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Small stories transposition and social media: A micro-perspective on the ‘Greek crisis’

Alexandra Georgakopoulou
King’s College London, UK

Abstract
In this article, I employ small stories research as a micro-perspective for the scrutiny of any crisis-related positionings of ‘Greece’ and ‘the Greeks’ that accompany the circulation of news stories from Greece in social media. My claim is that such positionings cannot be fully understood without reference to what stories get circulated, where, by whom, for/with whom and how. To substantiate this, I draw on a particular incident involving the assault of two female MPs by a male MP on a Greek TV breakfast show (June 2012). My analysis will show that the ways in which the Greek crisis is invoked or disregarded and erased in the social media transpositions of the incident are intimately linked with two key-narrative processes, which I call narrative stancetaking and resemiotizations (i.e. video-based or text-based) that involve a rescripting of the initial incident. In both cases, I will show how processes of story making are important for what is signalled as relevant and for how the context of the Greek crisis is made sense of, critiqued and ultimately backgrounded or erased in favour of more personalized and localized interpretations, grounded in the original and the transposed tales and tellings.

Keywords
Greek crisis, narrative stancetaking, rescripting, resemiotizations, small stories research, social media

Corresponding author:
Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Centre for Hellenic Studies/Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication, School of Arts and Humanities, King’s College London, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS, UK.
Email: alexandra.georgakopoulou@kcl.ac.uk
Introduction

There is increasing recognition in the social sciences that the first point of call for the study of the Eurozone crisis has been economics and politics based, approaches which, however illuminating, do not go a long way towards capturing people’s lived experience and sense-making mechanisms in periods of crisis. As Papagaroufali puts it, “‘crisis’, such as the financial cum political crisis in Greece and the so-called “European periphery”, are usually analyzed as they occur and interpreted through “hard data”, i.e. statistics and mathematical models. This is a rationalist and positivist, but also presentist and post factum approach’ (2011: 3). To redress the balance, there is currently a move towards, what I call in this article, micro-perspectives on the crisis. In the case of Greece, these encompass studies of ordinary people’s representations of the crisis (e.g. in interviews) and of forms of cultural expression ‘produced in Greece at the moment, which even though not always related to the crisis directly, can assume, in the current climate, a radical political position’ (Papanikolaou, 2011: 4). Some of this work’s insights are that the crisis has generated a public assault of hegemonic discourses in Greece, mainly to be found in the new media landscape (e.g. in a special issue of Cultural Anthropology in 2011). This social media production from members of the public often takes the form of an ‘incessant, entirely irreverent re-take on news footage, which is “augmented” and overlaid with other voices and images, brazenly spoken over with ironic counter-commentary, and insistently remembered’ and it is argued to have ‘become a profound act of engaged citizenship’ (Papailias, 2011: 3).

Following on from the above, my aim in this article is to employ small stories research, which I have been developing in the last few years, as a micro-perspective for the scrutiny of crisis-related positionings of ‘Greece’ and ‘the Greeks’ that accompany the social media circulation of news stories from Greece. I take the view that small stories research allows us to probe into how socially situated meaning making shifts from context to context and what semiotic modalities are mobilized to do certain things at certain times. Small stories research was put forth as an epistemological paradigm for the analysis of narrative and identities (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2007). It argued for the inclusion in the analysis of a range of communication practices that had hitherto been under-represented or not viewed as stories, even though they permeate daily life and are of major consequence for the tellers’ self-presentation. A detailed discussion of small stories research is beyond the scope of this article (for details, see De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2011: Chapter 6) but it suffices to say that narrative in this approach is seen as a social practice that is both sequentially embedded into and occasioned by a single event and presenting a trajectory and history beyond it.

The numerous applications and outreach of small stories research as a tool for making ‘visible big issues’ (Ryan, 2008) and ‘unseen and unheard moments of diversity within prevailing meganarratives’ (Olson and Craig, 2009) recommend it as a suitable micro-perspective on the Greek crisis, one that shifts attention away from mainstream media-promoted discourses about the Greek crisis to the more hidden and unofficial processes of meaning making of ordinary people, enabled by the affordances of social media. To put this promise of small stories research to work, in this article I single out a news story from Greece with high circulation in social media that involved the assault of two female
left-wing party MPs by a male MP candidate on a breakfast news show on live TV (7 June 2012). There are two elements about the specific incident that make it a ‘telling case’ (Mitchell, 1984) for examining how the social media transpositions of a particular story reveal how ordinary people make sense of an environment of crisis. First, one of the story’s protagonists is Ilias Kasidiaris, an outspoken and controversial MP, and currently spokesperson for the Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) party. Public support for Golden Dawn, widely held as having neo-Nazi allegiances, rose during the period of the Greek crisis: from 0.29% in 2009 to 7% in the 2012 elections, winning 18 (out of a total of 300) parliamentary seats. Recent polls in Greece show it to be the third party after New Democracy (right wing) and Syriza (left wing). Many commentators have attributed this increase in voters to the financial crisis and the drastic cuts imposed on working people’s salaries, which have resulted in dramatically falling standards of living (see both Angouri and Wodak, this issue). This, they argue, has turned part of the disillusioned Greek population against mainstream parliamentary politics and immigrants (Margaronis, 2012). Since the incident under study occurred, Golden Dawn and Kasidiaris in particular have frequently made headlines in Greece and around the world. The latest situation involves the arrest of Kasidiaris and his later release (October 2013), as part of a government crackdown on Golden Dawn following the fatal stabbing of an anti-fascist musician in Athens in September.¹

