CITIZENSHIP AND MEDIA POLICY IN THE SEMI-PERIPHERY: THE GREEK CASE

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Abstract

The following work examines the ways in which citizenship and citizenry have been affected by the changing structure of media systems in the periphery. The paper concentrates on television policy and performance in Greece. It explores the close relation between media policy and the notion of civil society that is articulated through media policy and the reflection in it of transformations in the political and economic system. The paper looks at the historical development of television and its relation with the public, arguing that the role of the latter has been diminished ei- ther to the status of receivers of propaganda 'products' or consumers of market ori- ented programmes. The paper aims to critically examine deregulation and current media policies and their impact on the notion of citizenship and the right to com- municate.

Television: The Ultimate Medium?

One of the increasingly significant areas in the study of media systems in the era of economic and cultural globalisation is the relation between citizenship, media development and media policy. Communications in general and especially those in new, technologically advanced forms attract the attention of industrialists, academic scholars and policy-makers, not only due to their perceived immense capabilities for market performance but also due to their social and cultural implications. Perhaps the most dominant Media form in the area of mass communications is television. Although the internet and other electronic forms are argued to be the future in communications, television remains the 'absolute' medium for a number of reasons. It has the capability to appeal to a maximum combination of human senses and relate them into one experience, second only to the scenarios of virtual reality. As a medium television has a very high penetration rate much higher than computers: it

is over 99 per cent in urban areas in Greece and exceeds 92 per cent in the whole national territory, while 40 per cent of the Greek households own more than one colour television set. As a result it fulfils its 'role' as the 'people's' entertainment and information provider in an immediate way while requiring no technical skills for its use. Furthermore, because it relies mostly on visual signals and images it does not demand literacy or high educational level from its users. Still today, television constitutes the most preferred method for receiving information among the peoples of Europe with the highest rate to be found in Greece: 74 per cent of the population prefers television in comparison to 20 per cent preferring newspaper or to an extraordinary two per cent who rely on their computer terminal (EC, 1998).

A further characteristic of the importance of television as the core audio-visual medium is the technological capability to claim a direct mediation of reality. It has become the central and often remains the unique information source, while its multiplicity and accessibility creates a situation difficult to be compared with other media. Especially significant is the role of the medium in the reconstruction of the *boundaries* between private and public life and its impact on personal and common experience and culture. As Wulff (in Hickethier, 1992, p. 106) suggests, the problem of the technologically accessible reality can be identified through the parameters of time and space that become increasingly relative. Electronic communications have even more advanced technological abilities to contribute to this phenomenon, and television is 'borrowing' such advances to become a powerful multidimensional medium. Therefore it is not only the impression or understanding of reality that changes through television but also the understanding of the experience of reality. Perhaps the most powerful attribute assigned to the relation of television to the real world is the changes caused to our perception of the freedom to *deny* the mediation of reality.

Borrowing some parts of the analysis of the medium from a system theory perspective, it is possible to emphasise the links between the cultural and ontological value of the medium to the set of practices that in many ways define its character and determine the conditions of its performance. To the category of such practices belong regulatory provisions, that range from what might appear as indirect as technological standards to policies targeting media content. According to system theorists Bruns and Marcinkowski (1996, p. 19), practical tele-viewing is understood as a 'human need' to acquire knowledge about the outer, remote world, beyond biological-bodily defined boundaries, through stimulation and impressions. The whole experience of the practice of 'tele-viewing' is therefore constituted by three dimensions: entertainment, information and transcendence of one's self. The system of television, not simply its technological but also organisational structure, corresponds to those three dimensions. Meanwhile the historical change of the 'need' is connected to ever changing social conditions and their influence on the transfor-

mation of the system itself. As 'environments' of the system, in an attempt to present taxonomy of social conditions, Droste (1993, pp. 60 - 65) refers among others to politics, economy and culture. These 'environments' play a significant role in the form of the medium but also become affected by and correspond to those changes. These changes refer to the structural operation of the system and expand to areas of content and even consumption of the content. In terms of content and aesthet- ics, for example, continuity, in most cases a common expression of new media con- tent, becomes a current core characteristic of the product of the system. Continuity, called 'flow of broadcasting' as described by Williams or 'flow of programme' *(Pro- gramflu/3)* as understood by Hickethier, serves the functionality of the system, in its role to 'perform' the complexity of reality.

