"You are not normal, you are against nature": Mediated Representations of Far-right Talk on Same-sex Child Fostering in Greek Parliamentary Discourse

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Abstract

This paper examines the media representations of scandalous parliamentary talk on same-sex child fostering in the discourses of representatives of the radical-right Golden Dawn party in Greece, but also by an MP of the conservative ANEL party of the SYRIZA-ANEL joint government at the time. Through discourse- and conversation analysis of online articles and a broadcast interview, it is shown that the media framing of populist statements is negotiated. Moreover, the interview enacts a subtly achieved interactional synergy between the interviewer and the politician, thus failing to address the issues through substantive public dialogue. It is argued that the process of (re)mediating racist or homophobic talk has the potential to serve as a publicity tool creating increased visibility for right-wing populist politicians, their core ideologies and policy platforms. This creates a challenge for practitioners of journalism who must balance disparate concerns in reporting on scandalous talk.

Keywords: far-right populist discourse, same-sex sexuality, same-sex parenting, media representations, scandalous talk, discursive framing

1. Scandalous talk, right-wing populism, gender and sexuality

In this paper, scandalous talk, i.e. perceived as racist, undemocratic, or homophobic, is seen as one of the discursive features that help enact a populist performative style. This style involves motivated choices among alternative semiotic resources (linguistic/discursive, interactional and visual), which have social and cultural resonance (Ekström et al. 2018). Albeit a controversial concept, populism has been generally perceived as a political discourse, or 'thin-centred ideology', typified by the discursive construction of antagonistic positions between 'the elite' (or the establishment) and 'the people' (Mudde 2007), conceptualised as 'the native people' by right-wing populism (Ekström et al. 2018). Populist style has also been seen as privileging

conflict and crisis as well as the performance of 'bad manners', as in unpolished and incorrect talk (Moffitt 2016).

Abi-Hassan aptly notes that "procedural definitions of populism ignore the substantive and symbolic elements that emerge from a populist gendered discourse" (2017, 426). As a result, gendered discourses by the populist right, or, even more so, discourses on same-sex sexuality and homosexuals' rights remain largely unexplored. For the most part, feminist studies approach the rise of far-right populism in Europe in relation to discursively constructed sexist and racist elements that tend to form "a continuum of normalised culturalist gendered discourses" in different parts of Europe (Vieten 2016, 621).

Mayer et al. (2016) link populist 'gender ideology' to a broader populist (or 'thin-centred') ideology. Tracing the cultural roots of this ideology in the conservative teachings of the Vatican from the 1990s onwards, they see the term 'gender-ideology' as an empty signifier that joins different facets of gender and sexuality together, and rearticulates them in one ostensibly coherent discourse; from women's emancipation, to gender mainstreaming, issues of equality for LGBT, as well as movements against sexual education in schools. Precisely and partly because of its populist character, the authors argue, the discourse on 'gender-ideology' has been successful in raising support for conservative movements among different parts of the population, and also in developing affinities with right-wing populist and extremist discourses that are predicated upon "the existential threats to 'the people' they construct" (ibid).

Similarly, Mayer et al. (2014) uncover significant inconsistencies in the meanings attached to gender and gender equality in populist (re)framings of these terms by right-wing (extremist) parties in Austria. On the one hand, right-wing populists capitalize on the protection of 'the traditional family', being, for instance, against same-sex marriage. On the other hand, these same actors argue against immigration by using contradictory gender arguments, by claiming, for instance, that Muslim men are culturally conditioned to discriminate against women and LGBT people. Thus, while, the fundamental dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them' is a constant for (right-wing) populism, the groups designated to fill these "slots" may differ according to the topic in an on-going process of (re)negotiations of meanings. Finally, Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) explore the intersection of contemporary anti-gender campaigns with the populist right, including debates around joint same-sex child adoption.

Within the broader field of media communication on gender, sexuality and contemporary politics addressed in this special issue, this paper sets out to contribute to a better understanding of the largely under-researched topic of right-wing populist discourses on homosexuals' rights and their mediated representations across different national contexts. More specifically, it examines scandalous populist performances during the 2018 parliamentary policy deliberations on same-sex child fostering in Greece, and the discursive negotiations at work in the media reports circulating in the Greek public sphere in the aftermath of these performances.

1.1 Talk scandals and the mediatization of political discourse

Drawing upon Thompson's (2000) theory of mediated political scandal, Ekström and Johansson (2008; also 2019) introduced the concept of a talk scandal, thus highlighting the importance of media talk for the generation of political scandals. Talk scandals are defined as breaches of norm in which a speech act, namely the talk itself, constitutes the scandal: "the core of a talk scandal is an action that constitutes a transgression of norms, rules or moral codes" (Ekström and Johansson 2008, 62; Ekström and Johansson 2019). These transgressions relate to what people in public office are allowed to say; yet, public criticism and a serious threat to reputation are prerequisites for a statement or speech act to qualify as a talk scandal (ibid).

