The Greek 'Underdog' Political Culture: An anti-European political identity?

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Abstract

In the literature of Greek politics, the 'underdog' political culture is not only widely considered to be one of the main ideological entities of the modern Greek political system since its inception, but also the main source of resistance to the processes of modernization, Europeanization and globalization. In the context of the Greek sovereign debt crisis and the wider Eurozone and multiple EU crises of the last few years, many have argued that this so-called 'anti-European' political culture has been revitalised in Greece by the contradictory responses from the EU towards Greece, but also the domestic appropriation and exploitation of underdog narratives by both radical right and left wing political powers. The present paper reflects on the above issues and challenges the conventional notion that the Greek underdog political culture is necessarily 'anti-European'. Through the presentation of empirical findings based on focus groups and personal in-depth interviews in Greece, this paper argues that the distinctly democratic political identities that the EU strives to create and maintain as part of its own desired political identity as a specifically democratic institution, are paradoxically the same kind of identities that resist and challenge its direction and the course of European integration. Conclusively, the paper suggests that contestation of Europe can be alternatively read as a sign of a healthier political community.

NOTICE: Please note that this is a work in progress and contains only preliminary analyses and as such, no ultimate conclusions should be drawn from the current draft.

Introduction

In the literature of Greek politics, the term 'underdog political culture' has become a widely accepted theoretical framework inside which to interpret political life in modern Greece (Triantafyllidou *et al.*, 2013: 3). Indeed, it is often the case that disparate and varied research projects on Greek politics and society, often begin their inquiries by referring to the well know cultural dualism that Diamandouros first elaborated in his seminal long essay in 1994 (e.g. Halkias, 2004 on the politics of reproduction; Kalpadakis & Sotiropoulos, 2007 on foreign policy change; Paraskevopoulos 1998 on social capital; Spanou, 2008 on reform; Stavrakakis, 2002 on religion and politics). This cultural dualism situates the 'underdog' political culture as antithetical to the imported culture of modernization, a process that has frequently come to be understood as a parallel one to those of Europeanization and globalization (Diamandouros, 1994). As such, in Greek studies during the last two decades the underdog culture is not only largely considered to be one of the main ideological entities of the modern Greek political system since its inception, but also the primary source of resistance to the country's modernizing path towards Europe and the rest of the western world (Diamandouros, 1994).

In the context of the Greek sovereign debt crisis and the wider Eurozone and EU crises of the last few years, many have argued that this so-called 'anti-European' underdog political culture with its populist and Eurosceptic undertones has been revitalised and radicalised in Greece (Malakos, 2013). This development could be attributed to the importance of the appropriation and exploitation of populist underdog narratives by both radical left and radical right political powers in Greece (Vasilopoulou *et al.*, 2013). These rhetorical usages combined with the disintegration of the past political system of the Metapolitefsi era that was played out between the two main political parties of PASOK and New Democracy, has allowed newer political parties to emerge as primary political actors, as in the cases of SYRIZA and the Golden Dawn (Pappas, 2013). Additionally, this could also be attributed to the significance of what has been publicly perceived as contradictory responses from Europe towards Greece during the economic crisis, such as lack of sufficient solidarity, formation of negative national stereotypes and imposition of unpopular austerity measures by the often demonised Troika (Featherstone, 2014; Kutter, 2014; Papagiannidis & Frangakis, 2010). Such accusations have often been understood as making the EU rather unpopular among the Greek citizenry.

In many respects, all of the above issues verge on the established research area of national and European identities and Euroscepticism, because – simplistically put - the kind of national political cultures and their corresponding political identities can either be framed as 'pro' or 'anti – European' (Fulga, 2005). The present paper would like to argue that it is important to examine and problematize the above issues through theoretical reflection and political argument, but also empirical research, because nationalist or Europeanist political identities are an important political feature during the wider Eurozone crisis since they can either promote integrating or disintegrating social tendencies. In other words, they can act as a form of political glue for the present and future of European integration - or not thereof. Furthermore, when we speak of Euroscepticism it is important to listen to what Eurosceptic agents, such as underdog identifiers, are saying and to comprehend what kind of Euroscepticism they project. Finally, in the Greek case, it is important to explore underdog

political identities because despite the popularity and fine articulation of the theory, its empirical record is virtually absent, which constitutes a large research gap in the existing literature.