Development of Television in the Periphery

The significance of television has been studied extensively and from a number of different angles; there have also been studies that examine the interaction of the various stages of production cycle and consumption and factors influencing those stages. Greece provides an interesting example for the study of media with partic- ular focus on these issues due to its historical and social dynamics. One of the main concerns in this study is the effects of two 'environments' of the system on its rela- tion with its audience. These 'environments', political life and economy, shape the preconditions under which the medium's character has been formed. From a multi- tude of factors, two determinants constitute the historical framework in the study of national television: the establishment of the medium under oppressive political cir- cumstances and the lack of local expertise.

For decades, Greece has carried the traits of the periphery such as economic un- derdevelopment, political instability, a general dependence upon great powers, but most strongly expressed in the form of *cultural dependency,* in many occasions ide- ological backwardness, such as inequality between women and men and the crude dominance of patriarchy, malfunctioning or absent welfare State. The country has been subject to turbulent political changes in modern times. For example, from 1922 (the 'disaster' of Asia Minor, the first and second Balkan wars, first and sec- ond world wars, civil wars, dictatorship) until mid 1970s there has not been a gen- eration that had not experienced war, and such experience relates to the broadest possible spectrum of social strata. Political and military conditions have been re- flected in media policies, while lived experience economic depression and totalitar- ianism down to personal-political experience of re-negotiating one's existence in ac- cordance to or in conflict with patriarchy, has been reflected in media content. Such 'reflection' had less to do with value-neutral or objective representation of reality. It rather signifies the structuring of reality in organised musters and performs their ma- nipulation that characterises all television programme genres, even non-fictional

ones (Sarikakis, 1997, p. 50).

Greece was one of the last European countries where television was introduced. The first call for tenders was made in 1958, in co-operation with the Italian RAI for the launching of a television station while almost a decade later, in 1966, the first ten minute news programme signalled the introductory phase of the new medium under State provision and control. The history of Greek television does not have a politically or culturally affirmative start: the launch of the medium took place during the years of the military coup d'etat in 1967. The first broadcasts, consisted of pro- grammes donated by the American and French embassies, reveal the traces of a long and continuing tradition of cultural dependence. What is now the most popular medium entered the realm of mass communication without having a secure finan- cial basis, specialised professional education, or a development plan based on de- mocratic aims. From its start, television was 'destined' to be used as an instrument for propaganda and exercise of power by small elite groups. The launch of televi- sion is *identical* with the launch of State owned television characterised by

- journalists inexperienced with the medium and the involvement of military offi- cials
- unwillingness to study the experiences of other countries with longer television traditions
- control over the programme form and content by the political and military forces
- a production, broadcasting and organisational structure with the characteristics of a 'closed system' (Kastoras, 1990, p.107).

Some of the dominant features of the current television system such as the de- pendant character of the medium's form and content derive directly from that early period and continue almost uninterrupted to today. Under direct control television became politically channelled in a totalitarian manner which resulted in the creation of an image and the belief that media but especially television are inseparably as- sociated with state control and propaganda. The change of government in 1974 and restoration of democracy did not bring the wished change in the media landscape. Even worse, instead of restoring or rather *establishing* even a mediocre form of plu- rality, the new government proceeded with the legitimisation of State control and propaganda over television. With the Bill 230/75, there ceased to exist any possi- bility for the democratisation of television. The new regulation came "above all to protect state control and propaganda, which in their turn provided for the govern- ment that promoted the resolution" (Kastoras, 1990, p. 109). According to this poli- cy, all decisions regarding production, content, presentation and even finances and administration lay with the State.

