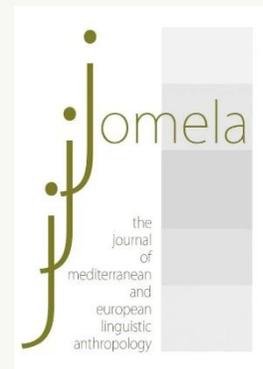


Im/Politeness and Aggression in Greek Political Discourse in the Years of Greece's Economic Crisis and Political Transitions (2009-2019)

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Abstract

In the context of the Greek economic crisis during the years 2009-2019, the present study seeks to discuss im/politeness, aggression and derogatory forms of speech attested in political discourse and computer mediated communication networks. Within the framework of im/politeness research (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010; Culpeper 2011; Lorenzo-Dus, et al. 2011; Erjavec and Kovačič 2012; Mitchell and Haugh 2015), I investigate correlations between im/politeness and abusive verbal discourse in political and social media communities of practice. I explore their potential to establish commonality in viewing political issues and determining ideological polarizations. I also examine the instrumentalisation of direct and indirect derogatory references to Greek political personnel and swear vocabularies for the division of the community into support of and opposition to different political agendas (Georgalidou et al. 2020). The study adopts an ethnographic/interactional approach to institutional and digital communities of political practice. The analytic approach is emic, observing discourse units as there and then social actions. I analyze episodes of oral and digital aggressive discourse for sequential turns-in-interaction. Moreover, I combine interactional and critical frameworks so as to expose complicated distinctions between expected political rivalry and verbal abuse.

1. Introduction

Political and parliamentary domains encompass conflict as an integral part of the organization of political discourse and rhetoric (Ilie 2001). Numerous studies exhibit that parliamentary discourse is predominantly oppositional, and disagreement, disputes and conflict are quite often components of political encounters, in the sense that they constitute powerful ways of positioning oneself with regards to one's political opponents and organizing resistance and opposition (Harris 2001; Ilie 2001, 2004, 2006, 2010a, b; Chilton 2004; Archakis and Tsakona 2011; Georgalidou 2011, 2017). However, aggression, as opposed to expected rivalry, is directed towards damaging self-esteem and/or the social status of political adversaries. Aggression may take direct and indirect forms and is often contextualized as dispreferred, thus impolite, by addressed parties, in their responsive contributions (see Section 3). Parliamentary sittings usually prohibit overtly offensive speech acts as they contradict parliamentary regulations for decorum. Nevertheless, adversary politicians seek confrontation and often address opponents with speech acts that are designed to be face-threatening and move along a continuum of oppositional/aggressive choices. What we could perceive as 'systematic impoliteness' is expressed via criticism, challenges, ridicule and the subversion of members of the opposition (Georgalidou 2017 and references therein). Whether such acts are constructed as preferred or dispreferred forms of political discursive practices is a desideratum of an emic analysis of episodes, adopting the point of view of the immediate participants.

Online communities of political practice, on the other hand, do not obey institutional regulations for decorum and can contribute to an emerging domain of research on im/politeness in political domains (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010b; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011: 2582, 2587; Culpeper et al. 2016). Participants in these online communities quite often express aggressive opposition or even employ hate discourse against those they position as enemies. The European Council¹ specifies hate speech as any conduct "publicly inciting to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group" and internet platforms forbid the use of hate speech, yet instances of digital hate are abundant. Membership to groups that potentially inspire the development of hate discourse can be predicated on race, religion, descent or national or ethnic heritage but conspicuously not political ideology and affiliation. Moreover, media platforms encourage online communities to pursue their right to freedom of expression which, more often than not, participants perceive as a 'right to offend' (Lockyer and Pickering 2008). The participatory nature of the Internet provides a space for the expression and dissemination of discriminatory ideas (Brown 2009; Baider and Konstantinou 2020), where an ever-increased anonymity and digital freedom of speech facilitate free expression of discriminatory and non-tolerant ideologies, either overtly or covertly, without fear of repercussion (Baider and Konstantinou 2020: 1). Thus, research has shown extensive impoliteness and aggressive

discourse choices to be prevalent worldwide in polylogic discussions, i.e., coherent threads of comments and sustained interpersonal interaction among commenters (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004; Androutsopoulos 2013), of human rights, feminism, religion ethnic identity, and so forth (Bou-Franch et al. 2012; Erjavec and Kovačič 2012; Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014; Lange 2014; Jane 2017).

The purpose of the present study is to review discourse analysis conducted over the past decade on Greek political polarizations and the discursive realizations of these polarizations in formal/institutional (Georgalidou 2011, 2017; Hatzidaki 2017; Frantzi et al. 2019; Boukala 2014, 2019a, 2019b) and informal digital communicative domains (Baider and Konstantinou 2020; Georgalidou et al. 2020; Vasilaki 2020). Verbal attacks, as well as aggressive and derogatory forms of speech have been attested in parliamentary discourse that has or has not been circulated via technologically mediated communication networks as well as in polylogic conversations addressing political personnel and actions (Georgalidou et al. 2020).

Despite the fact that, as (Janicki 2017: 157) informs us, agreement on how the terms impoliteness, conflict, aggression and hatred (Waldron 2012) are to be used is not given, and such a quest pertains to a rather essentialist or etic thinking in linguistics, for the present study, we will define impoliteness as face²-aggravating behaviour in particular contexts (Locker and Bousfield 2008: 3). Conflict and aggression constitute potentially offensive verbal action. However, if the avoidance of face-threats is not a universal preference (in ethnomethodological terms³) for communicators in all domains, conflict can also be seen as the eligible discursive means for constructing opposition and rearranging social order. Conflict is expressed via practices which, within an etic approach, may be categorized as face threatening, i.e., impolite, but in contexts such as political combat they constitute acceptable and thus possibly desirable ways of organizing communication. Aggressive verbal acts on the other hand, can be constructed as dispreferred in ensuing discourse.

In what follows, I will examine the correlation between impoliteness and abusive verbal discourse in political and social media communities of practice. I explore the potential of these communities to establish a common ground in viewing political issues and in determining ideological polarizations. I will examine the instrumentalisation of direct and indirect derogatory references to Greek political personnel and swear vocabularies for the division of the community into those who support and those who oppose respective political agendas (Georgalidou et al. 2020). I will specifically examine the discursive strategies employed by adversaries attempting to prevent the rise to power of a left-wing party of communist origin, namely the Coalition of the Radical Left (henceforth SYRIZA) and to subsequently defame its administration, by attacking not only ideological positionings and implemented policies while SYRIZA was in office (2015-2019) but also the integrity of its leadership and the collective face of its supporters.

Data include a) a corpus of transcripts of parliamentary sittings (2008-2019), b) selected video-recordings of political and parliamentary discourse uploaded on YouTube and c) abusive user comments attached to the video uploads. The study adopts a critical interactional approach to institutional and digital communities of political practice. The analytic approach is emic, predicated on the analysis of discourse units as here-and-now social actions which, however, can never be totally divorced from understandings in the there-and-then, as Kádár and Haugh (2013: 4) exhibit in their analysis of politeness phenomena. I analyze Episodes of oral and digital aggressive discourse so as to expose the sequential organization of turns-in-interaction and address and/or reference terms used by speakers/authors within these communities. I apply a combination of interactional and critical frameworks (Brown and Levinson 1987; Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 1998, 2000; Eelen 2001; Culpeper 2005; Arundale 2010; Watts 2010; Haugh 2013; Kádár and Haugh 2013; Mitchell and Haugh 2015), combining micro and macro analysis, so as to home in on complicated distinctions between expected political rivalry and verbal abuse. My findings confirm marked presence of verbal abuse in the context of politics and its potential to divide the readership into those who support and those who oppose different political agendas and ideologies (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011; Georgalidou et al. 2020).

In Section 2, I discuss the Greek political context. In Section 3, I discuss (im)politeness as a framework for the analysis of genres of political discourse and polylogic commentary in media-sharing websites. In Section 4, analysis follows a bottom-up/top-down approach of selected political discourse adopting a critical interactional approach to political interactions in Greece in the decade under scrutiny (2008-2019). Section 5 summarizes my findings and offers further research goals to be pursued in the future.

