

**In, against and beyond the demand:
Demand and identity as breakwaters of the content
of collective action. The concept of form as the
embodiment of emancipatory dimensions of struggle.
The experience of the claim for housing at the
University of the Aegean**

Marios Panierakis

Abstract

The University of the Aegean did not remain unaffected by the overall implementation of austerity policies following the economic crisis of 2008. In this paper, we examine the collective action expressed in Mytilene in 2013, following the cutback on funding for student residences. In particular, we explore the meaning, political significance and limits of this collective action, questioning the notions of collective identity and demand. The latter interpret, at first sight, the outbreak of collective action, but fail to signify its emancipatory aspects. The paper's central thesis is that those categories (demand and collective identity) obstruct the development of its context. In contrast, we support that a concept of form that underlines the fragility of social relation can be the starting point of an emancipatory theory. This study is based on fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews, and on the assemblies and the texts of the collective actors.

Keywords: Demand, Collective Identity, Non-identity, Form, Occupation, Collective Action, Melucci, University of the Aegean

Introduction

Over the last 12 years a notable amount of collective action has taken place in Greece. The most memorable actions – but by no means the only ones – being the uprising that followed the assassination of Alexandos Grigoropoulos, the "laboratory of new worlds" that took place on the squares in 2011, and stORGI,¹ that poured out onto the streets after the assassination of Zackie Oh! In this paper, we will set aside the major uprisings in order to comment on a hitherto invisible collective expression: the struggle of the students of the Aegean

¹ The word "stORGI" (Greek: στΟΡΓΗ) is a constructed word created in the struggles that followed the assassination of Zackie oh! It has a double meaning in the Greek language. On the one hand it refers to 'οργή' (orgi) which means rage and, on the other, it alludes to 'στοργή' (storgi), which means affection/caring. More about this play of words in a future paper.

University for the right to housing that took place in Mytilene at the end of 2013.

In turning our attention to this small place, our aim is not only to remember the collective action itself but also to address larger issues. Therefore, our central concern is how the demand placed through collective actions relates to the content of those actions. More specifically, we express our fear that the demand of collective struggles can lead to the institutionalization of collective processes; however, we also voice our hope that the social relations created between collective actors can potentially lead to the emergence of emancipatory dimensions of the struggles. At the same time, our study is not free of desires: this research is driven by a desire, the desire to create different worlds. This central concern has also been applied to our hypothesis: the demand gives symmetrical (in relation to the dominant world) forms to the struggle and, thereby, undermines the emancipatory dimensions of the struggles and/or the possibility that the new worlds created in the inner core of those struggles can become rooted.

As regards the method, our physical presence in the invisible networks and in the collective action described points towards the use of field study as an observation tool². Our research was complemented with texts and assembly proceedings of the “Struggle Committee of Lesbos³ for Claiming Housing” (the

² By acknowledging our presence in the collective action of the SCL, not only do we substantiate our participation in the action and the discourse of the subjects under study, but, even more so, we set on track the adoption of an epistemological perspective that seeks the osmosis of the writing subject with the struggling subjects (subjects of study). In light of this fact, the act of our writing seeks to create a channel of communication between theory and practice, through which new forms of resistance can emerge. Similarly, our choice to communicate this research also carries the hope that the collective action of the SCL will be a source of inspiration for further mobilization. Motivated by this position, we make use of the first person plural. This choice is the result of two refusals. Firstly, the refusal to use the third person singular, the dominance of which coincides with the acceptance of an example that seeks 'objective knowledge' and 'truth'. Its use, therefore, signifies the clear distinction between the cognitive subject and the object of knowledge, a distinction which, particularly in the case of social sciences, can be characterized as false at the very least. In addition, the use of the third person singular reflects a condition that remains constant or whose change lies beyond our power. The second refusal is that of the use of the first person singular, both for the excessive graveness it exudes and for its symbolic content as a crowning of the academic rationale that prevails in contemporary scientific discourse due to the demand for productivity.

On the contrary, the choice of the first person plural symbolically recognizes the writing of this text as an act of 'we'. In other words, if it were not for this collective effort, we would not be able to convey these words to you. Thus, the use of 'we' will hereinafter be used to refer to all the above. However, the use of the first person plural does not align the given text with a collective reference. As such, the author is fully responsible for its content. Finally, this extensive parenthesis - small enough to cover the issues it opens up - was developed in the presentation: "Epistemological aspects of a squat or how I fell in love with Stella", of May 2019.

