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**Master Thesis:**

**The Greek Economic Crisis and the  
“End” of the “Middle Class”**

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## 1. Introduction

For more than twenty years, during the post- socialist transition in Europe, the class analysis was marginalized not only as an analytical tool, in order to explain phenomena of the social reality, but also as an element of the political and social discourse (Petraki, 2006). A series of new theories emerged, like the ones of “social mobility” or those of “middle class societies”, which focus mainly on the elimination of the old divisions towards a new environment of equal opportunity and consensus. Georgia Petraki suggests that this tendency is the result of the disappearance of “class” as a concept from the social and political level, as the sociopolitical forces that based their analysis on it gradually stopped playing an influential role (Petraki, 2006). It derives from the inability of the exploited- working class to question the existing regime and organize in an autonomous political subject, ready to promote its own interest (Petraki, 2006). As she writes: “During the last decades there is a lack of theories that explain the construction of the society in terms of classes, strata and social categories, while, on the other hand, the beliefs that dominate analyze social stratification in terms of income- heritage- occupation or university degree” (Petraki, 2006). Moreover, she explains that in the postmodern way of thinking reality is perceived as a “cultural construction”, built from symbolic meanings through which the subjects interpret and create their own identities (Petraki, 2006). With the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant economic doctrine, crucial for the survival of capitalism after the crisis of the 1970s, new ideas emerged that tried to fit the social reality into the needs of the dominant economic forces. The existence of classes does not fit in the new principles of individualism and the deification of individuality over the society and politics. Social construction doesn't seem to matter anymore. Even “freedom” takes a totally different meaning, emphasizing on the freedom of markets, in which the individual takes specific roles. After all, as Margaret Thatcher used to say “There is no society, only individuals and their families”.

After 2008, the economic crisis has played a crucial role in the reemergence of class as an important notion. The unequal distribution of the costs of the crisis and the pressure that the middle and lower strata face have shown that in fact the class parameter never stopped to exist. In this framework, one of the attempts that the present analysis will try to make is to contribute to the redefinition of the concept of class in order to explain the present situation of the Greek society, four years after the beginning of the recession and the implementation of the austerity package under the strict supervision of the international Troika, IMF, etc.

The present analysis will focus on the middle class perceptions, experiences and reactions over the current economic crisis. First, we will try to discuss on the definition of the controversial term of the “middle class” by using different kinds of theoretical approaches, coming both from the Marxist and the Weberian tradition. However, what we are mostly interested in, in the frame of political anthropology, is

the way people themselves define classes, how they perceive themselves as members of a specific social class and which the main characteristic that distinguish the middle class from the others are. Here we need to make clear that there is not only lack of a common definition of the “middle class” but also a great disagreement on whether this social strata should be considered as a “class” or not. The fieldwork research will help us see how people define themselves through this term and why they choose to include themselves in this social group.

More specifically, we will try to show how the crisis has affected the lives of those people and what changes has brought in their everyday practices and social stratification. We will state here that the crisis has created a double burden, leading them to severe squeeze and mass impoverishment, which derives both from the direct imposition of the austerity package and its dramatic results and from the diminishing of the welfare state, on which they counted. What we will state is that a new social environment has started to emerge, in which people seek their new position. Practically, we wonder if we can talk about an end of the middle class, at least as it had developed and existed so far.

The scope of the essay, though, is not to study the phenomenon from a distant position or simply to describe it. Our main goal is to see how the people, assigned or considered to belong to the middle class, experience this new situation, what changes it has brought to their living standards and conditions, how they react on it and what they expect from their future. More than a definition, belonging to the middle class was basically a living experience. Using the methodological tools of social anthropology and through a series of personal interviews, we will try to let them explain what being a member of the middle class meant, in which position they place themselves, if they develop any kind of class consciousness and what that means in terms of political and social mobilization. For this scope we interviewed eleven informants, supposed to be members of the middle class, all willing to talk about their lives and personal experience. Here we need to stress that the majority of them wanted to keep their anonymity and privacy and consequently they are referred in the essay not with their full names but only with the initial letter.

The majority of our informants are members of existing social movements and collectivities, which have been established the last four years in the city of Thessaloniki, as a reaction to the austerity package and the governmental policies. More specifically, 9 out of 11 are political activists, participating in social movements, assemblies and initiatives, while the other 2 are occasionally participating in some social movements and initiatives that feel that fulfill their requirements, either serving their personal interests or giving them hope for change. Here we need to mention that apart from the personal interviews, the essay is based both on our personal participation in a number of movements in the city of Thessaloniki, like the one of the Citizens’ Assemblies and the Space of Solidarity for Women, which gave us the chance to experience personally the practices of

mobilization and self- organization of all these people and their everyday realities, through the construction of a personal relation of trust with them. Though, from the very beginning the informants were fully aware of the scope of the research, thus willing to take part on it. The main goal is to try to prove that the crisis has actually simplified the existing class relations, through the squeeze of the middle class, by creating what the majority of the informants called the class of “the new poor”<sup>1</sup>, leading them to activate against the existing situation. At this point, we shall pose the question, if all those movements and people can be considered part of a new “historical bloc” that has begun to formulate, able to re-challenge the existing regime and its hegemony and reclaim its lost active role in the political game, by establishing its own cultural and political narrative. After all, the crisis was not only limited to the field of economy, but spread quickly to the political and social ones, causing a major crisis of legitimization of the political regime.

## **2. About the definition of the “middle class”**

The biggest difficulty in the analysis of the class structure of the contemporary capitalist societies derives from inability to provide an accurate definition for the petty bourgeoisie and the middle classes in general (Milios and Oikonomakis, 2007). The problem is closely related to the definition of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and can be easily described as: “middle class or middle social strata, one or many?” (Milios and Oikonomakis, 2007). Here maybe lies the biggest conflict, since there is total lack not only of a commonly accepted definition but also of a commonly accepted point of view. Thus, we have a number of theories that do not even accept the existence of the middle class, putting it either on the side of the bourgeoisie or at the side of the proletariat, while a number of other theoretic streams argue for the creation of the “middle class societies” through the development of the capitalist way of production, the financialization of capitalism and advancement of the tertiary sector.

We shall start our analysis by briefly referring to the concept of the “class” and the way it was perceived both in the Marxist and in the Weberian tradition, trying to enrich the problematic of the middle class through the eyes of these two big schools of thought. Karl Marx was not the first to refer to the existence of classes in the society, as both Adam Smith and David Ricardo before him accepted the fact that the capitalist society was not unified. Though, he was the first one to put the class division and class struggle in the core of his analysis. For Marx, class is a social relation of exploitation that derives from the productive system itself (Moschonas, 1998) and is defined according to the possession of the means of production and the position someone has within the system of production. It is formulated through a historical process and as a result of the development of the productive forces, which in every specific historical moment require a specific division of labor and a specific distribution in terms of property relations and acquisition of the means of

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<sup>1</sup> In its Greek translation the term would be “νεόπτωχοι”.

production<sup>2</sup>. Here, we can find the dualistic nature of the Marxist theory, as he recognizes two basic classes, among which unfold relations of exploitation and struggle. In the capitalist mode of production those are the bourgeoisie, which by possessing the means of production takes the position of the exploiter, and the proletariat, which by selling its labor power to the former takes the position of the exploited<sup>3</sup>. The two classes are in a constant position of conflict but also in a dialectical connection. Many scholars accused Marx for his inability to see the existence of middle classes, which in fact rose in numbers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the pauperization<sup>4</sup> thesis raised heavy criticism, as it was accused of not taking into consideration the middle strata of the capitalist societies, whose life standards during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and after the WWII were steadily improving. Many scholars hurried to announce that this was the proof of the weakness of the Marxist ideology. In fact, none of the two criticisms were true. Marx, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of the capital recognizes the existence of a social complexity and the presence of more social strata than the above two. Though, he believed that the development of the capitalist mode of production will lead to their absorption by either of the two classes, leading to a simplification of the social construction into the initial, dualistic form (Moschonas, 1998; Giddens, 1971). For Marx, the proletarianization of the middle classes is inevitable. Their small capital can never reach the investments of the big businessmen and so it will eventually succumb to them. Furthermore, as the capitalist mode of production evolves, their skills will become gradually more devalued (Moschonas, 1998).

While Marx defines class relations in the field of production, Weber places his center in that of market. According to the Weberian theories, societies are not places of harmony and peace and one can find relationships of conflict, in which every subject tries to impose his will on the others. Though, in order for the society to function, social integration and consensus are also highly important. Max Weber does not distinguish classes as the only expression of social division. Together with Status Groups and Political Parties they form a “triad” of division in society. For Max Weber, a class is defined by the position that each person takes in the market. It determines his living conditions and life chances, through the distribution of wealth between the members of a society, which communicate through the market (Moschonas, 1998). A class is a group of people that have the same living conditions and opportunities inside the market, in terms of purchasing power, as well as the same access to products, services and job market. Max Weber identifies a variety of

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2 For Marx, the expansion of the division of labor is synonymous to the growth of private property and the emergence of Alienation (Giddens, 1971).

3 In capitalism there is a separation of the worker, the direct producer, from his products and a lack of direct control over them. Thus, the laborer is obliged to sell his labor power, which itself becomes a product, sold in the market. This is the source of the devaluation of labor power: in a later stage, the worker becomes a true slave of his own product, treated the same way as the product. This is the first expression of Alienation in the Marxist way of thinking.

4 The pauperization thesis claimed that as the capitalist mode of production develops and the accumulation of capital increases, the workers will steadily accumulate more poverty that will lead them to a gradual pauperization (Moschonas, 1998; Giddens, 1971).

different criteria that distinguish classes, mainly private property, business activity and income<sup>5</sup>. Others, such as education, can also play an important role. We can identify four different classes: 1) the working class 2) the petty bourgeoisie, the lower strata of the middle class, 3) the new middle strata which gain their position from the acquisition of knowledge and expertise 4) the upper strata, which derive their position from their property, their business activity and education (Moschonas, 1998). On the other hand, he recognizes the existence of specific “status groups”, defined in terms of lifestyle and non-material factors such as cultural preferences, social relations, use of language etc. (Moschonas, 1998). If a class is defined in the level of the market, a status group is mainly defined in the level of consumption (Moschonas, 1998). Finally, in terms of political power and access to the state, he identifies the division into different political parties<sup>6</sup>.

