

Greek television drama: production policies and genre diversification

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It is commonly believed that European fiction has been undergoing 'Americanization' over the last decades, in terms of content as well as in terms of production models, due to the massive influx of American drama into Europe. Even though the term 'Americanization' has provoked – and still provokes – a wide debate (Hamelink, 1983; Lee, 1979; Noam, 1993; Nordenstreng and Schiller, 1993), it is true that the immense popularity of American fiction series like *Dallas* during the 1980s encouraged several European television channels directly to model their national productions on the American formula. However, contrary to expectations, these experiments have not proved very successful (CCE, 1991: 44) – the case of the French soap opera *Châteauvallon* is one of the most frequently cited examples. Nevertheless, more recent analysis of popular domestic fiction has revealed that European drama is not simply an imitation of its equivalent American genre (Liebes and Livingstone, 1998: 171). European fiction seems to have appropriated elements of the modern – American-rooted – model and to have developed distinctive drama subtypes which are not common throughout Europe,¹ but reflect, on the contrary, their local settings of production.²

In the light of these elements, the study of different European fiction programmes within their specific production context, whether this be in a cultural, social, political, institutional, economic or technical field, has turned out to be significant. Not only because it illuminates the inner structure and functioning of European television systems, thus joining the on-going discussion as to the existence of a European identity (Pross, 1991: 342), but also because it is a means to reconsider the process of cultural homogenization throughout Europe (Biltereyst, 1992; Burgelman and Pauwels, 1992).

Within this framework, this article focuses on portraying the production trends of Greek television drama over the last three decades, in order to demonstrate how a small European country, over time, has developed different genre subtypes, based on its broadcasters' policy and on the necessities of the specific context of production. This analysis neither covers the import of foreign television fiction, nor the export of Greek television drama. It begins with the assumption that the case study of a domestic television genre like that of Greek drama might reveal the importance of the local context in television production.

Methodology and sources

The present study is based on a quantitative analysis of a sample of fiction programmes ranging from 1970, the date of the first Greek television drama, up to 1997, when, for practical reasons, the collection of data came to a halt. This approach combines two perspectives: the evolution of the global Greek television drama output in terms of quantity, as a means to define the legislative, political, technical and economic hallmarks of its production system; and its evolution in terms of genre, so as to pinpoint the ideological factors that underlie the system.

The framework of this analysis is modelled on a systematic approach according to which media industries constitute dynamic systems in which a variety of forces (production policies, financial and technical limitations, etc.) interact continually and exert various kinds and degrees of influence (Gerbner, 1969: 243; Turow, 1984: 11). The study of Greek television drama production is thus focused on the way that, over the years, the systematic exercise of power production output.

Collecting data was one of the major difficulties of this study. Those who have worked on Greek television are aware of the absence of archives, the extreme difficulty of obtaining financial data, as well as the lack of coherent and valid information on audience ratings and exports. Viewing the entire sample was impossible; a great part of it, mostly drama produced in the 1970s, no longer exists, for many videotapes were wiped in order to be re-used to record new programmes. Some private archives still exist, but they are partial and limited. For the long-lost fiction tapes, only two sources remain: the viewers' memories and information available in weekly television guides. The latter give data about the programmes' length, the channel and the time of screening, the genre of the programme, the casting and the production company, as well as a brief summary of the story-line. On the basis of this information, a corpus composed of 701 episodes has been compiled, derived from a sample study of 'the same' week per year. The weeks studied are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
The chronological structure of the corpus of the analysis

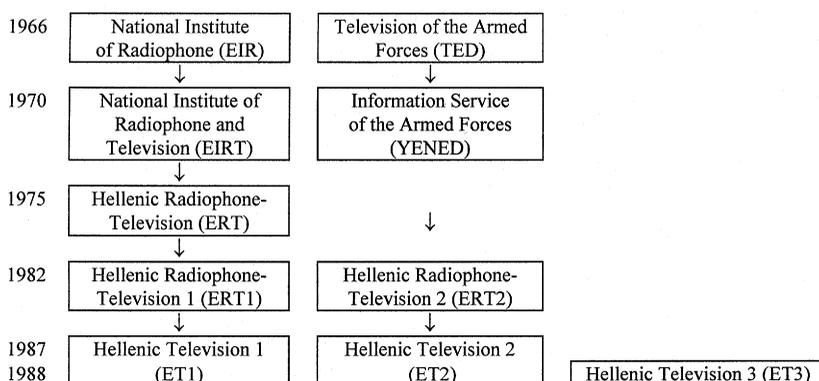
Week examined per year		Week examined per year	
1970	7–13 March	1984	10–16 March
1971	6–12 March	1985	2–8 March
1972	4–10 March	1986	1–7 March
1973	3–9 March	1987	7–13 March
1974	2–8 March	1988	5–11 March
1975	8–14 March	1989	11–17 March
1976	13–19 March	1990	3–9 March
1977	5–11 March	1991	2–8 March
1978	4–10 March	1992	14–20 March
1979	3–9 March	1993	6–12 March
1980	1–7 March	1994	5–11 March
1981	7–13 March	1995	4–10 March
1982	6–12 March	1996	2–8 March
1983	5–11 March	1997	1–7 March

All Greek television channels that screened Greek television drama during the period were examined. These consist of:

Five private channels: Mega Channel (broadcasting since 20 November 1989), Antenna TV (broadcasting since 31 December 1989), New Channel (created in 1990), Sky TV (broadcasting since September 1993) and Star Channel (created in November 1993).