³ At this point, we must make a geographical clarification. The University of the Aegean is located in a group of islands in the Eastern Aegean (Lesvos, Chios, Lemnos, Samos), the Dodecanese (Rhodes) and the Cyclades (Syros), while its headquarters are located in Mytilene, the capital of the island of Lesbos. The collective process we describe took place in Mytilene.

collectivity of students housed in student residences, henceforth referred to as SCL), as well as interviews with thirteen individuals who were directly involved in the mobilization (seven housing beneficiaries, four solidarians, an administration worker and the Vice Rector for Academic and Student Affairs of the University). Two series of interviews were conducted: the first took place a month after the completion of the mobilization, and its central questions had to do with the internal relations of the actors. The second took place in May 2014, and its central question was the political content of the collective action. However, what is of pivotal importance in the given text is the critical reading of Melucci's work concerning the conceptual category of form and that of identity/demand. That said, prior to moving on to the interpretation of the collective action, we must refer to some historical evidence.

The issue of housing at the University of the Aegean and the curtailment of available student residences

The University of the Aegean had been dealing with chronic housing problems. The lack of privately owned beds⁴, the renting of rooms located 17km outside the city (at a distance of 20km from the University) and the absence of a regular transport network create an impasse for those living in student residences. In addition, the announcement of housing beneficiaries on 23/10/2013 included an unanticipated reduction of 26 beds⁵.

The number of students who were able to secure accommodation for the academic year 2013-2014 was 154, far fewer than the beneficiaries and the applicants. This caused uproar among students who already had accommodation. More specifically, we attempted to deal with the matter through personal strategies (co-habitation, objections, leaving the island). However, we almost immediately opted for collective processes, such as daily assemblies at the region of Pirgoi Thermis, where most student residences were located.

The first public protest over the housing issue – following the cutback on funding for student residences – took place on 31/10/2013, outside the Regional Student Welfare Council (henceforth referred to as RSWC), which was examining the objections of the rejected beneficiaries. It is at this point that our first question arises: How does "I" become "we"? Even better, through which

However, one year before that, the collectivity of students housed in the dormitories was named "Struggle Committee of Lesbos" (SCL) (Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου in Greek), thus further highlighting the issue of the excessive distance of the student residences from the university itself.

⁴ The year that followed the occupation, the authorities of the University announced plans to construct student residences.

⁵ This reduction was part of the overall implementation of austerity policies carried out by the Greek Governments.

processes did the actors become collective? This is the guiding question in the following section.

The denial of student identity and the dimensions of non-identity

In our first public appearance we, the collective actors, shared a text entitled: "We are being deprived of our studies" (SCLCH 2013a). This wording presented, in a condensed form, the anger caused by the cuts in the number of beds. The value of the title is not merely that it is the first one issued by the collectivity regarding the cutback on funding; it also crystallizes the denial of student identity by the rectorate authorities.

The denial of identity can be found primarily in the words of the collective actors. We, the students, experienced intense feelings of injustice, disappointment and frustration. "*We were afraid that we were about to lose our lives in a sense, [...] they were pushing us away, we had nowhere to go, no idea what to do ...*" G. points out. "Suddenly", A. states, "*just as you are about to receive your degree, they tell you that you won't be able to attend classes because you don't have a home*". Similarly, P. notes: "*Some were crying. They were so disappointed at the idea of having to leave! That their studies were coming to a close, forcibly, violently. In a way, it seemed that their life, everything [...] they had built here, was somehow being taken away, [...] that they were being forced to leave*". For those who were banished from the student residences, student and academic life was over. "*They had to leave the island, discontinue their studies, this story had come to an end for them*", adds P. Therefore, we see that we, as rejected housing beneficiaries, shared anger, frustration, and emotion.

By refusing to launch a new tender for the provision of housing – which resulted in the loss of 26 rooms – the rectorate authorities directly intervened in the biosphere, the social relations, the needs and desires of the given subjects. Thus, they avoided identifying us as students.⁶

⁶ As Melucci (1996) notes, identity is a relational state. Therefore, the lack of hetero-recognition means loss of identity, loss of a piece of one's self. This loss, however, opens up possible opportunities.

As a result, we "opened"⁷ the conflict with the rectorate authorities, precisely in order to redefine and regain⁸ our (student) identity⁹, which the latter had denied us. We tried to reclaim things that belonged to us and which we recognized in ourselves: the right to housing and, consequently, the right to study.¹⁰ As pointed out in the texts of the collectivity: "Whoever does not recognize our right to housing, does not recognize our right to study" (SCLCH and Solidarians 2013a & SCLCH 2013b).

