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Alternative media ecology and anti-austerity documentary: The #greekdocs archive

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Abstract

This article presents the digital archive #greekdocs, a researcher-initiated practice. This work has both a theoretical and a practical aim. Theoretically, it critically analyses and situates alternative media such as independent documentaries within media ecology in times of austerity and argues that in the context of Greek austerity these operate as both journalist and activist practice. Practically, it offers a media resource of independent productions of various themes, all of which aim to redress narratives of the crisis and its multiple impacts on society. Diverse and inventive in their reframing of the crisis, they have addressed questions of its impact on media, politics and society. The article theorises #greekdocs within media ecology, mediatisation and media culture in Greece, and argues that independent documentaries produced under conditions of austerity are at the intersection of journalism and activism.

Keywords

Activism, alternative media, anti-austerity, archive, documentary, Greece, journalism, media ecology

Alternative media in the Archive: #greekdocs

Greek media culture has generated much analysis during the years of the crisis and following the introduction of hard austerity policies. The victory of Syriza in January 2015 fuelled hopes for the rejection of austerity at both the national and regional levels. Since the election, the Greek mainstream media have been set on a course to defame, silence or vilify the ruling party and its representatives. In June 2015, a referendum was announced¹ while, almost simultaneously, capital controls were put in place. These events saw street mobilisations for both the Yes and No vote cases, and led to a week of media frenzy. The Yes vote was curated by Greece's mainstream media as the pro-European position, although it meant accepting a harsh bailout deal. The No vote was dismissed by mainstream media as an anti-European stance that would lead to the country's destructive desolation. The Yes and No positions were socially divisive, and the conflict was fuelled by a media frenzy. Following the news on the days that led up to the referendum meant watching journalists on prime-time news utter statements like, 'It is not my fault that all the social groups are supporting the Yes vote'² when their objectivity was questioned by a Syriza MP on air. Despite such reporting, the landslide victory (slightly over 61 per cent) of the No vote echoed as a firm rejection of austerity.³ Another example can be found in the reactions of people towards journalists who were reporting the frenzy following capital controls. While queuing up at ATMs, people in Greece started talking back to mainstream news

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reporters. Curtailed by partisan and commercial constraints, mainstream media had conspicuously began promoting a pro-austerity agenda.

Against the lack of trust in mainstream media institutions, independent documentary production has flourished since the crisis, producing alternative framings of the situation for global audiences. Documentaries by citizens, journalists and other creatives have reframed the crisis and illuminated the possibilities inherent in the intersection between journalistic and activist practice when trust in mainstream media institutions has waned significantly. From this point, such works will be referred to as #greekdocs.

This article presents a case study of researcher initiated practice – the digital archive #greekdocs⁴ – and examines its contribution to the area of media activism and highlights the intersection of journalistic and activist practice. #greekdocs is a collection of documentaries produced between 2011 and 2016, which aims to continue documenting such production into the future. Since the implementation of austerity measures in Greece in 2010, the aftermath of the global financial crisis (GFC) has crippled public services, curbed employment and social provisions and cultivated cultures of resilience and solidarity, resistance and protest, as well as reinforcement and nationalisms (Lekakis, 2015). It is within the context of civic cultures and resilience that independent documentaries have emerged (Alevizou, 2016; Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2016b). #greekdocs are alternative media with an anti-austerity agenda.

The work presented here has both a theoretical and a practical aim. Theoretically, it critically analyses and situates alternative media such as independent documentaries within media ecology in times of austerity and argues that these operate as both journalist and activist practice. Practically, it aims to offer a media resource of independent productions of various themes, all of which aim to redress representations of the crisis and its impact on society. In an attempt to understand documentaries in the aftermath of austerity and ongoing crisis, I have compiled a list of works that have been produced about the crisis in Greece without state or corporate funding. Since the beginning, the rationale has been to enhance their visibility – not just in Greece but also internationally.⁵ The majority of documentaries are available online for free under a creative commons licence. With the exception of two out of 50 documentaries (see list of documentaries in the References section), all offer English subtitles.

This article is concerned with the power dynamics allowed as well as contested by media ecology: how can digital archiving possibilities protect and advance alternative media production? What kind of resistant frames and narratives are used to represent the crisis? To what extent can alternative media production challenge mainstream media production? The article theorises #greekdocs through the concept of media ecology, mediatisation and alternative media to elaborate on the role of independent documentaries produced under conditions of austerity and at the intersection of journalism and activism. First, the article introduces the Greek context of media and political culture. It then discusses documentary as a medium between alternative and mainstream, and between activism and journalism before presenting the archive and continuing to analyse alternative representations of the crisis that emerges in independent documentaries in terms of how they speak to and against austerity.

Austerity will be televised: Contextualising the Greek media and/in crisis

Greek media culture has been bound to the medium of television. This is a similar situation to that in several Southern European countries, where media systems have arguably been characterised by clientelism, partisanship and often propaganda. The Greek media context is 'televised' in the sense that the state, political parties, civil society and the interexchange between political and economic interests are tied to, and dictate, the so-called 'Mediterranean model' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). While Hallin and Mancini note that 'commercialisation has in general weakened the ties between the media and the world of organized political actors'

(2004: 282), Greece and other Southern European countries still have larger shares of TV audiences compared with their Northern European counterparts. The combination of the financial crisis and ensuing political turbulence has created a situation where the historical accumulations of mainstream media need to be re-examined through, but also significantly beyond, media systems.