At that time there were two television channels one of which, perhaps as crude

expression of the remains of military totalitarianism, bore the name of 'the channel of armed forces'. The channel (YENED), heavily controlled in its organisation and thematic production by the military, existed as such until 1981, when the Socialists came into power. Alone the fact that a military channel was allowed to claim prime time audience and monopolise information is an indication of two parallel dominant ideological concepts. On the one hand, it demonstrates an unbalanced and abusive power of military over civil forces and civil society, which continued to exist even well after the 'restoration' of the democratic system. On the other hand it provided the forum and official instrument for a strong appeal to nationalistic sentiments and their cultivation, in particular when significant internal and external affairs were concerned.

The dominance of the autarchic state in that realm of the public sphere penetrated by television has cultivated a negative perception of the media as will be discussed further on. It is interesting to note that 20 years after the launching of Greek television, the old patterns of etatisme continued to exist almost unchanged in substance. Even the socialist party's political programme was not put into practice during the first term. Instead the politics of 'change', the major slogan in the election campaign of the socialist party, populist politics, confused, unclear direction and demagogy delayed media democratisation for a second time. As Papathanasopoulos notes, socialist politics were confused with the exception of the manipulation of *news programmes* (Papathanasopoulos, 1995, p. 390). By that time, 1981, Greece had already become a member of the European Union (EEC at the time) having therefore decided to claim its 'western' identity, through its authorities, despite intense objections of all parties of the Opposition in the Parliament but also the greatest part of the population. Socialists, an opposition party themselves, avoided the subject after their election.

The military channel, a case of extreme State intervention, was abolished in 1981 for the launching of a second civil channel - also under State control - in order to provide more space for the promotion of freedom, and the creation of, democratic development of television. A third revision of the law (Regulation 1730/87), and with it a third chance to democratise media, was lost again since the government did not show the 'courage' to disrupt the relation of dependency (Kastoras, 1990, p. 109). According to the Greek constitution, freedom of speech is guaranteed for Greek men and women, the press is free but television is subject to State control. It would demand a major revision of the constitution therefore to change the provision related to electronic media. However, the phenomenon of some degree of State control over public broadcasters, as well as State monopoly of the airwaves, was relative- ly common in Europe until late 1980s, when the wave of deregulation and de-mo-nopolisation took place due to technological developments.

Post-modern Times: More Players, Pictures and Words - The Same Story

As member of the EU, Greece participates in the decision making of policy for- mation in the EU and is obliged to comply with regulation. One of the most rapidly developing policy making areas is that of media and especially audio-visual media and new technologies, under the broad umbrella term 'information society'. One of the first instances where Greek media policy had to be redefined and harmonised according to EU guideline was the case with ERT (the Greek State broadcaster) versus the mayor of Thessaloniki. The latter won the case for breaking state mo- nopoly in television broadcasting by setting up a local TV channel. This signalled the beginning of an inconsistent, problematic and abrupt process of deregulation while it also became the beginning of the official establishment of non-state region- al media.

The lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework in other European countries has only contributed to the increasing pressure for deregulation on the government from media industrialists together with, in particular, the conservative political op- position. The result was deregulation and lack not only of a new regulatory frame- work that would provide for the new electronic media but also the absence of any plan that would deal with the new economic conditions, such as the sudden open- ing of the broadcasting market and its social implications. The owners of the new channels are political parties, big publishing houses and other media owners and local authorities. The absence of any restrictions in the patterns of ownership and the significant delay in the implementation of guidelines and criteria for the granting of broadcasting licenses reinforced the relative closure of the system by allowing only the economically strong interested parties to take advantage of the situation and very quickly dominate the market. Within the first year, the market 'pie' was clearly reserved for the big players, a situation that has almost become polarised between private and public service broadcasters (Baroutas, 1996; AGB, 1995, 1998). It is significant that advertising revenue constituted 43.1 per cent for public service television and 56.9 per cent for the total of private broadcasters in 1990, while it dropped to only 3.5 per cent for the former and increased to an absolute 96.5 per cent for the latter within five years (Nielsen op cit. in Media View, 1996, p. 47).

