

“This is not a political party, this is Facebook!”: Political jokes and political (mis)trust in crisis- ridden Greece

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Abstract

The present study attempts to combine Raskin's (1985) and Davies' (2011) methodological approaches to political jokes to investigate Greek political jokes targeting politicians and circulated during the first four years of the Greek crisis. The proposed analysis identifies, on the one hand, what Greek people perceive as politicians' main incongruities, namely their flaws that prevent them from fulfilling their roles 'appropriately'. On the other hand, the particularities of the sociopolitical context in Greece and, most importantly, the pervasive lack of political trust among Greeks allow for an interpretation of the jokes under scrutiny as expressions of disillusionment and disappointment with politicians and the political system in general, and as manifestations of mild, playful aggression towards them. The findings of the study reveal that the accusations raised in the jokes against politicians capture and reproduce quite accurately most of the aspects and causes of political mistrust in Greece.

Keywords: political jokes, political trust, politicians, Greek crisis, incongruity.

Jokes are the aspirin of the people
taken to suspend political pain;
jokes cannot cure the pain.

(Davies 2011: 248)

1. Introduction

The fact that Raskin, in his seminal work on the linguistic analysis of jokes (1985), dedicates a whole chapter to political jokes indicates not only their popularity but also their significance for humour research. Although ever since then research on political humour has expanded to a significant extent (see among others Tsakona & Popa 2011, 2013; Tsakona 2015 and references therein), political jokes do not seem to be the most popular genre of political humour among humour scholars. Other genres such as political cartoons, satirical shows (whether on TV or in the form of stand-up comedy), politicians' humour, and, more recently,

online memes seem to be more attractive to researchers. The only notable exception here is political jokes coming from Communist and Post-communist states. Research on them has yielded interesting results and has shed light on aspects of joke-telling that seem to be specific to the political systems of these states (see among others Davies 1998a, 2010, 2011; Krikmann & Laineste 2009; Shilikhina 2013; Astapova 2014 and references therein).

In the present study, I will concentrate on Greek political jokes circulated during the first four years of the Greek crisis and targeting politicians. I will try to combine Raskin's (1985) and Davies' (1998a, 2011) approaches to political jokes. Raskin's (1985) linguistic approach will enable me to identify what Greek people accuse politicians of; what they identify as politicians' main incongruities, that is, their flaws that prevent them from fulfilling their roles 'appropriately'. Davies' (2011) sociological approach will allow me to provide an interpretation of my data based on the particularities of the sociopolitical context where the jokes under scrutiny were created and reproduced (Section 2). In particular, I will try to demonstrate that a key variable accounting for these jokes is the pervasive lack of political trust among Greeks, as described in research coming from political, economic, and social sciences (Section 3). After the presentation of my corpus in Section 4, the analysis of specific examples is intended to shed light on the main incongruities identified therein. Such incongruities eventually help us understand why Greek people distrust politicians and how they express their feelings (Section 5). Finally, in the discussion of the results of the study (Section 6), I summarise the findings of the analysis in view of previous research, and propose further research questions and directions.

2. Investigating political jokes

Let's start with Raskin's (1985: 222) definition of political humour and jokes:

Political humour is targeted at political leaders, professional politicians, or elected representatives as well as at political institutions, groups, and parties. In addition, political ideas and the life of entire societies under a political regime can be aimed at in political jokes. [...] The typical message of a political joke is that a particular leader or political figure, a political group, its ideas, or the entire way of life are not what they are supposed or purported to be.

Raskin (1985: 222–246) discusses jokes from both Communist and non-communist countries and further specifies their topics. When it comes to denigrating political figures (which is the focus of the present study), jokes evolve around politicians' unsuitability for the job, their ignorance, incompetence, corruption, immorality, unkindness, and less often their sex life. Politicians may also be denigrated by being wished dead or by being represented as unknown (although their job—at least partly—depends on their popularity). Hence, joke-tellers convey their disappointment with how politicians perform their roles and, by extension, with how the whole political system works. The incongruities or script oppositions (in Raskin's 1985 terminology) traced or constructed by joke-tellers in politicians' actions point to 'correct' or even idealised ways of doing politics, thus reflecting joke-tellers' perceptions of how the state and its representatives and institutions are expected to function (see also Tsakona & Popa 2011: 6).

Complementary to the linguistic analysis of political jokes could be considered Davies' (1998a, 2010, 2011) sociological one. Davies tried to shed light on the relation between jokes and the social order, and suggests that joke-cycles including thematically similar jokes constitute a "pre-eminently social phenomenon" (2011: 4–5), a "social fact" (2011: 4, following Durkheim's 1982/1895 definition of social facts), and, as such, they need to "be explained in social terms" (2011: 4). He further proposes specific steps to be followed by

those who explore the social dimension of jokes. First, we need to determine “a few key variables that will explain the existence of what at first appear to be a great mass of disparate jokes” (Davies 2011: 15–16). Then, we need to investigate the timing of the jokes: “Were there any particular circumstances that might have triggered their emergence, not necessarily events or crises, but more likely a slow intensification of a particular set of social contradictions that finally set off a new cycle?” (Davies 2011: 16). We also need to gather information “from social, economic, and historical studies [...] that were carried out for some independent purpose but that are here brought to bear on the study of humour” (Davies 2011: 17), so that we can account for our data in terms of real world knowledge and social facts other than the jokes themselves (see also Davies 2011: 7, 253, 268). Last but not least, a crucial question to ask involves, Davies insists,

why this particular set of jokes is in circulation at this particular time in this particular society rather than some other possible set. It is always necessary to consider the kind of jokes that could have multiplied and circulated but did not. The jokes that could exist but do not exist help us to understand those that do.

(Davies 2011: 5; see also Davies 1998b)

Following these methodological steps and concentrating on political jokes created and circulated in Communist countries, Davies succinctly describes their function using a metaphor: “Jokes are a thermometer, not a thermostat” (2011: 248; see also Davies 2010: 10). This means that political jokes may not be able to bring about political change or have any significant effect on the social order, but this does not prevent them from conveying truths for the social and political system that generated them. They may reveal what is happening in a particular society as their meanings are more or less related to real events and experiences (Davies 2011: 216–268). Political jokes often express people’s “alienation from and in some cases disgust with the entire political, economic and social order” (Davies 2010: 10). People have, in Davies’ view, “a good intuitive understanding of what was [or is] wrong” (2010: 19) and tell jokes “about what they knew and could see before their eyes” (2010: 20). In this sense, political jokes encode people’s perceptions of their everyday realities and, hence, could be investigated as counter-hegemonic testimonies of sociopolitical events, namely as unofficial sources of information on political changes and contexts. Political jokes may serve humorous purposes, but are definitely not a-political accounts of politics (see Laineste 2008: 27–29; Tsakona 2015, and references therein).

Although Davies’ (1998a, 2010, 2011) observations are based predominantly on Communist political jokes, they are not incompatible with how political jokes and humour in general work in more open societies (such as the Greek one examined here). In more open societies, people use political humour, among other things, to encode their criticism when they think that things ‘go wrong’, and to bring to the surface “social rifts and disagreements” (Kuipers 2008: 370). Consequently, one of the dominant functions of humour (if not the most important one) is critique based on the comparison between how politics is conducted and how it should be conducted (see also Raskin 1985 above; Tsakona & Popa 2011: 6, 8, 11–12, 14; Tsakona 2015, 2017b). In other words, criticism is achieved via political humour in both oppressive regimes (e.g., Communist ones) and more open ones.

