



Journalism and Austerity

Digitization and Crisis During
the Greek Memoranda

Christos Kostopoulos

Digital Activism and Society



Journalism and Austerity

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Journalism and Austerity: Digitization and Crisis during the Greek Memoranda

BY

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List of Abbreviations

ANEL	Anexartiti Ellines/Independent Greeks
DIMAR	Dimokratiki Aristera/Democratic Left
DOL	Dimosiografikos Organismos Lampraki/Journalistic Organization Lampraki
ECB	European Central Bank
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KKE	Komounistiko Komma Elladas/Communist Party of Greece
LAE	Laiki Enotita/Popular Unity
LAOS	Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos/Popular Orthodox Rally
ND	Nea Dimokratia/New Democracy
PASOK	Panellinio Sosialistiko Komma/Pan-Hellenic Socialist Party
PSI	Private Sector Involvement
SYN	Synaspismos tis aristeras, ton kinimaton, kai tis oikologias/Coalition of the Left, of the movements, and of ecology
SYRIZA	Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras/Coalition of the Radical Left
WWII	World War II

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Chapter 1

The Media and the Economic Crisis: A Critical Juncture

The eruption of the global economic crisis after the meltdown of the financial sector of the United States in 2008 has been a pivotal point for scholarly inquiries about the media. The crisis provided an excellent case study to tackle questions regarding the role that the media had in this crisis, as for example, whether financial media had a share of the blame for failing to critically engage with those that they reported upon (Schechter, 2009). The crisis quickly escalated from a financial to an economic one affecting nearly every country around the globe. Therefore a lot of scholarly attention has focused on the local offshoots of the crisis and the role of the media either in Asia and Australia (Carson, 2014; Dutta & Sen, 2014; Mao, 2014), or in Europe (Cawley, 2012; Damstra & Vliegenthart, 2018; Joris, d'Haenens, & Van Gorp, 2014; Just & Mouton, 2014; Rojo López & Orts Llopis, 2010; O'Malley, Brandenburg, Flynn, McMenamin, & Rafter, 2014).

Media and communication research on the crisis has mainly focused on its representations and their societal impact and the influence of the crisis on the structures and practices of journalism. For example, the impact of the media in the construction of the social reality of the crisis has been examined through the naturalization of neoliberal ideologies (Dutta & Sen, 2014). Moreover, Carson (2014) examined the impact of the crisis on the political economy of Australian media and concluded that managerial cutbacks impacted the capacity of journalists to hold financial institutions to account and perform their democratic role. Furthermore, the impact of the representation of the crisis on policy making and economic voting patterns was also examined (Wagner, 2011).

Framing has been one of the most employed theories utilized by researchers in order to shed light on the media representations of the crisis. News frame analyses were conducted in a multitude of local or transnational cases contributing to knowledge about the reporting of the crisis, but also how the crisis and other factors impact frame building. Just and Mouton (2014) investigated elite framing struggles and how they construct the meaning of the post-crisis financial culture, whereas Cawley (2012) in the Irish context uncovered how framing can be used to create a division between the public and private sectors of the country. Furthermore, the framing of the coverage of the crisis in the Low Countries was the concern of Joris et al. (2014). Damstra and

Vliegenthart investigated the framing of the economic crisis in the Dutch press, unveiling a remarkable similarity in over-time frame prominence. On the other hand, O'Malley et al. (2014) and Mancini and Mazzoni (2015) used the economic crisis as a case study to investigate how it impacted media framing, alongside other factors, in the case of the Irish elections and in the case of a European public sphere.

However, the economic crisis and its local offshoots present an excellent case study that can contribute to knowledge about wider media phenomena and debates in journalism and communication. For example, the crisis can be employed to investigate modern journalism and the process of media production. The prolonged timeline of the case, the impact of the crisis on the media and the maturing of current developments in journalism, such as the digitalization of the newsroom, call for an in-depth investigation of content production during and post-crisis. Furthermore, the crisis has significant political and social impact, with the media playing a 'mediator' role among the structures of economy and politics, and the wider society, shaping perceptions regarding societal and political processes. The owners of the media have a vested interest in shaping these perceptions through the content their outlets produce. Therefore, the process of content construction regarding the crisis and the political economic structures that impact it is an important issue that deserves more scholarly attention. This book contributes by combining framing and political economic theories and processes, in order to make sense of how the media construct the debate around political issues.