Deregulation, the most important moment in the history of Greek television after its launch, did not follow a code of conduct, as in similar cases did the liberalisation of the media in Europe. Moreover it is reasonable to argue that this was the result of the combination of external transformation of media landscapes, internal pres- sure and non-policy making mainly due to the political 'vacuum' which occurred in 1989- 90, after the downfall of the socialist party and the consecutive elections and temporary coalition government. Media market regulation was therefore not an opening to competition but an extension and transformation of political to econom-

ic feudalism, with the press barons to acquire more media 'land' using the press to support their claim. The process of the distribution of licenses took place under neither transparent nor accountable conditions, while instead of ensuring pluralism through the implementation of anti-concentration policies, cross-ownership was encouraged for the construction of a 'controllable' market in the hands of a few.

To the pre-existing conditions of lack of meritocracy that characterised personnel recruitment and human resources of the state broadcasters (Daremas & Terzis, 2000), the emergence of a paradox was added. This was the crude exploitation of journalists and the emergence of a journalistic 'proletariat' on the one hand and the construction of journalists and television presenters - stars on the other. The social implications of deregulation have very quickly been made obvious in television content. The deregulation phase, the first phase of which took place between 1989 - 1995, is characterised by

- significant absence of State control over the market
- disintegration of the role of the State in the area of regulation
- lack of economic and social provisions related to the protection of intellectual property, working relations and content provisions
- uncritical and unrestrained absorption of international programme tendencies
- limited investments in new technologies.

Private broadcasters imitated one another and brought very little innovation to the programme or the production structure. As a result of the non-policy strategy that Greek governments have adopted, very little provision was made to ensure the smooth operation of the system and the establishment of harmonious relations with its 'environments'. Therefore, at least in the beginning of the era of the privatisation of communications, the existing, general, measures for the protection of media workers, content as related to social values such as journalistic ethics, the protection and promotion of indigenous works and the involvement of the public in the production of meanings through the right to reply were not sufficient or adequate. Similarly there was no provision for the fulfilment of such conditions that would guarantee a degree of 'fair play' between big and smaller players.

The case of Thessaloniki local television can be understood as the start of the practical application of the regulatory regime and economic developments already underway in the rest of Europe. Bill 1866/89 opens up the way to the privatisation of airwaves by allowing local authorities and private companies to enter the communications market while the later 1943/91 provides for the establishment of regional and local television and radio station *networks* allowed to broadcast at a national and not only local level (Demertzis & Skamnakis, 1998, pp. 214-215). At this moment there are around 150 television stations broadcasting at a local and re-

gional range in Greece, but this number is an estimate of the current situation. There is no precise data to give us the full picture: some of these stations only sur- vive for a short period, others exist only as companies without broadcasting. Re- garding the content of these stations there is even less information, first evidence suggests that their news programmes mainly concentrate on local news, traditions and problems that farmers face (ibid). It is however not difficult to understand why domestic programme production is very limited with the consequence to rely heav- ily on imports especially American.

Studies of television content in European countries point out that the quality of programming suffers under commercialisation. Some of the characteristics of tele- vision content are homogenisation of products not only within the same broadcast- er but across providers, neglecting 'minority' audiences such as programmes for children and increasing tendency towards the dramatisation of non fiction pro- grammes (Kepler, 1994; Dauncey, 1996; Kruger & Zapf-Schramm, 1994). In the process of over-commercialisation following the turbulent phase of deregulation, content was one of the most obvious areas affected. 'Antennisation' (Tsaliki, 1995) of television content, taken by the dominant private television station Antenna, is the Greek version of that development. Despite the fact that public service television has been the object of State control, it remained a provider of educational and in- formation programmes, caring for the educational and entertainment needs of those social groups that are immensely neglected such as children audiences. It is in- dicative that in 1996, there were 16 programme titles of reality TV shows, most of them on a daily basis. Reality shows were watched by 16 per cent to 30 per cent of the audience between 4:30 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. (MEDIA SERVICES in Epikoinon- ia, 1996, p. 22). Children's programmes constituted 16 per cent of broadcasting time on public service television and hardly 7 per cent on both most viewed chan- nels, Antenna and Mega Channel.