Talk scandals embody and represent the interplay between politics and the media. The taking over of politics and political discourse by mass media (old and new), also known as the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck 2011) was precipitated by the proliferation and empowerment of mass media, coupled by the progressive decline in partisanship and legitimacy crisis of political parties (Asp and Esaiasson 1996; McNair 2011). These developments have led political institutions and their spokespersons to increasingly rely on media techniques that foreground "front-stage performances" (Forchtner, Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2013, 206). Accordingly, media logic has fast colonized political logic, namely the formulation of ideological claims and arguments (Mazzoleni and Schultz 1999; Meyer 2002).

In this context, politicians maintain themselves in the spot light and are continuously evaluated, criticized, or acclaimed, partly in relation to their mediated speech performances. In fact, increased visibility of politicians is a mixed blessing: it creates the conditions for enhancing reputation and gaining power, but also poses a threat to the politician's public image and can damage reputation and symbolic power (Ekström and Johansson 2019). As part of journalism's professional routines in the traditional and new media, utterances are processed to fit into headlines, soundbites, and dramatized news stories using different quoting techniques (Ekström and Johansson 2008).

Thus, scandalous speech performances by politicians are forms of social practice and also mediatized communicative events. As such, they undergo processes of recontextualisation (Fairclough 1995). The media, that is, take up politicians' newsworthy utterances and variously re-shape them into coherent narratives that are variously disseminated over time across different media and media genres. The media produce particular representations (or discourses) and

transformations, that may differ from other recontextualisations (or framings) of the same events (Fairclough 1995, following van Leeuwen 1993).

Emphasizing the quest for publicity by opposition or pole parties, Strömbäck and Esser (2014) point out "a mutually beneficial symbiosis between audience-oriented political actors and commercially driven media companies" (: 251), which raises a populist challenge to democracy. Likewise, being the building blocks for constructing appealing media narratives, talk scandals can also serve as communicative resources in far-right populist performances. This is because they enact a clean break with established norms and values of the political establishment, while projecting perpetrators as candid, outspoken and defiant of the status quo, even in the face of damaging face or even suffering legal penalties (Patrona 2019). In addition, by disrupting norms of appropriate public discourse, populist leaders can lay claims to voicing 'what the people really think' (see Ekström et al. 2018). Thus, scandalous speech acts may function as a rhetorical *modus persuadendi*, enhancing the speaker's credibility (ethos) with conservative audiences.

However, talk scandals as mediatized events also pertain to the fundamental mission of journalism as public watchdog. Media representatives, that is, are professionally (and ethically) bound to demand accountability from perpetrators of moral transgressions. According to Ekström and Johansson (2019), by embedding voices from the public, but also quotes from other politicians who state that the behaviour of the person in question is morally reprehensible, the media in essence objectify moral standards. In all, public controversy and discontent are staged as key elements in establishing a media scandal (cf. Thompson 2000), and journalists must balance often disparate – and ethically conflicting – concerns; on the one hand, the task of treating the moral transgression as newsworthy and bringing it to public scrutiny with envisaged consequences for the perpetrator, and, on the other, providing populist political actors with a public forum, by creating increased visibility and publicity for racist, undemocratic and fringe voices, their parties and political platforms. Finally, journalists must balance their personal ideological affiliations or those of the media organizations they represent against ethical standards of journalistic balance and impartiality.

Despite the existing theorization on political talk scandals, the performance and representation of scandalous talk on sexuality and gender is largely unexplored. This paper focuses on scandalous political performances on policy agendas relevant to homosexuals' rights by right-wing populist politicians of radical-right [1]Golden Dawn (GD) and Independent Greeks (ANEL) in Greece, and on the discursive negotiations taking place in the recontextualisation (or re-mediation) of these scandalous statements in on-line and broadcast news.

2. Method and data

On May 9 2018, legislation was passed in the Greek Parliament allowing same-sex partners who are in civil partnerships to become foster parents. Though still not providing for adoption by gay people, the groundbreaking legislation was passed by 161 votes to 103. Expectedly, article 8 on foster parenting by same-sex couples, sparked [2]controversy and turmoil both within the ruling SYRIZA party and between SYRIZA and opposition parties. Most notably, the bill also divided SYRIZA and its right-wing coalition partner, Independent Greeks (ANEL).

Drawing upon discourse analysis of spoken and written talk, as well as conversation analysis of one televised interview on the commercial ANT1 channel, the following section will examine the discursive realisations and mediated representations of scandalous performances on article 8 articulated in the Greek Parliament in May 2018. More specifically:

- The linguistic and rhetorical design of the original scandalous utterance
- The journalistic framing of scandalous talk in its subsequent recontextualisations in the online press as evidenced in the reporting language used and overall journalistic evaluation.
- The interpersonal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewed politician and the attendant negotiation of accountability in the ANT1 interview.