One of the most severely impacted countries was Greece, a case that garnered both journalistic and scholarly attention. The exceptional circumstances that Greece was plunged into, and the importance of the Greek case not only for domestic but also global politics and media garnered a lot of scholarly attention as well. Researchers were interested in understanding how the Greek crisis was represented through global and domestic media, but also how the crisis itself impacted media and journalism in Greece. The attention of the international media to the Greek crisis was one particular strand of research, focusing on the representations of the Greek case and their societal impact. Framing analyses were the dominant research method employed to answer a variety of questions. For example Touri and Rogers (2013) examined the framing of the Greek crisis in the UK media to investigate the role of the media in fueling the rising Euro-scepticism of the country, whereas Touri and Koteyko (2015) further probed the representation of the Greek crisis in UK media. Mylonas (2012) investigated the coverage of the Greek crisis in German tabloids arguing that a systemic crisis was represented as a showdown between Germany and Greece, assisting in the culturalization of the crisis through the scapegoating of Greece. Tzogopoulos (2013) on the other hand compared the frames promoted by US, UK, French, German, and Italian newspapers in order to shed light on the public image of Greece constructed in the foreign press. Finally, by employing a discourse analysis method Mylonas (2015) examined the coverage of the Greek case in German dailies and argued for the persistence of austerity discourses in the media despite the failure of the memoranda to attain their goals.

Less attention has been paid on how the domestic media covered the crisis and on how the various structural changes described in the previous paragraphs have impacted journalism and content creation. The case of Greece offers a compelling example to shed light on how the structural level impacts journalistic practices and content creation in the media. However, there are some notable exceptions that offer important insights. Regarding the coverage of the crisis by the domestic media, Doudaki (2015) performed a discourse analysis of the coverage of the first and second bailout agreement by the Greek press uncovering the discursive mechanisms that were employed to legitimize the memoranda. Furthermore, Doudaki, Boubouka, Spyridou, and Tzalavras (2016) conducted a framing analysis on the coverage of the first two memoranda by the Greek press, revealing an overall neoliberal representation of the crisis, which strengthened the hegemonic discourse over the necessity of the bailout policies. On the other hand, the impact of the crisis on Greek journalism and the window of opportunity created by new technologies for new journalistic avenues were explored by Siapera, Papadopoulou, and Archontakis (2014). Finally, despite not being explicitly concerned with the crisis, the research of Veneti and Karadimitriou (2014) paints a current picture of the political economy of the Greek media and the changes that occurred in the early years of the crisis, whereas Touri, Theodosiadou, and Kostarella (2017) explored how the introduction of the Internet in Greek journalism has impacted journalism culture in the country.

Although researchers so far have tackled important questions regarding the representation of the crisis in the media or the process of content creation, other important issues, some of which are addressed in this book, have not received the attention they deserve. The significance of the case, as well as the extraordinary circumstances that the Greek media system found itself present an excellent opportunity to examine the process of content creation and the impact of power structures in the social construction of our realities. Furthermore, this examination of the production of media content under circumstances of precipitously falling revenues and the maturing of digitalization processes allows for the investigation of the structures themselves, and whether these changes impact the power relationships within a media system. Finally, this research contributes by combining framing and political economic theories and processes in order to shed light on how the media construct the debate around political issues and the interests that are served in the process.

