

## **Conflict as News and News as Conflict: A Multidimensional Content Analysis of TV News in Cyprus**

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This research about how conflict is (re)presented on television news adopts a dual perspective on conflict: *conflict as news* and *news as conflict*. Focusing on the understudied case of Cyprus, it builds on the concept of conflict-oriented journalism, a theory-informed analytical framework for studying televised conflict. The analysis reveals the heavy presence of conflict-laden news referring to social conflict, violent crime, warfare, and political contestation. Especially in the case of political news, conflict is used as a paradigmatic mode of presentation. Current journalistic practices ignore the potential offered by peace journalism, meant as event reporting that includes various viewpoints but leaves open the possibility of resolution. This is especially important in societies of long-lasting conflict, such as Cyprus, because the media are one of the fields where conflict is reconstructed.

*Keywords: news, conflict, peace journalism, Cyprus*

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## Introduction

The emergence of new political and social conflicts around the world and the persistence of enduring tensions render the study of conflict, and its mediatization, highly relevant for contemporary societies. When studying conflict in the news, the first challenge media researchers face is its conceptual demarcation: The concept of conflict is extremely broad and covers a wide range of themes, such as international or ethnic confrontations (Zillich, Göbbel, Stengel, Maier, & Ruhrmann, 2011), minority groups (Carter, Thomas, & Ross, 2011), and confrontations among political parties and candidates (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012).

This study adopts a dual perspective on conflict: *conflict as news* and *news as conflict*. The former focuses on the mediatization of conflict, examining how real conflicts (from social confrontations to warfare) are represented in the media. Previous empirical studies have exposed several problematic aspects of this process, such as the episodic (instead of thematic) coverage (Coleman & Perlmutter, 2005), with broader implications for power allocation in society (Fiske, 1987; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). The latter perspective (*news as conflict*) refers to news practices that tend to frame crises or opposing political views in terms of conflict, rendering conflict almost paradigmatic for presenting news in mainstream television (Lengauer et al., 2012). To capture this dual notion, we adopt a broad understanding of conflict as “a two- or more-sided confrontation” (Lengauer et al., 2012, p. 184) in both its physical and discursive dimensions. This approach allows us to locate and analyze not only media representations of actually occurring conflicts but situations that are framed by the media in a confrontational manner.

The present study focuses on the case of Cyprus, an ethnically and geographically divided country since 1974. Studying how conflict is represented in the news of a country of long-lasting conflict is highly relevant, because the media are one of the main fields where conflict is reconstructed and perpetuated.

## Literature Review

### *Conflict as News*

A common concern shared by many studies on the mediatization of conflict is whether the media contribute to conflict resolution or, on the contrary, help sustain or escalate conflict. Evidence from recent studies indicates that news media tend to overreport acts of aggression (Fernandez-Villanueva, Domínguez-Bilbao, Revilla-Castro, & Anagnostou, 2006; Zillich et al., 2011), whereas the standard modes of news presentation are unsuitable for promoting solutions and triggering a creative public discourse (Zillich et al., 2011). This results in large amounts of violent imagery in news reports and overnarration of aggressive acts, while factors related to the phasedown of conflict are systematically neglected.

Nowhere is the clear demarcation of *us* and *them* in media discourses more prominent than in the case of war. Here, discursive mechanisms that transform the legitimate adversary into an enemy who should be rightly destroyed come into play (Mouffe, 1993). These highly divisive media discourses on the

Self and the Other are constructed by the use of elementary dichotomies—good–evil, just–unjust, innocent–guilty, civilized–barbaric, heroic–cowardly, and so on—that demonize and dehumanize the enemy while heroizing and exculpating the Self (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008).

Communication scholars believe that such characteristics of news media have significant implications for the public's understanding of news as well as important consequences for their emotional responses and behaviors (Iyengar, 1991). Decontextualized and conflictual information is found guilty of misguiding and misinforming the public, fueling disputes, and impeding any attempts to prevent and resolve problems such as crime, violence, and conflict (Carter et al., 2011; Coleman & Perlmutter, 2005; Zillich et al., 2011).

A systematic critical approach toward reporting of conflict is peace journalism, an alternative model of journalism based on a solution-oriented, rather than conflict-oriented, perspective (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Proponents of peace journalism criticize the media for applying conflict frames on controversial issues by emphasizing their most conflictual aspects. Carter et al. (2011) contend that the media, by discursively constructing an oppositional Other, lead the public to polarized depictions of particular groups and set the stage for future conflicts. As evidence suggests, journalists systematically exclude particular groups or viewpoints and rely exclusively on elite sources (Ersoy, 2010; Manning, 2001). Additionally, they emphasize the most dramatic aspects of conflicts, usually during the escalation phase, while systematically neglecting the factors that led to conflict as well as the resolution and reconciliation processes (Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Peace journalism is grounded on the principles of truthful, unbiased, and full-disclosure reporting as well as balanced coverage that reports opinions and interests of all sides of the dispute; equally important is to focus on all phases of disputes, before and after the conflict (Ersoy, 2010; Galtung, 2002). Sourcing practices also matter, especially paying attention to ordinary people. But the most significant element of peace journalism is related to journalists' attitudes toward the problem. Traditional journalism approaches require impartial reporting based on simply reporting the facts, whereas peace journalism calls for journalists' more active involvement in resolving confrontational issues. Such a solution-driven journalism requires news coverage that promotes dialogue and cooperation in the process of reaching common-ground solutions (Ersoy, 2010), often by promoting views outside the dominant ideology (Coleman & Perlmutter, 2010). Carter et al. (2011) advocate a solution-oriented reporting approach based on rigorous analysis of the events that reveals the social causes of the issue in question and proposes solutions for dealing with them. Instead of divisive discourse and confrontational representations of reality that prolong and escalate conflict, such issues should be framed as extended conversations among the opposing parties.

