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## Disputatious rhetoric and political change: The case of the Greek anti-mining movement

### Abstract

Rhetorical scholarship has significantly contributed to our understanding of the role of confrontation in engendering social and political change, but it traditionally over-emphasises its moral aspect, which results to the simplification of public issues and the radicalisation of identities. This article introduces a distinct form of political rhetoric and analyses the rhetorical conventions that constitute it. Drawing material from the anti-mining movement formed in Halkidiki, Greece, the article proposes that disputatious rhetoric, through employing the techniques of *parrēsia*, melodrama and *antithesis*, proves pertinent to the articulation of dissent, the formation of collective subjects, and the projection of a counter-hegemonic discourse which challenges dominant neoliberal practices and discourses. Disputatious rhetoric, the article concludes, encodes the possibility of social and political change, not least because it impacts on the meaning attributed to actions and prevents the solidification of a single narrative or discourse as commonsensical.

### Introduction

Those who study public discourse have long pointed to the connection between rhetoric and change. Burke (1969, p.41), for example, identifies as the basic function of rhetoric ‘the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents’. In a similar way, Bitzer (1968, p.4) affirms rhetoric as ‘a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action’. Indeed rhetoric in describing reality also intervenes in it, enriching and shaping an audience’s perception of a situation or issue and inviting it to respond to them. Through ‘proving, pleasing, and persuading’ (Finlayson 2014), rhetoric negotiates preferences and judgments, transforms attitudes, and inspires action. Rhetoric is constitutive of change, because it institutes new meanings and perceptions.

Naturally, then, social movements as collective agents that seek or resist change have attracted the interest of rhetoricians, particularly in the US where since the 60s they systematically explore the rhetorical strategies employed in the discourse of social movements (e.g. Cathcart 1978; 1980; 1983; Condit 1990; Griffin 1952; 1969; McGee 1980; 1983; Simons 1970; 1972; Smith & Windes 1975; Wilkinson 1976; Zarefsky 1980). These earlier explorations inform contemporary works of the rhetoric of movements that aspire to bring about or resist change related to environmental, social and political problems (e.g. DeLuca 2001; Lakoff 2011; Peeples 2008; Peeples et al. 2014; Pezzulo 2001; Sovacool 2008; Schwarze 2003; 2006). At the centre of this scholarship is the issue of how the tactical use of symbols—words, signs, images, bodies—contributes to our perception of reality and invites us to act accordingly (Morris & Browne 2001, p.1). The rhetoric of activism, what Morris and Browne call ‘the management of symbolic resources’, is bound up with calls for and attempts to social change.

Employing tools from the theory of rhetorical analysis, this article outlines a form of public discourse which is associated with resistance against the hegemony of neoliberal modes of organisation and production, as well as with the effectuation of change, affirming that this is a process that takes place amidst conditions of confrontation. The article suggests that although rhetoricians have previously associated social movements with confrontation, still we lack a coherent and more specifically political understanding of the sort of rhetoric employed by political collectivities that seek to contest dominant neoliberal framings and narratives. This is the form of rhetoric that this article identifies as disputatious rhetoric and that it suggests that it is exemplified in the case of the Greek anti-mining movement. The latter not only expresses dissent against a particular economic intervention in the natural and social environment of Halkidiki, but it also features the political nature of the controversy. Furthermore, it influences the meaning attributed to the practice of investing in extraction activities by a multinational corporation and it configures the public’s perception of the issue, invoking change in public discourse and consciousness.

The article opens with a brief introduction of the anti-mining movement in Skouries and

continues with a discussion of disputatious rhetoric, which is defined as the form of rhetoric that not only expresses dissent against a hegemonic constituency, but it also registers in public discourse a viewpoint that departs from the dominant neoliberal, disrupting its pre-eminence as common sense. The analysis shows how by employing three rhetorical conventions, namely *parrēsia*, melodrama and *antithesis*, the Skouries movement has influenced the public's understanding of the necessity to 'protect foreign investments at any cost' in order to achieve growth, even at the expense of social and natural environments. Even though the outcome of an attempt to persuasion remains always dependent upon structures and mechanisms that surpass the constituencies that pursue it, the study of disputatious rhetoric casts analytic light on the processes of framing and forwarding arguments for social and political change, whereas it also points to the role of rhetoric in mediating between structure and agency.

#### #Skouries

The economic crisis in Greece provided the opportunity to the governing coalition of Nea Demokratia and Pasok to regulate environmental legislation in order to facilitate activities such as mining and fracking, even in areas close to protected natures. Under the rubric 'protection of foreign investment at all costs' (Granitsas 2013), the austerity-imposing governing coalition encouraged and facilitated the implementation of large-scale projects that, allegedly, would raise revenue and boost the economy—and change the Greek landscape in unprecedented and irreversible ways. Halkidiki is one of the places where controversy over this issue emerged and escalated, when a mining exploration and extraction project started. This is the site where the anti-mining (or anti-gold) movement, a resistance movement against the construction and operation of mines and processing plants in the Skouries forest focuses its action, although it has developed links with other movements both in Greece and abroad.

