The Historicized 'Self' and the Hungry 'Other': Geopolitical Imaginations in Greek Television Comedy *Oi Aparadektoi/The Unacceptables*

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ABSTRACT

Popular geopolitics has recognized in popular culture a platform where geopolitical imaginations are created and discursive constructions of 'self' and 'other' take place. However, limited work has been done on the employment of specific methodological tools of Critical Discourse Analysis on popular culture texts. This article attempts a hands-on analysis on an episode of a popular product of Greek television fiction (Oi Aparadektoi), *and constitutes a combination of theoretical discussion, on one hand, and data presentation and analysis, on the other. Building on a growing body of literature arguing in favor of popular culture's value for study of politics, the main argument is that television fiction can, and should be, included in investigations of the (geo)politics of the contemporary world and the politics of (national) identity, while special focus is placed on how a discourse-oriented approach can be adopted for the study of products of television fiction.*

KEYWORDS

critical discourse analysis
national identity
Oi Aparadektoi
popular geopolitics
television fiction

The field of popular geopolitics is principally concerned with the study of the saturation of geopolitical discourses in popular culture (Dittmer & Dodds 2008). This could include the study of a number of sub-questions, such as how popular culture "leaks" into the world of International Relations and real world actions of policy-makers, diplomats, and citizenries (Grayson, Davies, & Philpott 2009), but also issues of representation, geopolitical codes and visions, as well as the construction of images of 'self' and 'other' (Dittmer 2010) within a growing pool of cultural products, such as video games, comic books, popular music, films, and television fiction. Using the field of popular geopolitics as a theoretical departure point, this article focuses on the representation of an issue of geopolitical nature in a popular culture text in order to analyze processes of the construction of 'self' and 'other' using national terms. Aspiring to contribute to the growing debate concerning the political significance of popular culture, this article addresses television fiction as a platform for the study of discursive processes of identity construction.

More specifically, in the following analysis I look at an episode from the popular Greek television comedy *Oi Aparadektoi* (somewhat awkwardly translated as *The Unacceptables*) which originally aired on March 25, 1992.[1] A well-known popular cultural product of the 1990s, created by Dimitra Papadopoulou, and one of the very first big successes of the Greek commercial ("private") television, *Oi Aparadektoi* introduced viewers to a number of caricatured yet quite recognizable aspects of the modern Greek, alongside a quirky but at the same time candid sense of humor, tampering with a number of issues which characterized everyday life in Athens of the early 1990s. As a television programme subjected to a number of reruns throughout the years, *Oi Aparadektoi* can claim to have a special place in the collective memory of Greek audiences.

The episode in question refers to a larger geopolitical debate of that period concerning the name issue of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (herein after abbreviated as FYROM and used in this analysis to refer to what is known today as the Republic of Macedonia); television fiction is addressed then not only as a 'mirror' of contemporary Greek society and its concerns, but also as "a cultural space which straddles both the public and private spheres in social life" (Casey, Casey, Calvert, French, & Lewis 2002: 65), in the sense that it is understood as a mediator between the two spheres, bringing public discourses into the private domain and vice versa (ibid). Building on the above, the main argument that this article aspires to contribute to has to do with the infiltration of events and critical moments of the social reality, as well as the permeation of politics, in popular culture and television fiction. I am particularly interested in

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[1] The date on which the episode aired is a National Holiday in Greece, commemorating the start of Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire, in 1821.