The data corpus consists of 30 on-line articles from major news and current affairs portals and newspapers, such as in.gr, enikos.gr, newsbeast.gr, eleftherostypos.gr, naftemporiki.gr, protothema.gr, cnn.gr, and lifo.gr. Many of these belong to media groups with a strong multi-media presence in Greece; for instance, the media group of Enikos.gr under the ownership of Greek journalist and media entrepreneur Nikos Chatzinikolaou; Likewise antenna.gr and skai.gr are the web portals of mainstream TV and radio stations.

The following section will examine the discursive orchestration of different (political and journalistic) voices in media reports that variously ascribe - or not - moral accountability to talk scandal perpetrators. As this study shows, though far-right populist politicians are often at the origin of scandalous talk on same-sex sexuality, homophobic discourses may also emanate from politicians in the political mainstream, thus helping to build discursive (and ideological) alliances across the conservative political spectrum.

3. Media framing of scandalous talk on child fostering by same sex-couples in Greece

The production and media uptake of scandalous parliamentary performances by spokespersons of Golden Dawn has been previously examined in relation to undemocratic talk, such as the call

for a military coup to overthrow the democratically elected government by GD MP, K. Barbaroussis (Patrona 2019). However, not all talk scandals are framed similarly by the on-line press and the media at large. This section will show that the framing of scandalous performances on article 8 of the bill allowing for same-sex child fostering by different sections of the press was negotiated or mixed, ranging from overtly critical to positive, with neutral reporting in between.

More specifically, on-line press reports:
a) Bluntly condemned the declarations as extreme, homophobic talk,
b) Engaged in neutral reporting of the contested statements and their aftermath, thus indirectly positioning the talk within the sphere of legitimate controversy (Hallin 1986), and
c) Indirectly aligned with the expressed views against article 8.

On 8 May 2017, in the course of the Parliamentary discussion of article 8, Ilias Kasidiaris, MP and media spokesperson for Golden Dawn, took the floor on the Parliament podium to say the following:

Extract (1)
"you are not normal, you are against nature"
(K: GD MP; MPs: Parliament MPs; P: President of the Greek Parliament; GD: GD MPs)

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 1 B     …SYRIZA is voting for nation-annihilating laws. We're
 2       talking about the ultimate decadence, the final breakup
 3       of everything, the absolute degeneration. The normal is
 4       what is being developed according to nature, in nature
 5       different sex couples have the possibility to reproduce
 6       – ((to SYRIZA MPs)) If today you are making a law for
 7       same-sex individuals to adopt children, you are not
 8       normal, you are against nature – the aim is dissolving
 9       the family which is the basic cell of the national
10       state – your aim is to dissolve the core of the
11       society, to tear down national state, a classic
12       globalization plan which only GD resists
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The characterizations "not normal" and "against nature" that were directly addressed to government lawmakers (lines 7-8) caused severe public stir, yet, in contrast to the uniformly dismissive stance of the media in previous talk scandals instigated by GD, this time they provoked mixed reactions. In fact, part of the press positioned against article 8 praised the far-right MP for being forthright and outspoken.

To illustrate this, the editorial from 'Crash Online' magazine is entitled [3]"Kasidiaris ((idiom.)) made no bones ((about article 8))! "SYRIZA wants to break up family" ("*Έξω από τα δόντια τα είπε ο Κασιδιάρης! «Ο ΣΥΡΙΖΑ θέλει να διαλύσει την οικογένεια»*"). By using the idiomatic

expression («έξω από τα δόντια τα είπε») to report the MP's position, combined with expressive punctuation (!) and direct speech, the article author readily adopts the stance and tone of the radical-right speaker. In its main body, the editorial mainly consists of direct quotes from Kasidiaris's speech, while the MP's position is highlighted through the reporting clause used ("…*didn't just stay at that, but he also accused* …):

"*Yet Mr. Kasidiaris didn't just stay at that, but he ((also)) accused SYRIZA of exercising racism against all those thinking in normal terms* ...".

The article thus includes additional points developed by Kasidiaris, to the effect that the government (SYRIZA) are treating those "*thinking in normal terms*" in racist ways.

Another publication entitled [4]"Kasidiaris: the bill on ((child)) fostering is against nature" simply reports a summary of Kasidiaris's talk relayed as direct speech, without explicitly taking a stance for or against it: "*SYRIZA is voting for nation-annihilating laws*", denounces the Golden Dawn MP. However, a journalistic stance in favour of the MP is implicit in the reporting verb chosen "denounces" ('*καταγγέλει*'). Another title reads: [5]"*Kasidiaris to SYRIZA MPs: you are non-normal*". The article's subheading is a direct quote from another, highly contested, extract from Kasidiaris's speech: "when the child is asked who will get the ((school)) marks and he says "Lakis", then Lakis will be a bald guy". Far from taking issue with the MP's statement, the article merely relays the scandalous talk.

