

CULTURAL OTHERING, BANAL OCCIDENTALISM AND THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ‘GREEK CRISIS’ IN GLOBAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY

ABSTRACT

In the wake of Billig’s thesis on banal nationalism, numerous social psychology studies have been produced documenting on the explicit manifestation or implicit indexicalisation of variants of national identity within text and talk. Within this strand of work, some attention has been paid to ways in which the banal manifestation of national referents may be further interrogated from a critical perspective focusing on Occidentalism. Drawing on this emerging line of research, an analysis is presented here of a travelogue on ‘the Greek crisis’, published in a globally circulating magazine (*Vanity Fair*). Using tools and concepts from the discursive turn in social psychology, the analysis highlights ways in which Occidentalist assumptions claim rhetorical and ideological legitimacy within a text that advances a ‘culturalist’ explanation of the financial crisis in which Greece has been entangled since 2009. The analysis focuses on ways in which the authorial voice others Greece culturally, while at the same time, manages its own accountability and (re-) affirms its Occidental credentials.

Keywords: Accountability, cultural othering, banal nationalism, banal Occidentalism, critical discursive social psychology, Greek financial crisis, neoliberalism

INTRODUCTION

During the first six months of 2015, the global media were saturated, once again, with reports on ‘dramatic’ developments in the seemingly unending ‘Greek crisis’ saga. It is well known by now that Greece, one of the weaker national economies within the Eurozone, was severely hit by the 2008 global financial crisis. Locked as it was within a common currency system (Eurozone), Greece had to be bailed out by

international creditors twice, in 2010 and again in 2012, loading its already overloaded national debt account with approximately 240 billion Euros in new loans.¹ Of course, the political price to be paid was high. Harsh austerity policies, dictated and imposed, led the country into an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and to the ‘dramatic’ political events unfolding from January to early July 2015.

Meanwhile, since late 2009, Greece has also been ‘hit’ by recurrent avalanches of

negative publicity in global media (e.g., Bickes, Otten, and Weymann 2014; Chalániová 2013; Kaitatzi-Whitlock 2014; Kutter 2014; Mylonas 2012; Tracy 2012; Tzogopoulos 2013; Wodak and Angouri 2014). As Triandafyllidou, Gropas, and Kouki (2013) point out, the dominant narrative within such global (and domestic) media coverage revolved around the (argued) *cultural* underpinnings of the ‘Greek crisis’ that make it an exceptional case (see also Σταυρακάκης 2014). In an important recent paper, the ethnographer Daniel Knight (2013) has also called attention to the gradual emergence of a ‘Greek crisis’ trope in global media discourse. This trope, Knight (2013: 147) argues, constitutes part of wider ‘narratives of blame [...] formulated by the European right and directed at specific nation-states based on essentialist ideas of culture and economy’. Indeed, in the social science literature, a pertinent observation has been made quite often recently: in the last few decades, at a global media level, the political enforcement of neoliberal policies often unfolds *in tandem* with waves of representational practices aiming at *culturally othering* populations, nations, or social classes that are being victimized by such neoliberal assaults (e.g., Mylonas 2012; Roberts and Mahtany 2010; Springer 2009, 2016). Such processes of cultural othering often also entail the pathologisation of direct or indirect resistance to neoliberal policies (see Theodossopoulos 2014). Arguably, at stake here are large-scale ideological processes working towards the transmutation of neoliberalism into global common sense (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001; Giroux 2007; Hall and O’Shea 2013; Harvey 2005).

Taking the form of a case study, my article focuses on the discursive construction of the ‘Greek crisis’ within a travelogue / investigative journalism account published in a globally

leading life-style magazine. Broadly speaking, my analysis offers a microscopic glimpse of ways in which neoliberal assumptions and lines of argumentation may come to claim being and, perhaps, pass as common sense. However, broader theoretical influences notwithstanding, mine is not an exercise in social or cultural theory. I approach my subject from a rather less travelled route. I bring into this task theoretical developments from the social psychology of nationalism (Billig 1995), works on the banal aspects of Occidentalism (Bozatzis, 2005, 2009, 2014; Μποζατζής 2005) and methodological tools and concepts from the discursive turn in social psychology (see, *inter alia*, Augoustinos and Tileagă 2012; Bozatzis and Dragonas 2014; Burman and Parker 1993; Hepburn and Wiggins 2007; Tileagă and Stokoe 2015). Critical ethnographic works—recent (e.g., Knight 2013; Theodossopoulos 2013; 2014) and older (e.g., Carrier 1995; Herzfeld 1987; 1992)—provide me, throughout, with a suitable theoretical background upon which to draw, albeit in a rather eclectic manner, and against which to pursue emerging (inter)disciplinary synergies.

It should be stressed that it is not merely contemporary political exigencies that make recent global media constructions of Greece such an apt case for my purposes. It is also that Greek identity has been historically constituted within hegemonic colonial discourses as an ambivalent cultural construct. On account of the bestowal of a glittering ancestry, it has been seen as standing at the symbolic epicentre of the Occident’s origin myth. On the other hand, during the last two centuries or so, Greece has also been exposed, repeatedly, to ‘testimonies’ of its marginal status within the symbolic community of Occidental cultural perfection, on account of its alleged contamination by Oriental / Ottoman traits (e.g., Herzfeld 1987, 1995,

2002, 2013; Τζιόβας 1994). Such ambivalent representational resources, I argue, are brought to bear upon the rhetorical / ideological (Billig 1991) work accomplished in the text I consider, and developments—theoretical and analytical—within social psychology are particularly well suited to projects aiming at empirically mapping them. Tuned in this direction, the aim of my analysis is to highlight: (a) ways in which the forceful critique of Greece involves its cultural othering / Orientalization; and (b) ways in which the authorial voice attends to its social accountability, vis-à-vis the articulation of this critique, through processes of banal Occidental (self-)positioning. As it transpires, when neoliberal political and economic arguments lay claim to common-sense status they are co-articulated with other discourses, constellations of ideological assumptions, resources, and practices (see also Hall 2011). Indeed, as it has been pertinently argued in recent ethnographic analyses (e.g. Theodossopoulos 2013; 2014), Occidental assumptions about Greek national identity come to inform and, thus, be reproduced even in counter-hegemonic, anti-austerity, lay, and political discourse in the contemporary Greek context.

THE CASE STUDY MATERIAL

The publication² I shall consider appeared in the ‘Business’ section of the U.S.-based, but global in circulation, life-style magazine *Vanity Fair* on October 1, 2010, only a few months after Greece’s first bail-out. The article was signed by a well-known, non-fiction writer cum financial journalist, Michael Lewis, while Jonas Karlsson, an esteemed photographer within the U.S. media industry, produced the two accompanying pictures. Two years later, it appeared as a chapter³ in a book by the same

author (Lewis 2012). The article comes in the form of an extended (approximately 11,000 words) investigative journalism / travelogue narrative. For the needs of his research, the author travelled and spent time in Greece, interviewing, among others, governmental ministers, politicians, bankers, and tax-collectors, as well as monks from a monastery (i.e. *Vatopaidi*) at Mount Athos⁴. The article was reproduced widely in the global blogosphere. Judging from the number of ‘Comments’, ‘Re-Tweets’ and Facebook ‘Likes’ and ‘Shares’ that its online version elicited,⁵ the least one can say is that it was successful in capturing the attention and in engaging its share of the global media audience. It is also worth mentioning that the article was received mostly positively,⁶ and it gained publicity within Greek blogs and social media. Quite characteristically, two major papers of the political mainstream, ‘H KATHMERINH’ and ‘TO BHMA’,⁷ reported extensively and positively on the then forthcoming book by Lewis and its Greek translation in their Sunday editions. The presentation of Lewis’ text on Greece in the latter newspaper ended with the sentence: ‘Lewis enters deep into the Greek culture and apparently he comprehends our behaviour rather well.’ It also transpires that the explanatory rationale developed by Lewis in this text also touched ground within international think-tank literature: a few days after the publication of the article, Hooper (2010) subscribed to, and echoed, its focal narrative construction of the ‘Byzantine’ (see below) stigmata allegedly tantalizing Greek society and politics and accounting for Greece’s entanglement in ‘its’ financial crisis.