The project is collectively known as 'Kassandra mines' and includes the construction of an open pit gold mine in the site Skouries, on Kakavos mountain, as well as underground mines and

processing plants in the sites Olympiada and Stratoni. Eldorado Gold Corporation, a multinational company based in Canada, is the major investor of the project and has undertaken its development and operation under highly dubious circumstances. Mining activities are not unknown to the residents of the area; through the antiquity to the Ottoman era, the mining sites in Northern Halkidiki were the main source of income for the majority of the locals of the so-called 'Mademohoria' (a complex of twelve villages in the area). Whereas during the 20th century small-scale mining projects flourished, more recently worries related to the intensification of mining activities sparked strong reactions amongst local residents and environmental societies. As a result, TXV Hellas, the sister-company of the Canadian TVX Gold that operated the activities since 1995, declared bankruptcy and activities stopped in 2002.

The events that rallied the anti-mining movement begin with the transfer of Kassandra Mines to the newly created company Hellas Gold in 2003. As Greece stumbled into recession, a large mining investment project started when exploitation rights for more than 300 thousand acres of land were transferred to the Vancouver-based company Eldorado Gold, fueling objection to the plans to turn Halkidiki from a unique protected nature into a site of intensive mining activities. The notorious transfer procedure that results in low revenues for the state, along with the experience of past mining-operations in the form of boom-and-bust enterprises that 'left behind piles of sandy gray tailings and yellow sea', as well as fears for the overall environmental degradation of the area, sparked division between those who oppose the project and those who aspire that the investment will fund valuable work places in the crisis-laden villages (Daley 2013).

This polarisation reflects or is indicative of the political developments in Greece. From the one hand, the pro-austerity parties with neoliberal ideological affiliations were eager to attract investments in order to accelerate growth through the exploitation of the country's natural resources and they fervently supported the investment in Kassandra mines. And from the other, leftist parties and populist parties of the Right opposed the Memoranda and the privatisation of national wealth, including the mining plans in Halkidiki. In 2013 Syriza pledged that as a government it would

immediately cancel the contracts for extraction activities in Northern Greece to prevent ‘the economic, ecological and social crime’ committed in the area and that it would work towards the promotion of ‘alternative models of local economic development’ (Syriza 2013). The party’s Central Committee also decided to form a special committee that would actively participate in the ‘social struggle against gold extractions in Halkidiki’. Skouries evolved into an emblematic point of reference for Syriza and its anti-austerity, anti-neoliberal and anti-memorandum rhetoric, both before and after the January 2015 election.

It is amidst these sharply turbulent political and social conditions that the Skouries movement emerged and developed its action. The formation of local organisations, such as the Coordination Committee of Associations of Stageira-Akanthos against gold-mining and the Hellenic Mining Watch of Ierissos, facilitated the coordination of the movement's activities, such as protests, public discussions, as well as the production and dissemination of information material with regard to the mining project and the local communities’ struggle against it. #Skouries is the hashtag that connects in Twitter activists, journalists, politicians, as well as commentators who follow the case.

The analysis in this article focuses on the material of the movement that is available online, namely a call for action, the two issues of a magazine published by the Coordinating Committee, several brochures, posters, and press reports. Other material available, but not analysed here, includes opinion articles, republished official documents such as the Environmental Impact Assessment, scientific studies and publications, as well as a rich visual material, such as images, videos and documentaries. The analysis of this material demonstrates that the rhetorical pattern employed by the movement is exemplary of the form of discursive intervention that seeks to contest the dominant neoliberal model of economic organisation and to negotiate social and economic change. Although change remains always dependent on the objective conditions and structures, a transformation in meanings and narratives is constitutive of any attempt to engender social and political change.

## Disputatious rhetoric: A rhetorical form against neoliberalism

The anti-mining movement in Greece can most easily be identified as an environmental movement. Its arguments against gold mining as a form of sustainable development, against extracting beyond the capacity of the ecosystem and against the creation of a monoculture in the area, point towards this direction. However, its aims surpass the mere idea of protection, preservation or restoration of the natural environment; anti-gold rhetoric does more than framing gold extraction as a threat for the biodiversity and natural beauty of the Skouries forest. Rather, it directly challenges the neoliberal rhetoric that propagandises the economic benefits of mining activities in Halkidiki and downplays its social and environmental disadvantages. The narratives and arguments of the Skouries movement emerge as a dissident voice that challenges the normalisation of neoliberal ideas and modes of economic organisation, such as deregulation of public property, privatisation of natures, and dependency of production on multinational corporations. At the same time, this set of discursive practices registers in public discourse the possibility of alternatives to neoliberalism, either in the form of preservation of traditional modes of production and consumption or by proposing milder interventions that can benefit the local communities without disrupting natures. The rhetoric employed by the opponents of mining activities in Halkidiki can specifically be affirmed as *disputatious* rhetoric.