Three state channels (according to Law 1730 of 1987, the term ‘state’ has been replaced by the term ‘public’). Their names, as presented in Figure 1, vary according to the period in question.

FIGURE 1
Evolution of state/public television in Greece (1966–7)



Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).

The study of the corpus was accompanied by 42 interviews with Greek television professionals.³ These informants were indispensable for interpreting the results of the quantitative analysis and enriched the study in two ways: on the one hand, by supplying expert knowledge of drama production, and on the other by adding their personal perspective as regards the evolution of the sector within the Greek television system.

Concept definitions and generic categorization

The first methodological problem that emerged concerned definitions of genres. Both the terms 'drama' and 'fiction' are abundantly used today in different contexts, from television news (Buonanno, 1993: 177–202) to theatre or literature, and there seems to be no clear common definition for either. However, for the purposes of this study, 'drama' and 'fiction' are used as synonyms in order to describe screenplay-based television programmes structured in more than two episodes, produced in Greek by Greek companies and screened on Greek television channels.

Providing definitions for drama sub-genres is equally problematic and the variety of terms used throughout Europe is evidence of the complexity of the issue. Despite various attempts to define Greek drama genres and build a valid typology, it turns out that there is no common terminology shared among professionals of Greek television. The term 'series' ('*sira*' in Greek) is used spontaneously in oral discourse to characterize all kinds of fiction programmes: soap operas, comedies, etc. When asked to define distinct sub-genres within the genre of fiction, professionals distinguish two basic categories, the 'serial' and the 'series':

The 'serial' (pronounced *sirial* in Greek) constitutes a succession of interdependent episodes that develop a unique and complete story.

The 'series' (*sira* in Greek) is made up of autonomous narrated episodes. Each episode presents a unique story with a beginning, a middle and an end, but all stories are thematically homogeneous or relevant. Several series seem to have developed a certain number of common technical features, due to the on-going homogenization of the production modes: they are shot with one camera (video or film), over a period of six to eight days, in a 'natural' (indoors or outdoors) environment. At times, the scenario of each episode can be entrusted to different writers, though the role of the director remains predominant. Crime series are often mentioned as being the most representative example in this category. Nevertheless, it seems that this kind of programme is becoming progressively obsolete on Greek television due to the on-going generalization of the 'serial' model of production, which is considered to ensure stable audience ratings.

However, on the basis of the above model, the classification of fiction known as ‘situation comedies’ (sitcoms) poses a problem. Some professionals prefer to include them in the first category because of their fixed casting (the introduction of guest stars is a supplementary asset) and also because the basic story-line evolves from one episode to another. Others believe, on the contrary, that these programmes form a separate category since they combine relatively autonomous episodes incorporated in a fixed, though evolving, story-line.

Various public or private organizations⁴ dealing with Greek television production have compiled categorizations presenting similar ambiguities: the tendency has been to mix broadcasting criteria such as frequency (weekly series vs daily series) with content criteria (comedy programmes, adventure dramas, etc.) and production criteria (studio programmes vs outdoor productions). The situation has become even more complicated given the fact that typology has changed over the past 30 years and new terms for defining genres, such as ‘soap opera’, have emerged.

In the frame of these restrictions, a new classification model has been formed, composed of four general genres, each of which is identified on the basis of a few stable common features, mainly in terms of content (Howard and Kievman, 1983: 72–5), but also in terms of format, production mode and broadcasting. These genres are:

General drama
Soap opera
Comedy drama
Adventure and crime drama

Classifying programmes on the basis of the above model, however, implies the possibility of being able to view them in order to evaluate and characterize them. In the case of this study this proved to be impossible, as a large number of the programmes to be analysed no longer existed. This restriction imposed the construction of a categorization model based on the information and the terminology used in weekly television guides. Despite its variety, this terminology can be classified as presented in Table 2.

General features of Greek fiction genres

General drama

This category refers to a variety of programmes – ‘social’ stories, ‘historical’ or ‘sentimental’ ones, etc. – that share one main feature: the predominance of the *characters’ evolution* as opposed to action. Most of them include considerable outdoor shooting on one-camera video or film; hence the importance of the director’s role. As far as the formal structure is

TABLE 2
Generic classification of Greek television drama

General drama	Soap opera	Comedy	Adventure and crime drama
Social drama	Soap opera	Comedy	Crime drama
Sentimental drama		Situation comedy	Adventure drama
Historical drama		Humoristic drama	Police drama
Biography			Justice drama
War drama			Mystery drama
			War drama
			Spy drama
			Thriller

Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).

