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## Protesting Against Property Foreclosures in a Fragmentized Socio-Political Sphere: An Action-Oriented Model

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### Introduction

From the late nineteenth century up until contemporary times, the issue of “the crisis of psychology” has generated long-lasting and intense controversies (Sturm & Mülberger, 2012). Recently, a large body of academic literature has supported that this crisis-ridden discipline has played a key role in the solidification of the neoliberal model of governance and uncritically reflected and reproduced the sort of atomistic individualism associated with it (Burton, 2015; Mentinis, 2013; Walker et al., 2014). Along these lines, deconstructing the role of the psy-complex in the neoliberal workings of personal debt and the debt industry constitutes a task of vital importance. The institutions of mainstream psychological science and the psy-experts have reinforced the propagation of debt as a matter of “cognitive delinquency” and “financial illiteracy” and enabled the sole attribution of indebtedness to the moral deficits and the internal pathologies of the “irresponsible” and “deceptive” indebted citizens (Burton, 2015; Walker, 2012; Walker et al., 2014). Ignoring and concealing the structural dimensions of personal debt (widespread precariousness, unemployment, recession, stagnation of wages, etc.),

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psychological science has remained solely restricted in helping indebted and evicted individuals to adapt to the new conditions and function better in an unjust system (Ballester et al., 2015).

This chapter challenges these conservative understandings of psychological science and offers insights from an action-oriented project that focuses on a network of evicted and indebted citizens in Greece's austerity context. The research initiative is informed by the community psychology principles of giving voice and empowering the most oppressed and vulnerable social groups and critically analyzing hegemonic practices and discourses. In Greece, community psychology as an integrated academic and professional practice has not yet been fully developed (Triliva & Marvakis, 2007). However, vis-à-vis the neoliberal transformations and conceptualizations within Greek society, many psychologists and mental health professionals are taking a critical and reflective stance toward the individualized and psychologizing approaches applied by social scientists in understanding or intervening in people's life-world. They are more skeptical of the decontextualized conceptual tools of mainstream psychological science and are moving toward alternative forms of interventions (Mentinis, 2013; Triliva et al., 2013).

## The Fragmented Socio-Political Sphere in Crisis-Ridden Greece

Greek society has been subjected to destructive neoliberal adjustments and to the painful austerity policies that were implemented as a remedy to the Greek sovereign debt crisis. The austerity packages imposed by European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) included unpopular measures, such as widespread privatizations and massive cuts in social welfare spending, wages, and pensions (Blyth, 2015; Williams & Maruthappu, 2013). A large body of academic literature has already outlined the lack of empirical support for the narratives of austerity policies and sovereign debt crises that have imbued public space (Blyth, 2015; Burton, 2015). The pernicious psychosocial effects of the neoliberal management of the "Greek" crisis have also been documented (Triliva et al., 2013; Vavvos & Triliva, 2018; Williams & Maruthappu, 2013). The socio-political and economic landscape in Greece was and is replete of crises, including a healthconomic crisis (Williams & Maruthappu, 2013) and the unprecedented global refugee crisis (Kousoulis et al., 2016). According to Public Issue's data for 2012, four in 10 households (41%) have taken out a bank loan (Public

Issue, 2013), while Sapounakis and Katapidi (2017) report that 4501 court decisions on evictions from primary residences had taken place in the Country Court (Eirinodikeio) of Athens in 2013.

Likewise, within the political landscape, confusion and complexity have abounded, including the rise of Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi political party (Zartaloudis, 2013), and the results of two elections (January and September 2015) where a historically uncommon coalition government between the radical right-wing party of Independent Greeks and the radical left-wing party of Syriza was formed. The political parties that coalesced were voted to usher in “the politics of hope” and a counter-neoliberal policy agenda (Katsambekis, 2016). Just a few months after taking on the realms of governing, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called for a referendum vote and the 61.3% of those casting a ballot in the so-called Greferendum—the Greek austerity referendum of 5 July 2015—voted “no” to the harsh third bailout package proposed by creditors. Despite these results, the government broke its anti-memorandum promises and implemented another round of brutal austerity measures (Giannacopoulos, 2016). This added to the political muddling, people’s bemusement, and political identity confusion. The latter is an important component in cultivating a common identity which is an integral part of mobilizing and collective action. Given the conflictual context, forging and upholding unity and common action is not a facile task for solidarity coalitions.