In this context, I will explore how Greek people’s criticism and, by extension, mistrust towards politicians is conveyed through jokes created during the first four years of the current crisis. To this end, the following Section is dedicated to the causes and consequences of political mistrust in Greece, which, in my view, constitutes an important parameter accounting for the creation of such jokes.

3. Political (mis)trust in Greece

Research on the current Greek crisis has been extensive the past few years. Many scholars have delved into its roots, causes, and consequences, so as to propose theoretically-sound accounts of it and/or potential solutions which would attempt to attenuate the relevant problems (see Hatzidaki & Goutsos 2017 and references therein). As to the roots of the problem, both exogenous and endogenous causes have been identified. Among other things, the exogenous parameters involve the contagion effects of the 2008 US financial crisis, the growing internal imbalances within the Eurozone, the flawed architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union of the EU (henceforth EMU), and the complex transnational neoliberalisation processes (see among others Markantonatou 2013; Agnantopoulos & Lambiri 2015: 7; Muro & Vidal 2017: 201–203). In the present context, however, emphasis will be placed upon some of the endogenous factors that are framed as having contributed to the current crisis in Greece. These factors seem to be more relevant to the purposes of the present study, which involves the investigation of political jokes within the Greek sociopolitical context, as an expression of Greek people's dissatisfaction with the political system and politicians.

In particular, our discussion will evolve around the concept of political trust, which, as I will try to show, has led to the creation and circulation of so many jokes targeting (mostly but not exclusively Greek) politicians. To be exact, it is political mistrust or the lack of political trust that lies beneath such jokes. In this sense, I will demonstrate that such jokes are produced to express Greek people's disappointment and frustration concerning the role politicians have played in not preventing, creating, sustaining, and eventually perpetuating the Greek crisis.

Drawing on Leach & Sabatier (2005), Exadaktylos & Zahariadis (2012: 1, 2, 5) suggest that political trust is defined

as faith or confidence in the state's "propensity to keep its promises, to negotiate honestly, to show respect for other points of view and to express some level of concern for the welfare of others" (Leach & Sabatier 2005: 492) [...]. [A]ll starts from the political ability of the government to track down problems and provide viable solutions that account for a positive overall welfare [...]. [I]t describes a two-way process of an ongoing relationship between the government and the citizen underpinned through a framework of establishing reputations over longer periods of time.

Political trust seems to be important for the economy of a state (Exadaktylos & Zahariadis 2012: 1) and "one of the most important resources of well-functioning democracies" (Ellinas & Lambrianou 2014: 2; see also Theocharis & van Deth 2013, 2015; Muro & Vidal 2017: 203-205).

Political trust seems to be particularly low among Greeks even before the onset of the crisis. In fact, it is among the lowest ones in the EU: the credibility of the Greek parliament, its members, and of democracy and its institutions, in the eyes of the Greek citizens, has been below the EU average before 2010 and has dropped even more after 2010.¹ This means that political mistrust in Greece was not caused by the crisis but was aggravated because of it.² So, let's see the economic, sociopolitical, and historical/cultural conditions pertaining to the high levels of political mistrust in contemporary Greece.³

With the onset of the crisis at the end of 2009, and later on with the signing of the first Memorandum of Understanding between Greece and the European Commission (henceforth EC), the European Central Bank (henceforth ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (henceforth IMF) in spring 2010, it gradually became clear that the financial landscape in Greece would change dramatically. The austerity measures imposed on the Greek people

were⁴ too harsh: salaries and pensions were cut off (first in the public sector), the minimum wage was lowered, taxes were significantly increased, unemployment started to grow rapidly, and at the same time labour laws were liberalised. In addition, a significant decrease in public expenditure and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises led to, among other things, the deterioration of the social services provided by the state (e.g., health, education, transportation). Greek people soon realised that they would have to pay for the high deficits and public debts accumulated for several decades, while the whole country sunk into recession. The standards of living for the majority of Greeks became (much) worse, the (lower) middle classes were strangled, a significant number of Greeks became homeless, and the number of crimes and suicides increased especially in the big cities. Only within a few months' time, anxiety, frustration, and disappointment grew higher and higher among Greeks due to the new economic conditions.⁵

The political system could not bring relief to the Greek people. Chronic problems of the Greek state such as an inefficient and highly bureaucratic public administration, lack of transparency, weak institutions, corruption, clientelism, and cronyism further decreased Greek people's confidence in the state and its representatives. The Greek political parties, especially the two major ones at that time, the centre-left socialist PASOK and the centre-right conservative New Democracy, proved, in the eyes of the citizens, incapable of handling the new conditions and of protecting people from the consequences of the crisis. They were accused, among other things, of inconsistency between pre-electoral promises and post-electoral actions, and of not being able to strike a balance between the measures imposed from the creditors and the EU, on the one hand, and the wishes and needs of the Greek people, on the other. Greek politicians more often than not strived to exonerate themselves by putting the blame for the crisis and/or the austerity measures on previous governments and on the international partners and creditors of the country, thus blurring responsibility for policy outputs. Moreover, it became abundantly clear that they would not reach any kind of consensus concerning state policies.

The Greek parliamentary system has traditionally a majoritarian/bipartisanship one, where coalition governments were not at all common. It was built on strong party discipline which, nevertheless, collapsed when parliamentarians started to refuse to follow the official party lines. Many of them defected (some to return to their party after a while), since their ideological standpoints did not align with the expected (i.e., party imposed) voting behaviour in the parliament. This gradually resulted in the crumbling of the majoritarian system, while new splinter parties were created by politicians who crossed the floor. In this context of political and parliamentary instability, citizens watched politicians voting against their political values, defecting, and neglecting their commitments to their voters. All this dealt a heavy blow to Greek people's (already weak) trust in politicians and parliamentary and democratic institutions. Greek politicians were accused, among other things, of hypocrisy, cynicism, and opportunism (see also Koutsoulelou 2017).

Opposition and mistrust towards politicians also extended beyond the Greek borders. Although Greece was "the first country to hand over state budget control to foreign authorities" (Malkopoulou 2014: 168), Greek people resisted the interventions of foreign politicians and representatives of international institutions in their domestic affairs. Their opposition targeted, among others, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the then German Federal Minister of Finance Wolfgang Schäuble, Christine Lagarde and Poul Thomsen from the IMF, and the President of the EC Jean-Claude Juncker (Malkopoulou 2014: 168–170). Widespread political mistrust has also been attributed to cultural and historical reasons. More specifically, it has been suggested that, although (or because) Greek people have traditionally⁶ participated in clientelistic networks with politicians or other state officials, they do not think highly of them:

[P]olitical elites were and still are largely perceived by the citizenry not as bearers of social peace, but rather as the thugs that managed to “make it” big, and cater for their descendants too! In which case one may have to follow them for purposes of survival, but certainly not trust them [...]

(Koniordos 2011: 51)⁷

Such a cultural predisposition seems to be directly related to Greek people’s reluctance to accept, and comply with, the recently introduced reforms and changes in the economic, social, and political sectors of the state (Markantonatou 2013).