concerned, Greek general drama is made up of 45- to 60-minute episodes. The number of episodes is not fixed, though in general they are numerous, unlike most European productions of this kind, which rarely exceed ten episodes.⁵ They are broadcast at prime-time⁶ and are considered to be 'luxurious' productions aimed at consolidating the channel's image (4 million to 7 million drachmas per episode for the period 1991–2, 14 million to 18 million for 1996–7).⁷

Soap opera

Greek soap operas are rooted in Greek radio productions of the 1960s. In the early 1970s, the first long-running serials appeared on Greek television. Most featured the everyday life of middle-class society and focused on the protagonists' sentimental affairs. By the end of the 1980s, the success of the American soap operas *Dallas* and *Dynasty* had influenced Greek fictional content. New serials emerged depicting new themes and reflecting society's on-going modernization: the triptych 'wealth, beauty, power' entered Greek television production.

However, Greek soap opera can be linked to the arrival of private television (1989), since it was the latter that introduced this American term into the Greek television context (pronounced '*sapounopera*' in Greek) and established its rules. The first productions of this kind took the form of dramatic serials, made up of 30- to 60-minute episodes and were programmed after 10 p.m. on a weekly basis. From 1992 to the present *Brightness* ('*i lampsi*' in Greek), the longest and most popular Greek soap opera, broadcast on the privately owned station, Antenna TV, has established new norms. The Greek soap operas of the 1990s were low-budget productions (approximately 2.5 million drachmas per episode for the 1992–3 period) that took the form of daily episodes lasting approximately

20 minutes. They are mostly screened in the evening, before the 8.15 p.m. or 8.30 p.m. news, unlike the American formula, according to which soaps are broadcast in the morning or in afternoon slots ('day-time' soaps), or late at night ('night-time' soaps).⁸

Comedy

Television comedy is a prolific genre and its production on Greek television started very early, at the beginning of the 1970s. The very first locally made comedies to appear on Greek television were based on some of the most famous Greek plays and their episodes lasted no longer than 15 minutes. For financial and technical reasons they were shot indoors with two or three cameras, and contributed to the establishment of a new term, specific to Greek television: the 'teledirector' ('*teleskinothetis*' in Greek), a term referring to the operator who was in charge of selecting which plans to record from the console onto videotape.

From the beginning of the 1990s the production of comedy series has flourished. Private television channels introduced the American term 'sitcom' into the Greek television context in order to characterize low-budget productions (3 million to 4 million drachmas per episode for the period 1991–2, 6 million to 8 million for 1996–7) of comedy content, shot indoors with three or four cameras and a regular cast. Unlike most American and European sitcoms, Greek comedies do not use 'canned' (pre-recorded) laughter⁹ and they are always intended for a weekly broadcast, usually just after the 8.15 p.m. or 8.30 p.m. news, covering the 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. time-slot. onsisting of 13 or 14 episodes lasting 20 to 26 minutes, they usually extend over several TV seasons.

Adventure and crime drama

This category covers a wide range of fiction dramas: crime drama, adventure drama, police drama, mystery, war or spy drama, justice drama, thrillers. Making a distinction between all these subtypes turns out to be particularly problematic due to the specificity of each production. The common feature among these programmes appears to be the importance given to *action* as opposed to the characters' evolution. However, the lack of spectacular high-budget scenes is one of the main drawbacks in Greek productions of this type, privileging indoor shooting and dialogue (their cost ranges from 4 million to 6 million drachmas per episode for the period 1991–2, 14 million to 18 million for 1996–7). In addition, unlike their American and European counterparts, Greek adventure and crime dramas are often structured in a serial form. They are composed of a variable number of episodes lasting approximately 45 minutes and are mostly screened late at night (usually after 10 p.m. or 11 p.m.) on a weekly basis.

The context of television drama production in Greece

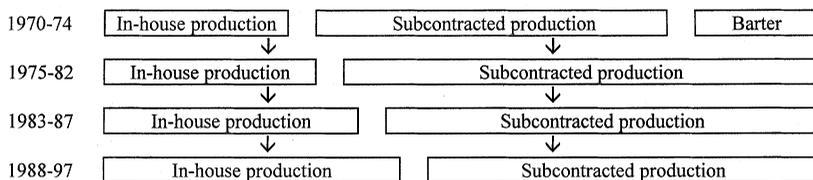
Television broadcasting in Greece began officially in 1966. The first Greek fiction programme was screened four years later in 1970.¹⁰ These dates are of great significance because from 1967 to 1974 Greece was governed by a military dictatorship. From the start, the new-born medium of television was thus under the dictators' direct control. YENED, one of the two national stations, was a politico-military organization that depended on the Ministry of National Defence. This phenomenon was unique in the history of European television stations (Euromedia Research Group, 1986: 3, 47) and it turned out to be fatal for Greek television production in general, and for domestic fiction programmes in particular. From the beginning, the latter were shaped to fit the necessities and the purposes of the military regime. In the years after the dictatorship, both of the national stations continued to be government-controlled, first by the conservative party New Democracy (*Nea Dimokratia* in Greek), which was in power from 1975 to 1981, and then by the socialist PASOK, which ruled the country until 1989. The television boards were appointed by the government and each time the latter changed, the former would change too.

