

**MARIA KONTOS, EVANGELIA TASTSOGLOU**

**THE BREAKDOWN OF NORMALITY AND THE NEGOTIATION  
OF EXIT: GREECE AFTER 2010**



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# **The Breakdown of Normality and the Negotiation of Exit: Greece after 2010**

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## **Abstract**

The starting point of this paper is that the profound economic and social crisis in Greece has lead to a »breakdown of normality«. The aim of the paper is to analyse the impact of this crisis on subjectivation processes of the Greek middle classes. Analysing the contributions of readers to an online forum following a commentary on social unrest in an online daily Greek newspaper, we reconstruct some lay theories about the crisis, the negotiation of coping strategies along the concepts of »exit and voice« as well as the transformation processes in self-understanding and identity.

Considering the online forum as a virtual »group discussion«, we utilize for the analysis the interpretative method developed in this field. The key topics in the forum commentary are: the crisis of the clientelistic state as the main context of the upcoming social violence, emigration as a favoured exit strategy accompanied by the negotiation of legitimacy, the construction of the crisis as a civil war, and the revival of self hate within the framework of an attempt to explain the crisis as an outcome of domestic structures and mentalities, ignoring its European and global dimensions.

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## Contents

1	Introduction and Conceptual Framework .....	3
2	Research Questions and Method: Online Fora as Fields of Discursive Constructions .....	4
3	The Online Exchange and Its Themes .....	6
3.1	The First Theme: The Clientelistic State and Social Violence .....	6
3.2	The Second Theme: Physical Exit as a Way Out, Justification, Alternatives, Expectations, Reality Checks .....	9
3.3	Third Theme: The »Civil War« Metaphor .....	14
3.4	Fourth Theme: Political Representations and New Constructions of Greeks and Their Consequences – Re-animating Self-Hate .....	16
4	Concluding Remarks: Overcoming the Crisis – Escaping the Crisis? .....	21
5	References .....	23

## 1 Introduction and Conceptual Framework

In the framework of our research project on »Subjectivation Processes and Citizenship Practices within the Greek Crisis« we understand the enduring Greek crisis as a collective trajectory going through different phases such as protest, resignation and collective action based on solidarity. These expressions of subjectivity are articulated and experienced differently by the various social groups and classes. In this first publication emerging from the project, we present our analysis of the subjectivation processes with regard to middle class people in the year 2011. We expect the analysis of subjectivation processes in the first years of the crisis to be of paramount importance for understanding such processes in later years.

Seven years have passed since the Greek state's high public debt became public knowledge in 2009. The IMF, EU and ECB became involved in lending to the Greek state, on condition that fiscal and structural adjustment programs of unprecedented scale were to be carried out within an unprecedented time frame. Since that time, the living conditions of the Greek population have deteriorated rapidly. Firstly, there has been a decrease in individual incomes, pensions and social benefits and a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate, of the number of people without access to health insurance and of people having lost or being at risk of losing their homes. Secondly, taxation has dramatically increased, while the cost of living has remained high.<sup>1</sup> The three adjustment programs from 2010, 2012 and 2015 envisaged radical labour market restructuring, the dismantling of labour institutions and loss of social and labour rights. The economic programs had to be implemented on the basis of strict conditionality as a prerequisite for the disbursement of successive loan instalments. After 2010 the above conditions resulted in a massive shrinking of the economy, widespread precariousness and insecurity in the labour market, broad marginalization of large segments of society, and a severe strain on social cohesion. At the same time an unprecedented media campaign started in Germany and some other European countries, which presented the Greek state as a »failed state« and Greek people as lazy, tricky and unwilling to pay taxes. These misrepresentations of Greeks through the media abroad have unleashed an ongoing moral crisis of the collective self.

It is our assumption that this continuing and profound economic, social and moral crisis has produced a »breakdown of normality« in everyday life for large parts of the population. We define »normality« as the dependability of routines structuring everyday life, the confidence in expectations for progress projected into the future, as well as the feeling of being a person living according to prevailing moral standards (Link 2009). The questions that arise are: how has this breakdown of daily routines and of future expectations been experienced by Greek people and how has this breakdown triggered

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<sup>1</sup> This is the classic IMF »shock therapy« implemented in the Third World debt crisis of the 1980s and the Asian tigers' crisis in the 1990s. It is now being implemented jointly with the EU in the Eurozone. The program has been proven to trap economies into a vicious circle in which austerity generates recession, followed by more austerity, new taxes and deeper recession (Lanara 2012).

constructions of the crisis and its reasons, coping strategies and individual identity processes? Our hypothesis is that the breakdown of normality triggers efforts for understanding the social world differently, and coping strategies such as adjustment of expectations, as well as repair work. These are manifested in the re-elaboration of positioning in the world by means of normative work, i.e. assessing developments with the lens of moral standards of justice (Dubet 2008); by means of biographical work (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000) i.e. reassessing biographical plans and considering new routes like emigration; and finally by means of a re-negotiation of identity (Strauss 1993), i.e. reconsidering the narrative of Greekness. Following the analysis of Albert O. Hirschman (1970) – who has produced an analysis of reactions to severe crisis phenomena – we place special focus on analysing the biographical work of individuals in relation to addressing issues of exit and/or voice.

We locate our analysis in the first years of the memoranda regimes, mainly in 2011, the second year of the crisis that still prevails some seven years later. In these first few years of the memoranda regime, a series of protest actions by the Greek population took place, which failed to have any effect on the austerity measures imposed on the country. At this point, it seems that a kind of normalisation of the emergency situation set in, in the face of the ongoing introduction of additional drastic austerity measures and the pauperisation of large segments of the Greek population, including the Greek middle classes.

In the first section we present our methodological approach, which is based on an analysis of an online forum. We address the social characteristics of the sample under investigation, as well as the limits of generalizability of our findings. In the second section we present the findings of our analysis. We start by discussing how the clientelistic system appears at the centre of efforts to make sense of the crisis; this is followed by our analysis of the negotiation of the »exit« option (i.e. the discursive consideration of its practicality, morality and usefulness) as one strategy to escape the crisis. We then proceed to the specificities of the perception of the crisis with the adoption of a »civil war« metaphor. We conclude by assessing the impact on individual identity processes of the misrepresentations of the »national self« by the media.

