

Journalism in conflict-affected societies: Professional roles and influences in Cyprus

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Abstract

Covering a conflict for journalists when they are members of one of the conflicting parties has some professional and moral dilemmas. It creates tensions between their professionalism and sense of belonging to their community. This article, focusing on journalism on both sides of Cyprus, explores how journalists think of their role in conflict-affected societies. Based on semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with journalists from the Turkish Cypriot media and Greek Cypriot media, it explores journalists' self-reflection of their roles and the forces they believe that affect their work when reporting on the Cyprus conflict. The findings show journalists do not have a fixed identity but a changeable one. They renegotiate and reproduce the meaning and role of journalism in society, and move between professional and ethnic identities depending on the state of the conflict.

Keywords

conflict, Cypriot journalists, Cyprus, journalism, peace, professional role

In conflict-affected societies, journalism has a crucial part in shaping the public's perception and knowledge of national identity, history, conflict and peace efforts. When mediating a conflict, journalists do not just circulate information about it, but also define, frame, deliberate and promote it. That is why journalists are one of the key actors in the mediation of information during conflicts and post-conflict periods. Conflicts pose many constraints and difficulties for journalists, but the cessation of violence or transitions to a more peaceful state present no fewer challenging conditions. Political pressures and professional and ethical dilemmas experienced during the conflict could still affect journalists. As the dynamics of the conflict change, journalists in conflict-affected societies renegotiate their role in society and (re)establish their professionalism (Andresen, et al., 2017; Voltmer, 2013). In order

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to better understand the significance of journalism in mediating information on peace and conflict, we need to examine how journalists regard their role and relationship with their society, and the forces that affect them. This article, using journalism in Cyprus as a case study, explores how journalists think of their role in conflict-affected societies.

Cyprus is home to one of the world's most intractable conflicts. Also known as the Cyprus problem, it is an ethno-nationalist conflict between Turkish Cypriot (TC) and Greek Cypriot (GC) communities. During the British colonial time, two differing nationalisms led TC and GC communities to seek integration with their so-called motherlands, Turkey and Greece. Intercommunal tensions resulted in armed conflict in the late 1950s. The establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 did very little to stop these tensions. The intervention of the Turkish military in 1974 in response to a coup attempt by Greeks divided the island in two. Today, separated by a buffer zone, Greek Cypriots live in the southern part under the legally recognized Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and Turkish Cypriots live in the northern part under a self-declared but internationally unrecognized administration called the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

The conflict in Cyprus has never formally ended. The search for a peaceful settlement began in the 1960s and is still ongoing. The peace process is aiming to reunite the island as a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. However, the lack of active conflict involving violence makes Cyprus, unlike many other conflict zones, feel relatively peaceful. Over the years, both sides have adopted the principles and institutions of democracy and are considered to be free and democratic (Freedom House, 2019). Numerous peace and confidence-building efforts have increased contact and communication between the communities. However, the lack of progress on finding a comprehensive settlement to the problem is enhancing a sense of insecurity and encouraging polarized national narratives, which in turn contribute to the prolongation of the conflict.

Until 2003, when the crossings between the northern and southern parts were relaxed, the news media were one of the main ways of getting information about the community across the divide. Today, they are criticized widely for increasing polarization and enhancing intolerance and mistrust towards each other (Anastasiou, 2002; Bailie and Azgin, 2008; Christophorou et al., 2010; Milioni et al., 2015). This is because, since the start of the conflict, the news media on both sides have acted as instruments of nationalist propaganda by disseminating and amplifying nationalist ideologies (Avraamidou, 2015; Christophorou et al., 2010; Sahin, 2008). As the efforts to settle the conflict have intensified, it is important to find out what journalists in Cyprus think of their roles in relation to the conflict. Based on these ideas, the article will address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do journalists in Cyprus define their professional role in society?

RQ2: What are the journalists' perceptions of the various forces that shape their work?

