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The Eurozone Crisis and the Politics of Blaming: Narratives, Identities and Discursive Patterns

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Abstract

The present paper wishes to investigate the public discourse that surrounds the Eurozone crisis and its management, in search for an understanding of the cultural politics that have characterised it. By the means of a critical discourse analysis of media and elite rhetoric, the various ways that both German and Greek citizens, are constructed as prototypical representatives of Core Europe and Periphery Europe, respectively, will be explored. Furthermore, the ways that both Germans and Greeks are represented as distinct 'nations' and monolithic 'cultures' and constructed as either malicious 'villains' or innocent 'victims' will be analysed and questioned. The analysis shall exemplify two main tendencies, namely the trend towards essentialisms and the pattern of binary oppositions. As will be concluded, these two linguistic and intellectual tendencies are intimately involved in an on-going process of identity formation with significant political implications, particularly for the distinctly normative conceptions of national and European identities. As a second layer, reflections and speculations will be offered regarding the psychological dynamics behind these tendencies by looking for insights inside social psychological perspectives, such as social identity theory, including social categorization theory, and social representations theory. These applications will reveal the political potential of these specific perspectives and the contribution of social psychology to political science.

Keywords: *Core Europe, critical discourse analysis, European identity, Eurozone crisis, Germany, Greece, national identity, periphery Europe, representations, social psychology.*

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Introduction: The Cultural Politics of the Eurozone Crisis

The Sovereign Debt Crises around Europe and the Eurozone Crisis have unleashed a vast sea of analyses and commentaries. However, when it comes to the tensions and disunities that have surfaced in the European Union (hereafter EU), most texts have focused on the economic and technocratic components of the crisis (e.g. Fernandes & Mota 2011; Gärtner *et al.* 2011; Pentecôte & Huchet-Bourdon 2012). This is unsurprising, since in a sense, it only resembles the focus of the management of the crisis itself. Eventually, political scientists and sociologists entered the discursive terrain and contributed with analyses of the democratic failures of the crisis management and speculations on the social and political future of European integration (e.g. Bosco & Verney 2012; Hughes 2011; Nicolaidis 2012). However, interestingly, little systematic attention has been paid to the distinctly 'cultural politics' that has surrounded the Eurozone crisis and the national stereotypes that characterised it, despite the rise of nationalisms and Euroscepticism. Such notions are often referenced, but no systematic and theoretical reflection has been dedicated to their respect. Consequently, the ideological implications of such discourses have not been fully addressed.

The present paper wishes to tackle this issue by examining the symbolic divisions that have appeared in the EU, which have been activated by what we can call 'the politics of blaming' or what has been named in the press as the 'the blame-game' (Bleich 2012; Kutlay 2011; Wee 2012; Weeks 2011). This paper argues that this certain kind of politics has put its imprint on the development of the Eurozone crisis, whereby we have witnessed undiplomatic exchanges of threats, ultimatums and insults between European politicians and citizens. As such, the aim of this paper is to arrest the flow of antagonistic and pejorative stereotypical ideational formations and narratives that have been floating and circulating during the unfolding of the crisis, as those have been expressed in academic, media and grassroots rhetoric. Furthermore, its purpose is to reflect upon their political implications, as well as their psychological and emotional underpinnings by applying an integrated theoretical model that combines social psychological theories, such as social identity theory and social representations theory, as well as Arendtian political theory, since the identities that are central to the Eurozone crisis, national and European, are characteristically political identities.

The analysis will focus on the core-periphery divide which 'has become a central feature of the crisis' (Becker & Jäger 2011: 1) and the two countries of Germany and Greece that can be – arguably – characterised as representative of the two categories. This choice can further be justified by arguing that these two countries have played protagonistic roles on the 'crisis stage', because Germany's strong economic condition has led to its leading role in the Eurozone crisis (Hübner 2012: 159), while Greece's domestic economic and administrative shortcomings, such as clientelism and chronic mismanagement, have contributed to this country being the weakest link in the Eurozone crisis (Kutlay 2011: 90). As such, it could be said that both countries have occupied exceptional positions in current affairs, which poses an interest in concentrating on them.

The journey this paper will attempt to take the reader on will begin by presenting this study's theoretical framework and methodological approach, namely that of critical discourse analysis, that will inform the subsequent discussion. Soon after, various excursions will be attempted to illustrate the narratives that have dominated the public discourse of the Eurozone crisis. After describing these results, a discussion will be offered regarding ideological and political implications for the question of national and European identities. As will become apparent, the predominant trends that arise from the analysis are the ones of essentialisms and binary oppositions and the themes of culturalisation and

moralisation. Reflections will be given regarding the links of these discursive formations to social psychological needs and their relation to depoliticization processes that operate through a variety of psychological displacements and misplacements.

An Integrated Social Psychological Model of Identity Formation and Political Action

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Representations Theory (SRT) belong to the disciplinary field of social psychology. While the first theory focuses on affective motivation and cognition, the latter concentrates on representations and cultural context. As such, while the first theory addresses the psychological ways that underpin identity formation, such as perception, categorization, emotion and evaluation, the second theory informs us of the ways people create meaning and its ideological implications. The ultimate purpose of these psychological theories is to provide an understanding of human action, in this case, political action. As argued by some authors (Huddy 2001; Monroe et al. 2000; Nisbet & Myers 2011), although the two theories belong to the field of psychology, they hold a political potential and they have been employed in the past successfully in the context of political psychology. The failures and disenchantments of political science (e.g. the Perestroika movement, Jacobsen 2005; also, see Breeden 2013; Lane 2003; Lichbach 2003; Monroe 2001; O'Sears *et al.* 2003) with its overreliance on rationalist and materialist theories such as Rational Choice Theory and Game Theory, render social psychological theories that provide alternative insights into the human psyche and political action illuminating and effectively complementary in our understanding of political identity formation.

SIT was first articulated by Henri Tajfel in the late 1950s – 1960s in the context of his research on stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination (Tajfel 1959, 1963, 1969). According to SIT, humans have two fundamental psychological needs: certainty and positiveness. To this respect, when it comes to identity formation, people need to define themselves (categorization) and to know that they can enjoy positive self-esteem (self-enhancement) (Hogg *et al.* 1995). As far as collective identities are concerned, the individual derives positive self-identity from formal membership or emotional attachment to various social groupings and collectivities (Fowler & Kam 2007: 815). In terms of stereotyping, the belief that a specific social dimension or quality is correlated to specific identity categories is a *stereotype* (Hogg & Williams 2000: 87). Such ideas have a normative character since they dictate appropriate rules of conduct depending on category membership, while certain members of a social group are considered more prototypical than others in the sense that they are perceived to embody more successfully the group norms (see continuation of Tajfel's work by Turner's Self-Categorization Theory; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Turner 1985). This creates the opportunity for the creation of 'internal others', liminal members that are inside, yet conceived as not fully 'deserving' of belonging or assigned a second-class status.