cases where such events instigate the production of discourses of national identity by activating the basic polarizing schema of 'self' and 'other' with subsequent ideologically nuanced relations between the two parts of the binary. Consequently, the analysis that follows is particularly concerned with the discursive processes of the construction of 'self' and 'other', which emerges as the cultural response to a matter of geopolitical nature. By placing this study within the context of Critical Discourse Analysis and its problem-oriented character (van Dijk 1995; Wodak & Meyer 2009), my main aim is to elevate television fiction not only as a politically relevant field, but also as a valuable pool of data for critical discourse studies. To put it in more specific terms, the present article aims at investigating the following enquiries: (a) what kind of discursive strategies are employed by television fiction for the construction of 'self' and 'other', (b) what kind of geopolitical imaginations are fuelled or solidified through these strategies, and (c) what kind of ideologically nuanced readings can be made. Drawing from the area of Critical Discourse Analysis and the approach known as 'sociodiagnostic critique', I suggest that the selected material qualifies for a study directed at detecting 'problematic' discursive practices and unmasking their political goals and functions (Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 32). It could then be said that this article constitutes a combination of theoretical discussion, on one hand, and data presentation and analysis, on the other, with a particular interest in how a discourse-oriented approach can be adopted for study of products of television fiction.

Below, an attempt is made to bring together the theoretical framework of this analysis, by establishing a dialogue between the 'popular', the 'political' and the 'national', highlighting key theoretical concepts and directions that this study wishes to contribute to. It is worth noting, however, that despite the fact that the present analysis – a working hypothesis, admittedly – is not making any concrete claims concerning intentionality, it could be said to prepare the ground for a more concrete ideological analysis whose focus will be on how specific texts work; what they do in addition to what they say (Tolson 1996).

(GEO)POLITICS AND POPULAR CULTURE

As was previously noted, the present analysis constitutes a test case stemming from the hypothesis that television fiction occupies a cultural space where moments of tension, including societal, financial, and geopolitical crises, for instance, are presented. The specific case study is particularly concerned with the ways that events of the social reality are retold in television fiction, or in other words, with the question of how an issue of geopolitical nature is disseminated to popular channels and invested with meaning which not only mediates images of world politics, but also generates understandings of who 'we' are and what 'other' people are like, contributing to the shaping of what Jason Dittmer has referred to as "geopolitical imaginations" (2010: 19). Dittmer

defines the latter as "a person (or society's) constellation of taken-for-granted truths about the world and the way in which power should be used in that world" (ibid). Consequently, it could be argued that the concept of geopolitical imaginations is attuned to processes of identity construction, especially in terms of the in/out-group binary, a core concept in studies of nationalism, but also a popular theme in studies of media and television, especially with regard to the representation of minorities and the concept of stereotyping (Casey, Casey, Calvert, French, & Lewis, 2002: 268-272; Pickering 2001). Before, however, looking more closely at how these notions are enacted in the selected material of this analysis, it is important to take one step back and frame this study within the larger debate concerning the relation between politics and popular culture, not in an exhaustive fashion, since that would exceed the scope of this study, but in such a manner so that the reader acquires some kind of overview of the ways that these two fields have been intersecting.

Different academic strands and clusters of research have approached the relation between politics and popular culture with diverse theoretical backgrounds and a variety of methodological tools, but their agenda is often quite common; popular culture should not be dismissed as a media landscape void of political value. In the field of political communication, for instance, John Street has promoted an understanding of popular culture as a registry of political thoughts and attitudes (Street 2012). Similar encouraging responses can be located in studies of television and the public sphere. Peter Dahlgren has written extensively on the subject, building on John Ellis's concept of "working through" (1999) and arguing for a loosening-up of the strict boundary between serious current affairs information and entertainment (Dahlgren 2010), by locating television's political relevance specifically within the area of identity politics (Dahlgren 2005). Following the above, a discussion about the possibility of a cultural public sphere emerged (McGuigan 2005), in association with the concept of cultural citizenship which added another layer of significance to the study of popular culture as a site of community building and bonding as an aspect of the identity politics involved in people's engagement with popular culture (Hermes 2005).

The above academic reactions, provided here somewhat indicatively since there is a growing literature on the topic, complement one another by underlining the belief that popular culture and politics are in a continuous dialogue; by rendering the traditional segregation of information and entertainment parochial, it appears that it is becoming less and less problematic to include popular culture and its various forms in the study of media and politics. Recent years have indeed witnessed a strong interest in the study of television fiction in relation to politics. Journals such as *Media, Culture & Society*, the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *Popular Communication* – to

name a few – have hosted numerous studies that have proposed a reconsideration of the area of popular culture (and television fiction in particular) as valuable resources for an investigation of the complex relation between entertainment and political representations, messages, and values[2].

