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Appraisal of BA Thesis *Soap Opera Polics: Displaying Socio-political Issues in the Georgian TV Series Chemi Tsolis Daqalebi* by Ana Arakhamia

In this thesis, Ana Arakhamia examines and contextualises the social and political contents of a prominent Georgian soap opera in view of the ways in which it portrays issues such as gender and workplace discrimination, domestic violence and political corruption as ‘politicainment’ (p. 11) and contributes to the country’s democratisation. A well referenced literature review synthesises media scholarship on political fiction and entertainment, the continuing relevance of television in a post-broadcast era, and the polarised political and media landscape in Georgia. Methodologically, the research combines quantitative and qualitative content analysis and references to societal developments, particularly national opinion polls. A first analytical chapter presents the findings of an analysis of 189 (!) episodes and 2 films on the presence and frequency of particular social and political content. Over a five-year period (2011-2015) that includes a change in government, it demonstrates a marked increase not only in social and political content but in critically addressing homophobia, discrimination and corruption. Based on the identification of over 80 relevant episodes, the following chapter attends in more detail to *how* five select issues are differently portrayed in the development of characters, plotlines and sometimes allusions to political events in progressively more overt and critical ways. Ana uses references to political events such as the violence at the 2013 pride march and roadmaps to Georgia’s EU and NATO membership, and surveys that document value changes in the broader population, ranging from stances to domestic violence, emigration and gender equality to contextualise these changes in sitcom content.

The thesis is well and engagingly written. Across the selected topics, Ana convincingly argues that the series shifts ‘from a socially aware sitcom to becoming a political commentator’ (41),



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showcasing the usefulness of anti-discrimination legislation or particular services in (fictional) practice and revealing the hypocrisy of media and political elites.

While this is an interesting and valuable finding, and more than sufficient for a BA thesis, without examining how the series, or particular episodes, have been discussed in (social) media or scholarship, the analysis does not allow for inferences about its ‘influence [on] public perception and discourse.’

For the defense, I am interested to learn more on the significance of the TV channel that broadcasted the series (rather than, for example, the producer or authorial team) and perhaps more broadly the usefulness of a (Western?) left-right characterisation (when a self-characterisation of the governing party as ‘centre-left’ (17) is associated with ‘more conservative and pro-Russian views such as anti-abortion and anti-immigration’(19) and the now oppositional centre-right party with which the TV channel aligns ‘support[s] equal rights, minorities and bodily autonomy’ (19).

Which of the findings in hindsight are most surprising?

I wholeheartedly recommend the thesis for defence, and depending on oral defence, suggest the grade excellent (1).

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