In sum, the political system has failed Greek people, but this was not something that was totally contrary to their expectations and attitudes towards it. Such disappointment and mistrust were expressed through their voting behaviour: many Greeks moved away from New Democracy and, mostly, PASOK and gave their votes to minor Opposition parties or splinter ones. Still, voting did not seem to be an adequate means of punishment for the major political parties, as elections do not take place often and new reforms and measures were imposed in rapid succession. Besides, it soon became clear that the alternation of different political parties in power could not improve people’s living conditions. Voting turned out to be powerless in this respect, thus increasing political mistrust further.

Political mistrust was therefore expressed through general strikes, massive demonstrations, occupations of public buildings, temporary traffic blockades, even arson attacks on public and private property, looting, fights in the streets with the police, etc. Some Greeks would also refuse to pay not only their taxes⁸ but also highway tolls and public transportation tickets to show their opposition to the austerity measures and the political system. Moreover, Greek politicians were sometimes publicly ridiculed and denounced when in restaurants, parades, public gatherings, etc.⁹ In their account of political unrest in crisis-ridden Greece, Pappas & O’Malley (2014: 1595) claim that

empirically states have been remarkably stable because they provide their citizens with basic goods and services such as security, justice, and welfare. When states deliver these goods, citizens will not need to question their legitimacy or threaten their integrity. [...] Where the state can no longer provide such normality, that is, when the utility it represents for its citizens gets diminished, its legitimacy becomes questioned. [...] [G]roups of people turn massively, and at times violently, against a state that is considered to have stopped providing public goods.¹⁰

In this context, I will try to show that the Greek jokes targeting politicians could be accounted for in terms of the widespread and intense lack of trust towards them. Such jokes originate in Greek people’s disappointment in the political system, which they hold responsible for creating, deepening, and not resolving the current financial and political crisis. More specifically, I will try to explore which aspects of the crisis and which politicians’ behaviours and practices are humorously represented as incongruous and hence are rejected by joke-tellers. Such an analysis will eventually bring to the surface how Greek people think politicians should behave in order for the Greek political system and democracy to work.

4. The data of the present study

The data examined here comes from a large corpus of canned jokes (596 texts) referring to the Greek financial crisis and collected from 15 January 2010 until 12 December 2013, that is, during the first four years of the crisis. All of them were sent to the author’s personal email account by friends and relatives. None of the emails sent was excluded from the collection and, at the same time, no other material was added by the author (e.g., downloaded from websites or coming from printed collections). Although the corpus does not claim

representativeness, it could be suggested that it was randomly selected and this selection was not biased by the author's personal preferences (see also Tsakona 2015, 2017b).

The jokes under scrutiny could be divided in two broad categories: a) jokes directly targeting and discrediting Greek or, less often, foreign politicians and their political decisions and actions concerning the Greek debt crisis (322 jokes, 54.0 percent); and b) jokes referring to Greek people's everyday lives and problems due to that crisis, thus only indirectly and by implication targeting politicians and their policies (274 jokes, 46.0 percent). The present study will focus on the first category which is more directly related to the notion of political trust.

In the following analysis, I will try to show the exact 'incongruous' and 'inappropriate' behaviours and practices Greek joke-tellers attribute to politicians as well as their own stances towards politicians. Such accusations against politicians seem to coincide to a significant extent with the causes of political mistrust (see Section 3). In this sense, the linguistic analysis of the jokes will confirm, and thus reinforce, independent findings from political and social empirical research pertaining to the Greek crisis, its roots and consequences (see Section 2 on methodology).

5. Topics and incongruities in political jokes targeting politicians

Humour, in general, is based on incongruity, that is, on an event, an idea, an action, a situation that deviates from our expectations, or which is incompatible in a certain context (Raskin 1985; Attardo 1994). In political jokes, it is politicians' actions, statements, practices, policies, omissions, etc. that are more often than not judged by joke-tellers as unexpected and incompatible with their role (see Section 2). In the present case, whether explicitly or implicitly, joke-tellers evaluate politicians' behaviour concerning the management of the Greek crisis, so the analysis could shed light on why Greeks distrust politicians. What is more, it will be demonstrated that the accusations raised in the jokes against politicians are directly related or even remarkably similar to the roots and causes of political mistrust, as presented in Section 3.

The data can be classified into seven thematic (sometimes overlapping) sub-categories: (1) politicians' incompetence; (2) politicians' corruption and lust for power; (3) politicians' sex life; (4) foreign politicians' interventions; (5) voters' violent reactions; (6) voters' responsibility; and (7) voters' political trust. The first four categories seem to refer to politicians' (incongruous) practices, while the last three focus more on people's manifestations of political mistrust.

5.1. Politicians' incompetence

A significant amount of the jokes under scrutiny considers incongruous, and hence disapproves of, the ways Greek politicians handle various aspects of the crisis. So, the latter are represented as unsuitable for the job, as demonstrated in the following jokes:¹¹

*(1) Πώς καταφέρνει ο Γιωργάκης να κάνει τόσο πολλές βλακειές σε μία μόνο μέρα;
- Σηκώνεται νωρίς το πρωί!*

[How does little George (i.e., George Papandreou, the then Prime Minister) manage to do so many stupid things in only one day?

- He wakes up early in the morning!]

(2) Σαμαράς. Ο πρώτος Έλληνας πρωθυπουργός που απέδειξε ότι είναι ανίκανος να κυβερνήσει πριν κυβερνήσει.

[Samaras (i.e., Antonis Samaras, the then Leader of the Opposition). The first Greek Prime Minister who proved that he is incapable of ruling before ruling.]

(3) Η Ελλάδα είναι αναπόσπαστο κομμάτι της Ευρώπης, που την εγάμησεν ο Ζεύς ως ταύρος - αλλιώς δεν εξηγούνται τόσα βόδια στη Βουλή.

[Greece is an indispensable part of Europe, who was fucked by Zeus transformed into a bull—there is no other way to explain the presence of so many oxen in the (Greek) parliament.]

(4) Κάθε φορά που μιλάει ο Βενιζέλος κρύβεται το πορτοφόλι μου από μόνο του.

[Every time Venizelos (i.e. the then Minister of Finance) speaks, my wallet goes hide itself.]

(5) Η κυβέρνηση πασχίζει να διατηρήσει την καλή εικόνα της χώρας στο εξωτερικό! Δηλαδή τι; Όταν έχει επεισόδια στέλνει καρτ ποστάλ από τη Μύκονο;

[The government strives to maintain the country's positive image abroad! By doing what exactly? By sending post-cards from Mykonos whenever there are riots?]

The two Leaders from the then major parties, namely George Papandreou from the socialist PASOK (joke 1) and Antonis Samaras from the conservative New Democracy (joke 2), are represented as stupid and thus incapable of, and even dangerous for, ruling the country.¹² Joke (3) is based on a pun involving, on the one hand, the Ancient Greek myth of Europe's abduction by Zeus who was transformed into a bull and, on the other, the Greek word βόδι 'ox' which is metaphorically used to insult someone as stupid and incapable of handling anything. Hence, Greek parliamentarians are humorously portrayed as inadequate in their role.