## 2 Research Questions and Method: Online Fora as Fields of Discursive Constructions

We decided to analyse »naturally emerging« but accessible discussions on the crisis in order to reconstruct and analyse subjectivation processes, such as structures of reflections on the crisis, on the self, as well as the coping and repair strategies of ordinary people. The online fora of Greek electronic newspapers are such »naturally emerging«

discussions, specifically fora emerging around articles dealing with the crisis. We consider these online fora to be public debates on the crisis. Through the readers' responses and exchanges, a »mini public« (Goodin and Dryzek 2006) emerges that is asychronic, mostly anonymous, and detached from physical space. Online fora can be thus considered as part of the emerging electronic public space offering much easier access and immediate participation for citizens and non-citizens alike compared with the public space of traditional communication media, such as print media, radio and television.

In these fora, anyone can write anonymously more or less what they please, with no need to reference, prove or justify their points. They can give vent to their frustration by resorting to foul language and even slander. A specificity of the online fora is therefore anonymity, avoidance of discursive or physical sanctions by others, non-locality, informality, unaccountability, no face-to-face exchange, and lack of repercussions of opinion-voicing. Thus, beyond the censorship through the editorial staff of the newspaper, these fora might be considered as fields where only limited social control mechanisms apply. We believe that this form of »citizenship in practice« (Abraham et al. 2010) is of significant value for revealing the spontaneous, socially un-censored, »information«, dialogic, discursive constructions of the crisis and identifying and assessing options based thereupon. The analysis of the online fora affords us an opportunity to gain a substantive insight into the discursive constructions emerging out of the deep economic and social crisis currently unfolding in Greece and the responses to it.

Considering the online exchange as a virtual »group discussion« – as readers respond to previous contributions such as the original editorial comment or to one another – we follow the methodological considerations suggested by Ralf Bohnsack (2000) and analyse the contributions in relation to the deployment of different horizons of knowledge and positionings related to concrete topics and themes in the course of the exchange. Contributions refer to assumptions that are shared collectively or may differ among the participants, in a similar way to a group discussion.

This paper focuses on the online forum derived from the website of the Greek daily newspaper with the highest circulation, namely the conservative *Kathimerini* (Bickes et al. 2012) from the 14-10-2011 and a short editorial comment on that day entitled *Let Us Stop the Downward Slide*. This online editorial sparked a lengthy and animated online discussion by readers, which lasted for three days (to October 17) and involved 174 responses, the majority of which were substantial opinion pieces.<sup>2</sup> Analysis of this exchange allows insights into the specific perception of the crisis to be made, also covering constructions of coping strategies as well as the identity work of the respondents in relation to the misrepresentations of Greece and Greeks entailed in German and other European media (ibid.). In this way, we aspire to analyse how the dramatic deterioration of living conditions and the intrusion of negative representations of the self have been reflected in identity work and construction of coping strategies. We aim

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<sup>2</sup> [www.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_kathpolitics\\_1\\_14/10/2011\\_1296507](http://www.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_kathpolitics_1_14/10/2011_1296507).

to arrive at a better grasp of some of the regulative power of the new public discourses that accompany the financial crisis and the intervention of the »Troika« in the Greek economy, politics and society.

With respect to the generalizability of the findings from the analysis of this forum, given our knowledge about the social fragmentations of subjectivation processes we have to pay specific attention to the specific »bias« of our »sample«, i.e. the social characteristics of those responding to the online commentary. We assume that the majority of the readers of the conservative newspaper *Kathimerini* are middle class and rather well educated. A majority of contributors to the commentary under consideration seem to belong to that part of the middle classes whose position has become precarious, located mainly within the private sector, who have been decimated by economic crisis and austerity policies, and generally lack relatively secure positions in the public sector. They are familiar with new technologies, so represent a rather »modern« part of the readership of the newspaper. The majority are most probably not elderly, although some of the participants refer to being in the fourth, fifth or sixth decade of their lives. Interestingly, several of them are members of the Greek diaspora, showing the broad resonance of the newspaper and the interest of the Greek diaspora in developments in Greece. Therefore, we regard the online forum under consideration as offering insights into the mental structures, not of Greek society as a whole, but of the middle classes in Greece in precarious circumstances and of some parts of the Greek diaspora.<sup>3</sup>

### 3 The Online Exchange and Its Themes

#### 3.1 The First Theme: The Clientelistic State and Social Violence

The short editorial comment that opened the discussion under the title *Stop the downward slide* refers to an incident of protest and touches upon some of the central aspects of the current crisis of Greek society.

»Violence and irrationality spread with a great speed to the country. Yesterday, violent attacks took place against mayors and even some of those newly elected into office who neither had done any favours nor belonged to the impotent and corrupt class of politicians of the period after the return to democracy [in 1974]. The attacks however were perpetrated by people who had been swindled earlier by politicians who had promised them tenure [into their jobs] with [...] soft conditions. These victims, as they are indeed victims, see today in their salary slips their salaries drastically reduced and themselves not being able to pay their loans. Their anger is obvi-

<sup>3</sup> A question for further research: to analyse how the mental constructions and subjectivation processes have developed for other social groups and in these later years of the crisis.

ously justified, but the way in which they are expressing it is unacceptable and maddening. The downward slide into unbridled violence, building takeovers [universities, government and other public buildings], and chaos must stop before it is too late.«<sup>4</sup>

The commentary refers to a protest action by local government workers against mayors the day before. The editor identifies »violence and irrationality« as social responses to salary reduction, and the prospect of undeserved unemployment and »chaos« as the outcome of these actions. S/he warns against a coming catastrophe, but avoids specifying the nature of this. The editor develops an understanding of the anger of the local government workers who had been promised tenure in their jobs, but condemns the way they express their anger and pleads for a stop to violent actions. S/he also defends the beleaguered mayors for being new to their posts. Seeing that they were not the ones who gave the false promises they could not be held responsible for the imminent unemployment of the local government workers. The journalist refers in this commentary to subcategories of two social categories that became central in the public debate about the crisis, as the exchange shows: (local government) civil servants and (newly elected) mayors/politicians. S/he evaluates their actions around the clientelistic exchange by expressing sympathy for both sides: the workers – because they have been deceived, and the mayors – because they were not the ones who gave the promises of tenure. Thus, the commentary focuses on a current anomaly in the clientelistic system, which is a result of the reduction of resources needed for its maintenance; neither the clientelistic system as such, nor the complex dynamics of the crisis, including the reasons, the main actors and the austerity measures that produced the reduction of resources, (unemployment, and reduction of salaries) are subjected to a critique.

To her/his interpretation of the incident and the conclusions, i.e. the general plea to put a stop to violent protest actions, readers responded by affirming or rejecting the viewpoints expressed, bringing in their own interpretations of the dynamics of the economic and social crisis, and distinguishing them from the general perspective that the journalist takes. They asked about causes and perpetrators, and suggested possible solutions and routes for individuals and the country to take, interjecting their own biographical experience.