2. The Greek Political Context

A detailed examination of the ideological polarisations that have dominated Greek politics for almost a century is beyond the scope of this article. However, a brief overview of the political situation in contemporary Greece will suffice to frame Greek crisis discourses. The turning point for the outburst of the Greek (political and economic) crisis may have occurred in the year 2008. In December 2008, the shooting and subsequent killing of a fifteen-year-old boy, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, by a police officer in Athens motivated extensive rioting and the subsequent repositioning of political parties in terms of divisive discourses which reintroduced post-civil war (1944-1949) vocabulary and civil war divisions between resistance to German occupation of Greece (1940-1944) affiliated to the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and right-wing conservative political parties. A crucial parameter for their reintroduction was the rising percentage of the left-wing SYRIZA, a rise which threatened the then well-established bilateral system of New Democracy (ND) and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (henceforth PASOK) rising alternately

to power. This process provoked reactions that sought to submerge the perceived trespasser.

More specifically, at the end of 2008, following the murder of the fifteen-year-old student Alexandros Grigoropoulos, Athens and other major Greek cities experienced extensive rioting that contributed to the cessation of most activities in these cities for more than a week. Students and civilians of all ages protested police arbitrariness and the oncoming political and economic crises. Groups of rioters of unspecified political identities contributed to the escalation of violence, some of whom sought to pursue private agendas. Alexandra Pappariga, the then leader of the Greek Communist Party (KKE), accused SYRIZA of “caressing the ears of the hooded”,⁴ implying that the party was reluctant to “condemn violence” in order to maximize its political appeal to left-wing voters. In this context, Pappariga’s directive to stop “the caressing” triggered a number of aligned reactions by all parliamentary parties and a temporary containment of SYRIZA’s appeal.⁵ Despite the fact that the term “hooded” contained multiple connotations, predicated on the positioning of interlocutors in the Greece’s political spectrum (Georgalidou 2011), the association of SYRIZA with the political extreme left adopted by its rivals temporarily succeeded in marginalizing the party and thus containing its political appeal. The term hooded here suggests persons covering their faces with hoods, usually demonstrators and rioters of unspecified political identities.

In 2009, the Greek fiscal crisis was officially acknowledged by the then prime minister Kostas Karamanlis (New Democracy / ND) who called a snap general election (2/9/2009), asking the Greek people for a new mandate with which to tackle the looming crisis. PASOK won power. In mid-2010, however, subsequent to the fiscal deficit, Prime Minister George Papandreou sought the assistance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union (EU) and the European Central Bank. Funding was provided, on the condition that Greece proceed to fiscal adjustment and consolidation measures. The Greek debt crisis strongly influenced Papandreou’s resignation. In November 2011, Papandreou was succeeded by Loukas Papadimos, the former manager of the Bank of Greece, leading a governmental coalition of the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) and the right-wing conservative parties of the New Democracy (ND) and the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS). The sharp deterioration of the economy, the rising unemployment rates and the increasing adoption of austerity measures dictated by the second memorandum with the IMF and the EU, forced Prime Minister Papadimos to call another snap general election on May 6, 2012, the outcome of which did not allow for the formation of a new government. SYRIZA won 16,78% of the votes and emerged as the loyal opposition party. A new election was called on June 17th, 2012, which led to rapid rearrangements in the distribution of power in Greek parliament and to a subversion of the previously powerful PASOK and ND. SYRIZA achieved an impressive 26,89% and achieved first place in voters’ preferences. Nevertheless, a new governmental coalition was formed among ND, PASOK and the newly founded left wing party of the Democratic

Left, which quit the coalition following the forced shutdown of ERT, the Greek state radio and television broadcaster, in 2013. On the 25th of January 2015, a snap election was called for the fourth time in five years. The election was won by SYRIZA (36,34%), who formed a governmental coalition with the Independent Greeks (ANEL) right-wing party. SYRIZA again called and won a snap election on September 20, 2015 (35,46%), after a referendum in July of that year, and the voting for a third memorandum by Greek parliament. Approximately five years later, SYRIZA lost the 7th July 2019 national elections to the New Democracy party, but managed to retain 31,55% of the votes, thus establishing its dominant presence in Greek politics.

The subversion of previously powerful political organizations and the rise to power of the left-wing party of communist origin (SYRIZA) in coalition with the newly founded right-wing Independent Greeks Party (ANEL) led to the resurfacing of the adversarial style of rhetoric already preferred by Greek parliamentarians and Internet users commenting on political events (Georgalidou 2011, 2017; Georgakopoulou 2013; Frantzi et al. 2019). Four years after the dramatic events of 2008, on the fourth anniversary of Alexandros Grigoropoulos' murder, the phrase "the hooded traitors of SYRIZA" used in an official press release by New Democracy⁶ further confirmed the re-introduction of aggressive post-civil war discourses of 'internal enemies' in the context of the Greek crisis (Boukala 2014). Marked impoliteness bordering on aggression and, in the case of the extreme right-wing party Golden Dawn,⁷ outright aggression, was employed not only to delegitimize opposing political ideologies but also to discredit the personalities of political opponents (Georgalidou et al. 2019). Personal attacks during parliamentary sittings as well as in online commentaries of political events and people became the dominant style of opposition in contemporary Greek political discourse. Aggressive forms of impoliteness were strategically used to enhance intergroup bonding and bounding and to aggravate intragroup political and ideological divisions. Thus, the attributing of insulting characterizations to selected persons emerged frequently in the years 2014-2019 with rates of aggressive discourse during parliamentary procedures rising by 41% in 2015 as compared to 2014 (Frantzi et al. 2019:20).

Divisive and *hate discourses* in Greek politics appear to be connected to post-civil war divisions as well as to the claim that, in 'the two extremes hypothesis'⁸, left-wing parties of communist origin identify with left terrorism and criminal predisposition and are directly juxtaposed to right wing extremism and fascist/ Nazi ideologies (Boukala 2014; 2019a; Hatzidaki 2017; Georgalidou et al. 2020). Discourses such as these, used in the formal political arena, are adopted and circulated by dialogical networks, i.e., sequential structures among interlocutors who do not directly recognise each other as valid communicative partners (Nekvapil and Leudar 2002), in both formal and informal / online domains, as weapons not only against adversary parties but also against their prominent political personnel. I now examine examples indicative

of divisive and *hate discourses* for the purpose of substantiating their potential to establish a common ground in viewing political issues and in determining ideological polarizations. I present 14 examples, which I draw from interviews of prominent politicians in the media and the press, the official proceedings of the Greek parliament, available at its official website (<https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/>), and uploads of political incidents and polylogic discussions on content sharing websites, and then I analyze these through a critical interactional framework.

2.1. Re-inventing the Enemy⁹

Attacking the collective face of one's political rivals and portraying their representatives as non-eligible for office is an attested strategy in political combat (Harris 2001; Ilie 2001, 2004, 2006, 2010a, b; Chilton 2004; Archakis and Tsakona 2011; Georgalidou 2011, 2017). Polarizations attempt to divide an electorate, creating clear-cut distinctions among agents. The chain of discursive events in the Greek political climate throughout the last decade is a case in point.¹⁰ The murder of the Greek fifteen-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in 2008, instigated social turmoil and extensive upheaval in major Greek cities, and aggravated the multiple, already existing polarizations among political parties, to be expressed in a way that would sharpen contrasts and to thus divide the electorate accordingly. I specifically examine the discursive strategies employed by adversaries to prevent the rising appeal of SYRIZA by attacking its ideological positionings, the integrity of its leadership and the collective face of its supporters (see Sections 2.1, 4.1, 4.2). The following excerpt could be considered as being the starting point of a systematic attack against the then rising SYRIZA, introducing the theme of its affiliation with the extreme left.¹¹ The connection was formally introduced by the then leader of the Greek Communist Party (henceforth KKE), Alexandra Pappariga, in her following statement to the press.

(1) Alexandra Pappariga (MP, Leader of KKE), December 9, 2008

From this position we invite the leadership of SYRIZA to stop caressing the ears of the hooded. Eh we are not saying that they identify with them, but nevertheless we believe that they are caressing the ears looking forward to the ballot-box, votes, chair, pillows I don't know what. They should stop.

Pappariga portrayed SYRIZA, the major rival of KKE in the left, as a party affiliated with left groups that instigate violence and that enforce indignation to residents of Athens and other big cities (Georgalidou 2011). Thus, Pappariga juxtaposed SYRIZA with KKE through her use of solemnity, also introducing the theme of SYRIZA lacking quality. George Karatzaferis, the leader of LAOS, a conservative party whose leading members were well known for their affiliation with the far-

right, aligned with Pappariga in her framing of SYRIZA as the political culprit for the escalation of violence. George Karatzaferis, indirectly claimed that the party represents what he perceived as left extremism.