According to SIT, when groups are ascribed a lower status and there is a perceived identity threat, their members respond in a variety of strategic relational ways in their psychological effort to manage the inflicted inferiority. For example, low-status social groups can follow strategies, such as social creativity, social change or social mobility (Huddy 2001: 134-135). The first refers to cases of poorly valued groups that create or construct an alternative identity, the second concerns struggles to alter the devalued group's negative image and the final implies the rejection of one's membership for the sake of moving to a more highly valued group. The choice of strategy depends on people's subjective understandings of the relationship between their group and other groups, which are called 'social belief structures' (Hogg *et al.* 1995; Hogg & Williams 2000).

Tajfel (1981) argues that a full theory of identity should be contextualised in the social milieu that individuals occupy and their social interactions, and should address issues of justification, causal attribution and social differentiation. As such, SIT is a theory of intergroup relations, since it postulates that individuals partition the world into ingroups and outgroups and struggle to achieve positive collective distinctiveness and esteem through their encounters with 'other' groups, which can lead to ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation (Brewer & Brown 1998; Fowler & Kam 2007; Greene 2004). This creates the possibility that intergroup relations may become ultra-antagonistic and acrimonious leading to social bias, prejudice, negative stereotyping and discrimination. But where do stereotypical conceptions of social groups come from, how are prototypes created? This is where SRT and its analysis of discursive formations of identities and the ways they relate to human cognition can complement SIT in productive and meaningful ways.

SRT was first elaborated by Sergei Moscovici (1961) with his seminal work on the diffusion of psychoanalysis in Parisian society. Moscovici investigated how specialised, expert knowledge became common-sense, everyday, consensual discourse through media communication. In this process, he argued, there was a creation of symbolic associations and connections that eventually acquired the illusion of being 'natural' or in other words, became 'common sense'. Such ideas make it possible for humans to classify, compare and explain individuals, groups and situations. As such, social representations concern the accumulated shared knowledge, the collection of floating discourses that circulate in a given social context, that provide a set of constructed 'objects' for interpretation, be it an identity category or a situational theme. For Moscovici (1984: 24), this process is psychologically prompted by the human need 'to make the unfamiliar familiar', to arrest meaning and provide certainty, which is achieved by associating new phenomena with previous well-known phenomena (anchoring) and solidifying their meaning by grounding it in specific objects, images or concepts (objectification).

In these processes, anchoring entails drawing 'something' out of its anonymity into the 'identity matrix of our culture' (Moscovici 2000: 46) and providing it with a 'name', which is a highly political activity and may contain both positive and negative connotations. Objectification concerns the 'discovery', the allocation of an iconic quality to an otherwise imprecise or confusing idea or being (Moscovici 1984: 38). Going back to SIT, SRT complements it by providing a theorization of the creation of *representations of stereotypes and prototypes* (Chrysochoou 2000: 417), which is the fruitful link between the two theories. Additionally, SRT provides SIT with a critical edge, since as argued by some (Elcherth et al. 2011: 730), SRT's focus on language and meaning formation can address 'the nature of power, and how it relates to political reasoning, communication and social influence, conformity and resistance, collective harmony and group conflict'. As Moscovici (1998: 377) explains, in every representation there is cooperation and conflict; cooperation because the representation itself gives us a common object and code to discuss social reality, conflict because we may disagree about this reality. As put, 'there is a kind of ideological battle, a battle of ideas' (Moscovici 1998: 403).

However, in order to speak of political identity formation we need to connect these social psychological theories to a *political theory of action*. Hannah Arendt's work seems to resonate ideally with the above framework. Arendt asserts that what makes human action 'political' is the passion for distinction, emulation and excellence (Arendt 1990, 1998). For Arendt (1998: 175), the core of the 'political' is the paradoxical plurality of distinct individuals that are simultaneously *equal*, because of being human, and *different*, because of individual uniqueness (the person's *daimon*). Through speech and action, *language as action*, humans appear in public, exemplify their distinction and agonise for excellence. In

this way, they achieve their full potential and experience a political public life, that is, a life characterised by speech (*doxa* as opinion and glory) and action (*praxis* as meaningful performance). However, the focus of her analysis is on the individual, rather than the collective, due to her indignation with what she called 'the social' as distinct from 'the political' realm, and possibly the only seriously flawed distinction in her otherwise exceptional political theory. Elevating her ideas to the level of the collective, we can relate it to SIT and conclude that individuals who unavoidably experience collective processes of identifications, since they live in communion with others and not in isolation - a publicness that is integral to the 'political' according to Arendt - have a need to achieve not only positive individual distinction, but also *positive collective distinction*. As explained by SIT, a comparison with another group is helpful in defining what characterises one group and in what ways this group is different and thereby, *distinctive* (Brewer 1991; Yildiz & Verkuyten 2011).

Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis

This excursus into the politics of blaming of the Eurozone crisis and the reconstitution of German, Greek and European identities will be conducted by the means of a critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA), understood as both an approach and a method (Fairclough 2001; Meyer 2001). As explained, CDA is a critical perspective that focuses on the ways language relates to power and ideology (Wodak 2001a), particularly on the role of language in the production, reproduction and transformation of power abuse or domination (van Dijk 2001). CDA's interest lies in social and symbolic processes of power, hierarchy building, exclusion and subordination (Meyer 2001). In the wider sense, CDA aims at reflecting on the actual and potential effects of language as 'action', as a medium that impacts on social reality in a variety of ways that are subject to critical evaluation.

CDA's procedure is of a hermeneutic character, whereby hermeneutics can be understood as the method of grasping and producing meaning relations, as opposed to the causal concerns of the natural sciences (Meyer 2001). CDA has been criticised for being a biased interpretation, because of its ideological commitments and its method of selection of texts for analysis, accused as chosen to support the preferred interpretation (Widdowson 1995). Conversely, CDA researchers have argued that, unlike most other approaches, CDA is honest in its explicitly stated purpose to expose power inequalities and defend marginalised and disempowered social groups (Meyer 2001). Nevertheless, both sides admit that this dimension of CDA gives it its political edge as a practice of political argumentation (Meyer 2001). As explained (Meyer 2001; van Dijk 2001), there is no guiding theoretical viewpoint or disciplinary boundary that is consistently used in CDA and a multiplicity of theories can apply. In this case, CDA can be fruitfully combined with social psychological theories, since as argued CDA needs to account for the various forms of *social cognition* that are shared by social collectivities, such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values (Meyer 2001; van Dijk 2001).