Thus, we notice that the collective process is triggered by the feeling of frustration that permeates the housing beneficiaries. A feeling reflected in the contestation of student identity by the rectorate authorities. This challenge reveals two competing dimensions. The dimension of the non-student, imposed by the actions of the rectorate authorities¹¹ and a dimension that explodes through this former state of the non-student. This explosion may have been present in the first texts and in the demands of the collective actors as a student identity, but it is the openness of the suppressed dimension that sparks the dynamic of the collective process. The oppressed "us" draws its volcanic power from the very fact that it does not fit anywhere. (Holloway 2009: 13)

But what is the promise borne by the explosion of non-identity, this open state that unfolds a series of contingencies?

⁷ It is not by chance that we use the verb 'open'; it signifies the prior presence of conflict and, therefore, the defetishizing of social relations brought about by the questioning of the student identity.

⁸ The verb regain is problematic in this case, as it only projects one dimension of non-identity. Indeed, the struggle often takes the form of a defense against old identities (Holloway 1996: 45). However, this form is rather restrictive with regard to the content of the struggle itself. On the contrary, we wish to argue that the non-identity movement, which exploded after the rectorate authorities refused to launch a new tender for housing, opened up a field of possibilities.

⁹ The use of the word identity is already provisional. As Melucci himself observes (Melucci 2002: 207-208 & Melucci 1996: 72), the semantic root of the word implies an essentialist character, which presents it as a given reality. This character does not respond to its use. Therefore, the concept of identity could more accurately be portrayed as identification. This lexical transformation underlines the relational and procedural nature of the concept, eliminating its essentialist elements.

¹⁰ The adjective that accompanies the term housing – namely: 'self-evident' – is indicative (SCLCH 2013b). Similarly, in the following text we observe: "*Housing ought to be considered every person's indisputable right*" (SCLCH and Solidarians 2013d).

¹¹ Moving forward in time, the phrase that was used in the texts of the rectorate authorities is worth mentioning, for it illustrates the fact that the collective actors were not recognized as students: "*The rectorate authorities call occupiers to hand over the Rector's Building of the University of the Aegean to the academic community*" (text with collected signatures 2013 & Rectorate Authorities 2013). Here, the collective actors are referred to as being external subjects with regard to the academic community. This distinction is so pronounced that it is actually emphasized twice within the sentence.

A chronicle of the mobilizations

Before moving on, we consider it useful to submit a timeline of the mobilizations. On the fifth of November we marched on the streets of Mytilene – informing the public about the lack of student residences – and held an open assembly in the city center. Through this process we decided to symbolically occupy the Rector’s Building with a series of demands: (a) immediate access to housing for those who are in need and are not staying in student residences; (b) reinstatement of (at least) 30 beds; (c) a monthly rent allowance for those who were entitled to housing and were not housed yet and (d) free public education for all. The following day, 6/11, we occupied the Rector’s Building of the University. This occupation turned out to be long-lasting, following communications with the Vice Rector. This occupation was legitimized by the Student Associations, the Association of Professors and Researchers and the board of Administrator Workers of the University of the Aegean on the grounds that the demands of the actors were just.

In summary, with regard to the demands, on 15/11 the RSWC proposed a re-launch of the tender and the provision of financial support to the beneficiaries who were forced to leave their homes. Nevertheless, we continued the occupation until 23/11, the date set by the rectorate authorities as that of meeting the demands (Soulakelis 2013). The commitment was partly fulfilled and, following a thank-you party the next day,¹² we abandoned the building, (SCLCH and Solidarians 2013b). The nineteen-day occupation is the core of the empirical material upon which we will base our theoretical inquiry.

It must be noted that the decision to terminate the occupation was accompanied by an intense sense of awkwardness. At the last assembly of the occupation, the dominant question was: “*Can this be called a victory?*” The debate yielded affirmative answers, B. stresses: “*We are going to end the occupation with a victory that leaves a legacy behind*”, while H. notes that “*it is a struggle that was won*” and urges for “*the fight to continue. There was a more general proposition: public and free education, rather than an abstract claim*”. At the same time, there was a strong rhetoric regarding the uniqueness of the victorious outcome of the occupation: “*There has never before been a victorious occupation in Mytilene,*” note G. and A., among others (Assembly proceedings, 23/11/2013). The proceedings conclude with yet another question: “*I haven’t understood! So, this is a closing, final-reflection assembly?*” (Proceedings of Assembly, 23/11/2013). How are we to interpret the frustration felt at the end of the occupation, given that the demands of the actors appear to have been met? How can we interpret this underlying conflict between the confirmation of a student's identity and the continuation of the struggle?

¹²One must not underestimate the significance of celebration and laughter within the context of collective action. However, we will not attempt to highlight this significant aspect in this article.

Beyond the contentious aspects of the struggle: the emancipatory dimensions of the occupation

We have already mentioned the demands of this specific collective action and the timeline of the mobilizations. However, the new dimension that the collective actors brought to the foreground adduces (at the same time) evidence with a deeper symbolic and material content. More specifically, we will argue that the very form of mobilization compounds contents that are quite different from those portrayed by established trade unionist forms.