A few of the readers referred directly to the way that the journalist started by blaming the »political system« and went on to defend the protesters as victims of the crisis. An example is Kostas'<sup>5</sup> commentary:

»Does anybody sensible person believe that the reactions could be controllable at a moment when a wrecked political system sends millions of Greeks to the bottom of the sea in order to rescue itself? [...] When they take your legal salary away and deprive you of the right to use it for the education of your children or for your old age [...] I think that the reactions will be unforeseeable. [...] When desperation

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpts from the online forum have been translated by the authors.

<sup>5</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of the writers, we have removed surnames where the signature consisted of a name and surname and left first names. Where the anonymity seemed to be protected through an obvious pseudonym or abbreviation of name we kept the pseudonym or abbreviation.

knocks at your door [...] everything is possible. From »absurd to outrageous reactions« as you say, even [...] suicides. And all these for the sins, the tragic mistakes of others [...] The downward slide into violence and chaos [...] is the outcome [...] The reason, you know very well, is the miserable political system and its supporters and servants. Political parties, the media, the trade unions, the intellectuals (how stupid we are to call them intellectuals), leaders of all kinds. War is war if a brother kills his brother [...] Did they realise they are leading us there?« (Kostas, 13:07:08, Oct. 14)

Regarding the local government employees threatened by unemployment, Kostas describes precisely the breakdown of the everyday and the biographical normality that could be taken for granted until the start of the crisis in 2010. Reducing salaries changes material life conditions and thwarts the biographical planning of the employees. The respondent also adopts a critical position to the journalist's demand for a general stop to reactions to (austerity) policies. Rather, he urges that the journalist should show understanding for the rather foreseeable violent reactions of desperate people, which may range from aggression against others to aggression against oneself (suicide). Kostas appeals for a comprehensive and differentiated rational analysis of the crisis, in particular that the journalist should name the social and political actors responsible for the violence – who he sees in »leaders of all kinds, political parties, media, trade unions and intellectual elites« – instead of just asking the »victims« to stop protesting in the way they do. In this way, the writer outlines the main social and political powers he sees as being responsible for the crisis, including the media, without, however, going into details. Kostas does not name austerity policies and too high taxation as reasons for the dramatic changes in the life circumstances of the citizens, directing his focus instead at their effects. The magnitude of the breakdown of normality in his view is revealed through his assessment of the crisis as the »catastrophe« that the journalist wants the people to prevent, but avoids naming. Kostas uses the metaphor of an impending civil war.

Most readers who pick up on the journalist's editorial disagree, however, with his assessment of those who attack the mayors as »victims« of the politicians who had promised them tenure in their positions and failed to keep their promise. Instead, they accuse particular categories of employees of being parasitic and certainly do not see them as victims. Readers respond to the commentary with a critique of the compassion that the journalist expresses for public servants. Some comments even include abusive words directed against the civil servants (for instance: »truant«, »trashy«, »cheeky«; S. K., 02:26:09, Oct. 15), showing that the civil service is a core social category in the construction of the sources and the dynamics of the current crisis. Many contrast civil servants as a privileged category with the category of those »working hard« in the private sector and having most to suffer under unemployment and loss of working rights.

Dianelos writes in an angry yet persuasive tenor, hypothesizing that the protesters feel betrayed by the mayors because the mayors did not fulfil their promise to secure them stable jobs. However, to use the vote in exchange for privileges would be a moral problem:

»I do not understand in which way those who sold their vote to a politician in order to receive a position in the public service or to secure privileges for their trade, now feel betrayed. Using one's vote to one's own benefit is a deeply anti-democratic act, an act that erodes ethics and hurts society's interest, an act responsible to a large extent for today's suffering of the Greek people [...] The least consequence for those who used their vote this way in order to secure jobs is now to lose them.« (Dianelos, 02:33:30, Oct. 15)

Others are much angrier and threaten the politicians who bought votes in exchange for positions: »If you have the slightest sense of shame, go out and ask forgiveness for the evils you brought to the country, and then go home.« (Vaggelis, 22:23:05, Oct. 14) A few disagree with the thrust of the main editorial to put an end to the »slide« into violence in public life and claim that unbridled violence is already taking place, perpetrated against Greek citizens by the state and the EU (Xenophon, 13:37:10, Oct. 14). The magnitude of violence in the political struggles is further explicated with the help of the civil war metaphor. However, naming the violence of the state and the EU-Commission does not find many followers among readers and writers.

In sum, the topic that arises in this discussion is about the breakdown of normality as interrelated with the breakdown of the clientelistic system due to the economic crisis.

### **3.2 The Second Theme: Physical Exit as a Way Out, Justification, Alternatives, Expectations, Reality Checks**

The editor took an evaluative view of the crisis and pleaded to the public to help put an end to the »violence« and increasing »irrationality« of public life, while readers responding to his/her commentary brought the clientelistic relationship into critical focus. The first to respond signed his piece »Paris« and put forward a personal and experiential view on the crisis candidly and eloquently, thereby introducing a new theme. Paris does not bother to refer to the arguments of the journalist, i.e. the »justified« anger of the »deceived« public servants who attacked the mayors. Instead, he<sup>6</sup> articulates his arguments for (physical) exit, i.e. emigration as the only solution in response to the journalist's exhortation to »stop the downward slide« to chaos. His exhortation is altogether different:

»My proposition: let us leave! If you can try to find a way to leave. [...] It is not that we quit [...] But this army of public servants will not allow us to be rescued. This is how they have been socialized [...] they cannot understand [...].

Do not search further. Leave!!! Each one of us is responsible for his own survival. I was furious because the politicians paid attention only to the civil servants and gave privileges only to them. [...] The politicians have cultivated this cleavage. [...]

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<sup>6</sup> Although the signee is »Paris«, spelled with Latin characters, the Greek translation of the name (»Πάρης« or »Πάρις«) based on both the mythological figure from the Iliad and Greek grammar, is masculine.

Leave, go far away. Going away does not make us less patriotic. It just gives us back our dignity. I have the courage to see the problem as a national one (as if we were at war). But they cannot see it this way. [...]

All reform efforts are drowned in the leftist ideology. [...]

I don't have anything to do with this kind of Greeks. For me there are two Greeks. And until now, the one I am part of is hostage to the other (the trade unionists, the civil servants, the frauds [...] etc.). [...] I am tired of being ashamed when I say I am Greek when abroad and having to give explanations for what cannot be explained.