(2) George Karatzaferis, (MP, Leader of LAOS) December 12, 2008

I don't know whether there is a connection, but what I believe is that if there was a polling station of the hooded, SYRIZA would get Ceaușescu percentages.

Karatzaferis juxtaposed the Romanian dictator Ceaușescu (1965-1989), with SYRIZA and its leadership, claiming that, should there be a "polling station of the hooded", SYRIZA would acquire near 100% percentages. Despite the fact that LAOS and KKE represent opposing parliamentary wings, their alignment in portraying SYRIZA as affiliated with the hooded rioters is easily explained by their common goal to maximize their absorption of public resentment towards those who could be held responsible for the ongoing turbulence, thus increasing their own influence on future voters (Georgalidou 2011). Days later, Theodoros Pangalos, of the most prominent parliamentarians of PASOK at the time, chose to align with both minor left- and right-wing opposition in framing SYRIZA as the political leadership of "the hooded", accusing the party and its leadership of "political vagrancy".

(3) Theodoros Pangalos, (MP, PASOK) December 21, 2008

We are talking about a phenomenon of political vagrancy. Well, this phenomenon of political vagrancy is directed by the political leadership of SYRIZA.

Introducing the theme of left extremism and attributing it to a rising left coalition which threatened the distribution of power among established political organizations promoted and partly legitimized the adoption of rhetoric subsumed under the rubric of "the theory of the two extremes" (Hatzidaki 2017). Both New Democracy and PASOK, the political parties dominant in Greece for four decades, branded the Left, and specifically SYRIZA, as by far the most significant exponents of the two extremes, who, together with, yet to a markedly lesser extent, the rising far-right Golden Dawn, were depicted as "the collective, irregular agents of violence, political and social instability, and sociopathology" (Hatzidaki 2017: 185-186). Hatzidaki suggests that depicting the (far) left as an extreme by ND and PASOK, compared to their discourse in relation to the far right, renders references to the "two extremes" dipole almost pretextual. Thus, civil war constructions of the left as the extreme pole in the political system (i.e., as the communist enemy, communist/anarchist bandits, traitors of the nation etc.) were reintroduced following December 2008 riots and were systematically invoked in the following decade of economic crisis and

redistribution political power. The next two excerpts by Antonis Samaras (excerpt 4) and Kyriakos Mitsotakis (excerpt 5), the former and present leaders of ND, respectively, are cases in point.

(4) Antonis Samaras (Prime Minister 2012-2015, ND), May 3, 2012

A conflict between two worlds will take place on Sunday (in the 6/5/2012 general elections). These two worlds have huge differences. Our world focuses on security – we aim to safeguard our borders against illegal immigrants. In contrast, SYRIZA asks for open borders. They will drive us to anarchy, together with their communist allies in Europe. They will destroy Europe!

Samaras portrayed SYRIZA as the enemy left-wing party which supports the actions of *anarchists* and *communists*. Employing civil-war era categorizations SYRIZA members and supporters were associated with 'hooded traitors'. They were depicted as acting against the Greek nation and were contrasted to right-wing Greek 'patriots' (Boukala 2014: 492) allegedly safeguarding the nation.

The following excerpts (5 and 6) evidence that the main opposition strategy of associating SYRIZA with extremism, in accordance with civil war discourses, constructs the left as a threat to national and civil security and is the prevalent line of opposition adopted by New Democracy diachronically.

(5) Kyriakos Mitsotakis, (MP, Leader of ND) June 27, 2017¹²

Terrorism has its roots in the far left. SYRIZA's government supports terrorists. They do not attempt to solve the problem of criminality and they have established lawlessness in the country.

As these lines were written, on October 10, 2020, after the conviction of the Golden Dawn leadership for the murder of a left rap singer, Pavlos Fyssas in 2013, the prime spokesperson of the ND government attempted to reinstate the alleged coalition between SYRIZA and the convicted criminals of the extreme-right, not only activating the two extremes theory but taking one step further by attempting to establish a bond between the two.¹³

(6) Stelios Petsas (prime spokesperson of the ND government), October 6, 2020¹⁴

The citizens embraced Kyriakos Mitsotakis' appeal and left the neo-nazist formulation of Golden Dawn outside the Parliament ((i.e. prevented its re-election)). However, at the time of the rising of the neo-nazist formulation, which was fed by the citizens' rage against the economic crisis, the reaction of the democratic political forces against it was not,

unfortunately, unanimous. Some shared the same square in gatherings exploiting the anger but also the suffering of the citizens. They were fishing together “indignant” votes in neighborhoods that fed hatred. They wore together the so-called anti-systemic mask in the years of the crisis.

Thus, prominent politicians as members of rival political parties locally reintroduced and established the post-World War II theme of left extremism in portraying their rivals. The fact that the leading conservative party in particular, has reintroduced terms from the civil war era and that the main opposition party SYRIZA replied in kind to New Democracy's statements (Boukala 2014: 487) legitimises the political polarisation of the past and reawakens two antithetical political/collective identities. However, formal subversive discourses that can be perceived as offensive, and even abusive, by the political personnel and people affiliated to the said collectivities, do not deal with political positionings exclusively. They also attack the personal ethos and integrity of parties perceived as opponents, during parliamentary procedures (see Section 4.1) and employ discourses that expose hate speech in the less controlled environment of digital platforms (see Section 4.2). Despite the fact that stereotypically impoliteness suggests behaviour which is less offensive than that of hate speech (Culpeper et al. 2016: 25), in the following section, I question how research on impoliteness would provide a functional framework for the analysis of such constructions in political domains.

3. A Critical Discursive Approach to Impoliteness and Verbal Aggression in Greek Political Communities of Practice: The Analytic Framework

Politeness analysis through pragmatics and sociocultural frameworks, pioneered by Brown and Levinson (1987), introduced a new gamut of sociolinguistic phenomena to scholarship. Brown and Levinson (1987) defined politeness as a set of linguistic strategies designed to reduce threat to face and to maintain social harmony in communication. However, contemporary approaches stress the importance of impoliteness as part of a continuum of sociolinguistic strategies designed not only for the protection of face but also as threats (deliberate or otherwise) to it.¹⁵ They also highlighted the essentialist aspect of perceiving face threats as dis-preferable, and the goal of maintaining social harmony as given. The act of ignoring impoliteness, no longer viewed as the opposite of politeness but rather as embracing phenomena ranging from disagreements to hate speech (Sifianou 2019: 60), bypasses an essential aspect of social relationships, namely conflict as a mechanism for renegotiating value systems and sociopolitical norms. Aggression is also a crucial part of social relations, and part of a continuum between deliberate threats to face and discourses of hate. However, impoliteness, whether perceived as aggressive or not, cannot be seen as rigidly embedded in linguistic devices, but as constructed by interlocutors in situated discourse (Eelen 2001; Culpeper 2005; Arundale 2010; Watts 2010; Georgalidou 2017; Haugh

2013; Mitchell and Haugh 2015).

Research over the past two decades has moved towards the participants' ostensible marking of verbal acts as im/polite versus top-down assessments dictated by the semantics of interactive choices or the analysts' perceptions of the illocutionary force of discursive practices. In this context, within ethnomethodological (Arundale 2010; Haugh 2013; Mitchell and Haugh 2015) and social constructionist approaches (Culpeper 2005; Watts 2010; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013), impoliteness is seen as an interactional construct accomplished by participants in discourse – political or other – via concrete interactional action and reaction (Georgalidou et al. 2020: 323). Within this perspective, impoliteness arises when the speaker communicates face attack and/or the recipient ostensibly marks, therefore construes, behaviour as face-attacking, whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not (Culpeper 2005: 38, 2011: 23).

Speech in parliament pertains to the formal genres of the public sphere (van Dijk 2000), therefore requiring typically polite forms of addressing interlocutors. As numerous studies highlight though, conflict is an integral part of the organization of discourse in political/parliamentary domains. Two decades of research in European parliamentary discourse confirm systematic transgressions of civility (Ilie 2001, 2004, 2006, 2010a, b; Chilton 2004; Archakis and Tsakona 2011; Georgalidou 2011, 2017). Disagreement, disputes and conflict are quite often the norm in political encounters, as they constitute powerful ways of displaying stance and of organizing opposition to the current discourse (Georgalidou 2017). Aggression, however, constitutes behavior aimed at hurting interlocutors (Shantz and Hartup 1992: 4). Aggression is directed towards damaging self-esteem and/or social status and may take direct and indirect forms (Galen and Underwood 1997: 589). In political domains, systematic impoliteness, as a discursive vehicle of verbal conflict and aggression, is expressed via criticism, challenges, ridicule and the subversion of opponents (Harris 2001). Impoliteness thus serves as a mechanism for constructing group identity. Offensive speech acts serve bonding and bounding functions as well as the negotiation of political intergroup divisions and intragroup cohesion. Humor, irony, insults, indirect and direct threats to face as well as appeals to emotion rather than to reason are “meant to exploit the fact that people are generally more easily affected and persuaded emotionally than rationally” (Ilie 2004: 78). What is more, offensive acts serve as an aggressive self-assertion strategy allowing the attacker to stand out of her/his group and to concurrently argue on its behalf (Ilie, 2001: 259).