Professional roles

Journalists describe their roles in different ways. Studying their role conceptions gives a better understanding of how they negotiate their professional tasks and how they define their social and moral responsibilities in society (Mellado, 2015; Vos, 2017). There is

extensive research on journalism, which categorizes journalistic roles in different ways (Christians et al., 2009; Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2007a; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Journalistic role conceptions follow global journalistic norms and rules, but journalism is practised within the influence of local political, economic and cultural forces. Many international comparative projects on journalism demonstrate that journalistic roles are not homogeneous but vary across countries (for example, see Hanitzsch et al., 2011, 2019). They show that journalists' normative and cognitive ideas are intertwined with forces of political, economic and media structures in which journalism is embedded. Therefore, regarding journalism as a discursive construction can provide a conceptual framework to account for different views on journalism (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017, 2018). Hanitzsch and Vos (2017: 121) explain that, when journalistic roles are constituted, a 'struggle over discursive authority in conversations about the meaning and role of journalism in society takes place'. In this negotiation over journalists' identity and role, sometimes dominant understandings of journalism are challenged by different forms of journalism that emerge, such as peace or citizen journalism resulting in identity renegotiation (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017, 2018).

When examining professional roles, different concepts need to be considered. Some studies identify these concepts as role conceptions, role perceptions, role enactment and role performance (Mellado et al., 2017), while others categorize them as normative, cognitive, practised and narrated (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). This is to distinguish between 'what journalists ought to do, what they want to do, what they do in practice and what they think or say they do' (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017: 214). What journalists believe they should do, what they think they do and what they actually do can be different things. The way journalists see their professional roles and the way they perform them do not always match (Hellmueller and Mellado, 2015; Mellado, 2015; Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014). That is because journalists do not work in isolation but are influenced by various forces such as political, economic or cultural factors during the news production process. While some of these forces are actual or objective, some are perceived, which means journalists think they influence their work (Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013). This article focuses on what journalists believe they should do and what they think they do rather than what they actually do. It also examines their perception of forces that influence their work.

Journalism in conflicts

Conflicts pose various constraints and difficulties for journalism. They are hostile environments for journalists who are faced with risks and dangers including death, injury, harassment and imprisonment. They also present situations that contest the normative understanding of journalism that is based on the impartiality of journalists. When the media become a part of propaganda instruments for conflicting parties, journalists are expected to support their own sides, which undermines their autonomy. Journalists could also experience tension between detachment and emotional involvement, and feel the pressures of professional and moral dilemmas (Boudana, 2015; McLaughlin, 2016).

Covering a conflict for journalists when they are members of one of the conflicting parties has added professional and moral dilemmas. In times of conflict, voluntarily or

involuntarily, they become part of the conflict and find themselves having to deal with the values that are at odds with each other (Waisbord, 2002; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005). On the one hand, their professional role requires them to maintain autonomy and stay neutral despite various pressures from the state, military and public. On the other hand, they are members of their communities and their attachment makes it difficult to be impartial towards the conflict, such as foreign correspondents when they report on other people's conflicts (Nygren et al., 2018; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005). In other words, journalists are in a 'crossfire' as they try to balance professional autonomy with pressures from political leadership and military as well as audience expectations of patriotism (Nygren et al., 2018: 1059).

In times of national conflicts, patriotic sentiments can overcome professional ones and journalists take sides with their national/ethnic community. The key to understanding journalists' shifting allegiance from professional to national/ethnic community is to recognize that journalists' identities are not fixed but fluid. Depending on the situation, journalists negotiate and choose which role to adopt, thus moving between identities (Hallin, 2017; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005). That is why 'while muted during "normal circumstances" under the observance of professional rules, sheer patriotism emerges in situations in which the "national community" is considered to be at risk' (Waisbord, 2002: 206). In cases in which patriotism becomes a dominant public sentiment, individual journalists find it hard to stay outside the patriotic manifestations (Elliot, 2004; Neiger and Rimmer-Tsory, 2012; Waisbord, 2002; Zelizer and Allan, 2002). In some cases, as in the Arab media, patriotism can be considered 'a virtue and not a breach of journalism ethics' (Al-Najjar, 2011: 754).