I address those Greeks who want to be able to dream for themselves and their children. The Greeks who have possibilities, talents, motivation, values and abilities. Here we are not recognized for all these. The system drowns us, marginalizes us and gives voice to the ›manges‹<sup>7</sup> and the populists!

I leave in order to remain able to dream and be creative [...].« (Paris, 13:15:18, Oct. 14)

Paris appears to have agonized about leaving for some time and reassures the readership of the forum: »Do not search (for other solutions) any more. Leave!!!« His response struck a chord with many readers who expressed enthusiastic approval for Paris and his plea for emigration and expanded this into an assessment of emigration as a strategy for themselves as well as considering its implications for society and the country under the current circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Paris' passionate plea for exit from a chaotic and extremely hurtful and traumatic social context, which he cannot influence, triggered a range of responses. In effect, the majority of the subsequent responses address Paris' »feisty and negotiated exit« proposition rather than the proposition of the main editorial for putting a stop to sliding down further, a seemingly impossible halt while free fall is underway. His enthusiasm for the seemingly easily accessible possibility of emigrating in order to be able »to work productively« seems to appeal to many readers and moves many to respond to him personally. It is as if the dilemmas he expresses were their own dilemmas, as if he spoke for them all. Therefore, it is worth looking more closely at the structure of his arguments.

An interesting feature of Paris' contribution is that he introduces emigration right away as an individual solution to the crisis. He argues that, given the magnitude of the crisis, there is no realistic way to overcome it, so the only option is to escape. He then embarks on an effort to prove the legitimacy of emigration as an individual solution (»we do not quit [...] we are not less patriotic«) showing in this way that the strategy of exit might well be in conflict with norms of social solidarity and patriotism as well as the duty of citizens to engage in improving the conditions in their country. Paris' argumentation reveals that there must be a general, shared moral condemnation of emigration. He presents emigration as a strategy in need of legitimacy and as one opposing main norms

<sup>7</sup> Manges: popular types of the early 20th century, poor men and boys of low education, street-wise, living on the border of legality and illegality.

<sup>8</sup> According to a large survey of high school graduates by Kapa Research in August 2010, seven out of ten said they are considering working abroad (Malkoutzis 2011b).

of solidarity and dedication to the community. The arguments mobilized to demonstrate the moral dignity of emigration are interconnected with the construction of the nature of crisis and the main social categories identified as involved in the social conflict as well as the need and obligation to care of oneself and restore personal normality.

The impossibility of doing anything to act and stop/overcome the crisis becomes an argument for the legitimacy of emigration. Central to this argument is the role of »civil servants« as a mighty social category (the »army of public servants«) that blocks efforts for getting out of the crisis. However, the power of the »public servants« turns out to be coupled with a weakness, an »incapacity«. Not being »able to understand« the impossibility of sustaining the political and economic system and to accept necessary »reforms« and social change that might encroach on their privileges, they will not »allow« the whole – or the rest of the population – with whom Paris identifies (»us«) to be »rescued«. Hence, this argument is related to a perception of the public servants as a powerful social group and a central player in the current social conflict, who, despite their »incapacity« to understand, control the status quo, turning the situation in Greece into an utterly hopeless one in consequence.

Another argument to counter the non-legitimacy of emigration as a solution to the crisis is related to the mobilization of the norm of personal responsibility for one's survival when the state disappears as a mediating actor. What if the state does not take responsibility for caring for its citizens and contributing to their survival by failing to offer services and support? The Greek state is apparently only prepared to offer care to »public servants«, leaving the rest to go without. The Greek state appears here to be an instrument in the hands of a particular category and not the expression of the collective will. The lack of state care that derives from the power of the civil servants legitimizes quitting of the country.

A third argument counteracts the perception that emigration is a »non patriotic act«. »Leaving does not make us less patriotic.« Patriotic would be to realize the »national dimension« of the crisis, expressed through the crisis being tantamount to »war«, while »they« – most probably the »public servants« – do not recognize the situation in this way. However, the »national« dimension of »war« remains unclear – is it a civil war? A war against an outer power? It is as if the writer expects the readers to know what he means.

A final argument refers to the need to restore the »dignity« damaged by current state policies and the actions of »public servants«. Paris seems to refer to experiences of misrecognition and exclusion. He feels cast aside, overlooked, with his perception of his own self-worth and dignity wounded. It is his dignity that has to be restored through emigration. He concludes that he is no less a patriot for leaving, he merely does so to preserve »his dignity and his dreams«.

Thus, Paris negotiates the legitimacy of emigration as a strategy to restore biographical normality by exiting the country. He negotiates the profound illegitimacy of emigration embedded in Greek social mores, despite, or maybe even because of the long history of Greek emigration. This illegitimacy – and at the same time necessity – is reflected in

popular music, proverbial sayings, and popular art<sup>9</sup> and is grounded in the trauma of separation through emigration (Grinberg and Grinberg 1990). Emigration might take place in the name of the interests of the family, but it might also imply at the same time a betrayal of the norms of familial solidarity and the expectations of dedication to family wellbeing and social solidarity. Paris negotiates the breaking of the norm of social solidarity (patriotism) and counters it with a more individualistic norm, the norm of responsibility of the individual to be active in devising strategies for survival and improvement of his/her conditions of life, which includes the legitimacy of the right to seek recognition when wronged or treated disrespectfully. Paris concludes that everyone is responsible for his or her own personal happiness. In this way, he contrasts and negotiates the traditional norms of family unity and family solidarity, as well as patriotism, with the modern norm of the responsibility of the individual towards the improvement of one's own life conditions.

Many responded enthusiastically to Paris' commentary and projected social recognition and restoration of everyday normality into life after emigration, confident that healing from the trauma of the current Greek crisis would take place abroad. Other countries are idealized in comparison to the socially destructive conditions in Greece, a fact that definitely appeals to many: »Abroad« is where there are prospects of getting a job, receiving recognition for one's qualifications and experience, having less stress in everyday life, having a good salary, leading a more predictable life, enjoying the ambience and (working) infrastructure of cities. These arguments come from the perspective of those who declare that they are planning to leave, but are also reinforced by those who have already left in response to the present crisis. There are some more sceptical voices advising caution and trying to lower expectations. While the »success stories« of those who have left are boiled down to personal experiences, the sceptical voices are usually more generalizing.