The second reason for singling out the incident is that it is a clear illustration of how events that happen in, are discussed by and further circulated by official media also engender a parallel process of dissemination in social media platforms. The fact that it was broadcast on a national TV channel and so was a media event in itself facilitated its subsequent circulation by a variety of journalists and expert and lay commentators, as a professional video was readily available to anyone who wished to circulate it and upload it to any site. This multi-platform and varied dissemination rendered the incident both a media and a vernacular spectacle, where the official and the unofficial develop alongside one another and afford the analyst insights into how they connect (or not), in this case vis-à-vis discussions of the crisis. Media spectacles become highly circulated stories through broadcasting media and new technologies (Kellner, 2012), while vernacular spectacles consist in ‘multimedia content that is produced outside media institutions and uploaded, displayed, and discussed on media-sharing websites such as YouTube’ (Androutsopoulos, 2010: 212). Androutsopoulos argues that vernacular spectacles ‘are a site of grassroots media creativity’ that provide lay people with ‘new opportunities to actively engage with global media flows from below, and from a local perspective’ (2010: 212). The extent to which this transformative potential is empirically true remains to be proven and this study is seen as a step towards advancing our understanding of such processes.

**Small stories research as a framework for the analysis of social media transpositions**

In recent work, I have extended small stories research as a framework for the analysis of stories as mobile resources on social media (Georgakopoulou, 2013a, 2013b). This involves tracking processes of sharing, performing, commenting on and circulating, in
different semiotic modalities (i.e. resemiotizing) and updating on minute-by-minute—often very mundane and ordinary—experience. It also involves uncovering how such experience sharing is multiply authored and sanctioned (or not) by unforeseeable ‘networked audiences’ (Marwick and boyd, 2011).

There is wide recognition of the need to explore such processes of discourse trajectories and circulation both within (socio)linguistics and (new) media studies. Certain concepts have emerged as pivotal for such an analysis: entextualization-decontextualization-recontextualization (cf. Blommaert and Rampton, 2011), traceable to the influential work of Bauman and Briggs (1990); and the ideas of multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001) and resemiotization (Iedema, 2003) that emanate from social semiotic discourse analysis (cf. Androutsopoulos, 2010; Coupland, 2003) or a combination of both sets of concepts (Leppänen et al., 2013). Nonetheless, there is yet neither a critical mass nor a unified, coherent and agreed-on framework of new media discourse analysis for bringing together these concepts and working out their synergies or incompatibilities. In addition, the scarcely existing work is not pitched at narrative activities, making all the more relevant Shifman’s plea to combine sensitivity to ‘social media affordances and constraints’ with attention to ‘the distinctive modes of communicating with texts’ (2011: 13). The equally scarce work on the interactional/textual aspects of stories on social media has placed emphasis on specific sites, working with models of stories as single events (e.g. Page, 2012).

In light of this, the time is ripe for small stories research to provide a suitable bridging framework between narrative analysis, discourse transposition and social media affordances. To this effect, I have shown elsewhere how its analytical apparatus of ways of telling-sites-tellers, originally developed for interactional data (Georgakopoulou, 2007), can be extended to the analysis of stories on social media (2013a, 2013b). The emphasis on sites allows us to tap into processes of recontextualization and resemiotization: how different tellings shape and are shaped by movement across spaces but also how this mobilizes different semiotic resources, by whom and why. Relations of ways of telling-sites-tellers are expected to be reconfigured differently in a story’s transpositions, and so we can document how circulated stories index previous and anticipated sites, tellers and intended/imagined audiences. The emphasis on tellers brings in aspects of them not just as part of a social group but also as individuals with offline and online biographical attributes, as stage directors who cast themselves and others in specific scenarios and choose to tell and circulate certain stories.

With the combined focus on ways of telling-sites-tellers, instead of attempting the impossible task of following an activity in all its transpositions, the analysis seeks to document circulation/circulatability of the activities, not as cataloguable events, but as interwoven into the here-and-now of any activity. I assume that activities will signal parts of their journey, however implicitly, with various transposition cues, e.g. stories will refer back to and anticipate previous tellings, tellers and audiences. In the light of social media practices, I also expect any transposition to present key stages, with a peak activity temporally close to the event and a gradual decline in interest. Finally, different transpositions will entail different degrees and forms of storying.

My work so far has shown that a key concept for the exploration of the social media circulation of stories is that of narrative stancetaking (henceforth NS). I have defined NS
as a speaker’s mobilization of conventionalized communicative means to signal that there is a narrative tale or telling in the making and/or circulation of it. I have shown how NS plays an important role in signaling, proposing and anticipating certain sites and participation frameworks (tellers and audiences) in the telling and circulation of a story (Georgakopoulou, 2013b). In this article, I will take a step further and examine whether and how the choice of NS makes the context of the Greek crisis relevant in transpositions of the incident.