These figures compared to 60 per cent of entertainment programmes and to non- existent educational programmes demonstrate changes in programming to accom- modate the economic imperative to attract audiences quickly. One of the tactics has been for several years the repetition of films of the 'golden era' of Greek cinema in 1960s with frequency of at least one such movie every day during prime time (Sarikakis, 1997, p. 97). While those films, as well as a soap opera versions of the same thematic of those films, through programmes such as Kalimera Zoi on An- tenna, provided older generations with a sense of security in a rapid changing so- ciety, one hour long news bulletins, also situated in the prime time zone, 'present- ed' the world through the discourse filters of nationalism and populism. Drawing up- on a series of techniques that combine characteristics from different genres Greek television adopted the same formats internationally known as 'reality TV' and 'info- tainment'.

Information Flow, Media Freedom or News Obsession?
Elements of National 'Identity'

The paradox of the new status quo is the emphasis given to news programmes that would now occupy one third of all air time of all major public service and private broadcasters (ibid, p. 104). In prime time zone eight out of nine· parallel broadcast talk shows were political shows (Sarikakis, 1997). One of the most characteristic developments and the fastest growing genre became reality TV. Through the combination of characteristics of political talk show and investigative journalism with dramatic elements of fiction genres a false impression of reality is created, which is based on the impression that 'live' broadcasting conveys. A pseudo-sense of reality is achieved through 'directed' spontaneity of reality TV and controlled dynamic among presenters and guest speakers. But the most important, most popular with programme designers aspect is the fact that such programmes are of very low budget while at the same time the authenticity of presentation of reality is claimed. Though the latter big channels keep high audience quotas that results in the biggest market share in advertising revenue. Such has been the success of reality television that one station (SKY TV) claims to be the Greek version of a quasi- CNN. Its programmes consist of one and half hour news bulletins and low budget talk shows that reach an average of 18 hours of reality TV broadcasting time each day.

'Reality TV' used as synonym for 'live' and 'direct', allows private and increasingly state channels claim their - journalistic - authenticity and status through live broadcasts that can last hours interrupting the programme flow in times of crises. If 'live' means, permanently newly produced reality (Schmitz, 1995, p. 120), technological advances make it possible for television stations to claim the reproduction of 'reality', that provides a whole different dimension to time and space: 500 journalists were involved in covering three events that took place at the same time in Athens 1996. These three critical events were the demonstrations that led to riots during the national remembrance day of 17 November, the prime minister's admission to the hospital and protest of prisoners in high security prisons in Athens. A total of 71 hours and 11 minutes were broadcast live from four television channels, equivalent to almost three days broadcasting. This 'news-mania', which has expanded to all channels is at a first glance contradictory to the television trends of highly commercialised media systems in strong industrial countries such as Germany, France or even UK. A closer look at the historical context of such developments, however, will reveal elements of Greek national 'identity' that finds itself especially at this particular point in time in a very intense process of re-definition.

News 'obsession' or more generally seen the 'politicisation' of television (Daremas & Terzis, 2000) have their roots in two main, emotionally charged concepts, information flow and media freedom. The reasons for this can be found first in the his-

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torical experience and common memory of political control over press, expressed in direct preventive (Tsaliki, 1995) censorship during dictatorship, control over television and radio by the state over 20 years. Secondly freedom of press, made explicit in its electronic form, means freedom of expression and the right to express and receive opinions a right that has been severely violated in modern history of Greece. A typical characteristic of the latter was the fact that for certain periods one's words would be enough for one to be judged, and therefore condemned (Tsaousis, 1983).

