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**CRITICAL PEACE IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: FROM CRITICAL PEACE TO
CRITICAL PEACE JOURNALISM**

Dimitris Trimithiotis & Nicos Trimikliniotis

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will try to adjust the critical perspective of Liberal Peace to the communicational process related to the reunification of Cyprus. The main idea is to examine the role and the functions of the media within the process of conflict resolution. We will first give a brief account on the discussion around the idea of 'Peace Journalism' as a normative practice which may help to overpass the conflict; we will then discuss its main challenging aspects within a broad process of Peace and Conflict Resolution using aspects of the Public Sphere Theories. Finally, we will try to adjust and apply the conclusions of the above discussion on the context of Cyprus and Cyprus conflict.

FROM PEACE JOURNALISM...

Peace Journalism: a definition (?)

According to Thomas Hanitzsch the concept of peace journalism penetrated the field of mass communication in the early 1990s and played a crucial role in raising a critical debate on conflict and war coverage. Thomas Hanitzsch (2004) defines peace journalism as a programme or frame of journalistic news coverage which contributes to the process of making and keeping peace respectively to the peaceful settlement of conflicts (Hanitzsch, 2004: 484).

Peace Journalism: a critical evaluation of conflict reporting

Academics that claim for peace journalism perspective they usually have as starting point a critical evaluation of the current state of conflict reporting. For example, they criticize the criteria of news selection in journalism such as ethnocentrism, negativism, personalization and proximity to elite countries and elite persons (Galtung and Vincent, 1993). Some other critiques underline the mono-causality within journalistic descriptions of the origins and

causes of conflicts (Schicha, 1999). Furthermore they mention that the media focus attention on a conflict arena only when manifest violence is about to take place (Jakobsen, 2000, p. 132).

This last one seems difficult to be applied on the case of Cyprus because of the type of the conflict which is not (anymore) a violent conflict, it is not a war situation, but rather a political conflict. But instead we could say that media in Cyprus focus particular attention on the Cyprus problem only when the process of negotiations is on.

Peace Journalism: its normative dimension

In contemporary societies media and journalism in particular are expected to provide and reinforce the social cohesion and they are often understood as important factor for the construction and the constitution of a democratic social order (Deuze, 2006). Indeed, modern journalism has consistently defined and legitimized itself as such (Zelizer, 2004).

This normativity in the function of Journalism is even more important in the practice of Peace Journalism. So, Peace Journalism, in its normative dimension, aims to explore the background of a conflict formation in order to make conflicts appear transparent to the audience. It seeks causes and solutions to conflicts on every side and gives voice to the views of all rival parties, in order to ensure that 'not simply a certain party (the "others") is seen as the problem, but the conflict itself' (Hanitzsch, 2004: 485). The Peace Journalism, due to its orientation towards solutions, dedicates particular attention to peace initiatives and reports on post-war developments. To put it different, described peace journalism may be described as a "new form of journalism" which looks "at how journalists could be part of the solution rather than part of the problem" (McGoldrick, 2000, pp. 19–20).

Peace Journalism: its limits

But, Peace Journalism Approach seems to take no notice of journalists' integration into a given society (which they report) and that in consequence journalists do face the same constraints and temptations as other individuals in that society (Kempf, 2002, p. 60). Peace journalism, as defined above, cannot be induced and encouraged from the "outside", but can only evolve

within a “culture of peace”. Thus, the question of how journalistic process construct reality gains a socio-critical dimension (Hanitzsch, 2004). We should, therefore, not see journalist as the problem; we need to see society and culture as factors that impact the journalistic practice - journalists are to some extent the “offsprings” the “result” of their societies and their cultures. Or better, one needs to recognise the interaction and the interplay between journalism and society – how society and its structures and the broader media sphere impact on the journalistic process and at the same time how journalistic products impact society either by legitimising or by contesting its dominants norms.

