BOOK REVIEW

Η Βία στην Κυπριακή Τηλεόραση
Violence in Cypriot Television
by Stelios Stylianou
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In the international academic literature, Cypriot television has been significantly understudied and it was only around 2000 that research on this area started to emerge and gain ground. The majority of studies on Cypriot television, either published in international academic journals/books or in Greek, are mainly focused on the historical, cultural, political and technological role of Cypriot television (e.g. Georgiou 2010; Maniou 2013; Maniou 2017; Maniou & Seitanidis 2018; Nicoli 2014; Roussou 2002; Roussou 2006; Stelya 2016), while other studies refer to the evolution of Cypriot television as part of broader projects on the wider area of the Cypriot media system (e.g. Christoforou, Sahin & Pavlou 2010; Vassiliadou 2007).

From this perspective, Stelios Stylianou's book is a significant asset in the academic literature regarding the Cypriot television landscape, not only because it refers to this understudied research area in modern Cyprus, but principally because the study is based on primary research on Greek-Cypriot channels, experts' viewpoints, and the audience's perspective. As Prof. Nicolas Demertzis states in the endorsement/introduction to the book, "this study is one of the few systematic researches regarding violence and the role of television [...] As such, this book constitutes an original scientific work, useful not only for the Cypriot but also for the broader Greek audience" (27).

The basic issue the book deals with, throughout its eight chapters and 251 pages, is the ways in which violence is depicted on television. As Stylianou (2019) argues, this

is a significant social issue and should be recognised as an important matter of public concern, since the depiction of violence in the Cypriot television is quite intense reaching as high as 2,5 violent scenes for every hour of presented program and dispersed around the 24 hours of televised program; as such, the author states that the goal should be to eliminate violence on television (243-244).

Chapter 1 of the book outlines scientific studies on violence in the international television landscape, employing specific examples from the USA and UK. The author presents a concrete theoretical analysis, drawing upon studies published from the 1950s up until today. The main theoretical concepts analysed are the conceptual definition of violence (57-59), the synthetic elements of violent scenes in the different television programs (121-172) as well as the audience's views regarding televised violence (175-191). Specific research data regarding violence on television are presented for Cyprus and Greece, based on the (limited) published research of previous years. Chapter 2 analyses the framework for the combined methodology, both quantitative and qualitative, upon which the study rests and offers the conceptual definition of violence in television. As Stylianou argues, violence in television can be defined in two ways: first, based on the necessary circumstances that define a projected action as violent and, second, based on empirical evidence that derives from audience research (58). In addition, this chapter includes a thorough presentation of the elements used in the analysis of the findings, helping the reader to fully understand the ways in which data were selected and interpreted. These elements refer to characteristics that directly and/or indirectly pinpoint to violence as presented in various scenes of televised programs and are analytically discussed in relation to the empirical findings later on in Chapter 5. Chapter 3 presents the research sample and sampling procedure. The author provides sufficient information to prove that the research sample can be considered representative. For the purposes of the study, 1.000 programme units were analysed, with a total duration of 1.255,92 hours.

In Chapter 4, research findings are presented in descriptive form, assessing violent scenes in both informational and entertainment programmes. As the findings show, an increasing percentage of violent scenes is observed in both programme categories and, additionally, in the programmes' promotional trailers, indicating that such scenes can affect viewing rates and audience measurements. Chapter 5 discusses the various elements of televised violent scenes, categorised into three main types: *obvious scene content* (perpetrators, victims, actions, means, effects), *context* (intentions, motives, morality, legitimacy, mental states, relation between perpetrators, and victims), and *scene direction* (direction techniques employed and evaluation assessment) (122). Chapter 6 analyses the quantitative findings of the

audience's views on televised violence. The survey includes a sample of 1.000 interviewees from all five provinces of the Republic of Cyprus and its findings usefully depict opinions and interpretation aspects of Cypriot society. Chapter 7 deals with the crucial question of why violence is depicted on television, based on 36 expert interviews, including academics and media professionals as well as government and non-governmental organisations' representatives. Finally, Chapter 8 presents concluding remarks as well as suggestions for improving the existing situation, based on 11 specific recommendations that, according to the author, could immediately be implemented by the authorities. Among others, the study recommends the implementation of severe economic penalties for media entities that favour the depiction of inappropriate audio-visual content in regards to violence, and the creation of a national *Television Observatory*.

Research into violence on television started to gain scholarly ground after the 1950s, initially in the USA, and especially during the 1960s onwards (Stylianou 2019: 42). The initial research question considered the effects of television violence on the audience and, specifically, the different effects on different demographic audience categories. After the 1980s, several studies were published on the relationship between violence and television around the world. For example, McCann and Sheehan (1985) present a content analysis of 80 programs shown on Brisbane TV as part of a larger longitudinal study on the relationship between television violence viewing and aggressiveness in children; Fernández-Villanueva et al. (2009) present a gender analysis regarding the projection of violence in Spanish television, based on a study of television content. Furthermore, Tajima (2012) assesses the level of violence in the Japanese television by applying the NTVS coding system to commercial analysis.

Historically in Cyprus, the issue of violence directly and/or indirectly connects to the country's turbulent political history. As such, the projection of violence through the media, in general, and television, in particular, has historically been a significant issue. The country suffered several distinct periods of intercommunal violence between the two main communities of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots during the 20th century. These remained the focus of scientific research on violence in Cyprus for a long period of time and research into other forms of violence in the country (e.g. domestic, sexual, etc.) did not emerge until many years later (e.g. Georgiades 2008; Karayianni et al. 2017).

After the 1990s and until recently – at least until the advent of the economic/banking crisis – violent events were less often a feature (compared to other European countries) of daily life within Cypriot society, which experienced

limited incidents of criminality. However, the banking crisis of 2013 has altered modes and aspects of everyday life, leading most Cypriots to a different notion of reality. This framework has brought the rise of incidents of (different forms of) violence following the society's economic decline (Kyriakidou et al. 2019) and an increasing tendency of Cypriot media towards projecting images that could potentially raise viewer figures/audience measurements (Maniou 2013).

From this perspective, Stylianou's book is essential for understanding the societal effects of projecting violence on television and builds on the author's wider research endeavours (Stylianou 2003; 2007). By emphasising the role of television, building on a research project that started in 2011, the author offers significant insights into new and undocumented areas of research in Cyprus, such as the level of violence projected in entertainment programs. In fact, Stylianou initiates his study from the findings of a 2005 research of RAI Consultants in Cyprus (47) which indicate that the projection of violence on television is one of the most important parameters that can affect the quality level of the medium. In this perspective, this book is a valuable guide for scholars, experts and students conducting research in the broader area of violence and television.

Future research, building on Stylianou's study, could focus specifically on the informative role of television and the projection of violence, as well as the role of journalists in depicting images of violence through their work, either intentionally or unintentionally, within a hybrid media environment. Such paths are important so as the audience can better understand and assess both the role of the media and the role of journalists in the depiction of violence. Although several recent events (e.g. terrorist attacks, the economic crisis, the migration crisis) have already been examined in relation to violence in the media, there is still space for research, either as national cases or comparative studies.

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