

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A NATION IN CRISIS

A study on the politics in/of Greek television fiction

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**DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM,
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

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PAPER I

“All good people have debts”: Framing the Greek crisis in television fiction
Originally published in *Crisis and the Media*, edited by Marianna Patrona,
Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 107-126, 2018.

PAPER II

Domesticating pathogenies, evaluating change: The Eurozone crisis as a ‘hot moment’ in Greek television fiction
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PAPER III

Laughing with / at the national self: Greek television satire and the politics of self-disparagement
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PAPER IV

Making TV fiction in a commercial context: The case of Greek private television
Revised and resubmitted

PAPER V

Authorship potentialities in Greek television fiction: The social dramas of Manousos Manousakis
Submitted for initial review

The author of the thesis is the single author of all the constituent papers.
Papers I, II, and III are reproduced here with the permission of the publishers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of years of watching television, as well as reading and talking about television. It is the end product of an intense intellectual journey that will hopefully not stop here. This page is an opportunity for me to acknowledge the people who have made this journey not only possible, but also enjoyable and rewarding.

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Georgia
Hisingen, October 2018

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A NATION IN CRISIS

A study on the politics in/of Greek television fiction

This thesis offers in-depth studies of the fictional reconstruction and negotiation of moments of heightened societal tension that take place throughout the life of a nation. Its constituent papers focus on the role of television fiction in representing and shaping either critical moments, events, or periods that disrupt the normal pace of life, or unresolved societal tensions that become part of everyday life. What is more, the papers investigate the socio-cultural consequences of representations, in terms of the interpretative lenses television fiction provides for understanding the events as such. The empirical focus is placed on television fiction produced and broadcast in Greece, a country that has recently received a large share of publicity because of its protagonistic role in the late 2000s Eurozone crisis and, at the same time, a media landscape with multiple dimensions that still remain uncharted. The thesis contains case studies from different periods of Greek television fiction, from 1989 – the year of the launch of the first private channels in Greece – onwards, in an attempt to connect the overall project to the production context characterizing commercial television, another aspect of European television in the process of continuous exploration. Through a close analysis of specific television programmes, as well as a complementary study of the production culture of private television in Greece, this thesis aims to contribute to the overall question regarding the role of the media in critical, uncertain, or tumultuous times, with an emphasis on television fiction's potential to recode their meaning and to reflect back on society.

Generally speaking, research focusing on television inevitably believes in the power of television; it emphasizes its importance as a medium through which people learn about and make sense of the world; it monitors its perseverance as an activity, a practice, or a ritual that characterizes contemporary life; it recognizes the impact of its content, specifically with regard to how it corresponds to a variety of socio-cultural needs, such as escapism, entertainment, and belonging, to name a few. The continuous clarification of what the power of television entails becomes, then, a central aspect of every endeavour to say something meaningful about why television (research) matters. In the case of this particular study that gives credence to the persistent importance of television for contemporary societies, the power of television – and the primary aim of this

thesis – could be described as a particular interest in clarifying the ways television fiction incorporates and interacts with critical moments in the life of a nation, with an attentive eye for the socio-cultural consequences of such encounters and negotiations. In this sense, the thesis is interested in the following major research questions:

- How are moments/events/periods and topics of heightened societal tension represented in television fiction?
- How do these representations reflect back on a given society and culture? Additionally, how do they inform the way the national self is potentially understood, accepted, or rejected?
- How do the specificities of a commercial production context aid in understanding the above?

The first research question is concerned with what this thesis calls the politics *in* television fiction. It is a question that draws from a long tradition of research having at its core the question about the relationship between on-screen and off-screen events, characters, issues, and realities, emphasizing the power of on-screen representation as constitutive of the off-screen world (Hall, 1997). The present thesis is particularly interested in the ways that politically relevant issues are absorbed by, depicted in, and given meaning by television fiction or, to be more specific, the ways that critical times infiltrate the content of fictional products. This is studied through a consideration of the codes and conventions of television fiction (such as genre, narrative, characters, settings, etc.) as a cultural form. The second research question is concerned with the politics *of* television fiction, defined here as the potential consequences of the aforementioned intersections between social and fictional worlds. This is a question that draws from a conceptualization of television programmes as events, as much as texts, which can be assigned some sort of socio-cultural agency (Caughie, 1980; Heath, 1990). Consequences in this context are not associated with the tradition of studying media effects through the reception by audiences. Instead, this thesis has been concerned with clarifying what kind of meaning the above representations feed back to society, including possible ways of understanding the world and potential impact on national identity, in terms of shaping understandings of the national self, both in particular moments in time and diachronically. The third research question contextualizes the above within a specific production framework and brings in additional parameters that can contribute to the analysis

of television fiction, such as institutional pressures associated with commercial broadcasting, as well as questions of authorship.

The thesis works with strategically selected cases of Greek television fiction, associated with important periods in the history of modern Greece, and, as such, valuable points of entry into the private life of a nation.¹ Television programmes are explored as socioculturally informative resources that can tell us something meaningful about modern Greek society and culture. Four of the papers (I, II, III, and V) adopt case-informed theoretical, methodological, and analytical frameworks, based on an overall assessment of the programmes' content, as well as an evaluation of their status within the historical context of their production and broadcast (and their legacy). A fifth paper (IV) functions as a contextualization study, situating the other papers within a particular production culture, that of Greek private television. As a result, in the papers that constitute the core of this thesis, the aforementioned general research questions take the form of the following, more pitched, enquiries:

- By reflecting on the role of television fiction in times of societal tension and the ways in which its formal conventions contribute to the (re)construction of an aspect of social reality, the definition of certain problems, the evaluation of possible solutions and the moral evaluation of situations, Paper I examines how the Greek crisis is framed in the popular Greek television comedy *Πίσω στο Σπίτι / Piso sto Spiti* (MEGA Channel, 2011-2013).
- By proposing an understanding of television fiction as an accommodator and shaper of 'hot moments', instigating processes of self-assessment and evaluation of change, Paper II examines the ways in which culturally based understandings of the Eurozone crisis in the popular Greek television comedy *Πίσω στο Σπίτι / Piso sto Spiti* become connected with constructions of the identity of the modern Greek.
- By engaging with the cultural consequences of the self-disparaging politics of television satire, Paper III focuses on the ways in which an emblematic programme of Greek television fiction, *Οι Αυθαίρετοι / Oi Afthairetoi* (MEGA Channel, 1989-1991) constructs and ridicules a particular (negative) version of the Greek self, the 'Neoellinas'.

¹ The title of the present thesis is a direct reference to the famous aphorism by John Ellis describing broadcast television as "the private life of a nation-state" (1982, p. 5).

- Paper IV draws from interviews with creators of television fiction (directors and screenwriters) with experience in Greek private television. By registering the particularities of making television fiction in a commercial context, the paper investigates the operational principles of commercial television and the parameters that factor in the creation of certain types of programmes.
- Paper V puts insights acquired from interviews with television practitioners (Manousos Manousakis and Maria Manousaki) side by side with the close reading of three television programmes (with an emphasis on the use of specific narrative tropes) in order to explore the creative forces behind the production of television drama within a commercial context.

The above exposition of both general and specific research enquiries walls in the main paths this research takes. By addressing these enquiries, the present thesis commits to the following objectives:

(a) It intends to correspond to an ongoing debate regarding the role of media in times of uncertainty, turbulence, and crisis, exerting an effort towards the inclusion of television fiction as a significant cultural platform where both understandings of critical times and their possible consequences are assigned meaning(s). In this sense, it is interested in expanding the gamut of resources that can clarify the prominence of certain interpretative frames in society and the downplaying of others.

(b) It aims to enrich the ongoing theorization of the relationship between politics and television fiction, through an expansion of what the study of the politics in/of television fiction could entail as part of its research agenda. More specifically, it combines an interest in the ways that events of heightened societal significance find their way into fictional stories, with an attention to the socio-cultural consequences of this fictionalization process, especially with regard to how they reflect back on issues of self-identity.

