BOOK REVIEW

50 Χρόνια Ελληνική Τηλεόραση: Πρακτικά Συνεδρίου
50 Years of Greek Television: Conference Proceedings
edited by Vassilis Vamvakas & Grigoris Paschalidis
Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2018

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50 Years of Greek Television (Vamvakas & Paschalidis 2018) is an edited volume that emerged from the proceedings of a conference held at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 2016, focusing on historical, social, technological and political aspects of Greek television and TV studies in Greece. Both the conference objectives and the aim of this volume revolve around underscoring the lack of research on TV studies in Greece and at the same time bringing together scholars and researchers who work with domestic television audiences, content production and, not least, television's position within the context of digital technologies. In effect, this collaborative work seeks to reestablish television studies within the domestic academia but also renew the interest in the medium amidst the proliferation and continuously increasing interest in online technologies.

In his introductory chapter, Paschalidis provides a historical political contextualization of the medium's reception and evolution in Greece. He highlights the ways in which panicky obsessions with television's allegedly influential nature and low cultural quality, undermined systematic research in the field. In providing a historical contextualization of television studies in Greece, Paschalidis succinctly

shows how television analysis at a domestic level largely ignored research advances in the Anglo-Saxon context and mostly advances deriving from British Cultural Studies. It is in this light that he critically discusses not just the disappointingly few Greek publications and the scarce number of translations of key works, but also the even fewer conferences held on the topic.

It is in fact true that paradigms such as audience reception studies and British Cultural Studies more broadly are scarcely represented within the Greek academic context, not just in terms of research in Greek TV (see for example the works of Aitaki 2018 and Chapter 10; Vamvakas & Gazi 2017) but also within the media departments. That is, only a handful of courses situated within British Cultural Studies and/or drawing upon audience reception studies are offered to media students in Greece. As a result, it is not just rare to find research of Greek origin drawing upon the politics of culture, but it is also very challenging and often discouraging to keep cultural approaches in Greek research high in a scholarly agenda dominated by mass-communication oriented works.

In an attempt to bring new light to domestic research within television studies and renew the academic interest in the field, Vamvakas and Paschalidis have organized this volume in such a way as to reflect the different angles of television research. Part 1 includes historical accounts, building upon previous works on the history of Greek television and working towards a contextualization of the field in Greece via case studies about public TV (Karadimitriou, Chapter 1) and local TV (Tsoukalidou, Chapter 3). Part 2 includes a larger number of contributions and focuses on TV news from the perspective of production, reception, and representation. Panagopoulos and Panagiotou (Chapter 7) work with newsroom culture (including agenda-setting issues) while other contributors focus on the representation of politics in the news, e.g. refugee crisis (Poulakidakos et al., Chapter 8), Greek financial crisis news framing (Armenakis & Poulakidakos, Chapter 4), Greek and UK referendi (Bakounakis & Pandia, Chapter 6).

Part 3 focuses on Greek TV series through issues of representation (e.g. Aggeli, Chapter 9; Gionis, Chapter 12), production (e.g. Kassaveti, Chapter 14; Xenidou, Chapter 15) and consumption (e.g. Vamvakas, Chapter 13). Two contributions discuss imported products, i.e. Turkish (Papanastasiou, Chapter 16) and Cypriot texts (Fotiou & Maniou, Chapter 17). Focusing on specific, culture-oriented texts, contributors in Part 4 provide analytical approaches to a diverse array of cultural texts such as religious (Vlasidis & Karekla, Chapter 18) and travelling ones (Vourou, Chapter 19; Pliakas et al., Chapter 23), childrens' television (Damigou-Papoti, Chapter 21) and not least texts addressing issues of national identity (Georgakaki, Chapter 20; Labropoulos, Chapter 22).

The last part of this volume (part 5) includes works on marketing via TV texts and media convergence practices in Greek TV. These contributions engage with the concept of convergence culture and explore ways in which Greek TV embraces digital and online technologies either in terms of marketing or in terms of content production.