The approach of peace journalism does not go unchallenged; it is critiqued for ignoring the actual conditions of practicing journalism, in terms of professional values and organizational imperatives (Hanitzsch, 2004), and for not being a viable alternative in practice. It is further argued that, as a journalism of attachment and partisanship, it is disrespectful to the core professional values of objective and impartial reporting (Hanitzsch, 2007; Loyn, 2007). In response to this criticism, proponents of peace journalism claim that, because objectivity is unattainable, especially in cases of conflict, more feasible

standards for good journalism are fairness, accuracy, and balance (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Peleg, 2007).

### ***News as Conflict***

The second perspective adopted in this study (*news as conflict*) refers to the tendency of news media to frame news in terms of conflict, especially routine news about differences of political opinion among public officials, as a means of capturing audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Empirical studies have found that the media contribute actively to defining controversial issues as conflict and steering audience perceptions accordingly (An & Gower, 2009; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

In normative terms, the predominance of conflict in news about formal politics is perceived differently within various theoretical strands. For example, pluralism is based on the assumption that “legitimate politics [is] a process in which competitions and political conflict could occur but within a normative framework of agreed rules and shared values” (Manning, 2001, p. 28). Within this approach (Dahl, 1982; Schumpeter, 1976), conflict is a necessary element of democratic life, because clashing interests and diverse opinions on any given issue are—and should be—presented in the news media arena. The presence of elite conflict, which is often a core part of televised political news, is considered as a manifestation of a healthy functioning democracy. The question that arises, however, concerns the diversity such a configuration can accommodate. Critical approaches recall the hegemony thesis, arguing that despite the diverging positions of political elites in the news, elites take a rather consensual stance regarding the field of ideas that circulate in society. As Woodly explains:

Though the issue positions of the elites may differ, they do not differ very much on which issues they think are worth discussing. Political elites aim to protect the control they have over popular political epistemologies, including the ideological range of political information that is produced and validated, thereby shaping and bounding public debate in way that serves current distributions of power. (2008, p. 111)

In this sense, “instead of functioning as investigators who unveil and clarify little known political truths, the press functions as either the referees of elite debate or merely as political announcers” (Woodly, 2008, pp. 111–112).

Competition and commercialization are two of the main reasons that news broadcasts turn to sensationalism and negativity when reporting political news. As argued by Lengauer et al. (2012), “conflict-centered negativity is more ‘marketable’ than positive news as it is more eye-catching, adds drama, stimulates interest, and is easy to understand even by uninformed audiences” (p. 182). Therefore, journalists tend to give a pessimistic outlook in stories concerning political issues, while focusing on conflict among political actors, often accusing them of incapability, failure, and misconduct. Adopting such negative and critical attitudes allows journalists to convey an independent and professional image that offers them legitimization vis-à-vis the public. Thus, journalists’ tendency to seek an opposing argument for every statement some political actor makes promotes a conflict-based understanding of balanced

reporting and has shifted negativity “from a mere ‘news value’ to an overarching ‘news ideology’” (p. 181).

### ***The Cypriot Context***

Conflict-oriented reporting of news comes as no surprise in a country of long-lasting conflict. The Cypriot news media agenda has been dominated by the “Cyprus problem”—the unresolved 40-year-long geographical and ethnic division of the island into the officially recognized by the international community Republic of Cyprus in the south, hosting the Greek-Cypriot community, and the Turkish-held Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the north, recognized only by Turkey, hosting the Turkish-Cypriot community. Research on the topic has revealed a steady pattern of conflict-centered coverage of related events on both sides of the island (Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, 2010). As Bailie and Azgin note, “the Cypriot media embrace a conflict-centered approach to peace efforts by shaping news that contributes to the increased mystification of the conflict and to a retrenching of divisive attitudes, sympathetic to a cementing of division” (2008, p. 57).

Ersoy’s (2010) analysis of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot media reinforces the assumption that journalism in both communities favors the dominant elite discourses and is oriented toward conflict-driven reporting. Mainstream media in both communities largely publish negative stories about the Other when reporting the news. Ersoy (2010) distinguishes two factors that contribute to media negativity in Cyprus: First, journalism in Cyprus is engaged in an elite-centered style of reporting, acting as an agent rather than watchdog of the elites. Second, the media refrain from criticizing negative elite statements about the Other while relying almost exclusively on elite sources and rarely quoting sources of the other community.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

The main purpose of this research is to understand how conflict is represented in television news, in both its physical and discursive dimensions. Our research questions are:

*RQ1: What type of events get into the daily agenda, who are the actors involved in conflict-laden news, and who gets to speak about conflict?*