(c) It aspires to contribute to a critical analysis of television content, by taking into consideration the particularities of the production culture they are born in. In this sense it treats programmes of television fiction as culturally relevant and socially significant resources, which are however produced within a commercial context.

(d) It hopes to provide reasons for the national lens for the study of television fiction to remain active. This does not mean that this thesis in any way negates current developments and trends characterizing global television production. It does, however, want to function as a reminder that scholarly research should not

overlook phenomena that take place within national borders and are, consequently, less visible to outsiders. As a result, this thesis should be understood not only as an attempt to provide greater visibility to Greek television by looking at it as a small nation but also as a necessary step towards revealing common grounds that could potentially inform future comparative approaches.

General conceptual frames, such as the above, regarding what television is and why it matters within the context of a given thesis are always necessary; they register the tenor of the investigation and predispose the reader regarding what a critical lens zooms in on and what exceeds its focus. A reflection on contextually situated frames is equally important, as it can communicate and justify all of the ideas and choices that give this thesis a specific angle. The birth and development of every research enquiry is, inescapably, a product of its time. The initial idea for this thesis was born during a time when Greece and the Greek crisis were receiving a significant amount of attention in the news, with international media creating and then attempting to satisfy a growing public interest in contemporary Greek culture and society. This most recent moment of tension, the financial crisis of the late 2000s, shed light on a number of different aspects of life in modern Greece and activated numerous discourses on Greekness that were negotiated intensely within the sphere of the media. Simultaneously, the crisis triggered processes of reflection and evaluation of the concept of what it means to be Greek, which was problematized and put under the magnifying lens of academia. This took place as an attempt to theorize the recent crisis not as an isolated incident, detached from historical, political, and economic circumstances, but as a consequence of a perpetual crisis caused by the country's divergence from European standards. The empirical focus of this thesis is inspired by a research current that attempts a historicization of the problematic reality and representation of Greekness, extending its study to the recent past and discussing the current crisis within the framework of the conditions that contributed to the shaping of modern Greece (Kakogianni, 2014; Tsoukalas, 2012; Vamvakas, 2014).

Similar developments were taking place in the academic world internationally; the recent Eurozone crisis and its Greek version renewed academic interest in the role of media during times of significant societal tumult. The multifaceted character of these intense events revived academic interest in the ideological role of media, as is illustrated by the vast number of published studies dealing with the media framing of the crisis and its discursive character, as well as with its impact on the awakening of identity discourses, based mainly

on studies of national and international newspapers, news magazines, and television news programmes (Bickes, Otten, & Weymann, 2014; Mylonas, 2012, 2014; Papathanasopoulos, 2014; Tzogopoulos, 2013; Wodak & Angouri, 2014).

Although recent events and responses from the media have perhaps intensified the impression that these crisis events are unparalleled and unique, this is not a study that limits itself to one single period of crisis, instability, transition, or change; instead, it turns to multiple examples of times when a given society is faced with some kind of need or obligation to transition “from an old to some new form of cultural life” (Bidney, 1946, p. 538). It is according to this logic that the sphere of popular culture – including film and television – also started to attract scholarly attention, on the basis of its potential to register, interpret, and ideologically attire such events of significant socio-cultural density (Boyle & Mrozowski, 2013; Negra & Tasker, 2014; Tziouvas, 2017). Inspired from this line of investigation, the present thesis attempts to equip the analysis of television fiction with sensitized analytical frameworks and concepts for the study of television fiction that responds to critical times in the life of a nation.

Finally, the years right before, as well as during, the writing of this thesis have been characterized by decisive shifts in the Greek media landscape. One can easily and rightfully assume that the major factor responsible for these changes has been the climate of economic exigencies caused by the Eurozone crisis, which were felt by both big and small ‘players’ of the local media industry. Indeed, in the last few years, the Greek media have suffered blows so severe that their economic survival has been challenged and their social prestige has been tainted. Apart from being framed as a victim of unprecedented times of economic asphyxiation, the media industry of Greece has also been accused of being part of the system that contributed to the general downfall (Pleios, 2013). The above events have also led to an existential crisis and the formulation of anxieties regarding the general role of media for a given society and their significance in times of extreme uncertainty and radical changes.

Each of the sections of this summary chapter aims at clarifying aspects of this thesis that either did not have the space to be included extensively in its constituent parts or resulted from the author’s negotiation with the case studies during their planning phase, in between the papers, or even at a later time. While the papers that constitute this thesis can be read as final products of the analytical process, the summary chapter reveals the status of a doctoral thesis as a process; in this case, it is used as an opportunity to provide transparency to a number of

choices on various levels, as well as a platform for a reflective assessment of the research output. More specifically, the summary chapter is committed to providing the following complements: a literature review that focuses on understandings and extensions of the ‘political’ in contemporary television scholarship; a synthesis of the theoretical springboards informing the studies overall; a section that summarizes the papers and pins down the specific contributions achieved in each one of them and in thesis as a whole; an extensive argumentation about the focus on Greek television as the empirical locus of this thesis; clarifications regarding methodology and data; and, finally, a reflective section that provides insights into the general conceptual framing of this thesis. Overall, the purpose of this summary chapter is to function as a companion for the papers that follow, revealing some things about their past, binding them together in the present time, and hinting towards future possibilities.

THE POLITICS IN/OF TELEVISION FICTION: A literature review

Today’s television viewer comes across a wide variety of television fiction described as ‘political’ on the basis of its content and angle: political dramas where the sphere of politics is an integral part of the plot, such as *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-present), *The Crown* (Netflix, 2016-present), *Madam Secretary* (CBS, 2014-present), and *Borgen* (DR1, 2010-2013); dramas that exceed the spaces of formal politics and take place against the backdrop of politically infused power struggles within institutions, such as *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-present) and *The Young Pope* (Sky Atlantic, 2016-present); and a broad range of fiction that deals with politically inflected issues, primarily engaging in the politics of identity and often quoted as making a difference, such as *Girls* (HBO, 2012-2017), *Dear White People* (Netflix, 2017-present), *Insecure* (HBO, 2016-present), and *Skam* (NRK, 2015-2017).² Correspondingly, today’s television

² The political content or significance of these shows is often underscored in accounts of journalistic criticism, encouraging audiences to interpret them through their political dimensions, while at the same time providing their own interpretations of and reflections on them – often including the creator’s take on what exactly is political about their shows. *House of Cards* is almost always referred to as a ‘political drama’ that can be read as mirroring contemporary politics (Murphy, 2013) but equally so as failing to depict American politics in the era of Donald Trump (Loofbourow, 2016). *The Crown* has been described as “a surprisingly granular, methodical look at British political life in the 1950s” (Sims, 2016). *Madam Secretary*’s relationship with the world of politics is defined, according to creator and showrunner Barbara Hall, as “politics without polarization – meaning no clearly defined party being followed”, as the

scholar is in the position to observe intersections of politics and television fiction in different academic strands and clusters of research originating in diverse theoretical backgrounds and applying a variety of methodological tools. However, one could notice that the agenda of these intersections is often quite common; television fiction is an aspect of contemporary media landscape brimming with political content and/or significance.