**A story from/of the crisis as a media and vernacular spectacle**

The incident studied in this article took place in a context of intense political discussions about how to manage the financial and social crisis in Greece and it is important to outline some of the parameters of this context. The April 2012 elections in Greece took place in the midst of the country’s financial crisis and in many ways redefined the political landscape with two parties – Syriza on the left and the extreme-right Golden Dawn – increasing in popularity and disrupting a longstanding two-main-party politics monopoly. Despite their profound ideological differences, both Syriza and Golden Dawn were notably against the bailout of Greece by the EU and proposed a self-empowering politics as the way out of the crisis. As no party claimed the majority of votes and no coalition government was formed first time round, a new election was called for in June 2012. In the period leading up to this second election, numerous daily discussion panels were held on various TV channels, dominated by the proposals of different parties as to how to manage the crisis. It was common for such discussions to include representatives from Syriza, as the party with a newly gained popularity, but the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn was rarely given any TV air time.

The incident under study unusually figured a panel discussion with two representatives, one from Syriza and one from Golden Dawn. Alongside them were Liana Kanelli, a frequent contributor on such programmes, from the Communist Party, and Prokopis Pavlopoulos, an experienced politician for the right-wing New Democracy party, who had served as Minister for the Interior in 2004–2009. The programme was hosted by George Papadakis, a seasoned daily TV politics show presenter. The composition of the panel, not unusually for such a programme, was well chosen for an ensuing debate but what followed was unprecedented even for such a format. Specifically, in the incident in question, i.e. during the TV panel discussion, Kasidiaris threw water at Syriza’s Rena Dourou and then repeatedly hit Communist Party MP candidate Liana Kanelli. This happened after Dourou referred to Kasidiaris’s impending court case and suggested that the Golden Dawn party, which, on the basis of the May election, looked set to enter Greek Parliament, would take the country back 500 years. The programme went off air immediately following the incident but reports suggested that the brawl continued. An arrest warrant was issued for Kasidiaris who went into hiding after the incident. Kanelli was interviewed frequently after the incident by different channels and mostly condemned the party rather than the individual (Kasidiaris), while Kasidiaris, who did not apologize, posted statements on Facebook against Kanelli and the TV channel (Karamanoli, 2012).
Data and methods

As I have already suggested, the aim of my analysis was not to produce an exhaustive account of all the transpositions in the incident but, instead, (a) to identify key transposition stages; and (b) within a single event, to examine transposition cues that point to its itinerary. I thus followed key transpositions in the time frame that the Google trends search had identified as the window for the incident ‘going viral’ (7–14 June and up to 25 June 2012). During this period, the first key transposition was the uploading of the scene of the incident on YouTube by ordinary people, and this seemed an intuitive point of departure for the analysis (see Appendix 1, Screenshots 1 and 2). The video clip selection averaged one minute and hundreds of videos with the scene were posted on YouTube with varying numbers of viewers from a few hundred thousand viewers to single thousand figures.  

Of this large number of uploaded videos, I chose to single out for close qualitative and quantitative analysis the 50 most viewed (and commented upon) YouTube videos. I will discuss the results of this analysis in ‘The crisis in transposition’ below.

With a delay of 1–2 days after the scene was uploaded and commented upon on YouTube, a circulation of comments on the incident that were meant as ‘jokes’ started on various social media forums: these included Facebook groups that were set up in support of Kasidiaris or Kanelli and blogs from widely followed Greek bloggers. It is telling that the online newspaper Gazetta ‘published’ a selection of such jokes one day after the incident, under the title of the ‘first jokes about Kanelli and Kasidiaris’, claiming that the jokes had circulated just hours after the incident (http://www.gazzetta.gr/politiki/article/296389-ta-prota-anekdota-gia-kanelli-kasidiari). In light of previous social media practices of circulation of commentary on popular incidents from Greek public life, I also watched the high-ratings TV stand-up comedy show Al Tsadiri News with comedian Lakis Lazopoulos, which was aired five days after the incident (12 June 2012). As I had expected, I was able to identify a repertoire of heavily circulated jokes that were told on the show. Through parallel intense scrutiny of Facebook groups and blogs, I began to identify a corpus of the most circulated material on the incident: I found this rather straightforward, as very quickly a stock of ‘jokes’ was formed that recurred in different sources. At the same time, I received a few of those jokes by way of email circulars from Greek friends: such circulars, particularly to diasporic Greeks such as myself, are typical of patterns of circulation of popular events from Greek public life. From all this material, I identified the ‘most widely circulated’ jokes/comments: they amounted to 23. I am not claiming that this is a definitive list: the steps I took to increase the valency of what was going to be an inevitably selective corpus was to allow a time frame of six months, during which time I periodically checked social media forums to see what of the original circulation had remained popular and what else might have been added. Perhaps unsurprisingly for how transposition works on social media, I did not find much new material but instead a consolidation of specific jokes/comments that were more heavily circulated. I will discuss those and the forms they took in ‘Resemioticization as story rescripting’ below.

The final and most delayed transpositions of the incident involved the production of spoof/fake videos and remixes and their uploading on YouTube: these are a recognizable genre of Web 2.0 production around popular stories. In this case, the number of videos
produced was small and it readily capitalized on existing popular videos for fake video production, such as *The Downfall* (see below). I therefore closely analysed all such videos and the top 50 comments (and responses to them) for each video. All this circulated material which reworked the original incident exploited the social media affordance of resemiotization: this involved changes in the original mode of communication, for example by removing the visual element of the incident in text-based forms, changing the original visual arrangements (as in fake videos), etc.