For the purpose of this analysis, texts from academic articles, political journalism, news reports, elite discourse and grassroots rhetoric expressed in new media (i.e. internet) were selected, since such texts constitute sources of everyday representations. As argued, it is through everyday discourse that people acquire knowledge of the world, socially shared attitudes and ideological preferences (van Dijk 2001). As suggested (Meyer 2001), selection and analyses were conducted on an ongoing basis, starting from making a first collection, making initial analyses to clarify indicators of particular concepts, expanding concepts into categories and on the basis of these results, collecting further data. Wodak (2001b) explains that quality and validity of CDA can be achieved by following the principle

of *triangulation*, by which it is preferable to work with a variety of approaches, methods and empirical data. In this case, this desired variety has been attempted at the level of data selection by choosing a multiplicity of sources and social actors, such as academics, journalists, politicians and citizens. In terms of analytical strategies and research questions, the examples offered by Wodak (2001b), designed especially for the study of racial, national and ethnic identities and stereotyping, was used as a guiding pathway. According to Wodak, there are five, carefully selected, questions that can guide a researcher's inquiry (Wodak 2001b: 72-73), which are presented here with slight alterations that are specific to the present study:

- “1) How are [German and Greek nationals] named and referred to linguistically?
- 2) What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?
- 3) By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do [these national] groups try to justify and legitimize the exclusion, discrimination, suppression and exploitation of [each] others?
- 4) From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attributions and arguments expressed? [i.e. moral, cultural, economic, political etc]
- 5) Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified or are they mitigated?”

It is argued here that Wodak's research questions offer a transferable and comprehensive set of questions that can be applied to the study of national stereotypes, which is the main reason that they are reproduced here and adjusted to the particularities of this research paper. As Wodak (2001b: 73) explains, these questions refer to five particular 'discursive strategies, which are involved in the positive self and negative other presentation', whereby strategies are defined as 'discursive practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim'. As such, the remaining paper will attempt to analyse public discourses drawing from the social psychological framework that was presented, as well as by focusing on the central points of the above questions. The presentation of the findings will be organised in terms of three themes: narratives of blaming, national pride and identity, and essentialisms and binaries.

Of Crisis and its Narratives

The preliminary analysis of the press and academic discourses reveals that there are two dominant narratives regarding the origins, dynamics and appropriate management of the Eurozone crisis. The first narrative attributes responsibility to Greece, in particular, and/or the peripheral European countries, in general. The second narrative projects culpability on Germany, in particular, and/or economically advanced European countries, otherwise referred to as 'core Europe'. It is often the case that authors make sure to note – briefly - that both narratives hold a certain 'truth capital', yet it is most often the case that one of the two is chosen as the 'truer' one, which we could call a matter of *ideological emphasis*. The two narratives unfold as follows.

Narrative I: Blaming Greece and the Periphery-Eurozone

The first dominant narrative has been discursively anchored around the economic acronym PIGS, which stands for the initials of the countries Portugal, Ireland (including Italy if written as PIIGS), Greece and Spain (Prokopijević 2010: 369). What all these countries have in common is their challenged economies. This narrative suggests that the origins of the Eurozone crisis are to be found in the fiscal profligacy of PIGS countries, particularly

southern European ones, which are accustomed to live beyond their means and work less than other Europeans (Weeks 2011). Words that are most often associated with the PIGS countries are 'lazy', 'profligate', 'irresponsible', 'undisciplined', 'disorganised', 'chaotic', 'corrupted', 'deceitful', 'violent', 'resentful' and 'troublemakers' (Bleich 2012; Prokopijević 2010; Rosenthal 2012). In this narrative, the role of Germans and other Northern Europeans is constructed as the mirror-opposite of the PIGS, and is ascribed characteristics, such as 'disciplined', 'hard-working', 'responsible', 'honest', 'trustworthy', 'well-organised'.

In this narrative, the side of accomplished economies and German citizenry, are ascribed the role of the conscientious tax-payer that has been working on low steady wages for many years and is now deprived of the fruits of this labour because of southern debt and EU administered bailouts. Examples of this role ascription can be seen in media titles such as 'Greece dependent on the patience of German taxpayers' (Costello 2012) or 'German Taxpayers' Association criticizes Greek bailout accord' that project the argument 'why should hardworking Germans bail out countries that borrowed too much and don't work as much?' (Weisenthal 2011), or *Bild Zeitung's* headlines 'Fear for our money' and 'We are no longer the paymaster of Europe' (Young & Semmler 2011: 17). This perspective intensifies impressions of core-periphery animosity and resentment, as well as perceptions of scarce resources and antagonism over them that can lead to Eurosceptic tendencies on both sides.

Greece has been conceived as a centre-piece representative of the PIGS countries, or as SIT would term it, the prototypical member of this group category, although at various occasions Greece has been described as exceptional in its downfall (i.e. Schäuble in Spiegel Online 2011) or other PIGS members has sought to prove that they are not 'like Greece' (e.g. Güemes 2012 on Spain). Knight (2013) argues that Greece finds itself subject to a narrative of blame from the countries of the European North and the Greeks are portrayed as the cause of the Eurozone crisis, which inflicts a sense of destitution and persecution among the Greek people (see also Tekin 2012). In such a climate, capable of inflicting damage to the national self-esteem, defensive or even offensive mechanisms of 'saving face' and re-evaluation of the national self as projected by SIT can be highly possible. It is probable that such psychological mechanisms emotionally prompt nationalist actions and choices and reactivate in precarious ways past cleavages. For instance, one of most vivid responses in Greek media has been the frequent representation of Chancellor Merkel as a Nazi officer, as well as claims for payment of WWII reparations to Greece by Germany, which have led to a public petition, an investigation by the Greek government and a subsequent demand expressed to the German government by the Greek one.

In terms of crisis management and responses, the Greek government has been perceived as incapable of achieving reforms and performing tax-collection successfully, which has led to the proposition of closer German surveillance and establishment of a mechanism that would necessarily entail Greece handing over part of its sovereignty, a most bitter issue in national politics (Juncker in wort.lu 2012; Schäuble in Spiegel Online 2011). Such statements have been perceived as attempts to justify external intervention and imposition on Greece by means of representing it as 'childish' and incapable of taking care of itself, thus in need of parenting by a 'German Big Brother' (Wee 2012). Such discourses bring to the fore the sensitive political issue of sovereignty and intensify the debate, which could lead to unwillingness to cooperate, an easiness in taking offence and rise of anti-German sentiments.

Roilos (2012) argues that the term PIGS attributes 'qualities of animalized criminal scapegoats' to the countries it means to describe. These layers of animalization and

criminalization can additionally be argued to lead to processes of dehumanization and objectification of these particular national subjects. Such ideas can make the imposition of tough austerity measures on these populations seem palatable and appropriate, even desirable. Ultimately, the matter of concern is that of legitimation and justification of the course of action taken in the management of the Eurozone crisis, which has consistently focused on austerity measures, rather than growth initiatives that have been more characteristic of overseas countries, such as the US and Brazil. More recently, the term GIPSIs has been suggested as an alternative acronym for challenged European economies by finance and investment actors (Alexandre 2010; Ovide 2011). However, this move does little to shift pejorative connotations from being attached to these countries and if anything, it clearly refers to Roma ethnic minorities, commonly referred to as 'gypsies', a social group that has been historically marginalised and discriminated.