## **The Local Context and the Emergence of SAOR**

During the crisis years, thousands of citizens in many European countries have been expelled from their homes and evicted from their residences due to their inability to pay their rent or make mortgage payments (Ballester et al., 2015; Ordóñez et al., 2015). Following this collapse of a failing Euroatlantic social and political system, many anti-debt and anti-foreclosure coalitions such as Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) in Spain and Bündnis Zwangsäumung Verhindern (BZV) in Berlin have taken direct action addressing crucial issues regarding debt and housing through grassroots activism (Ordóñez et al., 2015).

A paradigmatic case of the “foreclosure protestors” is SAOR (Network for the Mutual Assistance of Debtors), an anti-foreclosure network established in 2013 in a Cretan city. The network’s charter and members’ praxis include an agenda of actions planned and implemented in order to transverse a crisis-ridden economic and political arena. In a socioeconomic sphere where crises

prevail, have taken hold, and ravaged Greece, the SAOR coalition can be dubbed a populist social movement, which according to Aslanidis (2016) is a

non-institutional collective mobilization expressing a catch-all political platform of grievances that divides society between an overwhelming majority of pure people and a corrupt elite, and that claims to speak on behalf of the people in demanding restoration of political authority into their hands as rightful sovereigns. (pp. 304–305)

The aim of the coalition is to protect, inform, and empower debtors so that they can reclaim and redeem their lives. According to the members of the coalition, they have disrupted and prevented more than 1000 planned court foreclosure proceedings during the past seven years. The arsenal of their collective action praxes includes physically averting the serving of eviction notices and impeding court officials from completing the legal processes involved in foreclosures, creating a human wall to protect the threatened home from foreclosure, and protesting against the existing housing legislation. Due to their “unlawful praxes,” many members of the coalition have been arrested for trying to disrupt and impede the eviction procedures which were regularly scheduled in the town’s courts. Table 10.1 provides the information for the trajectory of the coalition, the stages of the intervention, and the key events in Greek politics.

The aim of this chapter is to inquire into how qualitative research can be used as practical knowledge. After a brief review of the first phase of this project which contained a qualitative study conducted with members of SAOR in 2014, the chapter presents the second one which included a public presentation of the results of this qualitative study and a focus group with members of the coalition. The scope of these research activities was to stimulate critical conscientization processes regarding the hegemonic and ethnocentric undertones of coalition’s praxis and discourse and to investigate how initial findings could have resonance and relevance for the participants’ daily struggles (see also Baldwin, 2001). In the third and last phase of the research we endeavored to work collaboratively with members of SAOR and use media and documentary film to bring public awareness to the mental health challenges of debtors and to engender community dialogue on the complexities involved when the political is equated with the personal sphere, especially in contested and conflictual public spaces.

**Table 10.1** Key events in this research initiative and in Greek politics

Timeline	The trajectory of the coalition and the stages of the intervention	Key events in Greek politics
October 2009		Newly elected Prime Minister George Papandreou from the socialist party of PASOK reveals the country's large budget deficit. Greece's borrowing costs skyrocket and its credit rating is downgraded to "junk status."
May 2010		First bailout of Greece in a context of political and social upheaval, including demonstrations and riots against austerity.
October 2011		Prime Minister Papandreou proposes a referendum vote focusing on the second bailout agreement. Prime Minister Papandreou resigns and a unity coalition government headed by economist Lucas Papademos takes over and implements more stringent austerity measures.
February 2012		Second IMF–EU bailout is approved, including a restructuring of debt.
November 2013	The charter of the coalition is written by its members. On a weekly basis, members of the network will meet in or outside of courtrooms in order to disrupt the scheduled foreclosure processes.	
October–December 2014	Implementation of the first stage of research: 11 interviews and one focus group with members of the coalition are conducted.	Prime Minister Antonis Samaras does not enter negotiations for another bailout agreement.
25 January 2015		Elections and formation of a coalition government between Independent Greeks and Syriza: showdown with creditors, amid discourses of default and Grexit.