We mentioned the above just to draw background of the contemporary theories of class analysis, through which we will attempt to share a middle class definition. The, let's say, “Post- Weberian” analysis pose their aim to the promotion of the need for social integration and incorporation into the existing social, political and economic system (Moschonas, 1998). And this is not strange at all. As it is explained by Petraki, the need to control class divisions was one of the main goals of the bourgeoisie since it gained political power (Petraki, 2006). As she writes: “state intervention, targeting towards an equilibrium in the relations between capital and labor, established an interclass social alliance, which, as its main political strategy, enforced the confrontation of the social issue through the adoption of a degree of equality, based on a commonly accepted, minimum living standard and prosperity” (Petraki, 2006). Gradually, the politically “biased” term of the class, highly connected with the Marxist tradition and the worker's movements, starts to be abandoned and new ones, like “strata” or “groups”, emerge to replace it. The individual is placed at the center of the theoretical analysis, a tradition deriving from the Weberian “methodological individualism”<sup>7</sup>, and new criteria start to emerge as important in order to determine social relations. Occupation becomes one of the most powerful, as groups of relative occupations are named classes under arbitrary justifications. In that spirit, Goldthorpe

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5 The first criterion refers to the ability of individuals to gain income from the possession of private property, the second refers to the gain of profit through business activity and state economic policy and the third refers to the amount of income an individual gains. Every criterion is subdivided in two extreme positions, a positive (when an individual has access to one criterion) and a negative (when he lacks access to the criterion). Those determine the place of the individual into the class structure (Moschonas, 1998). Apart from the extreme positions one can recognize middle strata, who are placed in the class map mostly according to their possession of an amount of private property and knowledge, through which they gain their income (Moschonas, 1998).

6 The above divisions express also the forms through which power can be expressed within a society. Consequently, he recognizes three modes of distribution of power: 1) social power, expressed through the participation in a status group, based on social status and esteem 2) class power, expressed through the division of society into classes, which differentiate through their unequal access to goods and services in the market 3) political power, expressed through the participation in political parties, may express different social groups or even society as a whole and has the ability to provide access to the state and the decision making (Moschonas, 1998).

7 Although Schumpeter was the first to officially use the term, Max Weber was considered as the father methodological individualism, due to his opinion that social outcomes can be explained as “purposeful actions” committed by rational individuals. Society, in this way of thinking, is nothing more than the sum of various, rational, individuals.

classifies the different occupations not only according to their field of expertise but also according to the prestige a person gains through it. He identifies three classes (the service, the intermediate and the working class)<sup>8</sup>, the members of which hold similar characteristics both in the market and in their professional field (Moschonas, 1998). In his schema there is a total absence of any kind of exploitation, struggle or even class hierarchy, as though everything work in a neutral space in terms of ideology and relations (Moschonas, 1998). The theories of “social homogeneity” state that gradually we move towards the creation of a “middle class society”, where the lower strata tend always to improve their position and move closer to middle ones and the upper strata steadily lose their privileges. This happens mostly for two reasons: 1) more people nowadays have a better level of education and expertise, as a result of the technological and scientific development and 2) the development of welfare state lead towards a homogenization of society, through fare distribution of income and more equal access to social advantages (Papadopoulos, 1987). Consequently, the boundaries between the different classes become vaguer and social stratification instead of a pyramid, takes the shape of a rhombus (Papadopoulos, 1987). According to this concept, practically everybody either is or will soon become a member of the middle class. Dahrendorf suggests that in the contemporary societies we face a double decomposition of capital (connected with the division between property and management and the emergence of managers as intermediates between capital and labor) and labor (as a result of the development of technology and of mass education, which enables a great amount of workers become skilled). The outcome is the emergence of a “new middle class”, which can be traced in the sectors of manufacture, commerce, services and public administration, composed of two categories, those that hold authority and higher places in hierarchy, who adopt a behavior identical to the upper strata, and the middle and lower employees, who adopt a behavior identical to the workers. Thus, we have the reproduction of the social relations and the creation of a complex environment, where a plurality of social conflicts develops (Moschonas, 1998). These conflicts, though, never aim to the overthrow of the existing regime but they always use the established, institutional channels, which guarantee social cohesion. On the other hand, social mobility refers to the movement of individuals and groups from a social position to another, in the framework of the division of labor (Moschonas, 1998). Individuals can move either upwards or downwards. Sorokin defined social mobility as follows: “*any transition of an individual or social object of value- anything that has been created or modified by human activity- from one social position to another*”<sup>9</sup> (Heberle, 1927). He recognized two kinds of social mobility, one horizontal, from one group to another when both groups are at the same level of hierarchy, and one vertical, from one social class to

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<sup>8</sup> The “service class” cannot be considered as the higher, and there is no intention for that as long as he places in it middle professional strata, public servants and experts with a middle hierarchical position and managers of small and medium enterprises. At the same time the majority of occupations are classified in the intermediate- middle space, where we find public and private servants of middle and lower hierarchy, petty bourgeoisie and manufacturers, technicians and supervisors.

<sup>9</sup> He defines social position as “the totality of” an individual's “relations towards all groups of a population and, within each of them, towards its members” (Heberle, 1927).

another (Papadopoulos, 1987; Moschonas, 1998). He believed that the development of capitalism leads to the enlargement of the middle strata, where one can trace the majority of the waves of social mobility. The degree of social mobility determines whether a society is “open”, where the movement from one stratum to another is totally free, or closed, where individuals or groups cannot move at all. For Sorokin the two extremes actually never existed. What has existed in reality is a modification of mobility across time and space. Social mobility will actually eliminate class struggle<sup>10</sup>, since the establishment of truly open societies will mean that all individuals have the same chances in taking a position in the social stratification. Thus, the existence of classes has no meaning. The outcome will finally be the “middle class” society, where the technological changes and scientific development will make social mobility inevitable (Moschonas, 1998). The increasing need for skilled workers and experts will lead to a decrease in the need for unskilled ones, so the lower classes will inevitably move towards the middle.

The Marxist tradition tried to update the classical thought of Karl Marx to the new conditions that the development of the capitalist mode of production had brought. In this context, the answer to the problem of the middle class became central. Gradually, as the social relations were getting more complicated due to the development of the capitalist mode of production that demanded the development of a new division of labor, new criteria were taken into consideration (apart from the control of the means of production) in the definition of the classes. As Papadopoulos suggest, as we move from the abstract analysis to the concrete reality, we should include new, secondary criteria as the amount of the income and the role in the organization of production, in order to classify somebody to a specific class (Papadopoulos, 1987)<sup>11</sup>. Although the basic criterion remains the possession of means of production, the class is defined from the application of both the basic and the secondary criteria. When it comes to the definition of the middle strata, he believes that they cannot be considered as a class, as they are unable to develop their own consciousness beside the proletariat and the bourgeois. In fact, he accuses mainstream scholars for creating an artificial perception that the middle strata are expanding constantly. For him, this is only a way to create a myth around the elimination of the proletariat and the end of class struggle. He identifies two categories of middle classes, the traditional and the new,

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10 According to his point of view even revolutions is a result of the lack of social mobility in a society (Papadopoulos, 1987), and lead to a period of great social fluidity, where changes in the social positions are severe (Moschonas, 1998). Although we cannot find an absolutely open or an absolutely closed society, democratic societies present a higher degree of vertical social mobility. Social mobility becomes a kind of protector of democracy and stabilizer of the system, as there is no obvious need for people to organize in social classes and develop a class consciousness. Differences become legitimized and are presented as fair, since everybody has equal chances to move from a specific position to another. The increase to the level of education helps towards that direction (Papadopoulos, 1987; Moschonas, 1998).

11 According to him, those strata that will result from this newly initiated criteria are just products of the basic division, which is the one based on the possession of means of production. They cannot be considered as individual classes, although they have a degree of autonomy in action, but they only reflect the basic division. Thus, we can find groups that do not fit in any of the basic three class categories (meaning proletariat, semi- proletariat, middle classes- traditional and new ones- bourgeoisie) though, based on the initiation of the new criteria, are finally positioned in a class (Papadopoulos, 1987).

in which he places the businessmen or self-employed that did not manage to expand the reproduction of their capital (usually they work aside their employees as well) and the salaried employees whose job is neither managerial nor purely executive (Papadopoulos, 1987). Nikos Poulantzas defines the middle strata in terms of productive and non-productive labor. He defines productive labor in a specific mode of production as the kind of labor that reproduces the dominant divisions and relations of exploitation. In the capitalist mode of production we can consider as productive labor the one that produces surplus value. A labor that depends on the distribution and circulation of capital or the liquidation of surplus value cannot be considered as productive. This is mainly the field of the middle class: it does not produce surplus value by itself, but it still is a source of wealth for the capitalist, as it is a subject of exploitation<sup>12</sup> and helps to the social distribution of the surplus value, produced by the workers. He argues for the existence of an individual, distinct middle class, in accordance with its position to the social division of labor, which places it neither to the capitalist nor to the proletariat<sup>13</sup>. According to his view, during the last years due to the development of monopolistic capitalism, the number of non-productive employees has vastly increased. In this category Poulantzas places the “white collar” employees that work in the service sector, namely the various kinds of offices, banks, commercial employees etc. which constitute the new middle class<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand he mentions the existence of a traditional middle class, which includes the possession of a small amount of private property and means of production, such as small scale manufacturing and family businesses, with the characteristic that the owner is also the direct producers and uses only a small amount of paid labor, usually for short periods of time. Thus, he does not exploit directly labor but he gains an amount from the social production of surplus value. Eric Olin Wright defines two different kinds of class locations where he traces the middle class, divided in terms of exploitation (Wright, 1998). The first ones are those who are neither exploiter nor exploited, where we can find the traditional middle class. The second consists of those who exploit on one dimension of exploitation but are exploited on the other. Here we can find the new middle class (Wright, 1998).