Public service broadcasting in Greece (in terms of both radio and television) were instituted as 'arms of the state' (Papathanassopoulos, 1997: 352); radio began in the late 1930s under the Metaxas dictatorship, while the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) introduced a year before the junta with television taking off in the mid-1960s under the junta. State paternalism characterised Greece, as the state exercised its monopoly over radio and television up until the 1980s (Papatheodorou and Machin, 2003). By the late 1980s, the broadcasting system had been deregulated and privatised. A decade later, the state monopoly had given way to a commercialised model consisting of over 100 private TV stations and over 1000 radio stations. This plethora of broadcasters did not necessarily produce a pluralist broadcasting model that would represent the diverse interests and concerns of a heterogeneous society, but was pioneered by partisan interests leading to a commercialised broadcasting system with strong state links (Boucas and Iosifidis, 2015; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Similarly, the public broadcasting landscape had suffered in terms of the quality of public debate even before the crisis, while the political speech presented in mainstream media has often remained locked within the partisan agendas of such channels up to the present day. The Greek context can be understood through the historical accumulation of partisan and commercial control over mainstream media. In 2016, Greece ranked 89th in the World Press Freedom Index, a position that has improved but only slightly over the last couple of years, but which had dropped severely from the 35th position in 2009.

Austerity has had severe direct effects and side-effects on media culture in Greece. Directly, it was signalled by the swift shutting down of the public service broadcaster (ERT) in 2013, while it has resulted in a sharp decline in newspaper circulation (Siapera, Papadopoulou and Archontakis, 2015) and a constant struggle for funds and audiences by all broadcasters. In addition, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2016) places Greece at the top of the list of countries where citizens use social media as a news source, with 27 per cent of the public stating that social media constitute their main source of news – more than TV and print combined. Indirectly, the effects of the crisis can be read through its reporting by mainstream media. Throughout the years of austerity negotiations with the Troika (IMF, ECB, EC), mainstream media have danced to the tune of the state. Studies exploring the coverage of the crisis through mainstream media discourses in the early years of austerity find that these tend to reproduce hegemonic explanations of the crisis (Leandros, Papadopoulou and Psylla, 2011; Nikolaidis, 2015; Pleios, 2013; Poulakidakos and Veneti, 2014). Mylonas's (2014: 317) analysis (*Ekathimerini*) illustrates the eschatological construction of the crisis as 'an opportunity to resolve "our" problems and reform our identity, our institutions'. Furthermore, Doudaki and her colleagues (2016) discuss how mainstream print news (*Ta Nea, Kathimerini*) have offered a decontextualised and accepting approach to austerity through three key frames: dependency, (non-)liability and austerity. At the backdrop of such pro-austerity reporting, public trust towards mainstream news in Greece is lower than anywhere else in Europe (European Broadcasting Union, 2016; Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016). Such a disconnect between mainstream media and Greek society has given the impetus for the rise of new forms of cooperative journalism (Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2016a) among other alternative media formations.

Several studies of alternative media in Greece have appeared (Galis and Neumayer, 2016; Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2016b; Siapera, Papadopoulou and Archontakis, 2015; Touri and

Kostarella, 2016). Yet until recently, despite the existence of numerous alternative media outlets, there had been limited studies; as Vatikiotis (2011: 172) suggests, 'limited attention has been paid on grassroots media practices in Greece that have diachronically promoted the inclusion of marginalized social domains, heterogeneous discourses, and diverse social actors in public and political life'. The study of alternative media in Greece deserves further exploration. In their study of cooperative journalism enterprises, Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016a: 183) trace cooperative journalism as part of the commons, and suggest that its rise is to be attributed 'in part because of the post-2008 economic crisis and in part because of a shift in culture and mentality'. Because of the crisis in the media sector, alternative forms of social and economic organisation have emerged based on social values such as trust and collaboration rather than economic benefits. Similarly, Touri and Kostarella (2016: 6) write that 'the emergence of journalistic collectives and online communities such as "Radio Bubble", which operates through a communal hashtag, a platform for bloggers and an online radio [station], signifies journalists' strong desire to utilize new technologies in search for alternative news platforms'. The embeddedness of technological innovations within alternative media landscapes is discussed in the following section. The existence of alternative media does not automatically negate the stronghold of mainstream media over dominant representations of the crisis. Indeed, as Doudaki (2015: 5) suggests in her analysis of the discursive struggles over the negotiations of Greece with the Troika and the ensuing austerity policies, through the mechanisms of naturalisation and objectivation, mainstream media operated 'as vehicles of legitimation, exercising political agency'. Power struggles continue over symbolic and material resources.

Independent documentaries are part and parcel of alternative media in Greece. As evidenced by the archive, documentary production in and about Greece has grown exponentially. Lydia Papadimitriou (2016: 470) suggests that Greek documentaries of recent times 'were not just about the crisis, but they were products of the crisis'. In line with their exploration of cooperative journalism, Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016b) refer to the #greekdocs archive and examine 20 documentaries, suggesting that these are radical media in the sense that they aim to recuperate social bonds. The significant argument they put forward is that, as radical media, they are part of solidarity economy that has flourished in the hard years of the crisis. The 50 #greekdocs in the archive could also be seen as crucial contributions to the alternative media ecology of Greece.