In conflict-affected societies, journalists experience external or internal and covert and overt pressures that force them to apply self-censorship. These pressures restrain them from either reporting on certain events or covering them in a way that would not cause any harm to themselves and others (Jungblut and Hoxha, 2017). Such pressures limit journalists' autonomy, making it difficult for them to put their professional role perceptions into practice. Even in post-conflict situations or, as in Cyprus, when the violence ends, censorship or self-censorship does not immediately disappear. Depending on how democratic the transition from conflict to peace is, journalists could still be under pressure from authorities, media owners or other actors and self-censor themselves (Jungblut and Hoxha, 2017; Nygren et al., 2018).

Journalism and conflict in Cyprus

The conflict has deeply influenced journalism in Cyprus. During the intercommunal tensions, the news media took on the mission of defending their communities' nationalist projects (Antoniades, 2018; Christophorou, 2010; Stubbs and Taseli, 2014; Ünlü, nd). Journalism was nationalist and journalists reported their side's political and military campaigns with little criticism. The news media and journalists did not just disseminate political and military messages but also took part in the creation of them (Christophorou, 2010; Ünlü, nd). Given that press freedom was restricted as there were pressures from authorities to comply with rules, journalists, even if they disagreed with them, had no choice but to follow them.

In post-1974, journalism did not immediately change with the end of the armed conflict but slowly transformed itself to adapt to the new conditions (Azgın, 1998; Christophorou, 2010). Development of new institutions such as political parties and their newspapers encouraged party journalism, a form of advocacy journalism, which mainly reflected the views and policies of political parties with which the news media outlets were affiliated.

The privatization of broadcast media in the 1990s on both sides of the island changed the media landscape and had a considerable impact on journalism. Until then, public broadcasting in the north was under the monopoly of Bayrak Radio and Television Corporation (BRTK) and, in the south, under Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC). They reproduced the statements of their political leaderships in line with official national policies. Privatization has changed the uniform content of public broadcasting in Cyprus, making it more diverse. The proliferation of media outlets has allowed more journalists to enter the sector and broadened the range of topics covered in the news, as well as expanding the expression of diverse political views (Çatal, 2006; Maniou, 2017; Nicoli, 2014)

New media technologies have transformed and diversified the way journalists gather, construct and disseminate information. Research shows that journalists on both sides are increasingly using social media to follow and engage with sources and their audience (Arikli et al., 2019; Milioni et al, 2018; Özejder, 2018). The networked digital media, such as social media, have also provided both Cypriot journalists and communities with diverse platforms to communicate with each other across the divide without any political and economic restrictions.

Methodology

This article explores journalists' self-reflection of their roles and their perception of the forces that affect their work when reporting on the Cyprus problem. The data comes from semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 35 journalists and editors working for the TC media and 32 from the GC media conducted between October 2018 and December 2019. The interviews lasted around one hour and were digitally recorded. They were conducted in Turkish by the author and in Greek by a GC researcher, who also transcribed and translated them.¹ The participants of the study were professional journalists, registered by the professional associations on each side and who had worked for print, broadcast and online media at the time of the interviews.

The data is analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis identifies and interprets the ideas in the data as themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke explain that the themes could be either 'data-driven' or 'theory-driven' which means the researcher studies the data with specific questions (pp. 88–89). In the interviews, journalists were asked a wide range of questions about their professional role, their relationship with political actors and civil society, and the impact of digital media on their work. However, this article focuses only on how journalists on both sides of the island think of their professional roles, their views on the Cyprus problem and the challenges and constraints of reporting on peace and conflict-related issues in Cyprus. It enquires into the participants' own understanding of their professional responsibilities in their societies. Once the interviews were transcribed, the participants' answers were used to categorize

the key themes about their roles and analysed to learn more about how journalists construct and renegotiate their professional role in their conflict-affected societies.