Let me start by outlining and synthesizing the theoretical and methodological traditions and lines of research that form the background to my analysis. My first route station is the influential thesis, in social psychology and

beyond, of banal nationalism (Billig 1995) and the closely related work on the rhetorical / ideological dilemma of prejudice (e.g., Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley 1988). Consideration of some of the central tenets in these strands of work will take us some way into the task of configuring a theoretical and analytic trajectory for the study of discursive practices of cultural othering and banal Occidentalism that, I argue, can be discerned within the text considered.

BANAL NATIONALISM AND THE DILEMMA OF PREJUDICE

Social psychology has been a latecomer in theory and research production on nationalism and national identity. Indeed, it was only after the publication of *Banal Nationalism* (Billig 1995) that social psychologists turned systematically to study them (see, inter alia, Abell, Condor and Stevenson 2006; Condor 1996a,b; Condor and Abell 2006; Every and Augoustinos 2008; Rapley and Augoustinos 2002; Reicher and Hopkins 2001; Reicher, Hopkins and Condor 1997). Billig's treatise can be usefully summarized as an approach that highlights the national colouring of everyday life in (late) modernity. For Billig, everyday life is punctuated by a multitude of explicit invocations or intricate indexicalisations of national referents. Forms of literal or metaphorical national flags routinely hail citizens as *national* citizens. Such literal flags may be seen, but not necessarily noticed, on a range of commodities or hanging unceremoniously outside public buildings. Metaphorical national flags, Billig argues, can be found embedded within indexicalisations of *the* national homeland in routine linguistic phenomena, like the national 'we' found in political speeches or in the typical designation 'external news' often heading newspapers'

categorizations of news items. For Billig, then, the semantic boundaries of the term nationalism should be stretched to include its inhabited⁸ aspect and nationalism should better be treated as an ideological (*omni-*)presence in the age of the nation states. Banal nationalism refers, then, to the range of casual habits of social thought, discourse, and action that unfold in everyday life and reproduce the implicit assumption of the naturalness of the national division of the world, or, in Billig's (1995: 61) words, of the 'nation in a world of nations'.

One of Billig's arguments, indeed one very relevant for my analysis (see also Bozatzis 2014), is that nationalism and internationalism are not two distinct ideological frameworks. The nation and the international order burst onto the scene at the same historical moment and, therefore, the 'national' and the 'international' themes are better thought of as dialectic sides of the same ideology. For Billig, their juxtaposition in casual thought and argument constitutes (part of) the *rhetorical / ideological mechanism* that naturalizes and reproduces the ideology of the nation in discourse. Manifest (or less so) juxtapositions of national / international themes and positioning affirm the ideological *topos* of the nation as one beyond argumentative contestation. This is an important insight for, arguably, it pertains to a massive part of the media *content* printed, broadcasted, or otherwise circulated globally and locally, highlighting an important aspect of its ideological function. Nevertheless, Billig's argument goes further than merely pointing towards *semantic* relevancies. The rhetorical / ideological mechanism he argues for also works through explicit or implicit negotiations of moral dilemmas and identities.

In order to exemplify such *pragmatic* dimensions of talk and text in which national / international themes come to be juxtaposed, Billig draws on previous work on the dilemma

of *prejudice* (Billig et al. 1988). This comes as part of a wider argument about the dilemmatic nature of ideology in general and classic liberalism in particular. As Billig et al. maintain, ideological reproduction entails *thinking* and *arguing*. The dilemmatic qualities of common sense and of ideologies provide food for thought, controversy, and debate. While contemporary citizens engage in thinking and arguing, drawing upon contradictory common sense postulates and assumptions of their age, the contradictory ideological framework of Enlightenment liberalism is casually naturalized and reproduced. As regards specifically national ideology, it is the key themes of the universal (or international) and the particular (or national) underpinning it that provide the seeds for such contradictory thought and argumentation and, therefore, for banal ideological reproduction.

For Billig et al. (1988), the dilemma of prejudice presents a good case in point for such processes. As they argue, in contemporary discourse one finds evidence of a dialectic between prejudice / tolerance, which originates in a 'two handedness' found within the discourse of Enlightenment liberalism. While Enlightenment liberalism linked the particularistic (racist / nationalist) theme to the moral charge of 'prejudice' and 'irrationality' and the universalistic one to the virtue and the social ideal of 'tolerance', it also afforded the space for the legitimation of racist / nationalist views on the grounds of 'rational' social reasoning. This thematic ambivalence, Billig et al. (1988) argue, lives on in contemporary talk and texts. It can be seen, in its most formulaic expression, in rhetorical disavowals of the type, '*I am not prejudiced but...*' Such rhetorical invocations of a (nationally) non-prejudiced moral profile often open the space for the expression of exclusionist

or nationalist arguments, accounted for by 'good social reasons'. Indeed, by now, many discourse analytic studies have documented similar patterns and have established the relevance of the moral charge of 'prejudice' in talk and texts of a great variety (see, inter alia, Augoustinos and Reynolds 2001; Dixon and Levine 2012; van den Berg, Wetherell and Houtkoop-Steenstra 2001; van Dijk 1984; Wetherell and Potter 1992). Increasingly, the rhetorical intricacies of the discursive instantiation of prejudice come into focus within ethnographic writings also (e.g., Herzfeld 2007, 2011; Theodossopoulos 2014).

The interplay of the national / international themes within national ideology and everyday discourse is also evident in the case of national stereotyping. For Billig (1995), national (auto-) stereotypes, as representations mobilised for the construction of national identities, have historically played an important role within the dialectic of nationalism. They present a 'universal' code for naming the (national) 'particular': *all* nations are deemed to be endowed with *unique* features that distinguish them from other nations. For Billig, social psychological accounts that link the use of (national) stereotypes with bigoted thinking are misleading. Indeed, Billig (1995: 82) warns us that 'it is important not to stereotype the act of stereotyping' because in stereotyping more is at stake, rhetorically and ideologically, than the mere ascription of characteristics to social groups. For Billig et al. (1988), what is at stake, *rhetorically*, is the speakers' concern to establish an untainted, tolerant profile on the face of talk that renders available inferences about possible, ill-psychological motivation, that is, *prejudice*. What is at stake, *ideologically*, is the casual (albeit thoughtful) reproduction of liberal ideology.