A further factor in the 'politicisation' of television is related to the character of Greek press in modern - and post-modern times. In a sense, the Greek press retains the characteristics of 'nineteenth century press' by being 'highly politicised and clearly related to party interests' (op cit. in Splichal, 1995, p. 52). The high number of newspapers, radio and television stations cannot be explained in terms of the market since very few of them are considered to be economically viable. In fact these operators owe their survival to subsidies, personal assets of their owners and loans. The reason is that the significance of newspapers lies not only in their profit making role but in their political power, since anyone who would be interested in having an influence in Greek politics would need to have either very good relations with the press or own a newspaper through which the government can be put un- der pressure, especially when party politics or market relations are negotiated (Tsa- liki, 1995). Television ownership and control follows the same pattern. As seen ear- lier, the number of national, regional and local broadcasters is not clear. What is clear though is the fact that from a financial perspective the market cannot accom- modate so many actors, since the advertising revenue cannot support all media. In- dicative is the data on viewing habits of the Greek audience: there is stability in viewership patterns in the last years, that reveal that the availability of free time re- mained unchanged (AGB, 1996; 1998). So average daily reach and daily viewing remained at the same levels. The biggest commercial broadcasters ANT1, MEGA and SKY also maintained [via] programming mix an audience share at 23, 21 and 15 per cent retrospectively. These broadcasters dominate the market and are close- ly related to party interests. Public service broadcasters are left behind regarding audiences quotas and advertising revenue but their role as PR for the government - at least through news programmes - is too valuable to risk. Private broadcasters are in an alliance relationship with a specific party, while remaining during the rest of their broadcasting time highly commercial.

The Citizen: Between a Rock and the Market Place

The significance of live broadcasting, reality TV and exceptionally long, one hour minimum news bulletins during prime time television, the political significance of the printed press and its extension to 'electronic press' and the consequent 'politicisa-

tion' of television present a core characteristic and a factor in the construction of the modern Greek identity and its relation to the role of individual as a citizen. Although generally it is neither simple nor wishful to design a concrete framework within which Greek television operates it is nevertheless possible to identify main trends and traits of media landscape, the effect of policy onto content and its relation to au- diences. The hegemony of television in the public sphere results in some identifi- able consequences on the formation of national identity and the negotiation with the role of the citizens.

Currently, private broadcasters dominate the market in the Greek television ter- ritory. Public service television had to re-define itself several times in order to attract audience, the latest instance of which is the transformation of ET1 into an enter- tainment channel and that of ET2 (renamed NET) into an information channel, that managed to monopolise national events such as sports and therefore achieve high- er shares (AGB, 1998, p. 13). PSB however provides programmes *even* for the most remote areas in Greece but also to the eight million Greeks of the diaspora. Recently linked with the Cypriot PSB, the public broadcaster (ERT) caters for a wider Greek speaking community, imitated already by satellite transmissions of An- tenna. It is reasonable to expect co-operations or *even* mergers between Cypriot and Greek private corporations in the Media field in the immediate future, although there are yet no satisfactory data as to audiences reach in the wider Greek speak- ing world. The tendency towards expansion however becomes clear when new ser- vices are considered such as pay-TV (FILMNET and SUPERSPORT), whose sub- scribers have been steadily increasing since 1995 and during 1998 and is expect- ed to increase further (AGB, 1998). Looking for new avenues to maximise viewer- ship and therefore profit and given the fact that audiences share remains stable, pri- vate broadcasters would need to either increase their share in advertising revenue and/or to expand into new markets. Both solutions are problematic to an extent be- cause the limits of advertising are not infinite while (Greek speaking) audiences can be reached only outside the Greek national territory.

