Constructing Local Identities via/for Humour: A Cretan-Greek Case Study

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To all my friends who originate and/or live in Crete

Abstract. One of the most common functions of humour is the construction of identity, usually achieved by including certain individuals in a group sharing specific values and views, and by excluding others representing different values and views (Archakis and Tsakona, 2005). The aim of the present study is to investigate how online interactants create a local identity via the production of digital humorous texts, thus forming a group of people with common perceptions on a specific event reported by the media. In particular, Facebook participants formed communities supporting the right of a crocodile -non endemic to Greece- to live on the loose in a lake in Crete, Greece, and opposing local authorities wishing to capture the animal. Interlocutors draw on, and reframe, popular -and even stereotypical- aspects of the Cretan identity involving, among other things, a passionate love of freedom, resistance to official authorities, rebelliousness, and heroism (Herzfeld, 1985). Such cultural traits seem to be attributed to the crocodile so as not only to bolster the interlocutors' own perspective, but also to create a humorous effect.
Keywords: humour, online interaction, Facebook, cultural identity, Crete, resistance identity.

1. Introduction

One of the most common functions of humour is the construction of identity, usually achieved by including certain individuals in a group sharing specific values and views, and by excluding others representing different values and views (see among others Archakis and Tsakona, 2005). The focus of interest here is *local identities*, that is, identities built by a group of speakers inhabiting a specific geographical area and sharing certain sociocultural norms and traits perceived as strongly related to that area. Local identities enact the distinction between this group of speakers and other adjacent or more distant ones: "local identity is always conditioned by a dynamic tension between extralocal forces and local traditions"

(Oakes, 1997, p. 66). Thus, a salient feature of local identities often is "resistance to homogenisation" (Iglesias-Álvarez and Ramallo, 2002/2003, p. 257) enabling speakers to react against homogenising pressures exercised by state or supranational authorities.

The aim of the present study is to investigate how humour is employed to construct a local identity, in particular the Cretan one. Crete,

"(...) by far the largest island at the outer, southern edge of the national territory of present-day Greece, regards itself as an idiosyncratic and proudly independent part of the national entity, distinct from it, physically separated from it, but yet endowed with qualities that have made Crete the birthplace of many national leaders in politics, war, and the arts" (Herzfeld, 1985b, p. 6).

The Cretan identity is (stereotypically) associated with resistance against foreign oppressors and state authorities (see Herzfeld, 1985b; 2005, p. 152; Damer, 1988, p. 295; Ball, 2006, pp. 275-276; and relevant references in section 2 below), so it could be considered a suitable locus for exploring *the interplay between humour, the local Cretan culture, and the construction of resistance identities*. More specifically, I will investigate how humour is employed by interlocutors to construct a local identity and simultaneously to express their opposition against authorities and their decisions. The data examined here involve online Facebook interactions and texts concerning the adventures of a crocodile accidentally discovered in a lake in the prefecture of Rethymno in Crete. The incident attracted (international) media attention and gave the opportunity not only to Cretans but also to other Greeks to express their opposition to official authorities and their support for the crocodile. In doing so, they evoked and humorously reframed salient aspects of the Cretan identity, which thus (re)emerged as synonymous to resistance.

So, in what follows, I first discuss the culture of resistance and rebelliousness developed in many parts of Greece and in Crete in particular, as anthropological and sociological research suggests (section 2). Then, in the framework of the discursive construction of identities, I refer to the distinction between *legitimising* and *resistance* identities (Castells, 2010) as well as to the connection between resistance and humour (section 3). Section (4) offers a description of the data examined and an account of the adventures of the crocodile, while section (5) investigates how the humour attested in the data relates to the construction of resistance identities by Facebook participants. The analysis of specific examples from the data is included in section (6), where it is shown how resistance identities are built via humour, in an indirect and/or direct manner. Finally, section (7) summarises the findings of the study and explores further areas of research.

2. The Particularities of the Cretan-Greek Cultural Identity

Anthropological and sociological research suggests that a prominent feature of the Greek culture is *resistance to official authorities*. Resistance practices can be traced back to when areas currently belonging to the Greek state were under Ottoman rule (i.e. before 1830). Greek people living mostly in mountainous, rural areas (but also in urban ones) and coming from underprivileged groups refused to obey rules and laws imposed by the ruling elite, thus preserving their own cultural values and ways of living (Herzfeld, 1985a; 1992, pp. 82, 147; 2001; Damianakos, 2003; Stewart, 2008, pp. 136-137). Exploring the conflicts between the centralised system of the state and the long-established local order(s), Damianakos (2003, p. 11) suggests in particular that the Greek culture of resistance and rebelliousness against official authorities is "inherent in folk behaviour and ideology", as authorities are perceived as *intrusive* in people's everyday lives and practices.

This kind of opposition seems to be directly related to ideals of manhood and personal honour. Men are expected to be brave, strong, aggressive, brutal, keen on physical violence, ready to defend their property, family and friends, and to live underground defying state laws, etc. (Damianakos, 2003, pp. 55-56, 81-82). Such perspectives and cultural values are often expressed in folk songs or other artistic genres based on improvisation and circulating among underprivileged social groups, thus confirming and justifying their opposition to any external imposition on their lives. State bureaucracy and urban, educated elites are thus denigrated and their influence on dominated social groups is questioned and eventually rejected (Herzfeld, 1985b; Damianakos, 2003).

This culture of resistance is so entrenched among Greeks that Herzfeld (1987, p. 124) suggests that Greekness could be considered "as a metaphor for insubordination".[1] Resistance practices developed among Greeks during the Ottoman occupation seem to have survived after the Greek state was created (1830) and have since been targeting official authorities and state bureaucracy (Herzfeld, 1987, pp. 177-179; 1992, p. 147). Herzfeld's (1992, p. 82) research attests to "the existence of a national model of resistance to bureaucracy, which in Greece takes the form of resistance to government in general" (see also Herzfeld, 2001, pp. 20, 22-24; 2005, pp. 119, 152; Hirschon, 2008, p. 283).