It was only in 1987 that state channels, henceforth called 'public' channels, became legally 'autonomous'. Two years later, in 1989, the monopoly of public television was abolished and the first two private stations, Mega Channel and Antenna TV, appeared without legal permission. The deregulation of Greek television has to be seen as a logical consequence of the general European television liberalization of the 1980s. Nevertheless, the disorder in which it took place was largely attributed to the turbulent context of political rivalry between the two aforementioned major Greek parties, PASOK and New Democracy, coming up to the national elections of 1989. The precipitate creation of a third public channel (ET3) by the PASOK government in 1988 can be viewed in the same light (Papathanassopoulos, 1993, 1997).

The television landscape of the 1990s to the present has been characterized by a two-pole oligopoly, in which two private channels, Antenna TV and Mega Channel, dominate the market. Several other private stations do exist but their audience ratings are of minor importance.¹¹ Since 1993, however, some stations, mainly Sky TV and, to a lesser extent, Star Channel and New Channel, have progressively managed to consolidate their place in the market. Unlike many European states (Ferrell Lowe and Alm, 1997), Greek public television was not able to keep up with the evolution of the sector.

In this context, it comes as no surprise to find out that the production of Greek television drama has always been undertaken by the national television channels. Figure 2 illustrates the increasing role of broadcasters in the procedure of production.

FIGURE 2
The increasing role of broadcast operators within the production of Greek television drama (1970–97) (the width of the rectangles represents the proportion occupied by different types of production)



Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).

During the first half of the 1970s, national drama production was assigned to subcontracting companies that worked under the control of the dictators' control (subcontracted production). These companies had roughly the role of an executive producer. They would undertake the realization of a programme demanded by a channel and would then be reimbursed for it by the latter. At times, 'barter', an American model of production based on exchanging programmes for advertising space, was applied. According to this formula, television stations received, at no expense, hours of programmes in which a producer or a distributor had inserted advertising spots negotiated with the advertisers. Finally, a small part of television drama was produced directly by the stations (in-house or internal production). The cost of these programmes was extremely low compared to 'external' productions. Nevertheless, the channels were not sufficiently equipped to sustain this model; hence the limited use of it.

Information about the production companies of this period (Georgiadis, 1980: 79–83), demonstrates that the latter rarely specialized in television drama but developed, on the contrary, a wide range of parallel activities, such as the import of foreign programmes, the production of TV games, advertising spots, films, plays, etc. In fact, a large part of them only produced one fictional series throughout this period. Production companies were created and run by TV writers, directors, actors, advertisers or entrepreneurs, who had acquired some experience in the Greek commercial cinema of the 1960s or had studied television abroad. Some of them had family ties with members of the dictatorship. Consequently, personal relations played a major role in the decision-making process and the latter was rarely based upon professional criteria.

The role of broadcasters in the process of production was consolidated over the following years. It is important to mention that, unlike in most European states, which openly sustained independent production during the 1980s,¹² Greek television of this period further reinforced the in-house, government-controlled model. The opening of television to the private sector during the 1990s did not modify this structure. Public channels still

broadcast their own productions, while two private television stations, Mega Channel and Antenna TV, directly or indirectly, via satellite companies, control the major part of all domestic drama production today.

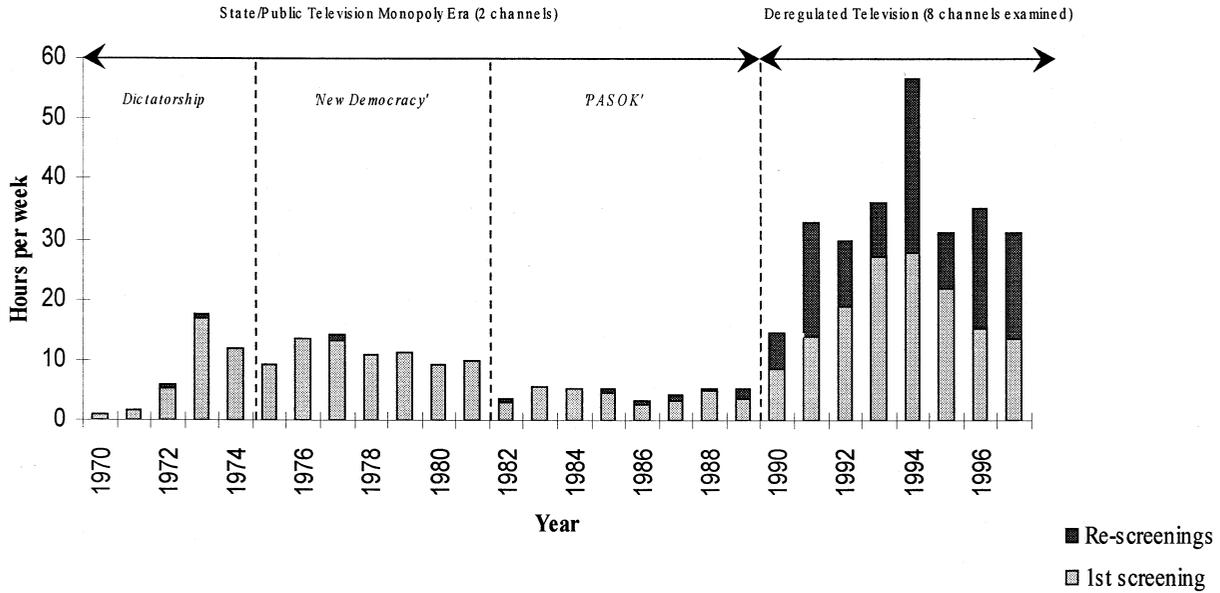
In this context, personal relations continued – and still continue – to play a major role in the organization of the production sector, in the absence of any legislative regulatory frame. The liberalization of television may have freed production from political control, but it was not accompanied by an effective opening towards real competitive liberal procedures. Moreover, the lack of specialization constitutes another major drawback in television production, which affects not only the quality of the final output, but also the structure and the organization of the market.