The turn of the century witnessed increasing interest in the political relevance of television, although publications explicitly exploring the relationship between politics and popular culture – including television fiction – had already started to appear in the 1990s (see, for example, John Street’s *Politics and Popular Culture*). The output of this academic encounter between politics and popular culture has been prolific, with journals such as *Media, Culture & Society*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, and *Popular Communication* hosting numerous studies proposing a reconsideration of the area of popular culture – and television fiction in particular – as valuable resource for an investigation of the complex relation between entertainment and political representations, messages, and values (Cardo, 2011; Corner & Richardson, 2008; Inthorn, Street, & Scott, 2012; Nikolaidis, 2011; van Zoonen & Wring, 2012). Through these attempts, the study of the political is associated with a focus on the mediation of political culture – mainly politicians and political processes – through Anglophone television series with explicitly political content. Such studies revolve around questions that seek to understand better how such representations contribute to the viewers’ understanding of formal politics through the imaginative potential of fictional narratives.

show is more interested in focusing on the world of diplomacy (Turchiano, 2018). The success of the Danish political drama *Borgen* is explained through its balanced mix of storylines involving formal politics and the personal lives of the protagonists, as well as an extensive depiction of the relationship between the world of politics and the world of journalism (Brown, 2013). *Homeland*, focusing on the professional challenges and internal struggles of a CIA agent, is discussed in its ability to hold “a mirror up to our current geopolitical situation” (Von Doviak, 2018). The story of *The Young Pope* has been said to “actually understand politics”, unlike *House of Cards*, focusing on the internal and external politics of the Vatican Church (Rosenberg, 2017). Lena Dunham’s *Girls* is widely recognized as a representational breakthrough when it comes to sexuality and body politics (Roberts, 2013). Netflix’s *Dear White People* and HBO’s *Insecure* have frequently attracted attention based on their focus on identity politics, even though the former is treated as intentionally political (Ugwu, 2018) and the latter as inadvertently political (Mulkerrens, 2017). The Norwegian teen drama *Skam* is associated with a commitment towards “wryly covering the politics and global issues that real teens are exposed to in everyday life”, including “the realities of being a Muslim – especially in today’s political climate” (Nashid, 2017).

However, apart from attempts coming up tangentially in scholarly journals, this doubling down of the relationship between entertainment and politics often takes the form of an attempt of systematization that aspires to clarify how the concept of the political is meant to inform the study of television fiction, among other genres of popular entertainment, such as films or television satire. In these accounts, the study of the intersection between the popular and the political takes the form of a research map with clear(er) indications about areas, types of questions, and empirical material more likely to deliver interesting results. What is more, such accounts provide more concrete explanations about the relevance of such questions within the current political and cultural climate. R. Lance Holbert's nine-part typology, for instance, channels research around the political towards the level of content ("the nature of the political messages being offered through various entertainment outlets") and the level of consumption ("the ways in which these different content types can influence an audience"), eventually associating types of entertainment television with possible effects on audiences (2005, p. 437). John Street identifies specific ways that popular culture engages with politics, namely, by representing the political (the portrayal of explicitly political topics), by revealing the political (where politics is read into the text and is communicated as ideology), by politically positioning the audience – by framing reality in a specific way and by contributing to the construction of collective identities –, and by dramatizing political morality (and motivating political action; (Street, 2012). A similar attempt is made by Stephen Coleman, who problematizes what is meant by politics and the political within the context of representation and the genre of soap opera in particular (2008). Coleman's study embraces the need for an expansive conception of the political, by providing certain dimensions or understandings that could reconcile the personal character of fictional storylines with the need to make the presence of politics visible in entertainment. Drawing mostly from the sphere of cinematic representations, Christensen and Haas develop a typology based on two axes, political content and political intent, in order to dissect the political messages transmitted by fiction and to foretell their potential impact (2005).

While the above typologies include definitional attempts and inscribe research paths in order to make the study of the political in entertainment genres more systematic, eventually what has mostly characterized them is the admission of the elusiveness of this intersection. Instead of an ensconcement in narrow definitions of politics, relevant literature tends to adopt a logic of continuous

expansion. In this sense, the political is inescapably tied into the interpretative nature of analytical work in the field of media and television studies, which – paired with audiences’ multiple and diverse interpretations – “make[s] any exact, unambiguous definition unattainable” (Sachleben & Yenerall, 2012, pp. 6-7). A review of the field is bound to bring to surface calls for both the scholar and the television viewer to discover the political by “see[ing] beyond the story, film, or specific television clip (or quip)” (ibid, p. 5), to “uncover the subtle aspects of politics in society” (Van Belle, 2013, pp. 10-11), or to study how the political is “revealed” in different facets of popular culture (Street, 2012, pp. 79-80). It would not be undue to argue that this kind of research is rarely organized upon predetermined understandings of the political;³ rather, it seems that its momentum is built through a consciously flexible definition of the political.

As a result, the political relevance of television fiction is now discussed within fields that traditionally focus on different types of spaces and texts. In the area of political communication, entertainment media and popular culture are seen as having a broadening effect in the scope of the discipline (Semetko & Scammell, 2012). Scholars in this field seem to welcome this logic of expansion in the ways in which the flow of politically infused messages is understood. This logic calls for an inclusion of entertainment media – including various genres of television fiction – in the array of resources available for the study of political engagement, based on the increase of overtly political content in prime-time entertainment television, as well as the effects of the latter in the formation and cultivation of particular views and attitudes (Carpini, 2012). Along the same lines, other approaches are characterized by an equation of the political relevance of television fiction with the route into citizenship and civic engagement. The work of Peter Dahlgren has been an important point of reference for this approach, addressing popular culture as a type of political education, training the viewers – especially the younger ones – into becoming citizens (2010), responding in this way to previously expressed pessimistic accounts of the effects of the medium of television on people’s political engagement (Putnam, 2000).

In a similar vein, the field of popular geopolitics – a sub-field of critical geopolitics – is strongly defined by the belief that geopolitics is no longer a discursive practice taking place within elite spaces of international relations and

³ This has, in fact, been one of the criticisms towards research that finds itself within this interdisciplinary space. In a review article focusing on five publications that appeared around the mid-2000s, it is argued that a common characteristic in this type of research is a conceptual ambiguity about what the concept of the political actually entails (Van Santen, 2008).

diplomacy. On the contrary, the main principle of popular geopolitics derives from the assumption that geopolitical discourses are not a privilege “in the hands of ‘intellectuals of statecraft’” (Sharp, 1996, p. 557), but rather they are to be found in “locations that may lie outside of the formal arena of state” (ibid.). Accounts such as the above debunk the monopoly of elite discourses and promote popular discourses as equally relevant but also equally constitutive of the social reality, elevating, as Jason Dittmer argues, popular culture as “one of the ways in which people come to understand their position both within a larger collective identity and within an even broader geopolitical narrative, or script” (2005, p. 626). Along the same lines, discourse studies has made some cautious overtures towards television fiction. Ruth Wodak, viewing politics as inherently linked to language, discourse, and communication, introduces the concept of ‘fictionalization of politics’ and pushes towards the recognition of particular fictional genres as carriers of political values (2010).

It could be argued that the study of television fiction in light of the politics of identity has been one of the most prolific and prioritized clusters of research. Here, the focus is specifically placed on ‘identity projects’, seeking to understand the role that fiction is called to play in negotiating, constructing, or bolstering national identity. In contrast with the above theorizations, which share an empirical focus on Anglo-American television fiction, the study of the intersection of television fiction and the politics of identity has enjoyed a stark transnational interest. Sanna Inthorn, for instance, in her study of German media and national identity, addresses television fiction as an agent of discursive practices for the national imagination (2007), while Hilde Van den Bulck and Dave Sinardet argue for the resilience of the national as a conceptual framework for the study of the politics of fiction, despite the seemingly outdated – within the modernist project – concept of national identity (2006). Monroe E. Price provides a view of national identity as something that needs to be protected by the media, especially when it comes to societies that go through processes of transition (1995). It is quite interesting to notice that through the involvement with different national and cultural contexts, more and more facets of the role of television in the construction of national identity are revealed and that each television culture follows – to a small or large extent – a different path. For example, Enric Castelló reveals an aspect of intentionality in the ways that Catalan public television utilizes fictional television series in the process of nation building (2007). Along the same lines, Van den Bulck (2001) and Alexander Dhoest (2004) examine the

case of Flemish public television and the processes of construction of a homogenous discourse of Flemish national identity in an attempt to educate the viewers into becoming citizens of a given community.

All in all, it appears that the conceptual intersections of politics and television fiction have been an all-win situation for the parties involved. On one hand, the integration of various forms of television fiction in the depository of available resources for the study of politics offers a refreshing tone and corroborates the centrality of the role that television fiction plays in contemporary understandings of political events, processes, and identities. This is, of course, connected to a general logic transcending interdisciplinary work, aiming to rejuvenate individual disciplines by establishing a creative dialogue between them (Salter & Hearn, 1996). On the other hand, television fiction has received reciprocal gains. The quest for embedded political representations, messages, and values in popular culture has been leading the crusade in favour of a process of legitimation of the study of popular cultural forms such as television fiction, defined here not (only) as part of the ongoing legitimation project that appears as a lingering characteristic of the study of television (Newman & Levine, 2012) but more so as an attempt to intensify the need for the continuous grounding of television research on contemporary phenomena.