Framing theory is one of the most suitable approaches to answer such questions. Erving Goffman (1974) argues that social meanings only arise in processes of interaction, interpretation, and contextualization that produce social frameworks that determine which parts of the discourse are relevant. From then on scholars have contributed to the accumulation of knowledge regarding the framing process, despite being guided by distinct paradigmatic perspectives (D'Angelo, 2002), recognizing in framing a concept that 'consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text' (Entman, 1993, p. 51). Framing research benefits from the multiple paradigms that guide it: addressing a number of research questions and goals regarding the representation of issues in the media through frames, the production of those frames, the examination of the effects of

those frames, and the impact of these frames in the production of social realities (D'Angelo, 2002). Van Gorp (2007) argues that elements of news production are part and parcel of the framing process, whereas Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) deem the framing approach well suited to explain the news production process. However, despite the suitability of the concept for the investigation of news production, the question of how frame building actually works, how frames come to be embedded in news content, and how power influences this process have not been addressed sufficiently by researchers (Borah, 2011). Entman (1993) argue that politicians need to compete with one another and with journalists in order to get their preferred explanations for social reality forward and conceal others. The political power gained from successfully setting the terms of the debate through framing (Entman, 1993) is why Van Gorp (2007) argues that frames are power mechanisms in their own right, especially since they hide the process of social construction (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). It is because of this political power that it is crucial to understand the process of frame building, how it is influenced by power, and the impact of frames in fostering debate around political issues.

However, in order to address the aims of this research, the media need to be investigated within the specific production paradigm that they operate under and through their relationships with the structures of the economy and politics, which play a defining role in the process of content creation. A relevant strand of research that assists in capturing these relationships is political economy. McChesney (2008) argues that political economists see the nature of the current system as an important factor for the content that the media produce. Furthermore, McChesney also argues that the critical position of the political economy of communication research aims to understand 'why the range of legitimate debate is so constricted comparing to what is possible' (2004, p. 48) by investigating the structural factors and the labour process of communication (McChesney, 2004). The severity of the crisis itself warrants the investigation of its impact on the media and on the practices and conditions of journalism, alongside other current developments such as the increasing introduction of new technologies in the newsroom and the media market, which influence the structures and the labour process involved in content production. Finally, political economy has also focused on the ideological role of the media, and how this ideology is produced in concrete practice (Murdock & Golding, 1974), as well as the impact that political economic structures have on the diversity of content provided in a media market (Wasko, 1984). Therefore, framing and political economic research are asking important and complementing questions that can be explored in the context of the economic crisis.

Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

This book sets out to examine the interplay between framing and political economic theories and processes, in order to shed light on content production in the press. More specifically, this research investigates the various factors that impact the process of frame building, such as political economic structures and processes,

as well as journalistic practices. Embarking from framing research that identifies a lack of a conceptualization of power in the frame building process, this book aims to theoretically incorporate various levels of power influence and pinpoint how each level contributes to the process of frame building in the media. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) identify three levels of influence, namely the level of media routines, the organization level, and the extramedia level, whereas Van Zoonen and Vliegenthart (2011) call for analyses that incorporate the macro level consisting of the national media system, the meso level consisting of the structure of the news organization and the market, and finally the micro level consisting of the routines of journalists when negotiating with political sources and the individual agency of the journalist. This book argues for the compatibility of framing and political economic theories and for the necessity of combining them in order to shed light on the process of content production. A theoretical model of how the various levels of power influence the frame building process is developed, in order to address gaps in knowledge and propose an innovative way of investigating the impact of power in content production. This research incorporates the macro level consisting of the national media system and the structures of politics, and the market (extramedia level), the meso level consisting of the organizational structure of the newspaper, and the micro level consisting of the transactions between journalists and political sources, as well as the individual agency of journalists. Therefore, the aim of this research is to shed light on journalistic practices in content creation and how they are influenced by the structures of politics, the economy, the media, and the relationships among them.

A second aim of this research is to assess what are the implications of the frame building process for political power and how the frames applied in the press reflect the power constellation of the structural level. Reese (2010) argues that when research is focused on the 'what' questions regarding the internal structure of the frame and the frame building process, the analysis is also opened to the connections of the frames to the surrounding web of culture, revealing the ongoing elite contests that play a part in the process of frame building. Therefore, this research aims to understand what the frame building process and the frames that are applied in news messages indicate about the framing contests that are taking place and as Entman argues 'whose power over government action is likely enhanced by media framing' (2007, p. 166). At the same time, this book aims to shed light on what the frame building process reveals about the power relationships on the structural level that shape the application of frames in the press.