Consequently, impoliteness embodies an excellent attention getter: For example, it serves the needs of political participants to advertise themselves, while taking advantage of media to immediately respond to aggressive, i.e., reportable, parliamentary episodes. Parliamentary disputes ensure instantaneous media coverage, and act which further promotes the above-

mentioned strategies, and which renders verbal attacks and offensive language a rather common choice in the context of highly competitive political systems such as the Greek (Tsakona and Popa 2011). As a consequence, local political systems together with mediated – mostly digital – dialogical networks (Nekvapil and Leudar 2002) which reproduce and distribute aggressive linguistic forms, contribute to the neutralization and reinforcement of offensive discourse choices in political domains.

Exemplifying online media, interactions on YouTube are triggered by the uploading of instances of parliamentary or media discourse. These interactions form online polylogues in which users can either contribute actively or participate passively without posting audiovisual/textual responses. In digital,¹⁶ often anonymous and asynchronous communication, conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as direct insults, threats and abusive vocabulary, become the linguistic carriage of deliberate, purposefully delivered aggression. Polylogues call for multi-layered approaches that draw on conversation and media discourse analysis, and from im/politeness theories (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011; Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014), as they do on new media studies (Androutsopoulos 2014; Lange 2014). Thus, a combination of bottom-up / top-down approaches (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010a) offers specific analytical advantages to the study of political discourse; digital or otherwise. It exploits conversation analysis methodologies for tackling the organization of sequences within polylogues as well as Culpeper's (2011) conventional / on- and off-record impoliteness distinction in the analysis of hostility in asynchronous digital media contexts. It can also account for both the dynamics of intergroup communication and the discursive construction of social face / identity in mediated, polylogic interaction, an account which must consider the macro-level of discursive social practices within a critical perspective (Fairclough 1995). A similar analytical approach can be applied to the analysis of political discourse in formal domains such as parliament.

Prototypical on-record impoliteness becomes structured by conventionalized impoliteness formulae (Culpeper 2011), such as taboo and swear words, vocatives,¹⁷ personal negative evaluations, dismissals, silencers and threats (see Section 4.2). Off-record /implied impoliteness, however, comprises indirect threats to face, as in the use of mock-politeness, irony and sarcasm (ibid). Despite the fact that off-on-record strategies are constantly mixed in discourse (Bousfield 2008), the systematic use of swearwords as abusives (Karachaliou and Archakis 2015) indicate that prototypical on-record impoliteness strategies are used against the outgroup in on-line communities of 'haters', i.e., interactants who post mean-spirited criticism and insults (Lange 2007). In the institutionally less controlled context of the current 'YouTubification' of politics (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010b; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011: 2582), on-record impoliteness is employed by participants to serve a bonding and bounding function, portraying the members of the out-group as political and social outcasts. Off-record impoliteness strategies, however,

contrary to evidence originating from formal political communication and procedures, have been found to be much less frequent, as polarisation in on-line polylogues is basically linked to on-record impoliteness (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011: 2587; Culpeper et al. 2016).

Thus, digital comments have become an important space for spreading speech that is:

abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing, and/or incites to violence, hatred, or discrimination and is directed against people and collectivities on the basis of their race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, age, physical condition, disability, sexual orientation, political conviction,

(Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 900; see also Jane 2017)

and so forth. Since participants in on-line contexts mostly construct identities in terms of their belonging to one or more social categories or groups, face threats generally not only address other individuals but also group/s in relation to the construction of social, on-line identities (Reicher et al. 1995; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011: 2581; Culpeper et al. 2016: 16).

In the Greek crisis context, after 2011, and particularly during the years of political transition (2014-2015), when SYRIZA came to power, breaches of formality moved towards the impoliteness end of the im/politeness continuum (Georgalidou 2017). In a study of vocatives and impoliteness in online discussions of the Greek crisis, Vasilaki (2020) found personalised negative vocatives such as name-calling inspired by social taboos to be almost triple in number when compared to vocatives of mock-politeness. She found these vocatives to mostly appear with no apparent trigger, in comment-initial positions. The finding implies that users engaging in public impoliteness might exploit such vocatives in order to express a pre-existing evaluation of targets, framing acts of impoliteness as 'triggered' by the inappropriate handling of the crisis by political personnel.¹⁸ However, instead of focusing on politicians' public stance, online users targeted personal (negative) qualities as well as personal and collective ethos, intellect, credibility, honesty, intentions and beliefs of perceived opponents (Vasilaki 2020: 17-18). What is more, divisive discourses reintroducing post-civil war phraseology combined with abusives referring to personal traits and sexual practices (for example, *αναρχοπουστάρρα* 'anarchofag') circulated in digital communities of contemporary political practice (Georgalidou et al. 2020).

Within this context, the issues I will discuss henceforth concern impoliteness in Greek crisis political discourse. In the following section, the qualitative analysis of my data is, informed by conversation analytic, social constructionist and critical approaches.

4. Data and Analysis

The present study is part of an on-going research project on Greek parliamentary/political

discourse (Frantzi et al. 2019; Georgalidou 2011, 2017, in press; Georgalidou et al. 2019, 2020). I have sourced the excerpts for the present analysis from a data base that has been created in the context of the above-mentioned studies. The study includes a) a corpus of transcripts of parliamentary sittings (2008-2019), b) selected video-recordings of political and parliamentary discourse uploaded on YouTube and c) abusive user comments attached to the video uploads. As such, to develop the methodological framework, I also draw on an online ethnography. Excerpts selected for the present analysis are sourced from a data base that has been created in the context of the studies discussed throughout the paper.

Parliamentary excerpts mostly emerge from the official proceedings of sittings, although I also draw on transcriptions of videotaped episodes uploaded to YouTube. In the context of dominant polarizations and divisive discourses portraying SYRIZA as affiliated, with extremism in general (excerpt 5) and far-right extremism in particular (as in the formal allegation of their sharing the same public space during protests against austerity measures – excerpt 6), excerpts discussed in Section 4.1 are chosen for the construction of rival politicians as lacking personal ethos. They emerge from the four-and-a-half-year period during which SYRIZA was in office (2015-2019) and indicate the opposition strategy designed by political rivals to limit its appeal on the Greek electorate. In Section 4.2, I discuss excerpts of polylogues attached to parliamentary incidents uploaded on YouTube which refer to politicians who achieved prominence in the same period (2015-2019) and who were systematically monitored and commented on by parties using traditional and electronic media. However, Georgalidou et al. (2020) showed, the uploaded content, i.e. parliamentary discussions over various issues, is more often than not vaguely connected to the abusive content of the polylogic conversations. Rather, the presence of prominent rival politicians in these uploads motivates digital attacks. Therefore, excerpts of parliamentary episodes, such as the ones discussed in Section 4.1, together with statements in the press discussed in Section 2.1, contribute to the overall context of the enduring divisions in Greek politics. Together with hate discourses in YouTube polylogic conversations (Section 4.2), they constitute macro-level contextualizing political discourse in contemporary Greece.

Analysis follows a bottom-up/top-down approach of selected discourse as here-and-now social actions, interconnected with relevant texts that are produced and circulated in both institutional and digital Greek political domains. A critical outlook on the political interactions in Greece will seek to juxtapose the local organization of discourse with political events in the decade under scrutiny (2008-2019) and Greek politics in general as the overall context of discourse.

4.1. Formal/Institutional Political Discourse: The Question of Adequacy and Personal Ethos

We now discuss six excerpts of parliamentary debate attacking the personalities of rival politicians constructed as markedly impolite by institutional participants to the sitting. The speakers attack addressees' face, targeting ethos and competence. In the first two examples (7 and 8), members of the minor opposition centrist parties Potami¹⁹ and PASOK portray SYRIZA members as lacking both ethos and competence. Excerpts are sourced from the parliamentary sitting which ratified the 5/7/2015 referendum over the bailout conditions of the third memorandum dispersed among the Greek government, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. Their content is not directly connected to the intense discussion that took place during the procedure. However, heated disputes among members of the government and the opposition contextualize the discursive choices of MPs.