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Table 10.1 (continued)

Timeline	The trajectory of the coalition and the stages of the intervention	Key events in Greek politics
5 July 2015		The Greek bailout referendum takes place, in a context of "capital controls." A "NO" vote overwhelmingly rejected the new bailout terms.
14 August 2015		With 222 voting in favor, the Greek parliament approves the third bailout program and the harsh austerity reforms. The Syriza Party splits into two.
21 September 2015		The Greek legislative election was held following Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' announced resignation on 20th August.
28 September 2016	The coalition is blamed by the antifascist network of Rethymno for being xenophobic and for participating in the campaign against hosting refugees in Crete.	
5 February 2017	SAOR and other coalitions in Crete merge into a larger anti-foreclosure network, the PanCretan Network of Forces of Resistance and Mutual Help.	
2 October 2017	Three members of the administrative council of SAOR are arrested for alleged crimes they committed. The coalition's actions receive a great deal of media attention.	
21 October 2017	Presentation of the research in the conference and conduct of the focus group.	
October 2017–February 2018	Publication of the interview articles in the local newspapers.	

*(continued)*

Table 10.1 (continued)

Timeline	The trajectory of the coalition and the stages of the intervention	Key events in Greek politics
24 October 2017	The first author and two members of the coalition speak about the research project in a local radio channel.	
04 November 2017–31 December 2017		Greek notaries decide to abstain from all auctions due to safety concerns.
29 November 2017		Greek government launches the platform for online auctions, a prerequisite of the third bailout program. The launch of online auctions was a means of keeping the protestors away from courtroom proceedings and brought the auction procedures in public courtrooms to a halt. Violent clashes of protestors with riot police in Athens and Thessaloniki take place.
02 December 2018	Presentation of the documentary <i>SAOR: A Reflection of the Crisis?</i> in an academic conference.	

## The Neoliberal Myth of Austerity: Indebted Personhood in a Bankrupt Nation

In May 2015, members of SAOR turned to the Department of Psychology at the University of Crete, requesting psychological help for debtors in their coalition, who were confronting mental health challenges connected to socio-economic difficulties. As they requested, a qualitative inquiry was conducted to clarify their needs and contextualize their stories and collective struggles. During the period from October through December 2014, 11 semi-structured interviews and one focus group (six participants) were conducted and analyzed using phenomenologically informed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three superordinate themes comprised an analytic narrative under the title: “The neoliberal myth of austerity: Indebted personhood in a bankrupt nation” (see Vavvos & Triliva, 2018).

In this study, participants described the collapse of their dignity and the feelings of shame and guilt they experienced as indebted citizens during the austerity era. They explained how SAOR had constituted a sociospatial topos where they could grasp the commonality of their suffering and question the individualizing narrative of indebtedness. The emancipatory (saving homes, redefining the narrative of debt, producing solidarity discourses, etc.) and the ambiguous (ethnocentric and individualized focus, the demands for the return of neoliberal pre-crisis conditions, lack of critical reflection on the neoliberal growth-oriented lifestyle, etc.) aspects of their struggles were also critically discussed. A second phase of research could ultimately aid in the exposure of these socio-political contradictions. Conscientization of the ways in which psychic functions and processes and social circumstances constitute each other and co-produce SAOR's members' realities and activities was necessary.