POLITICS AND PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Karadimitriou (Chapter 1) provides a historical account of how political content (mostly news content) has informed the programme of public broadcasting service for four decades. Via a description of public TV service objectives as outlined at a policy level (for a relevant discussion, see Papathanassopoulos & Negrine 2010) within the European context, he discusses the development of the Greek public broadcaster, including its adaptation to digital technologies. In the same way, he critically reflects on how political content is organized in TV programming in Greece via a discussion of how this takes place on the European level. In effect, he adopts a critical position towards the politically oriented influences that led public broadcasting service in Greece to follow certain strategic planning, which in some cases might justify the broadcaster's considerable unpopularity. From another perspective, Tsoukalidou (Chapter 3) offers a quasi-academic historical overview of how political objectives for the creation of a local TV station led to a reconsideration of the relationship between state-owned media and the media market's fair play rules. Although there is quite substantial research on local media at an international level (e.g. Aldridge 2007), Tsoukalidou chooses to offer a purely historical account, based almost entirely on media outputs of the period discussed. In effect, she does manage to deliver a rather illustrative picture of how the creation of a local public station influenced decisions about the nature of public broadcasting, albeit without contextualizing her discussion within the rich available body of knowledge on the topic.

RECEPTION OF POLITICS THROUGH THE NEWS

From a different perspective that is, in employing a quantitative approach to audience reception of news, Armenakis and Poulakidakos (Chapter 4) offer a mapping of how news audiences above 18 years old in Greece extract elements of propaganda in political discourses about the economic crisis. The authors situate their study within propaganda and media studies, thereafter attempting to investigate the extent to which news audiences in Greece understand and negotiate propaganda elements in political talk. Such a context whereby researchers assume some sort of hegemonic messages embedded in media texts which audiences are expected to unpack, lead to Hall's (1973) classical encoding/decoding argument, found at the basis of the epistemological work of British Cultural Studies. A mapping

of the kind provided by Armenakis and Poulakidakos is of major significance because it actually provides a representative picture of how adult news audiences negotiate with political discourses at an ideological level. Greek scholars have provided an analytical approach to the social locatedness of audiences' positive/negative emotions about politicians' talk (Demertzis 2013), which brings issues like national identity, ethical approaches to media or cultural approaches to politics to the front. To this extent, it seems that such works might offer an even more insightful approach to analyses of the sort Armenakis and Poulakidakos do.

Bakounakis and Pandia (Chapter 6) on the other hand, situate their study within the media effects paradigm to talk about how emotions are embedded in news and more broadly media messages. They derive from the overarching assumption that the media influence people in how they think about different topics and discuss news production within the context of mainstream media psychological approaches (e.g. Blumler & Katz 1974; McQuail 1987). Notwithstanding journalists and media organisations' attempts to influence people, or their – almost narcissistic – perception that they do influence people (see for example the works of Wiik 2009; Örnebring 2013), approaches to audiences and media content simply in terms of media effects do not do justice to the complexity of identity work and social and cultural negotiations that take place within an audience-text-production context. In the same context and following an effects-oriented approach to news-making through the gatekeeper model (e.g. Bruns 2005; Shoemaker & Voss 2009), Panagopoulos and Panagiotou (Chapter 7) provide an illustrative mass communication account of how agenda-setting practices are applied in the newsroom. Given that such systematic approaches to news-making in Greece are largely missing, this study opens a space to talk about agenda-setting and gatekeeping practices within the Greek media landscape in a crisis and post-crisis era.

TV SERIES AND SHOWS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CULTURE

A quite substantial part of the volume includes contributions about Greek television fiction, including two contributions that deal with imported texts from Turkey and Cyprus. Contributions range from the construction of illness in a TV success of the noughties (*To Nisi*/*The Island,* 2010-2011, MEGA) (Aggeli, Chapter 9), representations of the family in 80s series (Gionis, Chapter 12) and representations of class in the 90s (Kassaveti, Chapter 14) to a socio-historical account on Greek series' audiences (Vamvakas, Chapter 11), the reinvention of culture in texts (Fotiou et al., Chapter 17) and methodological approaches to imported texts (Papanastasiou, Chapter 16).