The studies included in this thesis benefit from the logic of expansion in the investigation of the political within television fiction, or, to put it in a different way, they attest to the political as informed and constructed by the cases under scrutiny on each occasion. Admittedly, this thesis is not concerned with the representation of formal politics in television fiction. The empirical focus is not placed on sub-genres defined by the ascendancy of political spaces, events, processes, and professionals. In this sense, the thesis is sensitized towards the status of the relationship between politics and the media in different national (media) contexts; political dramas, comedies, thrillers, etc. are not common within the context of Greek television fiction. Instead, the present thesis employs an approach of discovery of the political not only in the television text but also beyond and before it. To be more specific, it becomes concerned with the following conceptualizations of the political:

- i. The politics in the television text, defined as an interest in the presence of real-life events of heightened societal tension in the content of television fiction. This understanding is attentive towards representations of critical moments, events, or periods, but also unresolved socio-cultural issues of significant

- visibility in public debate and/or in the media agenda. As a result, it emphasizes an understanding of the political within historical conditions with a particular weight for the cultural context under investigation.
- ii. The politics of – or beyond – the television text, defined as an interest in processes that exceed the content of television fiction but are informed by it. This understanding includes primarily the function of television fiction as an agent of orientation in times of societal turbulence, as well as a contributor to processes of identity formation. In this light, it contributes to the group of literature that prioritizes the study of the political within the framework of ‘identity projects’.
 - iii. The politics before the television text, defined as an interest in the conditions that precede the content of television fiction. This understanding gives heed to the production context within which television fiction is born. By doing so, it contributes to the above-described general body of literature by turning the focus to the sphere of processes, instead of products, by means of an inclusion of the operational principles of commercial television and the creative visions of television professionals.

THE POWER OF TELEVISION, REVISITED: Theoretical springboards

Following the above body of literature focusing on the varieties of intersection of popular culture with the different conceptualizations of politics, this section could be described as an explication of the major theoretical springboards used throughout this thesis. First of all, it is important to clarify the television of this study, that is, to define it in terms of object of enquiry and analytical approach. In short, this thesis centralizes fictional stories produced for the medium of television as the central object of enquiry, adopting a *socio-cultural approach* for the study of television. In the papers that constitute the core of this thesis, television fiction is addressed and corroborated as a significant resource in an attempt to understand how societies and cultures make sense of social reality and of themselves respectively. At the same time, the papers present television as an integrated part of a society, based on the idea that fictional stories are in one way or another both products and shapers of a particular historical reality, drawing inspiration from and expanding the imaginative potential of societies. Therefore, the kind of television research included in this thesis is not only interested in delivering knowledge about particular programmes, genres, creators, or channels. Here,

television fiction is put under investigation specifically because of the ways it interweaves with a given society's present. Also, by looking back at its past and contemplating its future, the present thesis rehearses the argument about television analysis as a powerful resource for the understanding of society and culture, as well as the shifts, contradictions, and changes within it (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Consequently, the research undertaken in the constituent parts of this thesis do not apply evaluative television aesthetics, a strand of academic criticism of television fiction that tends to focus on "a narrow range of texts that apparently privilege a particular mode of television programming and a specific audience demographic" (Lury, 2016, p. 119). Rather, it tends to look at television without bringing in any kind of aesthetic prejudice or moral hierarchy. The papers adopt a 'situated' approach that places television fiction within "the daily flow of ideas, meanings, images and discourse that are esteemed (or derided) in national broadcasting services" (Piper, 2016, p. 164).

The description of television as an integrated part of society requires further elucidation; the notion is necessarily – and somewhat unoriginally – associated with a contextual study of television. The study of television programmes in this thesis does not take place in a vacuum – it rarely does anyway. Generally speaking, the study of contexts includes an attention for a wide network of forces that "determines how programs, audiences, and industries work, while further determining how and why television matters" (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 114). Particularly when it comes to the study of television programmes, contextualism is associated with the following view of and approach to television texts:

[...] not as discrete entities that stand alone but instead exist in relation to a broad range of other discourses, placing media production and consumption within a vast social and cultural configuration of competing voices and positions. Rather than canonize a text for its intrinsic or inherent value, we try to understand and articulate more fully the frameworks within which individual texts are produced, circulated and consumed. (Jenkins, McPherson, & Shattuc, 2002, p. 16)

The studies included in this thesis invoke contextualism in three main ways. The first layer of contextualism relates to the sphere of social reality; after all, the studies reflect on the infiltration and fictionalization of real-life conditions on television. The concept of television as primarily a storytelling mechanism has contributed to an understanding of televisual stories as "interpretative practices" (Buonanno, 2008, p. 72), with an almost *sine qua non* referential commitment to

social reality. In this sense, televisual stories are a tool for people to make sense of “the flow of events that would otherwise be chaotic, and cognitively and emotionally out of control” (ibid). This is in line with a body of literature that has argued for the value of televisual stories as a means for dealing with a gamut of complex situations and problems that characterize contemporary realities, from what has been called “the personal and private politics of everyday life”, which includes issues of identity, sexuality/gender, and community/nationhood (Creeber, 2004, p. 116), to “public issue storylines”, which refer to sensitive, controversial, and/or challenging social issues, such as sexual violence, health and illness, and mental distress (Henderson, 2007, p. 24), to even wider events of socio-economic nature that are leaving a mark on contemporary experiences of the social world (Boyle & Mrozowski, 2013; Negra & Tasker, 2014).

The second layer of contextualism concerns the positioning of television fiction within a wider network of connections and interactions that exceed the television text itself. The studies included in this thesis discuss television fiction not only as a reflection of the social world but also in its interaction with other media discourses simultaneously circulating and informing audiences’ understandings of the external social reality. These discourses are present both in other programmes of television fiction and in other television genres (e.g., news) and media (e.g., the press). This idea corresponds to a transtextual approach to the study of television fiction, one that is informed by a deliberation of its “relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (Genette, 1997, p. 1). It is also informed by an understanding of the television text as a bearer of various “layers of discursive sedimentation” that enable meaning to be created not only through interactions with the text itself but also through its embeddedness in a wider network of media stimuli (Deming, 1986, p. 34). In this sense, television fiction is studied through its ability to represent not just television itself, as Stephen Heath has put it (1990), but rather a wider constellation of mediated versions of social reality.

Since its conception, this project has been particularly concerned with a view of television as a medium and content of socio-cultural foundation, function, but most importantly, *consequence*. Therefore, a great deal of emphasis falls onto the repercussions of the interaction between fiction and reality, discussed here as a final layer of contextualism, which has to do with “situating our readings in terms of their impact on contemporary life” (Jenkins et al., 2002, p. 17). In other words, the work of this thesis could be described as generally belonging to a current of

enquiries particularly concerned with the ways that popular television reflects back on the social world and acquires some sort of socio-cultural agency. This resonates John Caughie's proposition of television programmes as "events", as much as texts (1980, p. 34), that actually take place within the life of a nation and leave noteworthy marks on it. These marks have been described as the "material effects" of television programmes, which occur both in the space they occupy within current debates at the time of their broadcasting and also in terms of their relationship to the other representations predominantly circulated within popular culture (ibid, p. 33). To this, one could also add the long-term impact of television programmes, in terms of the ways audiences remember these programmes (or are reminded of them through reruns), thus extending their impact across time, beyond their original broadcasting moment.⁴ After all, as John Corner has argued, "all of the television that we watch will bring about some modification in our knowledge and experience, however minor and temporary" (1999, p. 6). Television's "powerful agency" is then located – without turning a blind eye to the commercial model of its operation and the function of its content as entertainment – at the intersection of its 'political' and 'symbolic' character, and more specifically in its role as a supplier of information and mediator of events and processes, as well as a shaper of multiple facets of everyday experience (ibid, pp. 5-6).