Along the same lines, the field of popular geopolitics is strongly defined by the belief that geopolitics is no longer a discursive practice taking place within elite spaces of International Relations and 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: 557), but rather they are to be found in "locations that may lie ouside of the formal arena of state" (ibid). Insights 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" (Dittmer 2005: 626). In this sense, a number of studies have approached the study of geopolitics and popular culture from the perspective of the 'national', including comic books and the shaping of American identity (Dittmer 2005), American post-Cold War films and the construction of national identity through revised maps of world politics (Sharp 1998), as well as music's contribution to the construction of the enemy of the nation as a territorialized or racialized 'other' in post-9/11 country songs (Boulton 2008).

REVISITING THE 'NATIONAL'

So far, I have tried to illustrate the significance of the political value of popular culture, particularly in accordance with the idea of popular geopolitics and the contribution of various forms of popular culture as a cultural space for the (re)production and dissemination of (geo)political discourses, including collective and national discourses. I proceed now to the investigation of the value of the aforementioned observations within theories of the nation and nationalism and especially within ideas of national discourses invoked in times of – in our case, a geopolitical – crisis. Nicolas Demertzis, has argued for the topicality of nationalism, despite the growing scholarly expectation that transnationalism would eliminate the relevance of the 'national'. Demertzis supports his argument through a contextualized understanding of nationalism especially in Europe during the 1990s, both as a problem and as the necessary historical path to democracy (1996: 37-38). From another point of view, Michael Billig comments on the constant presence of the 'national' which, in his opinion, does not always need to be addressed as a problem; by proposing the term 'banal nationalism' (1995), Billig draws our attention to the ways that an

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[2] Relatively recent examples include Cardo 2011, Corner & Richardson 2008, Inthorn, Street, & Scott 2012, Nikolaidis 2011, and van Zoonen & Wring 2012.

established nation reproduces beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations, and practices both in a mundane manner, but also in the form of a reminder which kicks in when the circumstances allow or even call for it. It is therefore assumed that certain conditions enable and facilitate national discourses to emerge, with the media playing a significant role in the processes of construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of national identities, especially in the event of "national episodes", defined as times of emergency where negative stereotypes of the 'national Other' and the imaginations of national supremacy usually pervade the public life (Demertzis 1996: 377). It is then that the ideological attire of nationalism is revealed, as Michael Pickering explains; in times of tension or conflict, "the call to unity becomes paramount", and the negative representation of an 'other' plays a significant role (2001: 90).

In this study, fiction is understood as a shaper of social reality based on a social constructivist view of reality where (media) texts are perceived as "communicative units which are embedded in social and cultural practices" (Paltridge 2012: 7). According to this view, media discourse, including entertainment and fiction, both shape and are shaped by these practices. In this context, this aspect of the world as social construction is particularly associated with the relationship between language and identity and, more particularly, with the ways that television discourse is used to create, express, and establish identities (ibid: 24-29). However, as Martin Mueller has pointed out, the use of the concept of discourse in critical geopolitics has been characterized by a certain "fuzziness", which may indicate the need for scholars to be particularly explicit when applying discourse analytical tools in terms of what they wish to achieve with their analysis: "A critical geopolitics is [...] called upon to deconstruct, unravel and expose discourses in order to lay bare the schemes of power operating beneath them" (Mueller 2008: 324-325). Drawing from the above, the following analysis experiments with the use of discourse analytical tools for an exploration of how television fiction becomes involved with geopolitical discourses and how it contributes to the discursive construction of identities, with a particular interest in the way that a geopolitical crisis activates processes of discursively constructing the 'self' and the 'other'. Subsequently, having brought together the central concepts that function as the theoretical foundation for this analysis, the next section proceeds to matters of methodological concern and to a contextualization of our case study within a specific geopolitical framework.