As such, this paper wishes to challenge the conventional idea that the underdog political culture is necessarily anti-European and problematize the notion that the arguments projected by what we could call 'underdog political agents' are typically Eurosceptic. Consequently, this paper argues that we can understand this underdog political culture not only as congruent to the political ideals of the EU, but also as a valuable and useful reminder of them, and eventually as a necessary part of EU democracy. As far as the economic crisis is concerned, this paper demonstrates through empirical data from focus groups and personal interviews with Greek citizens that the kind of Euroscepticism met in Greece is not a radicalised one, but rather what we could call a 'conditional' one, based on a support that means to be granted only if certain conditions are met. Conclusively, the paper argues that the distinctly democratic political identities that the EU strives to create and maintain as part of its own desired political self-image as a distinctly democratic institution, are paradoxically the same kind of identities that resist and challenge the direction and quality of European integration. Ultimately, the paper suggests that politicized contestation of Europe can be alternatively read as a sign of a healthier political community, and a spiritedly interested public, rather than a disinterested and indifferent one.

The paper will begin by offering a presentation of the main tenets of the underdog theory as articulated by Diamandouros and associated authors. It will continue by outlining the political ideals of the EU as these are proclaimed in the formal documents on European identities, most notably the Declaration on European Identity in 1973, the Charter on European Identity in 1995 and the Udine Declaration in 2007. In the next part a discussion will follow whereby a comparison between the two will be attempted and the aforementioned arguments of the paper will be substantiated. Moreover, during this discussion preliminary findings of a study on national and European identities in Greece during the Eurozone crisis will be presented and used to punctuate the argumentation. These findings were produced by focus groups and personal interviews with Greek citizens in Athens during the spring and summer of 2014.

The Greek Underdog Political Culture

The term 'underdog' when used to describe Greek political reality was not first mentioned but Diamandouros, but it was his long essay on cultural dualism (Diamandouros 1994) that elaborated and built on Triandis's observation in 1972 that Greeks widely tend to identify with the underdog in any given struggle and are sensitive to the wrong doings of the more powerful (in Stephanides, 2007: 7). In this essay, Diamandouros employs a historical and cultural analysis of Greek society with references to the Ottoman, Balkan and Byzantine heritages (Diamandouros, 1994: 12) and diagnoses that the Greek political landscape has been divided throughout time into two antagonistic political cultures, the modernizing one and its opponent, the underdog. As explained (Diamandouros, 1994: 22), the latter is the political

culture that has claimed the allegiance of the majority of the Greek population since independence.

One of the main features of the underdog theory is that it encompasses a wide array of social attitudes, practices and characteristics, risking becoming an umbrella term for everything that is judged to be problematic in a society, culture, or nation - in this case the Greek one. This is why theories of political culture have often been rightfully criticised for being all inclusive or prone to implicit or explicit essentialism (Elkins & Simeon, 1979; Gendzel, 1997). From primordial attachments, pronounced xenophobia and intolerance of the alien (Diamandouros, 1994: 13, 18) to authoritarianism, parochialism and preference for familism, clientelism and statism (Diamandouros, 1994: 13-20), the underdog political culture encapsulates numerous and varied social phenomena. In this paper the focus will be placed on those cultural elements that are relevant to the kind of attitudes and beliefs that the underdog exhibits towards the international political landscape and its perceived relations to the EU and the rest of the world. This would allow us to reflect on the conventional understanding that the underdog is necessarily Eurosceptic by being hostile to the process of European integration.

To this respect, the underdog has a characteristically defensive view of international politics (Diamandouros, 1994: 18), distinguishing between the powerful and the powerless of the earth. In this context, the underdog culture often projects what is seen as anti-European, anti-western and anti-American arguments and criticisms. The same differentiation occurs in domestic politics whereby distinctions are made between the powerful political elites and the less powerful majority of the population, resulting in populist arguments. More specifically, populism is considered as a subculture of the underdog culture (Mouzelis, 1985). The underdog's political ethics concentrate on a levelling egalitarianism that demands social equity and protection, and strong tendencies towards identifying with and lending support and solidarity to any given collectivity that is perceived to have been done wrong by powerful international players, often resulting in demands for compensatory justice (Diamandouros, 1994: 18, 38). Finally, the underdog political economy revolves around ideas that are rather ambivalent towards global capitalism and the modern market which leads it to prefer pre-capitalist practices and experimentation with alternative paths to modernization (Diamandouros, 1994: 13-22). In short, the Greek underdog political culture is an insecure political identity that holds a defensive stand against what is understood as negative effects of modernization, including capitalism, Europeanization as part of the European integration, and globalization processes with their increasing interdependencies.