Overall, the discussion about the power of television revisited in this thesis includes the parameters explicated above, but it is also conscious of certain limitations. The first one concerns the acknowledgement that "[s]tudying texts in context also suggests that their meaning is subject to change" (Jenkins et al., 2002, p. 16) and the idea that scholarly analysis is tied to a specific historical reality. The second one refers to the paradox of speaking about the impact of television on contemporary life without including in this research the audience of television; scholarly analysis should always take into consideration the "openness" of television texts (Fiske, 1986). The third one concerns the risk involved in the presentation of causal relations within the study of television; according to Cummins and Gordon (2006), television is not an exclusive force but rather a component of a wider spectrum of changes in society. As a result, an embracement of the "heterogeneity, complexity, and the unpredictable dynamic of the cultural" (2017, p. 45) should always inform every attempt to interpret the relationship between television fiction and society.

⁴ In this sense, it is necessary that we constantly think of television as "a site of both simultaneity and storage" (Ericson, 2011, p. 140).

SPOILER ALERT!: Summaries of papers and key findings

The constituent papers of this thesis become concerned with various ways of interaction between television fiction and moments or topics of heightened societal tension in the life of a nation. This section includes a summary of each paper, presented in the order the studies were conducted so that the trajectory of the overall research process becomes discernible as well. The summaries address the general and specific research enquiries presented in the introduction, while they also recapitulate the main findings produced in each study. The section concludes with some reflections on the contributions of this study as a whole.

Building on the notion of the Greek crisis of the late 2000s as a discursive event and revisiting theories about the socio-cultural role of television fiction, Paper I discusses television fiction as a ‘framing mechanism’ through which events of the social world are defined and assessed. It works closely with an event clearly characterized as a crisis, primarily of economic nature but with evident political and socio-cultural aspects, and the ways it infiltrates the story, setting, characters and plot of the popular Greek television comedy *Piso Sto Spiti* (MEGA channel, 2011–2013). It is argued that by examining the way in which a particular topic is portrayed, by identifying what kind of problem it is presented as, by observing how it is assessed causally, by registering the ways in which it invites a moral evaluation of characters and situations, as well as by focusing on the kinds of resolutions it offers, it becomes possible to uncover the ideological slant of the media content under investigation. In this sense, the paper contributes to a body of work that emphasizes the discursive power of television content; more specifically, it explains fiction’s function as a platform where crisis events are talked into being and offered to audiences as entertaining content on prime-time slots, repackaged in such a way that specific interpretations of the crisis are elevated as more plausible than others. Eventually, this analysis illustrates television fiction’s contribution to the construction of the root causes of the crisis as tied to the cultural traits of Greeks, the impossibility of change and the futility of an alternative, left-wing consideration of the crisis, as well as an attempt to morally assess the situation at hand.

As a follow-up investigation, the fictionalization of the recent financial crisis of the late 2000s is explored in Paper II through the concept of a ‘hot moment’, borrowed from the study of media events of noteworthy societal impact (Zelizer, 1992). The paper argues for an understanding of television fiction as a shaper and accommodator of opportunities for cultural introspection. In this case, the

investigation approaches more closely the role of television fiction in times of crisis through an emphasis on the ways that the mediation of events of heightened societal turbulence reflects back on issues of identity and change. More specifically, the paper examines the ways in which the family comedy *Piso sto Spiti* provides culturally based understandings of the Eurozone crisis by depicting it as associated with inherent flaws of the modern Greek and by assessing the possibility of change through a juxtaposition with national ‘others’. Therefore, the understanding of the financial crisis as a case study of the interplay among economy, politics, culture, and communication is confirmed (Sandvoss, 2010), and television fiction emerges as a platform that not only encourages the culturalization of events of the social world but also evaluates and predicts how the national self will respond to such events. At the same time, it proposes the study of the content of television fiction in terms of interaction with other media discourses simultaneously circulating within a society.

One of the most important findings that arise out of the first two papers is television fiction’s contribution to the construction of a particular version of the national self, packed with shortcomings and referred to as ‘the flawed Greek’. Previous literature shows that the relationship between television and the shaping of national identity is strong and common across cultural contexts and time. The focus of the next study turns to a contextually situated understanding of the relationship between television fiction and the construction of national identity; it does so through a closer look at a different critical period in the life of a nation, associated with a kind of socio-cultural transition made possible through Europeanization. More specifically, Paper III explores whether the ‘flawed Greekness’ discourse that emerges in recent popular television responses to the financial crisis has any kind of historical background. The close study of an iconic television comedy from the first years of private television in Greece supports the above hypothesis with proof that, during a different period of existential anxiety on a collective level, television fiction can be seen to promote a problematic version of national self, the ‘Neoellinas’. Apart from the contextual value of the identification of television fiction’s role in the definition and encouragement of a notion of the national self that has diachronically informed modern Greek identity, the study joins a line of research that adopts a ‘suspicious’ attitude towards the ideological underpinnings of satiric discourse (Hutcheon, 1994; Keighron, 1998; Lockyer, 2010; Simpson, 2003). More particularly, it contributes to the enrichment of the concept of ‘satiric misfire’, a condition where satire does not

make full use of its critical edge; instead of taking advantage of its subversive potential, it gives rise to an ambivalent practice of self-disparagement.

Paper IV is a contextualization study, focusing on the production culture of television fiction in Greece – with an emphasis on the private channels that broadcast the programmes discussed in this thesis – in order to enrich the other four papers with additional layers of context. The paper discusses three themes that can enhance the conceptual and analytical specificity of private television: the transition from the state-owned media landscape to the commercial era, the status of ideology within a commercial context, and the notion of entertainment as the dominant institutional logic of private television. The empirical data consist of interviews with 11 television creators with working experience in Greek private broadcasting addressed here as carriers of experiences, intentions, and reflections. By embracing an exploratory approach, the paper assesses the ways that accounts from television professionals confirm, challenge, or clarify what we know about commercially oriented broadcasting in Europe, but also discloses certain particularities of the operation of private television in Greece. The main contributions of the paper include a clarification of the power of the advertisers and the extent of their interventions in the content of television, an identification of tangible ways that dominant worldviews find their way into television fiction, and an explication of the origins of the institutional understanding of programmes as commercial products with an entertaining function.

Paper V combines the lessons learnt in the previous studies; while remaining close to the analysis of television programmes, it incorporates creators' voices in order to clarify the creative forces behind the fictionalization of societal tensions and cultural differences in Greek television drama. The paper works closely with the work of an emblematic figure of Greek television fiction, director Manousos Manousakis. It offers an analysis of a triptych of television dramas that deal with unconventional or difficult romance, largely drawing inspiration from socio-cultural tensions taking place in Greece during the time of their broadcast. In this sense, television fiction is presented with the potential to contribute to meaning-making processes, activated by ongoing tensions taking place in the social world. This is discussed as a quite open process, in the sense that it generates a variety of interpretations since it stabilizes and organizes meanings while at the same time raises questions and maintains uncertainty. Finally, the paper confirms the polyauthorial nature of commercial television and argues for the value of the

concept of authorship as a means through which certain products – and television cultures – can gain scholarly visibility.

Reflecting on the above, it becomes imperative to provide an overall evaluation of the kind of extensions of the political that are eventually achieved in these studies. To begin with, it would be fair to observe that all of the studies adopt the logic of digging for the political, in the sense that they do not focus on facets of television fiction that can immediately be categorized as having a direct representational relationship with the political sphere. Rather, the focus is placed on discovering and informing the political in cases where it is intrinsically embedded within television fiction's "lifeworld content", to use William A. Gamson's term (1999). Papers I and II make a case for the function of television fiction as a source for information and orientation during a crisis situation, pushing for an understanding of television fiction as integrated in a society's reserve of meaning-making mechanisms. Papers II and III reiterate the impact of television fiction on the social construction of national identity, confirming the already established notion of national television as shaper of unifying understandings of the national self, but also extending this idea to include more problematic, discordant, or critical versions of it. Paper IV constitutes an attempt to form a liaison between the study of the political and the study of the commercial, discussing the case of private television not only as an enterprise wired towards profit making but also as a platform where one can witness political pressures in action and socio-political messages in the making. Last but not least, Paper V proposes an understanding of fictional narratives as both informative and constitutive of phenomena of socio-political density, and a view of the television creator as a commentator of current affairs with socio-cultural implications.