Even though Damianakos' (2003) observations refer to cultural practices and folk tradition in mainland Greece, rebelliousness and disobedience have been strongly associated with the island of Crete and its local culture. And although Herzfeld generalises his observations to refer to a Greek "national model of resistance" (see above), his main research area was the town of Rethymno in Central Crete (Herzfeld, 1991; 1999) and a mountain village in the same prefecture (Herzfeld, 1985b; 1996; 2005). There, he investigated, among other things,

[1] On freedom as a key value among Greeks, see also Hirschon (2001; 2008).

manifestations of Cretans' unlawfulness and love for independence. Interestingly, his findings are confirmed by Damer (1988, pp. 295-296) and Trudgill (2008) in their descriptions of people and life in Sfakia, a mountain village in the prefecture of Chania in Western Crete. In a similar vein, Ball (2006, pp. 275-276) maintains that

"Crete has long been associated with a wild, unbridled passion for freedom and the fierce resistance and heroism it takes to achieve or maintain that freedom, so much so that it has become something of a *stereotype*. […] Crete generally has an eccentric image among most Greek people" (my emphasis).

In other words, there seems to be a stereotypical perception of Cretans as the rebellious Greeks *par excellence* and this identity trait is not only sustained by the Cretans themselves but by other Greeks as well (see also Herzfeld, 1985b; 2005, p. 152; Damer, 1988, p. 295). Furthermore, given that resistance and rebelliousness are significant features of what is perceived as Greekness or the Greek identity (see above), Cretans identify themselves as fulfilling the Greek ideal which, in their view, bears no relation to state-imposed rules and "alien" (i.e. non local and hence corrupt) state authorities (Ball, 2003, p. 124).

Rebelliousness and disobedience in contemporary Crete take the form of traffic violations, tax evasion, perjury, bribery, illegal possession and use of guns, arm smuggling, the pursuit of local vendettas, animal theft, etc. (Herzfeld, 1985b; 1991; 1996; 1999, p. 235; 2001, p. 24; 2005, p. 36; 2011, p. 25; Ball, 2003, pp. 211-212; 2006, p. 282; Trudgill, 2008, pp. 97, 221-222). Defying rules is conceptualised by Cretans as a way of enacting local practices and preserving norms and values which have been part of Creteness (and Greekness) for centuries. At the same time, law-defying behaviour is considered typical of the Cretan male. The performance of manhood involves a pronounced love of freedom, an independent and heroic spirit, and the respect for traditional aspects of social life in rural areas (cf. Damianakos, 2003 above).

Important means of conveying Cretans' perspective and local values involves the use of the local dialect, the folk genre of *mandinada* (plur. *mandinades*), humour, and oral narratives recounting local events. The Cretan dialect is among the most distinct Greek dialects in the sense that it exhibits significant differences from standard Greek and from other, non-adjacent dialects. Such differences pertain to all linguistic levels from accent and phonology to syntax and lexicon (see Kontosopoulos, 1988; 2000; Tsakona, 2007; and references therein) as well as to sociopragmatics (Herzfeld, 1985b). It is important to note that, although the influence of standard Greek on Cretans' discourse should not be underestimated, one can still observe a pronounced preference and a salient positive attitude among them towards the use of their dialect: they continue to employ it in their everyday interactions not only with other Cretans on the island, but also with non-Cretans

and/or outside the island (e.g. by switching from Cretan to standard Greek and vice versa). This kind of behaviour attests to Cretans' attempts to resist[1] the normative pressures of standard Greek and the respective sociocultural values (Ball, 2003, p. 206).

Mandinades are 15-syllable rhyming couplets usually performed orally, in the Cretan dialect, during festive occasions, and expressing the Cretan spirit or, in more technical terms, the Cretan identity (Herzfeld, 1985b, pp. 141-148, 269; Dawe, 1996; Ball, 2003; 2006; Trudgill, 2008, pp. 44-45; Sykäri, 2009). Basic aspects of this identity are entextualised in this genre, such as heroism, rebelliousness, love of freedom, honour, bravery, but this does not exclude other topics such as love of (the Cretan) nature and landscape, environmental awareness and sensibility, romance, satire, humour, personal or philosophical views on life. What will prove relevant to the present discussion (in section 6) is that mandinades "reinterpret Cretan rebelliousness and connect Cretan identity with an environmentally-minded place awareness", "promote an ethic of 'the wild' through a particular reading of tradition" (Ball, 2006, p. 276), and "preserve wild, uncompromising, rebellious human emotional practices that resist certain rational and social norms and preserve nature's wild flora and fauna" (Ball, 2006, p. 294). Mandinades are usually performed in informal gatherings as part of songs or oral narratives; more recently, they are recorded and published in collections. Originally they were composed mostly by men as part of the male rebel identity, and their recitation is often accompanied by *lyra*, a musical instrument "inextricably linked to Cretan ideals of manhood" and "emblematic of Crete's heartland" (Dawe, 1996, p. 110; see also Dawe, 2003).

The Cretan identity is also constructed and performed via oral narratives of the Cretan people referring either to local historical events of the (more or less distant) past or to personal experiences. Recurrent topics in such narrative performances involve local people's resistance against historical oppressors (i.e. Venetians, Turks, Germans, state authorities) and their struggles to maintain their local values and independence (Herzfeld, 1985b; 1996; 2005; Ball, 2006, pp. 275-276; Trudgill, 2008). In such narratives Cretans present themselves as proud to have fought against "alien" impositions, irrespective of whether the result of their struggle was a successful one.