To an extent, all rhetoric is disputatious: its appeals—ethical, emotional and logical—take place amidst conditions of contest, attack, and counter-attack (Finlayson 2014, p.433). Political rhetoric emerges exactly due to the need to form judgments and reach decisions in conditions of plurality, contestability, and uncertainty. After all, in ancient Greece the occasion of the *agon* provided a productive context for the blooming of rhetoric; disputation is fundamentally associated with the practice of rhetoric. However, we can still mark out the space of a form of political discourse that is disputatious in its nature on account not only of the conditions amidst which it

emerges, but also of its very function. This is not to reinforce the—conventional in rhetorical scholarship—division between collaborative or managerial and confrontational rhetoric (e.g. Gage 1996; Cathcart 1978). Rather, this is to reinforce the idea that a particular form of rhetoric emerges when the circumstances call for it, a form of rhetoric ‘shaped by a strongly competitive purpose’ (Burke 1969, p.60). But it is also to suggest that this form of rhetoric functions by inscribing in public discourse an issue as a common political problem that needs to be addressed; it invokes disputation through the disruption of a hegemonic consensus. As an instance of political rhetoric, disputatious rhetoric influences the meaning a public attributes to actions and claims, by challenging their commonsensical character and the hegemony of their agents.

Contemporary rhetoricians have long identified confrontation as an essential aspect of the rhetoric of social movements and therefore as a determinant component of social change. As Scott and Smith (Scott & Smith 1969, p.2) discuss, the word ‘confrontation’ carries radical and revolutionary overtones and ‘reflects a dramatic sense of division’ which aims at challenging existing institutions. The act of confrontation, they argue, is led by the perception of an obvious enemy who must be destroyed; it is a consummatory act, since it functions to attribute ‘a sense of rightness’ to one’s cause ‘and, perhaps, firing a sense of guilt in the other’ (1969, pp.6–7). However, as Cathcart (1978) points out, although Scott and Smith have demonstrated how confrontation is not the end of communications but its extension, still they have treated confrontation rather instrumentally, either as a tactic to win audiences or as a way to open channels to carry the primary message. Rather, Cathcart (1978, p.241) proposes, we ought to view ‘confrontation as a consummatory form essential to a movement’. Confrontation is the form that consummates one’s rupture with an established order or a hegemonic perspective.

Cathcart works towards an elucidation of confrontation as the defining rhetorical form of movements for social change which threaten the commonsensical imperatives of the established system, its hierarchies, ethical codes and societal norms. Whereas reform movements accept the system as the system and merely seek to improve or perfect the order, ‘confrontational rhetoric



shouts "Stop" at the system, saying, "You cannot go on assuming you are the true and correct order; you must see yourself as the evil thing you are." (Cathcart 1978, p.243). A movement is a movement in so far it employs confrontational rhetoric, it enacts the dramatic, ritual form of confrontation. Because confrontation as rhetorical act enacts a dramatisation created by the forced juxtaposing of two agents, one standing for the evil, erroneous system and the other upholding the new or 'perfect' order, it invites a response that goes beyond the act of confrontation itself. Therefore, Cathcart (Cathcart 1978, p.246) argues, what is at stake is the moral accusation communicated by the act of confrontation; hence the response of the challenged order to confrontation is always a moral response, one characterised by polarisation and radical division.

Confrontational rhetoric as formulated by Cathcart provides fertile ground for further elaboration, but also for criticism. Cathcart aims to define a social movement from a rhetorical perspective and his compelling essay certainly gives an account of the elements that characterise a form of rhetoric that aspires to bring about radical social change. Yet, several objections have been formulated against his association of social movement with confrontational rhetoric and his rigid distinction between order and uninstitutionalised collectivities (e.g. Zarefsky 1980), but also against his very emphasis on confrontation as means of social change. Smith and Windes (1975, p.84), for instance, reject Cathcart's establishment-conflict theory as 'simplistic, because it perceives significant public communication as a grand debate tournament', whereby 'dogmatic pyrotechnics of extremists' capture the audiences' attention.

There is another aspect of Cathcart's conceptualisation of confrontational rhetoric that is open to criticism, though. Whereas he rightly connects the dramatic aspect that juxtaposition affords confrontational forms of rhetoric with the challenge of commonsensical perspectives that they invoke, it is the moral quality that he attributes to confrontation that we ought to problematise. For if the message that is communicated through confrontational rhetoric is a moral accusation, as Cathcart proposes, then both the division it produces and the sort of response it invites are played out at the register of morality, with counter-effective and even perilous outcomes for collective life.

Although moral convictions are an indispensable element of political justification and contestation over public issues, over-emphasis on moral motives and challenges, as well as the moral nature of responses more pertinent to them, vilifies and discredits adversaries, amplifies their purposes, and renders democracy irrelevant when addressing antithetical social and political claims (e.g. Ivie 2003; Johnson 1975; Vanderford 1989). Rather, a *political* account of confrontational rhetoric, one that is not exhausted in the form of claims that must be dismissed as immoral, but must be confronted on political grounds, is more pertinent to the negotiation of tensions caused by antithetical claims in the public realm. The agents of this form of rhetoric do not oppose unethical ‘villains’ who they wish to destroy, but political opponents who they seek to confront and discredit through the use of a robust rhetoric that combines the forcefulness of reasonableness with the attractiveness of affective discourse.