The roles of journalists

During the interviews, some journalists defined their roles in relation to other forms of journalism, such as the one practised during the armed conflict or party journalism. While journalism during the conflict pushed journalists to collaborate with their leaderships with very little criticism, party journalism encouraged them to practise watchdog roles on the political elite of rival groups and parties but not so much on their own parties. Journalists interviewed for this project detached themselves from these forms of journalism by stressing the importance of professionalism based on impartiality and accuracy. These accounts provide some evidence for the transformations in journalists' understanding of their roles and indicate that different role constructions are struggling over legitimacy with each other. Journalists on both sides of Cyprus articulated professional roles that varied from monitoring political and business elite, acting as watchdogs, promoting social change, and educating and informing the public about societal problems. However, concerning the Cyprus problem, role definitions were focused mainly on dissemination, watchdog and advocacy roles.

Watchdog role

Journalists in Cyprus expressed commitment to the watchdog role of journalism but also stated that it was a role that was challenging to practise. Watchdog journalism, an essential element of democracies, involves checking on those in power, denouncing their wrongdoings and holding them to account. The performance of watchdog journalism is determined by various factors such as press freedom, economic influences and socio-political contexts. In democratic countries, a watchdog role is more detached, while in transitional countries or non-democratic ones, this role could be more interventionist as journalists openly question and scrutinize those in power (Marquez-Ramirez et al., 2019). A cross-national study shows that journalists in Cyprus are more likely to demonstrate the characteristics of interventionist journalism compared to monitorial, collaborative or accommodating roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Milioni (2017: 2) also argues that journalists adopt assertive roles such as monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders. However, because she defines the watchdog role as being 'an adversary of the government and motivating people to participate in political activity', she finds that this role is adopted by a minority group of journalists in Cyprus.

In the interviews for this study, journalists on both sides of Cyprus remarked that it was their responsibility to check on elites, and openly question and criticize their wrongdoings rather than act as disinterested disseminators. High political parallelism and clientelism on both sides also encourage a more interventionist watchdog role but, as a TC journalist remarked, the main question is to check who benefits from this scrutiny:

Who does such scrutiny serve? If it is for personal gains, this is problematic. If it serves the public, then there is no problem. (personal interview, 2019)

Despite acknowledging its importance, journalists across the divide find it challenging to practise and, therefore, the amount and level of scrutiny in the news media are low. As a GC journalist stated:

We sometimes have revelations of scandals or documents related to the Cyprus problem or other social issues, but that's it. In the last decade, I haven't seen a journalist in Cyprus follow up or investigate an issue further. (personal interview, 2019)

This is because high levels of clientelism, political parallelism and state intervention undermine journalists' autonomy and ability to investigate abuses of power. A TC journalist explained that, if a media owner has links with politicians or business people, then they cannot investigate corruption allegations against them (personal interview, 2019). Similar forces affect journalism in the GC community. Research shows that, during the economic crisis in the southern part of Cyprus in 2013, GC media sided with the government rather than scrutinizing and questioning it (Maniou and Photiou, 2017).

Concerning the Cyprus problem, how much they should scrutinize the peace negotiations is an important matter. When news blackouts are applied to the negotiations between the community leaders, journalists know that the reason for these restrictions is to give the negotiating parties time and space to talk free from media and public pressures. They do not want to reveal any information that would create unnecessary tension between the parties. At the same time, they believe it is their responsibility and professional duty to scrutinize the progress of the negotiations and inform the public. As a GC journalist explained, journalists know that their obligation is to the public:

A journalist needs to assess everything based on public interest . . . Public interest demands journalists to be critical to what is happening because they are accountable to the public. (personal interview, 2018)

Disseminator role

When asked about professional roles, journalists on both sides of the island stressed that accurate reporting is a crucial part of their professional roles (also see Milioni, 2017). Accuracy is emphasized because, in both communities across the divide, information, especially on the Cyprus problem, can be controlled and manipulated by the political elite and shaped according to media owners' interests. Journalists remarked that they frequently experienced spin from the political elite, who try to use them to set agenda and public debates that would support their political positions.