In the identification and selection of the above material for analysis, I followed principles of the currently emerging social media ethnographic research. These principles are premised on the understanding that new, flexible routes need to be found to ethnographic research – what Hine et al. (2009) famously described as ‘adaptive ethnography’, to suit the mobile, ever-shifting landscape of social media. In these new ways, researchers’ own immersion and participation in social media culture with processes such as those of catching up and sharing, are recognized as a major part of the development of ethnographic understanding. Furthermore, systematic immersion in the field is replaced by the researcher’s mobility across social media platforms and the identification of routines and shifting intensities in the circulation of events (see Postill and Pink, 2012), which is what guided the data selection for this study.

Having identified the data for analysis, my main interest, as suggested, was in storying processes in the transposition of the incident. Following on from small stories research premises, I took it that storying involves taking a stance on the activity posted as:

- being offered or taken up as a story, thereby positioning participants as tellers-recipients-(co)-tellers, etc.
- consisting of events and characters in specific spatiotemporal scenarios whose actions and speech are assessable.

I looked to identify such storying in the data sets that I describe above. In YouTube video uploads, I specifically examined the video-clip selection, its title (plus description), comments on it and related videos. In the resemiotized material that emerged from the original incident (e.g. circulars of jokes, fake videos, as described above), I examined whether the material took the form of a story or reworked specific narrative aspects of the original incident (e.g. characters’ speech, events) and how. In this way, and unlike previous social media work on resemiotization, I focused on resemiotization not just as a process of choice of communication mode, be it with verbal or visual resources, but also as a matter of choice of genre – in this case, narrative or not.

**Presentation of multi-semiotic and resemiotized data**

Currently, any discussion and presentation of social media-based data necessitates audiences/readers becoming ‘viewers’ and ‘users’ themselves, not least by clicking on the URLs provided by the analysts. Beyond that, there is no developed system of annotating, transcribing and presenting such data. The emerging annotation in the area of multimodal discourse analysis, e.g. for television data, is not immediately transferable to social media data. As O’Halloran (2011: 25) recognizes, the multimodal discourse
analysis of ‘websites and hypermedia give rise to added difficulties as semiotic choices combine with hypermedia analysis of links and other navigational resources, resulting in hypermodal analysis’. To somewhat ease the reader’s task of hyperlinking for a visual image of the data discussed, I have included a selection of screenshots in Appendix 1. Nonetheless, these are still an inadequate and unsophisticated means for representing the social media-afforded dynamic transpositions and accompanying shifts in semiotic materials of a single incident, such as the one discussed here.

The crisis in transposition: NS as a vehicle for the particular

My analysis suggested that the choice of circulating the incident as a story had implications for how it was connected with the Greek crisis. In signaling the circulated incident as a story and in responding to it as a story, the video uploaders and respondents assumed storytelling identities, that is, they reported and assessed events and characters based on the incident. Close analysis of the 500 singled-out comments from the 50 YouTube video uploads I had chosen, showed that in 326 out of the 500, some type of NS was taken vis-à-vis the incident. I identified two main forms that this NS takes vis-à-vis the uploaded video, which I call ‘event-focused’ vs. ‘character-focused’ contributions. Event-focused contributions tend to dwell on what exactly happened. For instance, the title of a video upload may be contested on the basis of the accuracy of the events. In the character-focused evaluation, the respondents assess the characters’ actions or revoice (i.e. reproduce, quote) their speech. In fewer cases, they bring in biographical or other information about them, as lending weight to a particular assessment of their actions in the specific incident. In both cases, the signaling of any ideological or political positionings is indexical, rooted in positive or negative assessments of the events and characters. For instance, by assessing Kasidiaris’s actions positively or by justifying them, respondents are positioning themselves as affiliated with his politics.

In contrast, in a non-narrative stancetaking, the respondents detach themselves from the story and provide general socio-political commentary on the Eurozone and the Greek crisis. Instead of positioning themselves as story recipients and/or co-tellers, they appear as European citizens, pro- or anti-EU bailouts of countries like Greece, politically affiliated with one party or another, etc. This frequently took the form of affiliating explicitly with the ideology and politics of Golden Dawn or the Communist Party and Syriza, which the main protagonists of the incident represented. In other cases, as we will see below, (presumably) non-Greek respondents got into a debate with Greek respondents about the Greek crisis, blaming it on Greece and on Greek failings, something which arguably conformed with representations of the Greek crisis in some of the European press:

1. Fuck Greece! Stupid lazy scum sucking pieces of shit. Have fun trying to survive after Glorious Deutschland kicks your shit country out! Deutschland Deutschland uber alles! Still is true to this day. Fuck Greece!
   (DangerousBatman)

2. As soon as you start paying your debts for the usage of OUR Democracy (yes you were still savages and you were still living in caves while we were using Democracy), for the usage of
OUR Civilization (yes, you savages climbed down from the trees because of US), for the crimes of Germany against Greece during WW2, etc we will be glad to give you the change:)

Until then, GTFO of Youtube and start reading history books.

As we can see in examples 1–2, abstraction from the details of the specific incident makes relevant the larger subject of the Greek financial crisis and the rise of the far-right political party Golden Dawn as a context for interpretation and framing of the incident. On the other hand, common ways for a narrative engagement with the incident (examples 3–5) involve discussing the accuracy of events or revoicing, normally in a jocular way, what characters said during the incident:

3. Τελικά ο Κασιδιάρης σηκώθηκε από την αίθουσα και η Κανέλλη του επιτίθεται με τις φωτοτυπίες. ‘Ελεος. Δείτε προσεκτικά τη σκηνή.