In contrast to the above, another section of the on-line press takes a stance directly opposing Kasidiaris's talk: Consider the title [6]"*Incredible racist rant of Ilias Kasidiaris in Parliament: "Against nature" the SYRIZA MPs*". The description "racist rant" intensified by the adjective "incredible" openly labels the MP's statements racist. The term "rant" (in Greek «*παραλήρημα*»), as in "fascist rant", is recurrent in the online articles that negatively frame scandalous talk by radical right speakers (see Patrona 2019). With the choice of "went off track" and "racist sewer", the subheading rhetorically augments the oppositional framing: "*Ilias Kasidiaris completely "went off track" in Parliament, during his proposal on the child-fostering bill, breaking down in a racist sewer against the SYRIZA MPs*".

Finally, another title labels the controversial statements as: [7]"*A rant competition in Parliament*" followed by the subheading: "*Kasidiaris characterized the SYRIZA MPs as non-normal, while ANEL's Katsikis got jealous of Golden Dawn's glory and claimed that homosexuality is a crime.*"

The journalist's stance is evident in the choice of "*went off track*", here too, the ironic reference to the ANEL MP's statements ("*got jealous of Golden Dawn's glory*"), and the use of colloquial language (the verb '*γουστάρει*' / likes to); finally, in the reported view, which is attributed to

third parties (those inside the Parliament) yet endorsed to the effect that Kasidiaris has a psychiatric disorder: "*Kasidiaris ((coll.)) likes to provoke, but yet another time he went off track, doing justice to those inside the Parliament who claim that he is in need of psychiatric monitoring*".

It is clear, therefore, that one section of the Greek press treated the scandalous statements as being in the sphere of deviance, to use Daniel C. Hallin's conceptualisation of the three concentric ideological spheres (consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance), within which journalistic news coverage positions public events (Hallin 1986). Yet, even the online articles that strongly position themselves against the GD spokesperson's view, characterizing it as "racist" or "homophobic rant" contain extensive direct quotes from the original talk scandal.

The titles, subtitles and extracts from the online articles above are indicative of the potential for high visibility of talk scandals in the media, as they provide a constant source of media narratives that are built upon high news value, quotable statements. One common reporting technique used in the articles is reporting a summary, or gist of the speaker's talk as a direct quote within inverted commas. This means that the journalistic editing that has taken place is invisible to the reader. Importantly, the more detached or reportorial modes of reporting on the scandalous talk are evidence of journalism treating the scandalous statements as being within the sphere of legitimate controversy (ibid), with journalists adopting a position of journalistic impartiality.

The last article discussed above highlights another scandalous statement on article 8, this time by an MP of the conservative Independent Greeks (ANEL) party, in fact a government partner of SYRIZA and member of the SYRIZA-ANEL [8]joint government at the time. Kostas Katsikis ideologically aligned himself with the Golden Dawn spokesperson Kasidiaris, giving voice to yet another talk scandal along the same, homophobic, line of thought. His scandalous parliamentary declaration (extract 2 below) provoked widespread public outcry, and the MP was called to account both on television and radio:

Extract (2)

"Love of pedophilia is a crime, why should homosexuality be any different?"

(A: K. Katsikis, ANEL MP)

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1 B     … the homosexuality supporters say that love has no
2       limits. Of course it has no limits. Yet the issue is
3       where it is directed at. Love of money leads to greed
4       it is a sin. The love of a father for his daughter
5       which is different from fatherly love is a crime – Love
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6        of pedophilia is a crime, why should homosexuality be
7        any different?
         ((lines omitted))
8        we are afraid of saying what we believe - not me -
9        because we are afraid that we will be trolled and that
10       we will be decorated with characterizations and we will
11       be sued like I was sued by the ¹Helsinki
12       Observatory((Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights -
13       HFHR)) observatory - it is a ((arch.)) shame to express
14       your view if it doesn't fit theirs
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Note that the argument developed by the government MP (lines 1-14) directly equates homosexuality with criminal sexual behaviour, namely incest (4) and pedophilia (5-6). What is more, he calls attention to his outspoken verbal behaviour (`we are afraid of saying what we believe - not me`, 8), and portrays himself as defiant of fear in freely expressing his views (13-14). His use of the inclusive 'we' could refer to his party members or right-wing politicians in general. Note the subtle construction of the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy ("`if it doesn't fit theirs`", 14), that is typical in populist discourses of 'othering'.

The politician's declaration against issues of liberal thought that might be otherwise categorised as 'political correctness' (PC), echoes Sparrow's (2002) view about the existence of a dominant discourse of the Right set in reaction to the perceived hegemony of a feminist, gay and anti-racist politics and attempt by the Left to silence dissenting political opinion (see also Cameron 1995 about anti-PC discourse). The perceived attempt by the "Moral Majority" (Hall 1994, 165) to prescribe what can and cannot be said is cast as language policing (ibid), and set in opposition to freedom of speech (see Talbot 2007).

In the Parliament Plenary, the president of the DHMAR party commented on Katsikis's statement as "statements that come from a dark past … we expected such a rhetoric from Golden Dawn, but it came from your government partner" (see note 6 for reference). When replaying the extract from the Parliament speech, the official state-owned Parliament channel ran the screen title "*homophobic rant by MP K. Katsikis inside the Parliament*".