Within the contentious framework, we, the collective actors, though often unknown to each other, developed meaningful relationships. In addition to the lack of competitive behavior and the climate of mutual appreciation, the protagonists themselves also note that: *“It was a community [...] we shared common concerns, [...] there was no sense of alienation, no place for critical looks, we were all in it together [...]. I don't know if it sounds rather romantic, but that is what it was like”*, P. admits. Also, A. adds *“Some friendships have been created that I personally did not expect [...] all of a sudden you are talking and saying [...] important things about yourself /things that are important to you”*.¹³

The bonds we formed were so strong that they resembled those of family. *“We had formed ties like those of a family, even though there were a lot of people I didn't even know”*, S. notes, and A. adds. *“We had come to know each other, we had really become a family, and it was nice. And a family has its tensions [...], its tears, and its grievances. And so did we, this occupation had it all, it was a pleasant occupation! It had its flirts, its romances”*.

It is no coincidence that we also sought communication through artistic expression. Despite the overwhelming exhaustion, there were many times when you would catch us all playing music together, reading or discussing. As S. says, *“We knew what the morning would bring. Tomorrow would be another day of endless struggle from morning till night. So, we had to [...] gather strength, and we could take some wine and drink it as a group, we could play our guitars and sing our song”*. Overall, P. comments, *“we experienced a creative state like that found within all these struggles, [...] we found ourselves producing things”*. This creative state, he continues, is different to capitalist production: *“Productive creation, rather than production”*. As a result, the collective action developed by SCL was struggling to redefine housing but also to reclaim everyday life.

This distinct formation of social relations within the occupation was also reflected in collective decision-making processes, in assemblies. The assembly was a daily, open and dynamic process during the occupation. Despite its dynamic nature, some elements remained stable over time. Perhaps the most important was the circular arrangement. Al. points out the importance of the

¹³ «Σημαντικά πράγματα για σένα» in Greek this phrase has a double meaning.

circle: *“The assembly [...] was for me [something] impressive. Even just looking at the circle of us as an image evoked something very collective”.*

The circular arrangement of faces does not only serve practical purposes (the reading of the "other" body); it also emits a symbolism. It rejects bureaucratized and representative democracy and proposes a 'face-to-face' democracy. By extension, the circular arrangement of faces reflects the practice of horizontality observed by this particular venture. Furthermore, the positioning of the participants at the same level within the circle seems to correspond to the rejection of hierarchy and the conscious absence of the expert. As C. notes *“The collective occupation kept up well, it maintained horizontal relationships, I do not think it allowed any room for [the discovery of] a hierarchical structure, a vertical structure. And this, if you like, is also highlighted in the assemblies”.* From G.'s words that: *“We managed to all be equal inside it, [...] no one is inferior, no one is superior”* to D.'s thought that *“there were no hierarchies. [...] I think that covers everything. And that was for me, as I said before, unheard of. When I realized this, I said [...] in our times, this alone is reason for hope”*, it becomes obvious that the adoption of the circle in the assembly transformed the process from a mere administrative process to a deeply political one.

As a result, the assembly process is permeated by a deeper, dual meaning. On the one hand, it brings the collective actors into conflict with the institutionalized trade unionist form of student unions, as the latter insist on recycling the status quo. We are not dealing with a mere conflict between direct and indirect democracy but rather with a deeper discordancy between the form and the meaning of doing (prattein, πράττειν). At this point, reference should be made to an incident that took place on the second day of the occupation of the Rector's Building (7/11/2013), during the first open assembly at the occupation site. The assembly enjoyed massive participation. The circle created covered a space of 70-90 m². As in all assemblies of the occupation, the participants had direct visual contact with each other. The topics discussed included the daily actions of the occupation, procedural issues and financial assistance issues (Open Assembly proceedings, 7/11/2013). On this day, the presence of new colleagues in the field required a brief presentation of the situation. Thus, the issue of the lack of beds was raised, and the previous collective actions of the actors prior to the occupation were made public (Open Assembly proceedings, 7/11/2013). At that moment, a technical question regarding the functioning of the council of student welfare was raised. The particularity of the question was addressed with hasty and incomplete answers.