## **The Step from “Research on” to “Action-Oriented Research”**

The findings of this qualitative research were presented in a local scientific conference focusing on solidarity economy. After informing the coalitions' stakeholders about the conference, eight members participated in the discussion that ensued the presentation. All in all, rather than imposing our “expert” perspective on the data and overshadowing participants' voices, the democratic process of a public presentation ensured equal participation in the co-construction of knowledge and constituted a space to critique, provoke, and challenge the participants' and our own interpretations and perspectives. That process was a necessary step for this project and forced us to move into more intricate discursive positions and call into question the dominant positivist conceptualizations of data ownership and validity (see Baldwin, 2001).

The presentation was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Participants in the conference discussion provided informed consent after the study's aims, benefits, and procedures were explained to them. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms and all recordings were deleted once the anonymized transcripts were completed. Given that populist movements claim to express the will of the people (Katsambekis, 2016), we focused the analysis on how researchers, SAOR members, and activists present in the conference had constructed the concept of “the people” and how these constructions were promoting social justice. The systematic procedures and data analysis processes described by Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a framework for



coding the data. The thematic analysis included familiarization with the data, data reduction via coding, searching, and deriving themes, and producing condensed data in conceptually grouped analytical units. From this process, two overriding themes were identified: (1) the dispute between a pragmatist and an ideological discourse and (2) crossing the blurred lines of politics: a first-person reflection. Thematic analysis will be drawn on to critically examine the hegemonic undertones of coalition's praxis and discourse and the researcher's positionality.

## **The Dispute Between an Ethnocentric and a Left-wing Discourse**

Academics and activists, present at the conference, expressed their animosity toward SAOR's aims, tactics, and members. The "class" issue dominated the discussion and there were persistent questions about the class position of SAOR's members. Promoting a cross-class unification of Greek people against austerity measures and elites, SAOR members were criticized for reproducing an ethnocentric rhetoric and protecting the rights and interests of the beneficiaries of the neoliberal order. Zizis, an academic, pointed out: "Behind these, a discourse about the Greek people surfaces. ... Greek populace is not one populace, there are classes etc." and Christos, an activist, added: "How do you decide ... which business or which houses are you going to help, by stopping its foreclosure?"

The people present at the conference were members of grassroots economic initiatives, representatives of the social solidarity economy, and strong supporters of a radical social and economic restructuring of society. Hence, they were critical of SAOR's reformist and pragmatist demands (return of normal market conditions, urgent requests for dignified existence, finding jobs, canceling debts, etc.). Furthermore, apart from the appeals for a cross-class alliance against corrupt elites and foreign economic institutions, SAOR, similar to other anti-eviction groups, aimed to unite and include ideologically diverse actors and heterogeneous groups under the umbrella of a common objective—stopping foreclosures.

In the discussion, the inclusion of members and voters of a neo-fascist party in the coalition was the focal point of the discord. The articulatory links between austerity, Euroscepticism, and nationalism and the rise of neo-fascism galvanized the political atmosphere. Hence, there was a disputable and controversial issue at stake for solidarity initiatives: should a "solidarity" coalition

include members or voters of neo-fascist communities and parties? Iakovos, a member of SAOR, declared: "People, who are in the coalition, support different parties. ... I have seen people from Communist Party of Greece, I have seen people from neo-fascist groups, from New Democracy." And Vasilis, an activist, responded regarding supporters of fascist ideologies: "The existence of these people in SAOR's circles is a very serious matter ... because we are talking about dangerous people ... if we do not do something tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, we are going to mourn victims."

In the local community, there was much discord and condemnation for the reproduction of a "right-wing" populist rhetoric by, at least, some members of SAOR; namely, a rigid conceptualization of the people as a homogeneous ethnic group (the "Greek" people). This framing of the movement in patriotic terms accompanied by inclusion of all classes (among others, those who strategically do not pay their debts and elite debtors) and ideologies (among others, members of neo-fascist groups) created a hodgepodge with regard to the common identity of the collectivity. The process of public presentation made apparent these ambiguities and contradictions in the coalition's members' political stance. They were besieged to adopt a more critical and reflective stance.

