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Grassroots solidarity structures in Greece as counterhegemonic practices contesting the dominant neoliberal hegemony

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In crisis conditions, solidarity structures emerge as a social and political response to the crisis. This study introduces a new conceptualisation of solidarity structures as grassroots contestations to the neoliberal 'there-is-no-alternative' (TINA) discourse. It argues that their operation reflects counterhegemonic practices that can keep alive the hope that another world, based on principles of solidarity, is possible. Moreover, this paper, utilising Gramsci's work, argues that welfare grassroots community solidarity structures (WGCSS) challenge hegemonic assumptions surrounding the TINA discourse, such as responsibilisation and individual failings, by reflecting arguments for collective provisioning, empowerment and community action, and systemic failings. The arguments made in this paper draw on rapid ethnographic activist research in Chania, Crete, Greece.

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Introduction

Since the late 1970s, growing socio-economic inequalities have emerged, situated within a context of neoliberal globalisation (Harvey, 2005). An indicator of these growing inequalities is the concentration of wealth at the top level of society (Dorling, 2014), which has exacerbated social problems (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Brenner et al., 2010) and, at the same time, has undermined the ability of the welfare state to respond to the needs created (Pentaraki, 2017; Pentaraki, 2019b; Pentaraki & Dionysopoulou, 2019). Welfare state provision in the majority of countries has been undermined by austerity/social spending cuts, which have intensified since the last financial crisis in 2008 (Pentaraki, 2017; 2019b). One of the main features of these savage austerity measures has been the decrease in social spending associated with the retrenchment of the welfare state and public welfare provision in general. In order to legitimate the retrenchment of the welfare state and its reconfiguration along neoliberal lines, a number of neoliberal discourses have been advanced and circulated not only in Greece but also in the majority of western countries (Pentaraki, 2013).

These neoliberal discourses are part of the hegemonic 'there-is-no-alternative' (or TINA) discourse. 'There is no alternative' discourse declared Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative British Prime Minister in the 1980s. This ideological mantra is the culmination of a neoliberal agenda which started being developed at the beginning of the previous century (Harvey, 2005). The premise of this agenda is based on Hayek's and Friedman's economic arguments that 'the invisible hand' of the market will shape society for social and personal well-being to be achieved (Finlayson et al., 2005). It has several unfounded assumptions (Harvey, 2000, 2005; Peters, 2017), for example, that once the market triumphs, everyone will gain and have their rightful place in society, and as such, there is no need for collective provisioning. The latter ideological assumption has resulted in a discourse of self-responsibilisation (Peters, 2017), aiming to justify the inequalities that the majority of people experience as being self-inflicted and self-imposed and justify the rolling back of the state from the collective provision of the needs leading to the 'hollowing out' of the nation-state (Jessop, 1994). Since then, the TINA discourse has spread worldwide and has come to epitomise the triumph of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, neoliberal policies are presented as inevitable. The ideological and political spread of the TINA discourse reflects neoliberal capitalism's consequence and main feature (Queiroz, 2018).

This paper argues that it is important to highlight contestations to the neoliberal hegemonic order, such as those presented by grassroots solidarity structures, in order to sustain the hope that another world is possible. Toward this goal, this study introduces a new conceptualisation of solidarity structures as grassroots attempts against the legitimisation of neoliberalism and its associated TINA discourse. This analysis is based on the exploration of the eight years of operation of the Social Kitchen, a welfare grassroots community solidarity structure in Chania, Crete. The framing of the grassroots community solidarity structures as counterhegemonic practices is based on Gramsci's thought. Before

presenting the study and discussing Gramsci's thoughts as offering a useful theoretical framework to examine both consent and contestation to neoliberalism, we will first explore welfare grassroots community solidarity structures (WGCSS).

Solidarity structures are "formed and maintained by 'communities', i.e. by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form" (De Angelis, 2003, p.1). Solidarity structures are created when popular, grassroots social activities become the (or a) major way of providing 'common good' (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Caffentzis & Federici, 2014). In essence, the 'commons' character of solidarity structures provides "alternative, non-commodified means to fulfil social needs, e.g. to obtain social wealth and to organise social production" (Chandra et al., 2004, p. 23). They also provide spaces of configurative politics and can generate democratic power in creative and new ways (Purcell, 2013) that concurrently function as forms of protest, organising and social care (Izlar, 2019, p. 349). Gibson-Graham term the actions found in structures, such as what we call in this paper WGCSS, as "micropolitical experiments" that can provide evidence of "practising transformative politics" (Gibson-Graham, 2002, p. 34) and "performative practices for other worlds" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 613).