I will comment however at this point on Aitaki's chapter (10), an epistemological account that succinctly addresses not just the impact of economic crisis in media productions, therefore addressing issues of political economy of the media in this respect, but also points at the lack of research on Greek fiction in comparison to international scholarship. She argues effectively about the complexity of popular culture production and consumption and in effect, about the epistemological significance of approaching popular culture analytically, an argument that has been well established in Cultural Studies and Media Studies at an international level since the 80s (see the influential works of Ang 1989; Spigel 1992; Katz & Liebes 1990 among others). Moreover, in discussing how the economic crisis impacted upon the production of TV series within the domestic media industry, she also engages with Mills' (2010) concept of the 'invisible television' to aptly show how a fall in TV productions might coincide with a lack of academic interest on these products or TV as an entertainment medium more broadly. She discusses the need to examine the political nature of popular television and series production in this context, as well as see research on TV in its particular socio-cultural context across time.

From an empirical perspective Vamvakas (Chapter 11) employs a ratings' reading to conduct a reception study about the aesthetic, social and cultural elements that audiences prioritize in their favorite popular texts. Although he does not employ classic techniques of audience reception studies that bring to the front audiences' voices about certain texts, Vamvakas manages to provide a mapping of audiences' preferred choices in TV narratives via the exploration of the most popular texts as appearing in TV ratings across two decades (1993-2012). In this context, he provides a thematic reading of the core running thread in different categories of TV fiction that is, the representation of friendship, family in crisis, countryside vs. the city, political satire, and socially discomforting expressions of love relationships. This study raises important issues about how socially constructed and culturally specific issues of identity and agency are constructed in the context of the narrative and interplay with issues of class, age, gender or race, thereby showing the significance of a cultural approach to how such issues and conditions are lived and constructed in the Greek context.

Last but not least in this section, I want to highlight Karatzeni's contribution (Chapter 13), which appears to be the only one discussing the relationship of TV production, especially at the level of fiction, with the US culture and media production. In fact, throughout the turbulent times of the economic crisis, financial cuts in media companies forced cuts in the production of fiction (among others) and led to investing in much cheaper, imported texts or adaptations of success-recipes. Texts adapted from Spanish (*I Polikatikia/The Block of Flats*, 2008-2011, MEGA), US

(*Moderna Ikogenia/Modern Family,* 2014-2015, MEGA) or Israeli concepts (*To Soi Sou/Your Folks*, 2014-2019, ALPHA) have been included in the TV programming of the time. Audiences welcomed texts like these in the same ways they did earlier on with US imported texts *I Love Lucy* in the 60s, *Roseanne* and *Married with Children* in the 90s (Tsaliki & Chronaki 2017). Karantzeni offers a rather insightful account about how Greek texts embracing western (primarily US) aesthetic, social and cultural elements, have been successful incomings to the series portfolio. Her discussion is aligned with Tomlinson's (1997) influential critique on cultural imperialism and approaches to glocalization as a set of cultural and social practices whereby a US imported product is reconstructed, redefined and reinterpreted through particular lens of the culture that imports it (Thompson 1995).

The study of culture when it comes to most research in the Greek academic context, rarely includes analyses about cultural politics, youth cultures, gender or other components of consumption of culture. The fourth part of this collective work explores issues like religion, youth, reinventing tradition, national identity as inherent cultural components of society. In this context Vlasidis and Karekla (Chapter 18) explore religious shows in Greek TV, providing the first exploratory account in the literature about media and religion in Greece. The relationship between the Church and religion with the media, religious media and not least religious media audiences or media representations of religion have been investigated from various perspectives since the 90s (e.g. Stout & Buddenbaum 1996). When it comes to Greek research, however, scholarly approaches are scarce and are mainly focused on the political nature or projects of religion (e.g. Lipovatz et al. 2002).