## **Crossing the Blurred Lines of Politics: A First-Person Reflection**

Taking into consideration what Paulo Freire has ironically described as the academic "air of messianism" (see Freire, 1994, p. 79), we attempted to be, also, "conscientized" by the conference dialogue and exchange and question our own political assumptions and ethical stances. As researchers we were not neutral in that the ethnocentric rhetoric that was very evident in the first phase of the research brought up lots of critical analysis regarding the political ramifications of such narrations and our positionality as researchers. This issue captured the ideological complexity of the research project and became the focal point of the discord between participants. Dimitris, an activist, stated:

I believe that we have to overcome ... this neutrality about the values, which, let's say, Weber, has established ... if there was here someone from a neo-fascist party ... what should we do? And what should you do as a researcher when you face those people or even the choice of this subject matter.

Panagiotis, an activist, said addressing Dimitris: “I will disagree with my friend ... of course, reality includes people who belong to neo-fascist groups. What can we do? It is perspicuous that when you do research, obviously there are fascists.” The discussion generated a heated debate and revolved around the researchers’ positionality and constraints of SAOR’s struggles in generating a social justice agenda. On the one hand, the coalition had offered a socio-spatial space where debtors, who had been gravely oppressed by destructive neoliberal adjustments, could express their growing indignation and grievances. On the other hand, the SAOR coalition, similar to other anti-eviction networks such as PAH and BZV (Ordóñez et al., 2015), had not shaped an explicit political agenda to frame the issues of personal debt and affordable housing. As a result, their unstated ethnocentric rhetoric provided a fertile ground for the oppression of other social groups (refugees, migrants, etc.) and for the tolerance and indifference toward neo-fascist groups’ actions.

We attempted to address this difficult impasse denouncing the intolerance espoused by neo-fascist groups and while showing respect to the personal stories participants had shared with us and our collaborative relationships with the coalitions’ members. As qualitative researchers and psychologists influenced by principles of community psychology, we rejected a value-neutral stance and endeavored to make the tolerance toward neo-fascist parties a matter of public and rational argumentation. Given the rise of right-wing populist parties and movements in the European context (Katsambekis, 2016), we propose that it is crucial for community psychologists to critically highlight and analyze activists’ tacit political assumptions and “claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant” (Popper, 2003, p. 293).

## **Focus Group: The Aftermath of the Tumultuous Conference Discussion**

Immediately after the conference presentation, a focus group was conducted in the Center of Research and Studies of the University of Crete. The focus group lasted one hour and, apart from the researchers, six male members of the coalition participated: Iakovos (53 y/o), Stelios (64 y/o), Panagiotis (51 y/o), Lefteris (59 y/o), Vasilis (48 y/o), and Nikos (58 y/o). Based on the researchers’ and participants’ concerns and on the feedback from the presentation and discussion, the focus group was based on five thematic axes.

1. The relevance of the qualitative research and the discussion that ensued for their daily struggles.
2. The arrest of coalition members for being involved in criminal activities and the episodes of violence and fierce clashes of SAOR members with the police.
3. The challenge of the electronic foreclosures.
4. The need for common dialogical rules and how they interface with the lack of mobilization of a large sector of those that “belong” to the coalition.
5. The presence of people supporting a neo-fascist ideology in the coalition and the racist and ethnocentric rhetoric of some members of the coalition. The discussion was focused on this issue and caused a critical debate between participants. Most of the members of the group expressed their stance on these issues. Lefteris declared:

Because in our circles there was expression of an unprocessed rage and indignation, many tried to invest on this. This member of the neo-fascist group ... had said “the Muslims are threatening us” and I told him “I am a Muslim” [laughter] ... or against homosexuals ... or Nikos [pseudonym] was coming and saying “no immigrant in Crete.” I told him “no racist in Crete.”