Last but not least, an important means for the construction of Cretan identity is humour which is often attested in Cretans' everyday interactions, mandinades, and narratives. Cretans resort to humour, among other things, to resolve the tension they experience between their wish to maintain their own local norms, on the one hand, and the wider social expectations of becoming law-abiding Greek citizens, on the other (Herzfeld, 1985b, pp. xvii, 124, 146-149, 183). As Herzfeld (1985b,

[1] On the use of local linguistic resources to construct resistance identities, see among others Iglesias-Álvarez and Ramallo (2002/2003).

pp. 23-24) suggests, their humour "is forthrightly anticlerical and *antistatist* to a degree unusual in Greece; much of it consists of word plays that make fun of official discourse by revealing its internal contradictions or by turning it against itself" (my emphasis).

In this context, I will try to show how humour enables Facebook participants to construct a Cretan identity not for themselves (as many of them do not seem to originate and/or live in Crete) but for the crocodile which was found in the prefecture of Rethymno. Such an identity helps them justify and reinforce their wish to convince and eventually prevent the authorities from depriving the animal of its freedom, since the Cretan identity evolves around a passionate love of freedom, rebelliousness, heroism, etc. In addition, this identity seems to be most suitable for a crocodile found to live in a Cretan lake. In other words, not only the particularities of the identity but also the place where the events took place have contributed so that Facebook participants considered the Cretan identity as the "only appropriate" for the animal.

3. The Discursive Construction of Opposing Identities

As already implied in section (2), identities are not something people are born with/into, but something they construct via their semiotic behaviour. Discourse and other semiotic resources (e.g. image, music) allow us to signify specific aspects of ourselves, thus including us in specific sociocultural groups and excluding us from others (see among others Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Archakis and Tsakona, 2012; and references therein). As Castells (2010, p. 7) suggests,

"(...) all identities are constructed. The real issue is how, from what, by whom, and for what. The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. But individuals, social groups, and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning, according to social determinations and cultural projects that are rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework."

Pertinent to the present discussion is Castells' (2010) distinction between *legitimising* and *resistance* identities, which emerge in all contexts marked by power relations. Legitimising identities are "introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination *vis à vis* social actors" (Castells, 2010, p. 8). In Castells' conceptualisation, legitimising identities lead to the emergence of what is called *civil society*, namely "a series of 'apparatuses', such as the Church(es), unions, parties, cooperatives, civic

associations, and so on, which, on the one hand, prolong the dynamics of the state, but, on the other, are deeply rooted among people" (Castells, 2010, p. 9).

On the other hand, resistance identities are

"(...) generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society" (Castells, 2010, p. 8).

Such identities result in the formation of communities whose main aim is the "collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression, usually on the basis of identities that were, apparently, clearly defined by history, geography, or biology, making it easier to essentialise the boundaries of resistance" (Castells, 2010, p. 9; see also Castells, 2010, pp. 421-422). The members of such communities feel that they are unfairly excluded from the sociopolitical decisions concerning issues of central interest to them. This conceptualisation of identities highlights the fact that identities are constructed *in relation to* each other: "participants position themselves with regards not only to each other, but also to the ways in which they are defined by discourses […] which circulate through mass media, institutions and everyday contexts" (Lo and Reyes, 2004, p. 118; see also Castells, 2010, pp. 11-12, 421-422; Tsakona, 2012, pp. 103-104).

This view of identities seems most compatible with our discussion of Cretan culture. The Cretan identity appears to be constructed in relation to, and in opposition with, identities related to the official representatives of state institutions. Cretans evoke aspects of their local history (i.e. Venetian, Turkish, and German occupations) to frame and justify their contempt towards contemporary state institutions and their norms. Because they refused to comply with rules imposed to them several centuries ago, today they continue to show more respect for local norms and values than for "alien" bureaucratic ones (see section 2 and references therein). In Castells' words (see above), materials from history, geography, and collective memory are employed to give meaning to current practices which thus become deeply-rooted projects among Cretans. It could, therefore, be suggested that the Cretan identity is in fact a resistance identity opposed to legitimising state and bureaucratic ones.

The role of humour is important in this context, not only because humour emerges as a significant component of the Cretan cultural identity (see section 2), but mostly because it appears to be one of the most common discursive strategies employed for the construction of opposing and hence resistance identities. It has been argued (see among others Archakis and Tsakona, 2005; 2006; and references therein) that humour allows speakers to discursively construct the difference between *us* and *them* and simultaneously to prevent *them* from imposing specific practices and decisions on *us*. In this sense, the members of a particular group may

resort to humour to defend their own positioning *vis à vis* the positioning of the outgroup. This *resisting* function of humour is considered by humour researchers as one of its most significant aspects, especially when it comes to negotiating and debating political issues (see among others Shehata, 1992; Klumbytė, 2011; Tsakona and Popa, 2011; 2013; Tsakona, 2015; and references therein; also Damianakos, 2003, pp. 19, 146, 205).

In the present study I will focus on how humour is used to construct resistance identities, that is, identities which oppose the dominant discourse of authority and expertise in an attempt to propose an alternative solution to the problem of how to handle the Cretan crocodile. To this end, it appears that interlocutors draw on, and humorously reframe, popular –and even stereotypical– aspects of the Cretan identity, thus rejecting local authorities' wish to capture the animal.

4. The Data of the Study and the Media Story of Sifis

The data examined here relates to the unexpected discovery of a crocodile on the Greek island of Crete (see also Tsakona, forthcoming). It includes over 1,000 online posts, 59 memes, and 18 cartoons on this topic, coming from 5 different Facebook communities supporting the crocodile and his "rights", and was collected from July 4th, 2014 until April 3rd, 2015. These communities were created a few days after the crocodile was spotted (i.e. from July 7th until July 12th, 2014) and, until April 3rd, 2015 they had acquired 19,598 followers (see the *Facebook communities* list at the end of the article). The community called *Sifis the Crocodile and His Friends* (2015) was by far the larger one with 16,389 followers. The following account of the events concerning the crocodile of Crete will be based on news articles on the same topic.