In Greece, solidarity structures (i.e. of individuals and communities) operate both as a social and political response to the crisis (Rakopoulos, 2014; Cabot, 2016; Arampatzi, 2017, 2018; Teloni & Adam, 2018; Daskalaki et al., 2019). As a social response, they aim to address the precarious conditions created by the neoliberal restructuring of society by providing food and health care in a non-commodified way (Papadaki et al., 2015). Through this, care is reconfigured (Cabot, 2016), both within and outside the neoliberal logic. As a political response to the crisis, WGCSS question the imposed austerity measures, reducing social spending and organising by both placing demands toward and against the state. These communities of solidarity also reflect people's grassroots struggles for change through socio-political action or community action (Teloni & Adam, 2018) at a time of austerity. However, this literature fails to discuss the ways that neoliberalism is also contested. The present paper fills this gap by presenting how these structures can develop counterhegemonic discourses that challenge the neoliberal TINA discourse.

Before the arguments are advanced, the paper will briefly outline the main Gramscian concepts which inform this work. After this, the central counter-hegemonic discourse advanced through WGCSS will be discussed. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion on the contributions of WGCSS to counterhegemonic arguments about the need for solidarity and collective welfare provision.

A Gramscian political economy approach is useful in understanding consent to neoliberalism (Sum & Jessop, 2013; Ledwith, 2020) and how grassroots community responses can be part of a counterhegemonic political project offering social possibilities to challenge neoliberalism. However, it is not without its difficulties. According to Gramsci (1971), the ruling class achieves hegemony not only by physical violence, but also primarily through consent to its ideas, values

and practices. This consent is organised through the control of institutions which infuse ruling class ideas throughout society (Morton, 2007).

Ruling class ideas are presented as common sense or as self-evident truths through these institutions. Thus, the ruling elite obtains legitimacy when the working class accepts its values and ideas as self-evident truths or common sense. Moreover, based on Gramsci's thought, the ruling class maintains hegemony and rules as long as its ideas are accepted. Parallel to what is considered hegemonic, there is always counter-hegemony as ruling class ideas can be either accepted or challenged (Pentaraki 2019a). According to Gramsci, common sense comprises the "diffuse, uncoordi-nated features of a general form of thought common to a particular period and a particular common environment" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330). However, at the same time, it entails "a healthy nucleus of good sense" which "deserves to be made more unitary and coherent" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328). Thus, it follows that it is through common sense that hegemony is achieved, but common sense can be the "healthy nucleus of good sense" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328), from which counterhegemonic contestations are launched. This 'good sense' is argued in this paper to be reflected in the struggles, practices, and discourses of WGCSS. 'Good sense' highlights the possibility of challenging the neoliberal logic and order and can form the base for a Gramscian counterhegemonic response to austerity and neoliberalism. WGCSS, situated within a neoliberal restructured society and as a grassroots response to the crisis, develop counterhegemonic practices by challenging the hegemonic neoliberal logic.

According to Gramsci (1971), everyone has the ability to challenge the 'common sense' and mount an ideological attack on it. Such challenging comes through a philosophy of praxis outlined by Gramsci (1971, p. 330-331) as being present at the outset "in a polemical and critical guise, as superseding the existing mode of thinking […] a criticism of 'common sense', basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that 'everyone' is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity […] The purpose […] must be to criticize the problems, to demonstrate their real value, if any, and to determine what the new contemporary problems are and how the old problems should now be organized."

In formulating his philosophy of praxis, Gramsci purported that the 'common sense' articulations, values, and beliefs of the world are fragmented and contradictory. Furthermore, he argued that counterhegemony, or emancipatory hegemony, depends on the oppressed segments of society gaining awareness of the "contradictions within common sense that guide the social relations in which they live" (Zompetti, 1997, p. 78). However, becoming aware of these contradictions is a difficult process, nevertheless, it is one that can be achieved by everyone (i.e. since everyone has a philosophical capacity). A main contributor to the development of raising awareness of these contradictions is the organic intellectual, who can organise an effective counterhegemonic response. Gramsci's (1971) concept of the organic intellectual, "one who challenges the status quo

rather than supporting it" (Pentaraki, 2013, p. 705), provides a useful theoretical lens for examining the role of welfare grassroots community solidarity networks.