Verification is vital in the communication of accurate information. However, when journalists want to cross-check information with officials across the divide, they experience political barriers and mistrust. Journalists reported that political figures on both sides are reluctant to speak to the journalists of the 'other' community. TC journalists, in particular, stressed that GC political figures often rejected their requests for interviews, which made it difficult for them to verify information or provide a balanced account of events that represented both sides. Those who access the community representatives on the other side of the buffer zone are treated with suspicion. A GC journalist stated that she was criticized by GC leader Nicos Anastasiades for publishing information that she

had got from a TC source. The source had contradicted the information given by GC officials (personal interview, 2018). Similarly, a TC journalist explained that TC political figures are suspicious of journalists like her, who reach out to the GC side for information. She remarked that she was accused of not trusting 'our' politicians or even working for the 'other' side (personal interview, 2018).

Journalists on both sides of Cyprus are aware that the news media have been one of the key actors in the aggravation of the tensions between the communities. They acknowledge that, for reconciliation, it is essential that the communities learn from and understand each other. Therefore, some journalists have established communication across the line to exchange information and reflect their community's perspectives and narratives. Although the number of these TC and GC journalists that interact with each other is small, it could help improve relations between the communities. Research on journalism in Kosovo–Serbia and Israel–Palestine found that the interaction between journalists across conflict lines acted as a bridge between communities and improved mutual understanding (Gonen and Hoxha, 2019: 2496). In Cyprus, communication between journalists across the divide could also allow them to overcome political and structural problems to exchange information to produce accurate stories. A TC journalist observed that, as the relationship between TC and GC journalists had been enhanced, the information flow between them had also increased:

We exchange information, video and audio . . . There are disagreements on some political and Cyprus related issues, but they are nothing we cannot deal with. (personal interview, 2019)

Advocacy role

Research shows that journalists in conflict and post-conflict societies adopt broader responsibilities than their counterparts in democratic countries, and advocacy for peace is one of them (Andresen et al., 2017; Prager and Hameleers, 2018). Interviews conducted with journalists in Cyprus confirmed that both TC and GC journalists regard promoting the resolution of the conflict as one of their social and professional responsibilities. When asked how they saw their role in relation to the conflict, all TC and GC participants answered that journalists should support the resolution of the problem. However, not all journalists back the ongoing peace process, which aims to reunite Cyprus based on the idea of a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. The alternative to the peace process is the legalization of the status quo, i.e. the division of the island, which is favoured by some TCs.

For journalists in Cyprus, promoting the peace process is not in contradiction with their professional values of impartiality. They justify it by saying that it is in the interest of their communities. TC journalists, in particular, who have lived with sanctions from the international community since the establishment of the TRNC, are anxious about the effect of the conflict on their community and thus are keen to play a more active role in the resolution of the problem. When asked about it, a TC journalist remarked:

If we lived in another society, one without conflict, then we could have answered this question differently, but we live in Cyprus and we have concerns about our future. (personal interview, 2019)

Some journalists on the island identify themselves with peace journalism, which supports Lynch's (2016) argument that journalists in societies that have experienced violent conflict in the past, and who still experience some tensions, show an interest in peace journalism. Peace journalism challenges the hegemonic understanding of conflict reporting by encouraging journalists to renegotiate their identities and roles. It questions existing attitudes in the news media's coverage of conflicts and highlights problems with journalism practices when reporting on conflicts (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Shaw et al., 2011; Shinar, 2007). It is based on the idea that journalists can shape the news in support of conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, and therefore encourages them to make choices that would contribute to the de-escalation of conflict when reporting it (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Shaw et al., 2011). Some TC and GC journalists in Cyprus also see peace journalism as a form of journalism that can contribute to the reconciliation efforts on the island. As a TC journalist explained:

Journalists should practise peace journalism and it should be more widespread so in future when there is a settlement, it helps communities live in peace. (personal interview, 2019)