GREEK IDENTITY IN DISCOURSE: ORIENTAL OTHERING AND (BANAL) OCCIDENTALISM

Banal Nationalism advanced not merely a social theoretical but also a political argument. It was written at a time when ‘Western’ politicians and media were expressing their horror over the ‘return of the repressed’ (nationalism) in Europe’s ‘backward backyard’, the Balkans and beyond. For Billig (1995: 8), the elucidation of the habitual nationalism found in the ‘established nations of the West’ was a counter-hegemonic intervention: nationalism was shown to inhabit the supposedly nationalism-free polity of ‘Western societies’. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Bozatzis 2014), the thesis of banal nationalism avails itself to a further critical twist. While Billig focused on the *nationalism* of the ‘established nations of the West’, it may be argued that his analysis tended to hide from sight the rhetorical / ideological practices that work towards their reproduction not merely as nations but as *nations of the West*. Indeed, the thesis of banal nationalism may be seen as opening up further vistas for empirical analyses: projects aiming to highlight the process of *banal Occidentalism*.

I define banal Occidentalism (Bozatzis 2005, 2009, 2014; Μποζατζής 2005) as the analytically discernible constellations of representational resources and practices which, in their discursive deployment, naturalise and reproduce the ideological imagery of ‘the nation in a world of nations’ (Billig 1995). Yet there is more; they also contain the ideological imagery of a world of nations that is run through by a hegemonic distinction between what Hall (1992) calls (nations of) ‘the West and the Rest’. Such representational *resources* may be seen as including national (auto-) stereotypes generated

historically within contexts of asymmetrical, colonial (e.g., Young 2001), or crypto-colonial (Herzfeld 2002; see also, Herzfeld 1992; Theodossopoulos 2003) power relations, typically between nations of the West and of its peripheries. As far as the representational *practices* in question are concerned, these—obviously—include comparative exaltations and praise of Western attributes, typically centring around notions of ‘progress’, ‘development’ and ‘modernity’. However, I include in the relevant representational practices two additional, distinct, accountability management modalities: (a) rhetorical efforts by citizens coming from countries located at the core of the West, often with a colonial past, to disavow morally uncomfortable inferences about possible conceit and smug attitude towards ‘more unfortunate nations’ (Condor 2000: 186; see Bozatzis 2009); and (b) rhetorical efforts by citizens of countries located in the peripheries of the West to disavow inferences about potential, morally tainted, undue favouritism (or mimicry) of countries and cultures of the West (Bozatzis 1999; 2014). I argue that, in the course of highlighting processes of banal Occidentalism, banal nationalism and the dilemma of prejudice take a new critical spin. Processes of national stereotyping and rhetorical disavowals of prejudice emerge as drawing upon the international / national themes of national ideology—not simply to reproduce the ideological imagery of ‘a nation in a world of nations’, as Billig (1995) argues, but also the ideological imagery of a world run through by a symbolic and political distinction between the West and its others.

My interest in representational resources and practices that work towards the legitimisation of the assumption of Western supremacy (Bessis 2003) draws its inspiration from key ethnographic works on Occidentalism (e.g.

Carrier 1992, 1995; Herzfeld 1995) and, in particular, on Coronil's (1996: 57) understanding of the concept:

[...] by 'Occidentalism' I refer to the ensemble of representational practices that participate in the production of conceptions of the world, which (1) separate the world's components into bounded units; (2) disaggregate their relational histories; (3) turn difference into hierarchy; (4) naturalize these representations; and thus (5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.

For my discourse analytic priorities, one particularly relevant aspect of Coronil's (1996) conceptualization of Occidentalism is his emphasis on *relationality*: implicit notions of Occidental Self can be discerned, he argues, in representational practices which Orientalize culturally others' nations, peoples or, indeed, 'geohistorical categories'. For Coronil, these indexicalised conceptions of the Occident constitute the condition of possibility of Orientalism (or of cultural othering, more generally). Of course, Coronil's study focuses on Occidentalist representational modalities animating major intellectual works of Western cultural criticism. However, it may well be argued (and shown) that images of the Occidental Self, in the form of relevant subject positions (Wetherell 2003), are also indexicalised within (more) mundane discursive contexts. Discursive practices unfolded within global media texts may well be prime material for analyses in that direction. Practices of cultural othering of nations and peoples beyond the perimeter of the West may be accounted for, as well as accompanied and animated by, explicit or implicit invocations of Occidental cultural capital.

Admittedly, modern Greek identity makes an exemplary case for discourse analytic pursuits in such a direction. Seminal critical works in the humanities and social sciences have highlighted the cultural ambivalence, and the ideological and political aspects of that ambivalence, that has surrounded the construct of modern Greek identity, ever since its emergence in European discourse and imagination in the 17th and 18th centuries (see, inter alia, Faubion 1993; Gourgouris 1996; Herzfeld 1987, 1995, 2002; Tsoucalas 1991; Γιακωβάκη 2006; Σκοπετέα 1988; Τζιόβας 1994). Entangled within the large-scale (geo)political process of colonialism and of the constitution of a European (Occidental) identity through its juxtaposition to a surrogate cultural other embodied in the Orient (e.g. Said 1995), modern Greece and Greeks found themselves playing the peculiar role of the 'living ancestors' (Herzfeld 1987) of Europe. As Herzfeld's argument goes, this cultural lineage, as it were, was deemed to be symbolically 'tainted'; the lands that were to become modern Greece and their populations had a long history as part of the Oriental Ottoman Empire and, before that, of the Byzantine Empire, always somewhat extravagant for Western European tastes. As a result, at the time of 'national awakening', the Greeks, newly endowed with a *national* identity, 'discovered' that in the Occidental gaze of the ever-watching European 'benefactors',⁹ the most familiar and intimate of their cultural practices were 'Orientalised' as foreign inflictions. For Herzfeld (1987), *Hellenism* and *Romiosini* present the twin, overarching cultural stereotypes of modern Greek national identity, which arose with Greek nationalism's quest for origins on the one hand in ancient Hellas and, on the other, in the more recent Byzantine and Ottoman periods and cultural frameworks. Their interplay and juxtaposition, as he argues, can be seen in a range of cultural practices, from

the level of large-scale nation state-building, to the everyday negotiation of morality and social accountability (see also Herzfeld 1992).

Social history records (e.g., Koliopoulos and Veremis 2002; Πολίτης 1993; Σκοπετέα 1988), indeed, inform us about a wealth of ‘Hellenising’ turns, practices, and policies introduced to the newly established and aspiring to be ‘model kingdom’ of Greece (Σκοπετέα 1988) in order to re-Occidentalise a nation that was deemed to have fallen from its state of Occidental cultural perfection long centuries before. The choice of the nation state’s capital, the ‘purified’ language register invented and forced on the population, place names, first names and surnames, urban planning, and architectonic designs are some of the sites where the Hellenic and the Romeic aspects of Greek identity come to be juxtaposed, and where Occidental links and allusions to a Hellenic past were and are being made. As Herzfeld (1995) points out, in such processes of (practical) Occidentalism, what is at stake is the hegemonic gate-keeping of the symbolic capital of ancient Hellas, unfolding in chains of symbolic appropriations and exclusions. Western ‘observers’ have been Occidentalising their profile while Othering modern Greece and Greeks, either for their ‘inescapable’ Oriental overtones or for the ‘mimetic’ way in which they ‘consume’ the West. Greek sociocultural elites have been engaged in similar Orientalisations of Greek vernacular cultural practices and, in so doing, laying their claim to the Occidental capital encapsulated in ancient Hellas and modern West. Meanwhile, lay Greeks have been perennially engaged in practices of (self-)Occidentalising / (other-)Orientalising by means of their castigations of and moral indignation with the failures of the alleged bearer of Occidental cultural capital in the modern Greek context: the Greek State and its structures and institutions.¹⁰ In previous

works (Bozatzis 2005, 2009, 2014; Μποζατζής 2005; Μποζατζής, Condor and Levine 2004), I have highlighted ways in which modern Greek social actors, be they media voices, or lay people, engage and manage such moral accountability dilemmas and reproduce modern Greece’s ideological ‘fate’ as a ‘par excellence insider’ and ‘degenerate outsider’ to the symbolic state of Occidental cultural perfection.