Also, beyond cultural and social pressures on the journalistic process, there are also many structural constrains which shape and limit the work of journalists. In fact, journalists consistently work under conditions of heavy time pressure, limited resources and tight competition (Hanitzsch, 2007). There is no doubt that journalists can, in some way and in some cases, contribute to the resolution of conflicts, but as Jakobsen argues, their potential for influence is, by far, limited (Jakobsen, 2000). The extent to which news media can influence readers, listeners, viewers and users is highly dependent on the predispositions of the audience itself as well as on various social and cultural factors. Due to its specific function within society, it cannot be the primary task of journalism to free the world from crises, conflicts and other evils... In this sense one needs to observe the journalistic process in a broader context which includes organisational, financial, political, technological and work conditions factors.

THE PUBLIC SPHERE OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

To put it different, the proposition here consist to say that instead of only focusing on journalistic activity and products, we need to scrutinized these activities and products in their context of realisation.

The concept of “The public Sphere” seems helpful here for conceptualising the role of journalism and in broader of media in a given society. The concept of “the Public Sphere” in Habermas’ sense it describes a space in which political participation in modern and mass societies is (in theory) empowered through media. It is the space in which social actors and groups of social actors deliberate about their common affairs. Thus, the Public Sphere can be

seen as an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction. In the sense of Habermas the Public Sphere connoted an ideal unrestricted rational discussion of public matters; open and accessible to all (Fraser, 1990).

Critique of Mass Media Public Sphere

It is though this idealism of Habermas which lead other contemporary media and communication analysts to develop an important number of critiques towards the concept of Public Sphere.

As for example:

(a) The contestation of the unity of the public sphere (**Fragmentation** of the Public Sphere). According to this critique there is not one Public Sphere but various and often autonomous restricted public spheres (Fraser 1990).

(b) Other critiques claim that there is a sort of a **Hierarchysation** between discourse within public spaces – that is to say, the importance and the impact of the different public discourses are not the same.

(c) Other critiques underlines the **inequality of access** in the public sphere both for *persons* and *discourses*. (c1) They argue that public sphere is easier accessible to some political and economic Elite in contrast to politically and financially powerless groups of citizens. (c2) As regard to the discourses, the critique consist of saying that discourses which reinforce, legitimize and reproduce the dominant ideas, norms and values can easier penetrate the public sphere compare to discourses which contesting dominant opinions and values and aiming at the transformation of these opinions and ideas (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Gitlin 1992).

(d) Finally some other critiques emphasise on **gender inequality of access** of a given public sphere. Men and women they do not have the equal representation nor the same impact in a given Public Sphere.

Public sphere as an Open Concept

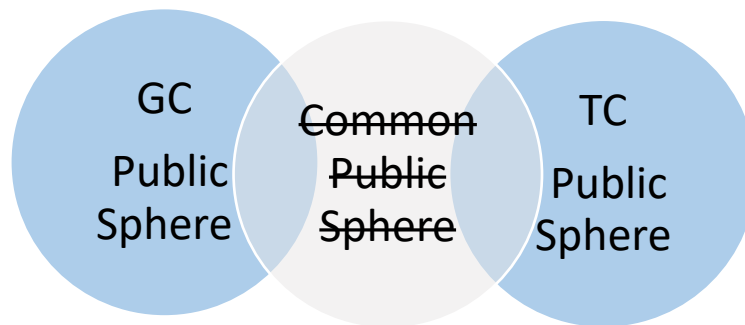
In other words, much communication studies are in agreement about the failure of the mass media to adequately facilitate a public sphere of open and reflexive debate necessary for strong democratic culture.

But, it seems that academics they actually used the concept or at least the idea of public sphere in order to demonstrate the above theoretical critical perspective and argumentation. Which means that the concept of Public Sphere is in a way a useful concept for describing the function of media in a society. Especially if one takes into consideration the above critiques and the limits of the initial theory of Habermas. As we will try to do...

We have to say that we use the concept of public sphere here as an open concept in which one can introduce various other concepts in order to overpass its limits and in order to make it operational and effective for a particular context and case study. As it is the context of Cyprus and the case of Cyprus conflict.