In opposition, the modernizing political culture is theoretically described as embracing antithetical characteristics to the underdog. As such, the modernizing culture looks at the industrially advanced nations of the West for inspiration and support, has a distinct preference for reform and rationalization along liberal, democratic and capitalist routes, favours the market mechanism and an internationally competitive economy, and is receptive to innovation and less anxious about the costs of social change (Diamandouros, 1994: 22-23). Furthermore, the Greek modernizing culture exhibits sensitivity and adaptability to changing conditions, an imitative and eclectic temperament to ideas coming from Western European

prototypes, a cosmopolitan attitude often linked to a high sense of Greece's international significance, a mild, secular and more sophisticated xenophobia compared to the underdog's aversion, and a dynamic nationalism grounded in the will for survival, combined with a manipulative and simultaneously realistic approach to international affairs (Diamandouros, 1994: 25-26). The social strata that adhere to the modernizing culture include business and industrial elites linked to the international system, Greek diaspora communities, especially their bourgeois segment, and various intellectual exponents inside and outside Greece (Diamandouros, 1994: 24).

The problem with this narrative that differentiates so clearly the modernizing agents is that it creates the inaccurate distinction between an 'enlightened' elite of reformist politicians, modernist intellectuals and successful professionals in the Greek diaspora who are supposed to be standing in pure opposition to the 'backward and provincial' domestic masses of citizens who project their own arguments and disagreements based on their own social and political experiences and understandings. As such, this theoretical framework can seem as fostering a strong element of elitism. Furthermore, the underdog theory may seem to assume at times that while the modernist elites are the sole advocates of social change, the majority of the public is necessarily hostile to any structural change, cultural shift or administrative reform. This can be seen as problematic because it implies that the very idea of social change is monopolised by the modernist camp, ignoring the arguments and desire of change that are voiced in the opposing camp of the 'mass underdog'.

The same applies for the two cultures' relation to the EU. While the modernist camp is unproblematically represented as an inherent part of the EU experience and a pioneer of Europeanization, leading to the enhancement of the country's European identity, the underdog political culture is presented as an alien and chronically far-flung element that stands separately and in complete dissonance. But what are these elements that make up the meaning of European identity, and as a consequence the standards by which to evaluate how 'European' a political discourse is? And who are the social agents that are supposed to carry this European identity? The following section will present the EU's political ideals in an attempt to answer these questions.

The European Union and its Political Ideals

This section will outline a list of the main political ideals that construct the political identity of the EU by coding through the EU's official documents on European identities, namely the Declaration on European Identity (Copenhagen, 14 December 1973), the Charter of European Identity (Lubeck, 28 October 1995), and the Udine Declaration (Udine, 9 November 2007). In these texts, there is a range of recurring themes that sketch out the notion of European identity, such as various commonalities among European nations, the related notions of unity and peace, ideas of the social Europe and of human rights, conceptions of democracy and cosmopolitanism, as well as and diversity and pluralism, and finally Europe's global role.

To this respect, the declarations speak of common features that European nations share, such as heritage and civilization, as well as values, attitudes to life (DEI, 1973), shared European identity awareness and historical roots (CEI 1995). These European values widely encompass:

> 'a European identity based upon a common respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, equality (including gender equality), the rule of law, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, social justice, shared powers, subsidiarity and diversity' (UD 2007)

The declarations often speak in both an affirmative and a suggestive way of these European standards as if these is what they are and should be, and stress the importance of the rule of law and social justice as the ultimate goal of economic progress (DEI, 1973) and the significance of enabling people to live in dignity (CEI, 1995). To this respect, trade and industry are meant to exist to serve the people and to eliminate unemployment (CEI 1995). All these resonate with the ideas of the European social model (Jepsen & Serrano Pascual 2005). Furthermore, the declarations speak of the role of democracy and the need for a European demos that can engage in public debate over reform proposals (CEI 1995).

In addition, and compliant with the EU's moto 'united in diversity' the declarations speak of the dynamic nature of European integration inside which national cultures are meant to be preserved and protected (DEI, 1973; CEI, 1995) and further promote tolerance towards other cultures (CEI 1995). In terms of Europe's global role, it is argued in DEI (1973) that power and responsibility can be in the hands of a very small number of great powers which creates the need for Europe to 'unite and speak increasingly with one voice if it wants to make itself heard and play its proper rôle in the world'. It is further emphasized that Europe should ensure that international relations have 'a more just basis' and that the independence of states should be defended by guaranteeing that the security of each country is more effectively upheld (DEI, 1973). In terms of global objectives, prosperity is argued to need to be more equitably shared (DEI 1973) and the EU should contribute to international progress, conflict prevention and mediation (CEI 1995).