Problematising the use of such acronyms, one can argue that they present us with various peculiarities. What is the political value of using these terms and who is doing the using? Admittedly, it is often the case that these terms are encountered in texts that actually speak in favour of Greece or other PIGS countries. Such texts make use of the term and the narrative that goes with it as a counter-argument against German crisis responses or the wider global financial system with its ascribed inequalities and malfunctions, and create an image of countries like Greece as 'victims' or 'underdogs' of the European South (e.g. Augstein 2013). Such discourses are often accompanied by romanticized ideas of revolutionary resistance and defiant national spirit, attributed to social movements like the *Aganaktismenoi* (GR) and the *Indignados* (SP). At the practical level, a group of Greek journalists has attempted to initiate a trial of the Troika leaders at the International Criminal Court with the charge of 'social and economic genocide' (Larouchepac 2012). The very word 'genocide', even in its metaphorical use, enhances an impression of victimization.

This strategic usage serves to remove responsibility from countries like Greece and create a climate of support and resistance. This is even more evident in discourses that represent countries like Greece that are subjected to severe austerity measures as powerless 'guinea pigs' that are forced to experimentation by capitalist forces that seek to understand how much austerity and deformation of democracy nations can hold, so that anti-labour and austerity policies can be imposed on all nations in yet another era of capitalist hegemony (e.g. Tsipras in Weisbrot 2013). Nevertheless, these blame-shifting and romanticising aspects of this narrative can have a powerful effect on the directions citizen-based domestic and European public opinion and solidarity is taking, in initiatives, such as 'We are all Greeks' and 'We are all PIGS' (e.g. Common Dreams 2012; Roar Magazine 2012). Such representations promote the idea that it is in the interest of all Europeans to resist austerity and neoliberal policies, implying that what happens in Greece will soon happen to other countries too, which aims both at emotional and interest-based, rational appeals.

Another kind of usage of the PIGS term relates to loose invocations, often combined with admitted condemnation that paradoxically does not inhibit its use. For instance, in a 2010 article, BBC admits that PIGS is a 'terrible acronym', but still goes on to pose the question 'how bad a situation are the PIGS in?' (BBC 2010). This particular usage (un)problematically allows and legitimizes the use of the term by the very means of its own condemnation, therefore trivialization or banalization. However, as stated in a recent paper presented by Galpin (2012), such representations are likely to appear in both the tabloid and conservative press, as well as in political discourse and quality press, and 'research of these is yet to be conducted'. As such, we should argue that current research should engage more systematically with the discursive analysis of such representations, the subject position of the author/narrator and the effects of the language used and narratives created, which should be established both on the discursive-analytical and an empirical

level based on interviews or surveys that will involve the citizens about which so much public discussion is currently being made.

Narrative II: Blaming Germany and the Core-Eurozone

The second dominant narrative is the one that focuses primarily on systemic, structural and macroeconomic considerations and places blame on Germany and its neomercantilistic policies. For example, Lucarelli (2012: 205) states, 'German neomercantilism is at the very core of Europe's descent into a seemingly irreversible phase of stagnation'. According to this narrative, the roots of the current crisis are to be found in the expansion of German exports in the EU that have created surpluses which in a system like the Eurozone necessarily corresponded to southern deficits because there are no mechanisms for tax and transfer policies that can equalise and stabilise regional economies, as is the case in federal systems like the US (Lucarelli 2012; Young & Semmler 2011). The explanation further holds that high export performance combined with sustained pressure for moderate wage increases and stability provided German exporters with the competitive edge that allowed German economy to dominate trade and capital flows in the Eurozone (Young & Semmler 2011: 1). As such, Germany was seen as the main beneficiary in the Eurozone and the most responsible for the emergence of a two-speed Europe (Young & Semmler 2011: 2).

However, in this narrative, Germany is not only blamed for the cause of the Eurozone imbalances and its downfalls, but also for the crisis management and its perceived failures. Looking at public discourse, a discursive analysis reveals various themes. During the unfolding of the Eurozone crisis, Germany has been attributed a variety of 'accusations': of procrastinating, being ignorant and ineffective, stubborn and close-minded, nationalistic and Eurosceptic, promoting its own interests and norms, aiming at punishing Greece instead of helping it, resisting the leadership role, yet seeking dominance of Europe by economic means, as well as profiting from the crisis of others. For example, in terms of procrastination, 'critical domestic and international voices argued that Merkel's hesitant intervention between February and May 2010 actually made the rescue package more expensive since the uncertainties in the Eurozone markets drove the credit default swaps and yields on government securities to ever greater heights' (Young & Semmler 2011: 8).

Regarding attributions of ignorance or stubbornness, Young and Semmler (2011: 17, 16) wonder 'are Germans simply obstinate or too ignorant about economics and politics...?', since as argued, the austerity-oriented crisis response 'is a cure that most believe will kill the patients'. As far as stubbornness is concerned, German leadership is often described with words, such as 'obstinate', 'insular', 'insistent', 'unequivocal', 'shortsighted', 'egotistical' or 'inflexible' (e.g. Augstein 2013; Hübner 2012; Young & Semmler 2011). Furthermore, the same ignorance that is attributed to German leadership, is also projected upon German citizens. For instance, a blog comment reckons that 'the ordinary German has no idea... They see a grand project and Germany at the centre of a strong Europe eventually. Of all the European nations, they are perhaps the worst informed about the realities of the euro disaster' (Ward 2012). This comment means to imply that Germans fail to understand the precariousness of the Eurozone crisis and that their confidence is based on this very failure. It furthers connotes overestimating German power and the centrality of its position, as well as underestimating the dynamics of the Eurozone crisis. Former Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, warned that 'the German Federal Constitutional Court, the Bundesbank and Chancellor Merkel are acting like the center of Europe, to the exasperation of our neighbors' (in Augstein 2013, Spiegel Online), which aims at creating a public demand for restriction of what is perceived as German unilateralism.

All of the above are anchored around blaming Germany of being driven by national, rather than European interests and norms, by blocking initiatives like the creation of Eurobonds, national debt relief, debt redemption fund and other suggestions. For instance, it was stated that:

‘...the German crisis management with regards to the Eurozone is very much driven by ideas that preserve German norms but do not live up to the challenges of the crisis. Germany’s insistence in its own interests and norms hinders the delivery of a comprehensive crisis management of the Eurozone crisis within the European Union’ (Hübner 2012: 159)

Furthermore, former Social Democratic foreign and finance ministers, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Peer Steinbrück stated that Germany has become increasingly isolated within Europe by insisting on a ‘German Europe’ rather than a more ‘European Germany’ (in Young & Semmler 2011: 16), while numerous leading German economists, former central bankers and business leaders have been writing articles advocating withdrawal from the euro on the ground that ‘Germany’s policies are incompatible with other members’ (Kaletsky 2012). Eventually, in this intense blame-game, Germany has been described in public discourse as equally ‘irresponsible’ as the PIGS countries (e.g. Hübner 2012), albeit in diverse ways. It may as well be the case that perceptions of German blame may be higher as a consequence of a perceived greater German power in the EU, which necessarily entails greater responsibility.