*RQ2: In which ways do television news stories promote conflict?*

### **Core Concepts and Definitions**

As noted, this study adopts a dual perspective on conflict: *conflict as news* and *news as conflict*. The first perspective focuses on the mediatization of conflict, examining how actual confrontations (from social confrontations to warfare) are represented in the media. This category involves verbal reference to

or the depiction of acts of violence or aggression<sup>2</sup> as well as events referring to a bilateral or multilateral opposition, controversy, or dispute among opposing individuals or groups—national, transnational, ethnic, racial, institutional, corporate, social. According to this definition, stories about *actual conflict* were selected and analyzed. The second perspective focuses on news practices that tend to frame news events or simply opposing views in mundane political news in terms of conflict. Thus, conflict as media framing refers to the process by which journalists' depictions of controversial issues contribute actively to defining conflict situations. Consequently, stories *framed by the media in conflictual ways* were also selected and analyzed. To code a news story as framed in terms of conflict, two criteria were applied: (1) that the story contained terms, phrases, or images portraying oppositional roles (e.g., winners and losers, perpetrators and victims, we/us vs. them in situations of antagonism or rivalry, dispute, contention, clash); (2) that the relevant events occupied a prominent position in the news story, either being mentioned by the anchorperson in the presentation of the story or recorded in the news tickers, captions, or headlines on television.

The two categories do not overlap: Stories about actual conflict (e.g., war, terrorist acts, protests) were selected because they contained references to or depictions of violence or aggression and of opposition, controversy, or dispute between social actors. News stories framed in terms of conflict were stories about mundane politics (e.g., differing opinions by political parties) that presented political actors in polarized or conflictual verbal contestation.

### ***Sampling and Coding***

The sample comprises news stories from the six nationwide Cypriot television stations that broadcast daily newscasts (CyBC1, Sigma TV, Mega TV, ANT1 Cyprus, Capital TV, and Extra TV).<sup>3</sup> The analyzed data set consists of 102 newscasts, which were selected via two-stage systematic random sampling from a seven-month period (June to December 2012). The 102 newscasts were equally distributed among the six television stations, thus making for each channel a subset of 17 newscasts on 17 different dates. Dates were allocated to each station by selecting its prime-time newscast every sixth day. All television newscasts were examined for the selected days to identify content that contained conflict-laden news in various news topics. Based on these criteria, 204 conflict-related news stories were identified and coded by two trained coders using the news story as unit of analysis. To reinforce the coding scheme and the definitions, the coders first analyzed qualitatively 50 newscasts that were not included in the final sample and then participated in several pilot coding sessions. To ensure reliability, each coder coded 27% of the cases separately. The average intercoder agreement scores were 0.86 for both Cohen's  $\kappa$  and Scott's  $\pi$ . Decisive variables—the type of event and the identity of the main and the speaking actors—scored near or above the average of 0.86, and all variables related to the concept of conflict-oriented journalism exceeded 0.80.

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<sup>2</sup> We adopt Potter and Smith's (2000, p. 307) definition of violence as "any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings." We define aggression after Fernández-Villanueva et al. (2006, p. 139) as "an action that demonstrates an intentional attempt to inflict some kind of harm."

<sup>3</sup> The study focuses solely on television stations broadcasting in the Republic of Cyprus.

### **Variables**

The main variables used in the study are the following:

1. *Type of event.* The qualitative analysis of newscasts yielded the following types of events:
  - Violent crime
  - Social conflict (nonviolent conflict and violent social or collective protest)
  - War and terrorist acts (any kind of military combat and armed clash)
  - Political contestation.<sup>4</sup>

This variable allows us to distinguish between *actual conflict* (which includes the first three categories) and *conflictual framing of news*, which refers to political disputes framed by the media in conflictual ways.

2. *Actor variables.* The identity of actors involved in conflict situations and of actors who get to speak in the media about them is of crucial importance in terms of social actors' representation in the public realm. Furthermore, the actors invited to speak about conflict situations in the media are not necessarily the main actors of the events, because not everyone is given equal opportunities to represent themselves publicly. To map such discrepancies, we recorded, first, the identity of the four most important actors involved in each story. *Actor identity* refers to the actor status as an ethnic/racial/religious group, a community/neighborhood, a family, a national government, and so on. The second actor variable was the identity of the six most prominent *speaking actors* in the news, defined as those who either appear to speak on camera or are quoted by the journalist, giving firsthand accounts of the events or offering their interpretations of events.

3. Based on the literature on peace journalism reviewed above, we operationalized the basic concepts of the peace journalism approach by creating 14 variables intended to measure the extent to which news stories were oriented toward building up or sustaining conflict or, on the contrary, toward peace or conflict resolution. The *conflict-oriented journalism* (COJ) variables are:

- No consideration of deeper causes [COJ1]
- No reference to long-term or nonvisible consequences [COJ2]
- No reference to immediate or visible consequences<sup>5</sup> [COJ3]
- No reference to the positions or opinions of all involved parties [COJ4]
- No balanced reference to the positions or opinions of all involved parties [COJ5]
- Attribution of responsibility to one specific side or group [COJ6]
- No attribution of responsibility to more than one specific group or side [COJ7]

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<sup>4</sup> The research focused on political news, because the pilot study revealed that political news constitutes the vast majority of cases where conflict is used as a discursive mechanism for the construction of the news story.

<sup>5</sup> This variable refers to the reference or depiction of real violence and suffering—for example, in war situations.