Media ecology and #greekdocs as alternative media: Between journalism and activism

Media ecology has been an important metaphor for theorising changes in the global media and communications environment. In his theoretical appraisal of the underpinnings of the concept, Carlos Scolari (2012: 205) identifies medium theory and defines it with regard to the questions it addresses: 'What roles media force us to play? How do the media structure what we are seeing or thinking? And why do the media make us feel and act as we do?' Media ecology, in other words, aims to illustrate the ways in which media institutions and practices influence social and political action. Scolari (2012) analyses interpretations of the media through the categories of environments and species. Both the *environmental* and the *intermedia* conception are parts of the ecological metaphor. Scolari offers three concepts to expand a theoretical understanding of media ecology: evolution, interface and hybridisation. The evolutionary approach is concerned with the advancement of communication technologies, as well as the appearance and disappearance of different media forms. The interface approach addresses communicative exchanges within specific spaces and presents an integrated theory to media ecology in the sense that media both have interfaces (human–technology) and are interfaces (technology–technology). The final concept, hybridisation, concerns the interchanges between systems that can appear in both media content and devices. For Scolari (2012: 217), these processes are not independent from one another, as 'media coevolve and hybridize each other'; from the

perspective of time, the process of evolution appears to be more visible, while from the perspective of space, hybridisation is apparent. The concept of media ecology is useful in analysing the role of #greekdocs, as it allows for a reflection on the possibilities offered by digital technologies in terms of media production and distribution.

This concept has been employed within studies of protest movements to analyse the dynamics of journalism in a changing communication environment (Burgess and Bruns, 2012), as well as to illustrate the complex dynamics between movements and media technologies (Tréré and Mattoni, 2016). With regard to documentary, the concept of media ecology has been used 'to look at emerging documentary platforms as situated within a complex media environment' (Nash, Hight and Summerhayes, 2014: 2). Such a focus on media ecology is concerned with possibilities for engagement allowed by changing technological landscapes – for instance, with regard to interaction, participation or collaboration, as well as the possibilities of narrative forms for the promotion, explanation or even critique of documentaries. Indeed, the advancement of communication technology has allowed for renewed discussions around documentary, in particular through web documentaries or webdocs, which are produced and disseminated through the web and aim for user engagement; they typically are concerned with issues of social change or environmental justice (Nash, 2012; O'Flynn, 2012).

With regard to the Greek context and crisis, medium theory needs to be complemented by an analysis of the social and cultural factors that are responsible for the shaping of the environmental and intermedia dimensions of the concept. The *mediatisation* paradigm, which complements and challenges medium theory, highlights the questions that media ecology leaves untouched (Hepp, 2013). Rather than asking what and how the media make us feel, think or act, it extends some of its questions to 'different fields of (late) modern society such as politics, education, religion and science' (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015). The framework of mediatisation has been developed to explore the power exchanges between media and political institutions and their logics (Hjarvard, 2008; Landerer, 2013; Downey and Neyazi, 2014). As a theory of media culture specifically, mediatisation is concerned with the dynamics of power in the interaction of media institutions and social and political processes. Mediatisation is the process by which society embeds media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979); specifically, media logic is the organising logic of content, which determines its form of presentation and is significantly shaped by commercial agendas. Although it demonstrates similarities with medium theory, mediatisation is not a deterministic approach that argues society is at the detriment of media logic; it 'both transcends and includes media effects' (Schulz, 2004: 90).

Mediatisation is significant as a concept to theorise the struggles of mainstream and alternative media outlets over meaning in the context of the Greek crisis. As mentioned above, despite the numerous alternative media outlets which challenged hegemonic representations of negotiations and the crisis, mainstream media managed to exercise power over these through marginalisation, omission or discrediting (Doudaki, 2015). Media power needs to be located within political economic, technological and cultural contexts (Couldry, 2003). While the definition of alternative media is often complex, and includes further clarification with regard to agents, tactics, processes and aims, there is an understanding that when we are talking about alternative media we mean 'media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations' (Couldry and Curran, 2003: 7). Similarly, alternative media are defined as sites that offer the opportunity 'to produce non-conformist and sometimes counter-hegemonic representations of the views of those marginalized, misrepresented and under-represented in the public sphere' (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007: 17). The elementary characteristics that differentiate them from mainstream media include their motives or purposes, sources of funding, message content and nature of research methodology (2007: 17). In the context of the

Greek crisis, these elements can be interrogated with regard to the assertion of social aims (healthcare, employment, inclusion, environmental justice), challenging of national and supra-national institutions (IMF, ECB, EC), facilitating support and solidarity (community engagement, support for resilience and solidarity initiatives), rejecting funding from state or advertising revenue (crowdfunding, zero-budget filmmaking), message content (reframing the crisis through artistic or expository approaches) and nature of research methodology (political economy, ethnographic, investigative). As alternative media, #greekdocs are to be found at the intersection of journalistic and activist practice.