In Example 7 (27/6/2015), Theodorakis, the leader of Potami, delivers a statement of facts attacking the collective face of all SYRIZA MPs (turn 1) (Sacks and Schegloff 1979). Theodorakis claims that SYRIZA MPs have never engaged in legitimate employment but have nevertheless been on their party's payroll, portraying them as incompetent party missionaries (Frantzi et al. 2019). He refrains from employing on-record impolite address forms. Following Theodorakis' disparaging, as subsequent reactions show, declaration, all SYRIZA MPs stand and protest strongly. Mantas breeches parliamentary regulations by taking the floor without permission. He counterattacks Theodorakis by directly assessing his attack as pathetic (turn 2: *What you are doing-2ndSING is pathetic!*). He switches to the informal 2nd person singular, basically used in conversations among people who are well acquainted, but also in non-friendly talk to mark withdrawal of respect and possibly aggression. Mantas, therefore, responds to Theodorakis criticism with on-record impoliteness, constructing his insinuations as highly offensive.

(7) 27/6/ 2015, Official Proceedings

1. STAVROS THEODORAKIS (President of Potami): You have never been professionals living from your job. You have always been on your party's payroll ((referring to all SYRIZA MPs))! (SYRIZA MPs stand up and protest strongly)
2. CHRISTOS MANTAS (SYRIZA): What you are doing-2ndSING is pathetic! Shame on you-2ndSING!
3. HOUSE SPEAKER (Alexios Mitropoulos): Mr Manta,...

Theodorakis attempts to establish inadequacy and lack of ethos for his political rivals as a collective. Intense protests on the part of SYRIZA MPs contextualize his contribution as offensive. By switching to the informal -and, as far as regulations concerning expected parliamentary

language, impolite- 2nd person singular to counterattack his rival, Mantas violates formality rules for parliamentary conduct, and in so doing, marks Theodorakis declarative as a grave offence. Mantas negatively evaluates Theodorakis' statement as *pathetic* (turn 2) and states he should be ashamed of himself. The House Speaker calls the SYRIZA MP to order (turns 3).

In Example 8 (29/6/2015), Kegeroglou (PASOK) remarks that the Undersecretary of Employment and Social Welfare, Theano Fotiou (SYRIZA), continuously forgets things that have been explained to her by him (turn 1). Kegeroglou goes on to suggest that Fotiou suffers from Alzheimer's, an illness that induces memory loss in the elderly. Kegeroglou's comment is directly contextualized by him as jesting. Nevertheless, the humorous interpretation of the remark is directly contested by Fotiou, who rejects the comment straightforwardly contextualizing it as a hideous insult (turn 2). The House Speaker calls both MPs to order, indirectly dismissing Fotiou's protest as unfounded (Georgalidou et al. 2019: 115).

(8) 29/6/2015, Official Proceedings

1. BASILEIOS KEGGEROGLU: But I have explained and I have handed the documents to Mrs Fotiou many times, not just once. Because she forgets. I have also told her jockingly that she has Alzheimer's.
2. THEANO FOTIOU: I do not accept this kind of jokes-DIMINUTIVE. I do not accept them because this is scurrility. I do not accept them.
3. HOUSE SPEAKER (Spyridon Lykoudis): Please Mr Colleague. Mrs Minister, please.
4. THEANO FOTIOU: You grand him the time in order to revile me?

In analogous attacks against women politicians, attackers resort to indirect verbal means invoking sexist, i.e., subversive stereotypes, in accordance with the sex of the addressee(s). Women politicians become the target of indirect sexist attacks predicated on insinuations of sexual or mental inadequacies (Tsilipakou-Makri 2014; Georgalidou 2017; Georgalidou et al. 2020). Humor and irony are frequently used as weapons allowing adversaries to become implicitly aggressive (Georgalidou 2011: 105). Women also become targets of bald on-record insults and aggression, more so when they address their male counterparts with remarks that entail criticism (Shaw 2002).

However, direct attacks by means of vocatives and taboo words are more common in aggressive episodes in which participants are men (Georgalidou et al. 2019). In the following example (9) (15/12/2016), after Pavlos Polakis' (SYRIZA) accusations that Georgiadis (vice president, New Democracy) illegally hired personnel in a state health organization based on criteria of political affiliation, Georgiadis addresses the Parliament to demand the waiving of Polakis' immunity (turn 1), by 3rd person reference to him as *the liar*. In the same turn, Georgiades switches addressees to directly insult Polakis in the 2nd person singular form which signifies lack

of respect in the Greek sociocultural context, by the vocatives *donkey* and *crook*. In turn 3, he escalates his attack by calling him *chief-liar*, *stupid-old-Cretan* and threatening to *rip his moustache out*. Georgiadis' conduct is constructed as unparliamentary by the House Speaker who repeatedly demands that he retract his insults (turns 2, 4). The adjacency pairs (1-2, 3-4) are organized as threats to face / rejection pairs, thus constructing offensive contributions as dispreferred. Repeated rejections of Georgiadis' abusive discourse by the House Speaker reinforce this interpretation.

(9) 15/12/ 2016, Official Proceedings

1. SPYRIDON-ADONIS GEORGIADIS: The immunity of the liar will be waived or he will present the notes! Donkey! Crook!
2. HOUSE SPEAKER (Anastasios Kourakis): You will retract-2ndPL that...
3. SPYRIDON-ADONIS GEORGIADIS: You will bring-2ndSING the notes here, you chief liar, stupid old Cretan! I will rip your-2ndSING moustache out, if you don't-2ndSING!
4. HOUSE SPEAKER (Anastasios Kourakis): Mr Georgiadis you will retract-2ndPL that.

Examples 7, 8 and 9,²⁰ comprise parliamentary discourse contextualized as offensive by ratified and/or unrated recipients (Goffman 1981). Offences insinuate lack of- or directly challenge- the ethos and competence of the rival politicians. In the episodes discussed so far, MPs of minor opposition parties (Examples 7 and 8) align their attacks to the integrity of their opponents with those of representatives of the loyal opposition. In Example 9, the Vice-President of ND attacks a rival SYRIZA MP, by means of straightforward offensive language. However, in the more extensive verbal combat of example (10) more delicate aggressive work is being done by the then leader of the opposition Kyriakos Mitsotakis (ND) and the then prime-minister Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA). Example 10 comprises excerpts of the long speeches delivered by Tsipras and Mitsotakis during the vote of confidence sitting that took place two weeks before the local and European elections in May 2019. The event culminated in a parliamentary conflict among political parties striving for optimal results in forthcoming elections, and ultimately in the national elections that finally took place in July 2019. In the omitted parts of their speeches, both leaders make long reference to the advantages of governmental policies that they have implemented (the former) or intend to implement (the latter). At the same time, Tsipras and Mitsotakis engage in harsh criticism on a personal level, undermining each other's personality and moral status. In order to do so, in tandem with parliamentary regulations for decorum, they resort to off-record impoliteness via humor and irony (Georgalidou in press). Instances of marking personal attacks as dispreferred construct offensive behavior exceeding the limits of expected political rivalry.

The selected excerpts 10, 11 and 12 form pair parts within a longer sequence. They are not

placed in consecutive turns as in everyday conversational genres. Pairs are initiated by preceding speakers and first pair offensive attacks are noted to be answered in the talk of the speaker who has been the target in subsequent second pair contributions. Therefore, excerpt 12 functions as the 2nd pair part, i.e., a delayed response to criticism deployed in excerpts 10 and 11. In the first part (excerpts 10 and 11) of the exchange, Mitsotakis launches successive attacks against Tsipras via humor and irony.

(10) 8/5/2019, Official Proceedings

1. KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS (President of New Democracy): You spoke about a plan, Mr Tsipra, you hurried back, you cancelled your Ipiros and Arta campaign for one reason only, because you knew that the media were discussing other topics, because your moral high ground, Mr Tsipra, sank in the turquoise Ionian waters. ((Applause by NEW DEMOCRACY)) You laugh, Mr Tsipra. Indeed, it would be funny because once people cheered "here comes the prime-minister" whereas now they will be cheering "here comes Tsipras the yacht-cruise-maker". This is how Greek society will remember you! From the Left of the squats to the Left of the yachts! ((Applause by NEW DEMOCRACY / Noise and intense protests by SYRIZA))
2. PANOS SKOUROLIAKOS: You have turned it ((the sitting)) into a vaudeville!