According to news reports of July 4th, 2014 (e.g. "Crocodile Almost Two Meters Long in a Dam in Crete", 2014), a crocodile was accidentally discovered by two firemen who passed by the Potami Dam Lake in Amari, near the town of Rethymno in Crete. The event was immediately reported to the authorities, as crocodiles do not live free in any part of Greece. In fact, this was reported to be the only crocodile on the loose in the whole of Europe ("'World's Greatest Crocodile Hunter' Fails to Catch 'Sifis' – Crete's Fugitive Reptile", 2014). The issue was evaluated as an important one, as the safety of the inhabitants and the tourists was considered in jeopardy. Hence authorities set out to find and arrest not only the crocodile but also the person who abandoned the reptile in the lake. They also placed fences in several parts around the lake to prevent the crocodile from escaping, as well as traps with dead chickens as baits to entice the animal. By July 10th, the crocodile was already given the name *Sifis* ("In Crete Stays 'Sifis' the

Crocodile (?), Who May Not Be Alone", 2014), thus acquiring a local identity and a gender one: *Sifis* is one of the most common male names in Crete.[1] The choice of name was indicative of the locals' wish to consider the crocodile "one of their own" and to keep him in the area. While the police could not find the owner of the animal, local people suggested that Sifis should remain in the lake because he caused no harm (provided he was restricted in a specific area by fences). In addition, the animal had already become a tourist attraction: hundreds of tourists (and locals) visited the lake daily hoping they could take a glance at Sifis and feed him.

The emerging Facebook communities fervently supported Sifis' right to stay in Crete, and resisted any idea of capturing and removing him from the lake. Furthermore, "[s]ouvenir shops in the area have reportedly recognised the new local celebrity by selling inflatable crocodiles" ("Mystery 6ft Crocodile Appears in Middle of Greek Lake – Leaving Local Farmers Terrified", 2014). The fugitive reptile also attracted the interest of international media.[2]

In the meantime, "local authorities […] enlisted the help of reptile specialists who will try to remove the animal" ("Tourist Snap: Crocodile on the Loose in Crete Sparks Visitor Rush to Island", 2014). So, Olivier Behra, a famous herpetologist, was summoned to help capture Sifis. Behra arrived at the island at the end of August 2014 and tried to capture Sifis twice but without any lack ("'World's Greatest Crocodile Hunter' Fails to Catch 'Sifis' – Crete's Fugitive Reptile", 2014). Interestingly, his first attempt was sabotaged by locals who tried to warn Sifis and scare him away from the traps and the herpetologist ("Crete: 'Sifis' Originates in the Nile and He Is… Well-Fed", 2014). Even though locals insisted on keeping Sifis in the lake, Behra was summoned again at the end of October 2014 for a final try; he failed again. On the whole, more than 10 attempts to capture Sifis were unsuccessful ("Sifis the Cretan Crocodile Is Found Dead – Defying His Hunters to the Last", 2015). Sifis remained on the loose, but locals seemed not to be afraid of him: a few of them even dove in the lake for the celebration of the Epiphany ("Sifis the Crocodile to Be Part of Epiphany Celebration on Crete",

[1] In one of the Facebook communities, however, he is called *Manolios*, a name which is equally (if not even more) common among Cretan men (see *Manolios*, 2015).

[2] News articles refer to Sifis in *The Guardian* ("Tourist Snap: Crocodile on the Loose in Crete Sparks Visitor Rush to Island", 2014; "'World's Greatest Crocodile Hunter' Fails to Catch 'Sifis' – Crete's Fugitive Reptile", 2014; "Sifis the Cretan Crocodile Is Found Dead – Defying His Hunters to the Last", 2015), *The Independent* ("Mystery 6ft Crocodile Appears in Middle of Greek Lake – Leaving Local Farmers Terrified", 2014), *News.com.au* ("Mystery Croc Turns Up in Greek Lake in Crete", 2014), *Mirror* ("'Uncatchable' Crocodile Who Terrorised Greek Island and Evaded World's Greatest Hunters Is Found Dead", 2015), and *Sky News* ("Crete's Crocodile Found Dead after Cold Snap", 2015), while his reputation has reached as far as Japan ("Tokyo Is Interested in the Crocodile of Crete", 2014).

2015).[1] The final act was written at the end of March 2015, when Sifis was found dead at the shore of the lake: "It was a sorry end for a reptile that had fascinated locals and foreigners alike" ("Sifis the Cretan Crocodile Is Found Dead – Defying His Hunters to the Last", 2015). His death was attributed by the authorities to the particularly long and heavy winter in Crete, while his body was taken for an autopsy to the Natural History Museum of Crete at Herakleion.

5. Humour and Identities Built around the Crocodile

The analysis of the data from the Facebook communities reveals that the events presented in section (4) are often treated and reframed as incongruous by Facebook participants. In general, humour emerges from incongruity, namely from the opposition between events/scripts which are considered "probable" and "conventional" in a specific context and events/scripts which may occur but are more or less "improbable" and "unconventional" (see among others Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 2001). In the set of data under scrutiny, three main script oppositions have been identified (see also Tsakona, forthcoming):

Script opposition 1: *exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities*

- the crocodile is an exotic dangerous animal brought to Crete, Greece from abroad/Sifis the crocodile has male human attributes and originates in Crete.

Script opposition 2: *remove from/keep in the lake*

- the best and safest solution (suggested by the authorities) is to remove the crocodile from the lake/the best solution (proposed by citizens) is to leave the crocodile in the lake.