Disputatious rhetoric proves pertinent to the attempt to challenge ideas and arguments imposed as commonsensical by agents of corporate capitalism, but also to the task of engendering change by manifesting alternative possibilities for organisation and action. In the case under scrutiny, for example, the argument that features as common sense is that the ‘investment’ is a continuation of the long mining history of Halkidiki. This argument strategically obscures the way in which the mining plans appropriate protected natures as resources and therefore as an object of extraction, constituting thus an example of ‘un-green grabbing’ (Apostolopoulou & Adams 2015). Furthermore, the argument that given the economic condition in Greece investments are welcome at any cost, unproblematically advances the idea that unlimited growth is the only way to achieve the economic viability of a social system. Disputatious rhetoric challenges the commonsensical character of arguments and registers in public discourse an alternative viewpoint, as for example, that the investment in Skouries is a ‘barbaric intervention in a small and dense place with rich natural and cultural environment’ (Coordinating Committee of Associations of Stageira-Akanthos. 2012). In doing so, disputatious rhetoric invites change to the public’s perception of a situation, averting the crystallisation and naturalisation of ideas and arguments that seek to become or remain

hegemonic.

Disputatious rhetoric attempts to challenge hegemony through the narration or re-description of facts from a standpoint it constructs as logical and authoritative; in a sense, truth has a distinct place in disputatious rhetoric. Truth, as Arendt (1993, p.264) argues, is ‘what we cannot change; metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us’. Although politics is located in the in-between space of what Arendt calls sky and ground, truth has a place in political life. Not in the sense that politics needs to preserve, restore or protect truth—for this would be not politics but coercion, totalitarianism—but in the sense that politics is concerned with truth. Disputatious rhetoric is concerned with truth in the sense that it takes the form of truth-telling, of *parrēsiastikos logos*. Not only it operates through the exposure and publicisation of tactics and practices that involve lying, deception, coercion, or even physical violence; furthermore, it also redefines a situation in a way that directly opposes the reign of a powerful social and economic constituency.

As a mode of political discursive engagement, disputatious rhetoric emerges as a response against an opponent in order to achieve the counter-hegemonic configuration of the social terrain. But in doing so disputatious rhetoric does not construct an enemy it wishes to annihilate; it addresses an adversary with whom it shares ‘a common symbolic space’ which they ‘want to organize [...] in a different way’ (Mouffe 2000, p.13). This struggle takes place not over the definition of the good, moral agent against the evil enemy, but over the appropriation of a common symbolic—or in this case also physical—space which can be organised by appealing to different political and ideological preferences and priorities and on which different meanings can be projected and shared. In the very end, disputatious rhetoric urges the formation of judgement, instituting dissent where there appeared to be consensus and inviting a political response that begins at the level of perceptions but addresses the objective conditions of social life. In its attempt to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism, disputatious rhetoric employs ideas and arguments from a variety of interrelated spheres, such as the environmental, the economic, the cultural, combining

them to express and inspire anti-neoliberal forms of dissent.

The Skouries movement exemplifies this particular form of rhetoric. The next section demonstrates how the movement employs disputatious rhetoric to confront not only a particular intervention that can prove deleterious to the environment and that is forwarded in the name of economic growth, but also the very effort to frame such interventions as commonsensical. That is, it confronts the pragmatic reality imposed by neoliberal practices, but also the spirit, the ideas that inform these practices.

*Parrēsia*, melodrama, *antithesis*: Three rhetorical devices for disputatious rhetoric

Anti-gold rhetoric emerged as a response to the neoliberal rhetoric promoted by the pro-austerity government, which propagandised the economic benefits of the gold mining activities in Northern Greece, downplaying their destructive effects on the environment, the local economies, and the social web. Anti-mining rhetoric resists the projected importance, viability and sustainability of the gold-mining operations in Halkidiki and elsewhere in Greece and abroad. At the basis, the fundamental arguments of the movement are three: first, the planned operations are illegal; second, the proposed method of extraction is ineffective; third, the negative impact of the project on the environment and the local communities will be irreversible. The overarching argument that underlies and sustains the rhetoric of the Skouries movement addresses in fact the spirit of this dispute; it is the argument that the neoliberal logic that prioritises growth, the limitless exploitation of natural resources, and the protection of investments ‘at any cost’, can and indeed must be challenged and fought against. It is in framing these arguments, which concern the essence and the spirit of the dispute, that the anti-mining movement develops and organises the rhetorical devices that are exemplary of disputatious rhetoric and that the remaining of this section scrutinises.