Gramsci (1971) asserts that organic intellectuals play an important role in actively organising ideas and developing and disseminating them to challenge the dominant ideology. In a Gramscian sense, an organic intellectual can either support or challenge the status quo. It is in this latter sense that we utilise the concept of the organic intellectual. "Organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense are not removed from the part of civil society that they represent; rather, they are a key part of that society" (Pentaraki, 2013, p. 705). Based on how Gramsci presents organic intellectuals, the members of WGCSS can be conceptualised as organic intellectuals since they are actively engaged in "practical life" as a "constructor, organizer, and permanent persuader" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10), who organise not only welfare provision structures from below, but also organise society to put forward demands to the local and state government for permanent and publicly-funded welfare structures. WGCSS' members operate as organic intellectuals to produce counterhegemonic ideas for the need for collective provisioning. They also challenge austerity imposed policies, as well as individualised and exceptional discourses which ignore systemic causes of social problems. The need for such collective provisioning should be an explicitly political issue in order for it to become the basis of transformative action. Thus, the common sense of individual provisioning because of the neoliberal narrative of responsibilisation should be transformed into the need for collective provisioning based on the principle of solidarity. The neoliberal debate needs to be contested to address the real causes of austerity.

The practices and discourse of WGCSS contribute toward this contestation as they generate a number of good sense/counterhegemonic discourses which facilitate the political dimension of the root causes of austerity and the need for collective provisioning. This discourse, once generalised, can be one of the ideological arguments for progressive social change. As Gramsci (1971) described almost 100 years ago, ideological struggles are necessary for social change. This paper is part of the critical tradition in the social sciences (i.e. including human geography, sociology and social work, amongst other subjects), which aims to unravel oppressive conditions, highlight resistance, and concurrently promote the potential of progressive social change (Pentaraki, 2022; Pentaraki & Speake 2015; Speake & Kennedy, 2019; Pelling et al., 2021; Travlou, 2020). As such, it showcases welfare grassroots solidarity structures as being both disruptive to the dominant hegemonic order and offering counterhegemonic possibilities. It contends that grassroots solidarity structures are articulating counterhegemonic practices and discourses and are thereby positioned to be part of the potential of democratic social change. Doing so keeps alive the debate on the need for the welfare state and highlights resistance through which neoliberal hegemony is not left unchallenged (Kingfisher & Maskovsky, 2008; Morgen & Gonzales, 2008).

The paper now discusses these discourses and argues that they encompass the kernels of good sense, which challenge the neoliberal common sense and comprise anti-welfare common sense (Jensen, 2014), and austerity common sense

(Pentaraki, 2019a). Finally, we explore and discuss these theoretical constructs in further detail, illustrating key foci through the lens of observations made during the authors' field study in Chania, Crete.

Methods

The development of the theoretical exploration of WGCSS as counterhegemonic practices presented in this paper was informed by rapid ethnographic activist research undertaken by the authors in Chania, Crete, Greece, during the summers of 2016, 2017, and 2019. The research utilised participatory methods and rapid ethnographic observations conducted over a month, approximately from mid-June to mid-July. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the relevant universities. During this time, the authors participated in the activist community in Chania and, more particularly, in the operations of one such solidarity structure, the Social Kitchen. During each visit in 2016 and 2017, observations, formal and informal individual and group interviews, as well as focus groups, were conducted with those who ran the solidarity structure in the city. In addition, follow-up interviews with founding members of the Social Kitchen took place in June 2019.

The methodology draws on two approaches, namely activist ethnography (Millen, 2000; Chatterton et al., 2008; Routledge, 2009), which is suited to researchers coming from the critical tradition, and short-term ethnography, which is helpful in research on both practical activities (i.e. the everyday practices of people/structures) and the non-representational (i.e. the unspoken, but sensory elements of everyday life) (Pink & Morgan, 2013). Short term ethnography (i.e. rapid ethnography or rapid ethnographic assessment) entails multi-method ethnography and typically involves weeks of research rather than months (Harris et al., 1997). While recognising limitations of this approach, such as providing just a snapshot of complex issues (Vindrola-Padros & Vindrola-Padros, 2018), this method was chosen as means through which to view and develop an on-the-spot and timely understanding of a welfare grassroots community solidarity structure.