- No reference to the conflict as a problem to be resolved [COJ8]
- No reference to actions or initiatives for conflict resolution [COJ9]
- No inference that the conflict is resolvable or possible to deescalate [COJ10]
- Inference that the conflict is not resolvable or is impossible to deescalate [COJ11]
- Reference to the possibility of conflict resolution only if “we” win [COJ12]
- No reference to positive results from tackling the conflict [COJ13]
- Use of language encouraging confrontation, division, separatism, or a Manichean approach [COJ14].

To estimate the extent to which news stories demonstrated conflict-oriented reporting, the score of each news story in the 14 variables was added up to calculate the conflict-oriented journalism total score for each story.<sup>6</sup> Last, the quantitative content analysis was combined with qualitative analysis of selected cases to highlight the more nuanced techniques used by journalists for handling conflict.

### Research Findings and Discussion

Before discussing how conflict is represented in television news, it is important to estimate the *extent* of conflict in the Cypriot television news sphere. The 204 cases selected correspond to 68 unique newscasts, broadcast by the six television stations, which make up 67% of the 102 newscasts that were analyzed in this study. This means that two out of three newscasts contained news stories referring to some kind of conflict. This is a high percentage, even after taking into account the wide definition of conflict adopted in this study. Relevant studies in other countries point to less conflict-related television news. For example, Johnson’s (1996) analysis of “bad news” in U.S. television broadcasts revealed that 53.4% of all news stories included various forms of violence, conflict, and suffering. Also, according to Gunter, Harrison, and Wykes’ (2003) research, 23.4% of all news programs on British television during 1995 to 1996 contained some form of violence.

Equally important for this analysis is to distinguish between media representations of actual conflict situations (conflict as news) and the conflictual media framing of political news (news as conflict). As shown in Table 1, the first category—including news of social conflict (e.g., strikes, demonstrations, worker unions disputing governmental decisions, cultural clashes, international news about citizen political and social protests), violent crime, and war and terrorist acts—makes up the majority of the sample

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<sup>6</sup> The 14 items were factor-analyzed (using principle component analysis with varimax rotation), but only one scale was produced with acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ). Because the construction of a composite variable measuring conflict-oriented journalism was not possible, we treated the 14 items as individual variables.



(73.5% of analyzed news stories); the second category concerns about one-fourth of the news stories examined (26.5%).

**Table 1. Types of Conflict-Related Events in Television News Stories in Cyprus, June to December 2012.**

	<i>N</i>	Percent
<i>Conflict as news</i>		
Violent crime	42	20.6
Social conflict	61	29.9
War and terrorist acts	47	23.0
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>73.5</b>
<i>News as conflict</i>		
Political contestation	54	26.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>

Next, we will examine separately for each event category the actors involved in conflict-laden reporting, the actors who get to speak about conflict, and the ways in which conflict is framed.

**Conflict as News:  
Representation of Actual Conflict—Actors, Speakers, and Frames**

Considering the *actors* in each particular event category, we begin with news stories about *violent crime* (Table 2). In these stories, "other/unidentified" is by far the most prevalent actor category, referring to actors who were not identified as belonging to a group (e.g., members of racial/ethnic minority groups) but as individuals. The other two most prominent actors are the police or coast guard and private business.

As we examine the particular event categories, it is interesting to contrast the identity of main actors to the identity of speaking actors to infer how well each group is represented in the news. In other words, are all actors equally represented in the news by speaking directly to or getting quoted by journalists?

Regarding violent crime, the police and members of the coast guard speak more often in the news, although they are not among the main actors in the events. In the vast majority of stories, the police appear on TV as a neutral voice giving an account of the events as an authoritative and disinterested party. The missing actors are individuals, who are rarely heard, despite forming the majority of actors involved in crime-related stories. This can be explained partly by the fact that individuals accused of having committed violent crimes are usually not willing to speak to the media about the events; to a lesser extent, the same goes for victims of such crimes. At the same time, this is consistent with the media's tendency to prefer organized actors as sources instead of individuals representing only

themselves. In any case, the criminal acts that are presented through a sterile police version of the events contribute to the presentation of crimes as completely displaced from the broader social environment. A typical example is a news story about the murder of an Iranian by a Cypriot. Although the story is initially announced as a standard crime news report, as the story unfolds it is revealed that the victim was in fact an asylum seeker whose petition was initially declined five years ago and who was living in limbo in Cyprus since. The murder occurred as the victim confronted a neighbor (the perpetrator), trying to defend his underage son. Although the crime occurred without any serious cause, the neighbors' testimony about the victim being a "troublemaker" provided an indirect but clear justification of the crime. In this story, the fact that the victim is not given the opportunity to present his own version of the events deprives viewers of the opportunity to be exposed to a thematization of the underlying issues of this "ordinary crime," which are related to the asylum seekers' situation in Cyprus.