CRITICAL DISCURSIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The rhetorical / ideological analysis which informs Billig et al.’s (1988) elaboration of the concept of ideological dilemmas constitutes an integral part of a more general ‘turn to language’ that has swept social psychology in the last few decades. Billig’s works, published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, along with the works of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Edwards and Potter (1992), are considered landmarks that successfully brought about something akin to a paradigm change within the discipline. Nowadays discourse analytic methodologies have established themselves as principled alternatives to positivism for doing empirical research on social psychological phenomena. Moreover, success has brought diversification and the discursive turn, nowadays, comes in different shapes and sizes (e.g. Bozatzis and Dragonas 2014). While some analysts tend to focus more on the minutiae of organizational aspects of text and talk, others tend to ‘zoom-out’ and aim, principally, at exemplifying macro-structures (historical, political, ideological) that can be shown to impinge on, enable, or constrain, discursive practices. Still others retain the dual, symmetrical focus that characterized early discursive work in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987): an emphasis, that is, on both *micro-* and *macro-* dimensions of text and talk.

Certainly, the most indicative and influential perspective in the latter strand is the one described by Wetherell (1998) as *critical discursive social psychology* (CDSP, hereafter; see also Edley 2001). CDSP favours a *dual* trajectory in discourse analysis. On the one hand, it urges analysts to adopt a ‘bottom-up’ approach: to highlight, that is, in the ethnomethodological spirit of conversation analysis (e.g. Atkinson and Heritage 1984), the subtle positioning work and accountability management accomplished in talk and text. For that task, CDSP relies upon the logic of *discursive psychology* (Edwards 1997; Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter 1996). In particular, it builds upon the empirical finding that a recurrent pattern within *descriptive* talk and text is the parallel unfolding within it of ‘world’ as well as of ‘identity’-making practices (e.g. Edwards 2007). On the other hand, in the manner of Billig et al. (1988), CDSP also urges analysts to treat such local accountability management as rhetorical instantiations of ideological dilemmas. Indeed, CDSP builds into the analysis a concern with the historicity of representational resources mobilized within text and talk, and with the ways in which such representational practices take part in political processes of ideological reproduction. CDSP, with its dual focus on both the micro-rhetorical aspect of discourse as well as on wider ideological issues, is particularly suited for a study like mine, which aims to highlight the entanglement of ‘local’ discursive processes of accountability management with wider processes of (banal) ideological reproduction.

My analysis is structured into two parts. In the first, I focus on the ways in which the article frames its descriptive object (‘Greece’)

within the narrative parameters of a *familiar* tale: modern Greece’s poor standing in comparison to its ancient glories and its *factual* (Edwards and Potter 1992) status as a nation of ‘the Rest’ (Hall 1992). In the second part, I highlight, in more detail, the discursive othering of Greece and the ways in which the authorial voice manages its accountability through banal Occidental self-positioning.

FRAMING: INTRODUCING AND SUSTAINING A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE—ANCIENT VS. MODERN GREECE

As noted above, the article under consideration appeared in the ‘Business’ section of the magazine. Nevertheless, even a fleeting glance at its first page provides enough information to the reader to indicate that what follows should not be read, strictly speaking, as a technical report on economic matters but as a report on finance *plus* culture; or, more precisely, as a report on finance as conducted in *another* culture. Indeed, the very set-up of the article’s first page occasions a comparative cultural framework, one that plays on the well-rehearsed narrative that juxtaposes ancient Greek (Occidental) glories with modern Greek (Oriental, or Romeic, see Herzfeld 1987) shortcomings. Two elements, in their entanglement, are crucial here: the title and the accompanying, over-arching, photograph.¹¹ Consider the title:

Beware of Greeks Bearing Bonds

And consider the photograph.



Photo: Jonas Karlsson (Vanity Fair)

The framing (Entman 1993; Goffman 1986) work accomplished with this title / photograph entanglement is important. A trajectory of cultural othering is introduced and foregrounded here, albeit in a ‘light’, humorous way. A distinctively Byzantine figure (a Christian-Orthodox monk), with all the connotations of cultural alterity that Byzantium historically evokes in the Western cultural imagination, is chosen to background a title that ironically plays with and, therefore, ‘playfully’ undermines, contemporary Greece’s Occidental credentials. A touch of location-wise exotica is added to the mix, as the monk is photographed in bright sunlight and against the indigo blue of the Aegean Sea. As the title of the article (‘humorously’) indicates, contemporary Greeks, personified in the sly-smiling portrait of the byzantine monk, perhaps should not be trusted on ‘serious’ contemporary matters

like bond issuing and trading. The spectrum of ‘cunningness’, ‘self-interested-ness’, and ‘rule-bending’—age-old Western cultural stereotypes of the Orient (Said 1995) as well as the Oriental / Romeic aspect of modern Greek identity (Herzfeld 1987)—is evoked here as the guiding principle for unlocking the mysteries of the financially crumbling nation state. The narrative trajectory of cultural othering is also reinforced at the beginning of the article through a familiar editorial practice: a fragment of the text is magnified in bigger print and reads thus:

How on earth do monks wind up as Greece’s best shot at a Harvard Business School case study? I work up the nerve to ask.

Occidental rationality and its institutions (science and journalism) turn a ‘well-meaning’

investigative gaze towards the apparently 'weird' Other-world of contemporary Greece. Of course, the relevance of a comparative perspective that occasions a juxtaposition of ancient Hellenic glories with modern Greek shortcomings was not, predictably, exhausted at the beginning of the article. Throughout the text, at more or less regular intervals, the authorial voice orientated to it, signalling, I argue, its *omni*-relevance. Thus, the following remark appears a couple of pages further down:

I'd arrived in Athens just a few days earlier, exactly one week before the next planned riot, and a few days after German politicians suggested that the Greek government, to pay off its debts, should sell its islands and perhaps throw some ancient ruins into the bargain.

The contrast between a chaotic, contemporary Athens marred by regular riots and the 'ancient ruins' that, to the simultaneous pride and shame of contemporary Greeks, retain such a value that 'German politicians' suggest their being used as pay-off for the country's increasing debts is a case in point here. Then again, a bit further on, the section of the article that reports on the author's interview with the then minister of finance came under the heading:

And They Invented Math!

The rhetorical time frame of the essentialized nation (Condor 1996; Figgou 2013), indexicalised in the collective pronoun 'they' (Billig 1995), alternates from the times of Thales of Miletus to the times of George Papandreu's government to the detrimental symbolic effect on the latter. And then, in the first paragraph of that very section:

Athens somehow manages to be bright white and grubby at the same time. The most beautiful freshly painted neoclassical homes are defaced with new graffiti. Ancient ruins are everywhere, of course, but seem to have little to do with anything else.