From an evolutionary perspective, documentary production has been advanced through technology, while it has also been enriched by different interfaces (Nash, Hight and Summerhayes, 2014). It has cross-fertilised journalism and in turn become cross-fertilised by it. A recent report by the MIT Open Documentary Lab (2015) analyses the use of digital narrative forms of storytelling by quality news organisations (case studies include *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *NPR*); the report shows how partnerships between journalism and documentary can be at the creative forefront of both media genres (or species). The key findings include a series of suggestions of how news organisations can nurture the intersection of the two (user-centric understanding, story over form, learning from experimentation, cross-border collaboration, conversation approach, creative use of archives and consideration of long-term impact). From a media ecology perspective, the report is grounded in an intermedia conception, exploring the media species of journalism and documentary with regard to their evolution, interface and hybridisation (Scolari, 2012). From an evolutionary viewpoint, it focuses on developments in interactive and participatory documentary. From an interface perspective, it discusses the implications of the changing gateways into journalism evident in the rise of mobile platforms (smartphones, tablets, laptops, smart televisions, augmented reality systems). From a hybridisation viewpoint, it maps the intersection of documentary and journalism cultures at the micro, meso and macro levels. While the report focuses on news organisations and their transformation through advancements in technology and subsequently documentary, it is significant in its elaboration of the transformations that have occurred in the news ecology.

Similarly, documentary is transformed. Like journalism, documentary is committed to telling the truth and providing explanations for past and current affairs. John Corner (2002) has identified three classical functions of documentary: (1) the project of democratic civics, (2) journalistic inquiry and exposition, and (3) radical interrogation and an alternative perspective. Documentary as a project of democratic civics is concerned with 'providing publicity and propaganda for dominant versions of citizenship' (2002: 259), and is therefore typically funded by state (or commercial) institutions. Documentary as journalistic inquiry and exposition is concerned with witnessing and 'reportage', and can also be found in forms of mainstream media that copy the style of 'in-camera presentation, or commentary voice-over, and perhaps with interviews intersecting either or both' (2002: 259). Finally, radical documentary 'attempts a criticism and a correction of other accounts in circulation' (2002: 260), and in this way taps into the rich traditions of alternative or radical media (Downing, 2011). Works that belong in this tradition 'have been widely deployed as a way of attacking established accounts (including established histories) and presenting counter-perspectives in the most strategically persuasive way available in order to encourage changed attitudes' (Corner, 2009: 114). The reframing of history, as well as reporting of the present, place radical documentary in an ideal position to redress issues in the Greek media ecology. Yet these categories are not distinct, as several documentaries in the archive aim to offer both a reporting of a recent event as well as a radical rewriting of its mainstream account. For example, *Ruins: Chronicle on an HIV Witch-Hunt* (2013), directed by Zoe Mavroudi and co-produced with independent journalists in Greece, accounts for the prosecution of HIV-positive women who were rounded

up and detained, tested for HIV without their consent, charged with felony, imprisoned and publicly exposed when their personal details (including mug shots) were published in the mainstream media before the 2012 Greek elections. This tragic story of several instances of human rights violations demonstrates the importance of the radical re-reporting of the event. It also illustrates how documentary can both fulfil the functions of journalistic inquiry and provide an alternative perspective.

It is important to acknowledge challenges in the study of alternative media. Rodríguez, Ferron and Shamas (2014) draw our attention to the importance of acknowledging context, the complexity of communication process and political economy, as well as previous research. The archive of documentaries about the crisis and against austerity offers a particular case of alternative media. It does not explicitly include productions of grassroots collectives or producers who would identify as radical, and it does not only feature the works of citizens, but also those of professional journalists. Media power is always at play within (alternative) media ecology, and while technological advancements allow for the production and promotion of alternative narratives of the crisis, these are often competing against dominant mainstream narratives (Doudaki, 2015). Media power is also often at the mercy of power imbalances in terms of political economy of communications (Fenton, 2016; Galis and Neumayer, 2016). This study takes into consideration previous research on this topic (Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2016b), while also aiming to contribute to the study of independent documentaries produced in the aftermath of the Greek crisis as a form of alternative media at the intersection between journalism and activism. Such media activism has the pressing role of responding to the crisis: 'it is global crisis that renders most urgent the need for alternative journalism, and its most critical (in both senses of the term) functions: counter-narrativity, and the formation and mobilisation of counter-publics' (Hackett, 2016: 14). While mainstream media (especially in television) in Greece have naturalised austerity, documentaries in the archive have challenged it.

On the #greekdocs archive and methodology

What constitutes an independent documentary in the #greekdocs archive (Papadimitriou, 2016)? In this case, documentary is political filmmaking – whether it is artistic or investigative or both. This is a tentative definition, driven by a strong interest in how documentaries can redress power imbalances in the media and beyond. Criteria for inclusion have been questioned since the inception of the idea, which basically was to include independent productions in order to distinguish documentaries as projects of democratic civics (Corner, 2002). With a few exceptions of more experienced production companies, most of the documentaries in the archive are either funded by several individuals or organisations, or are crowdfunded or zero-budget productions. Hence participation at festivals such as the Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival was not a criterion, though some of the documentaries in the archive have been screened at national and transnational documentary festivals. The aim of the archive is to provide support by contributing to and promoting the distribution of such documentary production. In terms of providing support towards pending productions, the archive and its social media aim to contribute further visibility and distribute information about productions that call for crowdfunding and support.

