalued emotional labor (Brown & Pickerill, 2009). The role of gendered power relations in activist spaces and movement circles has been further documented: Craddock (2017, 2019), for instance, illustrates that ‘ideal activist’ identities and methods of protest (e.g., direct-action versus slacktivism) are implicitly gendered, subject as they are to narrow criteria that are easier for men to meet, given their fewer caring responsibilities, among others. Activist emotions can also be gendered, with women tending to feel more anxious and guilty for not meeting internal expectations about the right amount and type of activist work (Craddock, 2019; Kennelly, 2014).

Given the central role that neoliberal adjustment programs and ideologies of austerity have played across the globe since the 2008 financial crisis, several feminist scholars have focused on austerity as a ‘gendered ideology, process and condition’ (Hall 2020, p. 242). Building on prior understandings of how capitalist crises are fought over social reproduction or ‘the work that produces the work-force’ (Federici, 2019, p. 55), a growing number of studies has provided evidence concerning the severe impact that most recent austerity programs have had on women, not least due to the structurally gendered nature of spheres of production, reproduction and care (Bargawi, Cozzi, & Himmelweit, 2017; Karamessini & Rubery, 2013). Yet, less attention has been paid to the intersection of such gendered critiques with anti-austerity movement activism (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018). Notable exceptions include studies on how feminist activists have challenged gendered austerity measures and worked towards new forms of feminist organization and ideological narratives (Durbin et al., 2017; Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2017). Few others have scrutinized the tendency to look at resistance as something disruptive or counter hegemonic (Coleman & Bassi, 2011) and instead examined how women resist and organize themselves in more subtle and ‘quieter’ ways (Hall, 2020; Walby, 2011). However, the potential reinscription of traditional gender divisions in the context of anti-austerity activism has also been highlighted (Craddock, 2017; Candas & Sillier, 2014).

Still, it is difficult to imagine feminist movements that are not predicated on rigidly defined notions of solidarity by women, for women (Cullen & Murphy, 2017). Despite the rich insights provided in relation to feminist solidarities and critical understandings of austerity as a feminist issue, few studies deal with mobilizations that do not evoke the language of gender ideology or explicitly embrace gender conflict (Taylor, 1999). The more implicit influence of gender on movement solidarity culture(s) therefore remains little understood, especially when it comes to anti-austerity activism (Cullen & Murphy, 2017; Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2020). Accordingly, we build on previous studies that have read gender as a key factor in the emergence, nature and outcomes of social movements (e.g., Craddock, 2017, Kennelly, 2014) to address the following questions: What has been the role of gender in anti-austerity social movements and their solidarity culture(s)? How can movements that are not explicitly or primarily identified as feminist offer fertile ground for the cultivation of feminist principles and solidarities? Subsequently, we introduce the Greek anti-austerity movements before discussing our methodological approach and findings.

**3. Protest Culture and the Emergence of the Solidarity Movement in Greece**

Greece is a country with a rich history of social movements and bottom-up mobilizations, commonly organized around trade unions, left-wing parties, radical left-wing organizations, authoritarian/anarchist groups and student contention; repertoires of action refer to strikes, demonstrations, school occupations and road blockades. This contentious political culture has traditionally leaned towards grand narratives that expresses disdain for what it regards as particular struggles and single-issue demands; feminist activists have failed to radically unsettle the male-centered and patriarchal character of both the political establishment and social movements (e.g., Simiti, 2002).

This picture began to gradually change in the early 2000s, following the Global Justice Movement: in anti-G8 protests and social forums, anti-war and student mobilizations, urban movements and anti-racist festivals (Panayiotakis, 2015), alternative forms of resistance focusing on the ‘here and now’ and everyday activism (Maeckelbergh, 2011) blended with confrontational antagonistic mobilizations. This was exacerbated in 2008 when a 15-year-old boy, Alexis Grigoropoulos, was killed by a police officer in the center of Athens: the significant youth uprising that followed brought together violent riots and occupations as well as solidarity initiatives, guerrilla parks and bottom-up resident assemblies (Vradis & Dalakoglou, 2011). While the focus on everyday forms of activism and political lifestyles helped to bring to the fore identity issues relating to gender, race and sexuality, it did not consolidate into what could be seen as a feminist movement with a broader base of support.

The same year also officially marked the beginning of the so-called Greece crisis (e.g., *The Economist*,2015). Building on a rich tradition of contention, the whole of Greece immediately turned into a laboratory of resistance: general strikes, disruptive demonstrations and occupations dominated public life during the two first years of the crisis, ‘dragging everyone to the streets’ (della Porta et al., 2017). Protests spread all over the country, engaging social and professional groups that were not previously part of collective action (Diani & Kousis, 2014). In 2011, the Greek version of the indignados engaged the totality of the resisting population, in calling for a rejection of austerity and for direct democracy (Serdedakis & Koufidi, 2018). Meanwhile, the crisis began to penetrate the socio-economic fabric of Greek society more deeply. By 2015, the country has lost more than 30 percent of its GDP, the biggest economic contraction recorded in a developed economy since the 1950s. General unemployment more than tripled from 7.7 percent in 2008 to about 25 percent in 2015, whereas youth unemployment skyrocketed to over 50 percent (ELSTAT, 2015). Inscribed in already existing inequalities, these effects resulted in a full-blown humanitarian crisis that was disproportionally experienced by women and the country’s most vulnerable populations, as already documented (Karamessini, 2013; Vaiou, 2016; Kosyfologou, 2018).