During this brief discussion, one could spontaneously take the floor, and this was done without a coordinator. After someone had finished speaking there was a few second's pause, until the next "bold voice" was heard. The only unwritten rules: be respectful towards speakers and listeners and show moderation so that everyone gets to be heard (Open Assembly proceedings, 7/11/2013). The abovementioned question was considered of minor importance and, as a result, it was followed by brief comments which attempted to address the issue hastily

(Open Assembly proceedings, 7/11/2013). At this point, there was an intervention by a student representative of the Welfare Council, who was also a member of the traditional left-wing party. When he began his intervention, he stood up and, stressing that he is a student representative dealing with these issues, he tried to answer the questions exhaustively. Apart from the symbolic nature of this move, his speech – as observed in the proceedings – focused on the bureaucratic steps that the university rectorate tends to follow with regard to housing, a briefing on the work already done by the regional council and, finally, on the demands that the students ought to bring forward (Open Assembly proceedings, 7/11/2013). After this intervention, several participants left the room. The conversation ended abruptly. A telling piece of information: only nine lines were written in the proceedings after that.¹⁴

On the other hand, the assembly process it realizes in the 'here and now' not only the form of democracy but, more importantly, aspects of the world that collective actors envision. Therefore, we could characterize the assembly process as the organizational form that condenses the symbolic challenge to that which exists. At the same time, it captures aspects of the meanings that we, the collective actors, wish to communicate to the outside world. These challenges do not lie merely within the spatial and temporal boundaries of the occupation but, on the contrary, "travel", with the bodies and words of the participants. As C. notes: *"I think that this crack that opened up in the given place, in the people who lived it [...] will stay! [...] You cannot leave it behind, [...] you carry it with you as a reminder that, through such forms of collective action, new meanings can be developed and born"*.

The "organizational form" as the embodiment of the emancipatory dimensions of struggle

The abovementioned aspects include the emancipatory dimensions of the collective action under study. On the one hand, the questioning and denial of dominant social relations; on the other, the collective imprint – through the constitutional creation of different social relations – on the "here and now" of meanings that call into question the dominant signification of life while, at the same time, show at the "formal" society different ways of doing. According to Melucci, this is exactly what new social movements are striving for: namely, to give an alternative meaning to social action. This struggle to change society is embedded in everyday life (Melucci 1984: 827). In this sense, social movements

¹⁴ This incident, typical of the clash of meanings between a trade unionist form of organization and the emancipatory aspects of social movements, has been interpreted in a previous article using Graeber's term of imaginary counterpower. Panierakis, M. (2017): «Symbolic aspects of an Occupation: Ritual, Non-Identity, and Imaginary Counterpower at the Collective Action of the "Struggle Committee of Lesbos" for claiming housing», *Society's Dromena* 3. pp.7-18, Thessaloniki. (in Greek)

state by their very existence that a different present is possible (Melucci 1985: 812 & Melucci 1984: 830).

Therefore, Melucci (1984: 821) emphasizes the "organizational form" of collective action¹⁵ as, according to him, the form of contemporary movements is the expression of the message that social subjects wish to convey to society. Thus, it urges us to interpret the meaning of any action through the actors' own internal relationships (Melucci 1985: 809)¹⁶. As he notes: "*the new organizational form of contemporary movements is not just "instrumental" for their goals. It is a goal in itself [...] the form of the movement is a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant patterns*" (Melucci 1984: 830)¹⁷. Organizational forms, he continues,

...are the basis for the internal collective identity, but also for the symbolic confrontation with the system, People are offered the possibility of another experience of time, space, interpersonal relations, which opposes operational rationality of apparatuses. A different way of naming the world suddenly reverses the dominant codes (Melucci 1984: 830).

Melucci's two incomplete inversions

Here we observe an underground attack by Melucci on the contentious aspect of collective action. This challenge might not be referred to in name, but it is developed in another part of his work, namely when he comments that success and failure are meaningless concepts with regard to the symbolic challenge of movements (1985: 813 & 1984: 830). His insistence on linking the content of collective action not to the goal of the given mobilization (the demand) but rather to the everyday life shaped by the collective actors themselves separates the content of a collective process from its demand. This decoupling is extremely important as it emphasizes the social relations of the actors, the form of the mobilization. In other words, aspects that had not only been ignored by previous scholars but also, in essence, constitute the material basis for autonomy.

At the same time, while Melucci detects in the concept of "*organizational form*" the importance of the content/of the internal social relations in contemporary collective action – as it is through organizational forms that the desired social relationships of collective actors are reflected/realized and diffuse/resonate on a

¹⁵ Besides, he traces the notable difference of new social movements compared to labor movements in the form of organization (Melucci 1985: 799).

¹⁶ Back to the words of the collective actors, H. notes that the way the SCL is organized "*is by no means accidental*". The absence of hierarchy, the existence of equality, etc., carry meanings desirable for the actors.

¹⁷ See also (Melucci 1985: 812).

symbolic level the changes that collective actors want to bring about – he fails to complete the reversal.