The #greekdocs archive contains 50 documentaries produced between 2011 and 2016 (see list in the References section).⁷ Of these, 37 are available for viewing online for free under creative commons licences. All of these, with the exception of two, are available in at least two languages (Greek and English). Of the remaining 13, one (*Island of Refuge*) is currently in production and will be distributed free online in the future, and six are available as Video On Demand (VOD) for a small fee (under \$5). Over the last two years, the author has been

maintaining the archive, updating and editing it as necessary. The #greekdocs in the archive are of varying lengths, starting at just under three minutes and ranging up to more than two hours.

Previous research has focused on documentary production (political economy, producers and their relationship with the public), as well as content (topics and aesthetics), distribution (methods) and reception. #greekdocs are regarded as radical media because of their conspicuous (non-partisan) political approach to their topics, the identities of their producers and their political economy context, and they are discussed in the context of a reorganisation of social relations through solidarity and the commons (Siapera and Papadopoulou, 2016b). As Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016b) also discuss, independent documentary production (citizens, journalists, creatives) rose rapidly as cultures of self-organisation, cooperation and cooperativism (Alevizou, 2016; Boucas and Iosifidis, 2015). Yet, in addition to being indicative of a radical turn in the civic culture of Greek austerity, documentaries have also sought to walk the line between activism and journalism.

An example of hybridisation in the alternative media ecology is evident in the case of Infowar Productions. This is a team that consists of 'highly skilled journalists, cameramen and photographers who have worked in various hot spots for leading international media and news agencies',⁷ and that has produced, in the words of one of its core members, Aris Chatzistefanou, 'guerilla documentaries'⁸ such as *Debtocracy* (2011), *Catastroika* (2012), *Fascism Inc.* (2014) and *This is Not a Coup* (2016). In her analysis of the first of Infowar Productions' works, Lydia Papadimitriou (2016: 471) posits that 'the film functions as an activist tool, using a number of techniques to inform opinion and persuade its audience to reject the bailout deal'. The focus of Infowar Productions has been to illuminate stories that would not otherwise be told because of imbalances of media power and constraints in media freedom. Independent documentaries have often been produced by teams of (former) journalists, creative workers and academics, but also by citizens or younger people through user-generated media production that aims to reframe the crisis (Triliva, Varvantakis and Dafermos, 2015). A cross-fertilisation of resources and creative ways of funding and distributing documentaries was noted in the early 2010s. In order to understand alternative representations of the crisis as emerging through documentaries and to enhance visibility and access to them, the rest of this article explores the #greekdocs in the archive through thematic and narrative analysis of #greekdocs. An analysis of themes allows for the representation of under-represented or misrepresented events and peoples. To complement that, a narrative analysis will expose the form and content of stories put forward by documentaries. Narrative analysis is a case-centred methodological approach that can be used to analyse stories in archival documents and visual media (Kohler Riessman, 2008). Hence the questions that it allows to be addressed include: What is the main message? What kind of a narrative structure communicates it to viewers? If 'narrative is about stories and story structure' (Berger and Quinney, 2005: 4), then the structure of the stories in #greekdocs will reveal a dense set of narratives about a deep crisis context. The narrative analysis helps situate #greekdocs on the continuum between journalism and activism. Hence it can allow for the recontextualisation of austerity to complement its decontextualisation in mainstream media.

Reframing the crisis: Media, politics, society

The themes that emerge in the archive are directly concerned with the deep contextualisation and illustration of the histories and effects of the crisis and austerity policies. Key themes include the political crisis, media crisis, social crisis and refugee crisis. The political crisis is understood as the culmination of neoliberal policies at the level of the state, as well as transnational governance. Here documentaries are dedicated to exposing and challenging processes of privatisation, the project of neoliberalism and, crucially, austerity policies. For instance, the first two (full-length) documentaries of Infowar Productions demonstrate not only successful

experiments in crowdsourcing before the time of platforms such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo,⁹ but also the first well-known documentaries that explored the crisis and voiced resistance against the austerity program. *Debtocracy* (2011) examines the causes of the debt crisis in Greece and the European periphery, while *Catastroika* (2012) is almost a sequel, which examines the historical, economic and social processes of privatisation, including the myth of the over-extended public sector. The fourth documentary of Infowar Productions (*This is Not a Coup*, 2016) also addresses abuses of political power at the national and transnational levels and offers a challenging analysis to the political project of neoliberalism.

The media crisis refers to the corruption and devolution of Greek media and scrutiny of the complicity of media institutions to austerity. For example, *The Lost Signal of Democracy* (2013) addresses the question 'Why did the public broadcaster (ERT) have to die?' The full-length documentary was produced by the Exandas Documentary Series of Small Planet Productions¹⁰ and is available on demand. A very different production, both in terms of length and its approach to and scale of production, is the poetic four-minute-long *Greek Honey Puffs: Media's Propaganda Cookbook* (2012). This collates a voiceover of journalists who are weaving the web of austerity and images of a carousel taking people up in the sky and down to earth. Someone is deep-frying honey puffs in an attempt to visualise Greek media as propaganda. *opPRESSion* (2016), the full-length zero-budget documentary by two Journalism and Mass Media students, exposes attacks on media freedom and key moments of abuse of corporate media power in the years of austerity. Myrto Simeonidou and Nikos Panierakis interviewed key figures on the Greek media scene, including Aris Chatzistefanou, who said that 'every journalist has a story to tell on how (s)he suggests interventions and attacks of a state, para-state or financial form'. As suggested earlier, this media oppression is tied to the partisan and commercial interests of mainstream media.