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES

At this point, it is worth providing a more concrete explanation of the approach undertaken, starting with the clarification that the concept of discourse used here is informed by Norman Fairclough's and Ruth Wodak's view of discourse as a social practice; mutually shaped by and shaping social reality (Fairclough &

Wodak 1997). More specifically, the present analysis experiments with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an approach and a method focusing on the ways that power inequalities are enacted, reproduced or resisted by a variety of signifying practices, including television (Fairclough 1995, 2001; van Dijk 2001; O'Keefe 2012). Within this framework, a lot has been written about the construction of national identity as a discursive process (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart 1999), as well as the use of specific discursive strategies for self- and other- presentation, which results in the construction of ingroups and outgroups through the language of discrimination (Reisigl & Wodak 2001).

The present analysis corresponds to a form of critique known as 'sociodiagnostic critique'. As explained, the 'sociodiagnostic critique', situated within CDA's politically-oriented interests, requires the identification of a problem. In our case, the main research question is directed to the identification of problematic discursive strategies for the construction of 'us' and the 'other(s)'. The interpretative approach of such an analysis is undeniable; therefore, the analyst is called to design the research in such a way so that the data is presented and analyzed meticulously, but also contextualized in way so that transparency is preserved and not compromised by the analyst's biases. Indeed, this form of critique requires from the analyst to widen the focus of the enquiry in order to exceed the internal sphere of the text and to expand the scope by means of including "a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances" (Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 32). In accordance with this prerequisite, this section's intention is to specify the object of analysis and the social problem in question, while at the same time contextualizing it within a number of frames of reference which add to the multidimensional character of the problem in question, such as the (geo)political context of the time, but also the specificity of the selected text.

In the analysis that follows, the emphasis is mainly placed on how Greek national identity is shaped through processes of 'othering', set against the general background of the name issue of FYROM, which conceivably becomes the occasion for other matters to reach the surface, such as the problematic relationship between Greeks and foreigners during the early 1990s, as well as the perpetual modern Greek anxiety about the relationship between the present and the glorious past. From a geopolitical point of view, the situation can be placed in the wider frame of turbulence in the Balkan region, after the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991, and the subsequent mobilization of processes of national identification. Within this context, reinforcing a national sentiment emerged as a priority for new nations, such as FYROM, for which it was utterly important to promote (a) a coherent national image in the domestic realm, and (b) a positive country image to the world community (Saunders 2012: 51). At the same time, however, the same necessity appeared for older nations, such as Greece, which

reacted strongly to FYROM's attempt at building its national image by adopting a historical and cultural aspect of what the Greek side recognized as distinctively 'Greek'. The most prominent materialization of this geopolitical conflict is known in Greece as the 'Macedonian question' or 'name issue of FYROM'; a retelling of how the name issue arose, as well as an account of the official position of Greece is provided on the website of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an excerpt of which is presented below:

> The name issue arose in 1991, when the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia seceded from Yugoslavia and declared its independence under the name 'Republic of Macedonia'. [...] [B]asing its existence as an independent state on the artificial and spurious notion of the 'Macedonian nation', which was cultivated systematically through the falsification of history and the exploitation of ancient Macedonia purely for reasons of political expediency. Greece reacted strongly to the theft of its historical and cultural heritage and the treacherous territorial and irredentist intentions of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia [...]. (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The name issue of FYROM")[3]

Despite the evident partiality of the above account, it is worth observing that the historical and political context in itself cultivated a tense climate, fitting for the development and expression of national discourses from each side and as a response to each other.