In the first jab line, the speaker refers to Tsipras' personal ethos. Mitsotakis uses the metaphor of Tsipras' ethos having *sunk in the turquoise Ionian waters*. In the next utterance we are informed that Tsipras' reaction to the attack was laughter. His dismissive reaction escalates the attack, this time by means of the mock chant, *Here comes Tsipras the yacht-cruise-maker*, echoing a pre-electoral chant, *Here comes the prime minister*, by which supporters customarily welcome party leaders. The pun refers to a three-day cruise Tsipras and his family went on, in August 2018, three weeks after a destructive fire in Attica which caused about one hundred casualties. The pun portrays Tsipras as cynical and indifferent to the people's suffering. The first part of Mitsotakis' attack is concluded with another humorous pan, *From the Left of the squats to the Left of the yachts!*, referring to Tsipras' young past as an activist of the Left and his alleged political transformation. The pan produces applause on the part of ND MPs and intense reactions on the part of SYRIZA. These are summarized in the 2nd person offensive speech act addressed directly to the leader of the Opposition in the form of the declarative, *You have turned it ((the sitting)) into a vaudeville!* by the SYRIZA MP, Panos Skouroliakos.

Subsequently, Mitsotakis escalates his attack by straightforwardly addressing the collective face of his adversaries.

(11) 8/5/2019, Official Proceedings

KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS (President of New Democracy): (...) Every Greek knows what happened next. Mr. Tsipras went on holidays hiding on a yacht when the country was still counting the dead of Mati ((referring to the disastrous fires in Attica in the summer of 2018)). This is your good taste, and this is the ethos of your administration, as your prime minister understands it. And this is your austere lifestyle on the decks of the plutocracy! This is your so-called battle against corruption! ((Applause by NEW DEMOCRACY)) It has impressed me! I wonder Mr Tsipras, really, why don't you repeat the dilemma you posed in your recent speeches, "with the people or with the elites". But how can you say those things my dear Mr Tsipras? How are you ever again going to speak about the elites? ((Applause by NEW DEMOCRACY)) Unless – there is one more explanation – you hang out with the elites so that, as Trotsky seems to have said, you can defeat them from within. There is this explanation as well. ((Applause by NEW DEMOCRACY)) This is the moral high ground of the Left.

((Noise by SYRIZA))

HOUSE SPEAKER: Quiet, please.

Mitsotakis claims that Tsipras' ethos reflects upon the ethos of the members of his party (*This is your good taste, and this is the ethos of your administration, as your prime minister understands it.*). The attacks are escalated by mocking jab lines which further disparage the adversary, juxtaposing his alleged austere lifestyle to his going on a cruise (*and this is your austere lifestyle on the decks of the plutocracy*). He feigns sympathy expressed by address terms of mocking conviviality (*my dear Mr Tsipras*) and rhetorical questions expressing compassion as to how Tsipras is ever again going to attack the elites (*How are you ever again going to speak about the elites?*). By doing so, Mitsotakis activates implicatures of impoliteness masked as mock politeness, i.e., an ostensibly polite stance, constructed by linguistic forms that would in other circumstances be associated with a polite attitude (Haugh 2014: 278). Bander is concluded by another mock explanation of Tsipras' supposed coalition with the so-called plutocracy, that is, his hanging out with them in order to defeat them from within. The pun is attributed to Trotsky, a famous Russian leader of the 1917 socialist revolution, to whom Tsipras is juxtaposed to be constructed as a caricature revolutionary figure within the socialist movement (*Unless – there is one more explanation – you hang out with the elites so that, as Trotsky seems to have said, you can defeat them from within*) (Georgalidou in press). Mitsotakis' attacks are cheered by his party members and vehemently rejected by SYRIZA MPs, thus contextualized as witty by the former and as particularly offensive by the latter. In his responsive contribution, Tsipras also contextualizes the attacks as offensive.

(12) 8/5/2019, Official Proceedings

ALEXIS TSIPRAS (Prime Minister): You have caused chills during your sixty-minute speech. Really, though, I have never expected that you, here, today, in the Greek Parliament, would go so far as to become Stefanos Chios ((an owner/editor of media affiliated to the far-right)) of Greek politics. I have never expected this downfall. ((Applause by SYRIZA)) But the end of decent is the bottom. And this is exactly where you are today. (...) I didn't enter politics as a rich man, I haven't become rich and I do not belong to a political family that have never had any other profession except for politics and became filthy rich, Mr Mitsotaki. You(-SINGULAR) do not have what it takes, Mr Mitsotaki, to talk about the elite and the ordinary people like myself! ((Applause by SYRIZA)) (...) Mr Mitsotaki, you shouldn't have wasted your money. If you had asked me, I would have given you my photos myself. I take selfies, I have taken pictures with the personnel. I might have given you one with the speargun if you had asked, because I like the speargun, if you wished to have more pleasant pictures of me than the ones you have your deep state²¹ waste money on, in order to steal moments of my personal life! And it is a shame of you! It is a shame of you!

((Applause by SYRIZA))

Tsipras initiates his response to the leader of the opposition with the ironic exaggeration *you have caused chills during your sixty-minute speech*, introducing the theme of Mitsotakis' inadequate rhetorical skills. He proceeds by dismissing his adversary's allegations as a *downfall*, i.e., moral abjection on his part (*I have never expected this downfall*) and by escalating his own attack by a pun which makes use of a popular metaphor, *but the end of decent is the bottom*, and the assertive speech act *and this is exactly where you are today*, which presupposes Mitsotakis' own moral *downfall*. Tsipras then shifts back to the serious, non-mocking mode. He directly denies insinuations of his alignment with the economic elites of the country, a choice that functions as a negative evaluation of Mitsotakis' interrogative allegations and thus as a defense (Nuolijärvi and Tiittula 2011). His shift to the serious mode as well as to the irreverent 2nd person singular are means which construct disrespect towards Mitsotakis' own face as well as a strong personal, rather than institutional, reaction against his insinuations. Tsipras thus, contextualizes banter on the part of his adversary as a serious offensive act, one that cannot be indirectly responded to. Mock politeness perceived as off-record impoliteness is answered by means of the serious mode.

Parallel to discourses which over time have constructed SYRIZA as affiliated with left- and right-wing extremism (see Section 2.1), the undertaking of the administration by the SYRIZA and ANEL coalition government opened up a new line of opposition to be pursued by rival parties. In the context of parliamentary debates, members of the government were constructed as lacking competence and, more importantly, ethos. Attacks mainly targeted the face of the prime minister and through him the collective face of his associates and supporters. In a continuum of parliamentary conflict-aggression, personal attacks to face are contextualized and rejected as impolite, thus as exceeding the limits of expected political rivalry. In the following section, we

discuss how off- and on-record impoliteness in formal institutional political domains is magnified in the less censored environment of digital polylogues.

4.2. Digital Communities of Political Practice

Polylogues, i.e., coherent threads of comments and sustained interpersonal interaction among commenters (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004; Androutsopoulos 2013), are a byproduct of the uploading and dissemination of political events which technologically-mediated communication facilitates (Georgalidou et al. 2020). Commenters refer to the original incident, and form more or less extended sequences of topically relevant synchronous or asynchronous contributions. Uploads and/or other users' comments can be commented upon months or even years after the original publication (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 21).

Georgalidou et al. (2020) have shown that online comments take the form of a continuum of expressions of affiliation and positive evaluation, serious or humorous criticism and extreme verbal aggression. Commenters aim to establish common ground in viewing political issues and in determining ideological boundaries. Polarizations based on positive in-group description and negative out-group presentation (van Dijk 1998, 2006) lie at the core of the commenting procedures, leading to the division of participants through bipolar distinctions. More specifically, in the context of political communication during the Greek crisis examined in this study, parliamentary episodes and polylogues connected to them exhibit that impoliteness and verbal aggression are the means to negatively evaluate and, more often than not disparage, members of the out-group. Attacks mostly remain off-record in the context of a parliamentary sitting but are expressed as a sequence of interconnected on-record insults in the context of a social media platform such as YouTube. The next example (13) is a case in point.