Finally, this research aims to examine how the process of frame building can constrain democratic debate around political issues and the interests that are served in the process. Entman (1993) argues that frames play a major role in the exertion of political power as the frame registers the identity of the actors that competed to dominate the text, but also reflects the boundaries of discourse over an issue. Therefore, this research investigates the frame building process in order to evaluate how the structural level constrains democratic debate through its impact on journalistic labour.

Of course, in order to properly evaluate and demonstrate empirically these processes, it is important to analyze them within a real-world context. Therefore,

the case of the Greek crisis has been selected as an example that demonstrates the impact of power on the frame building process. It is important for a researcher looking into the frame building process to have a current overview of the journalistic process; therefore a side aim of this research is to unveil a present image of how journalists went about covering the Greek crisis, and how they understand the influence of power on their job. This book unveils whether and how the current phenomena of the economic crisis and the ongoing digitalization of the newsroom impact the journalistic process and ultimately frame building. Although the main goal of this research is to understand how political economic structures contribute to explanations of frame building in the Greek press, at the same time the frames found in news messages can contribute to knowledge regarding the political economic system that leads to their application. Finally, the dialectical relationship between the frame building process and the political economic structures can reveal the boundaries set on democratic debate through the framing of the case under investigation. In order to achieve the aims of this research, the following three research questions were set:

- (1) How is frame building in the press affected by political economic structures and power influences?
- (2) How do the frames applied in news messages inform our understanding about the framing contests and power struggles that shape them in news content?
- (3) How did the Greek press frame the debate about the three memoranda between Greece and the creditor troika?

The Historical Political Background of Greece and the Greek Media

The crisis has been a catalyst for cataclysmic changes on every level that require further attention and analysis. On top of the continuous economic troubles of the country the crisis brought about major changes to the structures of politics and media. The political landscape was liquidated during the crisis, in a country that was characterized by a stable party system for more than 30 years (Lyrintzis, 2005), before a new equilibrium started to form. The crisis also had an impact on the Greek media that have been experiencing declining revenues since the 1990s (Papathanassopoulos, 2001). The many contradictions of the Greek media market in combination with the devastating blow of the economic crisis created a volatile situation during which many media organizations became insolvent and had to be sold off, or cease operations (Siapera et al., 2014). As an outcome, media labour became increasingly precarious, with flexible working conditions, few journalists on permanent contracts or on a cash-in-hand basis. The rising unemployment rates for journalists supported and enhanced these trends (Siapera et al., 2014). Due to these changes the Greek crisis presents a significant opportunity to not only study how content creation is impacted by political economic structures and processes but also how the content itself can contribute to knowledge about the

structures themselves and the relationships of power among them. This section provides necessary context for the case under investigation starting with a brief overview of Greek politics after the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1974. This context is crucial in order to familiarize the reader with the political culture of the country and the historical development of the relationship between press and politics, which has a significant impact on how issues are covered by the Greek media.

In order to fully understand the Greek sovereign debt crisis and its impact on the media, it is important to present the most significant points of contemporary Greek political history. Lyrintzis (2005) argues that the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 marks a point of significant change for Greek politics, with the establishment of a relatively stable party system. This party system that emerged after seven years of military dictatorship has been called *Metapolitefsi*, which means a new political regime in Greek (Voulgaris, 2002). The party system that was soon consolidated after the collapse of the military regime was a three-bloc configuration based on the Left–Right divisions that have dominated Greek politics since the beginning of the twentieth century (Lyrintzis, 2005, p. 243). The right was represented by the newly founded *Nea Dimokratia* (ND) party, led by Konstantinos Karamanlis who had been Prime Minister also in the 1956–1963 period and led the country also in 1974–1981 through consecutive electoral victories in 1974 and 1977 (Featherstone and Katsoudas, 1985; Pappas, 1999; Penniman, 1979; in Lyrintzis, 2005). Also founded in 1974 was the party that dominated the center and the center-left, as well as Greek politics for the most part of this period, the Pan Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). The party was founded by Andreas Papandreou and became pivotal to political developments after its electoral successes in 1981 and 1985 (Lyrintzis, 2005). PASOK managed to grow within a few years from a party that secured merely 13.58% of the vote in 1974 to the largest political party in the country that secured 48.7% of the vote in 1981 (Moschonas, 2013). Finally, the left bloc was defined by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the smaller reformist party *Synaspismos*. The KKE was banned during the 1950s and 1960s, because of the outcome of the Greek civil war in 1945–1949, but legalized once more in 1974 with a political influence that fluctuated around 10% of the vote. *Synaspismos* on the other hand was a splinter party from the KKE that struggled around the parliamentary threshold of 3% (Kapetanyannis, 1993 in Lyrintzis, 2005). Despite efforts to create new parties in between the three blocs, or on the edges of them, none of these efforts managed to have a significant impact on the political scene of the *Metapolitefsi* era (Lyrintzis & Nikolakopoulos, 1999). This party system has been characterized as a ‘two-party system’, with the two major political parties PASOK and ND alternating in power and attracting over 80% of the vote (Pappas, 2003). PASOK dominated Greek politics for almost two decades (1980s and 1990s) with the exception of the 1990–1993 period. The second decade of PASOK in power (1993–2004) was led by Kostas Simitis as president of the party and Prime Minister and characterized by his ‘modernization’ project (Lyrintzis, 2005, p. 250). A significant change in the attitudes of the Greek society took place during the 1990s. Whereas the post-dictatorship era was described by a clear interest in politics, the 1993 election