The focus of the study was 'Koinoniki Kouzina', Social Kitchen hereafter. The Social Kitchen emerged out of the Occupy/movement in Chania, Crete, in 2011. It was initiated and supported by diverse political actors who were part of the Occupy movement/Indignatos movement in Chania, confirming that Occupy activists regrouped in community grassroots struggles (Ogman, 2013). Among these actors were far-left and left-wing members of trades unions and political parties, as well as some from the non-aligned left. In the beginning, it operated in the main market square in Chania that had been initially occupied by the progressive activists. After a couple of months of placing demands in the city, it moved to a room in the 'Old City' maintained by a local school.

From 2011 to 2018, it operated seven days a week (other than one week's break) and was run by a local assembly, in which every member participated. Some of the practical activities concentrated on running the Social Kitchen to

provide food to the hungry people of Chania. The Social Kitchen participated in anti-austerity struggles, which had multiple goals, ranging from the end of austerity and the system that creates it to developing a public structure funded by the government. It also co-operated with other progressive political and community activists in many activist anti-austerity and other progressive campaigns. Some of the Social Kitchen's main mottoes were "No one is alone in the Crisis", which reflects the practical solidarity mission of the structure, which is further demonstrated in the motto "Solidarity is the first step of resistance". Another motto, "Society is not built in the palm of the hand which begs but in the palm of the hand which makes a fist", elucidates the fighting spirit of the structure (Social Kitchen, 2016).

The next section presents counterhegemonic narratives of such struggle against dominant neoliberal hegemony drawn from synthesis and discussion of the ethnographic study of the Social Kitchen and from the wider theoretical framings and contexts discussed in previous sections. The testimonies of the activists and members of the assembly and those who ate in the social kitchen are woven into the counterhegemonic narratives. As in other smaller scale ethnographic studies (Daskalaki et al., 2019), no names or pseudo-names are given to maintain the anonymity of participants.

Counterhegemonic narratives: the struggles against the dominant neoliberal hegemony

This study identifies that the operation of WGCSS can contribute to wider efforts to map the discontent with austerity measures and global neoliberal capitalism in general. But most importantly, their practices kept alive the debate on the need for collective provisioning, social and personal well-being, and the welfare state in general. We situate WGCSS as part of the project of counterhegemonic politics, as they represent the construction of other social possibilities. They offer a democratic space in which popular education through the construction of counterhegemonic narratives can take place. The construction of these narratives can be the starting point for challenging neoliberal hegemonic forces. Each of these narratives is a kernel of good sense, which this section explores further. These kernels are discussed by presenting three interrelated foci that form the areas of neoliberal contestation: collective provisioning versus responsibilisation, empowerment and community action versus fear and stigmatisation, and understanding social problems as systemic failings instead of individual failings.

Collective provisioning versus responsibilisation
An important area of counterhegemonic struggle revolves around the need for collective provisioning. Keynesian discourse and political practices of collective social provisioning and the welfare state have been replaced by neoliberal discourses of responsibilisation and neoliberal inspired social arrangements (Jones & Novak, 1999; Ferguson et al., 2002; Jessop, 2014). The hollowing out of

the state has been achieved through immense social spending cuts. Adverse mainstream media reporting on social spending (Pentaraki, 2013) aims to manufacture consent to social spending cuts (Pentaraki, 2019a). In western countries, numerous tabloid newspapers articles and mainstream television programmes attempt to stigmatise people in poverty and especially welfare benefits recipients (Briant et al., 2011) in order to legitimise exclusionary and disciplinary welfare policies. Through these media accounts, the need for welfare retrenchment is achieved by stigmatising welfare recipients and portraying them as undeserving of support (Happer & Philo, 2013; Jensen, 2014; Jensen & Tyler, 2015; Morris, 2016). This results in the hardening of public attitudes towards welfare benefits claimants (Happer & Philo, 2013) and in the crafting of anti-welfare common sense (Jensen & Tyler, 2015). Such blaming and stigmatising discourse of people living in poverty resides in the background of austerity policies and neoliberal capitalism in general (Harvey, 2005; Clarke & Newman, 2012; Levitas, 2012; Pantazis, 2016). This neoliberal discourse surrounding the welfare state endangers further its future, as social spending cuts and neoliberal restructuring undermine "the political ideas and values supportive of an inclusive welfare state" (Taylor-Gooby 2013, p. 36). It undermines the values of solidarity and collective provisioning.