The polylogue (example 13) was formed as a response to a YouTube upload of a parliamentary incident involving a male and a female politician.²² The upload is entitled *Row in parliament between Adonis Georgiadis (ND) and Olga Gerovasili (SYRIZA) about mobility [in the public sector]*. The title contextualizes the parliamentary procedure as an altercation between two MPs. Commenters refer to Georgiadis's attack against Gerovasili on the basis of her membership in a left-wing party. They make no reference to the subject matter of the sitting, i.e., mobility in the public sector or the protagonists' respective positions expressed in the uploaded incident (Georgalidou et al. 2020). The polylogue consisted of 86 comments by November 25, 2016 and of 80 comments when last accessed on 21/10/2020. The structure and the content of the polylogue has been altered since November 2016 and extremely violent contributions have been removed. The six top comments at the time formed the following sequence:

(13) November 25, 2016

1. 'How communists in Greece, despite losing the civil war and the Soviet Union collapsing, have managed to dominate ideologically, is beyond me. They control the journalists, the trade unionists and above of all the conscience of the Greeks. That's why we're in this sorry state.'
2. 'Adonis give them a third eye shoot them in the forehead and plant a third eye in them since they don't only have bad eye-sight they are blind as bats, them commies. It would be nice if we could open a hole in their skulls to let out the filth trapped in their third-world lefty [brains] sick of mental syphilis.'
3. 'Gerovasili the slut is going to save us! This trollop who together with the rest of them turned the no into a yes and so much more! Drop dead bitch'
4. 'shaming of the crooks, music to my ears'
5. 'Bolshevik crooks'
6. 'is her mouth stuffed?? get the dick out of your mouth before you speak bitch'

In the context of dominant divisive discourses of the last decade, in which the theme of civil war (1944-1945) has been re-activated (see Section 2), commenters refer to Gerovasili as a member of a collectivity defined as communists / bosheviks. The first contributor poses the rhetorical question of the alleged ideological dominance of political groups affiliated with communism and ex-communist states. Subsequent commenters align with him/her in attributing collective ideological identities to Gerovasili which, combined with allegations of deceit, escalate verbal aggression by urging Adonis Georgiadis to shoot her/them in the forehead. Sexist hate speech is addressed to Gerovasili via referents to prostitution and taboo sexual practices (contributions 3 and 6). In analogous polylogic conversations, similar disparaging verbal strategies are employed against women politicians, particularly those affiliated with the left, who are referred to by:

- sexual terms, such as *πουτάνα* 'whore', *πούτσα* 'dick'/'cock'/'prick', *πόρνη* 'hooker', *γαμιόλα* 'trollop', *τσιμπούκι* 'blowjob', *μαλακισμένη* 'wanker-FEM', *καργιόλα* 'slut', *παπάροβα* 'dick-FEM', *σαυρογαμημένη* 'village bike', lit. 'fucked-by-lizards'
- terms relating to external appearance, such as *κακάσχημη* 'turdface-FEM', *άθλια* 'miserable-FEM', *πουστόγρια* 'old cunt' (lit. 'old faggot-FEM'), *βρωμιάρα* 'filthy bitch'
- terms relating to waste, and moral and social degradation, such as *σκουπίδι* 'trash', *σάπια* 'rotten-FEM', *άχρηστη* 'useless-FEM'/'good-for-nothing-FEM', *μωρή* 'you bitch', *γελοία* 'joke-FEM', *στόκος* 'blockhead', *ηλίθια* 'moron-FEM', *ψεύτρα* 'liar-FEM', *κακή* 'mean-FEM', *ξεφτιλισμένη* 'wretch-FEM', *τσόκαρο* 'frump', lit 'clog', *σούργελο* 'laughing-stock'
- political terms, such as *χίτλερ* 'Hitler', *σταλινοφασίστρια* 'stalinofascistess'

(Georgalidou et al. 2020: 343)

Similarly, in example 14,²³ the upload titled , "Alexis Tsipras in Parliament (reply) on the repeal of pension cutback" was followed by a sequence of abusive comments whose authors justified their violent content by reference to the alleged selling out of the country by him. Similar accusations were in circulation in dialogic networks sustained by major and minor opposition parties ranging

from the center to the far-right of the political spectrum. The comments discussed in example 14 were last retrieved on 13/3/2019, four months before the national election in July 2019. One year and a half later, after SYRIZA's defeat and the coming to power of New Democracy, the polylogue has been edited, as there is a new sequence of comments that have been uploaded after March 2019. The ones analyzed here have been removed. The three top comments at the time formed the following exchange:

(14) December 11, 2018

1. 'Tsipras OLDWHORE you're not just selling out the country we get to pay you on top of that...BASTARD FUCKFACE WRETCH'
2. 'This liar again??we' re sick of hearing bullshit,,'
3. SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTH UP, STILL TALKING?? TRASH, YOU PIECE OF TRASH'

The first contribution in the three-turn exchange includes extremely abusive swearwords, addressing Alexis Tsipras as an 'old whore', a 'bastard', a 'wretch' and a 'fuckface'. The second commenter responds less abusively, referring to Tsipras as a 'liar' talking 'bullshit' to be responded to with an aggravated attack, amplified by capitalization. The list of abusive attributes is further expanded by repeating the address-term 'TRASH' twice. In analogous polylogic conversations, similar disparaging verbal strategies are employed against men politicians, particularly those affiliated with the left, who are addressed or referred to by:

- Sexual terms, such as *γαμώ* 'fuck-V', *γαμήσου* 'fuck you', *γαμήσι* 'fuck-N', *πούστη* 'faggot'/'puffta', *πουσταράκια* 'faggies', *πισογλετζήδες* 'arse-fucked', *παλιοκαριολίκια* 'fucking bullshit', lit. 'old hooker-tricks', *γαμιόλη* 'fucker', *μουνί* 'cunt', *μαλάκα* 'asshole'/'jerk'/'jackass', *σαλτσοπαπαρολογία* 'dickwaffle'
- Terms relating to external appearance and bodily functions, such as *χοντρομπουχέσα* 'shitty fatso', *στομφοπαπαρομαλάκα* 'pomprous jerkoff prick', *σώβρακα* 'jocks'
- Terms denoting moral and social degradation, such as *σκουπίδι* 'trash', *ψεύτη/ες* 'liar(s)', *προδότη* 'traitor', *τσογλάνι* 'punk', *βλάκα* 'moron', *κλέφτη* 'thief', *κάθαρμα* 'scumbag', *τσαρλατάνε* 'charlatan', *κοπρόσκυλο* 'waster', lit. 'mongrel', *σίχμα* 'filth'
- Scatological terms, such as *φασιστοκωλοτρυπίδα* 'fascist-asshole', *σκατοσακούλας* 'shitbag', *σκατόπουστα* 'shitty-puffta', *σκατολαμόγιο* 'shitty-crook', *κουράδα* 'turd', *κοπρίτη* 'waster' lit. 'mongrel', *καθίκι* 'asshole', lit. 'piss pot', *σκατοβρωμάρη* 'shitty dirtbag'
- Terms to do with the grotesque, such as *καραγκιόζη* 'buffoon'/'clown', *σαλτιμπάγκε* 'joker'
- Political terms, such as *φασίστα* 'fascist', *φασιστόμουτρο* 'fascist-scum', *συρριζοξεφτίλες* 'syryza-losers', *αναρχοπουστάρια* 'anarchofag'.

(Georgalidou et al. 2020: 342-343)

The lexical items used to attack politicians of both sexes in media platforms reveal systematic conceptual correlations between politics and verbal aggression. Terms referring to political

identities are combined with abusives, mainly in the form of taboo lexical items invoking the themes of sexuality, external appearance and bodily functions, terms to do with the grotesque and terms denoting moral and social degradation (Georgalidou et al. 2020: 342). Thus, political identities are combined with moral and physical repulsiveness, a phenomenon discussed in the relevant literature as being prevalent worldwide on various internet platforms basically in domains discussing human rights and feminism, religious matters and ethnic identities (Jane 2017).

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have investigated im/politeness and aggression in Greek political discourse in the years of the economic crisis and political transitions, 2009-2019. I reviewed discourse analytic work that has been done in the past decade concerning Greek political polarizations and their discursive realizations in formal institutional (Boukala 2014, 2019a and b; Georgalidou 2011, 2017; Hatzidaki 2017; Frantzi et al. 2019, Georgalidou in press) and informal digital communicative domains (Baider and Konstantinou 2020; Georgalidou et al. 2020; Vasilaki 2020). Verbal attacks as well as aggressive and derogatory forms of speech, pertaining to the impoliteness end of the politeness/impoliteness continuum, have been attested in parliamentary discourse that has or has not been circulated via technologically mediated communication networks (Frantzi et al. 2019) as well as in polylogic conversations commenting on political personnel and actions (Georgalidou et al. 2020).