(In the end Kasidiaris got up to leave the room and Kanelli attacked him with the photocopies. Please. Watch the scene carefully.)

4. ADE VRE NOUMERO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
(COME OFF IT YOU JOKE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!)

(Lolife54)

5. oxi oxi oxi oxi oxi xaxaax
(no no no no no xaxaax)

( john13lamiara, 2 months ago)

I have discussed elsewhere the NS choices of video-clip selection and title on YouTube uploads, as well as of the related videos (2013a). Here, I will bring in two elements that are important for subsequent resemiotizations of the incident. First, the NS vis-à-vis the incident involves assessing the protagonists not as politicians or public figures but as characters in a specific tale, with gendered, physical and personality attributes that guided their actions within it – for example, Kasidiaris as an aggressive or macho man who showed disrespect to two women; Kanelli as an overweight, heavy-smoking and assertive woman with a big house in an affluent suburb of Athens. The emphasis on the tale as a plot for a male–female duel with supporters on each side, although the incident involved two female panellists, is seen in two thirds of the YouTube video titles, which focus solely on Kasidiaris and Kanelli. In fewer cases, the TV presenter Papadakis was added, and in 5 out of 50 videos Prokopis Pavlopoulos was assigned a key role. They too were assessed as characters in the tale, rather than as public figures beyond the specific incident. They were negatively evaluated as passive bystanders to a serious incident. As we will see, this characterization also figured prominently in resemiotizations of the incident.

The second notable element in the choice of NS is that it implies any ideological positionings vis-à-vis the crisis, couching them in events and character assessments, while in the non-NS cases, participants’ political and ideological agendas are explicit. Implying a position results in an implied selection of a specific audience as that designated for a particular posting. For instance, even how the (main) event is described projects specific affiliations on the teller’s part. Reporting Kasidiaris’s assault on Kanelli as ‘punching’
was routinely cast as more negative and as a more severe form of assault than referring to it as ‘slapping’. In turn, the reporting of the event as punching (bunies) indexed an affiliation with Kanelli and the left-wing politics that she represented. Whoever sympathized with Kanelli and saw her as the victim indexically presented themselves as a sympathizer with her politics too.

**Resemioticization as story rescripting**

Analysis of the incident’s resemiotizations showed that not only did the form of its circulation change, but also that characters and events were put into new contexts, while analogies with other stories and characters were also created. These reworkings of the original incident as a story with events which I collectively call rescripting overrode the semiotic modality in which the transposition took place, applying both to verbal and visual resemiotizations. What was mostly kept from the incident was specific character revoicings, which became emblematic of the main events and characters. The most commonly transposed revoicings were: ‘ade vre numero’ (come off it, you joke) and ‘oxi oxi oxi’ (no no no), which we saw in examples 4 and 5. This condensation of the original incident into characters’ quoted speech, along with the analogies drawn with well-known stories from Greek popular culture, implied a gradual process of indexicalization of the incident, a re-insertion into local contexts for the benefit of local audiences that partake in specific indexical associations: they have seen specific films or sitcoms, are familiar with specific types of popular culture, know the biographies of specific actors, etc. Reminiscent of the communication of friends with a shared interactional history (Georgakopoulou, 2007), this rescripting was premised on humorous associations assumed to be shared by the intended audiences. This was evident in the constant drawing of analogies between characters and actions from the specific incident and famous ‘popular culture’ figures (e.g. actors, singers) and events.

6. Όπως η Βουγιουκλάκη ερωτευόταν όποιον την χαστούκιζε πλάκα θα χει τώρα και η Καννέλη να δηλώσει φουλ καψούρα με το Κασιδιάρη….!!!!!

(As when Vougiouklaki fell in love with whoever slapped her, imagine if Kanelli now declared she fancies Kasidiaris…!!!!)

Actress Aliki Vougiouklaki, who starred in numerous popular films in the 1960s, was a national star. The indexical analogy of Kanelli with her creates incongruous associations between two very different media genres: Vougiouklaki starred in romantic comedies and the act of slapping by the male lead, in the motif of the taming of the shrew, was normally part of a developing romantic interest.

7. Tsakonondan dyo geitonisses brosta mou proxtes ki evg emeina Prokophs!

(Two neighbours of mine were arguing in front me the other day and I remained Prokophs! (literally: ‘I did nothing’, ‘I stood by’).)

(Source: http://my-greek.blogspot.com/2012/06)

In this case, the teller draws up a (real or imagined) scenario in which he places himself as a character and jokingly assesses his inability to interfere in his neighbours’ row
by drawing an analogy with the bystanding behaviour of politician Prokopis Pavlopoulos in the original incident. We can see how the phrase ‘I remained Prokopis’, Prokopis being the first name of the politician, has by this point attained a level of indexicalization that allows it to short-circuit the specific incident.