The social crisis is addressed through the exposure of the everyday consequences of austerity and growing practices of social resilience. These express 'a sense of the politicality of many areas of everyday life' (Corner, 2009: 115) and include documentaries such as those in the series *Portraits of the Crisis* (2013) or *Love in the Time of Crisis* (2014) and *Athens from Beneath* (2015). The documentary project *Portraits of the Crisis* offers cinematic narratives about life under austerity. In doing so, it exposes major issues in the everyday experience of austerity, and sheds light on conditions of unemployment, under-employment, migration and disability. Two strong (and ideologically opposing) sub-themes here are the rise of fascism and the growth of solidarity. Fascism is directly addressed in documentaries such as *Fascism Inc.* (2014) and *Golden Dawn: A Personal Affair* (2016).

One of the first documentaries to deal with migration in times of crisis was *Into the Fire: The Hidden Victims of Austerity in Greece* (2013), a hard-hitting film produced by Guy Smallman, Kate Mara and the video activist collective Reel News. The film put in the picture the most vulnerable in times of austerity (refugees and migrants) and underscored the structural violence of EU laws (the Dublin agreement) and the everyday struggles for survival as 'other'. Solidarity and resilience are also highlighted in documentaries such as *Καεπέτι* (2012) and *An Alternative Economy During the Crisis* (2013). *Anti-Consumption in Crisis* (2015) is an ethnographic film co-produced with Skoros, an anti-consumerist collective that has been merging sustainability with solidarity (Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2012). *Solitarie Ou Solidaire?* (2016) presents a social clinic of solidarity in Thessaloniki, which was created as a result of the hunger strike of 300 immigrant workers in 2011; it highlights solidarity at the intersection of healthcare, immigration and the social crisis. *Building Communities of Commons in Greece* (2016) features a project at Sarantaporo village in North Greece, where the construction of network infrastructure in the form of a wireless network became a springboard for learning how to build relationships and collaborate, inspiring hope. Such works highlight the

importance of solidarity beyond a single definition.

Finally, a theme that is beginning to appear more prominently is the refugee crisis. Mainstream media have used the term 'solidarity' in a demeaning way to refer to and alienate public opinion towards those who are protesting or organising to support refugees in Greece. Furthermore, already existing tensions in the Greek media have been exacerbated, as reported by the Mapping Media Freedom project,¹¹ or the European Federation of Journalists,¹² which provides evidence about the lack of interest across mainstream media, press limitations and the dangers inherent in reporting the refugee crisis. Documentary production has demonstrated the potential of communicating critical narratives of the refugee crisis. One documentary that makes specific reference to Greece is *The Border* (2016), which offers a bottom-up perspective of the refugee crisis. The filmmaker travelled to Idomeni, on the Greek northern border with Macedonia and the gateway of Greece to Europe, and questioned the impact of national borders as expressed by those most directly affected. Press blocks introduced shortly after the film was produced endanger the possibilities of communicating stories from the scene and listening to those in most need. In an interview, Caoimhe Butterly said that her documentary addressed

the largest movement of those forcibly displaced since World War II but its media representation is too often played into stereotypes. *The Border* captures the pain of the people we met, but it also shows their strength.³

Roger Silverstone (2007: 47) suggests that 'proper distance' is required in our mediated interrelationships with others, and is necessary for 'a duty of care, obligation and responsibility, as well as understanding'. Documentary is one of the several forms of alternative media that can provide 'proper distance' in the time of the recent refugee crisis. Photography¹⁴ and participatory media outlets,¹⁵ but also journalism and mainstream media, carry the responsibility of redressing (media) power imbalances and highlighting injustice at the institutional but also everyday levels.

Narratives of the financial crisis and life under austerity vary greatly between the legitimating discourse of mainstream media and the radical approach of #greekdocs. As already mentioned, 'to study alternative media is to consider how the world might be represented differently' (Atton, 2015: 2) to the world represented in global and national media institutions. Regarding narratives, #greekdocs belong to the formats of journalistic inquiry and an alternative perspective. *The Lost Signal of Democracy* (2013) fits the bill of documentary as journalistic inquiry and exposition (Corner, 2002). Similarly, in their thorough research and meticulous argumentation, documentaries such as *Debtocracy* (2011) and *Catastroika* (2012) demonstrate 'an imaginative capacity to extend portrayal beyond the presentation of descriptions and propositions and to work with a discourse whose symbolic range can handle contingency, the incidental and the casual as well as the pursuit of a tight "informational" agenda' (Corner, 2009: 114). These documentaries are akin to investigative journalism. Despite being produced by a group of independent, non-partisan and non-professional young people, *Citiz€nd* (2016) is similar in its attempts to employ documentary as journalistic inquiry through a series of interviews with academics. An exception to the case of a former or current journalist using documentary as a tool of journalistic inquiry or exposition is the four-episode documentary *#thisisacoup* (2015) by BBC-trained journalists Paul Mason and Theopi Skarlatos. This is the first behind-the-scenes account of the Syriza story from the party's election in 2015 to after the capitulation of the prime minister in a 17-hour Eurogroup meeting, where he agreed to a tougher bailout deal. Mason has denied the relationship between the documentary *#thisisacoup* and journalism: 'I've done enough news on this – this is certainly not news ... It is a film in four parts that has the ambition to be cinematic, that has the ambition to also tell a deeper story.'¹⁶ While *#thisisacoup* aims to offer a chronological picture of events rather than contest or investigate mainstream representations of those events, it blends the cinematic with journalistic