'Ancient ruins' but still glories, 'neoclassical' beauty and contemporary urban decay, a.k.a. 'graffiti', punctuate a city that 'somehow' bestows an ambivalent aftertaste to the gaze of the well-meaning, acute observer: 'bright white' and 'grubby'. Some ten pages later, the reader comes across the section of the article where the alleged—Byzantine—machinations of the monks are explicated. The section is headed by the title:

Grecian Formulas

The shift from the 'Hellenic' frame of reference, with its wise dictums, 'ancient ruins', and scientific discoveries to a frame of 'Grecian Formulas' and machinations is telling. And, then again, toward the end of the article, after the recounting of a riot that led to human life losses, the reader reaches the following description:

The Marfin Bank's marble stoop has been turned into a sad shrine: a stack of stuffed animals for the unborn child, a few pictures of monks, a sign with a quote from the ancient orator Isocrates: 'Democracy destroys itself because it abuses its right to freedom and equality. Because it teaches its citizens to consider audacity as a right, lawlessness as a freedom, abrasive speech as equality, and anarchy as progress.' At the other end of the street a phalanx of riot police stand, shields together, like Spartan warriors.

‘Ancient’ Athenian ‘orators’ and ‘Spartan warriors’ bear witness to the cultural degeneration of contemporary Greece; the authorial voice appears as merely noticing them noticing (see Potter 1996).

Discursive psychologists (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter 1996; Wetherell and Potter 1992; Wetherell 1998) have invested a lot of effort in theorizing and analyzing ways in which descriptions attend, and lay a claim, to a *factual* status. As their argument goes, the sense of facticity within descriptions is worked up through two interlinked dimensions of text and talk: on the one hand, facticity is a rhetorical achievement, a result of the deployment of certain fact-construction devices; on the other, the sense of facticity that a text or segment of talk may create comes as a result of the historical *familiarity* with the representational resources mobilized within such descriptions.

The framing of a neoliberal explanation of the financial crisis in Greece (see below), within the comforting, rhetorical parameters of a historically familiar comparative axis accomplishes important ideological work. The ‘Greek crisis’ appears as exactly that: a *national, culturally fuelled* ‘misfortune’; indeed, a ‘misfortune’ that ought to be expected, given modern Greece’s long-documented poor standing compared with ‘their’ Occidental ‘ancestors’. Indeed, the very adoption of the *familiar*, comparative narrative frame also does important work in the establishment of the cultural identity of the authorial voice; it does not need to claim an *explicitly* Occidental positioning. Aligning itself with the ‘rationality’, encapsulated in ancient dictums, discoveries, monuments, and personas, as well as in the impeccable neoclassic aesthetic, and distancing itself from the business of Byzantine monks and Grecian formulas, the authorial voice is Occidentalized in a banal, seen but unnoticed way.

MODERN GREECE AS (PART OF) THE REST

The rhetorical process of othering culturally modern Greece was not solely unfolded within the Vanity Fair text through comparisons juxtaposing present times to the nation’s ancient glories. Often, the contemporary condition of Greece was explicitly equated with, and treated as indicative of, Greece’s status as part of ‘the Rest’ (Hall 1992). However, such a verdict, or rather charge, predictably raises accountability concerns. Excluding a national category from the symbolic community of the (civilized) First World is hardly ever an uncomplicated business, particularly for an authorial voice that claims to speak from within that symbolic domain. In the following extract, such concerns are managed by means of a shift of footing (Goffman 1979): other actors, treated as particularly knowledgeable about the situation in Greece, and, ostensibly, occupying third-party roles, mediating between the author and the object of his description, are invoked to spell out their unfavourable assessment of Greece. Here comes, of all such potential actors, the IMF:

‘Our people went in and couldn’t believe what they found,’ a senior I.M.F. official told me, not long after he’d returned from the I.M.F.’s first Greek mission. ‘The way they were keeping track of their finances—they knew how much they had agreed to spend, but no one was keeping track of what he had actually spent. It wasn’t even what you would call an emerging economy. It was a Third World country.’

On another occasion, a verdict to the same effect is reported as being voiced by a Greek tax collector.

On he went, describing a system that was, in its way, a thing of beauty. It mimicked the tax-collecting systems of an advanced economy—and employed a huge number of tax collectors—while it was in fact rigged to enable an entire society to cheat on their taxes.

The shift of footing, the articulation of mock amazement (‘a thing of beauty’) and a contrast structure do the accountability management business here: the Greek ‘tax collection system’ only *mimics* the ones of ‘advanced’ economies; in *reality* it was tuned to serve the atomized self-interests of ‘an entire’, obviously not very advanced society and economy. Discursive psychologists (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992) have shown that contrast structures embedded within descriptive practices attach a sense of ‘out-there-ness’ to the object of their description: the (described as) ‘world’ appears to be detached from the speaker’s / author’s potentially flawed, psychological motivation; the *dis-interested-ness* of the description is being attended to. The shift of footing further dilutes accountability stakes: the author claims limited accountability to the extent that the verdict is given by another, noticeably a knowledgeable, Greek social actor. On yet another occasion, the anxious aspiration of contemporary Greece to be treated like a First World, Occident-proper nation, was casually remarked upon:

Of course, Greece wanted to be treated, by the financial markets, like a properly functioning Northern European country. In the late 1990s they saw their chance: get rid of their own currency and adopt the euro. To do this they needed to meet certain national targets, to prove that they were capable of good European citizenship—that they would not, in the

end, run up debts that other countries in the euro area would be forced to repay.

If Greece ‘wanted to be treated [...] like a properly functioning Northern European country’ then, obviously, it was not (like) a ‘properly functioning Northern European country’, otherwise the ‘naturally’ neutral and objective ‘financial markets’ would have no problem verifying that in the first place. Greece, moreover, had ‘to prove’ their ‘good European citizenship’ credential—or, in other words, there were ‘good reasons’, in the first place, for Greece not to be accorded the status of a ‘good European citizenship’. This pattern of narrative construction tells a tale of ‘lacking’. Modern Greece appears as aiming well above its sociocultural means. It is a nation state (forever?) wanting to be treated as a ‘properly functioning’, ‘good European’, but it is not *yet* one.

In the previous extracts, drawn from multiple junctures of the text, the cultural othering of Greece was accomplished through explicit comparisons with countries, settings, and idealised modes of operating allegedly to be found at the core of the West. In the logic of Coronil’s (1996) analysis, it may well be argued that the representation of a culturally other Greece is animated by series of authorial, Occidentalist self-positioning(s), which implicitly allocate to the West what is seen as lacking in its surrogate cultural Other. When the practical Orientalisation of Greece is brought about by a (narrated as) Greek social actor, then the authorial voice may be seen as managing hearable inferences about a potential stake (Edwards and Potter 1992) by enlisting a pattern of practical self-Occidentalisation familiar in modern Greek cultural pragmatics (see Herzfeld 1995). The narrative framing highlighted in this first part of the analysis substantiates my argument that this article

‘naturalizes’ Greece as ‘a nation in a world of nations’. The article also reiterates the particular ideological construct of modern Greek culture as a ‘borderline’ case between Occidental cultural perfection and Oriental backwardness (Herzfeld 1987) through rhetorical practices of cultural othering / self-Occidentalisation. However, highlighting this framing work does not fulfil my overall analytic aims. In the next part, I shall take a more detailed look at the accountability management in which the authorial voice engages.

CULTURAL OTHERING AND NATIONAL DIS-INTERESTED-NESS

I noted above that discourse studies have documented a prevailing pattern in texts and talk that involves critical or derogatory stances against social groups, whether national, ethnic, or ‘racial’. On such occasions, speakers or authors have been shown to orient towards the management of their moral profile. Discursive psychology, in particular (e.g., Edwards 2007; Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter 1996), has shown that such talk or text typically entails a dual process of discursive construction: on the one hand, the *world* is constructed in a critical light; on the other, the *identity* of the speaker or author is constructed as *dis-interested* towards the object of description. Prejudice is a typical charge to be disavowed on such occasions, with *national* prejudice the prototypical sense of prejudice in the 20th century and beyond (Billig 1995). Let us see in some detail how the authorial voice orients to and manages such a rhetorical / ideological dilemma while advancing a forceful cultural critique of Greece.