The MP subsequently tried to qualify his statement portraying himself as a victim of misinterpretation. In the 'Good morning Greece' talk show on ANT1 channel (extracts 3 and 4), Katsikis denied the accusations of equating homosexuality with pedophilia. In the next extract, the host introduces the news item on the problematic MP statement, by unequivocally placing it

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[1] Reference to the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR), a non-governmental organization involved in the protection of human rights in Europe. Katsikis was sued by the HFHR for hate rhetoric against social groups on account of homophobic statements that the MP made in Parliament in December 2016.

within the sphere of legitimate controversy (as opposed to the sphere of deviance). He achieves this by stressing that the programme has received "ma::ny" phone calls that both agree and disagree with the contested statement (5,7). Thus, he both makes explicit the public impact of the statement that has captured the attention of citizens, and also distances himself from the talk scandal in a typically impartial (or "neutralistic", see Clayman and Heritage 2002) manner.

Extract (3)

"you started fires"

(H: program host; J1: in-house journalist; J2: in-house journalist; A: K. Katsikis, ANEL MP)

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 5 H    ((to J)) we have ma::ny phone calls that agree,
 6 J    mmmm,=
 7 H    = and many phone calls that disagree,
 8      (.)
 9      with what the MP of Independent Greeks M – Mr.
10      Katsikis, said yesterday in Parliament – let's hear a
11      short extract
12 J1   yes
        ((taped extract from K's parliamentary statement))
14 H    with us, the MP of Independent Greeks, Kostas Katsikis
15      – ((to A)) you started fires again =
16 A    = good morning
17 J2   good morning =
18 H    = you started fires - Mr. Katsikis,(.) let me pose the
19      question dir -directly – everyone can have their
20      viewpoint (1.0) .hhh you are a spokesperson of Greek
21      Parliament (.) were by any chance your views much too:
22      harsh? (.) .hhh because - the issue of homosexuality,
23      (0.1) we will neither discuss it in this program,(0.1)
24      nor is it an i:ssue tha:t (.) if you like can create a
25      taboo in the Gree:k (.) it's a reality (.) either you
26      accept it or you don't accept it it is a reality –
27      ((raised pitch)) here we have ((nation)) states that
28      have - a homosexual prime minister (.) who in fact has
29      had his wedding (.) in public too (.) and he has
30      presented himself with his sweetheart
31      (0.1)
32 A    ((low volume)) can I start with a complaint Mr>>
33 H                    [ ((you can)) start]
34 A    >>Papadakis? [Do you allow me?] =
35 H    = please =
36 A
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37       = ((lines omitted)) you:, ((have been)) tried for many
38       years, distinguished and loved journalist, and dear to
39       all of us, .hhh shou:ld not have only focused on this
40       extract, but should have watched with atte:ntion,(.)
41       the whole of my speech, which had a time duration, of
         nine minutes (.)
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On lines 14-15 and 18, the host frames his initial question to the MP by referring to the public controversy instigated by the latter's statement, thus foregrounding the conflict frame ("you started fires again"). This is a typical media framing adopted in the production of news, supplying evidence for the fact that "the media have a vested interest in conflict" (Putnam and Shoemaker 2007, 1; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, and Boumans 2011). In lines 18-30, the host develops an elaborate question turn, which despite professing to ask a direct question (18-18), performs a number of different actions:

1. States that everyone is entitled to having an opinion on the topic of homosexuality (19-20)
2. Highlight's the talk scandal perpetrator's public office as an MP (20-21)
3. Phrases the question in markedly polite and cautious terms ("were by any chance your views much too: harsh?", 21-22)
4. Goes on to provide an extensive warrant for the characterization "much too: harsh" by casting homosexuality as a fact of life (22-26).
5. Refers to the example of (unnamed) nation states with (similarly unnamed) homosexual prime ministers, who have been so open about their sexual orientation as to have a public wedding and to be seen in public with their "sweetheart" («με τον καλό του», 30).

The interviewer thus appears relatively tolerant of the scandalous statement, as, in his question preface, he hedges the perlocutionary effect of the MP's talk; rather than casting it as directly offensive to homosexuals, the host merely wonders (instead of, e.g. asserting) whether the politician's statement has been "too harsh", and refrains from incorporating a more explicit criticism in his question design. The adjective 'harsh', that is, does not convey a moral assessment of the politician's verbal behaviour, thus mitigating the quest for moral accountability underlying his questioning. In fact, the exchange is part of an ostensible accountability interview of the talk scandal perpetrator (see accountability interviewing, Montgomery 2007).

Rather than answering the question, the politician asks for permission to first respond with a complaint (32, 34), which the host instantly grants ("((you can)) start", "please", 33,35). In what follows (36-41), the reproached politician develops an elaborate eulogy of the celebrity interviewer as a "distinguished and loved journalist, and dear to all of us,"; In this praise, he embeds an indirect criticism/complaint to the journalist for

having "only focused on this extract", and proposes instead that the host "should have watched with atte:ntion" (38-39) the whole of his 9-minute long speech (42-44).