Against these hegemonic discourses and practices, WGCSS act as counterhegemonic practices as they operate based on solidarity and non-exclusionary collective provisioning. In the case of the Social Kitchen and its underpinning collective spirit, everyone who approached the structures was provided for and could become a member of the collective, a manifestation of the motto "No one is alone in the crisis". Both locals and immigrants were included even though, in the beginning, it was primarily immigrants, as they were the first ones to be hit by the crisis. Many immigrants without papers had been excluded from other structures and had access only to grassroots community solidarity structures that act in a non-exclusionary way in their provision and operational apparatus. One young immigrant without papers used the kitchen and was also an active member of the structure. Similarly, a young Greek unemployed woman who used the Social Kitchen but was also an assembly member of the Social Kitchen described to us how she was going hungry before the operation of the soup kitchen; she described how other structures had excluded her based on her being single and of working age and how stigmatised she felt after being in contact with them. She stated that she was able to find her voice and reclaim her dignity through the Social Kitchen. It is a clear indication of this social kitchen operating akin to other progressive social movement structures breaking away from the stigmatising exclusionary concept of deserving and undeserving poor (Teloni & Adam, 2018).

Empowerment and community action versus fear and stigmatisation

The coming together of people to respond to social and political issues is an empowering process. Coming together, sharing experiences, and grassroots political organising can break the politics of fear (Arampatzi, 2017) and the

culture of silence. The ruling class cultivated the politics of fear as common sense (Gramsci, 1971). At the present time, segments of the working class are paralysed by fear that if austerity does not continue, they will be much worse off than they are under austerity (Pentaraki, 2019a). Part of the population has internalised an 'austerity common sense' (Pentaraki, 2019a), in which everyone is to blame for the high public debt crisis and that there is no alternative to austerity. The underlying context is the ruling elite's thirty years of imposed neoliberalism in Greece, in which workers' rights and socio-economic positions have been progressively undermined. The working class, in particular, has felt these effects and fears their continuation. There is little in current hegemonic power structures to suggest another, brighter future as levels of poverty, unemployment and job insecurity keep rising. Hence De Sousa Santos (2016) argues that "[n]eoliberalism's deadly machine keeps on producing fear on a massive scale". WGCSS have acted as spaces that counter this fear, comprising progressive people fighting the impacts of neoliberalism as well as neoliberal and austerity common sense. WGCSS question and disrupt the dominant neoliberal discourses.

Thus, WGCSS can also play a counterhegemonic role in breaking the culture of silence (Freire, 1970) constructed by the culture of blame by stigmatising and shaming neoliberal people's discourses (Kent, 2016; Pemberton et al., 2017). According to Freire (1970), the oppressors' system (i.e. in the case of the present study, the hegemonic neoliberal system, which has imposed austerity policies) attempts to impose itself on oppressed people in order not to be challenged, and as a consequence, a culture of silence emerges. People feel shamed and stigmatised for being in poverty and being blamed for the circumstances in which they find themselves. WGCSS can help break this stigmatisation, shaming, and the resultant culture of silence, by discussing the causes of austerity and poverty and re-politicising the issues. Members of the Social Kitchen were well aware of this, and the concept of 'shame' was often heard, for example, *"…[people] who had been hit by the crisis and wanted to get food, but they were ashamed to come in. However, … the Kitchen played a role in countering this stigmatization"*. This is also reflected clearly in the following account by a member of the Social Kitchen who said: *"I first approached the Social Kitchen to eat. In the beginning, I did not feel at ease, but as time progressed, I felt stronger and stopped feeling alone because I could see other people in a similar position. I can't explain it, but the more we got together inside and outside the Kitchen, the stronger I felt. We fought together on the street, in the Kitchen and everywhere."*