The focus group discussion led to the decision to make a documentary film and to publicize in local media channels (radio, newspapers) the participants’ silenced stories of indebtedness in order to bring under public scrutiny the hardships, the problems, and the socio-political perceptions and actions of SAOR’s members. The scope was to engender public conversation and awareness regarding the complexities that were forging SAOR’s praxis with regard to the debt and foreclosures.

## **Using Interviews as a Tool for Self-Reflection: Debtor’s Stories in the Public Space**

During the third phase of this research, SAOR members’ interviews conducted in 2014 were published in two newspapers and in their electronic sites, *Kritiki Epitheorisi* (Cretan Inspection) in Rethymno and *Agonas Kritisi* (Cretan Fight) in Chania. The general public of this intervention included Greek-speaking citizens that had access either to the printed or to the online edition of the newspaper. As stated in the introductory article in *Agonas*

Kritis, “the aim of this cooperation is to open a fertile channel of communication and dialogue between the university, society and the ‘stop’ foreclosures movement” (Aggelakis, 2017, p. 3). The journalist from Kritiki Epitheorisi declared that “a research like that, which does not stop with the data of 2014, but follows the developments, has an unquestionable interest and concurrently proves the quality of collaboration that university can have with the local community” (Vilara, 2017, p. 6).

Initially, we came in contact with all the interviewees, explaining the aim and the scope of this intervention. Eight SAOR members responded positively. Furthermore, they each selected the parts of the interview that would be publicized in the newspaper article. Additionally, we jointly re-read, reflected, and critically commented on the transcript of the interview based on two thematic questions: (a) what emotions and thoughts did the reading of the transcript trigger and (b) how had their lives changed since the interview was conducted (three years later). All the final articles were approximately 800 words and were published from October 2017 to February 2018. Table 10.2 provides the following information: the pseudonym of the interviewee, the title and meaning of the title of the newspaper article, and interviewee’s comments on his/her interview in 2014.

SAOR members reported that it was redeeming and empowering to critically reflect on their biographical trajectories and make the public aware of their suffering. Most of them stressed that it was valuable to actively engage in an intervention that aimed to document how the crisis had impacted theirs’ and others’ lifeworlds. In a nutshell, the use of a newspaper article as a tool for community intervention provided a way to avoid circumscribing and limiting the research endeavor opening it up to a community-wide audience.

## **The Psychology of Indebted Man and the Shortcomings of the Anti-foreclosure Movement**

The media coverage phase of the research continued with the participation of the first author in a local radio channel on 24 October 2017. The first author was invited to speak about this research project and the discussion had the title: “The Psychology of Indebted Man and the Shortcomings of the ‘Stop’ Foreclosure Movement.”<sup>1</sup> Apart from the researcher, two members of the

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<sup>1</sup> For the radio broadcast see [in Greek]: <https://soundcloud.com/andreas-vavvos/25-10-2017a>

Table 10.2 Debtor's stories in the public space

Name	Title	Meaning	Comments
Michalis	In a cell	The fear that police would arrest and imprison him because of his debts.	Financially, I'm in a worse situation, but for some reason I continue to hope for something better. Reading the transcript I smiled, reflecting on how my life was three years ago and where I am now. For me, the coalition still inspires hope for human power and will, even after the tragic events.
Vasilis	No you do not pass five, you pass ten	A debtor living in the austerity era is like a student, who despite the fact s/he was initially told that s/he needs to pass five, s/he is finally forced to pass ten courses.	Today I am free. I have accepted that I cannot save anything. The trap was well positioned. I fell in. I gathered all my psychic strength with my family and some good friends and we are trying to get our lives back.
Aristotelis	When you hear the bell tolling, do not ask for whom it is tolling, know that it is for you	Using Ernest Hemingway's famous quote, in order to highlight the importance of getting informed and taking action.	I found interesting the idea of cooperating with the Department of Psychology. I was glad that this discussion took place, because I think that the well-documented presentation of conclusions helps in knowledge construction and informs society regarding the debt problem.
Ioanna	The "cheapskate" Character from the book <i>Christ Recrucified</i>	Parallelizing her daily life with the character "cheapskate," scrooge from the book <i>Christ Recrucified</i> .	It was very pleasant to re-read the interview. It is almost 3 years ago. I mocked myself about the innocent answers that I gave then and I thought "Was this me? Who was saying these things?" I have no contact with the coalition and its members anymore.