While the mass protests against the authorities started to relent, a dynamic and grassroots solidarity movement began to spread across different cities, addressing urgent needs in relation to food, education, healthcare and housing. Social support to deprived individuals took the form of self-organized initiatives, local groups and networks and spread across the country as the dominant mode of resistance against austerity: between 2011 and 2014 more than 400 self-managed spaces, social centers, workers’ collectives and community initiatives were informally established by thousands of volunteers. According to an estimate mapping – which always lags behind registering informality in real life – there were 40 self-organized solidarity clinics and pharmacies operating throughout the country; 47 self-managed food banks and 21 solidarity kitchens distributing hundreds of food parcels on a weekly basis; 45 without-middlemen networks that distributed more than 5,000 tons of products, and around 30 solidarity education structures (S4A, 2015). After the summer of 2015, these were complemented by pro-refugee initiatives and self-organized hosting centers (Oikonomakis, 2018). Workers’ cooperatives and solidarity economy initiatives also grew considerably (Temple et al., 2017).

Faced with an austerity that impoverished large parts of the populace and especially women, the Greek social movement culture was radically reconfigured: collective resistance moved from militant street protests to spaces of social reproduction. Importantly, women become the majority in this vast and spontaneous bottom-up mobilizations (Papageorgiou & Petousi, 2018), which gradually became celebrated, if not romanticized, for rescuing the city from collapse (Papataxiarchis, 2016). Still, the role of gender in the social movements of the crisis has been deemed as largely irrelevant and is grossly overlooked. The few studies that have recognized the presence of women in solidarity initiatives have assumed a potential reinscription of traditional gender divisions and the entrenchment of already existing inequalities. At stake is the risk of essentializing women’s preference for informal, self-organized initiatives primarily focused on care and social reproduction (Kosyfologou, 2018; Loukidou, 2019). Such interpretations, however, have not been empirically examined and the role of gender in the social movements of the crisis remains largely unexplored. While most movements did not explicitly engage with the discourse of feminism and feminist principles, they have brought about fundamentals shifts in what could be understood as patriarchal and male-centered activist practices. By empirically exploring their further impact on movements’ organizational choices and frames of mobilization, our aim is to assess how gender divisions and hierarchies of power were negotiated in practice, and whether this may have paved the way for a more implicit cultivation of feminist solidarity.

1. **Method**

This paper focuses on solidarity movements in Athens that emerged from both the fervent resistance to austerity politics and the necessity to support those in need.

We conducted extended longitudinal fieldwork in different movement sites across Athens: the first stage lasted from April 2010 to March 2015, and the second from April 2015 to June 2018. The first stage mainly involved a series of exploratory case studies and participant observations of the broader anti-austerity movement in Athens, including trade unions, ultra-left and anti-authoritarian groups, squats, student and neighborhood assemblies, solidarity initiatives and ad hoc mobilizations. Through engaging with these sites of protest, we managed to gather over 150 pages of fieldnotes, over 200 informal conversations and 52 qualitative, semi-structured interviews on the ways collective resistance evolved in the city. The second stage was more extensively focused on participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of five key solidarity initiatives to explore the shift in activist practices that had flourished across the city in an organic manner. These spaces were chosen since they were exemplary of the diversified emergent solidarity movement. During this stage, we conducted 73 interviews that lasted from 1 to 2 hours with such members, over 100 informal conversations and over 200 pages of fieldnotes. Questions were open-ended and generic in an effort to trace the formation of a new reality of resistance and revolved around issues of everyday praxis in solidarity spaces, including routines and mundane tasks, decision-making processes and organizational tools, personal histories, problems and successes, relations with other movements and the neighborhood. In both stages, the sampling was purposive and theoretical (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 2017) as we looked for variation both in terms of the socio-demographic profile of participants and the level and timing of their involvement in mobilizations.

As residents of the city, we have been both active in various movements for years; we did not enter these sites as ‘intruders’ but rather as part of a wider mobilization network. Trust, congeniality and rapport were established gradually and over time due to our long-term presence in these sites of solidarity, which continued even when interviews had been completed – we regularly visited these spaces, doing follow-up talks, participating in bazaars and events and becoming familiar with everyday life while, at times, when needed and asked, we also contributed to tasks. As for our role as researchers, we presented our profile and aims in all sites and from the outset, most often through participating in assemblies that approved or negotiated our aims and research plan; within this context, we asked for ethical approval, guaranteed anonymity and shared the recordings and transcripts of interviews with our participants. Unsurprisingly, we experienced ambiguous feelings due to our overlapping identity in many cases; still, the limits between activism and research cannot be clearly defined but are instead negotiated in each context, every time, differently.

Below, we briefly describe the five key solidarity initiatives that we focused on during phase two and that mainly inform our findings, before further explaining our approach to data collection and analysis. All the spaces and people we approached have been given pseudonyms.

The first initiative is the Urban Social Clinic (September 2016- June 2018), which was established in a middle-class neighborhood, staffed with more than 200 volunteers in total, including doctors, dentists, pharmacists and support staff. Since 2011 it has provided free medical assistance and medicines to those excluded from the public health system – the unemployed, the uninsured, the poor. Then, we looked at the Babylon Solidarity School (November 2016- February 2018), located in a residential district of Athens, which since 2013 has provided additional tuition, including foreign language and music lessons, to more than 150 pupils per year. The Mazi Food Cooperative (January 2016- June 2018), located in a residential neighborhood in the north of Athens, is run by over 30 volunteers. It emerged from a ‘without middlemen’ market, organized locally from 2011 to 2014, and directly linked producers with consumers. Limani Solidarity (August 2015- January 2018) is a broad ‘social support’ network established in 2011 in a working-class district. Run by 250 volunteers, it started as a collective kitchen and food bank and grew to include additional classes for students, a clothes bank and a pro-refugee support group. Lastly, throughout the second phase of our fieldwork (April 2015- June 2018) we have been observing Rafi, a collective established in May 2009 and which provided a space where people can come and give or take goods without the use of money or any other norms of reciprocity. Although originally aimed at challenging mainstream consumer culture, it increasingly became a solidarity structure in so far as it had to cater to an ever-increasing number of people who were in direct need of clothing and other material necessities.