As Wall Street hangs on the question ‘Will Greece default?’ the author heads

for riot-stricken Athens, and for the mysterious Vatopaidi monastery, which brought down the last government, laying bare the country’s economic insanity. But beyond a \$1.2 trillion debt (roughly a quarter-million dollars for each working adult), there is a more frightening deficit. After systematically looting their own treasury, in a breathtaking binge of tax evasion, bribery, and creative accounting spurred on by Goldman Sachs, Greeks are sure of one thing: they can’t trust their fellow Greeks.

This extract is presented as an introduction to the article. In terms of layout, it is positioned right underneath the title. In a strong sense, then, this is a piece of text designed to provide cues to the reader as to *how* to read the following text, as to what kind of story follows. I argue that the process of culturally othering Greece and Greeks, which was initiated with the particular title / photograph entanglement on which I commented above, is further unfolded here. There are a number of features worth highlighting. Let me start by pointing out how the author introduces a notion of distance—*spatial* and *symbolic*—into the narrative. ‘Wall Street’, a metonym for global financial capital, is indexed, naturalized, and projected to the reader as the navel location: the location on which the authorial voice, or, perhaps, ‘any voice really’, stands or ought to stand. Moreover, the author is depicted as departing from that naturalized location to ‘head for’ the place where the object of the article’s descriptive practices lies: for a ‘riot-stricken Athens’ and for a ‘mysterious’ monastery, which possesses such impressive powers it has brought down an elected government.

Greece, I argue, comes to be implicitly constructed as a *distant* place, with the relevant

distance measured spatially but not exclusively so. Since 'Wall Street' stands metonymically for global finance capitalism, the distance at which Greece is constructed as standing is also measured in terms of the insinuated 'weirdness' of the place. It is judged in terms of its deviation from what comes implicitly to be treated as the norm for the West: lack of protests on the streets against neoliberal policies,¹² and the rule of Occidental rationality over the religious authority of 'mysterious' monasteries. Moreover, the rhetorical process of culturally othering Greece is furthered with the introduction of the category 'insanity'. On the face of it, syntactically, 'insanity' seems to be used to describe the 'economic' condition in Greece. Nevertheless, the contrast structure ('but beyond [...] debt, there is a more frightening deficit') allows for a semantic slippage: 'insanity' comes to pertain to the 'systematic' normative behaviour of the *generalized* Greeks ('looting', 'breathhtaking binge' of 'tax evasion, bribery and creative accounting').

However, targeting a nation state for its culture or, judging its generalized population in largely 'moral' terms, predictably raises rhetorical dangers: the criticism may be heard as prejudiced, unfair, nationally biased, or, in discursive psychology terminology, *nationally interested*. How is this danger rhetorically dealt with here? Overall in the text, as we shall see, it is dealt with in a number of ways; in this particular extract it is attended to by having an *American* actor, 'Goldman Sachs', introduced into the account to spur them on. With this kind of *prolepsis* (Billig et al. 1988), the potential objection that the (American) author does not acknowledge American 'evil' when the situation demands it, is disavowed. Thus within this introductory note we have two parallel processes unfolding. On the one hand we see a process

of world making: that is, 'Wall Street' (and its concerns) as the naturalized, common sense *locus*, Greece as distant and Other, and Greeks as corrupted and 'insane'. On the other hand, we also see a process of identity making: the author as non-nationally prejudiced, as a fair observer of the world as it stands 'out there'. Of course, the normative, rational world imagery against which the Oriental oddity of Greece is measured is projected as the normative world image of the Occident (proper); and the authorial voice of rationality becomes a banally Occidentalised voice.

The rhetorical concern with articulating a balanced account which, on the one hand, would attend to its business of articulating a critique of Greece but, on the other, would deflect potential objections about the authorial voice's moral standing is also analytically traceable in the following extract.

The credit wasn't just money, it was temptation. It offered entire societies the chance to reveal aspects of their characters they could not normally afford to indulge. Entire countries were told, 'The lights are out, you can do whatever you want to do and no one will ever know.' What they wanted to do with money in the dark varied. Americans wanted to own homes far larger than they could afford, and to allow the strong to exploit the weak. Icelanders wanted to stop fishing and become investment bankers, and to allow their alpha males to reveal a theretofore suppressed megalomania. The Germans wanted to be even more German; the Irish wanted to stop being Irish. All these different societies were touched by the same event, but each responded to it in its own peculiar way. No response was as

peculiar as the Greeks’, however: anyone who had spent even a few days talking to people in charge of the place could see that.

In this extract we see listed a series of nations, essentialised culturally in anthropomorphic terms, imbued with a ‘character’ of their own and treated as susceptible to material ‘temptations’. ‘Americans’ feature prominently amongst them. All these nations have been selected for their problematic, ‘peculiar’, ways of responding to the ‘temptation’ of ‘cheap credit’; it just happens that the Greek response was the most peculiar. How does the production of this list work rhetorically here? I argue that, together with other features, it works towards the deflection of potential obnoxious inferences about the authorial voice and towards the establishment of the facticity of his report.

Edwards and Potter (1992), drawing on work in conversation analysis (e.g., Jefferson 1990) and on studies of political oratory (e.g., Heritage and Greatbatch 1986), have highlighted the rhetorical effectiveness of list constructions in externalizing the subject matter of reports, and in creating a sense of completeness. The parade of national categories that are selected for their problematic reaction to the ‘temptation’ of ‘cheap credit’ *externalizes* the act of criticism. It turns what is to be attributed to the Greek national character into a matter of the ‘world out there’ and not an issue that pertains to a bias of the authorial voice or, indeed, to a flawed psychological disposition towards Greece. The extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) at the very end of the extract (‘anyone who had spent even a few days talking to people in charge of the place could see that’) locally completes this process of externalization. The charge that the Greek response to cheap credit was the most peculiar of all is elevated to the consensual verdict of a fictional chorus of

observers, who would only need a minimum of experience with / in Greece to reach it.

Before moving on to examine the cultural sin of which the Greeks are charged, let us contemplate for a moment the cultural content and the symbolic value of the other nations’ ‘peculiar’ responses to the temptation of cheap credit that the authorial voice rhetorically ‘acknowledges’. I suggest that all of them, with the exception perhaps of the rather cryptic reference to the Irish, are variations, exaggerations, or caricatures of the ‘individualism-as-achievement motivation’ (Spence 1985) theme, which conforms to a core Occidental auto-stereotype (Sampson 1988). Thus, the rhetorical authorial claim to national dis-interested-ness comes up as a reflexive, therefore rational, and therefore Occidental move.

As it turned out, what the Greeks wanted to do, once the lights went out and they were alone in the dark with a pile of borrowed money, was turn their government into a piñata stuffed with fantastic sums and give as many citizens as possible a whack at it.