Still the relation remains that of centralised production and distribution from the centre to the periphery. This centralisation is also reflected and expressed in the content of television, which although nationalising politics (Daremas & Terzis, 2000) and therefore creating a 'national' public sphere with regards social issues, it is nev- ertheless preoccupied with the centre where such political decisions are made. It is only through the gradual but not unproblematic growth and development of region- al and local media that some form of de-centralisation is taking place. This does not necessarily guarantee wider citizen participation in the making of information or pro- gramme production nor does it present an adequate condition for the safeguarding of democracy. The same applies to the fact that liberalisation of communications cannot automatically provide from the liberal point of view pluralism of sources or

sources or content. It is characteristic that although cross ownership is restricted in most European countries, it constitutes a necessary condition under Greek regulation (Tsaliki, 1995; Daremas & Terzis, 2000).

Television articulates and negotiates social problems. According to Splichal (1995), ownership does have an impact on content. Control over Greek television is shared between media conglomerates and the State without a counter-power, that of civil society and civic movements to counter balance control of the public sphere. Control of the private media landscape is exercised by five people (see Daremas and Terzis). The National Broadcasting Council (NBC) is directly con- trolled by the government: its president, members and whole administration are di- rectly placed by, and report to, the government (Articles 6 & 11 of Regulation 213). The NBC has a very weak presence while another body, that of the Journalist's Union has not proved to be particularly dynamic either, especially in cases of news content and working conditions of journalists. The current 'personality' of Greek television, not particularly different from other countries however, is constituted by 'dramas', 'happy talk' news and 'human interest' stories that appear under the jus- tification of information, while the boundaries between advocacy, information and entertainment become increasingly blurred. In a sense, therefore, citizens feel more alienated in their role since they are mainly addressed as consumers, while politics and decision- making remain the domain of financial and political elites. This phe- nomenon reinforces a situation where centres 'produce' decisions while the periph- ery 'consumes' such decisions and the debates conducted around them. (Galtung and Vincent, 1992). Open discourse to contested issues is usually allowed by a commercial medium to the extend that debates do not jeopardise corporate inter- ests; part of such issues is the de-politicisation of gender politics (Rapping, 2000).

Some scholars however see a positive development in the acquisition of knowl- edge through the transformed character of commercial and public service televi- sion. Daremas and Terzis (2000) argue that the politicisation of Greek television had positive effects in the politicisation of women. Moreover, television is argued to be 'gender neutral', while the benefits from the 'nationalisation' of political issues is claimed to have provided Greek women with a certain knowledge about political is- sues as opposed to the impact of press over women's interest in politics. Their ar- gument presents a series of problems however. The claim that television is gender neutral is inaccurate. Not only is Greek television *not* gender neutral but it also demonstrates very strong patriarchal features at its structural, that is workforce-pro- ductive level, and representational level. Only in exceptional cases do female jour- nalists participate in 'serious,' usually political, programmes while the vast majority are used for decorative purposes in chat-shows, quizzes, dramas and in sexist stereotypical roles. It is characteristic that there were no female war correspon- dents, in particular during the Gulf war, when private television gained its audience,

with the argument that a female voice cannot possibly project the seriousness of the situation; such attitudes have very little changed until today (Sarikakis, 1997). Besides figures that appear to show simiiarity of viewing habits regarding television between men and women, uses and reasons for these need to be studied and analysed qualitatively, taking into account differences in realities in women's lives from those of male audience.

Furthermore, the assumption that television 'politicised' Greek women fails to take into consideration a series of factors. For a start, there are very limited studies on the status of women in Greece and even less studies on media uses. Secondly the definition of politics itself is very limited since it concentrates on state politics that are predominantly defined by male politicians. At the same time, it is charac- teristic that there is a total absence of gender politics or women's issues (working relations, childcare, health and education etc) from the public sphere. The latest election campaigns of the two major parties, socialists and conservatives, did not even mention such issues. Taking these facts into consideration, together with the fact that civil society is very weak in Greece (Tsaousis, 1983; Damianakos, 1987), it is very difficult to imagine how television and its representation of politics can ever be gender neutral.