INTROVERT TELEVISION CULTURES: The case of Greece

It was argued earlier that the focus of this thesis on Greece was partly motivated by the public and scholarly interest shown in a small country of the European south, which was at the time being discussed as a case of extraordinary economic, political, and cultural particularities. The high position these persistent discussions about Greece were maintaining in the media agenda inspired the design of a project that sought to indulge in the study of socio-cultural phenomena taking place in contemporary Greece, through a close monitoring of the role of media and television fiction in particular. This section is particularly dedicated to

a more detailed explication of the empirical focus on Greek television, which is addressed in this thesis as a piece of a puzzle, requiring close attention in order for someone to decipher the rich information it contains, while at the same time contributing to the shaping of a larger picture that is always in the process of enrichment and clarification. The view of the larger picture, which could be described as knowledge about the European media landscape, is more or less visible today – even if smaller pieces of the puzzle are still missing –, through previous research that has shed light on various layers of its historical particularities and circumstances (Bignell & Fickers, 2008) and its status in the everyday life of European citizens, as well as the tensions and possibilities of the ‘national’ (Bondebjerg, Novrup Redvall, & Higson, 2015), its commercialization processes (Donders, Pauwels, & Loisen, 2013), and the status of the ‘regional’ and the ‘transnational’, often delivered through a comparative framework (Fickers & Johnson, 2012; Wieten, Murdock, & Dahlgren, 2000). However, it is only when all the puzzle pieces are present that one can gain access to the details of the synthesis, observe how the pieces clasp together, and decipher what kinds of smaller configurations they create. The work of this thesis resembles the process of finding the right place for a piece of the puzzle; it is all about zooming in and out, paying attention to detail without losing focus on the bigger picture, and finding the right balance between specificity and relevance.

Traditionally, the area of Television Studies – and studies of television – has been characterized by a predilection for the study of Anglophone television fiction, establishing certain television cultures as ‘naturally’ prioritized objects of enquiry and overshadowing “the distinctive formations and histories of television in other nation-states” (Geraghty & Lusted, 1998, p. 9). Throughout the years, various critical approaches and concepts, as well as issues of popularity and trend, have shaped the agenda adopted by scholars interested in the study of television and its content. For instance, ‘quality television’ has proved a critical approach through which certain programmes claim visibility and gain legitimacy in television criticism, monopolizing scholarly attention and establishing what is important and relevant object of study (Geraghty, 2003; Jacobs, 2006; Lury, 2016). In recent years, the study of television in Europe has shown a penchant for hyped television products such as the so-called Nordic Noir, characterized by commercial success transcending the boundaries of specific geographical regions, high production standards – reviving discourses around ‘quality television’ once

again –, and high exportability (Bauer, Hochscherf, & Philippsen, 2013; Creeber, 2015; Novrup Redvall, 2013).

Studying Greek television in an international context reveals a striking contrast between what one might call *introvert* and *extrovert* television cultures. The above examples could be said to belong to a category of extrovert television cultures, defined by production principles that appear to be friendlier to international dissemination and, subsequently, scholarly analysis. In contrast, Greek television can be described as a persistently introvert television culture, characterized by production and consumption primarily on a national level, failing even to attract the attention of local academia (Vamvakas, 2018). This thesis does not demur to the value of an intensified focus on popular television that travels well and manages to leave a trace on the cultural imaginary of audiences across borders and across time. On the contrary, it acknowledges the significance of the close study of programmes, as well as production cultures and audiences, on the basis of “an increased Europeanization and globalization of our social and cultural imaginaries” (Bondebjerg et al., 2015, p. 14). Yet it wants to act as a reminder of the persistent function of the nation-state as the principal unit of cultural production and consumption of televisual content, a notion that still reverberates in the case of television cultures that do not appear to have the means, the inspiration, or the willingness to transcend national boundaries.

The study of extrovert television cultures benefits from their popularity and visibility. It is rarely, or at least less, burdened by expectations and discourses around legitimization. Introvert television cultures can also be popular – albeit to a smaller volume of audiences – but are to a large extent quite invisible. This condition of invisibility has been extensively discussed by Brett Mills (2010), who has explained in detail why certain facets of television production are covered by an invisibility veil. In this context, Greek television fiction could be considered an invisible television culture that, apart from its limited visibility outside the nation’s boundaries – attributed to linguistic, cultural, or other limitations –, has not managed to draw academic attention, either. The investigation of the particular reasons for this scholarly indifference or difficulty in establishing Greek television fiction as a relevant or interesting object of study is still a work in progress. The present thesis utilizes invisibility as a motivation for the design and completion of studies that could enrich knowledge about the private life of nations other than the ones that routinely enjoy such attention. In these terms, thinking of the case of Greece as an invisible television culture provides an opportunity to

address both an empirical and a conceptual gap. On one hand, the studies that follow are interested in communicating to the international community the particularities of a certain production culture, explicated through the close analysis primarily of individual programmes but also of creative voices, as well as the interaction between those two. On the other hand, each study enriches existing literature with situated analyses that test out, challenge, or confirm lines of argumentation that have so far been tested on specific cultural and media contexts. In other words, invisibility is never a disheartening condition; rather, it is associated with the potential and the pleasure of discovering interesting, relevant, and appropriate approaches so that a specific object of study escapes a niche status and emerges as conceptually equipped and confident to provide answers to both small and large questions.

The case of Greece is also addressed here as a case of a small nation, seeking to prove the significance and the relevance of the study of television products in countries that usually escape the attention of Anglophone research and bibliography (Jones, 2014). The admission of a television culture as *small* does not in any way deprive the television culture of the potential to contribute to the larger questions that define media and television theory; rather, it offers the researcher the freedom to explore the particular ways in which the small television culture participates in a number of social, cultural, and political operations. As a television culture principally generating products meant for internal consumption, with limited potential for exportability and little to no registered impact on global television history, Greek television generally fulfils the requirements for its categorization in a framework particularly interested in the challenges – and advantages – associated with media in small nations, including the question of “how small countries are represented and what these images mean to audiences” (ibid, p. 12). In essence, this approach corroborates the survival of the national lens for the reading of popular culture and subsequently the interest in processes of negotiation and construction of a national identity, despite the conceptual dominance of globalization (McElroy, 2016). What is more, the small nations approach promotes the study of television programmes – and fiction in particular – as agents of stories about and for the nation (McElroy & Nooman, 2016). In the grand scheme of things, the present author hopes this will lead to the designation of particularities that should be able to, on the one hand, seal the uniqueness of a particular case and, on the other hand, explicate its relevance for the understanding of global phenomena.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA: Clarifications and contributions

In the same logic of clarification of choices, this section discusses the methodological decisions that were made and offers some explanations regarding the data utilized for this thesis. The majority of the constituent papers of this thesis draw largely from a text-centric approach that seeks to illuminate the interpretative copiousness of television programmes. In this sense, textual analysis is necessarily hermeneutical, a mode of interpretation grounded in close analysis (Ott & Mack, 2014, p. 14) and solemnly devoted to the close reading of television programmes. However, this process takes place without ignoring the variety of parameters and resources available for their interpretation; these could, for instance, include a “wider contextual or extratextual framework”, such as the institutional, technological, social, and political conditions in which a programme is produced, broadcast, and consumed (Creeber, 2006, p. 35) or “relevant intertexts”, such as other texts in the series, the genre of the text, and intertexts about the text itself, as well as the wider public context in which a text is circulated (McKee, 2003, p. 93).