In a nutshell: (a) he does not highlight the way in which demands can place limitations on a collective process, as he focuses solely on the symbolic content of a collective action. Therefore, b) the concept of the demand, albeit exaggerated, returns through the confirmation of the identity (identity is the other side of the demand) and, much more importantly, c) he does not give prominence to the emancipatory dimension of a collective action as being in an ecstatic relationship with the demand. More particularly:

A) The demand as a breakwater of collective action and the emancipatory dimension in ecstatic relation to the demand

We observe that uprisings, mobilizations and collective processes in general appear in public discourse as a demand. Let us consider, for example, the occupation of the Rector's Building of the University of the Aegean: the mobilization was presented as a housing claim and recorded in a more general framework of contention, namely, that of public and free education. Therefore, collective action indicates its presence through the demand. In the collective action of the SCL, in particular, the existence of a demand for the restoration of the student residences for which funding had been curtailed may have initially led to a coming together (of students and/or other social groups of the University of the Aegean). However, it also placed limits on the collective process, for: (a) it presented an end to the collective process which had no direct relevance to the collective relations of the actors; b) it put collective action under the control of the university institutions and, thus, placed the collective process in a relationship of subordination within the existing trade unionist forms¹⁸.

Furthermore, the demand obscures the wealth of the social relationships we create within the uprisings. Collective actions exist through the demand, but at the same time they exist against and beyond the demand. The content of a mobilization overflows; it escapes the demand. We have seen that we, the collective actors, have formed social relationships beyond the contentious framework we created. The emancipatory dimension of the mobilization is not identical to its demand. It is rather an ecstatic relationship, one in which the content revolts against the demand, seeking its own autonomy. The last assembly of the occupation proves exactly that: the social relationships we developed within the

¹⁸ However it is very important to underline that collective actors have already rejected the logic of demand, as P. claims “*we are not demanding from the state to resolve the problem regarding our housing, we are doing it as political subjects; through our terms*” (Proceedings of assembly 19/11/13). In this respect, see the key discussion regarding prefigurative politics and the movement of the squares over the last years. For example, in an interview David Graeber (2011) claims “*If you make demands, (...) you're asking the people in power and the existing institutions to do something different. And one reason people have been hesitant to do that is they see these institutions as the problem*”. In this context, see the discussion of van de Sande (2013) over the successfulness of the revolutions.

occupation created the image of a different world, a world that was challenged when the demands were met. Therefore, when we argue that the content of collective action appears through the demand, we are in fact saying that the content of the collective action is the crisis of the demand. Content and demand are in a state of inner conflict.

B) Identity as another aspect of the demand

Here we need to remind the reader that the concept of identity came to the forefront when the rectorate authorities refused to recognize us as students¹⁹. At the same time, the collective action of the SCL opened up possibilities of collective identities, which, in the end, reaffirmed the identity of the student through the satisfaction of the demands of the collective actors. We acknowledge that demands contribute to the development of the collective process for, without them, the “scream” of the collective actors would not have been expressed in the first place; neither would the struggle have resonated with the teachers and administrators.

However, we observe that identity is another aspect of the demand. The demands of the action of SCL presupposed and sought the recognition of the collective actors as students. Conversely, the identity of the student was, according to the discourse of the collective actors, directly related to the satisfaction of the demands. Nevertheless, if the struggle is solely related to the identity of the collective actors, then it is given an expiry date and it is limited to the strict boundaries set by identity itself. The expiry date is set by the acceptance of the demands by the rectorate authorities. Furthermore, the limits of the mobilization do not reach beyond the institutionalized social relations that exist within the social context of the University.

That said, we have seen that the outbreak of the collective process is explosive; the actors open up a field of possibilities without any prescribed path. The content of the struggle involved meanings that largely exceeded the logic of the demand (and the confirmation of the student's identity); contents that eventually came into conflict with the demands of the collective action itself.

Here, we recognize another dimension of identity (and, at the same time, of demands): the congealing dimension. The demand presents a homogenized mobilization and, at the same time, the mobilization is presented as an exogenous force that could change society; in other words, as an object. Thus, on the one hand, demands cannot capture the diversity of the collective subjects and, on the other hand, they present the conflict as something external. Consequently, the demand and the concept of identity congeal the potential mobility of a collective action and allow it to take only one direction. We could

¹⁹ Here lies, first and foremost, the value of Melucci's perception, as he recognizes the possibility of the reconstruction of identity through the actions of the subjects. Therefore, the process of opening up identity is not simply the result of the rulings of the rectorate authorities but, rather, the result of the actions of the collective actors.

argue that the demand not only conceals the life existing within the movements but, more importantly, objectifies the social relationships we create within them.