**Rescripting and spoof videos**

The above rescripting also applied to resemiotizations of the incident through different visual material, in particular fake/spoof videos. These involved ordinary characters in a variety of settings, replaying selected events and dialogues from the original incident (e.g. Kasidiaris Kaneli sfaliara paralia (Kasidiaris Kaneli slap beach); http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cx-RXZLP9wl). Similarly, there was a spoof of the well-known YouTube video clip from the 2004 German film *The Downfall (Der Untergang)*, which portrayed Hitler after his defeat. A specific scene from the film has led to numerous spoofs since 2007, in which new/fake subtitles have been inserted into it. What brought the fake videos together was their indexical NS. On the one hand, they drew on the social media intertextuality created by previous spoofs. For instance, in ‘Kasidiaris Kaneli Dourou slap’, there is a focus on ordinary people, humour, simplicity, whimsical content and amateurishness, which are some of the main attributes that Shifman (2011) identified in her analysis of spoof videos. At the same time, characters and events are put in local, ‘Greek’ contexts and scenarios. The fact that the characters are on the beach, a setting culturally recognizable as leisurely, without wearing much adds to the incongruity with the studio setting of the original incident and makes light of the scene of Kasidiaris throwing water at Dourou (see Appendix 1, Screenshot 3). In this case, it becomes an act of water splashing, of typical fun-making on the beach. The parodic stance is also evident in the close-up of Dourou overdoing the emotional outburst (see Appendix 1, Screenshot 4). The reversal of body physique does not go amiss in the comments on the video: in the original incident, a lot is made of Kasidiaris’s muscular appearance and Kanelli’s weight problems, while in the commentaries on this spoof, the fake Kanelli (see Appendix 1, Screenshot 5) is commented on as being a very good-looking, trim woman and the rest of the cast as overweight, as we can see below:

**Top comments**

8. wraio kwlaraki h kopelia!hahahaha
(The girl’s got a nice bum! he he he)  
(Notisu7, 11 months ago)

9. EEEEEEEEEEEEEEE hodre dieta
(EEEEEEEEEEEEEE fatty (you need to go on a) diet)  
(SIXFEETUNDER102, 6 months ago)

In all cases of derivative and spoof videos, the rescripting creates a new layer of tale and telling, a kind of fictionalization, where the new/‘fake’ characters are judged in their own right and the new/spoof telling is evaluated. We can see this in the comments on ‘The downfall after the slap of Kasidiaris’.
10. entaksei … den yparxei!!! … mhn klais, tha sou skasei kai esena kanena…
(okey … it’s the best!!! … don’t cry, he’ll give you a slap too…)
(Holymen28, 51 Like)

11. όποιος ψήφισε κκε, συνασπισμό και ελευθερία ελευθερίου να βγει εξω χαχαχα
(Whoever voted for the communist party, the coalition party and eleftheria eleftheriou in
Eurovision get out now he he he he)
(Ruthless24, 9 months ago, 43 Like)

The revoicings above are from the fake subtitles. The spoof scene is placed in the
framework of the tense relationship between Greece and Germany during the period of
the crisis but the comments that accompany it pertain to the current telling and not the
original incident. They invoke figures from popular culture, creating incongruous asso-
ciations, such as between Hilter’s ranting and Eurovision (example 11), and in this way
add new layers of storytelling to the original incident.

12. From ‘The downfall after the slap of Kasidiaris’, mp4, 10 June 2012:
Fuhrer μαθαίνει ότι το σχέδιό του για διάλυση της Ελλάδας απέτυχε γιατί ο Κασιδιάρης βγήκε
εκτός ελέγχου σε πρωϊνή εκπομπή.
(Furher finds out that this plan to annihilate Greece has failed because Kasidiaris lost control
on a TV morning show.)
(ilpap0, 1 year ago)

Despite the above framing to the video spoof upload, the crisis in this spoof video,
as in the others, becomes a forgotten context. The more the incident is creatively appro-
priated, the more it is lifted out of the macro-context of the crisis and de-politicized. The
more the characters’ speech is circulated jokingly, the more the story becomes about a
man attacking a woman while two more men stood by and did nothing. Narrativization,
we can argue, equals personalization and the more settings and plots are added to the
original incident, the more loosely it is connected with the original circumstances of its
production: the TV studio and the political debate at a time of pre-election fever in a
crisis-stricken country. Politics in the narrative transpositions of the incident recedes in
favour of popular culture. The piece reaches its peak in a remixed official song in which
the main characters of the original video appear as pop stars and where the comments
typically focus on the current ‘telling’ of the spoof video rather than on the original
incident.

13. Κασιδιάρης Κανέλλη Δούρου OFFICIAL SONG
(published on 23 June 2012)

το νεο hit του καλοκαιριου!! παπαδακης ~ κασιδιαρης ~ δουρου ~ κανελλη!! αντε βρε
νομιμόρο!!
(The new hit of the summer!! Come off it you clown!!)
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw__mXxZX1A)
(See Appendix 1, Screenshot 6)
Awesome.

2 ΜΕΓΑΛΑ ρεμιξ εχουμε!!!
Αυτο και τα παπακια χαχαχαχα
(We’ve got two MAJOR remixes! This and the ducklings he he he he)
Reply…

Vixen.

Δεν ξέρω ποιο ήταν πιο δύσκολο μέρος, να φτιάξει το τραγούδι ή να βρεί φωτό με τον Κασιδιάρης να χαμογελάει:D
(Not sure what the most difficult part was, to make the song or find a pic of Kasidiaris smiling 😊)

Resemiotization in social media has been argued to draw on a wide range of resources put together in a form of collage (Androutsopoulos, 2010; Leppänen et al., 2013). However, when looked at from the point of view of rescripting, this mixing of resources is linked with certain plot and character elements that act as ‘hooks for circulatability’ (Shifman, 2011). In our case, these involve character quotations, which, through transpositions, became sedimented and indexical of certain behaviours: the verbal abuse of Kasidiaris and the by-standing role of the presenter. In this way, certain character-based assessments became prevalent and this short-circuited and conditioned future stories and circulatability. Furthermore, the crisis as an explicit topic of discussion and an articulated context for the original incident became increasingly ‘erased’.