More specifically, four out of the five papers included in this thesis (I, II, III, and V) employ an interpretative approach that draws from the analysis of the “codes of television”, which are, according to John Fiske, “links between producers, texts, and audiences, and [...] agents of intertextuality through which texts interrelate in a network of meanings that constitute our cultural world” (1987, p. 4). These codes refer to a number of technical, representational, and ideological encoding layers with a prescriptive value; their role is to organize meaning. Reading this in reverse, it can be argued that television analysis unpacks encoded meanings by using these codes as flashlights that evince certain interpretations as more plausible than others. A number of such codes are put under the microscope in the following papers. The question of *genre* often emerges as a central frame of organization of meaning, which, apart from “standardized production practices [...] also refers to standardized narrative codes to be found in the text, and to certain dominant ways of interpreting texts” (Bolin, 2009, p. 40). The study of *characters* takes place according to the logic that acknowledges the occasional realist reading of the character that reads it “psychologically as the representation of a unique individual” but, on the other hand, prioritizes the discursive reading that recognizes the character as “an embodiment of social value” (Fiske, 1987, p. 154). Particular narrative devices, such as tropes focusing on the romantic relationships between characters, are also

discussed as points of entry into the dense socio-cultural meaningfulness of televisual stories (Cawelti, 1976). Three out of the five papers (I, II, and III) also feature micro-analysis of excerpts of television dialogue, treating conversational exchanges of fictional characters as units of analysis that can yield something meaningful about the overall slant of the programme under investigation.

Additionally, two out of the five papers (IV and V) draw from interviews with television practitioners. Generally speaking, interviews have been argued to enrich knowledge about the interaction between television content and its socio-cultural background by referring to the work, visions, and collaborations of specific individuals; they also help to relate the content of television fiction with the larger context of the commercial media industry and the specificities of certain national media landscapes (Cornea, 2008; Creeber, 2006; Mills, 2008). In Paper IV, the use of the practitioner interview is motivated as a resource not only for providing insight into industrial practices and commentary on the socio-cultural role of various products broadcast on small screens, including fiction, but also as a path into the particular production logic that characterizes commercial (private) television in Greece. Here, production logic can be understood as the rationale that governs media and the production of media content; in that sense, it resonates with Lesley Henderson's term "production philosophy and ethos", which includes a variety of actors and complex networks of relationships influencing decisions, including not only the relationships between programme and channel, between producer and writers, and between production and audiences, but also the priorities and pressures that emerge through advertisers and channel hierarchy (Henderson, 2007). More specifically for the case of private television, by focusing on questions about its production logic, Paper IV investigates the pre-eminence of a commercial logic, the role of advertising, and the side-lining of overtly ideological projects, among other things. The same paper touches on the question of authorial agency against the background of industrial and commercial pressures, an enquiry further pursued in Paper V. In this last paper, the use of interviews is combined with the analysis of programmes in an attempt to initiate a dialogue regarding authorship potentialities in Greek television fiction, based on an understanding of creators both as agents of symbolic/cultural power, having the ability to create symbols and meanings that are publicly circulated and that affect people's views of the world (Hesmondhalgh, 2006), and as a reflexive community able to produce self-representation, self-critique, and self-reflections (Caldwell, 2008).

The interviewees were recruited with the help of Alexandros Kakavas, president of the Scriptwriters Guild of Greece, and Epameinondas Chatzinikolis, coordinator of the Greek television professionals' database Ordino. Both provided contact details for a number of television professionals, to whom the author sent a brief description of the overall research project with an invitation to participate in the interview study. Face-to-face interviews with the professionals who responded positively to the invitation took place in Athens, Greece in the summer of 2016 through the use of customized questionnaires with two exceptions: one pilot interview that had already taken place a year before and one interview that was exclusively conducted via email correspondence. Certain follow-up questions were sent to some interviewees via email during the summer of 2017. More specifically, the following television professionals were interviewed (in alphabetical order):

- Directors: Giorgos Kordellas, Yiannis Lapatas, Manousos Manousakis, Spyros Rasidakis, Dimitris Sofianopoulos, Myrna Tsapa
- Screenwriters: Giorgos Kapoutzidis, Eleni Mavili (has also worked as director), Rena Rigga, Charis Romas (has also worked as director), Elena Solomou
- Producer: Maria Manousaki

A conscious effort was made to include in the body of interviewees people who were involved in the production of the television programmes discussed in the papers, so that the analysis would be further enriched by insights coming from their creators. In this light, anonymization of the interviewees was not deemed necessary, because the readers should be able to associate the creators with specific programmes. The interviewees provided permission for their names to be used in this study. They seemed eager – but also surprised and flattered that they were asked – to contribute to a research project focusing on Greek television fiction, repeating on numerous occasions their disappointment with the conditions surrounding the production of local television fiction at the time of the conversations. A remark about the importance of the historical moment during which practitioners are asked to contribute with their experiences is in order here. As with any kind of analysis, every step in the process of this very informative interaction with Greek television professionals, as well as their responses – including their recollections and reflections –, is inevitably attached to a certain historical reality. For the Greek media landscape, the summer of 2016 was riddled

with changes and oozing uncertainty about what the future had in store for private television broadcasting. The SYRIZA government's decision to take measures in order to "crack down on corruption in the media sector and enable better regulation" (Sweeney, 2016) resulted in the launch of a controversial broadcast licence auction aiming to provide national broadcasters with legitimate permits for their function and to cut down the number of channels from eight to four. It has been argued that, for the most part, the public discussion about the above attempt of restructuring has been widely politicized (Kitsantonis, 2016), framing the operation of the media landscape as part of a larger political game of antagonism between the government and the opposing parties. However, arguments about the socio-cultural role of private television also circulated in the Greek public sphere at the same time, primarily by means of expressed worries as to how the renewed media landscape would affect the quality and diversity of information and entertainment to which people would have access. It is perhaps fair to assume that the interviewees' eagerness was partly fuelled by a state of uncertainty regarding the future of private television in Greece. It is, nevertheless, important to keep in mind that all interviews register reflections and opinions that may change over time.

The papers of this thesis focus on either one particular case or a cluster of texts in order to deliver in-depth investigations of specific socio-cultural phenomena in light of their interactions with the world of television fiction. Television scholars are no strangers to the focus on specific television texts; it is a practice that, by giving prominence to specific instances of cultural production with an augmented resonance to contemporary societies, contributes to wider understandings about why television matters. One of the major contributions of this thesis is the ample light it sheds on a particular cultural context and content. It works with a number of strategically selected examples of popular television, associated with important periods in the history of modern Greece. The selection of the cases is based on the researcher's intimate knowledge of the particular cultural weight of certain television programmes, the historical context of their original broadcasting, and their legacy. Besides, as Richard Dyer has pointed out, one needs to know "what kind of thing a text is in society in order to know what kind of questions you can legitimately pose of it, what kind of knowledge you can reasonably expect it to yield" (1979, p. 1). More specifically, the papers included in this thesis study closely the following television programmes (in order of appearance in the papers):

- *Πίσω στο σπίτι / Piso sto spiti* (translated as *Back Home*, MEGA Channel, 2011-2013), two seasons, 34 episodes, written by Rena Rigga, directed by Spyros Rasidakis and Pierros Andrakakos
- *Οι Αυθαίρετοι / Oi Afthairetoi* (translated as *The Arbitraries*, MEGA Channel, 1989-1991), two seasons, 66 episodes, written by Vasilis Nemeas, directed by Nikos Koutelidakis
- *Ψίθυροι καρδιάς / Psithyroi kardias* (translated as *Whispers of the heart*, MEGA channel, 1997-1998), one season, 33 episodes, written by Stavros Avdoulos and Eirini Ritsoni, directed by Manousos Manousakis
- *Η Αγάπη ήρθε από μακριά / I agapi irthe apo makria* (translated as *Love came from far away*, ANT1, 2002-2003), one season, 31 episodes, written by Vasilis Spiliopoulos, directed by Manousos Manousakis
- *Μη μου λες αντίο / Mi mou les antio* (translated as *Don't tell me goodbye*, ANT1, 2004-2005), one season, 32 episodes, written by Vasilis Spiliopoulos, directed by Manousos Manousakis

A reflection on how the format of this thesis contributed to its design and final result is appropriate here. The compilation thesis format – and its structural organization as a synthesis of autonomous, yet intertwined, studies – was a perfect fit for a project that aspired to work with a variety of television texts. This is in line with a more general understanding of the case-study approach as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness” (Simons, 2009, p. 21) of particular instances of cultural production, in this case. However, by using these cases to put together a compilation addressing a more general topic, this thesis contributes to the creation of a state of “limbo, suspended between the past, that is earlier texts, and the future, or forthcoming texts” (Berger, 2007, p. 142), establishing a possible red thread that could also transcend more televisual texts or critical periods in the life of a particular nation, or others as well. In this sense, the approach adopted in this study takes the form of a combinational multi-case analysis of collateral or even overlapping phenomena, which can also inform macro-readings. These could include questions about the significance of the fictional mediation of critical events in the life of a nation, the complex processes of formation of national identities, and – more generally – the power of television as it can be conceptualized today.