We mentioned the above not in order to define classes, let's say, “from above”, but to present the problem of the middle class in its different ideological scales. What we are really interested in is how people from “below” perceive the middle class and themselves as part of it, how they define it and what specific characteristics they attribute to it. Even at that level, we can observe a total lack of a common perception about the middle class, although we may be able to investigate some common

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12 The exploitation of the middle class does not come from the production of surplus value for the capital but through their surplus labor.

13 This is quite clear since the middle class is both deprived of the acquisition of the means of production, that would place it to the capitalist class, and the production of surplus value, that would unite it with the proletariat.

14 Here we need to distinguish between the various groupings of middle class, which derive not only from their economic, ideological and political position within a specific division of labor but also from the division between mental and manual labor, which, according to Poulantzas, is not equal to the division of productive- nonproductive labor in the capitalist mode of production. This second division is produced by the alienation of the direct producer from its product and its means of production, in the way that labor falls under capital. (Poulantzas, 1974).

characteristics that the majority of our informants mentioned. For them, the definition of middle class is not based on its position inside the mode of production at this specific historical moment, but much more by its position inside the market, expressed mainly in terms of consumption and possession of private property, especially some specific material goods such as a car or a second summer residence. One of our informants, we shall name her T, says: *“I believe that the middle class really existed. It was those that used to say that they possess a house and maybe a summer residence, a car and sometimes also a second one. It was not the civil servants. I never had an image of the “bad civil servants”. It was all the businessmen, what we call the “small ones”.* Here, we can see that our informant places the civil servants out of the frame of the middle class not because of their economic position and living standards or their role in production or in the function of the market but because of a totally moral criterion. While she rejects the image of the “bad” civil servants, she uses this negative connotation to characterize the rest of the middle class, mainly small scale businessmen. Here we need to mention that she and her husband used to be a civil servant themselves, working for the former national television. When it was closed down by the government, they both remained unemployed. Nowadays, she is an active participant in the occupation of the building of the national television in Thessaloniki, which holds up to a year now, asking for the reopening of the organization and their full remuneration and rehiring. Though, as she says, she never thought of herself as a member of the middle class. This has mostly to do, for her, with the height of her wage and the money she was able to spend every month.

The next informant, named M, is a former civil servant in retirement, whose husband, before the economic crisis, used to be a well-known mechanic, owing his own construction company. She states that an upper class- bourgeoisie never really existed in Greece. Instead, the role of it was played by the “upper middle classes”, which was created from, what she calls, “the stolen money of the Marshal plan”. *“The main body of the middle class, the upper and the petty, mainly comprised of internal immigrants, those who spent their lives in order to educate their children and reserve a ticket to a better life, but through a series of social and family networks, especially in the countryside. Those were the children of the postwar generation”.* The bad connotation and a bit of blame are obvious here as well and it becomes even more obvious while she continues her narration. Here we need to mention that she used to be a member of a once mainstream political party, so she had the chance to experience personal networking in many different occasions. In her thought education, especially higher, is an important characteristic of the middle class, as it was the “ticket” for the public sector, which provided security and “revenue”, as she characteristically, says. Here, we need to mention that she can be considered as highly educated, as she is nowadays finishing her master in Political Science. *“There was that belief that if you enter the University somehow you will manage to graduate, especially if you became a member of a youth of some political party. It didn’t matter how or what you would gain. And the degree would be the ticket for a better life, a*

*job in the public sector that would give you not a salary but revenue*". Here, jobs at the public sector are presented as the "common vision" of a society that seeks to improve its living conditions, both because of the economic convenience and the security they provided. *"We were the middle class. It was me that consumed at Zara and Jo Malone, without any "holiday- loans" or credit cards because I could afford it"*. As we can see, consumption becomes a central characteristic of the middle class belonging, in correlation with a real economic capability, based on the income, and not a fake one, based on the financial product of the banks. Thus, the personal income is another key characteristic for her that distinguishes the upper middle from the lower middle class, as she says. This is also expressed through the possession of private property, namely real estate, living in specific parts of the city or preferring a private to a public school for the education of the kids. *"It was us all that had a property, that used to live in Panorama and have summer residents and from one day to the other we collapsed"*.

Another informant named V, former public teacher and member of syndicates and leftist political organizations, believes that we cannot talk about a unified middle class and that as a term it is highly problematic. Instead, we should refer to the different categories of the middle class, a part of which can be considered as a member of the bourgeoisie, what she calls the petty bourgeoisie. She claims that after the 80's and the victory of PASOK we have a total new understanding of the definition of classes. In fact, the middle class as such was composed in this specific period but it is a question if it can actually be considered as such. She attributes to the middle class a series of characteristics that more or less can be considered as common with the previous informants. She talks about the life style of the civil servant, ingrained with the ideology of consumerism, expressed through the possession of a house ("my little house" as she says) and a car ("my little car" respectively). She also lets to reveal a bad connotation for her class and at the same time she rejects that it is under destruction, though she describes her personal situation as a catastrophe. *"The middle class has not yet been demolished. A couple with one salary, even a reduced one, still manages to survive. It is destruction for me that I am single. Alright, the situation in the big cities may not be good but see what's going on in the countryside"*.

She was not the only one to refer to PASOK as the "creator", let's say, of the middle class. Two more, D and J, young civil mechanics at the age of 35, mentioned that the term "middle class" started to exist after the governing of PASOK and didn't exist up to then. PASOK was the one to turn the farmers and the proletarians into middle class, by the mass opening of jobs to the public sector and the immediate rise on wages and pensions. At the same time it was the one to blame for the spread of the illusion of the "middle class society", in which everybody was, could or soon would be a member of the middle class. By referring to the "people" instead of the workers or the proletariat PASOK made the class lines seem vague and pointless. As J states: *"Everybody could find his place in this new concept of 'people': the farmers, the*

*workers, the petty bourgeoisie, the freelancers. At that point the distinction between PASOK and New Democracy was much more specific than the distinctions between the several social classes. 'People' was the cover of everything*". In this framework, a new ideology of individualism developed that demanded that everybody would fight on their own and for their own personal interests. This was accompanied by the logic of personal and family networks and bribery that were supposed to help the individuals improve their position in this new scenery of "Metapolitefsi". Of course this was not unintentional. For our informants, the aim was to destroy any notion of class consciousness, since class consciousness was synonymous to social fights and uprisings. This new era of "social peace" demanded a new kind of class alliance, in which the middle strata played a crucial role. Here, we need to mention that both of them had been political activists for many years. Though the one is still active, both as a member of a political organization and as a participant in the city movements and trade unions, the other has been quitted his action for many years. The only moment of inspiration was for him was the uprising of the Squares, where he found again expression and hope.

Although they both agree in the way middle class emerged in Greece, they differ in the way they perceive both how it was formed and how it got destroyed. D believes that the Greek society is characterized by a specific social stratification, which has changed a lot through time. This means that people that could be categorized in a specific way some decades ago, today they may belong to a different class. To justify this she gives the example of her father, who, coming from a working class family, managed, through university education, to become a member of the middle class, or what she calls "petty middle class". According to her this is how the middle class was created in general, people that after the 80's and through university education managed to become businessmen, freelancers or civil servants. Those were the people that used to have a relatively high level of living conditions, which was determined again mostly in market terms, by their ability to have their own house, one or more cars etc. According to her after the admission of Greece in the Eurozone, a lot of these people gained access to more money and at that point, this part of the middle class became, as she says, "something more than middle class", living a decade of a "general euphoria". Here, she makes a notion about a degree of social mobility that used to exist in the Greek society and led all those people to an improvement of their social position, which she determines in market terms, according to their income. For her the first victim of the crisis was the working class, followed by the middle strata. The second were mostly people that had taken some things for granted (either material or immaterial goods such as working conditions and life style), had a good quality of life and were trying to do their best in educational, economic, social and professional level. According to J, on the other hand, what he calls "the loans of Simitis" created the fake perception that we "are all middle class", as they gave people the ability to have easy access to money and to consume. As he says: "*A new class was created, which was taking money from the banks without any control until the bubble bust out. There was a large number of people that had money, although*

*they did not really own the money, paid loans, had goods and thus an illusion was created that “we are middle class” or “we are rich now” (a lot of people were saying that). They had a house at Panorama or Pylaia, they had a fancy car and their kids were studying abroad. They are the first to be hit by the crisis. Until 2011 they had collapsed”.* For him the middle class was not unified and he distinguishes many categories. There were a big number of people, though, that used to live as “middle class” while they were not. They gained a good life through loans but they remained stable and failed in the crisis. As he says, the social spectrum today is rather vague, as even some of the employers work under the same working conditions as their employees or some employees get the same salaries as workers. This is the outcome of the crisis: in the end, the classes will be so compressed that only two will remain.

The discussion about the loans doesn't seem to affect only the former two informants. Another one, named E (a middle-aged, former civil servant that lost his job when he got fired from the school he was working to as a guard) considers the loans of the 90's and 20's as basic characteristics of the middle class, accompanied by the possession of private property, more specifically real estate. While talking, he never refers to the “middle class” but to the “former middle class”. He believes that the middle class has now become the class of the “new poor”, which has now fallen into nonexistence, unable to repay the loans of the past. As he characteristically says: *“We used to be members of the middle class when we had a job. Now we are the ‘new poor’”*. On the other hand, the next informant (a young self-employed, owner of a private language school, named P) believes that we live in a class society, in which someone can find rich and poor as well as people in between. Of course this distinction is made in terms of income. As she says: *“The basic characteristic of the society is the economic one. I think history was always determined by this. Money makes the world go round”*. In this more simplistic schema she put herself in the middle class simply because she automatically excludes herself either from the rich or from the poor. And even if her income has started to diminish dramatically, she believes she still is a member of the middle class, since there are people in a much better or a much worse position. For her the basic characteristic of the middle class was the “Americanization” of its life style, a process that took place excessively and abruptly, through the new models that were presented on the TV.