The elaborate phrasing of the politician's response is an example of a subtly achieved synergy between himself and the journalist at the interactional level, which enacts and re-affirms the "mutually beneficial symbiosis" between politics and the media (Strömbäck and Esser 2014, 251).

Continuing his talk (extract 4), the MP attempts to afford an explanation for the contested statement. First, he denies the wrongdoing attributed to him, by referring back to the onset of his parliamentary proclamation, where he allegedly asserted every individual's right to freedom of sexual orientation:

Extract (4)
"they distorted the truth and mistreated reality"

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 1 A    so the first thing that I started saying, is that I
 2       respe:ct, every person's right, in the field of sexual
 3       orientation (0.1) and of course, of homosexuals too (.)
 4       following that, my statement, that you very mildly
 5       characterized as harsh, because some others you know
 6       what they said? and thank you for the difference you
 7       are making, you know what they said? that I identified
 8       homosexuality with pedophilia – mercy Mr. Papadakis =
 9 H    = that was the title in most sites =
10 A    = in most sites (.) me:rcy (.) and I seize the
11       opportunity, through your hospitable program, to
12       discredit them, to tell them that they distorted the
13       truth and mistreated reality, becau:se I didn't make
14       any ((such)) identification, I wo:ndered in the end,
15       after I said (.) if fatherly love isn't fatherly love,
16       (.) then isn't this love a sin? a:nd – the pedophiles
17       could claim – that they have the same love – that's
18       exactly what I said – a:nd in any case, this means, a
19       monstrous sin (.)and it is also prosecuted by criminal
20       law
         ((lines omitted))
21       how much love can these people have, in order to be
22 H    able to raise, (.) children, given that (0.1)
23 A    ((raised pitch)) [they have:,(.) the sexual] ability>>
24 H                     [yet who will judge it]
25 A    >> and activity, to reproduce,=
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26        = who will =
27        = to perpetuate their species, yet they don't do it,
28        maybe in order not to breach the - homosexuality
29        protocol? and they want, to take the children of
30        others? depriving a heterosexual couple of the
31        possibility of adopting, because these people the
32        heterosexuals they tried to have a child and they
33        didn't manage (.) they didn't manage -
          ((lines omitted))
35        but distortion and mistreatment, I resent- and thank
36        you for giving me the opportunity, [to explain exactly]
37 H                                        [yet]
38        the connection that you attempted - exactly as you
39        meant it (.) between homosexuality and pedophilia, =
40 A      = no: connection =
41 H      = connotatively leads to the: righ [- to the: r->>
42 J2                              [((unintelligible phrase))]
43 H      >> right? to th - rather gives the viewer the right to
44        make connotations, that you connect them =
45 A      = misinterpretations and paraphrases -
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On line 4, the politician topicalizes the term "harsh" from the host's previous question, claiming that this was in fact a mild characterization by the host compared to the ones attributed to his statement by other media (4-6), while, again, taking the chance to thank the host for framing his statement in a different light (6-7). Through a direct question to the host, he then casts the media reports on the contested statement as journalistic fabrication ("you know what they said? that I identified homosexuality with pedophilia", 7-8), and goes on to express his indignation: «έλεος κύριε Παπαδάκη» ("mercy Mr. Papadakis", 8-10). The interviewer confirms the critical media uptake of the politician's parliament statement (9).

Again, the partial repetition of the host's utterance by the politician in the next line ("that was the title in most sites"), followed by a repetition of the emotional exclamation ("me:rcy", 10) by the MP signal a collaborative interactional stance between the host and the politician, who is -at least theoretically - called to publicly account for his words. In what follows, the MP develops a mini-speech, in an attempt to clarify his point of view on homosexuality and same-sex child fostering.

Remarkably, not only does the host give the conservative MP ample speaking time to explain himself, but also actively provides him with a favourable interactional platform: his one and only attempt at interrupting the politician's ongoing argument ("yet who will judge it", lines 24-26) is only minimally enacted. The argument questions the love that homosexuals can

actually offer to children on the basis that, although they have the ability to procreate, they do not! Yet, the host's interjection does not end with the politician yielding the floor.

In fact, nowhere in the excerpt does the host challenge the MP's statement as being openly scandalous or insulting to homosexuals. Instead, the government representative is allowed to simply reiterate his original parliament statement with different phraseology. Note that on no occasion does the host – or, for that matter, the two in-house journalists that are present in the interview– challenge the homophobic discourse of 'othering' and exclusion that forms the premises, or logical propositions, underlying the MP's talk:

- Homosexuals cannot offer adequate love to children because, despite having the ability "`to perpetuate their species`", they have chosen not to have their own children.
- Homosexuals do not have children of their own in an attempt to not "`breach the - homosexuality protocol?`"
- By being given the right to foster children, homosexuals deprive heterosexual couples, who "`tried to have a child and they didn't manage`", of the possibility to "adopt" children.