Not all journalists in Cyprus, who support the resolution of the problem, identify with peace journalism. They agree with criticisms directed at peace journalism, for instance that it fails to take into consideration the influences of news production, media structures, and the political and economic environment in which journalism functions (Hanitzsch, 2007b; Keeble, 2010; Loyn, 2007). Some journalists argue that it is hard to practise peace journalism when political and economic forces undermine their autonomy. Others are critical that peace journalism fails to consider the current political state of the island. As a GC journalist suggested:

Peace journalism in Cyprus should focus on liberation from the occupation of Turkey rather than a peace agreement. (personal interview, 2019)

The tensions between professional and national/ethnic identities are also not articulated by peace journalism. In conflict-affected societies, journalists may find it hard to step outside their nationally/ethnically determined identities or the pressures of patriotic sentiments (Şahin and Ross, 2012). However, journalists do not support the criticisms directed at peace journalism for undervaluing the professional norms of objectivity and impartiality because of its overt commitment to peacemaking (Hanitzsch, 2007b; Loyn, 2007). It could be because some journalists in Cyprus acknowledge the difficulty of being impartial when reporting on the Cyprus problem (also see Şahin and Karayianni, 2020). A TC journalist, who identified herself with peace journalism remarked that being partial towards the ongoing peace process rather than supporting the status quo does not clash with her professional values:

I have always stated that I cannot be impartial because I support the peace process. If you publicly state this, then there is no problem . . . I don't think it conflicts with professional values if a journalist expresses her partiality when practising her profession. (personal interview, 2019)

Influences on journalism

When talking about their role perceptions and practices in general, journalists highlighted political, economic, organizational and professional forces undermining their autonomy. However, when reporting on the Cyprus problem, they mainly stressed the political environment in which they practised their profession combined with the position of media ownerships as the main influences shaping their work. Enquiries into their professional and national/ethnic identities also revealed that journalists experienced tensions between these two identities.

Political pressures and self-censorship

Today, although there are no longer violent clashes in Cyprus, the conflict still influences journalism. The official narratives each community has developed to explain the cause and continuation of the conflict shape the reporting of the Cyprus problem. These narratives are exclusive of each other and refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the other administration. Therefore, when they refer to each other, they use phrases such as ‘pseudo-state’ (rather than the TRNC), the ‘so-called leader’ or ‘the Greek-Cypriot administration’ (rather than the ROC). Having learned these narratives and the rules of what they can and cannot say, journalists apply self-censorship to avoid a conflict with political power and media managers. According to a TC journalist, the first thing journalists learn when they start work is to refer to the administration across the divide as the Greek Cypriot Administration, not the Republic of Cyprus (personal interview, 2019). A similar system is in place in the GC media as a journalist from CyBC admitted to applying self-censorship:

There is no censorship coming from the organization because, as journalists, we know the (official) line and limits. So, I think, in a sense, we apply self-censorship. (personal interview, 2019)

Turkey’s presence on the island poses restrictions for journalists from both sides. For GCs, Turkey is a country that invaded and divided the island, which is still an obstacle in the resolution of the problem. They regard Turkey as ‘the enemy’ (Christophorou et al., 2010). For TCs, the situation is more complicated. Turkey is influential in the governing of the country despite the self-proclaimed republic and the election of the head of state and members of the parliament by its people. It has political, economic and military power in the north of the island. Interviews showed that many TC journalists believe their freedom of expression is restricted when it comes to criticizing Turkey, especially its policies on Cyprus. Criticisms can lead to legal proceedings as it did in the case of *Afrika* newspaper. *Afrika*, a daily with a small circulation and a limited web presence, is pro-settlement in Cyprus and disapproves of Turkey’s presence on the island. In 2017, when it republished a caricature taken from the Greek media that criticized Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdoğan, the former Turkish ambassador to the northern part of Cyprus filed a complaint against the newspaper. The newspaper staff also received death threats. A TC court threw out the charges against the newspaper, but the case created a chilling

effect on journalists and produced enhanced self-censorship in the north. Şener Levent, the editor of *Afrika*, explained that:

Journalists here know what they can and cannot write. They are aware that there is a frame which they cannot step outside. No-one is standing beside them with a gun or sword to their head. They have learned and internalized what they can and cannot write. (personal interview, 2019)