**The creation of social-mediatised biographies through story circulation**

14. Η.Κασιδιάρης ‘Είναι σκουπίδι ο Πακιστανός βιαστής!
(Kasidiaris ‘The Pakistani rapist is dirt’.)
(serreosoo, 863,504 views)

ΚΑΣΙΔΙΑΡΗΣ, ΠΙΠΙΛΗ – ΚΑΤΣΕ ΚΑΤΩ ΡΕ ΠΑΛΙ ΠΙΩΜΕΝΗ ΕΙΣΑΙ
(Kasidiaris, Pipili: Sit down, you are drunk again!)

ΚΑΣΙΔΙΑΡΗΣ ΠΡΟΣ ΑΔΩΝΙ ΔΕΝ ΠΑΙΡΝΕΙΣ 8.000 ΕΥΡΩ
(Kasidiaris towards Adonis: Aren’t you earning 8000 Euros?)
(enikos.gr, 120,167 views)

ΚΑΣΙΔΙΑΡΗΣ: Skase Venizelo!
(KASIDIARIS: Venizelo, shut up!)

Since the wide distribution of the incident, of the main characters involved, Kasidiaris has gone on to develop an active social-mediatised life that involves portrayals of him as a macho, outspoken guy. His ‘rants’ in the Greek Parliament and verbal abuse of fellow MPs have lent themselves to numerous video uploads where the NS titles and
comments come from the revoicing of his abusive phrases, as the examples above show. The more Kasidiaris is narrativized, the more his social media persona emblematically stands for that of a guy who speaks his mind, whether this is viewed positively or negatively. Agha (2010) has suggested a comparable process of recycling of mediatized personae across different contexts, created by traditional media, through some kind of idealization of certain personality aspects. Similarly, Fairclough (1989) has talked about a process of ‘synthetic personalization’, the mediatized creation of a social persona that draws on the most salient or common aspects of the target community in mass media communication. This too involves a process of reduction and homogenization. In contrast, the creation of a social media persona, in the case of Kasidiaris, is intimately linked with NS processes on the part of ordinary users and their active manipulation of what content will be carried over, how and where. Importantly for this discussion, the embedding of politicians such as Kasidiaris (and Kanelli) into narrative activities and the creation of personae out of them essentially renders them as characters in plots with gendered and kinship-based roles and de-politicizes them. This is, for instance, evident in the many comments where users ponder the narrative scenarios of what they or others would do if Kanelli were their sister, mother, etc.; what they would do if they were a young, feisty man such as Kasidiaris, confronted by two ‘mouthy’ women. Over time and through transpositions of the original and related incidents, Kasidiaris and Kanelli as characters in a specific tale took off and their extra-tale political and ideological differences became erased.

Conclusion: small stories in the social media transposition of the Greek crisis

My starting point in this article was that small stories research could serve as a micro-perspective for circulations of the Greek crisis. It allows for a transposition-aware analysis that examines the choice of a story as a semiotic activity in the first place and the ways in which subsequent circulation may index previous and anticipated tellers, tellings and audiences. I drew on a ‘telling case’ to show this kind of analysis at work. The specific story had a video attached to it and YouTube became a platform of high preference for its circulation. My analysis demonstrated how NS in YouTube video titles and comments created indexical understandings of the uploaders’ and respondents’ political and ideological positionings vis-à-vis the crisis, by means of event-focused or character-focused assessments. In contrast, a lack of NS and an abstraction from the specific events of the story favoured explicit invokings of the context of the crisis.

Analysis of the story’s resemiotizations beyond the uploading of the original incident on YouTube suggested a tendency towards rescripting. This involved condensed storytelling, mostly based on revoicings of the original characters’ speech, and incongruous, humorous analogies with stories and figures from popular culture. These choices grounded the incident in local realities and in culture-specific and densely indexical understandings. The Greek crisis became less and less of a relevant context and set of associations for the incident in question. This de-politicization in favour of gendered and personality-based interpretative assessments of the characters of the incident was evident too in the development, over time, of a social media biography for the protagonists,
particularly Kasidiaris, that was conditioned by and intertextually linked with the incident of the assault – the first incident related to Kasidiaris that became viral.

In sum, both NS and rescripting in the stories’ circulation created opportunities for multi-temporal and multi-spatial co-authoring scenarios – for example, participants jointly assessed the characters and events in the original incident, sedimenting some of them as indexical of the incident in the story’s transpositions; drafted themselves into the story, contemplated what other scenarios could be invoked and brought in new tales and tellings (as in, for example, the spoof videos) that in turn were assessed in their own right. This shows a good fit with social media affordances of sharing, updating, circulating and user-generated content.