Script opposition 3: *captivity/freedom*

- the crocodile should be captured/should not be –and has not been– captured, besides several attempts by experienced specialists.

Based on Castells' (2010) distinction between legitimising and resistance identities (see section 3), it could be argued that the discourse produced by the local authorities and the experts consulted on how to handle the crocodile, evokes the first "probable" and "conventional" parts of these script oppositions. It thus contributes to the construction of legitimising identities by (re)producing arguments concerning the safety of the citizens and the tourists, and the well-being of the animal. Representing dominant institutions of Greek society, local

[1] "The custom of the Epiphany (January 6) celebrations is called 'diving for the holy cross' and is performed in all areas near water in Greece. It consists of a Christian Orthodox priest throwing a holy cross in the water to sanctify the water. Then, local men and boys dive in the water to bring it back" ("Sifis the Crocodile to Be Part of Epiphany Celebration on Crete", 2015).

authorities tried to rationalise their intervention for arresting the crocodile and to decrease the possibility of it injuring or killing people. At the same time, these social actors and their proposals projected an eco-friendly identity for themselves as they appeared to care for the animal.

Against such legitimising identities local people and other Facebook participants evoked the second "improbable" and "unconventional" parts of these script oppositions to construct resistance identities, thus not recognising the authorities' exclusive right to decide about the animal's and their own safety. Such a reaction clearly opposes state power and highlights alternative values and norms, such as the rejection of any official interference in local affairs, local people's right to decide about the natural landscape and fauna in their area, and the crocodile's right to live free (cf. section 2). The Facebook communities under scrutiny were in fact built around such views and values and continued to exist as long as it made sense to defend them, that is, until Sifis was found dead. It seems that their members felt excluded from decision-making procedures and ignored by the local authorities. This is clearly illustrated in the words of the administrator of one of the webpages for Sifis, who states the following (and at least 110 participants seem to agree with him):[1]

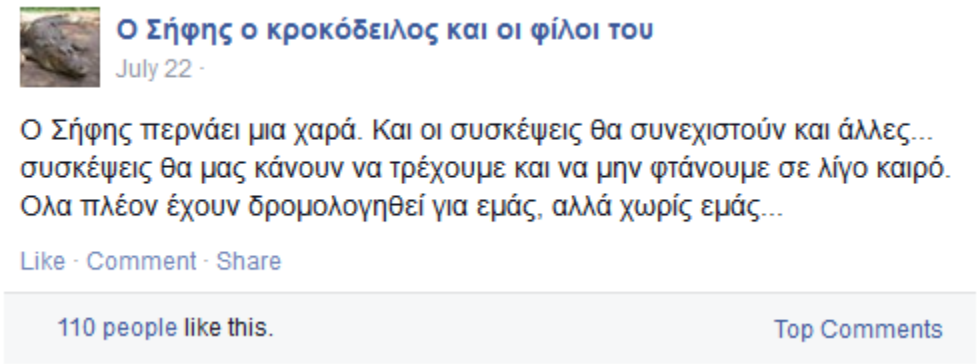

Figure 1.
"Sifis is doing fine. And the meetings [about the animal] will go on and more… meetings will soon have us run and things will be out of our control. By now everything has been settled for us, but without us…"

[1] The Greek examples included here maintain their original spelling and have been translated into English by the author for the purposes of the present study. The names and personal profile photos of participants have been removed to protect their anonymity. Unconventional spelling in the Greek texts has not been reproduced in the English translations.

Participants' feeling of exclusion and their determination to undermine official practices lead them to the construction of resistance identities as attested in these Facebook communities.

In this context, the present study concentrates on how resistance identities are constructed *via humour*. More specifically, I intend to argue that two different –but interrelated– ways of constructing identities via humour have been identified in the data under examination: the *indirect* (or by implication) and the *direct* construction of resistance identities.

In the first case, the construction of resistance identities is accomplished indirectly, that is, via the construction of the Cretan identity. Such resistance identities draw on cultural features strongly associated with the local Cretan identity, whose hallmarks are disobedience and heroism (see section 2). Such features are attributed to the crocodile, which thus becomes a local, Cretan figure. As such, (it is implied or stated that) the crocodile has no reason to leave the lake and/or the island and, most importantly, he is supposed to resist arrest, like any authentic Cretan male would do, due to their love of freedom and rebelliousness. The indirectness of this construction is also related to the fact that, even though this Cretan/resistance identity is ascribed to the animal, it nevertheless stems from, and reflects, the participants' own wish to keep the animal on the loose in Crete. The rebellious and disobedient character of the animal indirectly points to the respective attributes of those supporting it.

In the second case, Facebook participants expressly suggest that the crocodile is expected, and/or should be helped, to escape captivity. A direct resistance identity is thus constructed for both the animal and those willing to assist.

Finally, it should be mentioned here that the analysis of this set of data has revealed that participants' online contributions manage to build a *fictional narrative* (or *joint fictionalisation*, in Kotthoff's 1999 terms), where the crocodile is the main protagonist who lives peacefully in the Cretan lake, strives for his freedom against those who wish to capture him, and is supported by others who would rather keep him there (see Tsakona, forthcoming). The use of narrative is by no means accidental here. Narrative is one of the most common genres used for the construction of identities (see Archakis and Tsakona 2012; and references therein) and, at the same time, it is often used for the construction of Cretan identities. Cretans project their respect for cultural values and their contempt for official laws and authorities in their oral narratives. Such narratives are often built around historical events or personal experiences during which Cretans choose to defy foreign oppressors or state impositions in order to defend their own cultural norms and practices (see section 2). The online fictional narrative built around Sifis entextualises similar values and identities.

