Television rights and viewers' expectations

The Maltese people, like most other societies in western societies, love watching their favourite television programmes and can become quite passionate in their protests when their preferred channels are suddenly taken off air because of some cryptic reason. This happened recently when the two major pay TV providers, Gozo and Melita, announced they were discontinuing the transmission of two popular channels: Living and Cosmopolitan.

It is still not clear why this happened, even if there are indications the retransmission of the two channels by the local TV service providers was not perfectly above board. A spokesman for the owners of the channels was quoted as saying the TV service providers in Malta did not have the necessary permits or authorisation to include Living in its packages and that there were also some technical issues. So, it may not be just a question of someone not wanting to pay the transmission rights to relay services to Maltese paying subscribers. Many subscribers argued vehemently in online comments to The Times they do not care why they are being deprived of the channels in question because they have a legal right to receive the full line-up of programmes they contracted for. Some are not happy with the substitute channels offered by the TV providers as these are not considered similar to those taken off air.

If such a dispute between service providers and subscribers were to escalate, it is probable the already significant use of satellite TV or internet-enabled receivers will become more prevalent. The problem with this option is it may still breach transmission rights regulations and can, thus, be illegal. TV service expectations are that they are already aware that their market share of paying subscribers is shrinking as more people opt for satellite and internet TV options.

A compromise needs to be found to reconcile restrictions on transmission rights of local service providers and the expectations of subscribers who feel they should not be asked to make do with alternative channels they do not like. It is difficult to understand why the retransmission of such channels cannot resume after proper talks and agreements are made and the service providers are satisfied that their market share of paying subscribers is shrinking as more people opt for satellite and internet TV options.

Letters to the Editor

All pensioners should be treated equally

I refer to the letter by Kurt Fornai, the Labour Party's director of communications (Labour Supporter's Column Of Former Service- men, December 17).

As a pensioner, I am very happy and satisfied with the European Commission's position regarding British Services pensioners. For the last 30 years, pensioner associations and the pensioners themselves have always insisted that the abatement of a service pension (any service pension) from the two-third pension entitlement was a huge injustice to all pensioners.

Since 2007, the present Administration took action to address and rectify this injustice although at a much slower pace. In the circumstances, as a pensioner, I very much believe that thousands of pensioners who were not entitled to a service pension from the British authorities would have been denied pension in the future.

The measure created a disparity between two categories of pensioners: that is, those who have a service pension from the British Services and the others who are entitled to a service pension from other employers.

Carmel Mallioli

Mediaeval poet's place of confinement

First of all I wish to point out that the excise tax turnout for the recent talks by Godfrey Wintenger at Castille and Stanley Fiorini and Charlie Buhagiar on what happened in late medieval Malta generates a lot of interest. The three speakers expanded their views from healthy different angles.

With reference to Prof. Fiorini's letter (December 14) regarding my article, 'Maltese of former Christian Geof' (December 6), my point is that the poet does not live he was exiled in Gozo and that the manuscript's notes say the place of confinement was "Maltese" versus "Melitagaudo" once. As to compounders, there are many categories with different semantic associations (a letterbox is a box, a cupboard is not a throat, a cappella is not a sarafar and there is also the coordinate type (fighting, type, fa- rica, bittersweet). In the poem in question, the compound Melitagaudo/Melitagaudo is used only with reference to Publicans and Hagar. If, however, the poet was referring to both islands the compound is the same meaning here. This is confirmed by a Greek professor who teaches general linguistics and specialises in word structure.

Drawing in Gilberto Abate collections in its National Library report was not a census (as Mr Dalli claims) it was drawn up 100 years after the Greek poet wrote and historians still have to reconcile his figure with the fact that a number of Muslims had already been expelled from Malta in 1223-24 while rebels from Celano here in 1224. In fact, in such a point-in-time period, hypotheses will remain hypotheses with varying degrees of plausibility. Arguing that Gozo was not Muslimised, because Al-Himyut does not mention it, is as sound as stating that Gozo was not Christianised by St Paul because Luke only mentions Malta. The continuity of Christianity in Malta and Gozo does not depend on the Greek poem. Although I strongly believe in popularisation, I will discuss linguistic evidence on this matter is to be found in a scholarly publication.

Joseph M. Bonnici
St Julian's

The national carrier: a reliable airline

Do those who make the rules at the EU now understand why we cannot do without our national airline?

It is the only airline that really cares about Malta and the Maltese.

The other take the very easy route and cancel flights leaving their passengers stranded and joining in the chaos at foreign airports!

Charles Maclellan

Promt action to remove an unsightly pole in Valletta

I refer to the letter by Peter Montebello, Valletta Belvedere (Valletta Times, December 15). It refers to a lack of coordination between Mattu de Marco, Parliament Secretary for Tourism, the Environment and Culture on the one hand and the Malta Environment and Planning Authority on the other. The latter allegedly gave permission to erect a pole "right in the centre" of the "belvedere" near the Upper Barrakka Gardens overlooking St Ursula Street, Valletta.

Unfortunately, Mr Montebello got his "lack of coordination" wrong. The pole was erected under the authority of Transport Malta for purposes of the CVA system. Mepa did not grant any permission to erect such a pole nor was it invited to sit in on the planning process. It will be in the best interest of the service providers to give more added value to their subscribers rather than stick to what they are prepared to offer for failing to honour their commitment with clients.

Television transmission via satellite or the internet is becoming increasingly feasible and the rates charged are often very competitive. As already stated, this option is, in some cases, illegal and, as such, constitutes unfair competition to the local service providers. This may be so, enforcing the law in this case may prove to be difficult and very unpopular if the service providers are perceived not to be giving good value-for-money to local subscribers or, worse, if they appear to be able to violate the law with total impunity.

I, therefore, still hold the right for TV service providers to come up with a better offer to compensate their subscribers for their inability to provide them with the full service they had promised.

Incorrect language used by some television stations

Readers like me have noticed the worrying trend to programmes on TVM and, more recently, even an another channel, saying: "Dan il-programm bi luppiedd tad-profitter." It would be inappropriate if someone explained what it means in any program, this is a literal translation of "product placement" and it is obviously totally in correct. The translation is definitely not Maltese. I observe that works is translated and corrected if wrong. If I am right, I expect the TV stations to refrain from misusing the language and the input of the Maltese language.

Joseph M. Maclellan

Mepa