Moving on to the theme of the specific episode under investigation, it could be said that the Macedonian name dispute could be identified as the geopolitical background of the plot. The four friends and neighbors, Dimitra (Dimitra Papadopoulou), Spyros (Spyros Papadopoulos), Yannis (Yannis Bezos) and Vlassis (Vlassis Bonatsos), meet Yorik (Andreas Natsios), a citizen of FYROM, who has been employed by Vassilis (Vassilis Halakatevakis), the caretaker of the building where the four main protagonists reside. Instead of helping around with fixing the faults that the tenants report to Vassilis, Yorik appears to be spending his day consuming food and upsetting the main group of friends with his incompetence, but mainly with his provocative comments about national identities. His views on the Macedonian identity mobilize the group's reflective negotiation of what it means to be Greek. The remainder of this analysis is dedicated to a closer attention to the discursive strategies – in terms of "more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim" (Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 44) – employed for the activation of national imagination, including both the national 'self' and the national 'other', starting from the latter.

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[3] Available at http://www.mfa.gr/en/fyrom-name-issue/ Accessed 9 March 2015.
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STRATEGIES OF OTHER- PRESENTATION: GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS AND THE METAPHOR OF THE HUNGRY 'OTHER'

In the first minutes of the episode entitled *Ζήτω το Έθνος/Long Live the Nation*, the casual conversations between the four friends set the main axes on which the plot of the episode is based. Over breakfast, the married couple Dimitra and Spyros discuss Dimitra's growing anxiety about the fact that "the Skopjans are craving Macedonia" ("*Οι Σκοπιανοί λιγουρεύονται τη Μακεδονία*"). In the apartment next door, Vlassis appears particularly concerned when reading to his flatmate, Yiannis, a newspaper article claiming that "the Greeks as a people have lost their national identity and are more vulnerable than peoples who have a complete awareness of their national tradition and root" ("*Οι Έλληνες σα λαός έχουν χάσει την εθνική τους ταυτότητα και είναι περισσότερο ευάλωτοι από ένα λαό που έχει πλήρη συναίσθηση της εθνικής του παράδοσης και ρίζας*"). Very quickly then, we are presented with indications of the two separate, yet interrelated, topics that the episode wants to comment on; the tension between Greeks and Skopjans – sic; note that the word 'Skopjans' is continuously used in the episode to refer to the citizens of FYROM, although it literally means the inhabitants of the capital of the country, Skopje – expressed as a result of the claims of the latter over the region of Macedonia, and the need on behalf of the protagonists to reflect on their national identity, especially on the occasion of (but also as a response to the possible vulnerability resulting from) an external threat.

In the episode under examination, this threat acquires a name and a face; the character of Yorik is added to the regular cast in order to personify the generalized references to the "Skopjans" and to create the conditions for a tension in the private sphere of the Greek household (both on and off screen), rather than the public sphere of journalistic or diplomatic discourse. As a foreigner, Yorik is very quickly othered, especially since his behavior creates problems to the rest of the group. Although employed by Vassilis to help around with the maintenance of the apartments, Yorik appears to be rather lazy and incompetent. His voracious appetite is yet another element that triggers the other characters' irritation, which escalates when he starts throwing around comments questioning not only the Greekness of Macedonia, but also the Greekness of the group of friends. In this section, the data provided aim at revealing the two main strategies of othering used to contribute to the construction of geopolitical imaginations and their emerging ideological implications. It is, therefore, argued that the process of othering takes place through two distinct but interconnected discursive strategies; the use of a metaphor and the topos of danger.

Throughout the episode, Yorik is represented as constantly hungry. Both verbally and visually, his character is associated with the feeling of hunger which

generates analogous comments from the other characters who try to explain and evaluate his behavior. The recurring references to food and hunger reveal the multifaceted function of the metaphor. For example, a reference to food is used to characterize the labor relation between Vassilis and Yorik, which is not described in monetary terms but is reduced to a transaction that resonates slavery or beggary:

> "[Vassilis] has taken him in and he gives him a piece of bread" ("*Τον έχει μαζέψει και του δίνει ένα κομμάτι ψωμί*")

In a related example, Renia (Renia Louizidou) – Vlassis's girlfriend – furious with Yorik, uses food as a way to remind him that he is dependent on his employers, in an attempt to extort from him the confession that he does not have any claims over Greece's territorial integrity:

> "You will eat only when you admit that no part of Greece belongs to you" ("*Θα φας μόνο όταν παραδεχτείς ότι δε σου ανήκει τίποτα από την Ελλάδα*")

The recurring reference to Yorik as "hungry" ("*πεινασμένος*") also functions as a criterion for the evaluation of his country's diplomatic positions. For instance, Yiannis appears to be particularly unconvinced about the seriousness of the Skopjan claims when he meets Yorik, associating his behavior with the general socio-economic condition of FYROM:

> "These hungry lads want Macedonia?" ("*Αυτά τα λιγούρια θέλουν τη Μακεδονία;*")

With such comments, Yiannis undermines and ridicules the opposite side's claim over Macedonia, a strategy that is repeated again later:

> "It is not enough that they are hungry, they want Macedonia too?" ("*Δε φτάνει που πεινάνε, θέλουν και τη Μακεδονία;*")

We witness, then, a diplomatic position being downgraded on the premise that FYROM has not even managed to satisfy the biological needs of its people, let alone make provocative territorial claims. In addition to that, the above examples imply an understanding of the 'others' as more dependent and less developed in comparison to the Greek society, resulting in a discourse of inferiority.

It could be argued that the image of Yorik, as a citizen of FYROM, draws from, but also contributes to, the geopolitical imagination of a citizen of a former Communist nation (Saunders, 2012). As it has been argued by Maria Todorova, adapting Edward Said's theory of orientalism, "a Western gaze has constructed [the Balkans] as tribal, backward, primitive, dangerous, and barbaric, that is,

Europe's quintessential 'other'" (cited in Saunders 2012: 56). Although I return to its framing as dangerous, the region of the Balkans and the newly-established ex-communist nations and their peoples have often become the object of stereotyping and mockery in popular culture texts, particularly through their depiction as impoverished and starved. It could then be argued that in this case, the strategy of the metaphor is employed in order to connect Yorik's biological feeling of hunger with FYROM's geopolitical 'appetite' for Macedonia, as it is already established through the initial quote about the Skopjans craving Macedonia. Therefore, the trope of metaphor as a strategy of 'othering' emerges as frame of ideological significance, mainly through its presentation of Yorik and his fellow nationals as poor, starving, lazy people living parasitically at the expense of the societies who 'receive' them.

As the above examples show, the perpetuation of this stereotype sketches the image of the hungry 'other' with a number of ideological implications; to emphasize the relations of dependence, to undermine and lampoon the others' national claims, but also to frame the 'other' as dangerous. Drawing from the interconnection between the strategy of metaphor and the topos of danger as was conceptualized by Hart (2008), it could be argued that in our case, the metaphor of the hungry 'other' can also be read as a topos of danger or threat about the expansionist claims or strategies of a neighboring country. Throughout the episode Yorik repeatedly calls the other characters "compatriots" ("πατριώτες"), implying a certain connection between the two peoples, invoking intense reactions. "You Greeks are not Greeks" ("*Εσείς οι Έλληνες δεν είστε Έλληνες*"), Yorik says at some point, to add later that "Greeks Slavs were mixed" ("*Έλληνες Σλάβοι ανακατεύτηκαν*"). Yorik's comments also extend to an evaluation of the Greekness of historical figures such as Alexander the Great:

> "An aunt of Philip the Second – with evidence – married a Slav. And Bucephalus – we have proof – grazed outside Gevgelija" ("*Μια θεία του Φίλιππου του Δεύτερου – με αποδείξεις – παντρεύτηκε Σλάβο. Και ο Βουκεφάλας – έχουμε στοιχεία – , βόσκαγε έξω απ' το Γευγελή.*)

In this way, Yorik embodies a threat to the characters' shaky national confidence since he questions their (taken for granted) Greekness, in order to justify the geopolitical claims over Macedonia. Although no direct references are made to Yorik as a dangerous 'other', his recurring comments (touching upon 'sensitive' matters, such as the Greekness of Macedonia, Thessaloniki and Alexander the Great) appear to hold the 'Greek' characters in a state of constant alertness, activating a defensive strategy capable of refuting Yorik's provocations. Such a strategy – by means of repetitive verbal humiliations against Yorik – is only partly effective; that is why the rest of the group decides to intensify their individual and collective attempts for the fortification of the national 'self'.