Here comes the ‘we all partied’¹³ narrative, or ‘myth’ according to Corporate Watch (2015). The ‘Greek crisis’ boils down to peculiarities of national political culture. The childlike (Orientalized) citizens of the nation, arrested perhaps, in an earlier stage of, ‘cultural’ or, indeed, ‘civilizational’ development’ recklessly exploit their (Occidental) government with disastrous consequences for the ‘national whole’. The authorial voice, couched in the comforting rhetorical glow of instrumental rationality, forestalls any inferences drawn about lurking national prejudices to the extent that the criticism voiced does not turn against the Greek national category *tout court*: a distinction

between the ‘Greek government’ and the ‘Greek citizens’ is introduced, absolving the former and putting the blame on the latter. Thus, the nationally disinterested authorial voice, by ‘naturally’ valorising the Occidental aspect of modern Greek identity, shares with it the same moral universe of Occidental accountability. On the way, neoliberal political rationales and explanations of the financial crisis are, by default, naturalized and advanced.

ACCOMPLISHING A HUMOROUS CRITIQUE OR NAIVETÉ AS OCCIDENTAL PRAGMATISM

It is probably evident by now that the textual style adopted in this article is not that of a sober business report. While the article does present as a sobering and informed account, it does so by adopting throughout a recurring, *humorous* tone, evidence of which we saw in the title of the article. However, this stylistic choice, for a narrative account that, at times, comes up as a forceful critique of (another) national category, articulated in cultural terms, entails a distinct rhetorical danger. Humour may be received as sarcasm. Studies in the rhetoric of humour (Billig 2005) suggest that the sense that a joke ridicules its target presents an inherent moral danger for the joker; for ridicule sounds ‘unfair’. In the last part of the analysis, we shall see how the danger of ridicule is managed through the escape route of (self-)embarrassment. Indeed, throughout the text and with the rhetorical business of culturally othering Greece and Greeks underway, the authorial voice resorts to a series of embarrassing (self-)positioning.

After an hour on a plane, two in a taxi, three on a decrepit ferry, and then four more on buses driven madly along the tops

of sheer cliffs by Greeks on cell phones, I rolled up to the front door of the vast and remote monastery. The spit of land poking into the Aegean Sea felt like the end of the earth, and just as silent [...]. He guided me along with seven Greek pilgrims to an ancient dormitory, beautifully restored, where two more solicitous monks offered ouzo, pastries, and keys to cells. I sensed something missing, and then realized: no one had asked for a credit card.

This extract presents the opening paragraph of the article proper. Once again we see here the theme of the *distance* that separates the author from the location and object of his descriptive practices. Notice how the time taken to reach destination comes within a list construction, ‘after an hour [...] two [...] three [...] four [...]’, that prolongs the sense of the (physical) distance covered. In the same breath, as it were, the theme of distance takes on a symbolic dimension. The author’s destination is described as—almost—a realm of metaphysical exotica: a ‘mysterious monastery’, at ‘the end of the earth’, with ‘ancient dormitories’, ‘vast and remote’, with ‘solicitous monks’ offering treats like ‘ouzo’ and ‘pastries’, while ‘silence’ engulfs the scenery. Noticeably, the theme of insanity re-appears here, this time to characterize the ‘mad’ driving habits of reckless Greek bus-drivers. Nevertheless, what we also see in at the end of the extract is the author invoking an embarrassing self-positioning.

In a *quasi* Woody Allen style, the seemingly naïve American senses that something essential is missing; something that disorients him in this encounter: ‘no one had asked for a credit card’. While, on the face of it, this mode of accounting seems symmetrical enough, since the author looks like he is ‘making fun’ of both the object of his description as well as of his

own narrated persona, the sense of symmetry is only misleading. In this juxtaposition, neoliberal ideology (re-)affirms its hegemony. The 'normality' of finance-based late capitalism, with its mundanely sanctioned modalities of transactions and of ordering sociality asserts its *contemporary relevance* over the likeable, perhaps, but obsolete *modus operandi* of people and institutions in that culturally Othered, backward, faraway country. This confessional, embarrassing-sounding self-positioning trades naiveté for pragmatism, indeed, for Occidental, neoliberal pragmatism. Let us see how the description of the author's arrival at the monastery concludes.

'Which church?' I asked the monk.
'Just follow the monks after they rise,' he said. Then he looked me up and down more closely. He wore an impossibly long and wild black beard, long black robes, a monk's cap, and prayer beads. I wore white running shoes, light khakis, a mauve Brooks Brothers shirt, and carried a plastic laundry bag that said EAGLES PALACE HOTEL in giant letters on the side.

The self-positioning noticed above takes a further twist here. The account is shaped as a snapshot recollection, with the *active voiced* (Wooftitt 1992) exchange adding to its (claim to) facticity. Note the juxtaposition: on the one hand, the ritualistically-clad monk, on the other, the casual, colourful, but for that reason embarrassing, appearance of an American tourist. The laundry-bag carried, instead of luggage proper, adds to the contrast and to the insinuated embarrassment. How does this comparative positioning work here? I argue that what is implicitly claimed rhetorically in such instances is the moral profile of the 'everyday', 'normal', 'naively pragmatist' and therefore 'rational' actor, in counter-distinction to the

cultural otherness of the object of description (here: extravagant *Greek* monks). Let us see one last instance of a similar self-positioning by the author, which noticeably *does not* come about in contrast to an extravagantly garbed Greek (monk).

As he finishes his story the finance minister stresses that this isn't a simple matter of the government lying about its expenditures. 'This wasn't all due to misreporting,' he says. 'In 2009, tax collection disintegrated, because it was an election year.'

'What?'

He smiles.

'The first thing a government does in an election year is to pull the tax collectors off the streets.'

'You're kidding.'

Now he's laughing at me. I'm clearly naïve.

Right before the start of this extract, the readers were presented with the Occidental credentials of the recently appointed Greek minister of finance: studies at NYU and LSE; ten years of work experience at the OECD in Paris. Moreover, readers were informed that: '*he's open, friendly, fresh-faced, and clean-shaven, and like many people at the top of the new Greek government, he comes across less as Greek than as Anglo—indeed, almost American*'. Within the extract itself, as before, the sense of facticity is worked up through a vivid description (Edwards and Potter 1992), which includes dialogue in the active voice as well as reported paralinguistic features ('*he smiles*'). The extract starts with the minister maintaining that the discrepancy between the budget deficit estimated by the previous government and the deficit found by the new government, when it came to office, was not '*all due to misreporting*', part of it is accounted for by the disintegration of tax collection during 2009, '*because it was an election year*'.

What follows is a short dialogic exchange in which the author conveys his amazement at this statement (*‘What?’*) only to be followed by the minister’s (reported) *‘smile’* and his upgraded, extreme case (re-)formulation (Pomerantz 1986) of his previous statement: to *‘pull the tax collectors off the streets’* is *‘the first thing a government does’*. This is followed by a (reported and treated as) jocular request for confirmation *‘You’re kidding’*, the minister’s laughter and the author’s self-positioning which is explicit this time: *‘I’m clearly naïve’*. How does the latter work rhetorically here? I argue that it works in the direction of furthering the cultural othering of Greece and its politics, as well as in the direction of managing the author’s Occidental accountability vis-à-vis his reporting practices. If even an ‘almost American’ high ranking Greek government minister appears so well-tuned into, and accustomed to, the internal ‘insanity’ of the Greek political culture, then, against this *habitually* mad world, the well-disposed, objective, pragmatist American observer appears as a naïve and *therefore* rational social actor. In the spotless mirror of naïve pragmatism, the cultural Otherness of Oriental Greece is magnified without the moral identity of the Occidental observer being at stake. Indeed, the Occidental credentials of the authorial voice are further bolstered by the Orientalisation of the object of his descriptive practices.

EPILOGUE

Neo-liberalism, then, evolves. It borrows and appropriates extensively from classic liberal ideas; but each is given a further ‘market’ inflexion and conceptual revamp. Classic liberal principles have been radically transformed to make them applicable to a modern, global, post-industrial capitalism.