6. The Analysis of the Data

This section discusses how humour is employed for the indirect and direct construction of resistance identities.[1] Although these two ways of constructing resistance identities are interrelated rather than distinct, it seems that Facebook participants resort to different semiotic resources in each case. For the indirect construction of resistance identities they mostly employ the Cretan dialect, the genre of mandinades, cartoons, and memes/images created and/or recontextualised to suit the occasion. For the construction of direct resistance identities, participants usually publish status updates showing their support and sympathy for the crocodile, offering advice and suggestions, expressing their enthusiasm and/or their opposition to the "enemies", etc.

The indirect construction of resistance identities is based on the humorous recontextualisation of salient features of the Cretan identity. The crocodile is humorously assigned a Cretan male identity and is given one of the most common Cretan names, i.e. Sifis (or Manolios; see footnote 1 on page 126). In the images uploaded on the Facebook webpages, the crocodile is represented wearing the traditional Cretan male attire (ex. 2-3) and holding a lyra, the most popular musical instrument in the area (ex. 3). He appears to speak the Cretan dialect (ex. 4-5), to eat local cuisine (ex. 4), and to drink the local alcoholic drink *raki* (ex. 6). He is also wild and threatening enough to be Cretan and resist arrest (ex. 5, 7); he even carries a gun and uses traffic signs to improve his shooting skills as Cretans often do (ex. 7). The crocodile in ex. (6) is supposed to have improvised a mandinada declaring his love for raki. The details on the crocodile's belly are not without meaning: his imaginary surname *Κορκοδηλάκης/Korkodilakis* ends in *-akis* like most Cretan surnames, is a pun on the Greek word *κροκόδειλος* "crocodile", and is accompanied by a marijuana plant. As already mentioned (in section 2), illegal marijuana cultivation is among the common law-violating activities in Crete. Finally, the local identity of the animal is expressly stated in the sign "Local crocodile from Crete, 7.5 € [per kilo]" which implies that crocodiles are even bred in Crete to be sold as food, just like goats, fish, lambs, etc. (ex. 8).

[1] The script opposition(s) (see section 5) related to each example appear(s) in square brackets at the end of the English captions/translations.

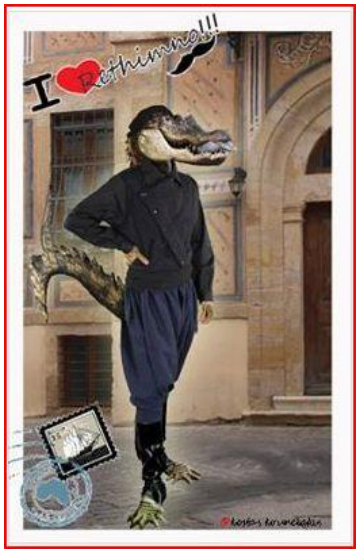

Figure 2.
Sifis in traditional Cretan male attire on a postcard from Rethymno [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities]

Figure 3.
Sifis in traditional Cretan male attire holding a lyra [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities]

Figure 4.
Sifis eating local dishes: "Today I will eat snails (cooked in a traditional Cretan way) again" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities]

Figure 5.
Sifis speaking the Cretan dialect "What are you looking at?" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities]

Figure 6.
Sifis improvising a mandinada: "It's you I love but it's raki I trust/ I wish I had a lake of raki to go fall in" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities]

Figure 7.
"Attention crocodile in Crete"
[exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities]

Figure 8.
"Local crocodile from Crete 7.5 € [per kilo]" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities, remove from/keep in the lake]

These pictures are indicative of the Cretan identity constructed for Sifis by his fans and illustrate the cultural material reframed to create humour and to represent the crocodile as local: Sifis talks, eats, drinks, rhymes, plays the lyra, carries illegal guns, shoots traffic signs, etc. like an authentic (albeit stereotypical) Cretan male. He is even sold as a local product. All these qualities humorously imply that the crocodile is as Cretan as can be (see the script oppositions evoked in each example), therefore, he should not be removed from the lake, but he should resist and fight back as fiercely as possible (ex. 7).

In this context, humour emerges as an important component of the resistance identities as it underlines the incongruous perception of the imported, wild crocodile as a local figure with Cretan qualities. Furthermore, given that the Cretan identity is associated with resistance against authority and love of freedom, it indirectly points to the resistance (expected to be) shown by the crocodile and its fans against official decisions.

Moving on to the direct construction of resistance identities, Facebook participants write humorous messages on Sifis' walls to express their sympathy (ex. 9) and support (ex. 10-11, 13) and to propose resisting actions (ex. 12). They evoke the crocodile's Cretan identity via the use of the possessive pronoun *our* (ex. 13) and also by calling him *Sifis/Sifalio* (ex. 9-12) as well as via concepts directly related to this identity, such as independence and love of freedom (ex. 10-11, 13-16). They also compose humorous mandinades in the Cretan dialect to justify and

bolster their support (ex. 14-16). Mandinades do not only highlight Sifis' Cretan origin and identity, but also praise him for his ability to escape the traps set by the opponents and to stay free. The authorities need to "become men" (ex. 15), that is, to show bravery, strength, and wit, like Cretan males (including Sifis) do, if they want to catch him.