Public Sphere: in Cyprus

So now, if we focus on the case of Cyprus, we can observe the existence of two mainstream public spheres, or, better, the inexistence of a common mainstream public sphere for the whole island. Of course the problem here, is not the existence of two autonomous public spheres; but the inexistence of a wider public sphere; a Common public sphere in which the two ethnic public spheres could bring topics, issues and concerns from the periphery to the centralised-federal public life in order to generate critical debate amongst a wider bi-communal public and audience.



Cyprus media as 'ethnic' media?

From this perspective one can argue that mainstream media in Cyprus are, defacto, functioning as Ethnic media. Their target audience is either GC or TC citizens; and thus they only cover issues and matters of the territory in which they operate, either GC or TC site.

Even if the ethnic and broadly community media are often associated to positive conclusions in the international scientific literature of media studies, we think though that some important problematic elements and characteristics of this type of media need to be discussed.

For example in the case of Cyprus, one can argue that this ethnic character of media in Cyprus allows a wider freedom of expression of the minor community, that is to say the TC one, to express its concerns and its proper issues independently of the major community- GC.

According to Mark Deuze (2006) the attention paid to diversity issues in general and ethnic minority issues in particular in European mainstream media has gone down in recent years, prompting a network of over 740 multicultural and media organizations, representatives of ethnic minorities, politicians and individuals in 49 different countries to draw up a 'European Manifesto of Minority Community Media' in 2004, calling for recognition of minority community media as basic public service.

But, as Sunstein (2001) argues, a consequence of the expansion of community/ethnic media is that it works in favour of the growth of group polarization (2001: 65) and this is likely to become more extreme with time. As such, Sunstein contends that two preconditions for a

well-functioning, deliberative democracy are threatened by the growth of the internet. According to Sunstein, first, people should be exposed to materials that they have not chosen in advance. This results in a reconsideration of the issues and often a recognition of the partial validity of opposing points of view. Second, So Sunstein argues that people should have a range of common experiences, in order to may come to an understanding with respect to particular issues. In other words, it is not enough to be informed of the opposite opinions and conflicting positions but one needs to know the perspective and the point of view through which these opinions and positions have been formed. This is fundamental in order to achieve an understanding and make a compromise which I think is necessary for the (non-violent) resolution of any conflict.

It is also important, as Nicos argued before, to bring to light other issues and debates, social, environmental, financial on which the rival opinions and positions go beyond the ethnic origins. That is to say debates which are able to create coalitions between GC and TC.

Analytical Fragments of a Fragmented Public Sphere

So now, if we take into consideration the various studies on the coverage of the Cyprus conflict, both sites, the results confirm the argument of Sunstein. That is to say, both in the South and North of Cyprus news media contribute rather to maintain and reinforcing the conflict than to its resolution. And that, by mainly constructing semantically the members of the 'other' community as evils, blameable and thus entities "to be protected from" and in contrast they construct the members of their community as victims, blameless, and thus entities "to protect"; (Avramidou 2016; Bailie & Azgin 2008; Christophorou, Sahin & Pavlou 2010; Lyndon 2011, Trimikliniotis 2004).

As Bailie and Azgin (2008) argue, historically, the Cypriot media, instead of providing the necessary elements for increased understanding and for the promotion of peace, they have tended to boost the bi-communal conflict and suspicion.

In some exceptional cases, the pro-reunification media promote overly simplistic discourses and arguments for the reunification and the peace between the two communities. (They emphasise on the idea of brotherhood and bi-communal friendship by ignoring the complexity for the formation of these relations).

Conflict-oriented journalism, within Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot media, is often identified with the outbreak of bi-communal violence in the mid-1950s and again in the mid-1960s or after the division of the island in 1974. But this is wrong. That is why it is important to clarify that this kind of journalism it appears earlier, even with the creation of the first newspapers in the island back in 1878.