»In a more rational and productive society, you will work and produce outcomes, you are not going to use yourself up without any meaning. If you have an entrepreneurial spirit, you will be able to contribute creatively and they will thank you, they will not try to strangle you in a corrupt bureaucracy.« (Ignatios, 23:59:38, Oct. 15)

Kostantinos, a Greek living abroad, in summarizing his own experience speaks for many and reinforces the expectations of »abroad«:

»Let me tell you, after 11 years of living abroad, that things are not as you think here. They are better! In a country where there are fewer educated people than its economy requires, there is hope for the individual. Here there is infrastructure as well. Most of the time there is logic to the system. And yes, life is not perfect here, but your life depends much more upon you than in Greece. I left [Greece] leaving behind a coun-

<sup>9</sup> »Την ξενιτιά, την ορφανιά, την πίκρα, την αγάπη, τα τέσσαρα τα ζύγιασαν, βαρύτερα είν' τα ξένα«, (»Emigration, becoming an orphan, sorrow and love, all four were weighed, and the heaviest was emigration.« [authors' translation]) proverbial saying, demotic song, taken from: <[www.diasporic.org/2011/01/batsikanis-nikos/%CE%AD%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%CE%CF%82-%E2%80%93%CE%BE%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%CE%CF%84%CE%CE%AC/](http://www.diasporic.org/2011/01/batsikanis-nikos/%CE%AD%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%CE%CF%82-%E2%80%93%CE%BE%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%CE%CF%84%CE%CE%AC/)>.

try that was like a madhouse, where logic has limited value, and everything takes place under the table, where knowledge is of interest to no one and everything is a lost game. Abroad, I did my PhD, I changed jobs, cities of residence, I travelled around for professional reasons, I learned the language [...] when you go out your eyes will open to many new things. Living and working conditions, the ability to plan your life, the green in the cities – all simple things and many others – make the difference.« (Kostantinos, 22:25:51, Oct. 15)

The norm legitimizing emigration here is the individual success of the effort to restore normality, as it is formulated as an expectation and even as the realization of the expectations of a Greek immigrant.

The issue of emigration as an exit strategy permeates the exchange and inspires the other readers. In sum, the legitimacy of migration is negotiated on two different levels. The level of the trauma of separation and the breaking of loyalty norms and morals, on the one hand, is pitted against the norm of success on the other. Due to the progressive individualization of Greek society, the norm of individual success seems to take the place of the norm of family solidarity most prevalent previously. This becomes clear in Paris' effort to counter the norm of family and societal solidarity with the help of the individualistic norm of success and responsibility for one's own life. This norm also becomes clear in the contribution of a reader who presents himself as »someone who left seven years ago while the others were mocking him« (Nikos, 21:53:42, Oct. 14). The reader narrates his success in migration, in professional and personal terms, and that he did not regret having left, justifying the decision to leave in these terms.

The argument for emigration as an individual response, conditioned and perhaps directly dictated by the logic of the crisis, is cogently *countered* by a number of commentators. Indeed, there are a range of readers who jump in to strengthen the arguments about the need to stay and fight. They point to the norm of staying and fighting for progress within Greek society: leaving is a totally individualistic, self-serving solution that contributes nothing to the broader Greek society that is now at a »turning point« (A. M. F., 13:48:31, Oct. 14; P. M. G., 16:51:01, Oct. 14; Yannis, 19:03:11, Oct. 15). Most combine the norm of staying with the critique of the civil servants and the state using the concept of corruption. DM (11:25:06, Oct. 14) claims that the solution to the crisis of corruption is to stay and fight, not to do a favour to »the corrupt ones« by leaving and creating more space for them. K. P. writes: »One should stay and fight, this is the most honourable thing to do, [otherwise we will] let the ravens of our country eat us up.« (20:44:55, Oct. 15) Leaving one's country at a time of »war«, as the present situation can be described, is tantamount to cowardice and treason. It is not: »what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country« writes Theodora, using a well-known saying of J. F. Kennedy (16:34:26, Oct. 14).

There is no kind of elaboration, however, about what »to fight« means. Some propose individual actions that would demonstrate correctness and moral integrity, such as not asking for bribes, not giving bribes, keeping the public space tidy, but also not going on

strike or demonstrating, everybody should do his/her job properly, and so on (Panagios, 12:41:40, Oct. 15).

### 3.3 Third Theme: The »Civil War« Metaphor

Paris and several others use the metaphor of war in order to describe what the journalist could have meant as the horrible consequence of the »downward slide« and in order to demonstrate the magnitude of the destruction of the social fabric confronting the Greek people. Speakers usually use metaphors to give expression to what cannot yet be described in words, the inconceivable (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This particular metaphor, however, is tied up with the historic experience and the memory of WWII, the German occupation and the subsequent Civil War, as well as the imagination (Salecl 1994) of the civil war shaping political and social life in contemporary Greece.<sup>10</sup>

We have seen the imagination of war and more specifically of a civil war in Kostas' contribution (13:07:08, Oct. 14). The war/civil war-narrative of the crisis was not contested by the other participants, which shows broad agreement about the use of this metaphor. They reanimate the imagination of the civil war that took place after the WWII and up to 1949 between the military branch of the Communist Party and the army of the anti-communist forces (Μαργαρίτης 2001; Mazower 2000; Gerolymatos 2004) to make sense of the breakdown of normality. It is important to note, however, that the spectre of the civil war is still present in Greek society. Even after the official end of the civil war, a latent civil war continued, as those considered to be followers of leftist ideologies and parties were excluded from public sector employment and were persecuted. Some historians have marked the end of the latent Civil War as late as in 1974, after the fall of the dictatorship, the time of the restoration of democracy and the legalization of the Communist Party of Greece. However, talk of an »unfinished« civil war was fuelled by the start of austerity policies in 2010 and the political strengthening of the ultra-right wing party Golden Dawn.

Some writers locate the »civil war« in the present, claiming that the country is already in this state. Tseligkas (20:22:40, Oct. 15), for instance, sees the civil war as having started in the public space of the newspapers' online fora, thus showing the rising significance of the online public space. For others it is located in the near future. Alexandros (13:08:30, Oct. 14) writes: »This country can no longer avoid a second civil war.« He considers that while at this point there is no liberation army »in the mountains« or in the poor neighbourhoods, as at the time of the first civil war, this is the direction in which the country is heading. This respondent sees no way of avoiding an impending civil war, nothing that individuals can do to control a systemic problem.

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<sup>10</sup> While the »metaphor« is a linguistic term, »imagination« refers to the psychoanalytic endeavour to analyse the relationship of the subject to social structures that cannot be understood entirely. Renata Salecl (1994) writes that imagination is of importance when we refer to something that defines us without (us) being able to define it.