STRATEGIES OF SELF-PRESENTATION: THE TOPOS OF HISTORY (AS TEACHER) AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'HISTORICIZED' SELF

In the previous section, it was argued that the character of Yorik is subtly framed as a danger, by means of representing a certain people and a certain diplomatic position with a metaphoric hunger, but also because he exemplifies a discourse of doubt concerning Greekness. In this sense, Yorik and his ideas instigate the conditions for the imagination of the national 'self' to be revisited. As a result, in the form of a reaction to the threat imposed by Yorik, in terms of an embodiment of FYROM's geopolitical intentions – and in accordance with the identified problem of the Greeks having become disconnected from their historical and cultural roots in the beginning of the episode – , the main characters of the show embark on a journey of rediscovering their Greekness. This is primarily understood as a process of revisiting their past, starting by locating their identity spatially and historically. Therefore, Dimitra proudly claims that she is a descendant of a fighter of the Greek Struggle in Macedonia, a struggle for domination over and integration of parts of the declining Ottoman Empire in the region of the Balkans (1904-1908); Vlassis locates his roots in Mistras, an area of high historical significance because of its serving as the capital of the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea; Renia reveals that her grandmother was one of the heroic women who jumped off a cliff in Souli during the Souliote War of 1803 in order to avoid enslavement, while Yiannis informs the rest that his Greekness cannot be verified since his family roots, originally found in Anatolia, are lost over time in the Turkish mainland. Even Spyros, who is highly skeptical about processes that mobilize this kind of nationalist discourses ("Guys, these are nationalisms okay? Let's not let our mind go towards dangerous paths..." /"*Παιδιά, αυτά είναι εθνικισμοί έτσι; Μην πάει το μυαλό μας σε επικίνδυνα μονοπάτια...*"), eventually consults his mother, only to be relieved to find out that his family comes from the island of Kefalonia.

The quest for Greekness is therefore framed as a reaction to a crisis of (national) identity, which is activated through a dispute over geographical region, but extends to the question of historical and cultural belonging. It could be argued, then, that the main protagonists resort to history, both in terms of national history and their personal family history – often by combining the two –, in an attempt to construct a historicized version of their national identity. Such an attempt has two main goals: firstly, to cover the gap between a glorious past and a present which is found in the position to defend a 'vulnerable' national identity, and secondly, to create some kind of continuity which will allow for the present to equip with the necessary arguments and defend itself against the contemporary dangers. In addition to that, the historicization of national identity results in a temporary reconciliation between Spyros, Dimitra, Vlassis, Yiannis,

Vassilis, and Renia; they put their differences aside and they focus on their common characteristic, their Greek decent. To put it in other words, the episode suggests that this crisis could be overcome as long as the Greeks reunite as one nation by means of remembering their heroic past (including the challenges faced and overcome during turbulent historical periods) and establishing the connections between then and now.

Hence, the topos of history as an argumentation strategy in the process of self-presentation is employed in the sense that Reisigl and Wodak have explained, "because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to" (2001: 80). However, unlike the authors' emphasis on the use of the topos of history in order to warn off a repetition of past failures, it is operationalized in a different manner here. Instead of constructing a lesson through bringing to the fore wrongdoings of the past, the topos of history as teacher (Forchtner 2014: 20) activates memories of national glory and heroism, which are meant to inspire the main characters; to reconnect them with emblematic spaces and events of the celebrated past and to help them construct a historically-informed self-image. It would then be possible to describe the lesson learnt as a reminder of the historical and cultural connections with a glorified image of the Greek past, with an emphasis on the idea of continuity – "the core of Greek national consciousness" (Zacharia 2008: 11) –, an important mechanism for the construction of national identity, aiming at building ties between modern Greek identity and previous historical eras, including Classical Antiquity, the Byzantine Empire, and the Ottoman period. Interestingly enough, as Antonis Liakos informs us, the employment of history played an important role in the early 1990s, when the dispute over FYROM's geographical and historical claims energized a politicized view of history:

> It was not strange that when the 'Macedonian crisis' exploded in 1991-1993, this attachment to history prevailed over all other political considerations. [...] History, even without historians, had become a decisive force for determining politics. Hellenism as the embodiment of the Greek history, culture and spirit became a powerful ideology for Greeks. (Liakos 2008: 217)

It is worth noting, however, that the construction of the aforementioned continuum does not only take place through language, but also through visual and aural elements. Throughout the episode, a number of different semiotic strategies are employed, functioning in combination and in reinforcing the argument about continuity. For instance, the episode begins with a traditional Greek song. References to more folk songs are present in other scenes of the episode too, including a scene where an actual folk singer and her musicians are invited to perform in Dimitra's and Spyros's apartment, while the protagonists

dance in an intense manifestation of national pride and unity. A similar observation can be made regarding the visual elements which the protagonists utilize in order to illustrate their attachment to (their version of their) history. More specifically, Dimitra decides to decorate her house with Greek flags and pictures of emblematic figures of the Greek history, namely Theodoros Kolokotronis (an iconic figure of the Revolution of 1821) and a man who resembles Pavlos Melas (a symbol of the previously mentioned Greek Struggle for Macedonia) who Dimitra presents as her grandfather.

Therefore, it is not only the characters themselves who seek to prove, establish, and showcase their Greekness by means of (re)discovering their roots. The domestic environment, too, transforms into a space where historical time and space become blended and national imagination is stimulated in the form of an unproblematic(?) continuum between the past and the present. This is particularly evident in one of the last scenes of the episode when Dimitra, Spyros, Yiannis, Vlassis, Vassilis and Renia perform a song, particularly written on their request as a celebration of their Greekness. History is revisited, selectively interpreted, personalized, and adopted, in order for the characters to reinforce the vulnerable present with a national fortification based on memories of the past; what Hayden White has referred to as the process of narrativization of the past, "[the] practice of arranging (selected) events in a unified plotline, including the closure of this sequence" (cited in Forchtner 2014: 23).

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to illustrate in this attempt at approaching a popular cultural text with analytical tools taken from the field of Critical Discourse Analysis is mainly that the study of popular culture – and television fiction in particular – provide wide possibilities for critical research and fertile ground for experimentation with combinations of theoretical and methodological approaches. By initially locating this report within the field of popular geopolitics, I wanted to draw attention to the significance of popular culture as a resource for a number of discursive phenomena. Here, the construction of national image has been foregrounded as one of them, and its study has been pursued within a product of Greek popular culture in an era when the concept of national image emerged as a kind of emergency. At the same time, by addressing fiction as a shaper of social reality and an agent of construction of national identities, the application of a framework for the identification and analysis of strategies of self- and other-presentation was considered necessary. The first part of the analysis looked at strategies of 'othering' and the use of metaphor for the construction of dangerous 'other', threatening the existence of the in-group by challenging the latter's understanding of its national identity, but also by mobilizing at the same time the (re)construction of a collective identity. The second part continued the analysis on the level of strategies of self-presentation,

this time, by indicating the ways that the topos of history as '*historia magistra vitae*' utilizes the narrative of a glorious past as a lesson and guiding light for overcoming difficulties of the present. Building on the above, the present article could be read as an invitation; the experimentation with more instances belonging to the area of popular culture and the application of appropriate (critical) discourse analysis tools could provide us with more ways in which television fiction accommodates processes of the discursive construction of (national) identities and becomes politically relevant.

Note: All translations from Greek are by the author.

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