The diachronic diversification of the genre

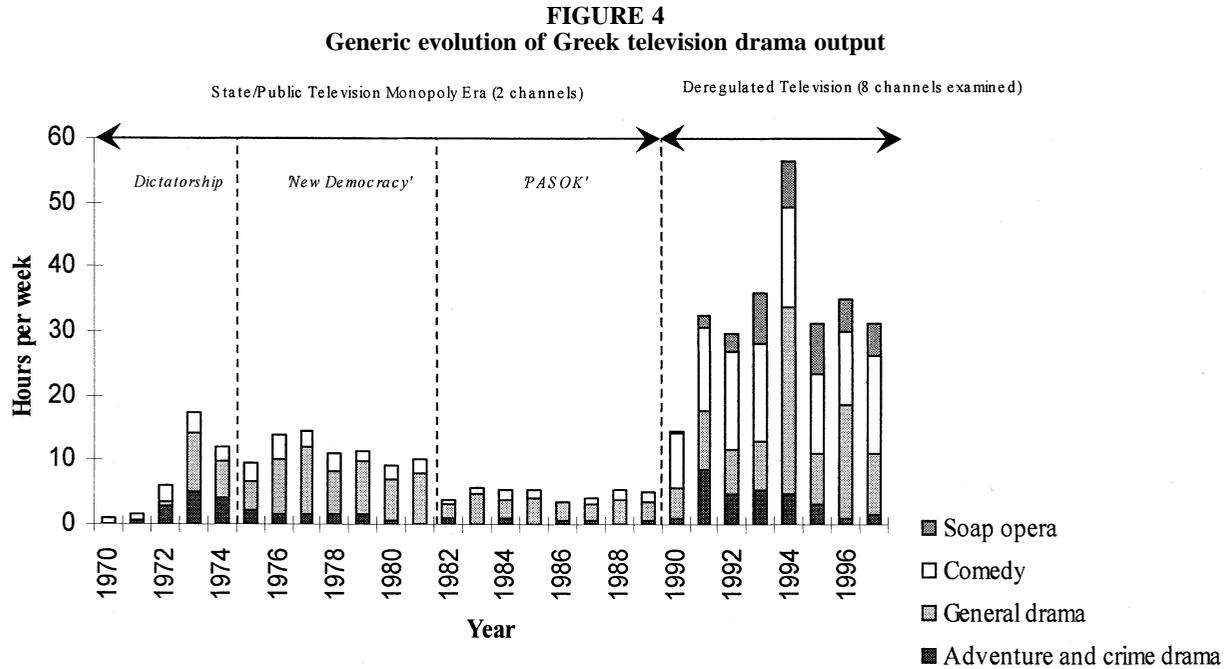
The dictatorship saw in television a means to expand its propaganda. YENED, the military channel, had an explicit order to ‘psychologically prepare the Nation for a possible outbreak of war and to reinforce its morale and spirit during battle’ (Kastoras, 1978: 93). Programmes needed to be entertaining and ‘neutral’, so as to encourage a passive attitude, thereby preventing any critical reaction by audiences. The values promoted were those of the dictatorship’s dogma: ‘Nation, Religion, Family’. Censorship was constantly exerted throughout the process of production, from screenwriting to the final edit.

Entertainment genres such as fiction perfectly fitted the dictatorship’s ideological project. Consequently, the production of Greek television drama blossomed during this period. As shown in Figure 3, its global output in terms of quantity rose considerably, especially in 1973, when the total weekly broadcast time of domestic fiction reached approximately 18 hours (on both channels).¹³ As far as genres are concerned, Figure 4 illustrates the subtypes that were developed over this period. Comedies and adventure were among the privileged genres of national production, occupying more than half the global output. Aside from their entertaining character, adventure and crime fiction had a complementary function: they served to highlight the role and the importance of the National Police Force as well as that of policemen’s devotion to the Law.¹⁴ General dramas were also important. A closer examination of this category in terms of content has brought to light the existence of a large number of ‘war fictions’ that abundantly developed the theme of Greek resistance to the German army during the Second World War. The significance of these programmes within the context of the dictatorship is therefore apparent: they were ideological products of military propaganda and were aimed at the nation’s conciliation with the army.¹⁵

FIGURE 3
Evolution of global Greek television drama output



Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).



Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).

During the second half of the 1970s, until 1981, the output of Greek television drama remained high (approximately 12 hours per week on both channels),¹⁶ as Figure 3 illustrates. The technical conditions of production made remarkable progress due to the arrival of new equipment that enabled outdoor video shooting, better sound recording and easier editing. Moreover, the first programmes in colour, screened at the end of the 1970s, stimulated the producers' interest as well as the public's enthusiasm. However, Figure 4 shows that, unlike the previous variety in terms of genres, this period was characterized by an abundance of general drama. Information on these programmes has revealed that most were not original scenarios, but adaptations of some of the most famous social and historical works of literature stemming from the Hellenic cultural patrimony. This return to the classics can be viewed on two levels: first of all, it demonstrates the lack of ideas and of original screenplays; second, it brings to light the policy that guided the television production of this period. Situated at the crossroads of financial logic and a symbolic project, the latter had a double aim: the establishment of a national industry in terms of television production, as well as the stimulation of the nation's collective memory¹⁷ by evoking its cultural roots.¹⁸

As shown in Figure 3, the year 1982 marked a radical decline in the evolution of Greek television drama output. From this point up until 1989, the latter maintained a considerably low level (approximately five hours per week on both channels, at times less).¹⁹ This rupture with the past needs to be examined, first, on the basis of the global financial penury of television production throughout this period (IIC, 1988: 127; Kopp, 1990: 127) and, second, in combination with the new government's position towards television in general (Papathanassopoulos, 1990). For the socialist party PASOK, television was an ideological medium with a pedagogical mission and, consequently, the production of entertaining fiction programmes was of minor importance. The consequences of this policy were equally obvious in the genre's diversification. Figure 4 illustrates that general drama predominated throughout this period. Further examination of these programmes reveals that they were mostly composed of contemporary social fiction that developed three basic themes, 'socialism, provinces, women', thereby reflecting the ideological orientation of government-controlled television over this period.

One may conclude that during the years of the state monopoly (1970–89), the production trends of Greek television drama reflected the political interests of its state-controlled producers and broadcasters. The latter interfered directly or indirectly in production by regulating the market, by imposing specific types of programmes, by authorizing or not authorizing specific contents. Mirroring the government's specific ideology, Greek television drama of this period thus confirms that every television system represents 'not only a people's culture, its customs and its language,

but also the point of view of the political system in effect in a specific country' (Cazeneuve, 1974: 46).

The deregulation of Greek television at the end of the 1980s marked a significant shift in the history of domestic drama, both in terms of quantity and genre production. The surge of global fiction output during the years 1990–4, as presented in Figure 3 (from approximately 32 hours up to 58 hours per week, on all stations),²⁰ showed the channels' positive policy towards this type of programme. Screened first at prime-time, these programmes were often recycled during the morning or afternoon slots. Hence the considerable increase in the quantity of re-screenings illustrated in Figure 3.²¹

Since 1994, the financial problems that private Greek television encountered have reduced the pace of production. Greek fictional dramas have often been replaced by lower-cost programmes (talk shows, reality shows, etc.) and the quantity of re-screenings has increased. Nevertheless, production output has remained relatively high.

In terms of genres (Figure 4), the return to entertainment and 'light' fiction is the major feature of this period. This is demonstrated by:

- the expansion of comedies, henceforth termed as 'sitcoms';
- the return to adventure and crime drama;
- the development of a new genre, the soap opera.

The standardization of production is one of the main drawbacks of programmes characterized by their 'poor' content, the degradation of the language employed, as well as the abundance of scenes of violence and sex. Sensationalism has become the central element of contemporary Greek television.