The above presentation makes it obvious that it is too difficult to talk about a common definition of the middle class. Though, we can find some commonly accepted perceptions that almost all of our informants mentioned. First, all of our informants seem to understand and distinguish classes mostly in market terms. Thus, the middle class is all these people that can afford a “good life”, with relatively high standards of living. Questionings such as the position in the mode of production or the control of the means of production are totally absent. Inside production it is relatively easier to distinguish relations of exploitation and hierarchy, since there is always the exploiter and the bunch of the exploited, which are more or less in the same position. As a result it is much easier to gain class consciousness, by

recognizing your position, your rights, your allies and your enemies. In terms of market, though, the individual is alone; he becomes a consumer and not an active personality. What really matters is his ability to acquire goods and private property. Thus, having a high income, a house, a summer residence, a car etc. becomes really important, a criterion to distinguish somebody's class position within a complex social environment. In this race everybody could have the same chances, as the market is always impersonal, though the amount of money each one has at a specific time seems to be what differentiates people from one another and creates the different social stratifications. Loans play exactly this role: they create the bubble that everybody can have access to money at any time, thus have the right to consume freely. This is exactly the environment that probably helps to create ideologies of individualism and antagonism and prevent the creation of a distinct class consciousness that would help to the development of a common belief about who they are, in class terms. *"People care only about themselves"*, says one of our informants, while another talks about the mass belief that *"the crisis will not affect me, I will manage to skip it by myself"*. In most of the cases our informants talk as if they used to live in a vacuum of interests and their class interest and common goals had only to do with their lifestyle and the promotion of consumerist ideas. The surprising is that in many cases this specific tendency was mentioned with negative words or attitude by the informants, who don't hesitate to blame their own class and its people, proving the lack of feelings and practices of solidarity among them. The loans, the fake lifestyle, the Americanization of living all these are elements of a critique that the majority of our informants does to its own class, while at the same time they put themselves out of this critique, as if they were something different from the rest. They declare for themselves that they did not have any kind of consumerist habits, no loans or expensive needs, that their way of living was totally affordable to them, away from any kind of exaggeration. This is a huge controversy, how they describe in general their personal life and how they present their class. We will say more about it in the following part. Though, with some exceptions, they recognize themselves as middle class and they have a more or less common perception of what is happening to them right now, meaning the elimination of the middle class, at least the way it developed up to now. Furthermore, a great importance has been given to education as a means to social advancement and a ticket to a better life. Our informants do not mention specific occupations that can be included in the middle class, as though the occupation does not play any particular role or as any occupation could be categorized in any social class. There are general references to businessmen or civil servants but even those do not seem to make it clear why they are placed in this category. As the "school guard" says, there seemed to be a "class mess" in the Greek society, as everybody could claim to be anything without any specific class consciousness. Perhaps it was also a degree of social mobility that existed, leading in a frequent change of the class position of the individuals. Perhaps Georgia Petraki is right when she describes that the "retreat" of class consciousness and class analysis is a result of the elimination of the power of the forces that used to be the main bearers of such conceptions, like the worker's movements, the communist, workers' and

leftist parties, the syndicates etc. (Petraki, 2006). We could also talk about the hegemonic ideology of the state that for years demanded the end of class divisions and the promotion of a common social identity under the European dream of the 90's and the new "Great Greece" of the 2000's. The idea of social cohesion for the common goal characterized that period, an era of social tranquility and alliance between the lower and the upper classes under the promise that everybody will have a better life, no matter in which class they belong. "*Even the workers lived well*", says an informant. In this framework a whole strategy was developed that included all possible means, such as a rise in wages and pensions, the creation of the Greek welfare state but at the same time networks of "friends" and "relatives" promoted by the system, accompanied with practices of corruption of every kind that provided the easy way to success. Though, it would be important to see which exactly class identity was distorted throughout all these years and if the upper classes still keep a concrete class consciousness and serve specific class interests. It is the same mechanism that has been mobilized by the system since the very beginning of the crisis that tries to create feelings of guilt at the members of the middle and the lower classes, by distributing the blame for the crisis equally to everybody and the cost of the crisis mainly to the middle and the lower classes.

### **3. Experiencing the economic crisis in Greece through the middle class lens**

Our informant M stated at the very beginning of her interview: "*The middle class is literally effaced... We were determined not to live the lives of our parents but unfortunately we ended up living it*".

It is a usual phenomenon when analyzing the case study of Greece to forget about international and European character of the crisis and put all the blame on the structural inefficiencies of the Greek economy or the greedy and irrational way of living of the Greek population. The outbreak of the international economic crisis in 2008, though, revealed the most severe internal contradictions of the capitalist system and the way it has developed so far. As Professor Thanasis Maniatis states, in the Marxist way of thinking one can find two waves of explanation of the crisis, regarding its character and nature. The first one believes that we can talk about a crisis of the financial sector that on a later stage affected the rest of the economic and productive activity. The second wave traces its roots back in 1970. The difficulties in the accumulation of capital due to the economic crisis and the stagnation that followed led to the financialization of the economy as a way of making new profit. The spread of loans as a way of increasing consumption and the creations of markets of financial products helped the economy to recover only temporarily. When the "bubbles" that the system had created finally exploded, all the inefficiencies of the economic model and its inability to reproduce itself revealed, causing its breakdown as a whole (Maniatis, 2010). Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos believe that it is wrong to consider the crisis something else but global. As they write:

"It is not only a financial crisis or a crisis of debt but a structural crisis of

capitalism, still unfolding, caused by the very same factors that created a period of boom in the current circle of capital's accumulation: the depreciation of the value of the labor power, the financialization of capitalism, operating as an accelerator for the realization of surplus value and the making of more profits, the spread of investments risks through new tools such as Collateralization Debt Obligations, the gradual retreat of what has been known as the welfare state and so on” (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos, 2013).

The above have created a crisis of overaccumulation, causing the first signs of economic meltdown back in 2008. Through the channels of interdependence, established by the process of globalization, the crisis soon hit the European Union and the fragile structure of Eurozone, taking mainly the form of a crisis of debt. In that respect, the Greek crisis should be examined also as a part of the European one, based on the structural inefficiencies of the Union. As Sakellaropoulos states, up to a point was almost expected that “a single currency by countries with entirely different levels of productivity would bring to the light a host of contradiction” (Sakellaropoulos, 2010). For him, these are related with the different structural characteristics of each economy that lead to differentiations in inflation and GNP rates, in public debts and specialization of the internal productive systems (Sakellaropoulos, 2010). In the framework of the world crisis, those contradictions became even more visible. The fall in production and in the GNP led to an elimination of public revenues, creating a number of public deficits and a need for new borrowing. An increase in unemployment resulted in fall in general consumption and a bigger fall in public revenues (Sakellaropoulos, 2010). Thus, the European economies entered in a circle of recession, which led to a chain of downfalls that apart from Greece included Spain, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and a number of other states. Papadopoulos and Roumpakis try to explain why Greece, specifically, was hit so severely by the crisis. They distinguish between domestic reasons, which put the blame on the behavior of the society that overconsumed for years and the attitude of the domestic political system that created huge debts and deficits, and systemic reasons, which accuse the chronic economic inadequacies and the lack of policy options within the Eurozone (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2013). The two of them analyze the Greek crisis as a result of both, what they call a combined result of “perfect storm conditions” (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2013).

The propaganda of the Greek state since the beginning of the crisis tries to put the blame on equal terms both on the society and on the political system. According to David Harvey, this is typical for neoliberalism: to put the blame on the victim (Harvey, 2005). Since there is always someone successful, even in times of crisis, neoliberalism tries to impose feelings of guilt on the subjects, to persuade them that the system works and they are the problem. Thus, the victims personalize and internalize the failure. It is a way of breaking the social alliance, creating feelings of atomism, making the subjects feel numb and guilty and reproducing the established

relations of domination and exploitation. Athina Athanasiou writes that the representations that use the language of personal blame are the ones that legalize the political discourse of austerity (Athanasiou, 2012). Thus they promote the creation of a culture of social consensus and they “educate” people on how they should experience not only the crisis but also life after it (Athanasiou, 2012). One of our informants says: *“This is only propaganda. They are attacking specific classes in a ‘surgical’ way. Their logic was to win through the division of the enemy”* regarding the society as the enemy of the political and economic regime. Our informants, in their totality, reject all the accusations of over-borrowing or overspending above their personal limits. As we wrote above, all of them believe for themselves that they lived moderate lives, always aware of the money they used to spend. Although most of them had a small personal debt, especially due to bank loans, none claimed that this can be considered as an exaggeration, in an era when financial and banking products were so vastly promoted in any possible way. They may blame their class for its attitude of overconsumption but they totally reject this accusation for themselves. *“I had a salary but I never took any loans or anything like that”*, says T. *“I don’t believe we lived arrogantly. We were buying clothes but we wouldn’t throw them away until they went really off. We would rarely throw food away. That’s maybe why we are still able to live decently without having any income: we live from what we had. We wouldn’t throw anything away if it hadn’t gone off”*, says P. *“What exactly is exaggeration? Having a house? Wanting your kids to become educated in the age of knowledge? We could afford the lives we used to live, we never borrowed”* states M. Statistics prove them right. Paraskevi Peristera proves that Greece was one of the poorest countries in the EU-15. Even until 2007 Greece had one of the biggest rates of poverty, with 20% of the population living below the poverty rate (Peristera, 2007). In comparison with the other European states, it had one of the lowest private debts, including households and businesses, although it boomed after the entry in Eurozone (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2013). Here lies the controversy we mentioned above: although the subjects do not accept the accusations for themselves, they criticize their class with almost the same arguments. Although the subject reject the system and fight against it, they seem to have internalized the very same propaganda they reject. *“I hate being called a thief”* says P of them but at the same time she states that there were extravagancies for example in cars, which became a kind of social prestige. T states that middle class destroyed itself, while she recognizes the targeting of specific classes by the state and she refuses that she was over-consuming or fell in the trap of the financial products. Other informants talk about fake lives and “bubbles” through loans while they put themselves totally out of this, though in some cases the way they speak seems more like a way to excuse themselves. *“I know I am not a thief but I don’t know who the thief is anymore... I don’t trust anyone”*, says an informant.