Contrary to ‘conventional wisdom’ advocating Greece’s exit from the Eurozone, Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi and others (e.g. Jahncke 2012; Sivy 2012; Soros 2013) proposed that Germany’s exit might be more helpful for the management of the Eurozone crisis. Such radical solutions have constructed an even more intensified opposition between the two countries and exacerbated perceptions of core-periphery divides. The reference of banishment from the Eurozone, which in many respects has been equated with Europe (Tekin 2012), prompts invocations of European identities as evidence of support and normative behaviours that uphold the ‘common European good’ and as an extension, the question of which countries fulfill these prerequisites. As such, a power struggle is formed not only in terms of economic might, but also in symbolic power, as representations of Europeanness, depending on the text, shift from the core to the periphery, and vice versa.

This version of the story underplays the factor of the domestic issues of Greece and the Greek government and governance, such as its clientilistic system, its bloated public sector, its delay in applying Europeanizing reforms during the first two decades of its EU membership, its entrance into the Eurozone by the means of creative accounting with the help of Goldman Sachs and various other dysfunctional shortcomings and poor handlings. According to this view, ‘domestic factors are not the main cause of the Greek debt problem’, but rather the current crisis is due to the nature of monetary union, the mode of integration of peripheral countries in the Euro-zone and the impact of the 2007–2009 crisis’ (Lapavitsas *et al.* in Fouskas & Dimoulas 2012). What both narratives have in common is their desire and purpose to delegitimize each other through various perspectives, be them moral, economic, cultural or political. Representatives from both sides use argumentation and various tactical discursive polemics, such as irony or sarcasm, to prove the other side wrong and illegitimate. The ultimate purpose appears to be the influence of decision-makers towards particular crisis policies (i.e. growth-oriented instead of austerity-oriented).

Economically speaking, the debate has been framed as standing between the Keynesian school and the Ordoliberal one, whereby both sides can offer adequate statistical evidence and theoretical reasoning in support of their thesis (Young & Semmler 2011: 4). There is 'truth' to both narratives. Both narratives can be supported and defended. After all, it is a matter of persuasive representation. Yet not one of them offers a fully explanatory framework of what went wrong in the Eurozone. When a crisis occurs, it is usually the case that a variety of reasons and causes have contributed to its occurrence. Nevertheless, it is most likely the case that the people of Europe will not easily settle for a common agreement on the matter, if at all. Ultimately, in socio-political phenomena, as Connor (1994: 37) has said, it does not matter *what is*; what matters is *what people think*. To this respect, it is argued in this paper that debating the dynamics of the Eurozone crisis from the point of view of media, expert or elite discourse can only illuminate us to a certain extent, which is why there is a necessity to investigate citizen opinion in a multiplicity of ways, so that public sentiments can be grasped. After all, it is the citizenry that upholds or dethrones narratives and their representatives in any given way: by support, opposition, even by mere indifference that reproduces existing hegemonies.

Of National Prides and Identities

In the case of national identity threats in the context of the Eurozone crisis, there has been an observable rise of national prides in both German and Greek discourse. In the case of German nationals, the issue of national pride in a post-WWII context was always a matter of uneasiness and ambivalence (Huddy 2001; Miller-Idriss & Rothenberg 2012), while Germans have been consistently the single one nation in Europe that would score the lowest in levels of national pride in the Eurobarometer surveys. In contrast, Greeks, Irish and Portuguese constituted some of the proudest nations, as exemplified by the same survey series. The rise of national pride, as illustrated by the following examples, can be understood as efforts of national self-esteem salvation in the face of collective identity threat inflicted by various discursive exchanges.

For example, in February 2012, Greek President of Democracy, Karolos Papoulias, an otherwise most benevolent presence in Greek politics, unleashed an angry 'Who is Mr. Schäuble to ridicule Greece?', as a response to German warnings about Greece testing Europe's patience and tolerance and propositions that Greek democratic elections should be delayed. In detail, the President stated:

"We all have a duty to work hard to get through this crisis... I will not accept Mr Schäuble insulting my country. I don't accept this as a Greek. Who is Mr Schäuble to insult Greece? Who are the Dutch? Who are the Finns? We always had the pride to defend not only our own freedom, not only our own country, but the freedom of Europe" (Papoulias in Spiegel Online 2012).

The statement is heavily invested in notions of national identity and invokes an everlasting past of Greek defiance and freedom-fighting, explicitly speaking of national pride and patriotic sentiment. The speaker's selfhood as a particular national is put to the front by the expression 'I... as a Greek', which connotes its primary position in the hierarchy of his selfhood and his will to speak for and in the name of the 'nation'. Moreover, the statement also implicitly aims to connote not only that the German side is 'uncivil' in its insults, but also unaware of what it means 'to be free', a claim that can potentially achieve high emotional reasoning as the idea of freedom is widely valued. Imagining the Greek nation, or any other nation for that matter, as the historical agent of freedom seeking, loving and

delivering, can be a powerful idea in the construction of national self-esteem, since liberation has been at the origin of nation-building and upholding.

However, this statement can be interpreted in alternative ways that may inspire ideas of Greek civilizational superiority that can easily be associated with the venerable, seemingly golden, ancient Greek past and the ideas it gave birth to, such as democracy and cosmopolitanism, which resonate with the statement's references to 'our own freedom' and 'the freedom of Europe', respectively. This would not be surprising, since as previous research of Greek and European identities (Chrysochoou 2000: 412) indicates, there has been an awkward sense of inferiority among Greek citizens as members of the EU, who felt that the inability of their national economy to be successful and to contribute to the wider European budget was a source of shame that at times needed to be overcome with declarations of cultural and historical superiority. For example, the following quotes by Greek participants in Chrysochoou's (2000) empirical research are particularly telling.

'If it wasn't for the Greeks, Greece, what we are calling today Europe would not be Europe but a region where barbarians fought each other' (Greek man, 33 years old, graphic artist)

'At some point Greece was not considered in Europe. We heard this: the Balkans, the Balkans, the Balkans; we were cut from Europe. I think that Greece is in fact Europe. From here Europe began... if we want to have a historical memory of what does it mean Europe, the centre of Europe is Greece, Europe is not the countries which made a technological civilisation but those which made a historical one' (Greek man, 34 years old, clerk).

Such ideas construct a differentiation between 'historical civilization' and 'technological civilization', which as Chrysochoou (2000: 413) explains, directs to the – equally constructed – question of 'what gives people the right to be included in a successful superordinate group at the cutting edge of civilisation, like the European one, is it a country's contribution to technology, industry, or its contribution to a historical continuity?' and adds that "further research might shed some light here". According to social psychology, anchoring the centrality of 'Europeanness' to matters of civilization, heritage and history, serves as a self-enhancement strategy that aims at constructing Greece as a prototypical 'European'.