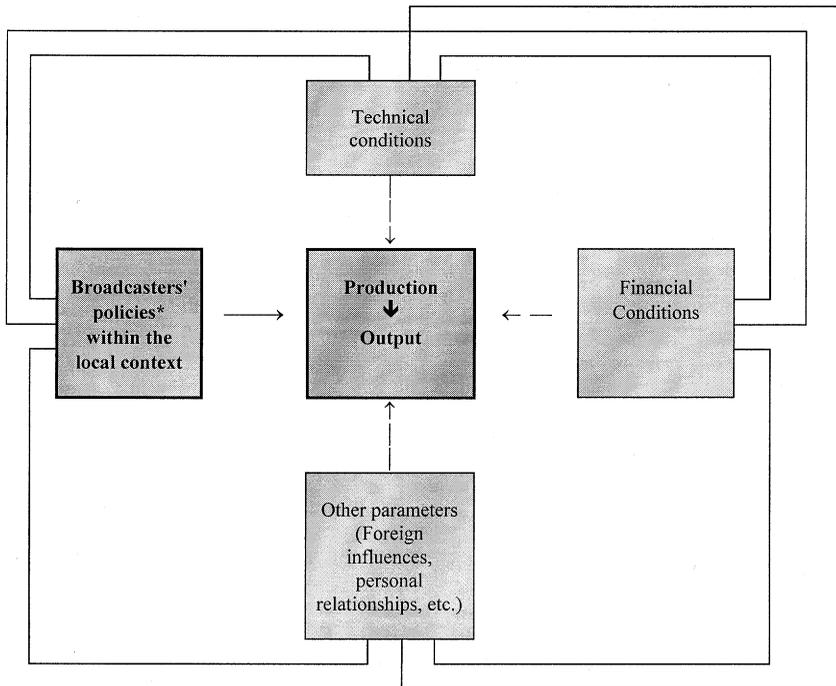
Delving into the causes of this evolution has revealed a variety of opinions shared partially or unanimously among Greek television professionals. Financial constraints and a lack of originality in finding scenarios are two of the factors often mentioned as grounds of 'low quality'. The limits imposed by the nature of the medium of television itself is a third one. Finally, there is a widespread assumption that the degradation of television content is 'consciously intended' to 'hypnotize' and 'alienate' society, to establish today's materialistic and consumer-oriented lifestyle. However, this discourse about television as a medium of ideological manipulation is not recent. It echoes several studies in Western Europe that have explored communication intentionalism in media since the 1970s (Mattelart, 1977). It has been argued, however, that the notion of manipulation implies the existence of a causal model that is too simplistic and that, in reality, television content reflects the society it is acting upon (Breton and Proulx, 1989: 154–9). The ideological hallmarks of modern Greek television drama need to be apprehended as the result of its

producers' and broadcasters' mercantile policy, reflecting society's ideological orientations and cultural homogenization.

Conclusions

The study of production trends of Greek television drama has shown how a domestic genre has been diversified over the last 30 years on the basis of its broadcasters' policies, embedded in the immediate circumstances of the local context of production. Figure 5 summarizes the significance of broadcasters' roles as regards production and its global output.

FIGURE 5
The economy of the production of Greek television drama on Greek channels during 1970–97



—>: strong dependence

- ->: secondary influence

□—□: The interconnected lines represent the interdependence between different factors that determine the output of Greek television drama.

* The broadcasters' policies refer to the channels' policies concerning Greek television drama production throughout the examined period.

Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).

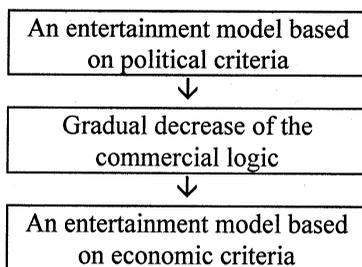
The fact that television stations have always been in charge of production has played a decisive role in the development of Greek television drama. Since the beginning, television drama had been destined to function as an ideological medium of state propaganda, reproducing the discourse of its government-controlled broadcasters. Within this context, Greek television drama was unable to elaborate an autonomous language of expression, nor was it able to develop into a real cultural industry.²² Craft methods were the consequence of strong politicization and concentration, along with the lack of a coherent long-term strategy and specialization. The deregulation of Greek television did not modify the situation; production remained a strongly concentrated sector, dependent on its broadcasters' short-term commercial interests.

This element is of vital significance as it sheds light on Greece's specificity regarding today's entertainment television model. More specifically, it has already been argued (Olivesi, 1998: 171–207) that in most European television systems, the expansion of the entertainment model in the 1980s came about as the natural result of a gradual evolution guided by the necessity to rationalize production and open it to international – mostly American – competition (Reichenbach, 1990: 15). In Greece, however, this evolution did not take place. Television was founded from its very beginning on the basis of an entertainment model, as a result of the ideological project of the military dictatorship. Until the end of the 1980s, the evolution of Greek television was marked by the gradual elimination of commercial enterprise and the affirmation of the political, social and cultural role of television. Consequently, the emergence of the entertainment model of the 1990s is not the last stage of a long and gradual process of evolution. On the contrary, it is the result of a combination of factors that are external to television production. These factors need to be linked to the political turbulence in Greece at the end of the 1980s, with the country being incorporated into the framework of a general European television deregulation.

The similarities between the dictatorial television of the 1970s and the private television of the 1990s are manifest, in terms of quantity as well as in terms of genre diversification, especially when it comes to programmes like fiction: both of them have sustained domestic television drama production and have given it a central place in their daily schedules; both of them have promoted 'light' and entertaining fiction that fitted their short-term projects. Their differences reside, however, in the underlying logics inherent to these projects. As far as television under the dictatorship was concerned, the ideological project was the reason for its entertainment model, whereas in today's private television, it is the natural consequence. Figure 6 illustrates the evolution of the Greek television model.

At the start of the 21st century, the standardization of Greek television drama may seem to have obliterated its distinctive cultural features.

FIGURE 6
Evolution of the Greek television model



Source: Koukoutsaki (2001).