During both phases of fieldwork, the above collectives were approached by either of the two co-authors, originally with a view to exploring the social movements of the Greek crisis and various creative forms of resistance, drawing on their distinct disciplinary backgrounds (sociology and history in the case of the first author and business and management studies in the case of the second). Although the data was first analyzed independently, using widely established techniques of thematic analysis (e.g., Braun et al., 2019), we came together to delve into our interview transcripts and fieldwork observations through constant iterations between our emic and etic understandings. We ended by sharing all our data, except for a few cases where restricted use and confidentiality agreements did not allow us to do so.

Neither of us had committed to a feminist framework at the outset or considered gender as a central research theme when exploring solidarity; hence, the original research and interview design was not attuned to gender-related questions. Gender came up ‘slowly but consistently’ (Kennelly, 2012, p. 242) in both data collection and analysis, as it is most often the case in everyday life. On the one hand, we realized that most participants in solidarity spaces were women, something that had gone unnoticed, both by us and very often by the activists themselves. Our sample reflected demographics within solidarity spaces and included 73 interviewees, out of which 48 were women; their age spanned from 23 to 74 years old, with the majority being between 50 and 65 years old and the age group of 18–30 largely absent; most were pensioners, precariously employed or even unemployed; all these aspects made us reconsider intersections between age, gender and class within spaces of resistance.

On the other hand, our own approach to fieldwork was defined by what we could call ‘feminist research practice’ (Craddock, 2019) as it was built on our concern with lived experiences, mundane routines, gestures and feelings; our attending to inequalities in every given context; the emphasis on the ways local particularities shape resistance practices; and our relational perspective on the ways knowledge emerges and is built on the ground. This enabled the very practice of solidarity to unfold in our notes and transcripts, revealing themes and ideas that were implicitly running throughout our observations but had been left unexplored.

In order to attend to unseen and unpredictable processes and transformations, we adopted Gibson-Graham’s (2014) ethnographic model of ‘thick description and weak theory’, which builds on Geertz (1973), to attune research to everyday praxis, materiality and small facts that ‘speak to large concerns’ (Gibson-Graham, 2014, p. 147). What has been distinctive about the solidarity culture under question is that it was not built on preconfigured alliances but emerged from the ground as a reaction against a gendered austerity. In order to capture this empirical reality and its gendered implications in full detail, we decided to move beyond rigid understandings of feminist solidarity and to employ an open, thinner framework instead. To do so, we borrowed social movement methodologies and tools to explore the very emergence of the solidarity movement (della Porta & Diani, 2009). We paid attention to transformative characteristics that enacted different capacities and forms of political agency and which can inform our understanding of existing feminist solidarities and the construction of new ones. In presenting our data, we briefly introduce some key tenets of social movement methodology as well, explaining how we used them with a view to more systematically categorize and analyze our key themes and subthemes.

**5. Findings**

Social movement theory emerged as an attempt to challenge assumptions about the irrationality of collective action and to more deeply understand when and how people take to the streets through a series of tools and methodologies (della Porta and Diani, 2006). Social movements are commonly described as examples of “collective identities that serve as a locus for solidarity in world politics, uniting members around the cause of opposing the current social order and promoting an alternative set of values, beliefs and practices’ (Stein, 2013: 123). Still, it is difficult and perhaps futile to provide a single definition that captures what a social movement is, given their diverse dynamics, multiple meanings and heterogeneity (Melucci, 1984) and that is why various scholars put emphasis on different movement characteristics (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Tilly, 2004). Solidarity emerges as their fundamental characteristic in the work of most scholars (Tarrow, 2011; Melucci, 1996), which is in turn influenced by their collective frames, identifications and emotions. Particular attention is given to how social movements are both constitutive of and constituted by broader socio-political, cultural and economic processes. Three main axes that are commonly used to capture the emergence and development of mobilizations are repertoires of action, organizational choices, and frames that interpret mobilization.

As we emphasize above, our social movements were neither explicitly identified as feminist nor did they adopt clearly articulated feminist goals (Einwohner et al., 2000). Yet situated and implicit modes of feminist solidarity emerged through praxis, and through particular moments or ruptures that, first, redirected repertoires of action from claim-based mobilizations to everyday responses to material needs such as education, health and food provisioning. In so doing, most social movements of the Greek crisis became social reproductive movements, including ‘not only having and raising children but also feeding people; caring for the sick, the elderly, and those who cannot work; creating safety and shelter; building community and kin relationships; an attending to people’s psychic and spiritual well-being’ (Briggs, 2018: 2). This paved the way to the further transformation of our movements’ solidarity culture both in terms of their organizational choices and their collective frames of mobilization. We draw on social movement studies (della Porta et al., 2017, p. 25) so as to decipher how the solidarity culture that emerged in crisis-hit Athens brought about this radical transformation of modes of (feminist) resistance.