format, as the film contains several interviews with politicians and citizens and a first alternative approach to the political turbulence of 2015. Contrary to mainstream media in Greece, the film aimed at providing a linear report of events, and thus cannot really be described as alternative.

Documentaries of a more radical inclination have spelled their anti-austerity aims clearly. For example, *128 Days at the Roadblocks* (2012) is not intended to be linear or 'objective', but to communicate the struggle of citizens against the creation of a landfill in Keratea (50 kilometres from Athens and the recipient of most of its garbage) in the occupation of the prospective landfill territory over a period of four months in 2011. Another film, *Athens from Beneath* (2015), aims to contribute to the constitution of a large and heterogeneous community of people who care about humanitarianism and solidarity, and will help to advance a humanitarian movement.¹⁷ *Golden Dawn: A Personal Affair* (2016), produced by the journalist Angelique Kourounis, casts an expository light over the leadership of Golden Dawn, its involvement in the killing of Pavlos Fyssas, and the group's manipulation of the middle classes during hard times. The film walks the line between journalism and activism because it has elements of a journalistic exposition, but it is also pronounced as a personal confrontation with fascism; the personal is political and the director's own perspective comes in dynamically in the framing of the documentary. Furthermore, narrative webdocs 'may or may not have interactive paratextual components' (O'Flynn, 2012: 142). For example, two documentaries – *No Means No* (2013) and *WAteRdrops* (2014) were attached to the struggle against the privatisation of water (Right2Water European Citizens' Initiative, 2014). While one could question whether the documentaries were the paratextual components of a pan-European campaign against the privatisation of water, rather than their accompanying campaigns, it can be inferred that such documentaries are a form of anti-austerity media activism.

Conclusion: Alternative media, the archive and anti-austerity

#greekdocs are at the epitome of alternative media production as anti-austerity activism. As independently funded media, they offer a dense contextualisation of a complex socio-political landscape with felt consequences at the level of everyday life. As austerity policies have taken their toll and the refugee crisis continues to test the humanity of the European Union, its politicians and its citizens, mainstream media in Greece and beyond remain for the most part complicit in pandering to the whims of media logic and media power. As a space for meaning making, media ecology is both diachronic and synchronic; it moves both through time and across contemporary media platforms. As mainstream media have bled public trust, alternative media such as documentary stake a claim at reframing the economic, social and symbolic dimensions of the crisis and its consequences. As forms of alternative media, documentaries can 'offer multiple versions of the world' (Atton, 2015: 2). As Couldry (2003: 51) suggested over a decade ago, 'perhaps we are entering an era in which many of us will want to look more closely at where and to what end we obtain news about the world'. Maybe, to a certain extent, when the 'processing plant' of media power (Couldry and Curran, 2003: 5) is dismantled, alternative media can strengthen our understanding of the world. This article makes the case for an alternative media ecology, which is in accordance with a hopeful growth of solidarity and resilience and an alarming rise of nationalism and racism.

Media ecology approaches have been examined through the perspective of technological innovation and cross-fertilisation between journalism and activism in the medium of contemporary independent documentary. Through a questioning of the effects and logics of media systems, as well as financial and cultural conditions, we can make sense of an alternative media ecology in the aftermath of the GFC and austerity policies in Greece. Such a conceptualisation of media ecology is in line with concerns posed by mediatisation approaches. While digital technologies cannot offer solutions to material problems, possibilities of digital

distribution and archiving of alternative media production can help to remedy a fragile media system and culture. While the televised media system of Greece still captures more audiences than its Northern European counterparts, the power balances are changing, with more and more people switching to digital news consumption. At that point, as a medium which has emerged at the intersection of journalistic and activist practice, independent documentary can challenge the 'processing plant' of media power. In creating the #greekdocs archive for such documentaries, this researcher-initiated practice aims to support them by enhancing visibility, contribute to them by offering another outlet for calling for funding, and distribute them via an additional platform. In facing such a wealth of cultural production, we need to ask how we can understand, foster and protect documentary production that seeks to reinvigorate political culture, redress power imbalances and provide alternative framings of austerity and the crisis. This article has argued that documentaries play a significant part in the (alternative) media ecology in a Greece that is under strict austerity measures.