Another interesting contribution is Damigou-Papoti and Theodoridou's discussion (Chapter 21) about childhood nostalgia, as illustrated in discussions and comments in online platforms. The authors discuss the construction of childhood in the 90s through nostalgia discourses and in understanding discourses as practices through which people construct the world and themselves, interpret reality and position within the wider social and cultural context. Within this perspective they employ works like Boym's (2001) among others', to aptly illustrate how people who grew up in the 90s provide ethical constructions of a lost or romantic childhood in stark contrast with what children allegedly experience today. In fact, the romanticization of childhood, but also its understanding in terms of nostalgia appears to be a convenient platform in the context of discourses of anxiety about the future of a given society or in the context of concerns about the 'loss of innocence' (e.g. Buckingham 2000; Tsaliki & Chronaki forthcoming).

MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE CASE OF GREEK TV

In the final part of this review, I will focus on two contributions addressing different topics in relation to TV, albeit in the broader context of media convergence. Via a mixed method approach (webpage content analysis and semi-structured interviews), Kaimaki et al. (Chapter 25) examine how public bodies communicate their services and related information to citizens, primarily through videos and their webpages. In effect, this discussion attempts a first mapping and exploration of how public bodies – assumed to lack any communication strategies and branding – use digital technologies in an attempt to explore potential recommendations in the context of the new public management (Hood 2015). To an extent, their study is by and large situated within a media effects context, albeit neglecting to an extent the social and cultural construction of the public sector (e.g. McAdam & Reid 2000; Niemelä & Saarinen 2012) and how this is talked about by audiences. Nevertheless, it does open a space for research dialogue regarding the relationship of citizens with the public sector via the ways in which its services and effectiveness is used and negotiated. Last but not least, Podara et al.'s (Chapter 26) is one of the few contributions of this volume on audiences, working towards a contextualization of audiences' agentic negotiation of online documentaries. The authors develop their discussion within a rather polarizing conception of youth as new media users that is, working within the approach to "digital natives vs digital immigrants" (Prensky 2000). Nevertheless, they succeed in showing how audiences engage with convergence discourses and cultural practices in consuming documentaries.

CONCLUSION

Vamvakas & Paschalidis' edited volume aptly illustrates both the research advances in TV studies in Greece, but also the need to invest more in research within the field. This collaborative work shows that in the Greek case, mainstream media (TV), including their engagement with digital technologies and online media, are still offering a great potential for empirical research. In fact, media research in Greece, as Paschalidis notes in his introductory chapter, needs to follow a more cultural shift and as Aitaki reiterates in her contribution, a shift towards making research in Greek media more extrovert.

Given the attempt of the volume to recontextualize TV studies in Greece, this volume is a first systematic attempt to engage with notions that draw upon Cultural Studies and recent advances in media studies. It therefore seems that media research in Greece would for example benefit more from the notion of convergence culture as proposed by Jenkins (2006): the shared spaces where offline and online media

collide, in effect giving new meaning to audiences and their interpretative practices, as well as new directions to content production and distribution. Along the same lines, research, for instance, on news production and consumption would benefit significantly from a socio-historical and cultural discussion about media ownership in Greece and the West more broadly, as well as about the relationship between media ownership, politics, and news reception. And last but not least, scholars' interest to systematize Greek television's key historical periods would benefit a lot from historiographic works of the sort Abramson (2003), Hilmes & Jacobs (2003) or Cooke (2015) do at an international level.

Therefore, a combination of objectives that could possibly renew researchers' interest for Greek audiences and content production might be summarized in the following points, succinctly shown through this collaborative work:

- a further engagement with approaches to convergence culture and modes of audienceship and citizenship;
- a further and more systematic turn to audience research;
- a further and more systematic turn to studying popular culture and other forms of content that do not necessarily fall into a political framework, but embrace everyday politics of culture more broadly;
- a need to embrace cultural and social constructionist approaches more fully.

In this sense, the most significant contribution of this volume is that it looks at media studies and TV studies in Greece more specifically through the lens of introspection and critical self-reflection; positioning them in effect towards engaging with international research in more effective ways.

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