In short, the EU is pictured as an agent that shall strive to deliver peace, prosperity and democracy inside and outside its boundaries, and as a global actor that holds responsibility for the lives of ordinary citizens. Furthermore, the EU is framed as a community that is based on shared cultural and political values, heritage and history, commonalities that co-exist with diversity and pluralism. All of the above are the declared political ideals of the European community that have inspired various normative theories of European identities, based on varying views of Europe, such as the 'cultural or heritage-based Europe' (Camia, 2010; Vujadinović, 2011), 'cosmopolitan or pluralist Europe' (Camia, 2010; Vujadinović, 2011), 'civic and political Europe' (Shore, 2004; Vujadinović, 2011), or 'international Europe' (Manners & Whitman 2003). How can we understand the meaning of these ideas that constitute normative understandings of the European political culture with reference to the so-called 'anti-European' Greek underdog political culture? Are the two necessarily incongruent and oppositional? In the following section preliminary findings suggest that this does not need to be the conventional reading of the Greek underdog and its Eurosceptic political discourse, and alternative readings are proposed.

An anti-European political identity?

In the present study of national and European identities based on focus groups and personal interviews with Greek citizens, various aspects of the underdog political identities were encountered and observed in the participants' discourse. As such, various interviewees were categorised as adherents to the political culture of the underdog on the basis of exhibiting several political views that resonate with the underdog narratives as those were described above, such as defensive views of international politics, nationalist sentiments, Eurosceptic tendencies, populist ideas, anti-capitalist arguments, and support for developing countries in general. Although Xenakis (2013) has rightfully and for good reasons argued against stereotypically dividing individuals and groups in either one or the other cultural stream and has suggested that we move beyond this dichotomy, the necessity of empirically studying these 'underdog' political identities demands a degree of typification. As such, various participants of this study were typified as 'underdog identifiers' to facilitate the process of analysing the discourse and argumentation they employed.

As was previously suggested by Xenakis (2013) with her term of 'normative hybridity', and as is affirmed by this study, there is no 'pure' modernizing or underdog political subjectivity to be met in empirical reality and individuals may choose to employ both modernizing and underdog features in their political opinions. In a sense, this was suggested by Diamandouros's original thesis which explained that these types of cultures are ideo-typical in character and it is more likely that the two intersect in the real world. In the same line of reasoning, interviewees of this study almost never exemplified the full range of characteristics of any one of the two conflicting cultures. Nevertheless, it was observable in the discourse employed by some participants that their ideological loyalties where closer to one of the two political cultures, which made the typification of research participants feasible and tenable. The interviews of this study revealed a wide array of contradicting phenomena in people's political discourse regarding a variety of issues. This paper will focus on the 'pro-European' elements of 'underdog identifiers'.

In this study, various socio-economic groups were interviewed that belonged to both active and inactive in the labour market spheres of the society. The inactive groups in the labour market included students, pensioners and unemployed people, while the active groups included employees in the public sector, employees in the private sector and self-employed professionals. The preliminary and to this point incomplete analysis of the produced data indicated that what we have called 'underdog identifiers' could be found across all of the above groups. However, some examples will be presented here from the student and pensioner groups of this study where many underdog narratives were employed. In the student group, several participants belonged to the radical left wing spectrum in terms of their electoral choices and voted for the Communist Greek Party (KKE) or for ANTARSYA (Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left), two parties that could be classified under the wider underdog cultural label, because of their political views on international and EU politics, such as critique of global capitalism and rejection of European integration.

Among the students, there were several critical arguments against the EU and many spoke of the dissonance between the reasons for the creation of the EU, such as peace and cooperation between nations, and the course of the European integration which in their view did not reflect these ideas in practice. They expressed great disappointment and frustration with the state of the EU today, voted for clearly anti-EU parties, but at the same time largely exemplified awareness of proclaimed European political ideals, and unexpectedly exhibited hope and support for the future of the EU project. For example, as one of the young KKE supporters stated at the end of the focus group session, 'it is worth being in Europe'. Left wing students with high underdog identification as exemplified by their interpretation of the international politics and use of revolutionary or even anarchist discourse, stated that they are proud of their country's 'distinctly democratic tradition' expressed in the protests and in demonstration, or as they labelled it 'social reflexes' and demanded that the EU becomes 'more democratic'.

Other participants when asked about the issue of European identity argued that they thought that the term was limited and insufficient to describe their political stance, criticised the notion of European identity, and went on to argue in favour of a cosmopolitan political identity that would embrace other world regions too. As stated by one of the young participants of this study 'I'm a child of the world'. As such, it was obvious that these young Greek people who were very critical of the EU used the same terms that the EU uses to describe its own political identity, such as democracy and cosmopolitanism, in order to construct their criticism against it. More importantly, it was the same young participants who seemed to be more 'educated' on European history and ideas and showed awareness of what could constitute a European identity in terms of political, cultural and economic standards. However, this did not necessarily translate into support for the EU. For example, a young interviewee who said that he felt very European, admired the European heritage and history, had been on European experiences, such as the Erasmus, declared that he did not need the EU or his country's EU membership to feel or participate in the 'European' experience.