Disputatious rhetoric is here affirmed as a strategic re-appropriation of a given situation. As Martin (2015, p.29) explains, in order to address the situation, to intervene in it, and acquire control

over it, political agents ‘formulate a distinct set of judgements to achieve certain ends given (more or less) known constraints’. In other words, they develop ‘rhetorical strategies’ which intervene in the situation aiming ‘to shape arguments and forge alliances in and through as well as against those constraining contexts’ (2015, p.32). In studying a political strategy rhetorically, there are at least three things we ought to consider, Martin suggests: the context amidst which the strategy is developed, the rhetorical devices developed and the assessment of the way the rhetorical intervention altered the situation it addressed. Although this article does not follow the exact methodological schema he proposes, Martin’s reflections on ‘strategy’ inform the analysis presented here. That said, the discourse of the anti-mining movement in Greece is here affirmed as a ‘rhetorical strategy’ and therefore as ‘the purposeful assemblage of arguments for a particular occasion and setting in light of its anticipated effects and by means of available techniques’ (Martin 2015, p.29). This approach enables us to consider not only structure but also agency as a force of political change.

We can distinguish at least three rhetorical devices that the movement under scrutiny employs in confronting the mining activities in Halkidiki and which can be seen as most pertinent to the effectiveness of disputatious rhetoric: *parrēsia*, *melodrama* and *antithesis*. Whereas each contributes its own part to framing the anti-mining movement and forwarding its cause, they all are vital—albeit to different extends—to address the three appeals to persuasion, namely *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. Whereas *ethos* refers to one’s appeal to their authority, character, or credibility, and *pathos* to the attempt to rouse or instill certain emotional responses to one’s audiences, *logos* is the term used to refer to argument itself and the ability of the audience to appeal to reason (Aristotle 2001; also Finlayson 2007). Even though in classical rhetoric these appeals are treated separately, they all function jointly and inform each other in the process of persuading an audience.

The three rhetorical conventions discussed here have helped the movement to form and establish its authority (*ethos*), appeal to the emotions of its audiences (*pathos*) and forward a rational line of argumentation (*logos*). This strategy enabled the movement to establish itself as a

prominent social movement in crisis-laden Greece, to win support for its cause, and to put further pressure on a favourable government to take action. *Parrēsia*, *melodrama*, and *antithesis* prove important to the form of rhetoric that aspires to challenge the commonsensical appearance of the hegemonic (neoliberal) discourse, by juxtaposing it to a more attractive alternative. The article now turns to these devices and demonstrates how the Greek anti-mining movement employs each one in making its case against the investment in Halkidiki—but also against the corporate model of investment and growth.

### *Parrēsiastikē rhetorikē*

The first rhetorical device pertinent to disputatious rhetoric is *parrēsia*. *Parrēsia* is the ancient Greek term for free speech, the practice of telling the truth. In a culture where public speaking was the defining element of political life, the exercise of *parrēsia* in the *agora* was an integral aspect of democracy. According to Foucault (2001), who carefully analysed this form of public speaking in his 1983 lectures in Berkeley, *parrēsia*—pace Plato who equated it to merely saying whatever one has in mind without qualification—was a virtue one exhibited in public life. The *parrēsiastes*, Foucault notes, speaks the truth he has access to and by doing so he puts himself in danger; the risk factor is essential in order to characterise a discursive activity as *parrēsia*. *Parrēsia*, then, establishes ‘a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says’ (Foucault 2001, p.12), but also between the *parrēsiastes* and the receiver of fearless speech.

Although, as Foucault observes, in the Socratic-Platonic tradition *parrēsia* and rhetoric stand in strong opposition, the rhetorical tradition treats *parrēsia* as a rhetorical figure, indeed the ‘figure that is not really a figure’, in that it is natural (2001, pp.20–21). In this analysis it is also affirmed as a figure, one that molds and establishes a certain relation between two interlocutors, whereby one represents the corporate, neoliberal power and the other the agents who takes the risk to challenge this power and attempts, through *parrēsia*, to register in public consciousness discredit

upon the corporate. In order for a disputatious movement to achieve this a strong emphasis on *logos* (rationality of the argument) and *ethos* (credibility) is required; the anti-mining movement in Greece is exemplary here.

Two are the most prominent parrhesiastic elements in the movement's rhetoric: first, its effort to associate the argument against the investment with scientific discourse; and second, the invocation of the investment's illegality. The Committee enlists in its website over twenty documents prepared by scientists and scientific institutions—mining engineers, geologists, geophysicists, environmentalists—all of which establish the case against the investment in the area. Scientific rhetoric in this case plays the double role of establishing the credibility or *ethos* of the movement (its cause has the support of the scientific community), but also the role of enhancing the case of the movement against the investment as reasonable and well-informed. By employing scientific rhetoric, the anti-mining movement establishes a strong ethical and logical argument, securing 'a sound basis for public activism' (Sovacool 2008, p.342). Its actions are presented as justified, reasonable, even inarguable, since its members include local residents, but also members of the academic and scientific community of the country.