C) From form to asymmetry

The notion of form in Melucci manages to place the social relationships we create within collective actions in a prominent position. However, in our view, the concept of “organizational form” in Melucci has two weaknesses: the first is that it presents the organizational forms of collective action as fixed, determinate, rather than as open processes. This results in both the absence of inner conflict within the struggles and the recognition of the system’s “symbolic challenges” as challenges arising, exclusively, from the ‘outside’, from a source that is external to the social relations of capitalism. This way, Melucci removes the explosiveness that social relationships²⁰ themselves encompass and, at the same time, presents two worlds in conflict. On the one hand there is the ‘official world’ and, on the other, the world created by collective action. Melucci’s second weakness is literally the fact that he does not complete this inversion; he does not take it a step further, to the sense of asymmetry.

At this point we must return to the concept of form in the writings of Marx. Marx alludes to the concept of form from the very first sentence of *Capital*²¹ : “*The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as “an immense accumulation of commodities”* (Marx 1976: 125). However, the concept of form bears its own dynamic in Marx, precisely due to its procedural character. From the first chapter of *Capital* we conclude that form is a concept that historicizes the social relationships that appear as determinate and timeless in every society²². At the same time, the notion of form denotes the fetishized character that social relations possess within the context of capitalism; in other words, it conceals the struggle taking place behind the appearance of form.

Therefore, the concept of form calls into question – from its very beginning – the existing dominance of capitalist social relations. It recognizes their fragility and reveals the struggle that takes place within social relationships. At the same time, it states that the social relationships we build within collective actions are always a process; never finalized, always a question. Therefore, the internal relationships of collective actions, which Melucci urges us to focus on, are never a completed task but rather a continuous process. They are constantly on the go.

²⁰ And we must also stress that the demand-content relationship is an internal, ecstatic one.

²¹ I follow here the ideas of John Holloway (2015) in the article: “Read *Capital*: The First Sentence”.

²² Social relationships are not carved in stone. In a similar sense, it is important to note that the demand is something that enters the daily lives of collective actors through Keynesian policies. However, today the demand for a mobilization seems to be a given.

This movement signifies a struggle with the social relations of capital. In the occupation of the Rector's Building, we, the collective actors, struggled daily to avoid reproducing hierarchical forms of struggle so as to not recycle a trade unionist form of protest. There is no pre-existing form of social relations that lead to the social relations of capital (symbolically or materially) but, rather, a constant struggle not to reproduce the latter and a ceaseless effort to create different kinds of social relations.

As such, the notion of form confers a certain internal connection between the relationships we create and the relationships of capital. The form itself is a struggle. This implies something particularly important for the study of social movements: the opponent is not a certain category of people (in this case the rectory); it is the social relations of capital.

The abovementioned imply that the very concept of form is a category of struggle, as it encompasses both the possibility of reproducing existing social relationships and the possibility of creating new worlds. Consequently, the notion of form challenges us to focus on the social relations themselves; it invites us to create social relations that are asymmetrical towards those of capital.

Against and beyond demand

Returning to the image of the last assembly of the occupation (see above), we recall the closing phrase of the proceedings, which made reference to the question of whether the assembly is recognized as a closing, final-reflection assembly. The persistence of the expressed viewpoints that referred to the collective action as victorious²³ gave great prominence to the demand itself, while ignoring the social relationships that we, the collective actors, had formed. Therefore, the characterization of the occupation as “victorious” undermines the attempt to create an alternative world. Even if we were to argue, in material terms, that the acceptance of the demands by the rectory authorities signifies the victory of the collective actors, we must not fail to admit that this material victory changed our living conditions only in a temporary and partial way. In addition, it confirmed the power of the rectory authorities and, thus, the established way of allocating resources (student residences). Thus, the – implicitly – affirmative answer to the last question of the proceedings was, in essence, stealing the content of the social relations of the occupation for the sake of the demand.

The significance of the last sentence of the proceedings lies in that it reflects the conflict between the demands of the collective action and the contents that the

²³ This is also repeated in the interviews: “A student struggle has been won, especially in Lesbos where it had never been won in so many years,” P. notes, while H. says: “If we are to look at it in a material way, then it was successful. In the sense that it has managed [...] to have its demands satisfied.”

collective actors developed within the occupation. The emancipatory aspects burst out through the demands. Therefore, the last question of the proceedings does not merely express an anxiety regarding the end of the occupation, regarding its termination. It expresses, to a much greater extent, *the internal conflict of form* within this specific occupation. In a sense, it disputes the view that the purpose of the occupation lies in its contentious aspect (in the demand). It indicates that the deeper meaning of the occupation does not end with the housing issue but, on the contrary, is located against and beyond the demand. Therefore, it implies that the collective action did not merely challenge the way resources are distributed; at an even deeper level, it questioned the existing content of society. This questioning, as we have seen, was reflected in the content of the collective action in which the actors' meanings were concentrated.