Diverse and inventive in their reframing of the crisis, documentaries have addressed themes around politics, media, society and the refugee crisis. Reframing politics has meant highlighting the voices of politicians, economists, analysts and academics in offering explanations about the processes and products of the neoliberal project. Reframing media has addressed power imbalances, biases and propaganda techniques adopted by mainstream media, and vilifying, ousting or pacifying alternative concerns. Reframing society has engaged in a celebration of solidarity economy and processes of resilience and inclusion while it has scrutinised the rise of fascism and intolerance. Reframing the refugee crisis has been a relatively recent topic among #greekdocs – and one which, of course, knows no borders. Filmmakers have sought to provide a bottom-up understanding of what life on the road or in the refugee camps of Greece is like, while innumerable forms of media production are bound to take this question and humanitarian crisis up in the future. It is time to think both critically and creatively about how communication can be part of the process of social change. To do so, we will need to be able to imagine it through many different perspectives. The provision of these is the aspiration and aim of the #greekdocs archive.

Notes

- ¹ The referendum asked 'whether to accept the outline of the agreement submitted by the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund at the Eurogroup of 25/06/15'.
- ² #GreekMediaPropaganda, *The Press Project*, 3 July 2015. Available at: <http://www.thepressproject.gr/article/78872/Greek-Media-Propaganda>.
- ³ A week later, the Prime Minister capitulated from the referendum result and signed a third package of austerity measures.
- ⁴ Available at: <http://greekdocsblog.wordpress.com>.
- ⁵ Between its creation in November 2015 and March 2017, the archive had a total of 916 unique visitors from 39 countries.
- ⁶ The process of designing and thinking through the shape and scope of the archive goes back to 2014, when the author started collecting links to documentaries that were addressing the consequences of the financial crisis and austerity policies in Greece via the hashtag #greekdocs. This collection was formalised with the beginning of the (free) WordPress site in November 2015, while social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter) followed soon afterwards. The author also posted several public calls for relevant documentaries (e.g. <https://greekdocsblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/05/what-is-greekdocs-%cf%84%ce%af-%ce%b5%ce%af%ce%bd%ce%b1%ce%b9-%cf%84%ce%bf-greekdocs>). Anyone who is willing to make a recommendation about

a documentary that could be in the archive can submit this via the email, Facebook page or Twitter account of #greekdocs.

7 Available at: <http://infowarproductions.com/about>.

8 <http://prin.gr/?p=10573>.

9 Q&A with Aris Chatzistefanou after screening of Fascism Inc. at University of Sussex, 30 May 2014. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/102429063>.

10 This was created by Yorgos Avgeropoulos in 2000 and has been one of the most internationally awarded documentary series.

11 This is co-funded by the European Commission and operated by Index on Censorship in partnership with the European Federation of Journalists and Reporters without Borders. For example, the Mapping Media Freedom project reported on the press block at the Idomeni border. Available at: <https://mappingmediafreedom.org/?k=belarus#/2333>.

12 Available at: <http://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2016/06/13/refugees-cover-up-and-impact-on-media-freedom>.

13 Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/film-on-idomeni-border-wins-award-in-dublin-1.2705930>.

14 For example, the exhibition by the artist and activist Ai Wei Wei at the Cycladic Museum of Art included a photography exhibit of approximately 600 photographs by local Greek photographers, detailing their experiences in the island of Lesvos. Available at: <http://aiweiwei.cycladic.gr>.

15 There is evidence of initiatives towards participatory communication, such as the magazine *Solomon*, which encourages media co-production by involving 'locals, im/migrants and refugees in the co-shaping of society through the free expression of their views, ideas and skills'. Available at: <http://www.solomon.gr>.

16 Available at: <https://fieldofvision.org/interview-with-paul-mason-producer-of-thisisacoup>.

17 Available at: <http://www.culturenow.gr/47362/h-athhna-apo-katw-to-ntokimanter-twn-neoptwxwn-toy-takh-mpardakoy>.

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- 128 days at the Roadblocks* (2012)
- Agorá: From Democracy to the Market* (2015)
- Anti-consumption in Crisis* (2015)
- Athens from Beneath* (2015)
- Athens: Social Meltdown* (2012)
- Building Communities of Commons in Greece* (2016)
- Burning from the Inside* (2016)
- Catastroika* (2012)
- Citiz€nd* (2016)
- Debtocracy* (2011)
- Fascism, Inc.* (2014)
- Future Suspended* (2014)
- Golden Dawn: A Personal Affair* (2016)
- Greece on the Brink* (2014)
- Greece: Days of Change* (2014)
- Greedy Profit* (2013)
- Greek Honey Puffs: Media's Propaganda Cookbook* (2012)
- In Wake of the Troika: Power Without Control* (2015)
- Into the Fire* (2013)
- Island of Refuge* (coming soon)
- Knowledge as a Common Good* (2014)
- Let's Not Live Like Slaves* (2013)
- Little Land* (2014)
- Love in the Time of Crisis* (2014)
- Mute: The visualization of an Economic Rape* (2013)
- Next Stop: Utopia* (2015)
- No Means No* (2013)
- Non Omnis Moriar* (2016)
- OpPRESSION* (2016)
- Plugs* (2014)
- Portraits of Crisis: An alternative Economy During the Crisis* (2013)
- Portraits of Crisis: Kialo Amadu, Minor Immigrant in Athens* (2013)
- Portraits of Crisis: A Country Full of Gold* (2013)
- Portraits of Crisis: Aggeliki, Blind Employee in Greece* (2014)
- Portraits of Crisis: Life in Darkness* (2013)

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