The prominence of the illegality of the investment further enhances the reasonableness of the intervention against the mining project, whereas it also strengthens the authority or *ethos* of the movement. An essential component of the movement's argument is the reference to the illegitimate way through which Eldorado Gold acquired responsibility for the technical management and implementation of the project. The anti-mining movement publicises relevant information and challenges the authority of a multinational corporation to impose its own laws, whereas it also takes the opportunity to directly criticise the Greek government which supports the company's practices, in the name of growth and of the 'protection of foreign investments'. The rhetoric of the movement is *parrēsiastikē*.

It is *parrēsiastikē* because it takes the risk to address a superior power by directly exposing its methods and its attempt to cover truth. The anti-mining movement premises its courses of action

on the unambiguity of scientific discourse and on the certainty that judicial argumentation provides, directly confronting the hegemonic neoliberal discourse. The rhetoric of the anti-mining movement opposes the state/ corporation complex in order to challenge its authority and credibility, not by appealing to morality (cf Cathcart 1978, p.243), but by employing a form of discourse that pertains to factual evidence, provided by contracts, scientific reports, and laws, that cannot be easily dismissed. It profoundly stands in the adversary's way by explicitly demonstrating its access to a truth that the adversary would like to keep secret, at the cost of acquiring even more adversaries. In the case of Skouries, this includes also a considerable number of locals, especially miners (referred to as *mademohorites* or *upogeites*—those who live underground) who support the governmental and corporate plans, because these provide them with a temporary exit from unemployment. The *parrēsiastes* is not someone who everyone likes; particularly in the context of small communities, division and conflict are the direct effect of the use of *parrēsia*.

### *Melodrama*

The second rhetorical convention pertinent to the case of disputatious rhetoric, and one indeed employed by the anti-mining movement in Halkidiki, is the use of melodramatic frame. The act of framing is a particularly important rhetorical tactic, because it creates the necessary connections between words, assisting audiences to make sense of events, terms and practices. Kenneth Burke (1984) created a taxonomy of frames or organised systems of meaning, broadly distinguishing between frames of acceptance and frames of rejection. Whereas in the first case 'a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it' (1984, p.5), what characterises frames of rejection is 'an attitude towards some reigning symbol of authority, stressing a shift in the allegiance to symbols of authority' (1984, p.21). Despite separate, the two types of frame are, closely related since, according to Burke, rejection is 'but a by-product of acceptance', involving 'primarily a matter of emphasis' (1984, p.21). To reject a certain authority or order is to already



accept a different doctrine.

The study of public discourse traditionally emphasises comedy and tragedy as the prevailing frames. However, as Schwarze (2006, p.241) observes, over-emphasis on these two particular modes of framing controversies ‘may deflect our attention from alternate frames in public controversy’. Schwarze calls our attention to melodrama, which is the realm of competition and rivalry. However, unlike tragedy which ‘focuses on conflicts *within* individuals’, melodrama (and comedy) ‘are staged around conflicts between individuals and some external opponent’ (2006, p.243). Moreover, melodrama uses polarisation to clarify division and constitute conflict, whereas it also provides the vision of alternative possibilities. Finally, because melodrama addresses differences not only in opinion, but also on the moral register it can ‘generate solidarity and motivate action among those who might engage one side of the conflict’ (2006, p.245). Melodrama can inspire potential political activists and supporters of causes, encouraging public contestation over ideas or claims normally accepted as commonsensical.

One of the most characteristic traits of melodrama is its ability to provoke strong emotions to audiences, changing from tears of sorrow to derisive laughter (Mercer & Shingler 2004, p.1). Melodrama works on audiences by infusing a storyline with *pathos* and therefore by appealing to their emotions. In the case under scrutiny, melodramatic rhetoric is present in various forms of public discourse, from opinion articles to scientific publications and from campaign posters to documentary film. It manifests itself primarily in the form of colourful language and vivid descriptions, as for example in the first issue of the movement’s publication ‘SOS Halkidiki’. Here, the investment is characterised as ‘evisceration of Halkidiki’ that will bring about a ‘biblical destruction’; it is planned to extract ‘beyond the holding capacity of the ecosystem’ and as a result it will ‘industrialize the region at the expense of all other means of production’, ‘increasing social dependency on just one multinational corporation’ and creating ‘a monstrous monoculture on all levels’. In another instance, the narration of the clashes of activists with police forces dramatically describes the use of plastic bullets and gas even against the elderly, generating the public’s

sympathy for the activists and its aversion for their adversaries. By contrast, the second issue brings in a humorous moment that breaks with the seriousness of the situation, when it identifies the local villages with Uderzo and Goscini's 'Galactic village'. There is a quaint element in the activist's endeavour, but their courage and endurance is comparable to those of the famous comic figures. Finally, a recurrent melodramatic issue is the continuous reference to the 'primordial forest' of the area which is under threat—and indeed destroyed—by the mining project. This argument is reinforced both by scientific papers which certify the importance of the forest and by visual material which depicts the natural beauty of the area. *Pathos* and *logos* work together to inform the melodramatic frame of the case.