Thus, in the context of the Greek crisis, a continuum of impoliteness strategies which extends to abusive verbal discourse was attested in political and social media communities of practice. Abusive verbal discourse was employed against rival politicians and collectivities a) to traumatize their collective face and b) as a means for the establishment of common ground in determining ideological polarizations. The instrumentalization of direct and indirect derogatory references to political personnel proved effective in dividing the community into those who supported and those who opposed different political agendas in the said period. I specifically examined the discursive strategies employed to prevent the rise to power of SYRIZA (2008-2014), a left-wing party of communist origin, and subsequently defame its administration (2015-2019). Verbal attacks to the integrity and competence of SYRIZA leadership reflecting upon the collective face of associates and supporters proved a successful communicative strategy in the attempt to reverse power relations as the 2019 electoral results show.

I adopted a critical interactional approach to impoliteness strategies employed by institutional and digital communities of political practice. The analytic approach was emic, based on the analysis of discourse units as there and then social actions. I analyzed oral and digital impolite/aggressive discourses for the sequential organization of turns-in-interaction and

address/reference terms used by speakers/authors. I applied a combination of interactional and critical discourse analysis frameworks, combining micro and macro analysis, so as to approach complicated distinctions between expected political rivalry and verbal abuse.

Research during the years of the economic crisis so far found on- and off-record impoliteness, i.e., sociolinguistic strategies designed as threats to face, to be deliberately employed, during formal institutional procedures and in on-line political communities of practice. In the latter, numerous aggressive verbal attacks and abusives which pertain to hate speech were detected (Georgalidou et al. 2020). In this context, aggression is shown to form part of a continuum of impoliteness strategies and to be privileged by attackers during a period of aggravated political confrontation. What is more, it is variably instrumentalized in different contexts of the political combat; in institutional contexts implicit aggression, usually by means of humorous/ironic jab-lines and mock politeness, is the means to deprecate the opponent whereas, within the anonymity of digital platforms, on-record aggression serves as the straightforward means of expressing renunciation and even hatred. Both strategies can be constructed as dispreferred in participants' responsive contributions, at least in oral, institutional domains such as the parliament. On the other hand, applause as well as subsequent polylogic contributions that do not reject prior on-record abusives, and even aggravate attacks, contextualize impoliteness as an acceptable practice in political domains. However, in a macro level analysis of discursive practices over time, the editing of polylogues and the removal of on-record offensive contributions also contextualize them as indecorous. It is quite characteristic that, after SYRIZA's defeat and the coming to power of New Democracy in 2019, contributions pertaining to hate speech addressed to SYRIZA members have been removed and polylogues seem to have been edited, an observation that calls for further research in the direction of digital ethnography as well as the ethnography of political communities of practice.

More specifically, in the context of reintroduced post-civil war polarized political identities during the Greek crisis, formal subversive discourses do not deal with political positionings exclusively. They primarily attack the personal ethos, the integrity and competence of perceived opponents during parliamentary procedures (Section 4.1) and converse with discourses that pertain to hate speech in the less controlled environment of digital platforms (Section 4.2). Parallel to discourses which over time portray SYRIZA as affiliated with left- and right-wing extremism (Section 2.1), its leading members have been constructed by political opponents and digital commenters as lacking competence and, more importantly, ethos. At the same time, personal attacks to face have been contextualized and rejected by attackees as impolite/offensive, thus as exceeding the limits of expected political rivalry. Nevertheless, off- and on-record impoliteness in formal institutional political domains (including traditional and new media dialogical network formations) is magnified in the less censored environment of

digital polylogues.

The lexical items used to attack politicians of both sexes in media platforms such as YouTube reveal systematic conceptual correlations between politics and verbal aggression. Terms referring to political identities combined with abusives, mainly in the form of taboo lexical items invoking the themes of sexuality, external appearance and bodily functions, terms to do with the grotesque and terms denoting moral and social degradation (Georgalidou et al. 2020: 342) are used to construct a repulsive face for the perceived enemy, a phenomenon discussed in the relevant literature as being prevalent worldwide on various internet platforms in domains discussing human rights and feminism, religious matters and ethnic identities (Jane 2017). They have been less discussed in political domains (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011; Georgalidou et al. 2020) for their potential to strategically complement oppositional strategies as well as in terms of planning and coordination within digital and traditional communities of political practice. As the phenomenon of instrumentalizing hate for political gain proves prevalent worldwide, research should focus on the working assumption that +/- institutional communities of political practice form communicating vessels whose discursive practices call for further research within the frameworks of digital ethnography and critical and interactional discourse analysis.

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¹ 2008, L. 328/ 56

² The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes (Goffman 1967: 5).

³ Pomerantz 1984

⁴ Audio file <https://m.naftemporiki.gr/story/185032>, 3.20'-3.50'.

⁵ Despite the fact that polls estimated SYRIZA's appeal to the electorate to be approximately 17% before 2008 events, the party achieved a minimum of 4,6% in the national elections in 2009.

⁶ http://www.enikos.gr/politics/102407,ND:h_5h_falagga_toy_SYRIZA.html

⁷ During Greece's fiscal crisis, Golden Dawn, an extreme far-right party with an aggressive anti-migrant, anti-feminist and anti-human rights stance, exploited popular anger with austerity measures and became the third biggest political force in the Greek parliament. On 7 October 2020, the tribunal found the group guilty of operating a gang of hit squads resolute in eliminating perceived enemies. Seven of Golden Dawn's former MPs, including the party leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, were found guilty of leading the organisation. The fatal stabbing of Pavlos Fyssas, an anti-fascist rapper, by the senior party member Yiorgos Roupakias, in September 2013, forced the ND government to send the files of Golden Dawn's criminal actions to justice. However, up to that point, ND politicians and reporters affiliated to ND referred to members of the far-right Golden Dawn as activists who, at times, had exhibited exaggerated reactions. Taking it one step further, on 11/9/2013, Babis Papadimitriou, a journalist and later elected ND MP, also referred to the possibility of forming a governmental coalition with a "more serious" Golden Dawn (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBPDiYbxnsg>).

⁸ i.e. comparisons of Nazism and the Socialist Soviet Union regime, with an emphasis on the supposed similarities between the two political systems (Arendt 2004), which are contrasted to the liberal West.

⁹ Paraphrasing the title of a well-known collection of essays by Umberto Eco, 2011 "Inventing the Enemy".

¹⁰ Also, see Boukala 2014, 2019a & b for an overview of polarizations in Greek politics since 2nd WW.

¹¹ A similar strategy had been activated in the 70s to contain the rising appeal of PASOK and its leader, Andreas Papandreou, at the time.

¹² <https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-fears-revival-of-far-left-violence/>

¹³ As Boukala (2019a & b) convincingly claims, SYRIZA's government (2015-2019) were being criticized by several members of the conservative New Democracy as being 'communists' and 'totalitarians.' Polarised rhetoric and the rediscovery of the 'communist enemy' were not unintentionally utilised by ND. Since the 2012 double national elections a politics of hate and anti-communist rhetoric transcended far right parties and have been integrated in the agenda of New Democracy until the present day. (Boukala (2019b: 135).

¹⁴ <https://www.in.gr/2020/10/06/politics/petsas-nd-oxi-o-syriza-stathike-apo-tin-arxi-apananti-sto-nazistiko-morfoma-tis-xrysis-aygis/>

¹⁵ For a concise overview of "the *status-quo* and *quo vadis* of impoliteness research" see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010a) and references therein.

¹⁶ Also see Boellstorff's (2015) call for an approach to digital/virtual worlds in their own terms in the framework of digital

ethnography.

¹⁷ A special type of address terms which have been established as one of the most prominent, standardised ways of expressing impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011).

¹⁸ The “right to offend” (Lockyer and Pickering 2008).

¹⁹ Potami (The River) was a centrist party that was founded by the journalist Stavros Theodorakis in 2014. In the two national elections of January and September 2015 it got the 6,05% and 4,09% of the votes, respectively. In November 2019, its dwindling political influence led to the suspension of its operation.

²⁰ Extensive parts of Tsipras and Mitsotakis parliamentary debate on 8/5/2019 are discussed in detail as to how humor serves as a means for negotiating im/politeness in Greek political rhetoric in Georgalidou in press.

²¹ A body of people, typically influential members of government agencies or the military, believed to be involved in the secret manipulation or control of government policy.

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl0Q3nHqB1k> (accessed 13/3/2019)

²³ <https://youtu.be/eAdQRuW7Hp8> (accessed 13/3/2019)