The economic crisis from its very beginning was encountered as a “state of emergency”, in which the urgency of the situation demanded a series of “shocking” measures with a temporal character. In 2010 the former Prime Minister G.

Papandreou signs the Memorandum of Understanding with an international Troika consisting of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The demand is the sovereignty of the state to be subdued to the international governance, through a bunch of technocrats and experts, presented as “excellent” and unmistakable. A new austerity and reform program is being implemented, based on a number of difficult measures: cuts in salaries and pensions both for the private and the public sector, deregulation of industrial and work relations, abolition of socioeconomic rights obtained long time ago, a new system of taxation based on different, heavier tributes, the diminishing of the welfare state, initiation of a privatization program of crucial state- owned sectors and public property, “flexibilization” of working life accompanied by a reform of public administration leading to the dismissal of thousands of public employees, privatization of public companies and sale of public property. *“The attack we faced was severe. The measures were coming one after the other and literally destroyed our lives”*, says J. *“What is going on in Greece is outrageous. The first years we lived in a state of shock. It is so violent that, no matter how socially active you are, you feel that you can do nothing about it”*, says D. In fact Greece was not the first country to cope with such a package of hard neoliberal policies. After the crisis of 1970’s neoliberalism was the “medicine” for any possible economic “patient”. The IMF played a key role in this process. For the international elites the crisis was always an opportunity to apply the necessary neoliberal transformations to a series of countries that until now they had managed to resist. Greece was one of them, since its traditionally strong workers’ movement burdened the overall neoliberal transformation of the economy, although neoliberal policies could be traced in the strategy of every government since the 90’s. In that sense, Greece was the experiment of the international and European markets (as our informants claim) and the Greek package was just a way of ensuring that a new model of state would be created, based on the integration of the Greek economy both to the international and the European models.

The outcomes of the crisis were not equally distributed to the entire population. This is actually the great success of neoliberalism: it managed to reestablish class domination through the redistribution of the wealth to the upper classes (Harvey, 2005). As the international experience shows, after every crisis the dominant classes, or at least a part of them, were totally unharmed or had even earnings. This is exactly what has happened in the Greek case. For Sakellaropoulos, the recent economic package is a political strategy aiming to the promotion of specific class interests (Sakellaropoulos, 2010). In Greece, the Gini coefficient<sup>15</sup> increased from 32.9 in 2010 to 34.3 in 2012, in the heart of the bailout program, 1.5% almost in two years. As

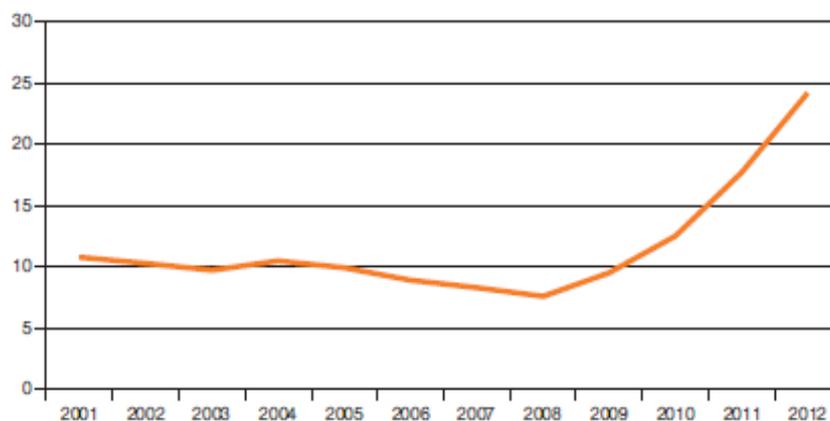
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15 The Gini coefficient is defined as the relationship of cumulative shares of the population arranged according to the level of equalized disposable income to the cumulative share of the total equalized income received by them. If there was perfect income equality the Gini coefficient would be 0%. A Gini coefficient of 100% means total income inequality and the entire national income is in the hands of one person. A Gini coefficient of 30% means that choosing randomly two persons the difference between their income is at 30% of the mean income (source: Hellenic Statistic Service).

Matsaganis and Leventi prove, between 2009 and 2010 the income of the richest 20% of the population appears to have risen while that of the poorest parts of the population has dropped (Matsaganis and Leventi, 2011). The trend continued to grow and by 2012 the income of the 20% of the wealthiest population was 1.5 times bigger than the poorest. Lefteris Tsoulfidis states that if we compare the distribution of income between capital and labor and the reward of capital and labor, the deterioration of the position of labor in comparison with capital becomes really obvious (Tsoulfidis, 2014). The biggest reduction of labor income takes place after 2007 and in the years of the crisis while the revenues of the capital seem to increase during the same period of time (Tsoulfidis, 2014). According to a study made by the international bank UBS the number of the extremely wealthy people increased in 505 in 2013, from 455 in 2012 and 445 in 2010 (Tsoulfidis, 2014). Their total income is estimated in 60 billion dollars, 20% more than in 2012 and 2011 (Tsoulfidis, 2014).

The burdens of the austerity program fell on the backs of the middle and lower strata.

**Table 1. Rate of Unemployment, year 2001- 2012**



Source: Hellenic Statistic Service

In the third quarter of 2013 unemployment reached 27% of the total population and a number of 1,345 million people. Here we need to stress that the measurement of unemployment is quite controversial, since it includes neither the rates of flexible nor part time or unpaid employment, which have become everyday reality nowadays. The majority of our informants belong to one of these categories. Our informant T states that although she got fired by the public television, she remained active to the occupation of the buildings of the organization and she continues to fulfill her former tasks just because she cannot cope with the idea that she is unemployed. We have to mention here that her family lives totally without any income, since her husband was an employee of the public television as well. J hasn't been paid for months, although he continues to work, since the company has been facing problems of liquidity for almost two years now. At the beginning it was supposed to be only temporal, but now he has a problem to survive on his own. Two of them, Ch and M, lost their jobs some time before they could get a retirement, after having served the public and private sector for many years from hierarchically high positions. For their age it becomes too

difficult to find a job. *“I am over 50 and while I should be able to support my children with their studies, their masters’ degrees, in their beginning in the life suddenly, due to the reduction in our monthly family income, I can’t even cope with the everyday needs. And the situation always gets worse. The state funding for unemployed people lasts only a year and for me is now over. Most of my shavings are now gone”*, states one Ch. She used to be a trainer at a private vocational school, where she also used to a managerial position. She is not the only unemployed in the family, as her older daughter, aged 26, hasn’t yet managed to find a job, while her younger daughter works as a waitress in a coffee shop while studying at the university. The family literally lives from the salary of the father, who holds a position as a university professor. Women and youth seem to be the most affected groups. According to V, a divorced woman with two children, the crisis totally flattened the women, especially those who were alone and had kids. For her, women actually had to face the effect of the neoliberal policies even before the crisis, as they were the first to face dismissals, unequal payments, flexibility of working relations and unemployment. Although she is now retired, she has an unemployed daughter, aged 26, which she is not able to support. As she says, one out of two young women today cannot find any kind of work, despite their level of education. A whole reserve army is being built on behalf of the capital, which serves as a means to devalue labor force even further, divide the working class and destroy productive forces. This is the cruelty of neoliberalism: in the end it turns people simply to numbers and expendable entities, side loses on the fight for “economic viability” (Athanasidou, 2012).

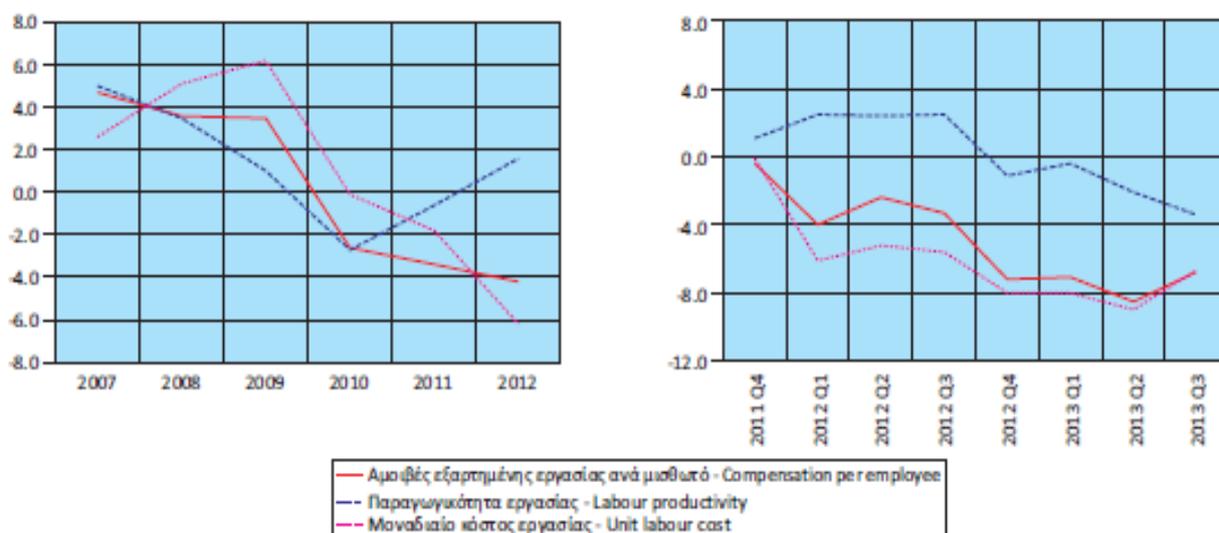
The policy of reduction of the cost of labor caused a series of cuts in wages and pensions that eliminated the family and personal incomes to the cover of the basics. In 2012 the year on year change of compensation per employee<sup>16</sup> dropped in -4.2 from 3.5 that was in 2009, meaning the very first beginning of the crisis. In the second quarter of 2013 we find the same rate in -8.5, almost double in only one year, indicating the rapidness of the changes. Within the period of the austerity program the unit labor cost<sup>17</sup> dropped by 6.1 percent, from -0.1 in 2010 to -6.2 in 2012, and the trend seems continuously decreasing, as in 2013 it even reached -9. The above are clearly presented to the table below.