Yet, melodramatic elements enhance the appeal of the movement's rhetoric primarily by registering it to the level of emotions. These tactics invite audiences to identify with the drama of the locals, to like them as other quaint comic heroes and to respond to their call to join their fight against a multinational corporation that already has the support of the austerity government. By framing their argument in a melodramatic way, the campaigners against goldmines help audiences to situate themselves in relation to their world, orientating them to feel concern, sympathy, and even aversion. Melodrama functions mainly as what Martin (2014, pp.120–124) calls 'affective strategy', invoking the audiences' interest and generating their support. It, also, helps them to draw a clear line of distinction between heroic and unpopular individuals, environmental-friendly and destructive interventions, and natural beauty and human hyperactivity. *Antithesis* or juxtaposition, the third rhetorical tactic pertinent to disputatious rhetoric, is a vital aspect of the melodramatic framing of public confrontation.

### *Antithesis* or juxtaposition

Aristotle considered *antithesis* as one of the greatest stylistic concerns of the orator—along with metaphor and vividness—because it makes the argument memorable (2001, p.234). However, there

is certainly more in this rhetorical device, which consists in ‘the pairing of contradictions to display the necessity of choice between them’ (Murphy & Katula 2014, p.33). As Finlayson (2006, p.549) explains, *antithesis* enables the orator to emphasise the opposition between two things and enhance his position. In other words, *antithesis* proves pertinent to the need to demonstrate the urgency of political mobilisation and choice. Schwarze treats juxtaposition as an integral tactic of melodramatic framing of public controversies. As he argues, juxtaposition provides a moral framework which ‘further crafts a clear division between residents in the community and the corporation’, elevating the problem to one that concerns the whole of the community and not merely some of its members, and therefore urging political action (Schwarze 2006, p.247). However, the crucial role of juxtaposition on the function of disputatious rhetoric calls for treating it separately.

In disputatious rhetoric the dichotomous presentation of a situation illustrates the existence of two opposing sides, which represent different symbolic systems of thinking about reality. Particularly in cases of public controversy, *antithesis* contextualizes different forms of knowledge about the situation, altering the dynamics of certainty and uncertainty surrounding the situation; and it heightens moral outrage, generating pressure on public institutions to act (Schwarze 2003, p.315). Juxtaposition asks from the audiences to choose sides, identify with agents, and evaluate policies and practices; it is an indirect call to action.

The anti-gold movement in Skouries reinforces its rhetoric with a number of pairs of antithetical concepts. Employing the device of juxtaposition, the anti-gold movement presents two different realities: the existence of a unique ecosystem with which people can co-exist harmonically, and the reality that will be created if the exploration and extraction project is completed. Kakavos, the ‘primordial forest of unique beauty’, ‘an invaluable ecosystem’, which homes ‘threatened, protected and rare wildlife species’, will be turned into ‘a place of a skull’. It is not only that ‘200 acres of previously green forestland today resemble lunar landscape’; it is also that ‘barriers, barbed wires, private security, the constant presence of police forces in the mountain, remind one of Gaza’

(Coordinating Committee of Associations of Stageira-Akanthos. 2012, p.11). Eldorado Gold has created ‘a law unto themselves’, destroying ‘one of the most beautiful landscapes in Europe’ (Coordinating Committee of Associations of Stageira-Akanthos. 2012, p.11). Its exploration and extraction activities stand in antagonistic relation to other activities such as agriculture, tourism, forestry, beekeeping, husbandry, which currently are the main source of income for the majority of locals. The ‘pseudo-investors’ destroy both a natural and a social landscape.

The melodramatic frame offers itself for a juxtaposition of two different types of actors, a technique that constructs the opponents of the controversy in the strong terms of heroes and destroyers, unifying the members of the movement—but also perspective supporters—against a clearly visible adversary. Juxtaposition sets figures as identification points. On the one hand, there are those who fight ‘for the future of their children’, scientists, activists and politicians, which are figures of courage, but also weakness, as in the case of schoolchildren and the elderly who participate in protests. On the other hand, there are those who represent and defend the interests of the corporation, such as managers, politicians, syndicalists, the *ypogeites*, and even the police. Two distinct groups of agents, two distinct ethical norms, two distinct ideologies. The first, oriented towards the future, seeks to protect the natural space; the second, oriented towards the present, is only concerned with short-term profit.

Visual juxtaposition is also a major contributor to the presentation of the two different realities. Rhetoricians attend to the visual component of communication, because visual images work like narratives to ground an argument: they provide concrete enactments of abstract values, helping to envision the pragmatic impact of policy commitments (Condit 1990, p.81). Moreover, an image is a visual form of persuasion, seducing our attention and urgently demanding our attention. For a resistance movement, images can underline or even reinforce its argument, adding credibility to it, strengthening its receptiveness, but also inviting responsiveness to it. As Condit suggests, because visual images are inexplicit, in order to function rhetorically they need to be focused; this focus is achieved through figures of speech (1990, p.81).