However, this is not the case. In order to respond to the demands of the commercial model, contemporary Greek television drama forms its specificity on the basis of two procedures:

The return to the past via the study of Greek commercial cinema of the 1960s; the remaking of classical popular Greek television productions; and the use of experts from the time of the dictatorship, who are supposed to be experts in commercial television.

The hybridization of foreign models: the triptych ‘wealth, beauty, power’ and the inner structure of American drama productions, on the one hand, and the melodramatic formula of Latin American *telenovelas*, on the other. Greek soap operas are the most representative example of this process.²³

By retaining specific elements from foreign models and combining them with its own tradition and its own sociocultural context, contemporary Greek television drama has thus been elaborating its own distinctive subtypes, similar to its foreign prototypes, though considerably different. Delving into the specificity of locally made television drama remains of major importance in order to study cultural diversity and homogenization throughout Europe.

Notes

1. For example, contrary to the widespread assumption that soap operas are spreading throughout Europe, it has been found that most European countries have produced few programmes of this type; moreover, countries such as France and Italy have produced no soap operas at all (Liebes and Livingstone, 1998: 148).

2. Latin American *telenovelas* are an example of television fiction that has successfully managed to marry tradition to modernity (Mattelart, 1987).

3. It is fairly common in Greece for television professionals to take on several roles within the audio-visual system (direction, screen-writing, consulting, etc.).

The lack of specialization is one of the main drawbacks in Greek television. Given this, the interviews on which this study was based can be more or less classified as follows: 16 interviews with television executives who are (or were) directly or indirectly involved in drama production and broadcasting; 11 interviews with executives in various recently founded organizations dealing with television (National Council of Radio and Television, AGB Hellas, the Greek company specializing in television audience ratings, etc.); 10 interviews with creators (directors and/or screen-writers); 4 interviews with scholars and consultants on Greek media; 1 interview with a journalist-critic of television programmes.

4. AGB Hellas, Metrix S.A., 'Organization for the Collective Management of Theatre and Audiovisual Writers', 'The Greek Directors Society'.

5. The relatively high number of episodes is a general feature of Greek television drama. Similar features of Egyptian television encourage the hypothesis that this may be a particular characteristic of a Mediterranean model of television production (El Emery, 1995: 174).

6. Greek prime-time usually covers the 8 p.m.–23 p.m. time-slot (Koukoutsaki, 2001: 118–23).

7. All financial figures derive from interviews with Greek television professionals, and from unpublished documentation (PLANET, 1992). During the 1990s, US\$1 was worth approximately 250–300 drachmas.

8. This distinction also reflects the production modes of the programmes (Blum, 1991: 41–54; IIC, 1988: 37–8).

9. In 1996, an attempt by the director and screenplay writer Nikos Mastorakis to introduce this element was not very successful. Attempts to produce one-off comedies shot outdoors with one camera have also failed.

10. The first Greek television fiction was 'The house with the palm tree' (*to spiti me to finika* in Greek), broadcast on the military channel YENED for 13 episodes, each lasting 30 minutes.

11. In 1995, more than 160 television stations – mostly local broadcasting channels – were operational all over the country.

12. The development of independent production throughout Europe demonstrates the efficiency of the independent lobbies, but also governments' care to diversify the sector of production in order to strengthen it against the increasing competition of American programmes (Reichenbach, 1990: 15).

13. Based on an average weekly broadcast of approximately 130 hours (on both channels) for this year (1973).

14. The existence of a production company within the Hellenic Police Public Relations Department demonstrates the spirit of television production under the dictatorship (Georgiadis, 1980: 447).

15. The Brazilian military regime of 1964–79 had similar cultural production policies (Mattelart, 1987: 33–4).

16. Based on an average weekly broadcast time of approximately 120 hours (on both channels) over this period (1976–81).

17. Similar functions seem to have underpinned the historic television fictions in Quebec (Lemaire, 1989: 207–8).

18. Doxiadis' comparative study of a specific television drama production of this period and the original novel from which it came reveals evidence of ideological interference with the literary text (Doxiadis, 1993).

19. Based on an average weekly broadcast time of approximately 125 hours (on both channels) over this period (1982–9).

20. On a 24-hour broadcasting basis.

21. It must be stressed, however, that this increase in global fiction output becomes much less important when examined on the basis of the total broadcasting time, which also increased considerably due to the multiplication of the number of channels.

22. Greek television drama remains local. Exports are rather rare and are mostly aimed at Asia and Africa.

23. *Brightness* is a particularly illuminating case. This soap, as its title implies, depicts a modern and wealthy Athenian family whose members, despite their high social rank and their exaggerated wealth, lead a life full of unhappiness, bad luck and tragedy. The inner structure of the scenario follows the American formula according to which there are always three story-lines that are simultaneously developed throughout each episode. In terms of content, melodrama is at the heart of the story and the screenplay is mostly inspired by the daily sensational tabloids. The dialogue employs hyperbolic, pompous language. Since its first screening in 1992, the astonishing success of *Brightness* has given birth to several soap operas of the same style, though none of them have managed to compete with its audience ratings (Koukoutsaki, 2001: 238–44).

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