Joke (4) attacks the then Minister of Finance who, among other things, increased the taxes Greek citizens had to pay. Greek people's wallets are jokingly personified and become afraid of the new, incongruously heavy taxes. Finally, in joke (5), the government tries to hide the social unrest and the violence in the streets of Greek cities (particularly Athens). Whenever there were/are riots by people protesting against the austerity measures (see Section 3), non-Greek media covered the events and sometimes tourists were reported to be deterred from visiting Greece. The joke refers to the efforts made by the Greek government(s) and the media to minimise the impact of such reports and to persuade tourists that Greece is a beautiful and safe place to visit (hence the reference to the popular, cosmopolitan island of Mykonos). The joke-teller finds incongruous the fact that for the (failed) Greek government it seems more important to maintain a false "good image" than to actually try to improve the living conditions in Greece.

Other opposition parties and their members are also attacked via humour:

(6) Πάει ο Τσίπρας και ο Στρατούλης στην Αγγλία για μία συνάντηση με τον Κάμερον. Πηγαίνουν στο ξενοδοχείο και ανοίγουν την ντουλάπα να βάλουν μέσα τα ρούχα τους και βλέπουν ένα ποντικό. «Ρε συ», λέει ο Τσίπρας, «ξέρεις πως είναι ο ποντικός στα αγγλικά για να πάρουμε τηλέφωνο στην Reception να τους πούμε ότι βρήκαμε ένα;» «Όχι» λέει ο Στρατούλης, «εσύ»? «Ούτε εγώ» λέει ο Τσίπρας, «αλλά άσε, θα πάρω εγώ να εξηγηθώ!».

[- Yes, Reception?

- Yes, how can I help you?

- Do you know Tom and Jerry?

- Yes, of course.

- Jerry is here.

Tsipras and Stratoulis [i.e. the Leader and a prominent member of the then major Opposition party, SYRIZA] go to England to meet [David] Cameron [i.e. the then British Prime Minister]. They check in the hotel and they open the closet [in their room] to put in their clothes and they

see a mouse. “Dude”, says Tsipras, “do you know how they say ‘mouse’ in English so that we call the reception and tell them that we found one?” “No”, says Stratoulis, “do you?” “Me neither”, says Tsipras, “but let me call [them] to explain myself!”.

- Yes, Reception [there]?
- Yes, how can I help you?
- Do you know Tom and Jerry?
- Yes, of course.
- Jerry is here.^{13]}

(7) Πώς λέγεται ο ψηφοφόρος που στις προηγούμενες εκλογές ψήφισε Χρυσή Αυγή και σε αυτές ανεξάρτητους Ελληνες ;;;;.....

ΧΑΡΟΚΑΜΜΕΝΟΣ

[How do we call the voter who voted for Golden Dawn in the previous elections and for Independent Greeks in these ones?

Struck by death.]

(8) Μετά το «Κλέφτες και Αστυνόμοι» είδα κάτι παιδιά σήμερα που έπαιζαν «Χρυσανγίτες και Μετανάστες».

[After “cops and robbers”, today I saw some kids playing “Golden Dawn members and immigrants”.]

In joke (6), the Leader and a prominent member of the left party of SYRIZA are targeted for their inability to recall a rather common English word, and/or possibly for the limited skills in English stereotypically attributed to them (see also Spilioti 2016: 71-72). It is thus implied that they may not be suitable for the job as they may not be able to discuss and negotiate with our EU partners and other international institutions. Joke (7) is based on an untranslatable pun. The word *χαροκαμμένος* [struck (lit. burnt) by death] in the punch line is a compound one from *χάρος* [‘death’] and *καμμένος* [‘burnt’], and denotes someone who has suffered the loss of a close person (or more), usually a family member. *Χάρος* [‘death’] metaphorically refers to the members of Golden Dawn who often dress in black, while the party in general is portrayed as “a fascist, pro-Nazi organization that uses *coercion* and *violence* [...] to establish itself in the political and social arena” (Mouka & Saridakis 2017: 368, my emphasis). At the same time, *Καμμένος* [‘(lit.) burnt’] is the surname of the Leader of the Greek right-wing, national-conservative party of Independent Greeks, one of splinter parties created in 2012 (see Section 3). The Greek adjective *καμμένος* [‘burnt’] denotes not only someone whose body (parts) is (are) burnt but also his/her mind is ‘burnt’, namely someone who has lost his/her mind, is of diminished mental capacity. Consequently, the supporters (members and voters) of Independent Greeks and those of the extreme-right, neo-fascist party of Golden Dawn are targeted for their stupidity. It is humorously implied that those who support, or belong to, such parties must have lost their minds and are hopeless cases (‘struck by death’). Via a reference to the classic childhood game *κλέφτες και αστυνόμοι* [‘cops and robbers’] (joke 8), Golden Dawn members are also targeted for their excessive and incongruous hostility towards immigrants (see Ellinas 2015; Saridakis 2017).

Such jokes suggest that Greek politicians from various parties (and sometimes their voters, too; see also Section 5.6) are stupid and unable to perform their roles effectively. This is perceived as incongruous and becomes the basis for humour, as it seems that politicians are expected to be smart, trustworthy people, capable of handling more or less difficult situations.

5.2. Politicians’ corruption and power hunger

Politicians are also targeted for favouritism, power hunger, and criminal behaviour:

(9) Όσο και να σπουδάξεις πάντα οι κόρες του Πολύδωρα θα έχουν τα απαραίτητα προσόντα..
[No matter how hard you study, Polydoros' daughters will always have the required qualifications...]

(10) Αυτό δεν είναι κόμμα, είναι φέισμπουκ.. Ο Γιώργος έκανε φίλη πάλι την Κατσελη!
[This is not a political party, this is Facebook...George [Papandreou] befriended Katseli [i.e., a PASOK member and Minister] again!]

(11) Μικροποσότητες δερματίνης προερχόμενης πιθανότατα από καρέκλα, βρέθηκαν στα νύχια του Πρωθυπουργού [ενν. τον Παπανδρέου], από άγνωστη μέχρι στιγμής αιτία.
[Small quantities of pleather possibly from a chair were found under the fingernails of the Prime Minister [i.e., George Papandreou], due to an unknown so far reason.]

(12) Πάντως, είναι λογικό ο Τσίπρας να έχει χειρότερη προφορά από τους άλλους στα αγγλικά. Λέει κι άλλες λέξεις εκτός από Yes.
[Anyway, it makes sense that Tsipras has a worse English accent than the others [i.e., his opponents, the members of the government]. He says more words than “Yes”.]

(13) Οι αρχηγοί θα συμφωνήσουν μόνο μεθαύριο, στη σύσκεψη επιχορήγησης των κομμάτων για τις νέες εκλογές.
[The political leaders will only reach consensus the day after tomorrow, during the discussion concerning the state funding for the parties for the next elections.]

(14) Ψήφισε Αλί Μπαμπά. Έχει μόνο 40 κλέφτες.
[Vote for Ali Baba. He has only 40 thieves.]

(15) Ο διευθυντής των φυλακών συγκεντρώνει ένα πρωί όλους τους κρατούμενους στο προαύλιο και τους λέει:
-Αύριο να είστε καθαροί και ξυρισμένοι γιατί θα έλθει στη φυλακή ο Παπανδρέου με τον Βενιζέλο. Οπότε ένας κρατούμενος από το βάθος φωνάζει:
-Τους πιάσατε?
[One morning the prison warden gathers all the prisoners in the yard and tells them:
-Tomorrow I want you to be clean and shaved because [George] Papandreou and [Evangelos] Venizelos are going to be here.
A prisoner from the back of the yard shouts:
-Did you [finally] arrest them?]