In the pensioners' group, participants exemplified an increased identification with agonistic politics of resistance and projected various populist and conspirational interpretations of the crisis, exemplifying elements of the underdog narrative. A pensioner stated that she would tolerate any kind of protest against reforms and austerity measures as an expression of 'solidarity for the disadvantaged'. The same person stated that she would not advocate exit from either the EU, or the Eurozone, and confined that she felt very European and that Greece was really a European country. Other participants in the pensioners' group talked about issues of social welfare and a distinct preoccupation of wanting to live with dignity in their older days. As such, participants projected arguments that feature in the EU's official documents as the social goods that the EU would like to offer to its citizens, such as this request for 'living with dignity'. In other words, many participants who criticised the EU did so by 'throwing back' at it the very same ideals that the EU itself aspires to: democracy, cosmopolitanism, social welfare, human rights.

Finally, despite the co-existence of underdog narrative elements and Eurosceptic arguments and critiques, many expressed their belief in what they commonly referred to as the European

idea or vision, and as such, exemplified a high degree of Europeanist spirit. This went back to the original ideals of the European community, such as peace, co-operation, unity and solidarity. In fact, the adherence of the EU to its original ideals was their main condition for their continuous support for European integration. As a result, it became obvious that in many respects, the 'love' for Europe co-existed with its 'hatred'. As one unemployed young participant explained in a metaphor, referring to her grandfather's social attitudes:

> 'When my grandfather was aggressive towards someone that usually meant that he cared, that he loved him a little… if he didn't take notice or say anything to him that usually meant that he didn't care about him at all…'

Similarly, these kind of Eurosceptic underdog political identities are not necessarily against Europe, but they constitute part of its multifaceted democracy and a reminder of its original ideals, which include public debate and political critique. In fact, these kind of dissenting and contesting semi-Eurosceptic identities may be the ones that keep the European demos alive and interested. In the Greek case, the degree of support and interest in the EU may be attributed to the salience of EU issues during the economic crisis and the increased sense of insecurity that may have led to an increased support for EU membership as a perceived source of security and stability. More analysis of the existing data and more research would be needed to clarify these points.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to challenge the conventional idea that the Greek underdog political culture is necessarily anti-European and problematized the idea that the political discourse emanating from these streams of Greek society are typically Eurosceptic. The paper begun with a presentation of Diamandouros's original thesis on cultural dualism of modernizers and underdogs and subsequently presented the proclaimed political ideals of the EU as these feature in its declarations and other formal documents on European identities. A reading of these documents revealed a variety of recurring themes, such as commonalities between the European nations, unity and peace, ideas of social and democratic Europe, human rights and the rule of law, conceptions of cosmopolitanism, diversity and pluralism, and Europe's global role.

The preliminary analysis of Greek citizens' political opinions on European integration, the economic crisis and Greece's position in the EU suggested that participants who exhibit many of the populist, nationalist and Eurosceptic attitudes of the underdog narrative and can be classified as 'underdog identifiers' do not necessarily reject the project of European integration or project identities that are non-European. As such, this paper proposed that instead of looking at the Greek underdog culture as a separate and incongruent part of European political culture, we can alternatively view it as a compatible part of the European public sphere. Furthermore, this paper suggested that underdog identifiers that may see the EU in cospirational terms, may use the very same political ideals that the EU aspires to in their critique of the course of European integration. As such, it was argued that underdog national

cultures may function as useful reminders of such ideals like democracy and cosmopolitanism, and may fruitfully contribute to public debate over the contested nature of these ideals.

Moreover, the preliminary analysis of the data indicated that the kind of Euroscepticism that is to be found in Greece is often one that criticises the development of European integration and co-exists with a Europeanist spirit that advocates for and not against the 'original ideas' for the creation of the EU and posits a conditional support on the basis of returning to the original values that inspired the foundation of the EU, such as unity, co-operation, solidarity and peace. In conclusion, it is suggested here that the very same democratic political identities that the EU strives to create and maintain as an essential element of its aspired political identity are paradoxically the same kind of identities that contest and challenge it. As a result, we can understand these underdog Eurosceptic identities and the politicised contestation of the EU that they carry as signs of a healthier political community characterised by a spirited and interested public, rather than a disinterested and indifferent one.

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