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16 Refers to all branches of economic activity (source: Hellenic Statistic Service)

17 Average cost of labor per unit of output, calculated as the ratio of labor compensation to the real GDP (source: Hellenic Statistic Service)

**Table 2. Wages, productivity and labor cost, years 2007- 2013**



Source: Hellenic Statistic Service

The shrinkage of wages and pensions and the devaluation of labor cost have a direct impact on domestic consumption, since the purchase power of the population is steadily diminishing. One of the informants, V, explains that she had to cut everything not connected to basic needs from her everyday life, such as shopping or going to the theatre or cinema. She even stopped using her car because she couldn't afford paying the gas. Her constant anxiety was that there wouldn't be enough money for the next day. She characteristically says that she has learnt by heart the prices of every product she buys in the supermarket, so as to be able to estimate the money she has to spend. *"I couldn't sleep at night. My mind was a constant calculator, counting numbers relevant with the expenses of my daily life. At the end of the day we were saying 'Congratulations, we managed to obtain our food and to pay our bills'".* The table below presents the changes in the distribution of the monthly expenditures of the household since 2008. As we can see there is an increase in consumption on basic products like food and housing and a decrease in what can be considered as secondary like clothes and footwear. As another informant, J, explains he was obliged to cut his expenses in order to be able to survive. For a period he lived from his mother's pension, as he was not getting any salary from his job, although he was not unemployed. As he says he never starved, but he was on the boundary of living, unable to pay taxes and bills. *"I have stopped doing some specific things. I cannot buy a present, go to a doctor or a dentist but I still pay my electricity bills"*, says another informant.

**Table 3. Percentage of distribution of average monthly expenditures of households on goods and services, year 2008- 2012**

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Goods and services
16.4	17.3	18.0	19.5	20.1	Food
3.2	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.8	Alcoholic beverages and tobacco
8.2	7.9	7.2	6.2	5.8	Clothing and footwear
11.8	11.2	11.7	12.6	13.9	Housing
7.1	6.7	6.7	6.0	5.8	Durables
6.7	6.5	6.4	6.3	6.4	Health
13.4	13.3	13.5	13.2	12.8	Transport
4.4	4.3	4.0	4.0	4.2	Communications
4.8	4.9	4.7	4.7	4.5	Recreation and culture
3.1	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.5	Education
10.9	11.0	10.7	10.4	9.8	Hotels, cafés and restaurants
10.0	10.4	10.4	10.0	9.5	Miscellaneous goods and services

Source: Hellenic Statistic Service

The above should be combined with an increase in the average cost of living, through the increase on the prices of basic products and the imposition of new taxation, both direct and indirect. *“Everything got more expensive, even the bus tickets and we couldn’t go out of our houses anymore”* says V. The members of the middle and lower classes have to carry the burdens of the shrinkage of the tax- free threshold, the abolition and elimination of a number of tax exemptions and the simultaneous increase in the cost of a number of goods such as electricity, petroleum and gas. One of our informants, M, explains that due to her husband’s occupation, a mechanic owning a construction company, they ended up having a considerable real estate property. *“It has now become a huge burden for us. Until 2013 we have managed to pay our taxation but for 2014... God help us...”* The Federation of the Manufacture Organizations of Thessaloniki<sup>18</sup> estimates that more than 200.000 small and medium businesses will close down within 2014, as a result of the new measures and more specifically the increases in direct and indirect taxation, leading to a huge loss of jobs. Small and medium scale businesses has been one of the cores of the middle class economic activity for many decades and one can imagine the destruction that this will bring in class terms. What our informants characterize as the worst part of this new ‘tax invasion’ is the so called “haratsi”, a form of fees on private real estate property, imposed through the electricity bills. Papadopoulos and Roumpakis characterize this measure as a stroke at “the core of the main pillar of socioeconomic security of Greek families” (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2012). The majority of our informants believe that possession of real estate property and especially houses was a determinant factor for the middle class, on which they had put their fortunes. As they say, the “haratsi”, together with the liberation of auctions, marks the real end of the middle class. *“We have returned to the middle ages, it’s like living in the feudal system. Like in the middle age, they are creating the new “landless workers”, who are going to feed their new kind of “industrial- economic revolution”, the economic*

18 In Greek language it would be translated as Ομοσπονδία Βιοτεχνικών Σωματείων Θεσσαλονίκης. Source: <http://www.kathimerini.gr/752271/article/oikonomia/epixeirhseis/dysoiwno-to-2014-gia-tis-ellhnikes-mikromesaies-epixeirhseis-provlepei-h-ovs8>

*war of the financial products and the bubbles of the international economy. They want to alienate us from our property, to leave us only with the power of our hands, in order to become vulnerable, willing to sell ourselves at whatever price and to anybody. This is it, the extremist capitalism*”, says M. David Harvey states that this is what neoliberalism is all about: it is not the accumulation of capital through productive investments but the literal theft of already existing property (Harvey, 2005). This can take many forms that include the stealing of private property by the banks and the numerous international financial foundations, the stealing of public property through the privatizations of state and public enterprises and the stealing of public and social goods through direct sale (a characteristic example would be the sale of land, islands and beaches that has started to take place or the gradual process or privatization of health and education). Moreover, the destruction of small and middle sized businesses serves as a way of concentration of capital in the hands of the big capitalists that not only preserve and reproduce themselves in periods of crisis, but also strengthen their position and gain more power when the recession ends. The above process goes hand in hand with the delegation of power to the numerous international financial organizations, which work as mechanisms of robbery and speculation. This redistribution of wealth is a way of reproducing class domination, by strengthening the position of the dominant classes and disempowering the lower ones. Andrew Mellon, an American banker, had said some years ago: “In every economic crisis property returns to its real owners: us” (Harvey, 2005).

The destruction of the welfare state was mentioned by all of our informants as one of the worst outcomes of the crisis. Free access to public health and education, the system of social insurance through the public and social fund, the public kindergartens for the kids of the working families together with a number of other provisions used to be a pillar of security and a huge support for the members of the lower and the middle classes. The destruction of the welfare state, thought, begun long before the crisis as part of a process of gradual privatization of the key sectors of state action. As the informants say there was a yearly propaganda aiming to persuade people that the public sector and its provisions is problematic and whatever is private is of a much better quality. This was the beginning of a process of privatization that first tried to devaluate the public sector in order to bring the private on the surface. One of our informants accuse the state and the government of stealing the money of the public funds, by literally gambling them, as they invested a part of them on the stock exchange and another part on bonds. The money was totally lost and consequently access to free medical treatment and medication was almost cut. When she needed to be cured by a public hospital she had to take a loan, which she is still paying. Because of her health problems she was obliged to retire, but for a great period of time she was receiving no money at all. She counted on her mother’s pension in order to survive together with her two daughters. *“In the name of the debt and in order to save money they closed down schools and public kindergartens or stopped providing the kids with daily meals, they closed down the shelters for women, they privatized the structures of the “aid at home” that were supporting elderly*

*people and people with special needs, they even did not let women to give birth to their children if they couldn't pay the 950 euros needed by the hospital. A number of women had to leave their kids to orphanages because they couldn't breed them",* says V. The importance of public health is noted by almost all of our informants. According to one of them, T, the pressure the individuals feel makes a lot of them "lose their health". Her example was her mother, whose sickness some months ago was attributed to the anxiety she was feeling for her family, because of their bad economic situation. Another one, J, talks of the economic disaster that the sickness of his mother caused to the family, as they had to pay big amounts of money for her treatment. Two informants, N and S, are volunteers in the Solidarity clinic of Thessaloniki. N is a middle-aged teacher of a public elementary school while S is a 40-year old, currently unemployed woman, formerly working as a physiotherapist. They claim that during the two years of clinic's function they had more than 15.000 visits. At the beginning they treated mostly immigrants but now 70% of their patients are Greeks, mainly freelancers and small businessmen that during the last three years they have been unable to pay for their public insurance or they lost their jobs. *"I have seen retirees of the public sector, unemployed or people that work illegally and they are not insured. Up to a point we substitute the state by covering mostly Greek citizens",* says N. As they say, almost 3.000.000 people stopped paying for their public insurance during the four years of the crisis. *"Leaving people with diabetes or cancer without their medication automatically means their death. And people die in Greece nowadays... We can talk about a humanitarian crisis in Greece. There are hundreds of kids that do not get vaccinated; people with hepatitis and HIV do not have access to their medication; a true sanitary bomb".* The destruction of the welfare state is leading to a quick impoverishment of the population, since people will be forced to sell their property or get loans in order to afford the now privatized, formerly state, provisions. At least this is what is going on in the USA, whose model the Troika seems to follow. For the informants this policy constitutes a real mass murder. The Minister of health Adonis Georgiadis said it once in the most cynical way: not everybody needs to live. This is actually the core of neoliberalism: not only to create an economy based on the principles of free market and the apotheosis of private but also to create a society based on exclusion, where the state will have the total control on who is going to live. For Athena Athanasiou this is the way to create the ideal citizens of neoliberalism: he asks nothing from the state, he lives and thinks as a personality and not as part of a society, he is the "businessman of his own self" who accepts that equality doesn't exist and thus equal lives cannot be lived (Athanasiou, 2012). Whoever cannot succeed in this self-management of life, does not worth living. This is the new way of the system of imposing its domination: controlling life itself. In order to impose this bio-political power the system introduces mechanisms of exclusion, a new kind of racism based now on who can conform to this new style of governance.