marks a turning point towards the electorate losing interest and becoming more apathetic, less trustful towards society, politicians, and parties. The tolerance or even involvement of the modernizers in the intersections of the state with economic interests reinforced these tendencies (Lyrintzis, 2005). Furthermore, the convergence between the two main parties and the diminishing of important ideological debates contributed to the decline in societal interest in politics (Lyrintzis, 2005).

Before the 2004 election, Kostas Simitis stepped down from the presidency of PASOK, being replaced by the son of the founder of the party, George Papandreou, in order to introduce change and renew the party (Lyrintzis, 2005). The elections of 2004 marked yet another turn for the political system of Greece, with Nea Dimokratia winning the elections for the first time since 1990 with a landslide victory (Lyrintzis, 2011). The main pledges of ND were the reorganization of the state, the end of clientilism, and the introduction of transparency (Lyrintzis, 2011). ND secured a second electoral victory in 2007 and remained in power for five and a half years (2004–2009) (Lyrintzis, 2011). With the global financial crisis erupting in 2008 and among allegations for several economic scandals the government was forced to call for an early election in 2009 (Lyrintzis, 2011, p. 10). The election was won once again by PASOK, led by Giorgos Papandreou.

The eruption of the Greek sovereign debt crisis can be marked after the change of government in October, when the projected deficit of the country was expected to be double than the projections of the outgoing government, in fact being calculated to a 15.8% of GDP (Katsikas, 2012). The fallout of this revelation led to the markets focusing on the state of the Greek economy, which at the point had a 129% debt to GDP ratio and an 11% account deficit to GDP ratio (Katsikas, 2012, p. 50). Katsikas reports that by the end of April 2010, Greek bonds were rated as 'junk' and their spread exceeded 1,000 basis points, thus making further loaning from the international markets impossible (Katsikas, 2012, p. 50). In order to address this, Greece asked for financial aid from the EU and the IMF on 23 April 2010 (Gemenis, 2010, p. 361). In exchange for the loan, the Greek government signed a memorandum of agreement, entailing an extensive policy program, including tax increases and horizontal cuts in government expenses alongside a number of structural reforms, to be implemented under the supervision of what came to be called the troika consisting of the IMF, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank (Katsikas, 2012, p. 50).

Despite the early significant success in reducing the deficit, the complexity of the structural reforms and the strong opposition to them, alongside the detrimental effects of austerity on the economy made the recession worse, thus leading to a failure to achieve the ambitious goals of the program. This created the necessity for a second bailout agreement (Katsikas, 2012, p. 51). The agreement of the EU summit on 26–27 October 2011 between the European partners and Greece entailed a 50% debt restructuring deal called Private Sector Involvement (PSI), in exchange for further austerity measures. In a bid to consolidate his position, George Papandreou announced his plan to hold a referendum over the agreement, in order to turn a positive outcome to a vote of confidence to his government and avoid a snap election (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2013,