In the category of *social conflict*, four actors stand out: governments, trade unions, employers'/professional organizations, the police, and political parties. The two most frequent speaking actors are representatives of trade unions and members of political parties (see Table 2). The prominence of political parties and trade unions as speaking actors does not come as a surprise, because most events involve some kind of dissent over the distribution of resources (e.g., policies for public spending cuts and austerity measures). The actors who do not speak so often, although they are prominent participants, are national governments and the police. Seeking to understand this, we resorted to qualitative analysis of the relevant newscasts. The relative absence of the government as a speaking actor can be explained by the fact that its position is usually represented by the journalists who report on the governmental policy regarding the issue at stake. This way, the government is not brought into the picture as an interlocutor so that it can be questioned by watchdog journalists or engage in direct discussion with the actors opposing governmental policies. The other actor who is rarely invited to speak in the media about events related to social conflict is the police. In most cases, the police are involved in events as the guardians of law and order during protests—some of which result in clashes and police violence. However, this dimension, despite receiving prominent attention in the reporting, is rarely thematized as an issue of public concern; rather, it is presented as an expected and more or less natural occurrence in the course of a protest, rendering the presence of police representatives as talking heads in such news reports needless.

Not surprisingly, when *war or terrorism* hits the news, prominent actors are national governments, military bodies, and terrorist or guerrilla/paramilitary organizations (see Table 2). All news in this category concerns stories from the international news bulletin (e.g., war in Syria, warfare in countries of the Middle East), with the exception of one story about the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus. International institutions (such as the United Nations) and national governments (including ministries of defense, for example) are the most frequent speaking actors. The actors actually involved in warfare (military bodies, armies and terrorist or guerilla/paramilitary organizations) do not speak directly in the news. Usually, national governments speak for the army, but the opponents rarely appear on TV to offer their viewpoint directly. This is especially true for events such as suicide bomber attacks, where either an official visual statement by the attackers is unavailable or relevant sources (e.g., radical websites) do not pass the media's credibility test. In such cases (e.g., war in Syria), the side of the rebels is presented by journalists, but without visual statements given by the rebels themselves. Whether the lack of visual presence attenuates or delegitimizes these actors' perspectives at the level of audience reception is a

question for further research. Nevertheless, in the case of Cypriot TV at least, this is hardly the result of editorial choices made by Cypriot journalists, because the vast majority of international news reports are either reproduced by liaising Greek TV channels or are based on already edited footage from international news agencies.

**Table 2. Actors and Speakers in Television News Stories in Cyprus, June to December 2012.**

	Violent crime					Social conflict					War/terrorism				
	Actors		Speakers		Var- iance (%)	Actors		Speakers		Var- iance (%)	Actors		Speakers		Var- iance (%)
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Ethnic/racial/religious group	3	3	3	8.1	5.1	11	6	3	3.2	-3	8	5	1	3	-2
Community/settlement /neighborhood						1	0.5	2	2.2	2	5	3	0		-3
Family	2	2	0		-2										
National government	1	1	2	5.4	4.4	26	14.3	7	7.5	-7	39	26	8	25	-1
Governmental institutional group	1	1	2	5.4	4.4	12	6.6	7	7.5	1	9	6	6	19	13
State institutional group	0		1	2.7	2.7	6	3.3	1	1.1	-2					
International institution	1	1	0		-1	14	7.7	1	1.1	-7	10	7	9	28	22
Informal transnational group											1	1	0		-1
Regional/local institutional group						1	0.5	1	1.1	1					
National army/transnational military body	4	4	0		-4	3	1.6	0		-2	31	21	0		-21
Police/coast guard	11	11.1	14	37.8	26.7	22	21.1	5	5.4	-7	3	2	0		-2
Professional organization/trade union/ employers' organization						25	13.7	26	28	14					
Private business/profession	11	11.1	5	13.5	2.4	15	8.2	6	6.5	-2	0		1	3	3
Political party/organization	4	4	3	8.1	4.1	21	11.5	23	24.7	13	2	1	1	3	2
Civil society organization/nongovernmental organization	1	1	1	2.7	1.7	3	1.6	1	1.1	-1	2	1	3	9	8
Common criminal organization	1	1	0		-1						1	1	0		-1
Terrorist/guerilla/paramilitary organization	1	1	0		-1	2	1.1	0		-1	25	17	0		-17
Other/unidentified	58	58.6	3	8.1	-50.5	20	11	4	4.3	-7	15	10	2	6	-4
Media representative as specialist	0		3	8.1	8.1	0		6	6.5	6	0		4	11	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>		<b>37</b>			<b>182</b>		<b>93</b>			<b>151</b>		<b>32</b>		

As explained above, we used 14 questions to operationalize and measure the extent to which television news in Cyprus is oriented toward conflict accentuation instead of conflict resolution. Table 3 displays the mean conflict-oriented journalism score for each category of news stories. Overall, we can see that COJ is quite high in all types of conflict-related events.

**Table 3. Conflict-Oriented Journalism (mean score) in Conflict-Related Television News Stories in Cyprus, June to December 2012.**

	Violent crime	Social conflict	War/terrorism	Political contestation
Conflict-oriented journalism score (mean)	0.54	0.60	0.66	0.56

*Note.* A score of 1 would mean that a story is coded as presenting all applicable COJ elements. A score of 0 would mean that none of the COJ elements are present. The nonapplicable cases for each variable are not included in the calculation of the percentage.

In news stories about *violent crime* (see Table 4), one element of conflict-oriented reporting is present in *all* cases; journalists failed to present the views of all sides evenly. Less often but still in most cases, journalists did not consider deep causes, did not air the views of all sides, and did not portray the possibility of deescalation.