*"During the last years we have faced a great increase in incidents of psychological diseases of every kind. Our psychologists work like crazy"* states one of the

volunteers at the Solidarity Clinic. All of our informants mentioned the psychological pressure they feel as a result from the crisis. Every one of them had his own experience to describe. *“The psychology of everybody is a bit strange... for the first time in my life I faced a breakdown. I feel I am in a dead end. I had panic attacks and had to visit a therapist”* says D. *“I now make small plans so as to avoid freaking out again. I try to be happy with the small everyday things. It is a way of self-protection from the general fluidity of our time. In this situation you lose your human nature, you become an animal. It is difficult for me to feel happy or sad. Everything passes in front of me like a movie”*. Another informant states that she feels ashamed to say that she cannot live while others faced much worse situations. People claim to be in a state of shock. *“I feel I am inside a vortex that takes me steadily to the bottom”*, says T. *“From every direction the psychological pressure was really hard. You could see no happy people. You had no one to rely on because everybody was like you”*. The worst impact is the devastating increase of suicides and suicidal attempts. In Greece almost two people per day commit suicides. Since the beginning of the austerity program we have almost 550 suicides, mainly of men, that they couldn't stand the great pressure and chose to die. One of our informants, T, has personal incidents to describe, since the shutdown of the public television caused the suicide of one of their closest colleagues, who couldn't stand the despair of unemployment. The vast majority of those can be connected with the austerity measures, a direct murder for their debt. But this is the crisis: apart from numbers, it is also about the living experiences of the destroyed lives of the people who live in it and internalize it. Of those, like our informants, that had to quit their life plans, to postpone marriages and children, to quit their studies because they couldn't afford it, to live without electricity or heat because they couldn't pay for it, to close down their businesses or live in unemployment for months and years, to give their homes to the banks, to migrate to other countries, to lose their dignity in order to survive, to fall in depression and even to die.

#### **4. Social movements in the period of the crisis**

The majority of our informants are also participants in a number of social movements that activate in the city of Thessaloniki. Here, we will try to investigate the connection between this new round of social mobilization and the participation of the middle class, as an organic part of it. At the beginning our scope was to work only with people participating in the citizens assemblies of Thessaloniki, mainly the ones of the eastern and central neighborhoods. Though, the decline of the movement of the citizens' assemblies obliged us to open our perspective and include a number of other entities, the occupied building of the National Television in Thessaloniki, the Solidarity Clinic of Thessaloniki and the Space for Solidarity for Women. The question we need to answer here is what is going on now with the middle class people, four years after the implementation of the austerity package.

The Greek debt crisis is a critical juncture in the contemporary history of the country and a turning point for the Greek mass movement, as a new round of protests starts to emerge, that used both the traditional way of protesting, such as strikes, and new ways of expressing solidarity and fight. In 2012 Greece hits a world record with more than 5.600 demonstrations per year, something that can be translated in more than 15 demonstrations a day, strikes, occupations of public and state buildings, protests at the offices of politicians and other forms. But the turning point in the citizens' reaction against the government and the Troika is the movement of "Aganaktismenoi", the Greek "Indignados". Most of our informants participated in that movement from its very beginning. For some of them it was the first moment of political activation while for others it was the reason to reactivate after a long period of abstention. The movement can be considered as part of the international movement of "the Squares" that began with Arab Spring only to be followed by the different "Indignados" and "Occupy" movements. All those revealed a form of "new internationalism" that united different people in different corners of the world under the same demands: democracy, dignity, justice<sup>19</sup>. Both political and economic oppression let all those people to the same statement: "We are the majority and we can change the world". Thousands of people were gathering every evening in these highly symbolic places, the squares<sup>20</sup>, where for the first time politics were becoming property of people. Protestors occupied public space, reclaiming it in a way, and created their own alternative society as a means of addressing the destruction of the existing. The squares protest against austerity, demand a government overthrow and a regime change, talk against politician and the parliament, the international institutions mainly IMF and EU, the bankers and their agents. The slogan of "direct democracy" becomes both a way to operate and a vision for the future, marking the need for greater participation of citizens into politics. The movement places a central goal: the Middle Term agreement. Here comes the reversal of the initial peaceful discourse and practice and the movement gives an actual fight against the police with hundreds of thousands of protesters. It is the time when people become really "dangerous". "*We were a real danger for their system*", states D. Though it didn't manage to fulfill this goal, it succeeded in a number of other ways: the resignation of a government, illegitimate to people, the fighting tradition it left to all those people that participated to the movement and a number of other initiatives of solidarity and resistance that were formed after the 'Squares' and used and evolved the already gained experience. At the level of the city, the numerous citizens' assemblies tried to directly "transport" the spirit and the practice of the

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<sup>19</sup> See: Μπαρτσιδης και Τσιμπιρίδου, 2014

<sup>20</sup> In the movement of Aganaktismenoi the squares become again the places of democracy and democratic dialogue, as in the ancient Greek tradition where the square was the main space for performing democracy, and fight, as in the tradition of the fights for democracy and constitution, especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> September movement for the establishment of a constitution that took place in the same square (The Syntagma square was named after this event as Syntagma in Greek means Constitution- another symbolism for the choice of the specific square). Finally, the fact that the square is just under the Greek Parliament played a crucial role in the creation of a dichotomy between real democracy, the real place it is performed and the people who perform it (direct democracy, the squares and the masses) and the rotten political regime- fake democracy along its performers and place (representative- fake democracy, parliament, politicians- professionals mostly- and MPs).

“Aganaktismenoi” to the level of the neighborhood. Beginning with the imposition of the unjust “haratsi” citizens started to self-organize, in order to repel the attack they were facing and express their solidarity to their neighbors, keeping the principles of equality and direct democracy they learned at the square. At the same time numerous movements of solidarity begun to function, in an attempt to address directly the problems caused by the austerity policies. The “Solidarity Clinic” gathers tens of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and volunteers, who with their own work and the aid and donation of the society have managed to organize by themselves a fully functional clinic and a pharmacy, which offers free medical treatment and medication to people that are excluded from the healthcare system. The “movement without intermediaries tries” puts the relation between the producer and the consumer in a new basis, talking about the notion of fairness in economy, instead of market, and posing the need of another management bot of the country’s production and of the distribution of food to the society. A number of local movements start to develop, such as the one against the privatization of water and that against the gold mine in Chalcidice. In parallel a number of worker’s and employees movement, such as the one of the employees of the National Television, who have occupied the central buildings in Thessaloniki and broadcast every day for more than a year now, and the movement of BIOME, a factory occupied by its workers who try to run it by themselves, proved that the ‘traditional’ way of protesting and demanding was not dead.

Inevitably one would ask who all these people were, in class terms, and what motivated them to mobilize. Douzinas states that *“on May 2011 a ‘multitude’ of men and women of all ideologies, ages and occupations, including many unemployed, started occupying Syntagma Square in Athens”* (Douzinas, 2013). For him, the “multitude” takes the notion of *“a material, coming together of people in spaces; a crowd with a common political desire, not a mute but a debating, deciding, acting crowd .... a new type of political subjectivity as a result of the return to the right to resistance”* (Douzinas, 2013). Inside it he spots three resisting subjectivities: the expendable, redundant humans; the biopolitically excluded and the democratically disenfranchised (Douzinas, 2013). All these are the new precariat of our times, seeming almost as a new “class” that form common interests and identities and thus common fights, all these expressed in a framework of equality, *“not as an objective or effect but the premise and strategic aim of action ”* (Douzinas, 2013). In fact, our informants give more “class” explanations to the rise of those movements. After all it was not only the movement of the Aganaktismenoi but also a number of other struggles and fights given in that specific period of time that more or less kept the “traditional”, let’s say, way of fighting through syndicates, strikes, general or departmental, occupations of buildings and other forms. Here we also have to consider the role of the Left that managed to gain important power in that specific period. For our informants, this, let’s call it, first round of fight had more or less class characteristics, consisting mostly from the members of the middle and the working class together that were in a process of compression. *“It was not only the middle class. It was the workers as well”*, says an informant. *“In all those movements a*

*number of people participated that hoped they would find a solution to their problem, the “haratsi” in the case of the citizens’ assemblies, without having a concrete class consciousness. But the ones that kept fighting after all those faded out and really believed that through collective action we can succeed were mostly workers and middle class members. The sample though in Thessaloniki is relatively small to enable us to make safe conclusions. The majority of them had somehow leftist and progressive references”* states D. *“The ones that really organized the “squares” had a previous experience and were politically more trained than the others that came to see what was happening there. The left organizations gave some of their knowledge in order to make things work. But the general characteristics of the “squares” were much more class, representing the lower classes, like the workers, with the traditional meaning of the notion. But at the same time you could find people that perceived the squares as an opportunity of self-expression”* says J. For him, the squares were the reason to participate again in the political struggles, as he had been absent from any kind of political fight for many years. For Ch it was the first time that she actively participated in some kind demonstration. After that, she became a fully active member, present to a number of city movements and solidarity initiatives. Maybe we could state that in this period we have the formation of a new class alliance between the middle and the working class, long before broken, that gave common fights against a common enemy and under some basic common goals, such as to overthrow the government or to stop the middle term agreement.