In the case of the anti-gold movement visual persuasion is paired with *antithesis* and is particularly evident in the publications of the movement. For example, the pullout of the second issue of the movement's magazine presents the ecosystem under threat by the investment, yet its final pages juxtapose this with the condition in Skouries, the part of the forest where works have already started. Images of Kakavos, with trees, running water and vivid colours prevailing, are contrasted with images that show the deforested area, where dust, soil and huge machines impose themselves on the landscape. In a similar way, the second issue of the magazine brings together on the one hand images of thousands of everyday people of every age who protest against the project and images of violent police forces, on the other. In both cases, the combined use of visual rhetoric and *antithesis* contributes to shape judgment in favour of the movement, calling the public to sympathise with its cause. Why should an investment that causes such an extensive destruction be 'protected at all costs'?

A story of success and danger

Disputatious rhetoric is a productive force for the generation of change. It is a form of rhetoric that challenges hegemonic policies and vocabularies as commonsensical and seeks to introduce alternative viewpoints and meanings, through the construction of counter-hegemonies. But it is also a form of rhetoric that confronts the established order directly, using *parrēsiastikos logos* to present itself as radical and innovative, yet trustworthy by appealing to *logos* and *ethos*; it exposes irregularities, threatening the hierarchy and orderliness of the system. Melodrama becomes the overarching frame of this rhetoric, because, by providing distinct lines of identification, it helps to clarify sides and attribute value to agents; it, therefore, calls for judgment. Finally, through *antithesis*, disputatious rhetoric echoes decisive, clear, and memorable.

In the case of Skouries disputatious rhetoric has been the discursive form through which the anti-mining movement has achieved to establish itself as a prominent and effective voice of protest

and dissent. With an established and growing presence in the social media, the hashtag #Skouries trending daily in Twitter, and frequent references in the Greek and international press, this local movement has achieved to win support for the anti-gold cause from the Greek society and abroad. Most importantly, it has achieved to frame a corporate investment as a political problem, that is as a conflict between two adversaries who want to organise the same space in radically different ways. Furthermore, it has achieved to problematise the idea that growth is the only way out from the economic crisis and to institute dissent, disturbing the projection of neoliberal practices as commonsensical. Finally, it engendered change in the public's perception of the issue, as well as in the objective reality, pointing to the transformative power of disputatious rhetoric. In August 2015, Greece's Ministry of Energy suspended Eldorado's technical studies and as a result the corporation halted all mining and development activity in Halkidiki. Although it would be an exaggeration to see this development as the direct outcome of the movement's actions, there is no doubt that had there not been for its resistance, the government would probably not had taken action. *Kairos*, the circumstances, is an integral factor in the success of any attempt to persuasion.

As an instance of political rhetoric that invokes direct confrontation between different ideas and ideologies, disputatious rhetoric is charged with polarisation, especially for its emotional invocations. Indeed, rhetorical scholarship has been sceptical about the use of melodrama in framing political issues. Burke, for example, argues that as a frame of rejection melodrama 'lacks the well-rounded quality of a completely here-and-now philosophy' and as a result 'makes for fanaticism, the singling-out of one factor above others in the charting of human relationships' (1984, p.28). As the case of Skouries demonstrates, melodrama can lead to polarisation, which can even take the form of clashes between members of the same community. The road from agonism to antagonism is short.

Yet, political activism that aspires to bring about change needs disputatious rhetoric. It needs the explicitness of *parrēsia*; the force of clarity that juxtaposition brings with it; the moment of decision, of judgment, that melodrama urges for. Activism for change, in other words, needs the

political response that disputatious calls for. The anti-gold movement presents a rigid example of contentious politics, whereby two different agents strive for the same symbolic and natural space. By demanding from Eldorado Gold to ‘go away’, the Skouries movement does not merely oppose an intervention in the natural environment; it opposes the neoliberal obsession with ‘growth’, investment, and privatisation of public spaces, even protected natures. It registers in public discourse a counter-hegemonic set of arguments, invites change in public consciousness, and capitalises on *kairos* to effectuate political and social change. Rhetoric is essential to each of these tasks.

## Conclusion

This article made the case for a particular instance of political discourse that aspires to effectuate change. It scrutinised the rhetorical patterns that emerge in this discourse, addressing a gap in the existing literature which, despite having considered the role of confrontation, has failed to provide a political account of this rhetorical technique and to explain how the rhetorical conventions more pertinent to it influence meaning and action. Treating the anti-mining movement in Greece as exemplar, the article argued that there are three particular rhetorical devices that make up disputatious rhetoric and it analysed each of them to illustrate how each contributes to the effectiveness of the movement. More than a form of environmental discourse, disputatious rhetoric connects different political, economic, social, and environmental claims, to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal discourse through a forceful counter-hegemonic discursive assemblage. Disputatious rhetoric is integral to the effort to generate social and political change, not least because it redefines issues as political problems, projects a counter-hegemonic discourse, and invites more politics.

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