In joke (9), a prominent member of the conservative party of New Democracy, Vyrion Polydoros, is accused of non-meritocracy and cronyism. As soon as he became Parliamentary Chair only for one day in June 2012 (because on the next day a second-round of elections was announced and the parliament was dissolved), he managed to hire his daughter in the Greek parliament. Joke (10) underlines the loss of credibility of politicians who cross the floor, on the one hand, and of their parties who take them back a few days later, on the other. Louka Katseli was expelled from the parliamentary group of PASOK when she rejected the official party line and voted differently from the other PASOK parliamentarians. A couple of days later, she was accepted back to the same group after the decision of its Leader George Papandreou. These events are perceived as incongruous and are humorously represented as ‘unfriending’ and ‘befriending’ people on Facebook, thus ridiculing the blurring of PASOK’s political lines and the lack of determination of the individuals involved. In joke (11), the Leader of PASOK is ridiculed for “grabbing himself from his own chair” (this is how traces of pleather got under his fingernails), a metonymy denoting his incongruously strong wish to maintain his office, regardless of his failure in the eyes of the Greek people. Incongruity in joke (12) does not stem from Alexis Tsipras’ non-standard accent in English (see joke 6), but

from the government's incongruous inability or unwillingness to negotiate with the country's creditors and eventually to fight for and protect the interests of the Greek people.¹⁴ In order to remain in power, the government seems to constantly agree with the creditors' demands, when the expectation is that it should have tried to object to them.

Joke (13) denigrates all the leaders of the Greek parliamentary parties for not being able to reach consensus in any of the important problems Greece is facing. The only issue they agreed on was how much funding they will receive from the state budget to sponsor their pre-election campaigns. Joke (14) humorously represents Greek parliamentarians as thieves¹⁵ stealing Greek people's money and property. Thus Greeks are advised to vote for Ali Baba instead, who only has 40 thieves, while the Greek parliament has 300 members/thieves. In a similar vein, George Papandreou and Evangelos Venizelos from PASOK are incongruously represented as criminals who would rather be behind bars (joke 15).

In such jokes, Greek politicians are portrayed as corrupt individuals, who try to maintain their power any way they can, to preserve their own interests (including the interests of their parties and families), and to embezzle Greek people's money. Such practices are represented as incongruous and hence are rejected. Politicians are implicitly and ideally perceived as social actors who support meritocracy and transparency, respect their parties' political values and decisions, are not obsessed with power, care for people's interests, and are honest.

5.3. Politicians' sex life

Politicians' sex lives become an object of ridicule, but usually after a politician has himself attracted attention to it. Petros Tatsopoulos, a SYRIZA parliamentarian at that time, was called a "faggot" by a member of the Golden Dawn party. In his defence, Tatsopoulos publicly declared that this could not be accurate as he has slept with half the (female) population in Athens. This statement led to the production of several jokes, such as the following two:

(16) *Φοβάμαι μην είμαι παιδί του Τατσόπουλου.*
[I am afraid I may be Tatsopoulos' child.]

(17) *Ο Τατσόπουλος όταν έχει αϋπνίες μετράει Αθηναίες.*
[When Tatsopoulos cannot sleep, he counts Athenian women.]

Jokes (16-17) denigrate the politician for his statement, as it seems incongruous to hear a politician to publicly disclose (rather exaggerated) accounts of his/her sex life as a response to political opponents. In joke (16), the joke-teller humorously claims that chances are his/her mother may have slept with Tatsopoulos at some point, while joke (17) humorously exploits the practice of counting sheep when suffering from insomnia to undermine Tatsopoulos' (alleged) sexual prowess. In such jokes, it is usually implied that politicians are not serious or trustworthy enough to represent the citizens in the parliament.

5.4. Foreign politicians' interventions

A few jokes from this corpus denigrate foreign politicians and institutions for interfering with Greek politics:

(18) *Η Μέρκελ θα μιλήσει προεκλογικά στο Καστελόριζο στις 5 Ιουνίου, στο Δίστομο στις 10 Ιουνίου και στο Πεδίο του Άρεως 15 Ιουνίου.*
[Merkel is going to give pre-election speeches in Kastellorizo on 5 June, in Distomo on 10 June, and in Pedion tou Areos on 15 June.]

(19) Οι τρόικα ζήτησε οι 45 Γιάννηδες να γίνουν 28.
[The troika asked to reduce the 45 Johns to 28.]

(20) Παιζουμε τρόικα?

-Δηλαδή?

-Εσύ θα μου χρωστάς κι εγώ θα σε πηδάω..

[-Wanna play Troika?

-What do you mean?

-You owe me, I screw you...]

The first two jokes need background information relating to Greek culture, history, and language to be understood. During pre-election campaigns, Greek political leaders speak in open rallies in Athens and other big cities around Greece. So, in joke (18), the German Chancellor is humorously portrayed as a ‘Greek’ political leader touring Greece to deliver speeches, thus implying that she makes decisions and rules the Greek state.¹⁶ Joke (19) plays on the well-known Greek proverb 45 Γιάννηδες ενός κοκόρου γνώση [‘(lit.) 45 Johns (i.e. men called John) have the knowledge/mind of a single rooster’]. The proverb jokingly portrays men whose name is John as stupid, much less clever than a rooster. The joke refers to the excessive, unreasonable, and hence incongruous cuts (in pensions, salaries, public expenditure, etc.) imposed by the members of the Troika (i.e., the EC, the ECB, and the IMF). Incongruity here is based on exaggeration: their absurd demands even involved reducing the number of Johns in the relevant proverb. In joke (20), the harsh austerity measures imposed by the Troika are metaphorically (and thus incongruously) represented as sexual intercourse (perhaps non-consensual).

Therefore, all these jokes employ exaggeration to frame the foreign interventions in Greek domestic affairs as incongruous. Joke-tellers appear to imply that foreign politicians and institutions should not impose harsh austerity measures and reforms on the Greek people.

5.5. Violent reactions against politicians

Greek people’s disappointment and distrust is sometimes encoded as violent behaviour and curses against politicians, as the following jokes suggest:

(21) 1 φλιτζάνι καφέ, αξία: 5EURO

1 ποτό στο μπαρ, αξία: 10EURO

1 λίτρο βενζίνη, αξία: 1,70EURO

1 γιαούρτι στα μούτρα ενός κουστουμάτου, ψεύτη πολιτικού, αξία: ANEKTIMHTH!

[1 cup of coffee, price: 5 euro

1 drink at the bar, price: 10 euro

1 liter of gas, price: 1.7 euro

1 yogurt at the face of a well-dressed, lying politician: priceless!]

(22) Η προσευχή ενός απλού Έλληνα...

«Αγαπητέ Θεέ

τον τελευταίο χρόνο μου πήρες:

τον αγαπημένο μου τραγουδιστή Νίκο Παπάζογλου

τον αγαπημένο μου συνθέτη Μανώλη Ρασούλη

τον αγαπημένο μου ηθοποιό Θανάση Βέγγο...