5.1. Repertoires of Action

Repertoires of action refer to actions, tools or rituals that are shared by a social movement organization or contention group in a specific context of time and space, ‘the “know how” which movement activists draw on in order to promote their causes’ (della Porta & Diani, 2015, p. 15). Movements’ courses of action are thought to be associated with strategic interactions, political opportunities as well as traditions of unconventional tactics that are often conflictual or even violent. As noted above, social movements within the Greek context traditionally relied on ‘noisy’ (e.g., Askins, 2014; Hankins, 2017) mobilizations embedded at the street level, with a view to enhancing visibility and thus disrupting and challenging the normativity of everyday life so as to achieve their demands.

Around 2012, we observed that most Greek social movements redirected their action away from taking to the streets to demand that the authorities protect those hit by austerity and into multiple, decentralized initiatives that addressed the urgent needs of local communities. The overall aim was to provide direct support to people who were ill or homeless; could not afford to eat or to buy clothes, or to pay the bills, rent, children’s education; and all those left alone to deal with hardships that exceeded their skills or energies. Within this context, resisting austerity politics meant protesting against cuts in the public health system, the abolition of employees’ rights, or repression and police impunity; but at the same time it involved collecting food from supermarkets, farmers, networks of friends and family so as to store them in food banks to be distributed to deprived households or organize collective cooking efforts to prepare meals twice or three times a week; creating links between local producers and urban consumers and organizing self-made open-air markets that cut out the extra in-between trade costs, and providing affordable solutions to food production and consumption; offering teaching support and collecting pencils, notebooks, schoolbooks or bags for students; repairing and sharing clothing, shoes, blankets or furniture; creating networks through which medicines and drugs could be recycled and shared among those thousands who were shut out of the public health system (fieldnotes, April- October 2015).

The locus of resistance thus moved from visible protest in central streets to reproductive activities (Briggs, 2018) in residential neighborhoods, decentralized squares, abandoned structures or municipal buildings that hosted all this activity (Malamidis, 2020). This shift can be also understood as ‘quiet activism’ (e.g., Askins, 2014; Hankins, 2017), a reorientation towards less noisy and disruptive politics that are commonly associated with heroic masculinity, and more into the everyday and the banal (Hall, 2020). In the face of ever-diminishing traditional social safety nets, precarity became the default condition for most Greek households, dismantling certainties as to given class and socio-cultural belongings, which in turn foregrounded common interests and experiences in subsequent mobilizations.

Movement practices were organized around the principles of direct democracy, horizontality and equal participation, building directly on previous left-leaning mobilizations and their organizing principles. Still, the ‘usual suspects’ of protest, members of left-wing and anti-authoritarian groups participated in, but did not set the tone of, such initiatives, which were mostly inundated by ‘ordinary’ middle-aged men and women, often pensioners, most of whom had strong ties to the neighborhood (Kouki, 2019). Many of them were people in need themselves in the first place, such as 49-year-old Margarita, a single mother, who describes how she joined the food cooperative:

How did I end up here? The crisis destroyed my life. A friend told me I could find clothes for my son at a food bank, so I came one night; a volunteer told me to go to the loft and pick up whatever I need and he apologized for the mess… Well, I took some stuff and I then I came back the next day, just to help and tidy up, and, here I am, three years afterwards

At the same time, the gendered composition of these movements became increasingly skewed towards women, also because of the influx of so-called ‘apolitical’ (Hanisch, 1970) participants that had no previous experience in movement activism (fieldnotes, September-November 2015; March- June 2016). Natasa, a 44-year-old mother of two, explains how she became active in a solidarity movement in her neighborhood:

I was working as a hairdresser and then I got fired. Once all that started, I was so angry, and at the same time I felt the urge to do something, to help, and I ended up here […] I’m not into politics, I haven’t been part of any other group before. But, you know, I have been always running around helping family and friends, even people I don’t know, always. So how could I have stayed home now when all this is happening here?

Despite the lack of previous experience or political identifications, many participants like Natasa felt that the crisis gave them very good reasons to take part in political activism (Hanisch, 1970; fieldnotes, March- June 2016; January-March 2017). The spontaneous and widespread emergence of these alternative forms of bottom-up politics was as much the product of ideological reconfigurations as a pragmatic, widespread response to urgent social needs (e.g., Chatzidakis, 2020) and brought about a series of implicit transformations in the movement field.

5.2 Organizational choices

The role of gender in our movement went beyond a quantitative increase in women’s participation and the reorientation towards social reproductive forms of activism (Hall, 2020; Einwohner et al., 2000). And it also moved beyond explicit attempts to organize themselves along the principles of direct democracy, horizontality and equal participation; principles that are commonly (and rightly) associated with feminist imperatives yet are often beset with problems and contradictions in practice (e.g., Einwohner et al., 2000), as many of our respondents noted. Less explicitly yet profoundly, divisions of social roles and labor, and key spatio-temporal logics started to reflect feminist perspectives on movement organizing.