The recognition of the shared reality amongst people leads to the re-politicisation of the issues. Hunger is not a personal problem but a political one as it is shared and emerges from the existing socio-economic framework. This realisation breaks the culture of silence; once oppressed people develop a critical awareness of the real cause of their hunger and austerity. The Social Kitchen demonstrated the broader assertion that WGCSS, operating as organic intellectuals, can play that role of critical education as they act as liberatory learning spaces. As one member of the Social Kitchen remarked, *"I learned to think more politically, I learned to listen, to accept, and to hear ideas …"*

Thus, people in poverty who operate through grassroots community solidarity structures become active participants in counterhegemonic struggles that can reduce isolation and challenge the stigmatising discourse of deserving and undeserving poor. Grassroots community solidarity structures can be this collective space where a critical consciousness can be achieved. WGCSS then become the spaces through which organic intellectuals operate not only through raising consciousness but also by organising the material basis for struggle.

This mirrors the Social Kitchen motto, "Society is not built in the palm of the hand which begs but in the palm of the hand which makes a fist", reflecting the efforts to transform the consciousness of all the participants in order to engage in struggles.

Systemic failings versus individual failings

Another necessary counterhegemonic process of WGCSS entails the understanding of the systemic nature of the social problems that both people and countries face (Pentaraki, 2013; 2017). The political nature of the social problems can facilitate the mobilisation of struggles to challenge their cause. However, it tends to be masked through the discourses of neoliberalisation. Through these discourses, blame is relocated away from systemic causes (Pentaraki, 2013) to country-specific reasons. A clear example is Greece, which has been the focus of such framing that aims to legitimise the imposition of austerity measures as part of a structural adjustment programme, as deserved (Pentaraki, 2013, 2019a). The dominant discourse blames the Greek people for the country's high public debt crisis, yet it was an outcome of class-based policies that successive Greek governments had put into operation (Pentaraki, 2013). These policies include one of the highest military expenditure levels in the world, one of the lowest corporate taxation rates in the European Union (EU) and a high bank bailout (Pentaraki, 2013). The imposition of these austerity measures accelerated the level of hunger, poverty, and unemployment, all components of the neoliberal restructuring of society (Karamessini, 2014; Pentaraki, 2019a). Such social problems experienced frequently in the Global South are now seen at the wider scale in the Global North. Therefore, a critical analysis of how a neoliberal structural adjustment programme, as a part of global neoliberalism, was responsible for these problems is relevant in the analysis of the social problems in Greece, a developed country, as well as in other developed countries of the EU.

This global to local connection has been characterising the discourse of grassroots community solidarity structures. It was discussed at public events such as the Anti-Racist Festival, organised in June 2016 by progressive social movements networks in Chania, in which the Social Kitchen participated. During the Anti-Racist Festival, discussions took place, and campaign materials were distributed, including those contesting the hegemonic discourse of Greece's exceptionality and the self-inflicted nature of its social problems. Other campaign events and materials aimed to situate the global nature of the social problems as emanating from global capitalism. Hence, the connections between the global and the local ties become evident, and the need to scale up the struggles to confront

the global structural context of the imposed austerity policies, which undermine their lives and Greek society in general. WGCSS' struggles are thus tied in with struggles against the policies and struggles against global neoliberalism.

In 2018, after eight years of continuous operation, fatigue and physical tiredness associated with the day-in-day-out commitment of its members contributed to the closure of the Social Kitchen. In its eight years, it had become one of the longest-lived solidarity structures in Greece. However, the arguments produced in this paper are still relevant since the counterhegemonic legacy of the activities of the Social Kitchen is reflected in the actions of the former members. In the summer of 2019, discussions took place with them. They had not stopped participating in anti-austerity struggles and continued to engage in counter-hegemonic practices to challenge the TINA discourse. Some members maintained a broader quest for political transformation through political parties. Others had added a political dimension in their day-to-day paid work. Others transferred their activities to other solidarity structures in Chania. However, there is a clear message that hope still lives on in former members' actions. Although the Social Kitchen no longer operates, the activism of its former members, along with the counterhegemonic ideas of another society, continue and offer a possibility of hope. It will be interesting to explore in future research if these members who are no longer active in WGCSS participate again in grassroots solidarity structures, such as those which emerged from the COVID-19 global public health emergency or if they will concentrate on different political activism. Even though the discussed social kitchen does not exist anymore, there are many other grassroots solidarity structures with similar philosophies which continue to operate, particularly social pharmacies and social medical centres. This analysis can apply to them too.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 public health emergency crisis has provided the context for similar solidarity structures to operate not only in Greece (Travlou, 2020) but also worldwide (Domínguez et al., 2020; Béhague & Ortega, 2021; Spade, 2020; Littman et al., 2022; Valdebenito-Acosta et al., 2022; Van Ryneveld et al., 2022), keeping alive the counterhegemonic project. Their operation reflects a resistance and an alternative to the current neoliberal order. Crises provide useful lessons that educators from the critical tradition can utilise towards achieving this aim (Pentaraki, 2022).