Levent argued that journalists are afraid to take an adversarial position towards Turkey's Cyprus policies as they fear it may lead to isolation, rejection or personal attack. A TC news editor confirmed this fear and self-censorship:

In the north, the news media cannot write anything critical of Turkey. If you do, it could create problems for you and your organization. Therefore, you cannot write freely. You must be careful of what you say or write and avoid things that might put you in a difficult situation. (personal interview, 2019)

Organizational influences

Commercial concerns and increased competition among the news media have put extra pressures on journalists. They are caught between meeting their professional responsibilities and the demands of their organizations to produce stories that would attract an audience. In the digital media environment, speed has gained more importance and journalists struggle to balance it with accuracy. Competition to break the news first has shortened the time spent on news production and verifying the information. Yet, journalists know that, if their information is incorrect, it could affect the public mood and support for the ongoing peace process and damage its trust in journalists. In spite of this, journalists frequently publish information without checking it. For example, some TC journalists were convinced that a breakthrough was about to happen in the peace talks in Crans Montana in Switzerland in 2017 and rushed to report it without verifying it. Soon after their announcements, the negotiations between the parties collapsed, resulting in public disappointment. One of these journalists, who had announced that the leaders had reached an agreement, admitted that he regretted some of his stories during that time:

I think it was too early to announce them. They didn't affect the process, but they raised questions among people. (personal interview, 2018)

Journalists' sense of professionalism is also influenced by the restrictions that media ownership imposes on journalists. On both sides of Cyprus, media ownership, a combination of state, private and political parties, intervenes in the news production process in addition to considerations about the allocation of resources, profit expectations and advertising. Interference affects journalists' perception of autonomy and creates a gap between their professional role and practice (Mellado and Van Dallen, 2014). Journalists, who have a smaller gap between their professional role and practice, perceive themselves to have greater freedom. In Cyprus, especially in the state-owned media, there is a wide

gap between journalists' professional role conceptions and practices. Journalists in these media must work in line with official ideologies that they find restrictive. A TC journalist working for public broadcasting, BRTK, explained:

What I do is not journalism. We communicate information but journalists should also investigate and research. That is not what we do. Politicians make statements, and we announce them to the public. Can we report things that they don't want the public to know? This is what journalism is, but it is not what we do. (personal interview, 2019)

GC journalists working for the state media expressed similar sentiments. A journalist from CyBC remarked that journalists should do more than 'just record and convey the statements of the politicians' (personal interview, 2019), which is not always possible.

Media owners' political and economic interests are significant determinants in the construction of news on the conflict and peace process. They inform journalists how to frame the news on the Cyprus problem. Sometimes there is a clash between the positions of journalists and media ownership. In this case, journalists either act, as a TC journalist remarked, 'professionally' (personal interview, 2019), which means they perform in line with the media's political line or they resign. When a settlement plan based on the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's 'Basis for Agreement on a Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem', also known as the Annan Plan, was negotiated between 2002 and 2004, some journalists, whose views on the plan clashed with the media they worked for, resigned and moved to another media organization. A GC journalist explained that, although these journalists were not under any direct pressure, they felt that they should either adopt the organization's line or leave (personal interview, 2019). Similarly, some TC journalists threatened media ownerships with resignation unless they changed their position regarding the Annan Plan (Şahin and Karayianni, 2020).

Patriotic sentiments

Due to the conflict, detachment or neutrality have never been strong characteristics of journalism in the communities of Cyprus. Journalists are always expected to identify themselves primarily with their ethnic community before their profession, which requires involvement rather than detachment. Depending on the situation, journalists frequently renegotiate their professional role and relationship to their communities and move between their professional and ethnic identities. While they act professionally during normal times, when inter-communal tensions increase, journalists can be patriotic and choose to identify themselves with their ethnic identity. Zandberg and Neiger (2005: 139) suggest considering the patriotism of journalists in conflict-affected societies not in terms of being 'opposed to professionalism but as an inevitable component of the profession'. They underline that patriotic sentiments can overshadow journalists' professionalism and make it difficult for them to stay detached from their communities.