Access to the programmes discussed and analysed in the studies was made possible through two different online platforms. Some of them were available on the television channels’ own official webpages, which nowadays work as an

archive of older programmes and shows, responding to the needs of local audiences for immediate access to older yet cherished – and, in some cases, iconic – programmes. Some were also available on the channels’ official page on YouTube. It is becoming common practice for television channels in Greece to upload full episodes of both new and old programmes on the popular video-sharing platform, possibly in an attempt to reclaim control from unofficial uploaders but also as a way of increasing advertising revenue generated through views.

THE POLITICS OF TELEVISION CRITICISM: Television analysis as metacommentary

It was argued in the beginning of the summary chapter that every scholarly endeavour that centralizes television can be seen as a reminder that television matters. This final section reflects on certain conceptual and somewhat personal modes of engagement with the medium of television in general and the topic of this thesis in particular. This is done by applying to the process of television analysis the notion of metacommentary, according to which “our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and appropriate it” (Jameson, 1981, p. x). If the previous sections were directed towards providing analytical transparency regarding the guiding principles behind the theoretical, methodological, and data-related decisions made within this thesis, this final section reflects on the general “mental operations” that eventually become part of a research enquiry and its output, including observations that have to do with the analyst’s individual engagement with the object of her research (*ibid*, p. 32).

Writing about television is a way of describing people’s relationship with the medium and its content, as well as their expectations from it and its impact on them. It is also an invitation towards other people to join the scholar in an intense and rewarding engagement with a companion who does not merely take up time; rather, it transforms personal – but also family and social – time into individual and societal quests for meaning. Scholars of television are comfortable with the adoption of a personal and intimate tone; they often find themselves writing about things they feel passionate about in both positive and negative senses. This is the case for this research project as well, whose interpretative approach is unapologetically infused with an individual’s own relationship with television and

especially with the gradual recognition of belonging to a specific media generation, one that grew up in parallel with Greek private television's increasing popularity and power over the formation of public opinion and taste. In this sense, this project is informed by a long-standing personal engagement with the object of study, transformed into a strong belief in its socio-cultural potential and consequence, an attraction towards understanding these better, an excitement for communicating its introvert existence to others, and a vague – at this point – disposition towards giving something back to it.

The studies included in this thesis are all characterized by a critical tone. A complete decomposition of the latter might never be possible, but some of its layers are more visible than others. Firstly, the critical approach adopted here should be understood as an urge to address the nature of television as something both familiar and strange. The challenge that television analysis always faces is to make the material under investigation relevant and to propose its study, not only on the basis of its diachronic status as a powerful cultural form, but also by means of anchoring it to ongoing intellectual currents and strands of research. Today, the study of television does not necessarily need to justify its importance against the backdrop of medium specificities that had hindered an unapologetic analysis in the past – for instance, its ephemerality, its entertaining character, or even its occasional bad quality. However, this does not mean that the medium and its content do not continue to benefit from the same process of making television “critically strange” (Allen, 1992, p. 3), which includes not only rendering it “visible” and “objectified” (ibid.) but also motivating its close analysis through the voicing of relevant questions, ones that can yield something meaningful about the role that television plays within the specific conditions that shape present-day experience.

Secondly, it is important to notice that the work included in this thesis looks at television in a certain way. It is informed by a textual tradition for the study of television content, one that elevates single programmes and single cases as resources for condensed socio-cultural information and assigns to the scholar/critic the intricate task of decoding this information and re-communicating it to others. This kind of analytical work corresponds to ideas such as the ones developed by Thompson and Mittell, who describe criticism as the process of opening up a text to various readings and interpretations, expanding it rather than reducing it, protecting it from the simplistic “thumbs up/down” model of writing about television in the tradition of journalistic criticism (2013).

According to this logic, critical writing on television, as it is employed in this thesis, takes account of television's textuality and other medium-specific formalities, but it is necessarily "grounded in a cultural context which may determine what any given text might mean" (Hartley, 1992, pp. 5-6). This is in line with what John Corner has communicated in a concise yet comprehensive description of critical work around television:

I take a defining feature of critical activity to be an engagement with the signifiatory organization of television programmes themselves, with the use of images and language, generic conventions, narrative patterns, and modes of address, to be found there. This requires a reading or analysis which foregrounds the critic's own interpretative resources as a specialist in the medium and does not work with a notion either of 'data' or of 'method' in the manner conventional in the social sciences [...]. Of course, this does not stop the critic making inferences about the social relationships and configurations of value within which television's texts are placed – there has been a long tradition of such text-and-context scholarship in other areas of criticism [...]. Television criticism has most often wanted to go beyond the textually descriptive and evaluative and to use its observations here as a route to a broader or deeper cultural diagnosis, either of the past or the present. (1999, pp. 7-8)

Thirdly, one of the main things that this thesis advocates for is the importance of a close engagement with the empirical material involved in the research process. Television's omnipresent nature makes it vulnerable to judgement that is often based on peripheral/background watching or mediated knowledge about it through what one hears or reads about it. The importance of actually watching television before producing a critical analysis of it cannot be emphasized enough; it is a time-consuming process, but it is the only way that the study of television can be once and for all liberated from any kind of doubt regarding its socio-cultural significance and consequence. Despite quick evaluations that see it as good or bad, new or old, popular or not, the content of television will always contribute to the production of "[s]ocio-cultural universes – identities, practices, norms, values and tastes [...] through programmes produced in professional and institutionalized practices and media genres" (Ekström & Djerf-Pierre, 2013, p. 12). In order to see the above and be able to talk about it in an informed manner, it is necessary to get rid of any cavalier attitudes towards television and to position it at eye level, as it is meant to be watched anyway.

A final level of analytical transparency concerns an underlying yet reoccurring notion of responsibility and expectation from television itself, which

might at first seem incompatible with the study of content produced within a commercial context. However, the overall tenor of this thesis has not given up on the idea that both scholars and viewers alike should hold on to the right to 'look at television' in a variety of ways, including through the belief that people have the power to judge and maybe also affect its content. Theodor Adorno writes in 1954 that "[w]e can change this medium of far-reaching potentialities only if we look at it in the same spirit which we hope will one day be expressed by its imagery" (p. 235). One of the major focal points of this thesis has been an emphasis on the role of media in times of societal tension. One should also start to consider the role of media scholars in critical times of the medium itself. As was already mentioned, this thesis took shape during pressing times for the Greek media industry and significant changes in the televisual landscape. Without claiming it is possible to present a clear plan about what the researcher of television fiction could offer to the medium, it is important to keep in mind that the relationship between the researcher and the object of study could take a number of different directions, as Georgina Born explains: "We, as researchers, should learn about and from the object; through reflection and analysis we should achieve critical distance; and we may then decide to intervene in the object, through advocacy, journalism, consultancy or policy writings" (2000, p. 408). In this sense, it could be argued that especially in periods during which the medium of television itself and the production of certain programming – such as television fiction for the case of Greece – go through some type of atrophy or crisis, the least that a researcher can do is to keep a close eye on the object, and the most is to contribute to its improvement. The present thesis focuses on the former; the latter will be saved for future scholarly endeavours.

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