In the context of the crisis, this attitude has occasionally been received negatively. For example, an Italian contributor in a video-sharing website has commented:

'The PIGS countries believe their brilliant past guarantees a privileged relationship with present hegemonic forces and a first class seat in the global policy-making tables. They reached the modernity without going through the process of creation of the middle classes that was stimulated by the Protestantism, the Enlightenment and the industrial revolutions. They are old countries, cynical, individualistic, with a low sense of community.' (vimeo.com user, 2013)

In this representation, the PIGS countries are constructed as delusional about their international role, unwilling to play by the (historical? economic? developmental?) rules and with a backwards, uncivilised 'state of nature', anti-social mentality. All these create negative cultural representations of the countries that have been ascribed a PIGS status and membership. In SRT's terms, this is a prime example of how specialised knowledge, in this case drawing from history or economic sociology (note the references to the Reformation, the Enlightenment and so on), albeit a rather Western version, is adopted in

common sense rhetoric and anchored around particular discursive objects, i.e. 'PIGS countries'.

These quotations present us with opportunities for reflections and hypothesizing, especially since the current economic crisis creates a sharp divide between the economic avant-garde and the limping followers, which from a critical perspective links back to notions of 'Balkanism' and 'Euro-Orientalism' (Murawska-Muthesius 2006; Hammond 2006) and core-periphery or two-speed Europe divides. As indicated by previous research (Jones & Subotic 2011) countries in the EU that fail to achieve economic and political power use the strategy of cultural means to achieve positive national self-esteem, which the authors critically call 'illusions of power'. This argument resounds with SIT's assumptions that when a group is assigned an inferior status, its members will strategically attempt to find an alternative source of group self-esteem to reinvent their group and its meaning. It is of interest to follow up these assumptions empirically and clarify what currency these ideas hold in the Greek public, what sort of political actions they lead to and whether they constitute forms of sublimation of frustration, rather than a rise of malevolent nationalism that goes beyond the borders of 'healthy' patriotism and postulates a Greek cultural superiority, which can be the fertile ground for nationalist ideologues and the planting of their ideological seeds.

Moving on to the German side, regarding recent events, such as Greek protesters burning German flags and Greek newspapers representing Merkel wearing a Nazi uniform, actions that constitute extreme manifestations of the national sentiments described above, Fleischhauer (2012) commented in Spiegel Online that Germans have become 'the new villains' and stated that:

'...that's how things go when others consider a country to be too successful, too self-confident and too strong. We've now become the Americans of Europe... We Germans are accustomed to having people admire us for our efficiency and industriousness and not to hate us for it... Of course, one can try to make oneself seem smaller than one really is. But this self-denial doesn't work... A giant can't conceal his size for long' (Fleischhauer 2012)

Just like Papoulias, Fleischhauer speaks of and for the nation, using the 'We Germans' expression. This statement can be understood as disturbing to the extent that one perceives an implied notion that other nations envy the Germans because the Germans are 'a superior nation', a natural 'giant' that due to its superiority has mastered the practices of the market. However, just like Greek claims of democratic and civilizational superiority, this argument facilitates a psychological displacement of the central issues of crisis management policy and detracts from the idea that insulting gestures by angry protesters in the South were most possibly prompted by the imposition of ever more austerity measures and the impoverishment these policies inflicted, rather than the existence of a jealous pathology.

Furthermore, this commentary seems to legitimize the divide between core and periphery, so that the avant-garde of economic development cannot be held back by the less economically successful, which was promoted in the mid-nineties (e.g. see Schäuble & Lamers 1994 paper on Kerneuropa). Furthermore, anchoring the Germans to the (North) Americans is a rather controversial tactic, since in the eyes of the beholder, the judgement will unavoidably be based on the opinion that this beholder has of the US, which would be fair to say that it has been one of the most severely – often with good reasons – criticised country in world affairs. The statement further invites a parallelism between the US and

Germany on the one side, and the Islamic world and Greece on the other, which further promotes civilizational and Euro-Orientalist visions.

Nevertheless, a self-enhancing strategy may also be encountered here. As explained (Giesen 2004), Germans after the WWII suffered a tremendous blow to their national identity because of the events of the Holocaust. This has rendered feelings and expressions of national pride extremely controversial for German citizens. It has been argued (Stefljia 2010) that the German drive for economic success and achievement served as an alternative source of national self-esteem that would overshadow the past. As put,

‘post-war Germany turned to timeless German virtues of ‘honesty’, ‘reliability’ and ‘industriousness’, which were suited for modern organizations but ‘exempted from the changing tides of history, the decay of the German nation-state, and the shame of Nazism’. Taking pride in their economic success, the importance of which has been highlighted, as innovative and industrious citizens – the economic miracle culture (Wirtschaftswunder)– might have allowed Germans to accept group faults and ‘missteps’ in other areas’ (Steflja 2010: 247).

Zygmunt Bauman would suggest that it was precisely the industriousness and modern organization, as well as the mentality of efficiency and rule-following that went with it that contributed to the Holocaust, which would point to the other side of these valued attributes (see Bauman’s classic work on *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 1989). Nevertheless, these representations of German historical trajectory suggest that economic achievement was the vehicle to reinvent and redefine German national identity. From an ethico-political, normative perspective, any nation that has undergone the trauma of war, be it the perpetrator or the victim, deserves a new beginning.

We can observe that both nationals experience an intensely felt identity threat and respond with strategic and reactionary ways that aim at rearticulating the meanings of their respective national identities. In these endeavours, it is often the case that ‘insults’ are spelled out or implied diplomatically, yet sharply. On the Greek side, representation of the crisis management as the imposition of ‘the Fourth Reich’, construct an anchoring of the current situation to the experience of WWII, which complicates matters. One of the effects is that it detracts from the immediate issues that the Greek government should focus on, such as necessary reforms that have been pending for many years. The scope and nature of reforms is a contested issue that will not be addressed here, but suffice to say that a variety of administrative conditions need to change in Greece, albeit at several occasions not always as dictated by the Troika.

Another effect is that it appears to impose a symbolic ‘warning’ to Germany not to be ‘too hard’ or ‘too authoritative’ by postulating the ‘Holocaust card’ which is a weak point in German history, a strategy that could be characterised as ‘a hit below the belt’. Furthermore, it appears to be even more unjustified since as has been indicated in the last elections, Neo-Nazi parties like the Golden Dawn enjoy certain levels of support in Greece. Finally, this repeated reference to German occupation of Greece, although it may point out to the role of collective memory, trauma and feelings of re-victimization, it may as well constitute a re-victimization of Germans in the sense that the new beginning they were able to do after the WWII is now attacked. It appears to be the case that both countries hurt each other in a multiplicity of symbolic ways that have the power to influence the dynamics of the crisis management by the impact they have on public opinion and citizen action.