On lines 35-36, the politician protests against the "`distortion and mistreatment`" that his statement was allegedly subjected to by the press, before thanking the host once more for giving him the opportunity to clarify his position. To this, the host responds with yet another attempt to critically question the implied equation between homosexuality and pedophilia, prefaced with "`yet`" (37). Notably, his statement is phrased in similarly cautious terms, hence the use of the adverb "connotatively" and the noun "connotations", suggesting that, rather than having established a direct equation of homosexuality to pedophilia, the politician's attempted link between the two was only indirect, and *might* lead the viewer to infer that the ANEL MP is in fact connecting the two concepts.

What is more, rather than formulating an unattributed or even personal criticism, the journalist attributes the view to a third party, namely the absent viewer, again thus distancing himself from the criticism (see Clayman 2007). Finally, the interviewer's false starts (41, 43) are evidence of his reticence in formulating what is perceivably a challenge to the politician's position. The politician responds to the implied criticism by forcefully denying the attributed association, again, casting it as a distortion of his statement by the media ("`no: connection`", 40; "`misinterpretations and paraphrases`", 45).

The MP's attempt to qualify his original statement and denial of the accusations can be viewed as an instance of elaborate double-voicing, namely the linguistic strategies (use of politeness, hedging, meta-comment, qualification, etc.) used by speakers to ward off potential threat in the

face of criticism (Baxter 2014); here, the critical 'others' are the media and liberal public opinion (or the 'Moral Majority') set against the politician's parliamentary declaration. The MP's double-voicing cuts across the functions identified by Baxter (2014, 4-10): It is at the same time anticipatory, corrective, mitigating and dialogic as a means of restoring the politician's public image, while warding off (further) criticism. This is achieved through the qualifying of the original statement, while using meta-commentary to (re)frame his position as one of respect for freedom of sexual orientation. What is more, following Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of double-voicing as inextricably connected to the institutional workings of power through discourses (ibid, 19), the politician's talk can be viewed as having an authoritative function (ibid), namely that it covertly enacts the power to essentially re-affirm his initial position against homosexuals while, at the same time, catering for public criticism.

Extracts 3 and 4 are embedded as a click-on video in an online report of the incident on the ANT1 channel proprietary web site. The article is entitled [9]"*Katsikis on ANT1: I don't equate homosexuality with pedophilia (video)*", while the subtitle reads "*For one more time, he referred to the misinterpretation of his statement. "Fire" by SYRIZA MPs*".

In the title, subtitle and main body of the article, the channel, therefore, chooses to foreground the MP's disclaimer of the morally reprehensible identification of homosexuality with pedophilia. The title relays the gist of the MP's studio talk in the form of direct speech. The qualification "for one more time" at the onset of the subtitle, stresses the repeated denial of the moral misdemeanour by the perpetrator, thus subtly pointing to the vehemence of his emotions, potentially, as a sign of candour. The subtitle goes on to report the critique of the statement by government MPs in a laconic, verbless clause, which metaphorically alludes to the ANEL MP as being "under fire" by the government: "Fire" by SYRIZA MPs".

In the main body, journalistic balance and impartiality are conveyed through the adoption of a reportorial mode of narration, hence the reporting verb 'said' in "*The Independent Greeks MP said on the ANT1 morning show of Giorgos Papadakis that he respects every person's choice in the field of sexual determination*".

In sum, the channel's online report adopts a journalistically neutral mode of reporting on the talk scandal and its aftermath, choosing to foreground the MP's position against same-sex child fostering, and disclaimer of the original scandalous statement. Here, too, there is no journalistic evaluation whatsoever regarding the offensive nature of the statement, or its implications for the quality of public dialogue on the controversial law. Finally, the article chooses to focus on the conflict frame, reporting that the MP has come under "fire" by his government partners of the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition.

4. Conclusions

This paper has shown that the media uptake of far-right scandalous talk on child fostering by same sex couples during the 2018 Parliamentary deliberations in Greece was mixed, ranging from openly dismissive, to neutral and positive. It is argued that the negotiated media framing attested in the on-line reports can contribute to the normalization of far-right populist discourses and ideologies, with the potential of mainstreaming fringe right-wing parties and policies. By virtue of the role of media as *echo chambers* of far-right populist performances, scandalous talk has the potential to rally party supporters, but also politically dissatisfied and conservative citizens in general around divergent or deviant ideologies and 'voices'.

Interestingly, no public apology was offered in the aftermath of these parliamentary performances and in light of the negative media reports. The publicity potential of extremist, undemocratic, or racist talk is evident in media meta-commentary that calls attention to the communicative intentionality of such statements as resources aimed at enlisting the support of conservative audiences, and also in the rare cases where the media engage in [11]self-critical commentary on their role in supplying fringe political personalities with a public platform to the detriment of rational political debate.