I started by claiming that circulation of the incident fitted the profile of a vernacular spectacle. In light of the above, it is arguable and a matter for more scrutiny that the processes of narrativization, from NS to rescripting, lend themselves more and better to the social media affordances of the vernacular spectacle and grassroots creativity than to non-narrative activities, such as opinion. In the former case, we saw many creative possibilities, while in the non-NS cases, stereotypical, flaming and hateful kinds of discussion seemed to be reproduced, thus closing down other possibilities. In particular, NS and rescripting allowed what we could call, following Briggs, the creation of alternative communicable cartographies – that is, alternative destinations, intended meanings and audiences. Briggs suggests that ‘in accepting communicable cartographies, we accept particular spatializing and temporalizing practices, recognize specific sets of spaces and temporal contours, and define ourselves in relationship to them’ (2007: 556). But there are other options too: ‘As they receive a text, people can accept [the communicable cartography that it projects] but reject the manner in which it seeks to position them, treat it critically or parodically, or invoke alternative cartographies’ (2007: 556). In this study, narrative practices in social media transpositions mostly involved critical and parodic treatments, as well as invoking alternative cartographies for the original incident. This is a notable feature: the vernacular spectacle of the crisis erases its ‘serious’, no-laughing-matter aspect and involves a gradual de-politicization of the incident in question and the main characters in it, locating them in personality-based indexical chains. Certain evaluative perspectives and subjectivities prevail through circulation and others are silenced. We are left then with a double bind: circulation of the incident under study provides new ways of understanding the incident through critique but it also closes up meanings for the sake of specific audiences and networks. Reminiscent of boyd’s remark regarding the potential for unprecedented distribution of material on social media, ‘the property of scalability does not necessarily scale what individuals want to have scaled or what they think should be scaled, but what the collective chooses to amplify’ (boyd, 2010: 48). It could be argued that this discussion, concerning the potential for social media engagement in grassroots political responses and social transformation, has been put so far in terms that are too dichotomous. As the findings of this study instruct us, there are surely more intermediate positions and more nuanced meaning-making potentials than the two extremes of generating ‘new perspectives’ or ‘just reproducing pre-existing perspectives’ (Polletta, 2012: 246). These can be empirically discovered with the tools and epistemological outlook of small stories research, which I hope will serve as a point of departure for
further studies on the socio-political potential of ordinary people’s social media engagement with any context of crisis.

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**Notes**

1. Since then, a Golden Dawn supporter has been arrested and charged with murder. The party’s leader and two of its MPs have been jailed pending trial on charges of forming a criminal organization. Since the arrests, Kasidiaris has vehemently denied any wrongdoing and accused the government of conspiracy to blacken the name of Golden Dawn (see http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/10422171/Golden-Dawn-members-killed-outside-party-office.html).

2. A Google trends search shows how the story peaked in web-related postings within the first 48 hours following the incident, remained ‘active’ for a week and gradually subsided. This, however, has not precluded the continuing posting of comments on, for example, YouTube videos and occasional periods of increase in viewing figures, such as when Kasidiaris was arrested.

3. YouTube video postings are parts of pages with multiple navigation bars (from above the video screen to the related videos on the right), which create a web of intertextual relations (cf. Androutsopoulos, 2010).

4. This selection took place at the beginning of the analysis, in August 2012. Since then, viewing figures have changed and numerous comments have been added, and so it is likely that the ranking of videos has changed.

5. I have argued elsewhere for the close links of small stories research with ethnographic methodological perspectives (2007).

6. This is what Kasidiaris said before throwing water at Dourou.

7. This is what presenter Papadakis kept on saying during the assault of Kanelli by Kasidiaris. In the aftermath of the event, he was criticized and/or mocked in many forums for not taking a more proactive stance during the escalation of the incident.

8. I have discussed elsewhere the implications of this re-localization of the incident (Georgakopoulou 2013a) vis-à-vis the ‘global’, viral circulation afforded by social media.

**References**


**Author biography**

Alexandra Georgakopoulou is Professor of Discourse Analysis and Sociolinguistics at King’s College London. She has published extensively on everyday life storytelling (both face-to-face and on new/social media) and identity construction with a focus on youth and gender identities. Her books include *Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (with A. de Fina, 2011, Cambridge University Press) and *Small Stories, Interaction and Identities* (2007, John Benjamins). She is currently co-editing (with A. de Fina) a *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Wiley-Blackwell) and a *Handbook of Digital Language and Communication* (with T. Spilioti, Routledge).
Appendix 1

Screenshot 1. Video-clip upload available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xi6TbLmeFoQ
This particular video upload came with English subtitles too, for the sake of non-Greek-speaking audiences, as was the case with other uploads too. On the top-left hand of the screenshot, we can see Liana Kanelli and immediately below her, Ilias Kasidiaris (as can be seen from the captions in Greek). Guests appearing in windows (close-up shots) when they address one another is a common format in Greek TV shows such as this one. On the top right-hand of the screenshot, we can see a ‘window’ (close-up) of politician-guests Pavlopoulos and Dourou and below that, the entire round-the-table panel set-up can be seen.

Screenshot 2. Exactly as the viewers, the analyst is faced with the video upload on the left-hand side and numerous related videos on the right-hand side: I discuss this intertextual set-up elsewhere (2013a). The comments are positioned below the video upload and, as I discuss in the chapter, they too became part of the analysis.
Screenshot 3. The fake Kasidiaris throwing water at the fake Dourou.

Screenshot 4. The fake Dourou in a close-up that displays her emotional outburst after water was thrown at her.
Screenshot 5. The fake Kanelli approaching the fake Kasidiaris.

Screenshot 6. Kanelli–Kasidiaris remix: in capital letters in front and on the sides, the revoicing of Kasidiaris’s ‘come off it, you joke’ serves as the title of the supposed 2012 summer hit. Kasidiaris is foregrounded in the picture with Dourou behind him on the viewers’ left and Kanelli on the viewers’ right. The host of the show, George Papadakis, can be seen in the background.