(continued)

Table 10.2 (continued)

Name	Title	Meaning	Comments
Themistoklis	Finding equilibrium in a descending elevator	Giving voice to precarity and insecurity.	In general, the situation remains stable. Only with a bank I had a major improvement. Seeing my interview three years later, I am realizing how stagnated the financial situation continues to be. Psychological malaise continues unchanged. Eventually the elevator's belt may break.
Iakovos	Wherever you look, you see walls	Describing his life as a trap where he feels hemmed in and cannot find a way out.	Personally, nothing has changed since the interview. The state has closed the doors to us. What the University of Crete did was a good praxis, following what SAOR requested. From that process one sees what every citizen feels.
Stelios	They are the same like you	Expressing feelings of solidarity between SAOR's members.	My life has no improvement, the opposite is true. I do not stop hoping, since SAOR is in a developing process.
Despoina	Debt as a recourse	Depicting debt as systemic necessity in order to deal with daily financial problems.	My life has changed a lot. My health is not good. Cancer treatment brings many complications and I am unable to work. Regarding the interview, my emotions are mixed. On the one hand, I feel relieved because I shared with someone my problem, but on the other hand I feel shame.

In the Greek educational context, a student is obliged to pass a specific amount of courses each semester. Vasilis uses this analogy in order to depict how he was finally forced to pay over the odds and describe the false promises that governments and creditors gave to debtors.

coalition participated in the discussion. The discussion lasted almost 17 minutes and was focused on the following themes:

1. Description of the nature, the aims, the results, and the methodology of the research and a brief literature review.
2. A critical evaluation of the differences and similarities of creditors' and debtors' discourses, as presented in the specific research, and the blame-game around the Greek crisis.
3. A discussion about the limitations, contradictions, political aims, and future of the "stop" foreclosures movement.
4. The relationship of university with the local community and the collaboration of university members with local actors.

## SAOR: A Reflection of the Crisis?

The audiovisual part of the project took the form of a documentary<sup>2</sup> entitled *SAOR: A Reflection of the Crisis?* and added useful insights as compared to other documentaries, such as *Mietrebellen* and *La Plataforma*, that refer to anti-foreclosure coalitions (Ordóñez et al., 2015). The final version of the documentary was a result of an in-depth collaboration between SAOR members, a journalistic working group, and members of the Department of Psychology, who had been working on interviewing the coalition's members in the first phase of the research process in 2014. The researchers and the interviewees commonly chose the interview excerpts that would be included in the documentary. The excerpts chosen highlighted best the essence of the participants' narrations and stories and were befitting with the documentary's aim.

The documentary was initially inspired by the growing insecurity and precariousness that the crisis brought to peoples' lives. Its aim was to highlight the psychosocial effects of the economic crisis in the specific region, from 2015 to 2017. The focus was directed on SAOR as a reflection of the crisis in the region, since this anti-foreclosure network was first founded in Greece and the subject of "foreclosures" received national publicity at that time. This interlacing of discourses, media broadcasts, and information brought to the surface the connection between the facts in a more cogent, complete, and

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<sup>2</sup>This part was co-written with Matthaios Kapetanakis, journalist, main director, and producer of the documentary. For the documentary, see: <https://filmfreeway.com/SAORacrisisreflection>



valid way. This form of triangulation revealed that there was a climax in coalition's protest events that finally led to arrests, but also in the hidden criminal activity of some people who took advantage of the SAOR network's members' recognition, acceptance, and friendship, so as to hide their clandestine and illicit activities. Another significant issue that arose was the hidden facts and information in the course of some of the collectivity's praxes. Using multiple sources, unapparent or only circulated as rumors events, what came to light was a climax that had provided an unofficial safe environment for illegal activities.