In translating these ideas to different discursive forms and a different historical moment, neo-liberalism performs a massive work of trans-coding while remaining in sight of the lexicon on which it draws. It can do its dis-articulating and re-articulating work because these ideas have long been inscribed in social practices and institutions and sedimented into the ‘habitus’ of everyday life, common sense and popular consciousness—‘traces without an inventory’. (Hall 2011: 711)

Let me weave together the threads unfolded in my text. I stated in the introduction that my ambition, at its broadest, was to offer a *microscopic* glimpse of ways in which neoliberal economic and political argumentation works out a common-sense status in contemporary media texts. The ‘culturalisation’ of the ‘Greek crisis’ offered me a suitable canvas. Arguably, this is an occasion of major political importance and not merely of local or national interest. As more than six years have elapsed since the ‘Greek crisis’ erupted and growing segments of the population find themselves in conditions of acute humanitarian crisis, it is becoming increasingly evident that Greece constitutes a laboratory for the fermentation of large-scale neoliberal transformations on the continent. Arguably, the framing of the ‘crisis’ in cultural terms has played (and still does) a significant role in legitimating—both ‘in the eyes’ of the global public as well ‘in the flesh’, as it were, of the local electorate—the implementation of harsh and doomed-to-fail austerity policies, particularly when such ‘culturalisation’ occurs within well-written and well-received texts like the one I considered.

The *microscopic* glimpse I offered was fashioned out of disciplinary tools, concepts, and traditions of theorizing and researching

social issues that have been developed, on the one hand, in social psychology, and on the other, in anthropological and critical ethnographic literature during the last three decades or so. I used the theoretical framework advanced in *Banal Nationalism* and in *Ideological Dilemmas* in order to open up and bring into social psychological focus the realm of banal, mundane reproduction, in the sphere of rhetoric / ideology, of Occidentalism. The treatment of the concept of Occidentalism by Coronil (1996) and Herzfeld (1995) proved to be an invaluable asset, providing a wealth of insights ripe to be 'exploited' within a social psychological perspective. The methodological outlook of critical discursive social psychology provided me with the *symmetrical* perspective needed for capturing analytically discursive practices that unfold both in the context of textual pragmatics, as well as in the wider context of cultural pragmatics, history, ideology, and politics.¹⁴

Unfolding my analyses, I placed emphasis on the elucidation of *twin* rhetorical practices: the articulation of a forceful cultural critique of contemporary Greece and the management of the authorial voice's moral accountability vis-à-vis the critique offered. As I argued, the representational 'material' mobilized, both for the construction of *factual* accounts of what-*counts-as* contemporary Greece, as well as for the authorial (subject) positioning, reiterated themes of historically entrenched cultural stereotypes. Through the cultural othering of Greece and Greeks, by constructing, say, Greece as a backward exotic location, the authorial voice laid claims to Occidental capital, (re-) affirming its 'subject matter' and symbolic value. I drew upon the existing literature to argue that what was textually (micro-socially) mobilized here, explicitly and implicitly, originated in representational resources (e.g. images, ideas, identities, arguments, positions) that have a

history of entanglement in power / knowledge processes, in macro-social processes of Orientalism and Occidentalism. In Herzfeld's (1995) terms, these cultural stereotypes, by informing the rhetoric of castigating Greece and Greeks and exalting the subject position of their enunciation, constituted processes of *practical* Orientalism and Occidentalism.

Stuart Hall, in the quotation prefacing this Epilogue, has acutely pinpointed the transformative dynamic of neoliberalism. Liberal ideas, he argues, and *dilemmas* I dare to add, are dis-articulated from their original 'lexicon' and re-articulated within contemporary contexts of practice, with the appropriate 'market inflexion and conceptual revamp'. Shaped by my affiliation to critical agendas within discursive social psychology, my analysis highlighted ways in which representational resources and practices that emerged with colonialism, and the institution of the culturally ambivalent construct of Greek identity, are casually reproduced in a text that silences the systemic aspects of the 'Greek crisis' and advances a cultural explanation. Such an analysis exemplifies, I hope, the social theoretical argument that neoliberalism does not march triumphantly within common sense *alone* (see also Lueck, Due and Augoustinos, 2015). In the specific text I considered, the co-articulation involved the discourse of the nation, with its familiar themes and dilemmas and the discourse of Occidentalism, with its ensuing evaluative distinctions. Almost needless to say, I am not claiming that these are the sole resources on which neoliberalism depends in the various texts in which it is embedded. What I claim is that such process of analytic disentangling ought to be undertaken and the constellations of the neoliberal kaleidoscope should be empirically charted, not once and for all, but as often as we come up against them in discursive contexts that we deem to matter.

NOTES

- 1 Of course, as the critical argument goes (e.g. Corporate Watch 2015), the new loans effectively bailed-out the European and international financial institutions that were exposed to the Greek banking system. Or, more crudely put: Greek taxpayers effectively were called upon to bail out major global financial institutions, hedge funds, and banks for their irresponsible and non-accountable way of pursuing short term financial interests through irresponsible lending.
- 2 For the needs of the present study, I take into consideration the online version of the publication: <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2010/10/greeks-bearing-bonds-201010#livefyre> last accessed on November 4, 2015.
- 3 With its title modified.
- 4 This monastery and its head monks were at the epicenter of a financial scandal right before the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008. Much of the authors' narrative revolves around his visit to this monastery, his interviews there, and the details of the financial and political moves and machinations in which the monks heading the monastery were, allegedly at least, involved.
- 5 November 28, 2014 count: 1,261 Re-Tweets; 22,000 'Likes' and 'Shares' in Facebook.
- 6 For an exception to the vogue of positive reception in the Greek press see the article published in ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΤΥΠΙΑ (October 3, 2010) with the title '*Vanity (Un)Fair*', by Δημήτρης Αγγελίδης.
- 7 Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ, (November 27, 2011); ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ (November 27, 2011).
- 8 Billig (1995) draws extensively on Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' to conceptualise banal nationalism, and the terms 'enhabit' and 'enhabitation' are neologisms introduced by him to acknowledge this theoretical debt.
- 9 The Great Powers of Europe secured Greek independence militarily and, in the normative discourse of the Neohellenic Enlightenment the cultural capital of ancient Hellas was transplanted and preserved in the European West during the 'long centuries of the nation's captivity to the Turks'.
- 10 A process instantiating what Herzfeld (1992; see also Theodossopoulos 2013) names as 'secular theodicy'.
- 11 In the print version of the article, the photograph reproduced here covered the whole, two-page

space of the section where the article appeared. In the online version, it expands to a sizable part of the screen. Noticeably, the only other photograph that accompanied the text is again one taken at the monastery, featuring a group of monks.

- 12 In the fall of 2010 the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement was yet to appear.
- 13 Or, 'όλοι μαζί τα φάγαμε' ('we ate it all together'), as the then Greek Deputy Prime Minister notoriously claimed in February 2010.
- 14 While the social psychological discourse analysis unfolded here owes much of its inspiration and social theoretical rationale to critical ethnographic accounts of modern Greece (and beyond), perhaps the path of academic influence may also be reversed in future synergies. As contemporary ethnographers (e.g. Theodossopoulos 2014) set to delineate ways in which hegemonic or nationalistic assumptions enter even counter-hegemonic lay and political discourses and interactional contexts, the tools and concepts of CDSP as well as the relevant accumulated research record could prove to be a useful resource for their work.

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