**Table 4. Conflict-Oriented Journalism in Conflict-Related Television News Stories in Cyprus, June to December 2012.**

Elements present in more than half of the cases	Violent crime (%)	Social conflict (%)	War/terrorism (%)
No balanced reference to the positions or opinions of all involved parties	100	93	96
Attribution of responsibility to one specific side or group		59	67
Nonattribution of responsibility to more than one specific group or side		74	84
No reference to the conflict as a problem to be resolved		69	52
No reference to positive results from tackling the conflict		92	98
Use of language encouraging confrontation, division, separatism, or a Manichean approach			77
No reference to the positions or opinions of all involved parties	93	82	85
No consideration of deeper causes	79		68
No inference that the conflict is resolvable or possible to deescalate	69	87	91
No reference to actions or initiatives for conflict resolution	—	69	62
No reference to long-term or nonvisible consequences	—		54

*Note.* Blank cells indicate that the COJ variables were coded as nonapplicable in violent crimes items due to the particular nature of the crime news reports. Dashes indicate that COJ elements were present in less than 50% of the cases.

To illustrate these features with an example, one of the news stories in the category of violent crime with a high COJ score (0.57) was the “abduction of four fishermen by the occupation authorities” (September 28, 2012, Mega TV).<sup>7</sup> In this story, there is no reference to the causes of the incident (COJ1), rendering the Other’s actions one-sided and arbitrary, in effect cementing the conflict. The second element is a failure to present the positions of all sides (COJ4) in a balanced way (COJ5); here, the Other side is not mentioned at all. We do not get to know the reasons behind this incident and the probable justifications behind this action. One more element is the lack of inference that the conflict is resolvable (COJ10). The news report makes no reference to the broader state of the “Cyprus problem” and the ongoing negotiation processes. Rather, it presents the incident as “one more Turkish provocation,” as one more link in the unbroken (and unbreakable) chain of the enemy’s aggravation, connecting the present event with past (dramatic) experiences and heralding future (equally displeasing) developments. The arrest is either used in quotation marks, or it is called an “abduction” to make it clear that the regime in the occupied territories is not recognized as a legal entity. Also, the interchangeable references to “Turkish soldiers” or “Turkish commando” and the “occupation authorities” equates the age-old enemy (Turkey) with the local community (Turkish-Cypriots), rendering the reconciliation process all the more difficult.

In cases of *war/terrorist acts*, all the elements of conflict-oriented reporting are present in most of the news stories, plus two more: absence of reference to actions for conflict resolution and to long-term or nonvisible consequences. Here, however, the most commonly used strategies (in more than 90% of the stories) are absence of reference to positive results from tackling the conflict, lack of balanced reference to views of all sides, and lack of reference to possibilities of deescalation. A news story with a 0.93 COJ score (13 of 14 elements of conflict-oriented reporting) concerns the war in Syria (September 26, 2012, Sigma TV). In this news report, all features of conflict-oriented reporting are present, with the exception of the reference to immediate or visible consequences. The story is only 26 seconds long, with a caption reading “new terrorist attack in Damascus” and the reporter recounting the following:

The battles in Syria keep on and on. Syrian rebels bombed today a military complex in Damascus, in the heart of President Bashar Al-Assad’s forces, resulting in a fire that destroyed the army headquarters and left behind dozens of casualties. Local residents reported shots in the area for at least two hours after the explosions. The streets in the region were blocked by ambulances that rushed to the sight.

This form of international news reporting (less than one minute long, factual, and episodic) was common among the Cypriot TV stations, providing poor information to viewers with regard to developments beyond national boundaries. The apparent lack of even the most essential background information, combined with the depiction of the anti-Assad fighters as “terrorists” without further explanation of the two sides’ positions, renders a thorough comprehension of the conflict highly unlikely. At the same time, failure to refer to either the long-standing consequences of the war to the Syrian people (e.g., a humanitarian crisis framing) or to initiatives for conflict resolution renders remote the possibility of triggering citizen reaction against the war.

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<sup>7</sup> “Occupation authorities” refers to the unrecognized Turkish-Cypriot authorities.

When stories concern *social conflict*, the most frequent elements are lack of reference to positive results from tackling the problem, lack of balanced reference to the positions or opinions of all involved parties, and lack of inference that the conflict is resolvable or possible to deescalate. A closer look at one news story about the clashes between protesters and police forces in Athens during a mass demonstration and strike (September 26, 2012, Sigma TV) allows us to exemplify these qualities. The anchorperson used the following lead to introduce the story: "Unrest, clashes, Molotov cocktails and tear gas marked today's demonstrations in the center of the Greek capital." This is a paradigmatic case of biased reporting against protesting social actors. According to Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, and Boguslaw (2001), description bias in media representation of social protest occurs through the marginalization and decontextualization of protests. Protesters are marginalized by the use of disruption-of-social-order frames, which overstate chaos and vandalism and depict demonstrators as instigators of violence, law breakers, and criminals while understating peaceful aspects of protests and misrepresenting their symbolic meaning (Hertog & McLeod, 1988; Jha, 2008). In this case, the disruption-of-order frame is evident from the start, as the story begins with a 16-second-long edited video of subsequent images of Molotov cocktails being thrown at riot police and erupting in fire, with escalating dramatic music and a caption reading "battlefield." Furthermore, these protesters are clearly separated from and established as enemies of "peaceful protesters," as evident by stereotypical expressions such as "the rage of the hood-wearing [youths]" and "Syntagma Square is delivered to the desires of the youths." The *decontextualization* of protest ensues as protesters are pit against law enforcers rather than the forces they really oppose—usually government or corporate power (Hertog & McLeod, 1988). In this news story, there is not a single sentence about the strikers' demonstration and their claims, let alone the underlying factors leading to these actions; the story is ultimately about the police acting to stop the enraged protesters from spreading chaos and vandalizing the city.