In the interviews conducted for this project, some journalists stated that they tried to stay detached and neutral, but many stressed that their professionalism is shaped by their personal views and experience of the conflict, and they could not be neutral on the issues related to the Cyprus problem. A TC journalist remarked that, having lived with the

influence of the Cyprus problem, it was difficult to be detached when covering it (personal interview, 2018). Yet, some try and reconsider their professional and personal values when they report on the conflict and the ‘other’ community. A GC journalist stated that:

In periods of tension with the other community, I intentionally choose not to write anything related to the other community because I know that I would be subjective. I consider it a big mistake to write while being in that state as you often end up writing the wrong things. (personal interview, 2019)

Discussion and conclusion

This article looked at how the conflict conditions in Cyprus impacted on journalism and journalists’ reflections of their roles and the forces that influence them. The interviews conducted for this research demonstrated that journalists are committed to professional values and have strong role ideals. Yet, they face limitations in the form of political and economic censorship and self-censorship, experience tension between their professional and ethnic identity, and have to deal with the interferences of media ownership that undermine their autonomy.

In general, role conceptions of Cypriot journalists are no different from traditional Western ones. However, living in conflict-affected communities, some roles are more emphasized, especially in relation to the conflict. For example, TC journalists stress the importance of disseminating information about the community across the divide as they believe it would help develop trust and understanding between the communities and contribute to the reconciliation efforts. Journalists’ articulation of their role as a disseminator, advocacy and watchdog in relation to the Cyprus problem also shows that they practise their agency by getting involved in the resolution of the problem with their journalism rather than acting as passive participants. On both sides, journalists believe they have responsibilities to promote the settlement of the problem. These responsibilities require them to play different roles at different times, such as advocating for a change or scrutinizing the political elite who lead the peace negotiations. However, they believe ideological and structural obstacles such as censorship, access to information and interference of media ownership restrict their practices and sometimes undermine their professional autonomy.

This article identified and focused on the common factors that influence journalists’ role conceptions and practices in Cyprus. However, journalism on both sides has been shaped by each community’s political, cultural, economic and media contexts and, inevitably, there are differences in the way it is conceptualized and performed. For example, TC journalists, who experience the economic and political restrictions in their daily lives due to the internationally non-recognized status of their administration, are keen to play a more active role in the resolution of the problem. GC journalists, on the other hand, are concerned about the division of the island and the restrictions it imposes on them but, at the same time, are also uncertain of the changes a settlement could bring to them. They have fewer restrictions and better resources, which enables them to access information on any development regarding the Cyprus problem quicker. Inevitably, these impact on their perceptions of their professional roles and forces that affect their practices. Future

studies could explore how political and economic differences between communities affect journalists' role negotiations and the quality of journalism.

Overall, the study provides some evidence of the professional roles and influences in conflict-affected societies. It underlines that journalists' identities are not fixed but fluid and journalists struggle to find a balance between their professional and national/ethnic identities and responsibilities. Depending on the state of the conflict or the transition their communities are going through, journalists renegotiate and reproduce the meaning and role of journalism. Journalists who are committed to professional values also demonstrate patriotism in their work or feel the pressure to do so when they consider their societies to be at risk.

Journalists combine Western ideals of professionalism with their societies' needs. Sometimes, they cannot follow certain professional values, such as impartiality, or roles such as advocacy, for example the watchdog role, can be more prominent than others. That is because these journalists practise journalism not just within the political, economic and media structures of their societies but also the constraints and pressures of conflict. They frequently renegotiate their relations with various forces that affect their work during the conflict and transition periods. During the negotiation process, new norms, ideas and practices can be legitimized (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017, 2018; Hanitzsch et al., 2019) as seen in the example of Cyprus where journalists identify their role as peace journalism. However, as each conflict and transition process is different, further research is needed to better understand how journalism adapts to the changing conditions in societies during the conflict and post-conflict periods.

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