Conclusion

This paper, informed by Gramsci's thought, has introduced a new conceptualisation of solidarity structures as grassroots counterhegemonic attempts against the legitimisation of neoliberalism and its associated TINA discourse. It maintained, amongst other things, that their operation reflects arguments about the need for collective welfare provisioning, which can advance 'the war of position' against the pervasive hegemonic system. Moreover, solidarity structures such as social kitchens, solidarity clinics and so forth, as well as being

essential survival resources in times of crisis (Koos, 2019) and need, are also a vital social and political resource in challenging austerity common sense (Pentaraki, 2019a) and the neoliberal capitalist logic in general.

Such an approach brings to light the role of grassroots welfare provisioning from below as sites of progressive political education and, furthermore, analyses solidarity structures as counterhegemonic political actors. Of course, this does not ignore that these communities are just one part of the more comprehensive counterhegemonic project. The visioning of this project requires as Stephen (2011, p. 214) argues, a socio-political struggle to create "a new political organisation capable of mobilising all subordinate strata into a coherent whole, one capable of replacing the coercive apparatus of the bourgeois state". The question of strategy for attaining this goal raises many questions. Active contestation of the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal capitalism is one such way. As Gramsci asserts, "it is on the level of ideologies that men [sic] become conscious of conflicts in the world of the economy" (1971, p. 162). The construction of alternative ideological positions based on critically enhanced human knowledge presents a new common sense, or else a good sense and this construction of a new hegemony to replace the ruling class hegemony. For Gramsci (1971, p. 288), the starting point for constructing hegemony must always be "that common sense which is a spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which has to be made ideologically coherent". Towards this goal, the narratives of grassroots community solidarity structures can play a role. These narratives create new ways of thinking concerning the neoliberal TINA. We need to remember, though, that it is not only these counterhegemonic narratives which can lead to human and social emancipation. To argue this would be rather idealistic. As Gramsci argues throughout the Prison Notebooks (1971), a genuinely hegemonic project, aiming to take over the ruling elite's hegemonic project cannot be reduced to the battle of ideas. Thomas (2013) asserts that it involves changing perspectives across many practices (i.e. including cultural and social) and the overtly political, as part of the project to build hegemonic power, must be continually tested and revised. This is what the actors of WGCSS do as organic intellectuals. Thus the: "political project of hegemonic politics … comes to represent a type of "pedagogical laboratory" for the development of new forms of democratic and emancipatory political practice" (Thomas, 2013, p. 27).

Members of the structures learn to operate in a different way both within and outside the structures, forming and being part of communities of contestation which offer a glimpse of another world (Pentaraki & Speake, 2015). However, large-scale socio-political transformation needs the forging of progressive alliances capable of undermining the neoliberal hegemonic bloc (Arampatzi, 2017; 2018; Featherstone & Karaliotas, 2018; Gómez Garrido et al., 2019).

The purpose of this paper has been to highlight the counterhegemonic practices and articulations of grassroots community solidarity structures and, in doing so, has sought to enhance contestation against neoliberal capitalism. WGCSS are a sustaining element of the 'war of position' and counterhegemonic struggles against global neoliberalism as they highlight collective provisioning

versus responsibilisation, empowerment and community action versus fear and stigmatisation and systemic failings instead of individual failings. In so doing, counterhegemonic articulations and practices are on-going and become visible. These can be part of the critical learning resources that can be used to inspire humanity about the possibilities for another world that open-up in times of crisis.

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