*a. Social Roles and Divisions of Labor*

Immediately upon my arrival, they told me, fine, you are a technician and may be happy with that but here we have an agreement where we all rotate our roles. So, you will also need to do admin support, run the reception and so on. (Giorgos, 56)

Here, I’ve done everything possible, from cooking to going to the supermarket and farmers market. I also helped decorate the space. I cleaned it regularly, even cutting and fixing the tiles. (Yannis, 46)

Giorgos and Yannis had previously participated in protest actions and considered themselves members of various social movements; still, they did not experience their engagement with movements of the crisis as something totally familiar. As they both illustrate, the practical needs of most movements began to unsettle previous hierarchies of power that normalized certain (gendered) divisions of labor. Various day-to-day difficulties and urgencies led to rotations quickly becoming the norm in most of the solidarity initiatives that we researched. This was not always easy yet it was endorsed by everyone, as explained by Natasa (44), who had also been previously engaged in other social movements:

I’ve been through everything, from collecting food in the supermarkets to shifts in the front desk, I’ve cleaned and prepared the classrooms for the students, I’ve even cooked, and I really hate cooking!

Importantly, the gendered aspect of normative divisions of activist work was often explicitly challenged (Craddock, 2019). Chloe (44), for instance, a member of Rafi for over six years, mentions how ideas around ‘feminine’ versus ‘masculine’ tasks were soon exposed:

So we found ourselves spending each shift cleaning, tidying up and helping all those in need of help. It was not as in the past, where men would sit around the table to talk high politics and argue about what is the right thing. This had to change and did change! Everyone had to walk the talk here.

It was not just gendered divisions of labor that were challenged. A parallel, more implicit reevaluation included the differences between (previously) professionalized versus voluntary care work. For instance, Lena (61) talks about how doctors in the Urban Social Clinic were challenged both in terms of shifting roles and what should dictate the time, care and attention given to each patient:

And when there were no patients, our doctors would get a bit annoyed. And long discussions would ensue as to how here you are not just a doctor, you are also a volunteer and you have to see how this self-managed medical center functions. So, we tried to break away from given ideas as to how doctors function, say ‘here I am’, ‘I give 20 minutes to each patient’, ‘I make as many appointments as possible’. We broke away from that in practice. People were ill because no one listened. Here the doctors had to listen.

Lena’s observation reflects the difference between forms of care work that are market-mediated and often rewarded as ‘highly skilled’ versus those that are perceived as ‘low skilled’ and are often undervalued, if market-mediated, or not rewarded at all (Held, 2002). In a way, our participants discovered on the ground the so-called irreconcilability between market or exchange value and care values (Skeggs, 2014). With little or no resources, or any assumed training or expertise, the experiences, skills and knowledge of so many women and men that did not see themselves as ‘experts’, ‘skilled’ or ‘knowledgeable’ were mobilized to produce superior care compared to other for-profit or public-private providers (fieldnotes, May 2017). Kalliopi (54) was one among many participants that explicitly expressed this:

Our support center could turn into a municipality branch, of course, this could be done. But it wouldn’t be the same, that’s what I feel. We know every single person in the neighborhood, who needs what, who is ashamed to ask for help, who looks sad when passing by, and we find ways to talk to them, to help them… how could all these relationships become professionalized?

Institutionalization and/or the pursuit of economic gains were therefore viewed as potentially ‘corrupting’ practices of genuine care and solidarity (Held, 2002).

*b. New Times and Spaces of Movement Organization*

The ungendering of previously established divisions of labor and, thus, the transformation of care into a collective responsibility (Candas & Sillier, 2014) brought about a reconsideration of movement goals that challenged the assumed spatiotemporal context within which movement actions and decisions were embedded. Firstly, as mentioned above, many movements decided to focus their actions on specific neighborhoods and communities with acute social reproductive needs. In doing so, the privileged site of movement organizing moved from the street and symbolic sites of confrontation to the local, the intimate and the recognizable. Previous activities associated with the spatial realm of domesticity and homemaking (Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2020) were now collectivized, performed in common spaces and repoliticized, firmly bridging the personal with the political (e.g., Hall, 2020). Leonidas and Yota, who were both participating in community-organized food banks, observe:

Suddenly you are part of everyday social relations that were up until recently perceived as the prerogative of friendship groups or families. (Leonidas, 36)

When you are cooking out, no matter if it’s cold or hot, you are coming together with other people and you want to speak. For example, during holidays we cannot allow ourselves to stop cooking for others! Even during Christmas or Easter, if we have to be away, we make sure there is someone to cook and offer food to those that need it. We don’t think of these days as family days, time to care for one’s own; it’s the opposite. (Yota, 58)

As the above quotes illustrate, the boundaries between familial and civic responsibilities, the public and the private, the inside and the outside, were inevitably unsettled. Most participants referred to their collective spaces being their new ‘homes’ and other members their new ‘family’. They therefore approximated what Whitehead (1984) identifies as spaces of alternative kinship and solidarity. Yota notes that everyone would engage in the managing, maintenance and cleaning of these spaces:

It’s our home, whatever we do in our home, we have to do it here as well. It should be clean and tidy, people should be happy to enter here!

Accordingly, they engaged in various home- and family-making practices, from collectively decorating to adopting family-like rituals such as eating together on public holidays (fieldnotes, January 2016; April-May 2017). Conversely, obligations stemming from normative notions of kinship (e.g., looking after ‘one’s own’ first) were oftentimes challenged in practice.