These dynamics have sway on European identities, not only in the sense of European unity, but also in the sense of European belongingness or as SIT would have it, European prototypicality. While titles such as 'In Greece, We See Democracy in Action' (Douzinas 2011) and 'Greece Teaches Europe about Democracy Again' (Kosyrev 2011), anchor the European project to political democratic values and seek to create the impression that the prototypical European subject is Greece due to its political and historical heritage, the urgency of the crisis and its management or even the mostly economic focus of the EU so far, point to another direction. According to this assumption, the prototypical, genuine European member-state is that which has a functional, liberal, open and productive economy, which has become more important by the crisis. For example, in a recent paper, Tekin (2012: 5) commented that there has been an observed shift in the public discourse of European identity 'from civilisational/cultural heritage or roots of the European Union to the needs of a properly functioning, genuine market system'.

Marketization of the crisis phenomenon has been one of its more intense features, which has led to a variety of democratic failures (Hughes 2011). This has further led to depoliticization of the debate which is predominantly played out on the financial and economic register, rather than the political. As such, in this (a)political climate, market-oriented solutions have been proposed, like the one by Finland's former foreign minister, Alex Stubb, who stated that 'the euro is a Darwinist system, it is the survival of the fittest... the markets take care of that, that's the best way we can keep up market pressure' (in Baker 2011). This statement bluntly aims at creating the dangerous illusion that markets and financial crises are natural phenomena, in which humans and political decisions are irrelevant, a view further facilitated by expressions, such as 'economic Tsunami' and other derivatives found in the press (e.g. Workers Party Ireland 2012). Stubb further added that the six (out of seventeen) triple-A countries should have the strongest say in the management of the crisis and the ones that are not granted a triple-A rating should keep up. In such a context that favours financial interpretations of 'Europeanness', of who 'truly' belongs to the EU, only countries like Germany, France, Austria, the Netherlands, Luxemburg and Finland would be considered to be prototypical members, with other countries-economies being conceived as second rate members or 'internal others', thus of limited decision-making power.

As indicated by the above selective findings, more of which circulate in abundance in old and new media, national and European identities are under severe reconfiguration and increasing ambiguity regarding their future. Are we facing a more blatantly technocratic EU? Is there space for intangible political demands and considerations? Where do European citizens stand on these thin lines? This is the time for robust and engaging empirical research to be conducted on what people think, how they negotiate the above tensions and what kind of political actions these dynamics lead to, combined with the grassroots arguments that support these actions, both positive and negative actions. Although the above analysis has focused mostly on the worrying negative dimensions, times of hostility and division can inspire the most valuable gestures of peace offering and solidarity by critical and politically sophisticated citizens, both Germans and Greeks. Empirical research should be able to capture both dimensions and clarify any obscurities in the current debate.

Of Binaries and Essentialisms

The major feature of the above narratives is their tendency to construct essentializing ideas of the two nations, Germany and Greece, and the economic regions they were made to represent in the public discourse, Core Europe and Periphery Europe, respectively,

implying the existence of an essential national character (i.e. the lazy nation, the industrious nation). As an extension, the separation of the politics of blaming between these two poles of 'essential nations' betrays a discursive constitution of oppositional binaries. For instance, in the following examples, regardless of the direction they take in the attribution of blaming, we can observe both trends (*italics added*),

'It is noticeable that *the Northern European countries* seem to be *doing well to keep* their finances *in check* whereas in *Southern European countries* such as Spain and Italy, everything is *running out of order*' (Becker 2011)

'*Lazy, profligate, scheming Greeks versus honest, thrifty, industrious Germans*' (Rosenthal 2012)

'These acronyms are catchy and memorable. But they are not helpful. Associating these fragile national economies with potentially derogatory terms reinforces a perception that Europe is divided between *the core and the periphery, the central and the marginal, the successful and the needy, the worthy and the unworthy*' (Bleich 2012)

The first quotation appears to be congruent with the narrative that attributes blaming to Southern countries, the second one summarises the debate concisely and the third one shares the view that Southern countries have been stigmatised by the Eurozone crisis discourses and expresses support. However, beyond the division between economically functional and dysfunctional countries, in any way named (core, Northern, German, European, non-PIGS, non-GIPSIS, as opposed to, periphery, Southern, Greek, non-European, PIGS, GIPSIS), there are numerous other binary oppositions that are constructed in the Eurozone discourse and pose false dilemmas; national identity versus European identity, nationalisation versus Europeanisation, backwardness versus modernization, instrumentality versus passion, abstinence versus indulgence, ideology versus markets, politics versus economy, democracy versus technocracy, austerity versus growth, villains versus victims, us versus them.

Looking at these polarizations critically, we can argue that their use, even when judged, ends up reproducing this polarisation and division with uncertain consequences. Ultimately, we can estimate that the two poles are not fundamentally any different from each other, since they employ the same discursive tactics of essentializing and antagonism, with the only difference being the direction of the pointing finger in the game of blaming. As such, they both create a rather one-dimensional reality that fails to acknowledge one of the integral characteristics of the 'political': the plurality of the world. From Hannah Arendt (1998) to Chantal Mouffe (2005), political theorists have been arguing that the core value of political life is the recognition of plurality, of multiple ways of being. Ideologically polarising the world in absolutist distinctions between black and white and failing to think politically in multipolar ways, or other than acrimonious ones, narrows the scope of shared reality and promotes one of the most apolitical ideas: that there is *no alternative* to what we experience today.

These depoliticizations are further intensified by a mixture of *moralisation* and *culturalisation* of the Eurozone crisis discourse, whereby instead of political arguments moral claims and cultural attributes are implied, displacing the issues of concern. Rosenthal (2012) punctuates this notion with his succinct comment '*southern vice versus northern virtue*' (*italics added*). At another instance, Wolfgang Schäuble, German finance minister, has stated that 'it will be much easier in the future to enforce sanctions against deficit sinners' (Spiegel Online 2010). The choice of the word 'sinners' has unavoidably moral and religious connotations and ideationally constructs links to discourses that emphasize the role of the protestant ethic in the rise of capitalism (see Weber 1997). According to this

perspective, which has been revitalised in the discourse of the Eurozone crisis, the countries that failed to develop economically are those that have a Roman Catholic majority, with the exception of Greece which is Greek Orthodox. As such, these countries lacked the protestant ethic of reinvestment of accumulated wealth, hard work, inhibition of waste and rejection of beggary and charity. As argued by Franco (2012), both the anti-Mediterranean rhetoric and the anti-German one, nourish stereotypes that are both cultural and religious, while the novelty of these discourses is that they are tied to 'a judgement... a definitive condemnation of a culture, a way of life'.