### ***Conflict as News: The Presentation of Political Contestation***

The second category of news analyzed in this study is that of *political contestation*. It refers mostly to rather commonplace stories about mundane politics, focusing on the actions and opinions put forth by domestic political parties. The stories coded in this category present political actors in polarized or conflictual verbal contestation, adopting a conflict-centered approach to politics and assuming conflict as a form of presenting news and describing political reality to the viewers.

As shown in Table 1, this type of news makes up one-fourth of the stories in our sample (26.5%). When political contestation becomes news, the dominant actors are political parties or organizations, and their dominance is even higher when they appear as speakers of these events (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Actors and Speakers in Television News Stories in Cyprus About Political Contestation, June to December 2012.**

	Actors		Speakers		Difference (%)
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
National government	11	7	4	2	-5
Governmental institutional group	7	4	10	6	1
State institutional group	4	3	4	2	0
International institution	5	3	—		-3
Professional organization, trade union, or employers' organization	3	2	4	2	0
Private business/profession	4	3	—		-3
Political party or organization	122	78	159	88	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>		<b>181</b>		

Regarding conflict-oriented reporting, stories about political contestation score slightly lower than televised events about sociopolitical conflict and war/terrorism and slightly higher than violent crime, with a mean conflict-oriented journalism score of 0.56 (see Table 3). The main strategies Cypriot media use to present mundane political news as conflict-ridden situations are: absence of reference to the conflict as resolvable or as a problem that needs to be resolved, to positive results from tackling the conflict, and to actions for conflict resolution (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Conflict-Oriented Journalism in Television News Stories in Cyprus About Political Contestation, June to December 2012.**

Elements present in more than half of the cases	Political contestation (%)
No inference that the conflict is resolvable or possible to deescalate	96
No reference to positive results from tackling the conflict	89
No reference to the conflict as a problem to be resolved	89
No reference to actions or initiatives for conflict resolution	83
Nonattribution of responsibility to more than one specific group or side	74
No consideration of deeper causes	61
No reference to long-term or nonvisible consequences	51

One example with a high COJ score (0.71, 10 of 14 elements of conflict-oriented reporting) concerns the contestation of Cypriot political parties during the negotiations with the troika for the bailout agreement (November 21, 2012, Capital TV). The tone of the starting headlines, accompanied by intense music, is dramatic and creates a sense of emergency: "No plan B from Nicosia. A potential termination of the negotiations is visible. Dead-end in the president's meeting with the party leaders." Even though the situation is presented as crucial, with the danger of the negotiations' termination recurrently stressed, the news story focuses almost exclusively on the confrontation of the opposition with the government. There is no reference to the deeper causes of the two sides' conflict, and only one side, the government, is presented as responsible for the problem. Furthermore, nothing in the story indicates that it is possible

that the political parties will come to some agreement or that some sort of consent would be beneficial. The story is framed as a conflict by the opposition, and the TV station adopts this frame by giving ample time to its representatives (3.45 minutes) to attack the government through divisive language and threatening dilemmas; the government's position is restrained to 20 seconds.

One additional level of contestation is present in this news report: the conflict between Cyprus and the troika. At this level, the story is about the "collapse of the negotiations," which is presented in an alarming tone from the beginning of the newscast. However, the imminent "collapse" is not substantiated by the information presented in the news story. We never learn why the collapse of the negotiations is probable. Furthermore, the actors responsible, as well as the consequences of such an outcome, are completely absent from the story. Later on, and after we learn from a reporter that the troika is actually still on the island, continuing the talks, an economist is interviewed to give his expert opinion on the issue. Throughout the interview, the expert asserts repeatedly that there are no alternatives and that the signing of the memorandum is a "one-way" solution. Also, it is stated several times that "the Cypriot economy is in a dead end," that "there is no room for negotiation," and that "actually, there is no negotiation."

The troika's absence in this story as an opposing actor is used to legitimize the no-alternative frame in relation to the signing of the agreement. In a 13-minute-long news package consisting of one news report, one update from a reporter, and one interview with an expert, viewers are left in the dark on the most important elements of the issue: on the content and progress of the negotiations as well as on reasons behind their threatened termination. Although two levels of conflict are noticeable—one between the opposition and the government and one between Cyprus and the troika—the television station explicitly frames as conflict only the first one, serving the domestic political game, while legitimizing the second conflict's outcome (signing of the memorandum) as unavoidable.

In another example of political contestation, a news story that scores equally high in COJ (0.71) concerns the "attack of AKEL and Malas on Anastasiades–Lillikas" (December 17, 2012, CyBC1)—namely, the "attack" of the political party that was in power at the time and its candidate for the upcoming presidential elections on the candidates of the opposition's two major parties. The news story is structured around the governing party's criticism of the opposition's stance on several issues. The newscaster's introduction notes the governing party's "attack" and reproduces its accusations. The opposition's stance is one-sidedly portrayed as populist, opportunistic, and unreliable with little room for debate, while the positions of the governmental party are completely absent.