Secondly, the temporal configuration of these activities was also reconsidered. There was a slow realization within our movements that various activities pertaining to care and collective provisioning required ample time, the ability to embrace experiences of time suppression, to delay, wait, endure (Baraitser, 2017). This was consistently emphasized by most of our informants:

Most people were just procedural in making phone calls, but this cannot be done in this way; you have to talk, to spend some time, to ask how people are doing, to listen, to care, to create relationships. (Chrisoula, 44)

This thing about coming to contact with each other. Slowly, slowly. You can’t have it any another way. It requires time, patience. There is no other way of doing it. (Katerina, 53)

Hence solidarity and caring time was not the same as in marketized or corporatized provisions of care (e.g., Farris & Marchetti, 2017). It required thinking beyond efficiency-driven, procedural arrangements to address the observation that the quality of care provided is often directly determined by the amount of attention and time spent on it. As various feminist scholars have illustrated, caring relationships are ‘sticky’, time-consuming and often ambivalent (e.g., Tronto, 2013; Folbre, 2001). While historically undervalued exactly because of their gendered nature, high quality (and thus slow) care work began to be revalued within our movements and viewed as indeed vital to their survival. Different ways of organizing and managing everyday life were made important in activist spaces, including slower and subtle practices of emotional labor.People’s bodies, relationships, as well as economic practices, were attended to in a caring and holistic way, contrasting sharply with state, third-sector or market-mediated relationships. For instance, when asked what distinguished state- or NGO-run soup kitchens from her solidarity initiative’s collective cooking events, Kleio (51), one of the founding members, replied:

There’s little in common. We directly relate with the people out there and we understand the problems each one has. We take time, and listen attentively to what they say, no one else listens, no one.

In sum,organizational choices within the solidarity movement required shifting between different roles, broadening the spaces of political action and enduring time, overall transforming them into communal and collectivist experiences.

5.3 Framing Solidarity

Framing analysis addresses the creation of meaning and collective identities, how people come together to define what is at stake, especially at the very moment when movements emerge. It is commonly termed as ‘an interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the “world out there” by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action’ (Snow and Benford, 1988: 197). We observed that collective frames began to embrace feminist principles both in their outward manifestations, that is, in terms of inclusivity and identification with other groups, and their more inward-oriented processes (Hunt and Bedford, 2004), that is, in terms of member-member expressions of radical care and affect.

*a. Towards a Collectivist Model of Solidarity*

Well, in what concerns demonstrations and all that, I’m a bit disappointed. It’s a mode of protest that is somehow meaningless, not like it used to be in the past. We used to say I protest so as to be heard, so as to change something. Now we know… nothing is going to change. That is a bit liberating at the same time. (Yota, 58)

Whereas early social movements described by Yota retained an antagonistic frame, with clear boundaries between ‘we’ and ‘they’, the crisis foregrounded a universal (or at least mostly universal) challenge that affected everyone despite prior political ideologies and identifications. Encapsulated in the ubiquitous slogan of ‘No one should be alone in this crisis’, we observed an implicit shift towards a more collectivist model of solidarity (Rowbotham et al., 2013). The focus on common interests and experiences that were directly derived from the crisis paved the way for an explicitly inclusive and intersectional framing that is often lacking in more explicitly feminist movements (Cullen & Murphy, 2007). Although this is not to say that gender injustices were effectively recognized or addressed in their entirety, such framing emphasized the common and collective experiences of movement participants. An action-based rather than predetermined understanding of feminist solidarity, it allowed a certain ‘acting in concert’ without reifying preexisting identity categories (Allen, 1999). Alekos (68), a retired schoolteacher and member of a solidarity clinic, noted:

To my mind this solidarity clinic movement has gone through its adolescent phase, during which we were dependent on our struggles against something… that is to say that we were strictly dependent on what we were ‘against’. We are gradually learning instead how to stand on our feet, and from there to bring out different movement characteristics.

Accordingly, a key challenge to overcome was opening up to a broader membership base and bridging divides even with people that would normally be frowned on, if not outrightly perceived, as ideological opponents. Georgia (32), who has been an active member in various social movements since her 20s commented, for instance:

Those who are more politicized often have a trade union mentality, which often doesn’t help in structures such as ours. I mean, it’s hard to convince some of them that it’s not important if their new comrades come to a demo or not. It’s more significant to come to our assembly, voice their opinion instead of pontificating about strikes.

Here Georgia articulates a widespread observation, a difficulty that many members had in working with and beyond difference, as this was not familiar within the pre-existing movement culture. As Markos (48) put it, ‘they don’t know how to approach ordinary people, simple people. They have to simplify their language, be more open.’ Yet the move towards a more inclusive and collectivist (Gilbert, 2014) model of solidarity emerged as a possibility, to a large extent, precisely because it was not a rational or ideological decision, but a radical necessity expressed by a resisting and poverty-stricken population. Those to be excluded were those who promoted exclusionary understandings of participation and solidarity, such as far-right advocates (fieldnotes, May-June 2015; January 2016; September-October 2017). Across the movements studied and despite various everyday difficulties or confrontations, we observed members’ willingness to participate and to bridge divides that were previously built on the basis of political party affiliation or reified identitarian differences (Allen, 1999).

*b. Embracing Affect and Radical Care*

To be sure, the move towards a more inclusive model of solidarity was beset with challenges. Given the absence of more ‘purist’ ideological principles, reified identities and established modes of organizing, attentiveness to different modes of situated knowledge and subjectivity became a key imperative. Akin to Featherstone’s (2012) notion of action-based and generative – as opposed to preconfigured – solidarity, most movement participants embraced a more dynamic and experimental understanding of the everyday social glue that kept them together. As Dora (34) put it:

When you are among such heterogenous people, you force yourself to be more creative, to get everyone involved in ways that you would never see being embraced by traditional politicized people using traditional means of political action.