Απλά ήθελα να σου θυμίσω

ότι οι αγαπημένοι μου πολιτικοί είναι:

ο Παπανδρέου, ο Παπακωνσταντίνου, ο Πάγκαλος, ο Βενιζέλος

από βδομάδα θα σου πω και τους άλλους!!!!»

[The prayer of a common Greek...]

“Dear God
last year you took away from me:
my favourite singer Nikos Papazoglou
my favourite composer Manolis Rasoulis
my favourite actor Thanasis Veggos...
I just wanted to remind you
that my favourite politicians are:
Papandreou, Papakonstantinou, Pangalos, Venizelos...
next week I will give you more names!!!!”]

Joke (21) constitutes a parody of the Mastercard “Priceless” advertisements and explicitly suggests that it is priceless, namely particularly satisfying, to throw yogurt at the face of “lying” politicians. Such a gesture constitutes an act of protest and denigration against people who are perceived as deceitful and worthless. Instead of a product or something that could be paid by a Mastercard and please us, the punch line involves a more violent type of ‘pleasure’.¹⁷ Parody is also involved in joke (22), where a prayer becomes a curse for prominent members¹⁸ of the socialist party PASOK. They are implicitly represented as the main responsible people for the crisis and they are jokingly wished dead, so that people can get revenge for all their suffering during the crisis. Incongruity here is created by the reversal of the purpose of praying: normally we pray for the well-being of our beloved ones, not for politicians (our enemies?) to die.

Hence, through such jokes, Greek people play with aggression and give vent to hostile feelings against politicians, which shows their disillusionment and lack of faith in them.

5.6. Voters’ responsibility

Greek people may occasionally blame themselves for voting for their politicians, thus in a sense sharing responsibility for what is happening in the country:

(23) *Βλέποντας αυτούς που εξέλεξαν οι Έλληνες στη Βουλή, σκέφτομαι πως δεν πρέπει να μας διώξουν από την ευρωζώνη αλλά από τον πλανήτη.*

[Watching those elected in the parliament by the Greek people, I am thinking that we should not be expelled from the Eurozone but from the planet.]

(24) *Τώρα που θα παραιτηθεί ο Μπερλουσκόνι να τον κάνουμε εμείς εδώ πρωθυπουργό. Είναι και γκομενιάρης και θα θυμίζει τον Αντρέα.*

[Now that Berlusconi is about to resign [in Italy] we should make him our Prime Minister here. He is also a womaniser and he will remind us of Andreas (Papandreou).]

Joke (23) blames Greek people for voting the wrong people for the parliament, thus proposing that they should be even forced to leave the planet for such wrong choices. Incongruity here is based on this exaggerated proposal. Joke (24) makes fun of Greeks’ incongruous criteria for choosing political leaders - here the politicians’ personal charm, especially to women. Andreas Papandreou (father of George’s) was a Prime Minister with PASOK for several years since the 1980s and had the reputation of a womaniser and a bon viveur, but recently was blamed, among other things, for Greece’s public debt and resistance to reforms. Joke (24) circulated when Greek parliamentary parties were intensely looking for a Prime Minister who would efficiently cooperate with most Greek parties and EU partners. Berlusconi thus appeared as an incongruous solution based on unsuitable criteria.¹⁹

In sum, it seems that Greek people consider themselves partly responsible for the crisis (see also Tsakona 2015, 2017b), at least to the extent that they choose who is going to rule the country or enter the parliament. It is also implied that Greek people would rather be more

careful and rational in their choices and follow political criteria when voting, so as to elect reliable and competent politicians.

5.7. Voters' political trust

The final two examples epitomise, in my view, all that is said so far concerning Greeks' lack of trust towards politicians:

(25) *Εξαιρετική επιλογή ο κύριος Παπαδήμος. Ευγενής, μορφωμένος και τον σέβονται οι Ευρωπαίοι. Και, κυρίως, δεν τον ξέρουν οι πιο πολλοί Έλληνες.*

[Mister Papademos is an excellent choice (for Prime Minister). He is a gentleman, (he is) educated, and Europeans respect him. And, most importantly, most Greeks do not know him.]

(26) *Ο νέος πρωθυπουργός δεν θα ράψει κουστούμι για την ορκομοσία. Θα νοικιάσει πανοπλία.*

[The new Prime Minister will not have a new suit made for his swear-in ceremony. He will rent an armour.]

Lucas Papademos was chosen to become the Prime Minister in a coalition government supported by PASOK, New Democracy, and the far-right party of Popular Orthodox Rally, due to his professional experience and expertise as, among other things, a former Vice President of the ECB and a former Governor of the Bank of Greece. According to joke (25), however, his qualifications are not perceived as that important, hence an incongruity arises: his major asset is that most Greeks had not heard of him before, hence, it is implied, they cannot know whether they like him or not and whether they (can) trust him or not. Joke (26), in a sense, anticipates the suspicion, hostility, and eventually rejection the joke-teller believes Lucas Papademos will have to deal with as a non-elected Prime Minister: the attacks against them will be so incongruously fierce that he will need an armour to protect himself.

Humour in such jokes stems from the political mistrust expressed for the politician in question. It seems that political mistrust is perceived as incongruous to Greek joke-tellers: they recognise that citizens should trust and respect politicians.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The present analysis reveals (or rather confirms) that Greek people do not think highly of politicians and do not trust them: the jokes capture and reproduce quite accurately most of the causes of political mistrust in Greece. Greek politicians are represented as not particularly clever, inadequate in their roles, corrupt, selfish, and obsessed with power, money and, less often, sex. In addition, they are not particularly keen on solving the country's problems, achieving consensus with their political opponents, or negotiating better solutions for the people. Foreign politicians are humorously attacked for interfering with Greek politics and for being excessive in their demands. All such behaviours are evaluated as incongruous: Greek politicians ought to be capable of handling state affairs, to be honest, and to care for Greek people more than they care for themselves. Foreign politicians would rather not impose their demands or decisions on the Greek governments and people. The incongruities identified here convey Greek people's frustration with politicians, hence the jokes could be perceived as a (a relatively mild, if compared to violent reactions; see Section 3) expression of their disappointment and mistrust against them as well as an expression of playful aggression towards them (cf. Davies 2011). At the same time, Greek joke-tellers realise, and make fun of, their own responsibility: Greek politicians would not come to power if Greek people did not vote for them.

The present findings confirm Raskin's ones (1985; see Section 2) on political jokes. Especially the first five sub-categories (Sections 5.1–5.5) are compatible with what Raskin detects in his data: references to politicians' incompetence, corruption, unkindness (cf. foreign politicians' strictness), sex life, and to wishing them dead. The last two categories (Sections 5.6–5.7) seem to be closely related to how Greek joke-tellers position themselves towards the crisis and the Greek politicians. All the jokes examined here demonstrate, even in humorous terms, "a decline of ideological legitimacy of the whole political system" (Malkopoulou 2014: 162). Thus, they reflect what Greek people feel about specific politicians or the whole political system, and what they see before their eyes (cf. Raskin 1985; Davies 2010, in Section 2).

Ellinas & Lambrianou (2014: 23) suggest that

[t]he literature on political trust assures us that the rise of Greek distrust is unlikely to be fatal for Greek democracy. Distrusting citizens distance themselves from political institutions but are thought to remain *loyal* to democratic principles and ideals (my emphasis).