Since 2012, though, the scene in terms of mass mobilization is totally reversed. Mass movements seem to pass through a period of crisis, both in terms of identity and in terms of action. Participation to the different movement has dropped dramatically; some of them have even stopped to exist or they just vegetate. Many have started to feel powerless and there is the constant question of what we can do. Even our informants present an image of disappointment; some of them have stopped participating during the last months. There seems to be a combination of reasons for this. A lot of our informants mentioned the lack of a real hope that through the mass movement they can really change the regime. After facing a number of defeats and giving fights with no results at all, a lot of them seem to have lost their belief and energy. Additionally, there is not a political subject at this specific point willing to lead and able to describe persuasively another road other than the one we follow. *“There is not a political program or a plan to inspire us”* says J. *“What happened after the “squares”? What did we do? It just created more disappointment. Even the Left went home”*. The majority of our informants claim that they themselves feel disappointed but they wait for a change; that something will happen: *“I’m not sure we will continue like this. At some point there is going to be an explosion”*. For them the lack of a concrete class identity was the reason for their inability to react. The ideology of individualism that dominated during the last decades led people to develop personal strategies in order to overcome the crisis. Many claimed that in this situation everybody is alone, others that they would find their own way to survive or they would somehow remain totally untouched; some counted on what they already

had as saving or fortune, some others on their parents and family, while a lot chose to migrate to another country. All these attitudes are blamed by our informants. They claimed that even after the crisis the society continued living in an illusion. People developed feelings of defeat by believing that they can stand it as it is not going to last and feelings of guilt that stated that what was going on was fare because everybody was to be blamed. The society let to be patronized by the mass media that were stating that the crisis is only temporal. Though, it seems strange to see people committed to collective action blame society in such a harsh manner. It is also a way of division: people blame each other, unable to find the way to express their solidarity, name their common enemy and fight it. *“Your death is my life”*. It’s another way of internalization of the dominant ideology and although the informants realize that, they still seem to have assimilated it. According to the informants a lot of people tried on the first place to protect what they already had or what they were left with from fear that they were going to end in a much worse state. This made them unwilling to react and returned them home. Another reason for our informants seems to be the strategy that the government followed in order to pass the austerity package. The discourse of emergency and the “shock doctrine” that the government and the Troika followed made people feel numb, unable to understand what was really going on and thus unable to fight it. Moreover, the strategy of division of the society into different groups and attacking each group at a time didn’t help the people to realize that the attack would be total and would affect everybody. This created both feelings of sympathy and solidarity but also feelings of hostage, turning the different divisions against each other. *“The attack took place in a surgical way”*, says T. *“The propaganda about the ‘privileged’ turned the whole society against us”*. Furthermore, there was a part of people that encountered the acts of solidarity more as service or philanthropy. Thus, although they received the benefits of it, they never considered themselves as organic part and never participated. *“A lot of people see as offer of service, although a few of them help us when we need them”* says one of the volunteers at the Solidarity Clinic. We must not forget that the implementation of the austerity program included loads of violence in literal terms. Protesters had to face both the criminalization of their movements by the state and their literal hunt and the physical violence used by the police, as part of the usage of the monopoly of the state to violence. This is the basic element of neoliberalism, or “the extremist capitalism” as one of our informants says: the usage of violence. Here lies also its controversy: although neoliberalism is believed to go hand in hand with liberal democracy and propagates freedom as its major goal, in fact it needs a strong state that will be able to implement the heavy program, even with usage of violence when society does not cooperate. Our informants state that we live in a real junta. Under the discourse of “no alternative” the state is legitimized to use any means, even if they turn against the society. Additionally the depoliticisation of the society and the crisis of legitimation of the political system led a number of people fear anything that has to do with politics. People are afraid that there will always be someone to exploit them in order to gain power or to cheat them, since people are not neutral but they always serve specific interests. *“People believe that one way or the other we will return to where*

*we are now, that humans are always 'infected' by power and misuse it".* Finally, what they all mention is the big absence of youth from all these movements. *"The average age of the participants was between 40 and 55. Youth is absent from everywhere".* The ideology of individualism and the lack of high culture are blamed for this state of the youth, which seeks the easy way to personal survival mainly through migration. Moreover, they blame the new family models that have developed the last years, in which parents breed away from their children due to the heavy hours of work and as a substitute to their absence they fulfill every fake consumerist need their children may have.

So why do our informants mobilized politically in the first place and continue to mobilize in this difficult period? The majority of them believe that the ones who remained and still try to keep all these movements in existence were mostly political activists from the parties and organizations of the left and people that used to have a past in solidarity and resistance movements and would anyway participate. S, one of the volunteers at the Solidarity Clinic states that she has always been touched by the importance of the issue of health and that she would anyway take part in actions of solidarity, as she has been an activist for many years. *"For me it was totally natural to be here. When I wasn't a volunteer I was a member of my syndicate. One way or another social action has always been a part of my life. I have come to the Social Clinic because here I am more useful. But it also covers our own need to be with others and not to be alone. This is the message we want to pass as well: loneliness is not a solution. Together we can do something, if nothing else to support each other psychologically"*, she says. The issue of psychology plays an important role in the motivation of our informants. One of them, Ch, states that she couldn't just stay home and get depressed or commit suicide. For her, the committee she participates in is a place where someone can go and see how to face the difficult reality and an opportunity to start talking and externalizing his problems. V, a member nowadays of the Solidarity Space for Women, states that their slogan is: "No one alone in the crisis", pointing out the need of people to be brought together. *"I will not surrender. I am unemployed, I have loads of free time and I will offer it to help other people. I want to do something; I cannot stay at my home, stare at the ceiling doing nothing and live in misery"*, states N. For D there are two reasons that motivate people to participate in all those actions. The first one is because you cannot see yourself out of it; it is a part of who you are. The second is because you really believe that if you activate you can succeed or at least gain something. If you don't, you have already lost. This is the optimistic side. Maybe this has also to do with her participation in a political organization of the left. The employee of the National Television, T, states that their movement faced a lot of problems, like an internal split in two parts and the majority of the employees that finally surrendered. They even had to cope with 2 suicides. But she is committed to their cause. She believes that in the end the National Television will open again. She wants to fight so that it will remain independent and won't become mouthpiece for any political party or any future government. *"They wanted to bury us but they didn't realize we were just the seeds"*. J states that he is

optimistic. The system is a whole mechanism and will not abandon the fight easily but after all it is the political decision of the people to put an end. He believes that one way or the other there is at some point going to be a reaction and he wants to be part of it. Although he had a political background he was inactive for many years until he was inspired by the fresh air of the “Square” movement that was far away of the usual way of manifestation. There he had the chance to meet people, listen to new things and expressed his own opinion. *“It was like an automatic reaction, I didn’t think much of it”*, he says. *“The change is very big. The situation has affected me a lot. It hurts me, because I cannot stand this humiliation of people and their lives. I feel we are being humiliated; they are humiliating our standards of living and our personal dignity. They are humiliating us as a country. In previous times Greeks where admired everywhere. What about now? For all these reasons I want to participate and help as much as I can”* says Ch, a member of the citizens’ assemblies. Through the committee she feels she can mobilize the people, so that every social, economic and political change will be the product of them and not of the elites. *“Everything that is being built from the base of the society is the foundation on which we are going to build the sociopolitical change. The committees can become a form of another “management” let’s say of our needs. So yes, they are a hope, because they build the perception that people can “manage” everything on their own. It is another, new perception of our role”*.

## **5. Conclusion**

After four years of austerity policies we need to ask what is going on in terms of class relations in Greece. We have put the focus of our research on the middle class, not only because it is the one that has been facing a mass destruction in the period of the crisis, but mainly because it is so difficult to say precisely what is this middle class, after all, who belongs to it and why and mainly if it can be considered a class at all. The debate is not only taking place in scientific terms, with the development of a huge variation of theories concerning the middle class, but also in social and individual, affecting the way people define themselves, both individually and collectively, and internalize the experience of the “middle class”. This is clear when we think of our informants, who, although they share some common views and perceptions, it is very difficult to say if they really develop some kind of class consciousness and belonging to some specific group. Although the majority of them claim to be members of the middle class, this “belonging” seems to be something different for anyone of them. There are also those that totally exclude themselves from the middle class, although they may be generally perceived and thought as members of it. The determination of the middle class is mostly done in market terms (income and consumption), a tendency connected with the years of “euphoria” that the Greek society lived in the 90’s and 2000. Though, it would be really interesting to see how the other classes are defined and what constructs the personal identity against “the other”, at least in class terms, and in what relation do they place

themselves with those “others”. This would need a broader approach on the matter of classes, in order to try to define class and approach the matter of interclass relations.

Maybe what is more common among our informers is their experience of the crisis and their perception of what is going on with their lives nowadays. Almost all of them clearly talked about an attack and an end of the ‘middle class’ and they used the term “the new poor” in order to re-define themselves in this new situation. They face similar threats, both from the direct implications of the Troika policies on their everyday lives (referring to measures such as the diminishing of wages and pensions, the increases in taxation etc.) and from the indirect implications of the crisis such as the increase in unemployment rates, the implications of the crisis on their health and psychology etc. This new self- definition seems to be described in terms of loss: all those people that were comprised by the crises, lost their rights and jobs, were robbed of their fortune and had to face a dramatical change. The truth is that we live in a period of social fluidity and relocation. The crisis has caused a redistribution of wealth towards the upper classes, which see their position strengthen and their interests promoted. At the same time the middle and the lower strata face a hard downward compression. Though, it is relatively early to say how exactly the scene is going to end.

The majority of our informants participate actively in a series of social movements that emerged in the period of the crisis in the city of Thessaloniki. They have different reasons of activation, including the implications of the crisis in their everyday lives, the need to resist, the need to socialize and share the common problems and the psychological motives etc. All this are clearly contrasting with the ideology of individualism, which is presented as mainstream in the Greek society. At the beginning of the crisis there seems to be a period of time that the middle class massively mobilized, expressed in the different movements that developed in this turbulent era, with a peak at the movement of Aganaktismenoi but also after it through a network of solidarity initiatives and resistance movements. As our informants claim, the fights are given in common with the elements of the working class, forming a new social alliance that seeks to destroy the former social contract and play a new role. Although they managed to form common demands and give common fights, they faced disappointment, betrayal by the political system and retreat, unable to form a new block that would pose their own counter hegemony and question the established regime. Though, the process is ongoing. The political system is passing through a state of total delegitimation and the hegemony of the upper classes is guaranteed mainly through violence, promises and discourse of emergency and fear. But while the old is dying, the new seems up to now unable to form, as there is total lack of a social, economic and political suggestion able to inspire, mobilize and organize people. The majority of our informants stated the lack of a political program- party that can give them hope and persuade them to support it wholeheartedly. We need to stress here that the opinion of those members of the middle strata that do not participate in social movements is totally absent from this

essay. This would be a field for the continue of the present research in the future.

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