Accordingly, more emphasis was placed on praxis at the local level - Irene (42), for instance, explains that, ‘the best way to say something is to do it’. What kept solidarity initiatives together was listening and talking to each other, being there for the other, empathizing with people who were ashamed of being in need (fieldnotes, May 2015; September-October 2015; February 2018). In turn, this praxis led to new ways of creating meaning and to relating with each other, one that foregrounded the role of affect and emotions (e.g., Ahmed, 2004):

I have seen many things and I have felt many more. In this collective you learn to be a better version of yourself. That’s why I love it, it is all about emotions really. (Irene, 42)

Why am I still here? The question is, where else could I be? This is my home now. (Kalliopi, 54)

The embracing of affect and emotions in all their diversity and contradictions resonates with Hemmings’ (2012) notion of affective solidarity. For Hemmings, conflicting and contradictory feelings, from empathy and care to rage and anger, have the potential to generate solidarity that is not rooted in identity but in an overwhelming sense of injustice and a desire to transform oneself and the world. This more embodied and affective solidarity is produced by the dissonance between what one feels and what they are told that is happening, and has the capacity to generate new ways of knowing and resisting. The concurrent shift from ‘individual experience to collective feminist capacity’ (Hemmings, 2012, p. 150) is encapsulated by Natasa (44), in response to a question about her daily experience in a solidarity initiative:

Every single day you see people’s sensitivity – the other day I was standing outside a supermarket collecting things for those in need, and there is this man, holding two shopping bags, one is full with products and the other almost empty; he approaches me and gives me the first one… These people make you so emotional, so many feelings. And then there is hate, frustration, why so many people were thrown into such misery – the other day a couple brought their kid to our space, they had no electricity at home so he could not study there […] That is why I love our solidarity initiative, it is all these feelings brought together.

Moreover, we observed how participants would often easily talk about the ‘therapeutic’ effects of their participation in the movement, and a relative ease to opening up to each other and exposing their vulnerability:

At first, I was so embarrassed, because I was in a difficult situation with no housing or money and here there was no judgment, I was trusted as an equal. (Margarita, 49)

Because even for those that had a job, family, etc., there was an additional need – that’s how I felt it – to do something beyond, to lean on each other. I keep saying it, it was not about us helping others but also about helping ourselves through setting up a collective space and doing things differently. (Ismini, 51)

Put differently, notions of vulnerability, fragility and interdependency were now explicitly embraced within the initiatives we studied, generating a culture of radical and “promiscuous” care, meaning caring in ways that are more extensive, experimental and nonnormative by current standards (The Care Collective, 2020). Various participants talked about the movements’ double function: on the one hand, they satisfied material needs and, on the other, psychological ones, both for themselves and for others (fieldnotes, June 2015; January 2016; May-July 2016; January 2017). ‘It is not about provisioning only; it is about supporting each other, helping each other restart, to understand there are no vagabonds!,’ as one informant put it.

When asked about motivations for persistently participating in the daily and often grim routine of these solidarity spaces, many informants somewhat surprised us with their answers. Oftentimes, the cultivation of feelings of collective joy and happiness took center stage:

In general life is not about work and family, it is also about transcendence, something bigger, and I feel we get it in a way here. (Nikodimos, 36)

Building and sharing collective joy is a real thing, that’s what we try to do at every opportunity. (Ismini, 51)

Such feelings resonated with Lynne Segal’s (2017) notion of “radical happiness”, encapsulating the sense of joy that often accompanies moments when people feel they are part of a collective struggle to achieve positive social change. This satisfaction did not mean, of course, that everyday life in solidarity initiatives was ideal: mundane, exhausting processes often led to burnout, internal conflicts and desperation over inertia and the lack of change (fieldnotes, July-October 2015; January-March 2016; February 2017). Still, for most of our informants, amid a general feeling of powerlessness, participation in these movements added a sense of agency, purpose and meaning, one that made life feel more interdependent, relational and, ultimately, a little bit happier.

**6. Discussion**

Drawing on extensive fieldwork, this article addresses the role of gender in broader anti-austerity movements and the extent to which they can provide fertile ground for the cultivation of feminist principles and solidarities, even while not being explicitly or primarily identified as feminist. We begin by identifying a reorientation away from traditional forms of protest politics and oppositional activism and into the realm of social reproduction and ‘quieter’ politics (Hall, 2020): from collective cooking and refugee hospitality initiatives to self-managed educational centers and health clinics. In parallel with this reorientation, our social movements underwent a reconfiguration of their member composition, with many ‘ordinary’ people entering the movement field and many previously understood as ‘apolitical’ women playing a key role in the social struggle. We illustrate how this shift gradually challenged traditional divisions of labor and the temporalities and spatialities of movement organizing; and brought forward the value of building intersectional coalitions and embracing affect and radical care.

Despite the lack of explicitly articulated feminist ideals, the solidarity culture that we report here shares many of the characteristics commonly associated with feminist praxis. As we extensively document above, it was not just that nearly all movement politics became reproductive politics (Briggs, 2018) and that their gendered composition was significantly altered. In the process of doing so, ideas around the role of women and ‘women’s skills’ were inevitably brought to the fore and regularly questioned. The spaces and times of, and for, the domestic/private versus public were joined together. Although not founded on explicit notions of ‘sisterhood’ (Lyshaug, 2006), the Greek solidarity movement embraced ‘political transversality’ (Gago, 2019) in so far as it brought together disparate social groups and insisted on building alliances among all those who found themselves violently displaced and excluded from the ‘good life’ (Rai, 2018). As a result, the ideal type of activist identity and activist praxis, as well as differentiations between experts and non-experts within social movements, were also challenged on the ground. Importantly, this movement progressively embraced and revalued interdependency and unpaid, non-marketized care (Held, 2002; Tronto, 2013), ultimately reasserting the role that radical emotions can play in emancipatory everyday politics (Segal, 2017). Women and men working together in these reproductive, solidarity spaces together destabilized in praxis prior binary thinking that defined social movement ideas and processes.