Many hint in the same direction. Yiannis (13:28:44, Oct. 14), for instance, adds in response to the editor's call for an end to »slipping«:

»[...] if you wait for the desperate and the wronged people to show self-restraint [from violence], you will have to wait for a long time. Especially today after the news about more taxes.«

But which are the war parties in this civil war narrative in the online forum? The theories advanced address the main current cleavages and divisions in Greek society and what they mean for the current great crisis. They outline lines of social divisions of the privileged and non-privileged, of profiteers and of losers, excluded and discriminated, those denied their rights. The main social division is between the »corrupt«, i.e. those who are doing wrong and profit from their positions and are responsible for the crisis, and the rest, who suffer as a consequence of (austerity) policies and spreading social exclusion (Grigoris, 23:21:20, Oct. 15). Paris specifies conflict lines and conflict parties by constructing »the two Greces«. One of the social conflict parties involves those Greeks who want to continue with the old regime. In this context, he identifies powerful »trade unionists« and »public servants«, »living at state cost«, »frauds« as those who hold the other parts of the population »hostage«. He does not describe the other »Greece« in a detailed way, but only identifies their positive qualities and desires. This category is composed of those with talents, abilities, values, qualifications, »desire to work hard and ambition to go far«. He considers himself a representative of this »other Greece« and expects to be able to live according to his principles after emigration.

Tseligkas specifies the »warring parties« by recalling an interpretation of the social history of the years after the reestablishment of democracy in 1974, the period during which the Communist Party was legalized and the social democratic party PASOK came to power (1981). This interpretation is centred around the narrative of the establishment of the political and cultural hegemony of the previous left party, which was defeated by military means. This hegemony would finally have brought about fiscal bankruptcy by promising better life conditions to the »nonprivileged«, a category that was used by Andreas Papandreou in the 80s, and by including them in (privileged) employment in the public sector, previously the domain of right wing citizens only. The previously »nonprivileged« are now on one side of the imagined civil war, and have become the »privileged« fighting to preserve their privileges while on the other side are the »then privileged«, i.e. the old middle class, the bourgeoisie, »who are now called upon to take the country out of the stalemate, as happened before, following the Greek Civil War in the forties« (Tseligkas, 20:22:40, Oct. 15).

According to this narrative, the social and political shifts after the Civil War have not brought about entirely new social divisions, but transformations of the civil war parties, albeit in new roles and positions of power. In this sense, there is not really much difference between the »civil war parties« at the time of the Civil War of 1946–1949 and in the actual imaginations emerging out of narratives of the current crisis. Now, the warring parties are not the left versus the right wing block but the block of »civil

servants«, »politicians« and privileged »trade unionists« versus the block of the rest, meaning especially those working in the private economy, including the entrepreneurs. Thus, when Paris declares »left ideologies« to be the main hindrance to social progress, he uses the old ideological cleavage and gives a clear political positioning of himself along the old cleavage of the Greek society, i.e. the deep ideological division between left and right wing forces. Moreover, the indexical character of some terms Paris uses (»rescue« in the sense of the »rescue package«, »reforms« in the sense of the restructuring measures) clearly indicates a (diffuse) identification with the argumentation of the lenders expressed through the »Troika«, who insist on specific »reforms« for »rescuing« the indebted state (Knobloch 2015).<sup>11</sup> This identification seems to be met by approval from the other participants of the online forum, who show enthusiastic sympathy with Paris and his writing.

### **3.4 Fourth Theme: Political Representations and New Constructions of Greeks and Their Consequences – Re-animating Self-Hate**

One argument Paris uses to justify emigration as a coping strategy to deal with the crisis revolves around the »shame« that is piled on Greeks because of the way the bankruptcy of public finances is reflected in the media abroad. According to this argument, Paris presents his personal experience of being ashamed when abroad because people there condemn the social and political conditions in Greece that led to the high public debt. By this, he refers to the repercussion of the media campaigns on public opinion abroad, which attribute the fiscal and economic crisis to the »laziness« of Greek people and their alleged many privileges that the state cannot afford.

This media campaign – the »Griechenbeschimpfung« i.e. »defaming the Greeks«, as critical scholars and journalists have named it (Ries 2015) – finds its legitimacy in statements of high-powered politicians, for example Angela Merkel (»Greeks like to take too many vacations«; Spiegel Online 2011a), and the »Troika« institutions, for example Christine Lagarde speaking for the IMF (she has more compassion with children in Niger than with pauperized Greek people who avoid paying any tax; Spiegel Online 2012). Thus, after the emergence of the crisis and under the influence of the anti-Greek campaigns – both at the level of politics and media – the Greek people as a whole came to be presented in the German media – the media that have been most reflected in the Greek press – as a major threat to the German economy, to the prosperity of German citizens and the sustainability of the German social benefits and pensions systems. This construction was possible due to the transfer of the Greek debt from German and French banks to the EU states, who now became lender countries. Germany – due to its large economy – became the lender with the largest participation in loans to the Greek state and thus a major player in shaping the positioning of the EU and the »Troika« towards Greece. Indeed, demoscopic investigations from the year 2015 show that the euro crisis

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<sup>11</sup> See also »Memoranda of Understanding« with Greek Governments: Memorandum of Understanding 2010, Memorandum of Understanding 2012, Memorandum of Understanding 2015.

is now (before Brexit) the issue that German citizens find most frightening and alarming, and that the Greek debt is the issue around which the euro crisis threat is constructed (Spiegel Online 2015). The previously friendly attitudes of German people towards Greece and the Greeks, an outcome of positive experiences in summer vacations in Greece and the representation of Greek people as knowing how to enjoy life, is changing to accusations of »laziness« and »living at a costs to others«, according to the politicians and the media, at a cost to the German taxpayers in particular. The state debt is interpreted as being a result of an amoral mentality and the prodigality of Greek politicians and population and thus evidence of guilt and culpability that deserves punishment. Consequently, the criminal law idiom often appears in the discourse of the politicians calling for »no clemency for Greece«, as Jens Weidmann, President of the German Central Bank in 2011 declared (Spiegel Online 2011b).