The heightening of political polarization is not uncommon before elections, when usually there is little room for consolidating the different positions or balancing the different approaches. In a highly developed culture of political antagonism, as in Cyprus, which is coupled with a weak civil society with low levels of social trust, civic participation, and interest in politics (Demertzis, Milioni, & Gialamas, 2013), the political opponents are treated as enemies to be destroyed (cf. Mouffe, 1993). Conflict-centered journalistic narration serves the political polarization at the party-political level by accentuating the difference in constructing the Other. The conflict in such cases is not treated as a problem; it is, rather, an end in itself and part of the solution. By completely excluding actors other than official representatives, media discourses do little to strengthen civic society and reverse citizens' alienation and disengagement



from political processes. It is common on television news in Cyprus, as demonstrated in this study, to construct the stories on political news around political parties' criticism of the other parties' policies or positions without any information on these actors' policies or positions. The political parties avoid presenting their positions in concrete ways, and television systematically serves this avoidance. Thus, the comment on the policy becomes the policy itself.

### Conclusion

Conflict, present in multiple and complex manifestations and dimensions in societies, is unavoidably highly visible in the media. This research, examining how conflict is (re)presented on television news, adopts a dual perspective on conflict to capture both its physical and discursive dimensions. The first perspective focuses on the mediatization of conflict (*conflict as news*), examining how actual conflicts are represented in television. The second perspective (*news as conflict*) studies how news is framed in a confrontational manner, regardless of whether the represented events actually involve conflict.

Besides painting a comprehensive picture of how television news deals with conflict in the understudied case of Cyprus, the study builds on the concept of conflict-oriented journalism to examine the subtle ways in which conflict is constructed in the news. Its contribution to the study of mediatization of conflict lies, first, in the identification, through inductive analysis of newscasts, of four distinct categories that capture the different aspects of conflict in the news (violent crime, war/terrorism, social conflict, and political contestation). This typology can assist news analysis researchers in approaching the messy notion of conflict in concrete terms. Second, the study takes into account the dual function of conflict in the news, highlighting not only the ways in which the media handle conflict-laden situations but the active role of journalistic processes in constructing conflict as they represent political realities. Third, the study operationalizes, in quantitative terms, significant qualitative aspects of news analysis, paving the road for comparative studies across cultural settings.

The analysis reveals much conflict-laden news on Cypriot television, referring to social conflict, violent crime, warfare, and political contestation, mostly among domestic political actors. Not surprisingly, the institutional actors—mostly political parties and organizations—are the ones that dominate both as main actors and as speaking actors, offering their accounts of the events as well as their definitions and frames under which these events are understood and interpreted. These findings resonate with empirical evidence from other countries showing that conflict-oriented journalism is a dominant mode of covering news, particularly in the United States (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Carter et al., 2011; Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992) and the Netherlands (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In the Cypriot context, this finding acquires increased significance, because Cyprus is a paradigmatic case of a country whose social and political reality is deeply affected by a long-lasting conflict that persistently resists peacemaking efforts. To the extent that the Cypriot media adopt the artificial conflict employed by politicians regarding public affairs (instead of deconstructing it), such practices legitimize conflict as a paradigmatic practice in the political realm and nurture the culture of (political) antagonism in the Cypriot society.

Furthermore, the study explored the qualitative dimension of conflict-laden reporting, showing that the main features that contribute to conflict-oriented representations of events are the following: lack of balanced reference to the positions of all involved parties, attribution of responsibility to one specific side, no inference to the deeper causes of the conflict or to the possibilities of deescalation, and use of divisive language. These journalistic practices paint a picture where conflict is perpetuated with no end and where the complex issues of conflict are decontextualized, detached from their broader social, political, cultural, and historical environment. To some extent, these characteristics can be related to the particularities and special conditions prevailing in the production of newscasts on television, dictated by inflexible delivery deadlines, time restrictions, and harsh competition. Thus, these findings should not be generalized to other journalistic genres (e.g., investigative journalism, documentaries), which are more prone to in-depth reporting of conflict.

Nevertheless, it cannot be disregarded that in the news stories analyzed, conflict is used as a standardized model of presenting political news, and conflict resolution is rarely pursued. The media under study seem to fully adopt the divisive rhetoric and conflictual frames posed by the political parties, using the pretext of objectivity, to "neutrally" present the diverging opinions without taking sides. However, the analysis made clear how the selection of statements actually constructs the angle of the news story. This is an easy way of producing television news, resorting to ready-made material and not to time-consuming practices of investigative reporting, and presenting an eye-catching format of disagreement that legitimates the role of impartial journalism.

These journalistic practices ignore the potential offered by peace journalism, where journalists assume a more active role in explaining the facts and providing accounts of events inclusive of the different opinions and positions that also leave open the possibility of resolution or deescalation. This is not particularly surprising, because there are contradictory perceptions among journalists about their professional roles and considerable cross-cultural variation in support of even classic journalistic roles such as the watchdog (Willnat, Weaver, & Choi, 2013). This fact, however, does not compromise the importance of this study's findings regarding how journalists handle conflict, especially in societies of long-lasting conflict, such as Cyprus, since the media are one of the fields where conflict is reconstructed and perpetuated. If there are any connections between the media's reality and societal reality, the implications raised by the tendency of media discourses to exclude the possibility of resolution of major crises and conflicts in societies are considerable.

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