But why has the Eurozone crisis and its management provoked that many constructions of essentialist representations of national identities and cultures, as well as that many anchorings in binary oppositions? How can we understand these tendencies from a social psychological point of view? And what is their political relevance? Social psychological perspectives provide an answer. According to social identity theory and self-categorisation theory, the creation of stereotypes and prototypes, as well as the division of the world in binaries of ingroups and outgroups, can reduce subjective uncertainty about thoughts, feelings, actions and self-understanding and provide the illusion of coherence and precision (Hogg & Williams 2000; Huddy 2001; Pickering 2001; Tajfel 1969). Additionally, fixing of meaning and collapse in a limited number of poles can simplify social reality which in most cases is too complex to grasp, especially at moments of crisis. In other words, all these perceptive mechanisms and shortcuts can fulfill the need for 'ontological security', especially in the absence of economic, social and political securities.

Conclusions: A German, a Greek and a European Question

In the Eurozone crisis's passionate 'blame-game' both Greeks and Germans have occupied the throne of guilt at numerous intervals and have been both attributed the characterisations of Bad 'villains' and Good 'victims' on different occasions. It is only the division breeding debt itself that can undeniably and on most occasions be seen for what it is: Ugly. This paper started by presenting a theoretical framework of identity formation and political action, which was comprised of social psychological theories and Arendtian political theory of action, and was used to shed light in the acrimonious symbolic debates that have characterised the Eurozone crisis. Through the means of a critical discourse analysis focused on the effects of language and the flows of power relations, and with the use of discursive data found in new media and academic articles, a qualitative analysis was conducted that illustrated the existence and depth of the current European discord. Subsequently, a discussion was performed that concentrated on particular themes springing out of the data analysis, such as its dominant narratives, the reconfiguration of national identities and European identities, as well as patterns, such as the use of essentialisms and binary oppositions and depoliticizing dislocations and misplacements. All along, endeavours were made to connect the analysis and discussion back to the theoretical framework that was initially presented. This provisional analytic exercise indicated that the chosen theories hold a certain promise for explanatory power of some crucial dimensions of the crisis, such as intergroup antagonism, symbolic violence and defensive nationalisms in times of transnational crisis. Finally, it can be argued that the polarization of the Eurozone crisis has created both *a German question* and *a Greek question*.

In terms of the *German Question*, Germany has been one of the founding members and protagonists of European integration, although the dream of this unity was always based on overcoming the role of Germany in WWII. Today the dilemma is shaped around Germany's past, combined with fear of recurrence of German hegemony in structural-economic and

symbolic-ideological ways, and the need for a strong European leading country that shall provide successful management and resolution to the crisis (Hübner 2012; Patterson 2011). As Hübner aptly (2012: 160) summarises it:

‘For most of the period after World War II, and prominently after the Fall of the Wall, it was all about restraining the political power of Germany. Why then today the complaints about the lack of German leadership or even hegemony when for the most part since the end of World War II European societies were afraid exactly of Germany playing such a leading role?’

As indicated, Germany appears to be in the most awkward and peculiar position of ‘doing no right’; if it leads too much, it will be accused of acting as a European hegemon, if it leads too little, it will be attributed with irresponsibility. However, the increasing dissenting voices inside Europe have rendered German crisis management questionable and demands are made for a ‘more European’ Germany that would agree to alternatives that are framed as good for Europe as a whole, but not for Germany individually. Will German leadership succumb to symbolic threats to its European identity and adopt a softer policy framework? As an extension, can German citizens manage the national identity threat constructed in denunciations of being framed ‘again’ as the nation that divides Europe? Would Germany prefer to hold on to its economic might even if that meant an exit from the Eurozone? Can the EU survive the departure of its most gifted economy? Tough questions for both German leadership and citizenry and Europe as a whole.

In terms of the *Greek Question*, it would be fair to say that Greece’s stay in the Eurozone is repeatedly undermined, both by speculations and hard facts. There are no mechanisms for a country exiting the Eurozone, or the EU for that matter. These options were never even imagined for fear of undermining the very idea of European unity and the commitment that had to go with it. Greece was often thought to have been included in the European Community on the basis of its ancient heritage, rather than its suitability in terms of economic, political or modern cultural standards. It has been seen as a ‘favor’ at worst, or a repayment of a historical debt at best (Barber 2011). Symbolically, Greece has ‘a’ value for the EU and its political identity as the intellectual root of cherished European values such as democracy and cosmopolitanism – ironically, the mere name ‘Europe’ is of Greek origin (see, Greek ancient myth of Zeus’s seduction of Europa). However, today Greece’s Europeaness and belongingness to the EU or its monetary zone are challenged in a variety of ways – practical, cultural, symbolic, ideological. Could these intangible identitarian claims ever be enough to keep Greece ‘inside’, when all pragmatic evidence resonates with the opposite course of action? A most uncomfortable, awkward, almost embarrassing dilemma to reflect on, especially for the Greeks that are now more than ever before confronted head on with the disappointment of modern Greece. Moreover, would it be better for the economy of the Eurozone, or for Greece in the long term, if a Grexit would materialise? Can the EU survive politically the schism and letting go of one of its southern member-states? Would others follow? Is a two-speed Europe a desirable idea? Equally tough questions to answer, especially for the Europeans as a whole.

However, all these can arguably be understood as false dilemmas or pseudodilemmas, since the single most important question, and hard-learning lesson still in progress, is that of European unity: can European nations work together to resolve this crisis, can they overcome, can they make the necessary changes in the wider and domestic financial systems, can they prioritise that which makes Europe – its citizens and their well-being? The future of European integration, and the grassroots identification that ideally should go with it, will heavily depend on the route chosen for the resolution of the sovereign debt crises and the wider Eurozone crisis. The analysis of the symbolic politics of the crisis

indicates that there has been a variety of psychological displacements, while the dislocation of focus towards moral, cultural, essentialising and oppositional themes and patterns have promoted a wider depoliticization through the triggering of ultra-antagonistic dynamics and detraction from the crucial political questions of solidarity, cooperation and unity.

Although this paper has focused on the particular parameters of the 'blame-game' that was enacted among EU member-states in public discourse and issues of identity (re)formations, there are alternative narratives of responsibility attribution both at the levels of origins and crisis management, such as the ones that place fault on financial institutions, capitalism and political elites. Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that these narratives reconstruct binary oppositions, such as the ones between citizens versus elites, finance versus society, money versus people. Binary oppositions may be symptomatic of the intensity of the times and their politically charged call to make up one's mind: which side are we on? As often said, crises demand decisions, which resonates with the alternative meaning of the Greek word 'crisis', defined not only as rupture, but also as *judgement*. But crises are also frequently said to create opportunities; for hard collective self-reflection, redefinition of destinations and reinvention of identities or what Hannah Arendt (1998) used to call 'the natality', the human capability to make new beginnings and give birth to new realities. The only concern appears to be the avoidance of turning the present era into the 'times of monsters', what Antonio Gramsci (1999) from his prison cell once wrote referring to the dangers of transitional times from 'old worlds' to 'new' ones, such as the times we currently experience.

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