An initial version of this documentary was presented in the conference "Crete in the 21st Century: Problems, Challenges and Perspectives in the Cretan Society, Economy, Politics and Health."<sup>3</sup> After the viewing, a fruitful discussion followed between SAOR members, researchers, academics, and members of other coalition groups. This revealed the impact of the incidents to the main actors, the members of the community, who had the chance to reflect on how the political economy of debt had contextualized human suffering and on the political narrations of the "stop" foreclosures movement.

## Conclusions

In the first phase of this research project, participants likened their realities to a "fairy tale." Their stories highlighted that austerity is a "fairy tale" narrated by those yielding power in order to portray "a happy ever after" for "elites" and, to concurrently be applied, "as a made-up story" designed to hoodwink and mislead the populace. This simile resembles what Martín-Baró depicted as the Social Lie, which "consists in constructing a reality that is ideologically compatible with the interests of the dominant class" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 188). We hope that this research has contributed to bringing a more critical awareness of what SAOR members had described as a "fairy tale" and helped to bolster SAOR's members' critical reflection on how bringing about political change is complex. Collective action proved to be tricky and, although the austerity regimes continue to be enforced, the SAOR coalition is struggling to find a cohesive political identity and to fight the foreclosures in what proved to be shifting and highly contested socio-political spaces.

Our long and reflexive engagement with the coalition, the community, and the multifaceted literature emanating from different fields of study kept us aware and actively involved with the complexities of doing the research and

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<sup>3</sup> For the conference see [in Greek]: <http://30years.soc.uoc.gr/>

also in recognizing, examining, and understanding our own assumptions and positioning throughout the process. We learned a great deal both personally and professionally, since it was demanding to deconstruct the political, personal, and economic forces and their confluence. Endeavoring into the community and assuming the role of intermediaries between the tainted identity of the coalition, other collectivities, public condemnation regarding the criminal activity of three of SAOR's members, and the fragmented political space was and continues to be an arduous task for us and all involved. Furthermore, conducting action research at a time of constant change and debate about the roles of those governing, people's responsibilities, and the nation's future placed all involved in the process in precarious positioning. Working with people within the same community, who concomitantly espouse diverse and antithetical values was laborious, yet crucial. In doing this, we focused on community psychology's critical agenda, bringing to the forefront and underscoring the many contradictions that pervade neoliberal practices and the political subjects it produces.

In terms of practice, we propose that future community psychologists should engage in community-based art initiatives such as the documentary produced in this research initiative. Community-based theater (theater of oppressed, documentary theater, etc.) is also an alternative medium of disseminating research findings. Theatrical activities, apart from being a means of self-expression and self-growth, can be a tool for a "gentler" and "softer" social activism for adults with psychiatric experiences (Faigin & Stein, 2015, pp. 157). In particular, documentary theater, a performance style which cites real documents such as interview transcripts, can be a useful tool for community psychologists and qualitative researchers engaging in conversation with communities where discord and divisiveness exist. The use of reflexivity throughout the research process from the outset until the end can also be a catalyst for an innovative research practice. Creating a manuscript open to criticism and comments from academics, activists, journalists, members of community groups, and local citizens is an eye-opening process where different filters offer perspectives that are valuable. This community collaboration creates a participative framework that highlights complexity and the many different aspects of social issues. Stretching and blurring these technical boundaries between researchers and researched and engaging in the anxiety-producing process of venturing out of the "ivory tower" of academia is the task at hand for psychologists interested in political activism and social change.

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