These misrepresentations of the Greek state and Greek people construct, not only a national narrative of Greece imposed on the Greek population from outside, but also a new national narrative of Germany (Fidler 2015). The latter entails polar positive representations of the German people as being, in contrast to the Greeks, hard working, just as Max Weber (2000 [1905]) described in *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as well as sincere and willing to pay their taxes. Germany's economic success is supposedly based on their virtue and willingness to bear sacrifices such as the labour reform of 2005 that led to an increase in poverty. In relation to the old narrative of German guilt for the crimes of WWII, a kind of healing narrative for the sins of the past is thus set up, with the aid of the contrast with the Greeks. In this way, the misrepresentations of Greece and Greeks entail relational categories of superiority and inferiority and, at the same time, serve deep-seated needs of the German society and economy. The narrative of Greek inferiority has also mobilized a media debate about the »ethnic character« of modern Greek people. From time to time the media report on earlier theories questioning the ethnic origins of the modern Greek population, and stress that this population consists of a mixture of Turks, Slavs and Albanians, having nothing to do with the glorious Greeks of antiquity and their civilization.<sup>12</sup> The anti-Greek campaign reached a climax recently when the anti-austerity government of SYRIZA-ANEL was in power in Greece from January to June 2015 (Link 2015). This negative and noisy media campaign fuelled sensationalism in the lender countries and has been reflected by the Greek media, thus transferring identity-damaging contents to the Greek public.<sup>13</sup> Following the analyses on social identity constructions,<sup>14</sup> our

<sup>12</sup> Such a theory is traced back to Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1830). A recent article of this kind appeared in the conservative newspaper *Die Welt*. See Boeselager (2015).

<sup>13</sup> Malkoutzis (2011a), Lanara (2012) and Sotiropoulos (2012), among others, debunk the major misrepresentations perpetuated by the media. Some highlights are: 1) according to 2011 Eurostat figures, Greeks work an average of 42.1 hours a week, which is the highest in the EU and six hours more than their German counterparts (Malkoutzis 2011a). Lanara (2012), on the other hand, argues that the Greek labour force works the second highest number of hours per year, on average, among the OECD countries, after South Korea. 2) minimum retirement age in Greece in 2010 was 61.4, while in Germany it was 62 years. According to the new pension law the retirement age will increase to 63.5 by 2015 (Malkoutzis 2011a). Sotiropoulos (2012), on the other hand, drawing upon the EC Ageing Report 2012, reports for 2009 the average real retirement age (by contrast to the legal retirement age) in Greece as 62.2 years, which is the same as in Germany. Finally, 3) the annual total hours worked per person in Greece is the

hypothesis is that media misrepresentations about Greece and the Greeks have had a strong influence on the development of self-understanding and identity processes of Greek people themselves, as reflected in the communications of the forum. The anti-Greek campaigns and debates in Germany and other European countries produced, at the European level, a breach in the upcoming and still fragile »European mental space«,<sup>15</sup> and in Greece in particular, a crisis in self-perception in relation to responsibility for the state debt, whether guilty or innocent. This has led to a moral crisis.

While accepting and internalizing this criticism (»having to give explanations for what cannot be explained«), Paris seems to expect that once he has left the country, he will not be identified with the »Greeks in Greece« but be allocated to the category of the »Greeks abroad« who are absolved of economic crimes. Greeks abroad are indeed discussed in the forum in a positive light, while accusations are generally aimed at Greeks inside Greece. In this sense, Paris does not reject the misrepresentations of the media, but rather confirms them and opts for physical exit in order to no longer feel the shame of being perceived as a Greek from Greece.

Only a few contest the »shame« that is showered on the Greeks in the course of the media campaigns and criticize the identification of others with the negative European media campaign. In response to Paris, Paratirisi remarks:

»There is nothing to be ashamed of in being Greek and suffering through the fiscal crisis. Germans and Japanese had much more to be ashamed of after WWII and yet they went ahead and re-built their societies.« (Paratirisi, 12:11:32, Oct. 14)

The issue of shame for what is written in the media abroad about what Greeks are or do is referred to in several contributions. It seems to lead to a strange »hatred« towards what is supposed to be the »Greek mentality«. In addition to referring to the power of the »public servants« and the widespread »corruption«, »Greek mentality« is used both to explain the crisis and legitimize exit. A frequent explanation of the problems of the Greek economy and society points to the specific Greek »way of thinking«. A range of statements express a deep hatred towards what is thought to be the »Greek mentality« which many respondents identify as the culprit. »Mentality« has a number of expressions. Some equate »Greek mentality« with selfishness and egoism. Speaking in the form of »we«, they acknowledge that they are also part of the problem. »Putting the nation first, and then ourselves, has never been the case in this country« writes Yianna (13:36:38, Oct. 16). Ignatios (00:05:56, Oct. 16) echoes this by saying: »In Greek society there has always been an absence of a sense of concern toward society as a

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highest in comparative perspective within the EU, though the productivity of Greek workers is well below that of their German and Italian counterparts but higher than that of Portuguese, for example (Sotiropoulos 2012; citing data from OECD).

<sup>14</sup> Identity formation theories (Mead 1934) have demonstrated how representations of the self, in interaction with other actors including media, help form positive or negative self-perceptions and self-esteem. As well, Axel Honneth (1994) has analysed the meaning of recognition or misrecognition experiences for identity development, while Judith Butler (2003) investigated the power of interpellation (naming the other) for processes of subjectivation.

<sup>15</sup> The term has been coined by Fritz Schütze to describe processes of a fragile European integration on the mental level. See Schütze and Schröder-Wildhagen (2012).

whole.« A manifestation of the Greek »mentality« is identified in the role of the public sector in an unproductive and stagnant economy and its significance as an employer:

»Is it not the dream of every parent to place his child somewhere in the public sector (and the municipal government)? Is it not the dominant philosophy to have a job in the public sector (for relaxation) and work in the evening (in the private and ›black‹ economy)?« (Epaminondas, 14:19:11, Oct. 14)

Some respondents see the »Greek mentality« as an inevitable outcome of Greek institutions:

»The good, mild-mannered Greeks from abroad whom I knew for a [short] period of time upon returning to Greece changed their behaviour and followed the system.« (Evan, self-identified as a Greek living abroad, 03:50:41, Oct. 16)

Thus, participants construct the overwhelming figure of the »bad Greek mentality« and the »bad Greek«, whereas the figure of the »Greek« turns out to be split in the construction of the »bad Greek« inside and the »good Greek« outside of Greece. The Greeks inside Greece with the above described »mentality« are, for the respondents, ultimately responsible for the crisis. In an angry mode, George, referring to the Greek people, writes:

»The way in which you make your demands reveals the quality of your character. You represent the peak of the most self-serving behaviour; the worst humankind has ever produced!!! This pertains to public servants, but also some private businessmen and professionals (those in the ›closed‹ professions).« (George, 00:10:00, Oct. 16)

Indeed, there is a long list of criticisms and insults directed against particular categories of privileged professions, also some outside the public sector, less privileged occupations within the public sector (e.g. civil servants, teachers, garbage collectors, those in contractually limited positions who expect a permanent position, doctors who demand money from their patients on top of their salaries), state organizations in Greece (e.g. electricity companies) and public employee unions.