In conclusion, the questions that dominated the last assembly of the occupation reveal its symbolic and material content, the shaping (through asymmetrical ways in relation to capital) of a world that stands “*at the height of dreams and people*”.²⁴

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank John Holloway and Panagiotis Doulos for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, Anna and Nenia for their contribution to the English version of the text, Theodoros Paradelis for his meaningful companionship during the field work and, above all, all the comrades (without name) for those wonderful days of struggle.

References

- Holloway, John (1996). La resonancia del zapatismo. *Chiapas*, 3, 43–54. [en: The resonance of zapatismo]
- Holloway, John (2009). “Why Adorno?” pp.12–17 in *Negativity and revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, Edited by John Holloway, Fernando Metamoras and Sergio Tischler. London: Pluto Press.
- Holloway, John (2015). Read Capital : The First Sentence or, Capital starts with Wealth, not with the Commodity. *Historical Materialism*, 23(3): 3–26.
- Marx, Karl (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Volume 1)*. London: Penguin Books.
- Melucci, Alberto (1984). “An end to social movements? Introductory paper to the sessions on ‘new movements and change in organizational forms’”, *Social Science Information*, 23(4): 819-835.

²⁴ Excerpt from the plea of Nikos Bellogiannis.

Melucci, Alberto (1985). “The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements”, *Social Research*, 52(4): 789-816.

Melucci, Alberto (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Melucci, Alberto (2002). *Κουλτούρες στο παιχνίδι: Διαφορές για να συμβιώσουμε*, Αθήνα: Gutenberg. [original title: Culture in Gioco. Diferenze per Convivere]

Panierakis, Marios (2017). “Symbolic aspects of an Occupation: Ritual, Non-Identity, and Imaginary Counterpower at the Collective Action of the ‘Struggle Committee of Lesvos’ for claiming housing”, *Society’s Dromena*, 3: 7-18 (in Greek)

Panierakis, Marios (2019). “*Epistemological aspects of a squat or how I fell in love with Stella*”. *Social sciences today*, 9 June, Mytilene.

van de Sande, Mathijs (2013). The prefigurative politics of Tahrir Square: An alternative perspective on the 2011 revolutions. *Res Publica* 19 (3): 223–39.

Material from the web

Graeber, David (2011). “You’re creating a vision of the sort of society you want to have in miniature.” Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/youre-creating-a-vision-of-the-sort-of-society-you-want-to-have-in-miniature/2011/08/25/gIQAXVg7HL_blog.html (Last Accessed Date: 23 April 2020)

Primary sources

Rector authorities (2013). “*Internal briefing note*”

Soulakelis Nikos (2013). “*Briefing note*”

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing (2013a). “*We are being deprived of our studies*” [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου (2013α). «Μας στερούν τις σπουδές μας»]

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing (2013b). *Text of 13rd of November 2013* [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου (2013β). «Κείμενο Τετάρτης 13 Νοεμβρίου 2013»]

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing (2013c). *University of the absurd* [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου (2013γ). «Το πανεπιστήμιο του παραλόγου» «Μας στερούν τις σπουδές μας»]

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing and Solidarians (2013a). *Advertisement* [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου και Αλληλέγγυες/οι (2013α). «Αγγελία»]

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing and Solidarians (2013b). *Announcement* [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου και Αλληλέγγυες/οι (2013β). «Ανακοίνωση»]

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing and Solidarians (2013c). *Press release following the appointment with the Rector* [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου και Αλληλέγγυες/οι (2013γ). «Δελτίο Τύπου έπειτα από συνάντηση με τον πρότανη»]

Struggle Committee of Lesbos for Claiming Housing and Solidarians (2013d). *They are not working for us... they are toying with us* [gr: Επιτροπή Αγώνα Εστίων Λέσβου και Αλληλέγγυες/οι (2013δ). «Δεν δουλεύουν για μας... μας δουλεύουν»]

Text with collected signatures (2013) “*Inside note*”

About the author

Marios Panierakis became politically active in December of 2008, after the assassination of the student Alexandros Grigoropoulos by the police in Athens. In 2009, he began his studies in Sociology at the University of the Aegean and (from there) took part in various collective actions and social struggles. These actions included the movement of the Squares, which he studied in his undergraduate thesis. He is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla /Mexico) and the ICSyH (Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades), in the context of which he is researching the new forms and the new vocabulary of social struggles.

e-mail: mariopsoc AT gmail.com