Figure 9.
"Dear Sifis what do they do to you! Poor guy……" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities, remove from/keep in the lake]

Figure 10.
"Free Sifis" [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

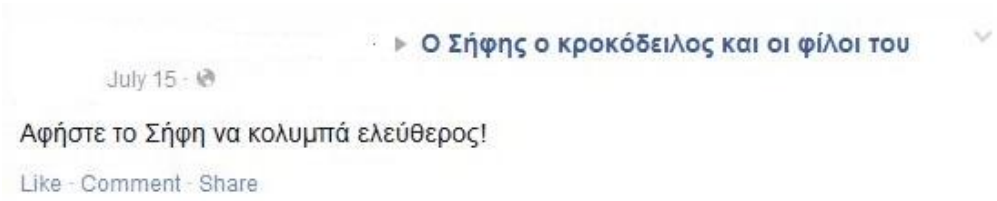

Figure 11.
"Let Sifis swim free!" [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

Figure 12. [1] "The only solution is to go form a human chain around the dam [lake] so that they won't take Sifalio [pet name meaning "little Sifis"] away from us…." [remove from/keep in the lake]

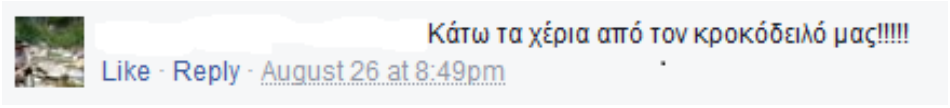

Figure 13.
"Keep your hands off our crocodile!!!!!" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities, remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

Figure 14.
"God give you enlightenment to avoid the cage/ and to remain the lord of Cretan rivers" [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

Figure 15.
"Sifis has confused them and does not fall into traps/ and if they want to catch him they should become men…" [captivity/freedom]

[1] The Greek original post in written in latin script, which is common practice among Greeks when communicating online (see also ex. 18c).

Figure 16.
"I'm not moving from here because I'm a little Cretan…/ and I'm not stepping into the cage with the chicken [bait]…" [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities, remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

Finally, direct resistance identities involve direct (often illustrated) threats against the not expressly defined opponents (ex. 17):

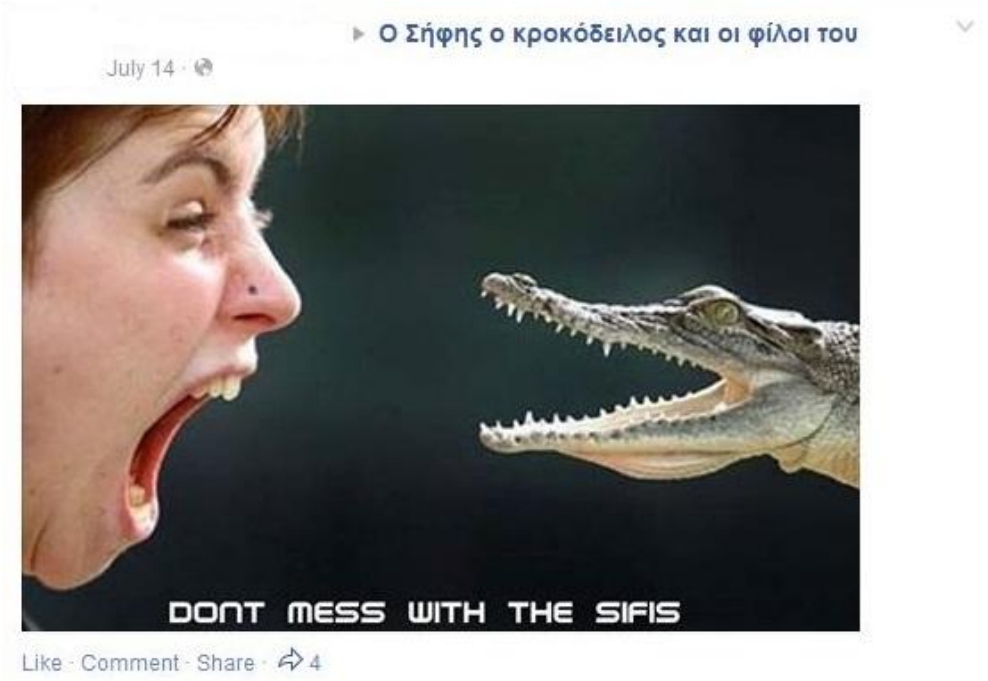

Figure 17.
"Don't mess with the Sifis" [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

Such examples show that Facebook participants often express their concern and solidarity for Sifis by sending him humorous online messages directly indicating their refusal to comply with the solutions proposed by the authorities.

Thus they state their disagreement with the practices proposed and/or implemented by the local authorities to entrap the animal (see also ex. 13).

The composition of mandinades deserves, in my view, special attention. As mentioned in section (2), mandinades is a typically Cretan genre associated with traditional values such as manhood, rebelliousness, bravery, freedom, as well as with the love for the Cretan landscape and an effort to preserve the natural environment. Even though crocodiles are not endemic to Greece, the mandinades examined here represent Sifis as an inseparable part of this natural environment, as he is referred to as "the lord of Cretan rivers" (ex. 14). It could, therefore, be suggested that in the mandinades (ex. 14-16) as well as in other examples of this category evoking the Cretan identity of the animal (e.g. ex. 13), the interrelationship between the direct and indirect construction of resistance identities is manifested.

The combined direct and indirect construction of resistance identities via humour often becomes the main goal of online interaction, as the following extract from a long discussion (ex. 18) illustrates:

Figure 18.
Text in the meme:

(a) "I'm not going anywhere, anywhere/ I will stay here….." [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities, remove from/keep in the lake]

Comments:

(b) If you could fit into my house, I would take you and hide you [there].. [exotic dangerous animal/local pet with human qualities, captivity/freedom]

(c) Sifako [pet name meaning "little Sifis"] a French crocodile Dundee wants to come and catch you, he says. Will you catch him? [captivity/freedom]

(d) Sifis hang on don't go anywhere [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

(e) Don't go anywhere stay there! [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

(f) Leave Sifis to do what he wants!!!!! He knows best!!!!!! [remove from/keep in the lake, captivity/freedom]