Parallel to the adoption of a more implicit feminist solidarity culture, however, it can be argued that the social movements of the Greek crisis in many other ways or moments failed to fully reflect on or subvert latent gender norms and divisions of labor. For instance, Kosyfologou (2018) argues that the central role that women played in the solidarity movement could have reinscribed essentialist assumptions about their natural role as (unpaid) carers, previously within their homes and now further beyond. We cannot entirely dismiss this argument. During our interviews, for instance, many women were surprised themselves when they realized their overwhelming presence in solidarity spaces; or, some participants reverted to essentialist assumptions about women being ‘more emotional and caring’ and ‘less confident and educated’ than men. Questioning gender hierarchies remained in many cases an invisible and incomplete process. This contrasted with the more explicitly feminist articulations in some women-only and queer mobilizations and groups (e.g., Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2017), although, as we note above, explicit feminist movements remained fewer and far between during the crisis.

Notwithstanding, during the years of the crisis traditional forms of noisy and disruptive politics were profoundly challenged (Hall, 2020). Previously ‘apolitical’ women (Hanisch, 1970) played a key role in their reorientation towards ‘everyday’ and banal politics, ones that aimed to address urgent social needs. In doing so, the personal and the political were irrevocably bridged. We should clarify, of course, as Federici and Linebaugh note, that ‘assigning women this task of commoning/collectivizing reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of femininity’ (2018, p. 112). Rather, what we try to explore is the emancipatory potential contained in a solidarity practice which was vehemently revealed during this moment of urgency and transition, even if it remained incomplete and was not put into words. Everyday tasks of care and social reproduction that are traditionally confined to the limits of the household’s private space and remain invisible in the urban landscape became public, collective and radical. Streets, squares and buildings were no longer used as platforms for political demands or visibility, but as infrastructural goods per se (Butler, 2016): public space was reappropriated and commonized. In doing so, care of the community was not only foregrounded as a meaningful act of resistance in times of social dismantling but also revalued along the axes of time, attention and relationality (e.g., Tronto, 2013). There was universal recognition of the need to revalue care and resource it appropriately (e.g., Fraser, 2014; The Care Collective, 2020).

Thus, while we do not argue for the naturalization of housework and care work as a female vocation, at the same time we cannot ignore the emancipatory potential contained in domesticity (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Federici & Linebaugh, 2018), especially when this becomes ungendered and instead rendered public and common. To do so otherwise would mean dismissing the collective experiences, skills and knowledge that women have accumulated through reproductive work. Our middle-aged pensioners, mothers and housewives felt the urge to leave their homes and families and passionately engage in caring for strangers and ‘others’, sharing their knowledge with other men and women, within broader, newly enacted political communities. As testified by our informants, motivating skills that were previously not visible or valued led to their empowerment and exposed them to roles and responsibilities that had not been part of their inventory. While such mobilizations might not survive, still they formed part of a long genealogy of women’s struggles against authoritarianism and capitalism, both in Greece (Vervenioti, 2013) and in the Global South more broadly (Federici & Linebaugh, 2018).

Still, undoing the gendered architecture of everyday life does not require only women’s struggles or struggles explicitly focused on women. Fraser (2016), for instance, observes that instead of struggling to turn women’s lives into what was the traditional life of men, we might think of making men’s lives look like women, that is, attentive to diversified human activities that are necessary for sustainability. Along a similar line, Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003) call for ‘feminizing the economy’ which refers to envisioning or enacting alternative economies, open to ‘difference’. Grassroots collective action and feminist thinking in Spain (Roth & Baird, 2017; Perez, 2018) and Latin America (Vega Solis et al., 2019) build on the rather contentious concept of the ‘feminization of politics’, which reveals emancipatory potential in attempting to both foreground what is understood as ‘feminine’ and question it by challenging both women and men to think and act differently.

In sum, our study attests that feminist solidarities can be both explicit and implicit. Understanding gender as a crucial factor in the emergence and development of social movements that were not explicitly rooted in feminist identities or discourse but were responsive to an ever-increasing number of social reproductive and care needs, enabled us to discern repertoires of action, modes of organizing and frames of mobilization that were irrevocably feminized. The distinct solidarity culture of these movements was not an add-on to already existing struggles by other groups nor did it refer to a surplus of empathy; it dominated the city exactly because it emerged through feminist principles that generally reconfigured activist practices, offering a space to expose naturalized assumptions about gender roles and expectations and even subvert these, even for a while. By focusing on such situated modes of feminist solidarity, and the ways in which they were sometimes implicitly yet profoundly adopted, we address Cullen and Murphy’s (2017) call to move beyond rigidly defined women’s or feminist movements and to adopt instead a wider lens that examines how broader social movements may still make important demands and advances in favor of feminist principles and interests. As many feminist scholars have long asserted (Taylor, 1999), gender is a key force in the emergence and sustenance of any social movement. We extend this observation by asserting that gender is also a key influence on the development of any social movement’s solidarity culture. Put differently, there is no movement solidarity that is not already gendered and, therefore, the possibility of radical emancipatory feminist action, or its subversion thereof, is ever present. In a world overwhelmed by multiple crises of care across different scales and levels, feminist solidarities are bound to play a central role in all radical social movements.

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