In the case of controversial issues, such as article 8 on child-fostering by same sex couples, it was shown that positive reporting in on-line platforms and in broadcast news may indeed offer a supportive environment by highlighting and legitimating the 'scandalous' perspective, and may even provide space for populist counterattacks on media for publishing critical reports of the talk scandal. Furthermore, it is argued that even non-critical, or formally neutral, modes of journalistic reporting may also work in the direction of normalising homophobic right-wing discourses, as they indirectly position this type of talk as a legitimate controversy in the public domain.

This article is not meant as a comprehensive analysis of far-right populist discourses on same-sex sexuality in Greece; rather, it is intended as an illustrative case study on the negotiated media framings and representations of political statements that could be unequivocally framed as talk scandal in other European mediated settings, with potentially serious repercussions for the political career of the perpetrators and requiring immediate remedy (e.g. a public apology or even removal from the political party). Thus, variations in the degree and type of media coverage are expected to exist as a result of differing sociocultural attitudes and values. Cross-cultural comparative research can shed light on differences and similarities in the mediatization of scandalous political talk on same-sex sexuality and homosexuals' rights.

By looking at the original statements and their journalistic re-mediations, this article calls attention to the challenge faced by contemporary journalism, regarding the choices, including

discursive choices, that journalists make in reporting on and recycling populist discourses and agendas against gay/lesbian rights. In essence, the challenge consists in weighing the central journalistic mission of bringing moral transgression (offensive, racist, or homophobic talk) and its perpetrators to public scrutiny, against the risk of providing a public forum or *echo chamber* for far-right populist discourses. Arguably, what is at stake in the journalistic quest for attention-seeking or shocking statements is, at least to some extent, compromising liberal calls and equal rights movements for homosexuals, including joint same-sex parenting.

Practitioners of journalism need to reflect on the implications of the mediated representations of these populist discourses for "forming coalitions across the right-wing political spectrum" (Mayer, Ajanovic, and Sauer 2016), and also for consolidating ideologies of normality and 'otherness' across conservative audiences.

Notes

[1] At the time, radical-right Golden Dawn had already consolidated its position as third parliamentary party in three consecutive national elections. Despite its Neo Nazi background, in its official public performances in the Greek Parliament and in the media, GD have consistently tried to downplay their Neo Nazi profile. In the latest legislative election of 2019, GD failed to secure the minimum threshold to enter the Greek parliament.

[2] 'Historic same-sex foster parenthood law passes, but divides parties in parliament' https://www.in.gr/2018/05/09/english-edition/historic-sex-foster-parenthood-law-passes-divides-parties-parliament/ (date posted: 9 May 2018)

[3] 'Kasidiaris ((idiom.)) made no bones ((about article 8))! "SYRIZA wants to break up family'. https://www.crashonline.gr/politiki/1138680/ekso-apo-ta-dontia-ta-eipe-o-kasidiaris-o-syriza-thelei-na-dialysei-tin-oikogeneia/ (date posted: 8 May 2018)

[4] 'Kasidiaris: the bill on ((child)) fostering is against nature' https://www.inewsgr.com/267/kasidiaris-to-nomoschedio-gia-tin-anadochi-einai-para-fysin.htm (date posted: 8 May 2018).

[5] 'Kasidiaris to SYRIZA MPs: you are non-normal". https://www.newsbeast.gr/politiki/arthro/3578049/kasidiaris-se-vouleftes-tou-siriza-iste-mi-fisiologiki (date posted: 8 May 2018).

[6] 'Incredible racist rant of Ilias Kasidiaris in Parliament: "Against nature" the SYRIZA MPs'. http://www.epikairo.com/apistefto-ratsistiko-paralirima-tou-ilia-kasidiari-sti-vouli-para-fysi-i-vouleftes-tou-syriza/ (date posted: 8 May 2018).

[7] 'A rant competition in Parliament' https://www.iapopsi.gr/diagonismos-paralirimaton-stin-voyli/ (date posted: 9 May 2018).

[8] In January 2019, the government coalition disintegrated when the leader of right-wing Independent Greeks (ANEL) announced his leaving the government over the Macedonia issue, namely the parliamentary ratification of the name change of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following the Prespes Agreement.

[9] 'Katsikis on ANT1: I don't equate homosexuality with pedophilia (video)' http://nkv.antenna.gr/news/Politics/article/504020/katsikis-ston-ant1-den-taytizo-tin-omofylofilia-me-tin-paidofilia-binteo- (date posted: 9 May 2018).

[10] "K. Katsikis: "I have friends [who are] homosexuals. – I don't identify homosexuality with pedophilia" https://www.pronews.gr/elliniki-politiki/anel/685279_k-katsikis-eho-filoys-omofylofiloys-den-taytizo-tin-omofylofilia-me (date posted: 9 May 2018)

[11] 'How the media let malicious idiots take over'. George Monbiot. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/22/political-monsters-media-jacob-rees-mogg-platforms (Date posted: 22 March 2019)

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Declaration of interest

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