The readers' rage against the Greek »mentality« culminates in strong abusive epithets. These are combined with racist language referring to the »hated other«. George, who has already left Greece, is advising others to do the same. He is extremely angry:

»This is Greece! Yunanistan! Poor Kostas' wife! This is Greece! The land of Vlachs, of ›manges‹ and of ancient ancestors! Geographically in Europe, but in terms of culture between the Middle East and the Balkans, during ›real existing socialism‹ [...] poor fools! We thought that the Gypsies became Europeans!!!« (George, 19:03:16, Oct. 14)

By calling Greece »Yunanistan«, i.e. in the Turkish language, the writer equates Greeks with Turks, whereas, in the dominant ideology, Turks are the prototypes of the uncivilized enemy. He equates also Greeks with Vlachs and Gypsies, in the dominant ideology, the prototypes of the uncivilized ethnic minority in the country. The expression »Psorokostena« – literally translated »poor Kostas' wife« alluding to the

countryside and meaning someone who is worth nothing but not aware of this – is also used to underline the condemnation of the Greek »mentality«. Linguistic elements of self-hate in Greek slang, which degrade Greek »mentality« and Greek people as shown above, provide evidence that the mental structure of self-hate is not something completely new, but latent in normal circumstances. The self-hate is interconnected with complex and contradictory elements of the Greek identity as it developed along with the constitution of the Greek state in the 19th century (Herzfeld 2003 [1995]).

In the midst of the dramatic breakdown of normality experienced in the crisis and especially under conditions of widespread misrepresentations of the self, the lack of a mental structure that could help make sense of the unprecedented disintegration of society boosts self-hate. Such a positive mental structure would allow an explanation of the social disintegration and the losses accompanying it in terms of, for example, the deficits of the single currency in the Eurozone, without the need to utilize concepts and attitudes of self-hate.

Only very few combine the argument for staying with a critique of the generalized condemnation of Greeks. These few seem to counter the misrepresentations of the Greek state and the Greeks in a decisive way. Their – not very loud – voices try to refute the media campaign about the Greek mentality, Greeks being unwilling to pay taxes or being lazy with the statement: »this is not Greece!«<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [www.kampnagel.de/de/programm/this-is-not-greece](http://www.kampnagel.de/de/programm/this-is-not-greece).

## 4 Concluding Remarks: Overcoming the Crisis – Escaping the Crisis?

The four themes of discussion identified in our analysis of the online forum under consideration in this paper address various aspects of the re-elaboration of respondents' positioning in the world, in response to the breakdown of their everyday life normality, engineered by the economic, social, political and moral crisis in Greece. More specifically, the first theme, consisting of various statements and counter-statements on the clientelistic state and social violence in Greece, primarily involves normative work by the respondents. The second theme of physical exit as an escape route, the assessment of possible alternatives, justifications of positions adopted by various respondents, expectations and reality checks (of those respondents with relevant experience from living abroad), primarily involves biographical work, intertwined however with normative work and identity re-negotiation. The third theme, the »civil war« metaphor and its emerging implications, primarily involves normative work, intertwined with biographical work and identity re-negotiation. Finally, the fourth theme addresses the political representations and new constructions of Greeks and their consequences, both abroad and also internally, in terms of the reinforcement of self-hate with historical roots. This primarily involves identity re-negotiation intertwined with normative work elements.

Our analysis has confirmed that the Greek debt crisis after 2010 has been experienced by the middle classes, whose position has become precarious, as a far-reaching breakdown of normality. This has brought insecurity for many of the online forum respondents who belong to the well-educated middle classes. The broad use of the »civil war« metaphor explicates the magnitude of the breakdown of the social fabric and the loss of elementary feelings of security. The civil war metaphor is at the same time embedded in the deep ideological cleavages produced by the Civil War of 1946–1949, and yearns for an answer as to which social categories and classes the Civil War parties are and the guilt of specific social categories for the current crisis. Public servants, politicians, and trade unionists are broadly named, showing that for the participants, there are clear images of the »enemy« on the other side.

There are only very few references to the lenders and the »Memoranda of Understanding« as actors of and in the crisis and these few references are not appealing to the other respondents and do not lead to further discussion. There is a nearly exclusive emphasis on the internal pathologies of Greek society. The state, the political parties, the civil servants, and the trade unions, as well as the »Greek mentality« are the actors and factors responsible for economic decline. Current policies that destroy the economy and society are cited as the almost sole responsibility of the Greek state. Other European countries, like Germany and France, are presented either in an idealised manner as »good societies« and »welcoming immigration«, or on the contrary, as not really the paradise they are made out to be for those planning to emigrate and yearning for the

recognition they have lost. In any case these countries are not questioned as to their roles as lenders and central actors in relation to the Greek debt and the austerity policies imposed on the Greek people.

The respondents are expressing their feeling of powerlessness with no hope of improvement. Thus, there is no concrete plea for »voice« (Hirschman 1970), except for the rather abstract counter-plea against emigration expressed in the statement »stay and fight«. There is, however, no reference to appropriate and specific forms of »fighting« except for single references to individual good behaviour like »do your work properly, do not strike, denounce a doctor who receives bribes«, and other similar individual »correct« actions. Collective action seems to be unfamiliar to the »natural sample« of readers of the newspaper under consideration who, on the whole, condemn the protest actions and strikes of social groups as being a hindrance to the life of other citizens. Exiting the country in order to exit the crisis seems to be the main imagined solution in this forum discussion.

A respondent summarized some forms of exit: »to starve, steal, commit suicide, emigrate« (K. M., 17:33:06, Oct. 15). To »steal« refers to the exit from state rules on legitimate exchange; »starve« and »commit suicide« refer to an ultimate exit, and are expressions of desperation in the context of the slipping away of not only material but also psychic and mental resources for action. There is statistical evidence that suicide rates have increased during the crisis in Greece,<sup>17</sup> while physical exit through emigration is practiced by many Greek people, most of them young and well-educated (Cavounidis 2015). In the literature about the crisis in Greece, however, there is reference to another form of »exit«: Another answer of the Greek people to the breakdown of the material conditions of production has been a variety of efforts to restore a minimum of normality through self-organized cooperative structures of exchange of goods, including food, but also health and services (Tsomou 2014). Such self-organized actions might be considered as exit strategies, leaving state policies and market processes aside. Networking and new learning are the main features of these collective efforts. This type of exit does not appear in the discussion in the online forum. The respondents, due to their conservative political positioning, do not seem to be able to perceive or consider collectively organised ways of exit.

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<sup>17</sup> See Truth Committee on Public Debt (2015).

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