The present analysis confirms their claim: it is this very loyalty to democratic principles and ideals that seems to generate the jokes. Even though Greek people distrust politicians and frame their behaviours as incongruous in the jokes examined, they simultaneously imagine, and wish for, a polity whose representatives respect democratic values and principles and where there is political trust. According to Greeks' expectations, politicians should be reliable, trustworthy, honest individuals who care for, respect, and serve the citizens and do their best to keep the country safe and sovereign (see Section 5). It appears that such well-entrenched expectations and values underlie the jokes targeting politicians, and not strong anti-systemic feelings which would lead to the overall rejection of democracy and its institutions.

Previous studies on the same set of data (Tsakona 2015, 2017b) have yielded results which are compatible with the present ones. Crisis jokes have previously been examined in combination with speakers' spontaneous metapragmatic comments referring to the purposes served by recycling such jokes in online environments. In particular, joke-tellers concentrate on the incongruities of their everyday realities (see the second category in Section 4) and convey their dissatisfaction with how things have become after the eruption of the crisis. It seems that joke-tellers are critical towards their living conditions and express their anxiety and frustration for the deterioration of their standards of living. At the same time, they use political jokes to bolster each other's morale and to laugh their troubles away, so as to cope with the consequences of the crisis on their everyday lives (cf. Davies 2011: 247–248). All this is, in my view, relevant to the low levels of political trust attested among Greeks (see Section 3); after all, it would be awkward and unexpected not to hold politicians responsible for many of the social, political, and financial consequences of the crisis on the lives of Greek people.

As described in Section 2, the present study has tried to follow the methodological steps put forward by Davies (2011) for analysing joke-cycles as social facts. So, I have tried to interpret Greek crisis jokes targeting politicians as a manifestation of the political mistrust documented and analysed in independent studies from political, economic, and social sciences. The timing of the jokes (i.e., the first four years of the crisis; see Section 4) has also been taken into serious consideration to account for the data under scrutiny. The only question left here to discuss from Davies' methodological steps pertains to what other jokes could but were not produced concerning the Greek crisis. In my view, it could be hypothesised that jokes could have been built on the exogenous factors that led to this crisis, such as the transfer of the 2008 crisis from USA to Europe, the broader Eurozone crisis, EMU's structural defaults, the EU's slowness and restricted ability to cope with the new

conditions and its difficulty in achieving consensus on the necessary steps and measures to prevent such crisis and to effectively deal with it (see Section 3). All these are certainly unexpected, not often occurring, and hence potentially incongruous events, so why not becoming the core of crisis jokes? In other words, why not put the blame on external factors such as the financial markets, the private interests, the international institutions, and the credit rating agencies rather than on politicians?

Admittedly, Greek people are more often than not unfamiliar with (the details of) how international financial and political institutions work as well as with the economic and institutional parameters that led to the current crisis. At some point, they started to listen to reports on what was going on, for example, from the media and the Greek politicians. Public discourses, however, usually framed previous governments and active, retired, or even diseased politicians, and even the Greek people themselves as responsible for the consequences of the crisis (Markantonatou 2013: 20; Kovras & Loizides 2014: 6; Muro & Vidal 2016; Hatzidaki & Goutsos 2017). As Demertzis (2011: 12) points out, “during crisis periods the media and populist figures point to scapegoats, i.e., inadequate politicians, political scandals and the like instead of highlighting systemic contradictions of capitalism”. Even when these discourses referred to international economic conditions or developments, it would be incongruously and unjustifiably expected from the average citizen (if s/he exists) to understand the respective register and the technical terminology and thus to be able to follow the details of financial and political analyses.

In this context, it comes as no surprise that Greek people turned against those who, in their view, should have protected the country from the crisis and should have eventually found adequate solutions to overcome it: the (mostly but not exclusively Greek) politicians. The already increased mistrust towards them had turned them into sitting ducks. By putting the blame mostly on politicians (and much less on themselves; see Section 5.6 and Tsakona 2015, 2017b), Greek people could give vent to their indignation and frustration originating in their deteriorated living conditions. As Demertzis (2011: 12) insightfully suggests, “anger elicits negative judgments to targeted individuals rather than situational or systemic forces” and “bypasses system de-legitimation by focusing on persons rather than institutions” (see also Pappas & O’Malley 2014; Theocharis & van Deth 2015: 64). Furthermore, in the eyes of Greek people, politicians represent the state which was “the main provider of benefits and resources through clientelist practices and, consequently thereafter, the public’s immediate primary target of hostility when it outlived its former utility functions” (Theocharis & van Deth 2015: 70; see also Pappas & O’Malley 2014). The same tendency of accusing politicians of being responsible for the crisis is also attested in Greek songs reflecting lay perceptions of the crisis (Koutsoulelou 2017). Politicians certainly constitute much more ‘concrete’ targets than the ‘distant’ financial markets, credit rating agencies, etc. In this sense, it is once again confirmed that political jokes are a momentary social disruption (through symbolically attacking persons in power) which has no lasting or radical effects but eventually reinforces the existing sociopolitical order, rather than an act of rebellion against the financial markets and agencies (cf. Billig 2005: 200-235; Davies 2011; Tsakona & Popa 2011; Tsakona 2015).

For better or worse, the present study appears to leave some interesting questions unanswered. Comparative analyses (cf. Davies 2008) of political jokes targeting politicians are in order. Given that political mistrust is not a recent phenomenon in Greece but one that seems to have deep historical and cultural roots (see Section 3), it would be interesting to compare the present set of data with political jokes created and circulated before the crisis. Thus, we could identify similarities and differences on the respective topics, and explore why Greeks humorously attack their politicians each time. Furthermore, if, as Theocharis & van Deth (2013, 2015) suggest, political trust correlates with generalised trust (i.e., trust among

citizens), it would be equally interesting to examine whether there are jokes based on mistrust among Greeks.

The jokes analysed here come from the first four years of the crisis, when the two major political parties since 1974 could still form governments. After the elections of January 2015, however, the left party of SYRIZA formed a coalition government with the splinter national-conservative right party of Independent Greeks; for both it was their first time in power. Political jokes never ceased to be created, now targeting the new political figures in power. It would therefore be interesting to compare older crisis jokes with more recent ones (i.e. after 2015), so as to trace potential similarities and/or differences in the ways they represent Greek politicians. This could shed light on whether Greek people see any differences in the policies and practices of various governments during the crisis.

From a different but still comparative perspective, we could investigate what has happened to other crisis-ridden countries. Did politicians become joke targets there and to what extent? And what accusations were raised against them in jokes? Research has so far shown that the decrease in political trust due to financial crises has not occurred only in Greece: Italy, Portugal, and Spain have also suffered such a consequence due to the crisis (Muro & Vidal 2016). On the contrary, Pappas & O'Malley (2014) argue that, despite the important political, social and cultural similarities between Ireland and Greece, political trust has not decreased in Ireland. Such sociopolitical parameters could perhaps correlate with the production of different kinds of humour concerning the crisis, or even to the production of no humour at all. Further research is definitely welcome in this respect. In case political jokes cannot become the object of study (e.g., if they are not created and circulated in a particular linguocultural community), research could focus on other humorous genres, such as political cartoons and satire (TV shows, stand-up comedy).