The webpage administrator impersonating Sifis uses humour to declare the animal's decision to remain in the lake: s/he recontextualises a popular Greek song titled *Δεν πάω πουθενά* "I'm not going anywhere", while also using the Cretan word for *here* (i.e. *επά*) instead of the standard Greek one (i.e. *εδώ*) originally appearing in the song lyrics (ex. 18a). Responding to this meme, Sifis' fans play along with this humorous recontextualisation by offering their support to the animal (ex. 18d-18f), by proposing to help him hide (ex. 18b), and by inciting him to attack the herpetologist who was at that time reported to be on his way to Crete (ex. 18c). The Cretan dialect used by both Sifis and his fans to indirectly construct a local resistance identity (see *επά* "here", *Sifako* "little Sifis", *εκειά* "there" in ex. 18) is here combined with a direct resistance identity, as Sifis supporters clearly demonstrate their preference for keeping the animal on the island. Furthermore, the fact that Sifis talks online and his interlocutors address him using the second person singular indicates that all of them act on the humorous premise that Sifis is a person-like creature of Cretan origin (see script opposition 1 in section 5), thus also contributing to the indirect construction of a resistance identity.

In sum, in this section, I have tried to show the interplay between the use of humour, the Cretan culture, and the construction of resistance identities. First, humour is used to portray Sifis as a local, Cretan person-like creature. This identity construction *indirectly* points to values such as love of freedom, rebelliousness, and heroism, which are assigned to the crocodile and indirectly to those who defend him. Second, humour is also used to *directly* express the participants' wish to prevent Sifis' captivity and removal from the lake. Such a direct construction of resistance identities is accomplished via utterances explicitly showing interlocutors' support, sympathy, encouragement, enthusiasm towards the animal, offering their help and advice, and praising its bravery and disobedience. The direct

and indirect ways of constructing resistance identities can be combined in some occasions.

7. Concluding Remarks

The aim of the present study was to explore the interplay between humour, Cretan culture, and the construction of resistance identities. Research on the sociopragmatic functions of humour underline its important role in signalling humorists' opposition and disagreement with specific views and values, and hence in constructing opposing identities (see section 3). On the other hand, humour emerges as a significant feature of Cretan culture allowing Cretans to express their reluctance to comply with widely accepted values and official/state norms and impositions (Herzfeld, 1985b; see section 2).

In this context, humour becomes a most suitable tool for constructing resistance identities, that is, identities which express speakers' wish to differentiate themselves from widely circulated values and opinions and to propose alternative ways of thinking and acting (Castells, 2010; see section 3). This creative combination between humorous perceptions of reality, resistance activities, and Cretan cultural traits is manifested in the present case study of Sifis the crocodile. It appears that, drawing on a well-known stereotype concerning Cretan disobedience and heroism, Cretan and other Greek Facebook participants joined online communities defending the animal's right to freedom and demanding its staying in Crete. Thus, they expressed their opposition against the plans devised by local authorities, and questioned the values such plans represented (e.g. the safety and well-being of local people, tourists, and the crocodile).

The analysis of the data brings to the surface two different but interrelated ways of constructing resistance identities via humour. First, interlocutors assign a Cretan identity to the animal and *indirectly/by implication* a resistance one both to the animal and to themselves. Second, resistance identities are *directly* constructed by proposing that the animal should escape captivity and that its supporters should assist in this endeavour. These two ways could be summarised as follows:

1. *Indirect construction of resistance identities*: "The crocodile is Cretan, hence he is supposed to resist and we are to resist with him/on his behalf".
2. *Direct construction of resistance identities*: "We disagree with the official decisions and we support the crocodile's right to live free in Crete".

Both ways are accomplished via the use of humour and the production of texts belonging to various genres, such as memes/images, mandinades, status updates, and online interactions.

Other aspects of the Cretan identity appear to be relevant to the present discussion, such as the preservation of the Cretan natural landscape and the use of narratives recounting local events (see section 2). First, the participants' wish and efforts to keep the animal in the lake and their insistence on its local identity both strongly imply that Sifis is not perceived as a foreign animal but as an integral part of the wild Cretan landscape. They practically seem to overlook the facts that crocodiles do not typically live in Greece and that at that time the authorities were also searching for the person who illegally imported the animal to Greece and released it in the lake. Second, the Cretan/resistance identity is constructed as part of a humorous fictional narrative where the crocodile is the main protagonist heroically resisting his oppressors and striving for his independence (see section 5 and Tsakona, forthcoming). This narrative is a collective creation as the online social network allows for the collaboration of numerous participants for its production. Sifis is represented as a local (super)hero enacting and preserving Cretan culture and values against alien impositions and homogenising pressures.

Sociological and anthropological studies maintain that Crete is not the only area in Greece where a resistance culture can be found (see section 2). In fact, Herzfeld (1985b, p. xvi) even suggests that

"[t]o understand Greece's relationship to the world at large, it is necessary to understand the relationship of such "eccentric" communities to the administrative centre; and it seems likely, on the face of it, that *the same holds for most other countries*" (my emphasis).

This observation points to a wide variety of research questions for future investigation. Such questions could involve, among other things, which social identities (besides the local one; e.g. gender, religious, age identities) may be more or less closely associated with resistance and/or the use of humour among Greeks and how they discursively/semiotically construct them in public or private contexts. Cross-cultural comparisons could also yield interesting results concerning the similarities and/or differences in the ways the same social identities are built in diverse linguocultural communities, as well as the different aspects of identity that may be humorously reframed and negotiated in each community.

Finally, the role of online social networks seems crucial here, since they bring together people sharing and building collective identities, even if these people may never meet in person or have any other contact outside the specific network. Research could further explore the ways, the reasons, and the processes people from different geographical areas and/or sociocultural groups become involved in common identity projects requiring their resources, creativity, and dedication (cf. Castells, 2010). Entertainment, humour, laughter, stance-taking, resistance, solidarity, and a sense of belonging are, as has been shown here, some of the reasons, but they must not be the only ones.

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