It is also very problematic to claim that Greek women are not interested in politics since figures of newspaper readership reveal only a part of female politicisation and activism. It is the same argument that is used to claim that there have been no great female scientists in history when it becomes obvious how difficult it is to 'discover' them and to recognise that discriminatory structures have precluded them from recognition. 'Measuring' interest based only on readership numbers reveals habits related to newspaper readership but not to political understanding or politicisation.

Regarding content, Greek television is less than gender neutral: on the contrary sexist language, that expands to educational programmes, and sexist images of women reproduce the structures of Greek society. In that sense neither PSBs nor private broadcasters have come any further; they continue playing a negative role in the educational task to provide the public with values of equality. The citizen remains gendered, disrespected and misinformed.

Extremities in content has provoked some debate in Greece regarding trash TV containing such images as described above that range from disrespect of privacy and violations of the right to remain 'anonymous', to works that can be argued violate the human right of freedom of speech through the portrayal of stereotypical images, have not been effectively addressed by the NBC or journalist union. Psarithis, chairman of public service radio, publicly acknowledged that journalists betray the

trust of audiences because they convey no information but entertainment (Sarikakis, 1997). The journalists' association has mainly remained silent regarding pornographic and other explicit images that have penetrated television, usually with the pretence of dancing activities, talk shows and family entertainment programmes in general. Content that is offensive to a particular part of the population such as women remains uncriticised by the press, the NBC or other professional organisations.

The growth of transnational advertising and the extension of audience commodity exchange and technological dependency (Maxwell, 1995) influence the chang- ing patterns of construction of 'identities'. A strategy of the global corporate logic is to mediate and construct a semi-peripheral identity based on and directed to the consumption of 'globally available' goods, such as films, music etc. The construc- tion of semi-peripheral identities that keep a contact with the international dynamics of economy, politics and culture theoretically does, however, allow for a certain de- gree of re-negotiation of characteristics of identity. The obstacle to the development of such values that do not stand in conflict with human rights and human dignity and equality, or even such that would project a civil society, is that in the absence of the latter, individual actors as well as affected parts of the population become dis-em- powered. As Splichal (1995) notes about the Eastern and central European coun- tries, the question of the kind of counterpower civil society has at its disposal is one of the main problems related to its autonomy from the state. The same can be ar- gued to be the case of the market. This can be seen in the fact that no consumer organisations or any civil organisations such as the women's association have ever been consulted for issues that concern citizenship and its relation to media policy. If media policy is citizenship policy (Hutchison, 1999) then the features of current Greek media policy and non-policy do contribute to the undermining of the impor- tance of the role of the public as citizens. One of the most important functions of civ- il society is the formation of citizenship information and education that is channelled in two directions, that is towards both citizens and governments. This takes place in public spheres (from the feminist critique to Habermas's notion of the public sphere) but also through the *dominant* public sphere, to which access and control concern mainly the mainstream media. Especially therefore in the case where civic move- ments appear to be weak, their media could only feed mainstream media with sto- ries and alternative opinions with great difficulty. New technological opportunities, such as the 'opening' of the airwaves to accommodate more mediated voices, do not automatically bring solutions to deeply entrenched problems of democracy in political systems and communities. It is the use of these new opportunities for edu- cation, information, participation that remains a matter of political will among gover- nors and citizens (Van Dijk, 1999, p. 234). One would be blind not to see the great changes in the character of Greek society, that is in many ways reflected in the me- dia through contradictions in the content, even in the regulatory provisions. Such

changes regard a more open, democratic society allowing criticism especially directed to two main areas: that of the nature of national identity and nationalism and the critique of a social system of deeply rooted patriarchy.

Note

Such is the pace of change in television services *in* Greece that some of the station names used in this paper will have changed by the date of its publication.

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