Another most intriguing research question would involve politicians' attitudes towards political jokes targeting them. Are they aware of their existence? Do they ever ponder on their meanings? Do they dismiss them as 'trivial' and/or 'inconsequential' texts? Such questions are rather hard to explore, especially since politicians may come up with answers that, in their view, would satisfy the researcher him/herself, or may deliberately try to construct a specific identity for themselves: that of the politician with a sense of humour who 'can take a joke' and align with the common people; or, on the contrary, that of the 'serious' representative of the people who takes his/her job seriously and does not 'waste his/her time' telling or listening to funny stories, etc.

Whether politicians take political jokes into consideration or not, it cannot be denied that such texts offer an account of how people perceive political actions and decisions and how they evaluate them. It could therefore be suggested that political jokes are built on more or less latent ideological standpoints held by people concerning how politics should or should not be conducted. Strange though it may sound to non-humour scholars, more research on political humour and jokes is required to detect the diverse perceptions people have on political reality and systems and their positioning towards them.

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they mostly referred to the everyday problems and conditions Greek people have had to face during the crisis. As I promised on that day, this is a paper on the “political” jokes of my corpus.

Notes

¹ On low levels of political trust among Greeks, see Demertzis (2011: 5–6), Koniordos (2011: 52), Lyrantzis (2011: 10), Exadaktylos & Zahariadis (2012: 6), Theocharis & van Deth (2013: 6, 16–19, 2015: 71, 74), Ellinas & Lambrianou (2014: 9–12), Pappas & O’Malley (2014: 1608–1609), Ellinas (2015: 11–12), Muro & Vidal (2016: 4–5, 9–10, 2017: 199–201), and references therein.

² It is not accidental that scholars often argue that this is not predominantly a financial crisis but a *political* one: the austerity and the reforms imposed on the Greek people in combination with the political elite’s failure to handle them did not cause but merely brought to the surface and intensified “feelings of disillusionment, alienation and hatred towards politicians” (Theocharis & van Deth 2015: 64). Lyrantzis (2011: 11) even suggests that this is the “advent of a *foretold* crisis” (my emphasis). In a similar vein, it is also claimed that it is political mistrust that has turned a financial/debt crisis into a political one with significant political repercussions on the Greek state and its citizens, even more significant than the financial ones (Sklias & Maris 2013: 144–145; Theocharis & van Deth 2013; Kovras & Loizides 2014: 3; Pappas & O’Malley 2014: 1609).

³ My account is based on a number of relevant studies coming from political, economic, and social sciences: Demertzis (2011), Koniordos (2011), Lyrantzis (2011), Exadaktylos & Zahariadis (2012), Markantonatou (2013), Sklias & Maris (2013), Theocharis & van Deth (2013, 2015), Ellinas & Lambrianou (2014), Kovras & Loizides (2014), Malkopoulou (2014), Pappas & O’Malley (2014), Ellinas (2015), Muro & Vidal (2016, 2017), Lambrianou & Ellinas (2017).

⁴ The use of the past tense to describe the Greek context does not mean that things nowadays have changed for the better; it rather indicates that the present situation began a few years ago.

⁵ As Ellinas (2015: 10) points out, “the severity of the economic adjustment [has been] greater in Greece than in the rest of Europe or the Eurozone”.

⁶ Political mistrust is traced back to the years that followed the restoration of democracy in 1974 after the fall of the military junta (Sklias & Maris 2013; Theocharis & van Deth 2015), or back to the Greek Civil War (1946–1949; Koniordos 2011: 51–52), or to the creation of the modern Greek state (1830; Lyrantzis 2011: 3), or even much earlier to the Ottoman occupation (1453–1821), when the state and its representatives were perceived as enemies or as aliens intruding Greek people’s lives (Markantonatou 2013: 4; see also Herzfeld 1985, 1992: 82, 147, 2005: 36; Tsakona 2017a: 120–123).

⁷ See also Pappas & O’Malley (2014: 1604–1606).

⁸ Tax evasion is considered among the most important parameters which led to the crisis in the first place (see among others Exadaktylos & Zahariadis 2012: 17).

⁹ On public attacks against Greek politicians, see Demertzis (2011: 11–12), Koniordos (2011: 53), Lyrantzis (2011: 20–21), Exadaktylos & Zahariadis (2012: 17–21), Theocharis & van Deth (2013: 3–5, 2015: 64), Ellinas & Lambrianou (2014: 3), Malkopoulou (2014: 166–167), Pappas & O’Malley (2014), Ellinas (2015: 12). Pappas & O’Malley (2014: 1597–1598, 1601–1602) even suggest that all this can be accounted for in terms of a “protest culture” developed in Greece after 1974 (when democracy was restored after the fall of the military junta) and escalated since December 2008. Cf. Herzfeld’s (1987: 124) conceptualisation of

Greekness as a “metaphor for insubordination”. Public dissatisfaction with politicians has even become the inspiration for Greek songs (see Koutsoulelou 2017).

¹⁰ Such actions are insightfully characterised by Pappas & O’Malley (2014: 1596) as *political Luddism* in the sense that “Luddism was neither a ‘pointless and blind activity’ nor an act of despair by people faced with harsh economic difficulties; rather, it was a rational reaction of workers feeling threatened [...]”.

¹¹ All the data presented here was translated by the author for the purposes of the present study. Some humour may have been lost on the way. Unconventional spelling was maintained in the Greek original texts, but was not reproduced in the English translations. Square brackets include additional explanatory material. It should also be noted that due to space limitations short jokes were preferred to longer ones (which were more than one page long in several cases). Short jokes also proved relatively easier to translate.

¹² The nickname *Γιωργάκης* ‘little George’ in joke (1) further reinforces a widely circulating stereotype referring to Papandreou’s allegedly limited political skills.

¹³ The underlined extract appears in English in the original Greek joke.

¹⁴ This joke could also be considered an incompetence one (Section 5.1).

¹⁵ See also Herzfeld (1991: 202), Koniordos (2011: 53), and Malkopoulou (2014: 166).

¹⁶ It is interesting to note here the places where she is supposed to deliver her pre-election speeches: Kastellorizo is a small island in the Dodecanese from where the then Prime Minister George Papandreou officially announced that the country would have to ask for help from the EU institutions to avoid bankruptcy; Distomo is a village in mainland Greece, whose inhabitants were slaughtered by the Nazis in 1944; and Pedion tou Areos is a big park in the centre of Athens where open rallies but also protests often take place. All three places are heavy with symbolism not only in relation to the Greek crisis and politics (Kastellorizo, Pedion tou Areos), but also in terms of the relationship between the Germans and the Greeks (Distomo).

¹⁷ The product prices may also allude to the incongruous increase of prices during the crisis due to heavy taxation (see Section 3).

¹⁸ George Papandreou was the Leader and the Prime Minister at that time, George Papakonstantinou the Minister of Finance who signed the first Memorandum of Understanding between Greece and its creditors, Evangelos Venizelos was the Minister of Finance later on, and Theodoros Pangalos has been one of the most prominent members of PASOK since the 1980s and has been Minister in several PASOK governments (on Pangalos’ statements at the beginning of the crisis, see Demertzis 2011: 10; Hatzidaki & Goutsos 2017: 6-8).

¹⁹ Both jokes could also be considered incompetence jokes (Section 5.1), as they hint at politicians’ unsuitability for the job. Joke (24) could also be included in Section 5.3.

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