Conflict-oriented journalism transcends the bi-communal fights of the 1950s and 1960s and the Coup d'Etat and the Turkish invasion of 1974. In fact During these periods, inter-communal fighting only amplified an already long standing journalistic tradition and contributed to align both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot newspapers and journalists with the corresponding "national struggles" (Bailie & Azgin 2008).

As Sophocleous argues, the first GC newspapers, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, they have "promoted the demand of the Greeks of Cyprus that the island should be ceded to Greece" (Sophocleus, 2006, p. 1).

In turn, the earliest TC newspaper, Zaman [The Times] states in its first issue, that one of the purposes for its publication was "to fight against the numerous Greek newspapers which were propagating the Greek view on the Cyprus question and to resist the Enosis movement" (Azgin, 1998, p. 642).

So, when we look at contemporary journalistic practices in the Cypriot media, and their deeply conflict-centred and antagonistic discourse, it is not difficult to recognise the leftovers of this late nineteenth century ethnic struggle, in the newly established Cypriot public sphere.

TOWARDS A DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Promises of Digital Public Sphere for the Cyprus Conflict

So the question now is to try to understand in what extent the formation of a Digital – of an Online, Common Public Sphere could help to overpass the ethnic conflict, by providing the means for the voicing of positions and identities which are excluded from the traditional mass media in both sides of the island. The online technology makes accessible the journalistic content produced by media of one site to the citizens of the other site. And this could give the possibility to the citizens from both sites for a better understanding of opinions and positions

of each other. Digital communication offers the possibility of the creation of new and alternative media. Media which aiming at promoting the understanding between members of the two communities and at creating new intercommunal synergies. As you know establishing a website or an Online News Media is easier objective and of course it dements less important financial investment from the founders. At the same time, Internet also reinforce the rise of Citizen Journalism by enabling direct communication between members of the two communities. Especially through the use of social media (Facebook, blogs etc.). And this could give the opportunity to the users both sites to undertake dialogue and discussion. And the opportunity for example to organise common events and public actions.

Critiques and potentialities of Digital Public Sphere for conflict resolution in Cyprus

While Internet is seen by many analysts to be extending the debate on traditional Public Sphere, however, there is some ambivalence among critical theorists as to the future role of the internet in advancing the public sphere. And those can also be applied to the case of Cyprus.

As regards to the question of accessing the content of the media of the one site by citizens of the other site of the island: the major problem is linguistic, that is to say the language of communication. News media of the GC community they produce stories in Greek and TC media produce news in Turkish. While the majority of GC they do not speak Turkish and the majority of TC do not speak Greek. The only exception is the online news portal of PIK/KRYK/CYBC the public media corporation of the Republic of Cyprus, but which present a very low traffic. And of course as you can imagine it delivers a government friendly coverage. Further exploration of the audience of this online news media will be interesting I thing. In both sites it exist few online mainstream media which produce and disseminate news in English. Some of them only in English (Cyprus mail), and some of them in English and in Greek (sigmalive) or in English and in Turkish.

As regards to the question of the creation of new and alternative media: On the one hand, as we have argued earlier the internet is providing the means for the voicing of positions and identities excluded from the mass media. On the other hand, a number of problems are limiting the extensiveness and effectiveness of this voicing. One of the most significant

problems is the corporate colonisation of cyberspace, and subsequent marginalisation of alternative information and communication (Dahlberg, 2005). A number of recent studies show how online corporate portals and media sites are gaining the most attention oriented to public communication, including news, information, and discussion. And the problem is that these sites generally support conservative discourse and consumer practices. The result is a marginalisation online of the same voices which are also marginalised offline.

It exist a small number of alternative online media but we need to say that the thematic core of the news coverage and news reporting remains the “Cyprus Problem”. Also, they are mainly not bilingual but in English. It exists few alternative bilingual online news media but they provide different content in the two languages. In fact usually they do not produce original content but they republish the news and the articles of other online media. And often the selection of the content to be republished is based on the criterion of “reunification friendly content”. We need to underline and emphasize though that corporate colonisation is as yet only partial, and control of attention and meaning is highly contested by multiple ‘alternative’ discursive spaces online.

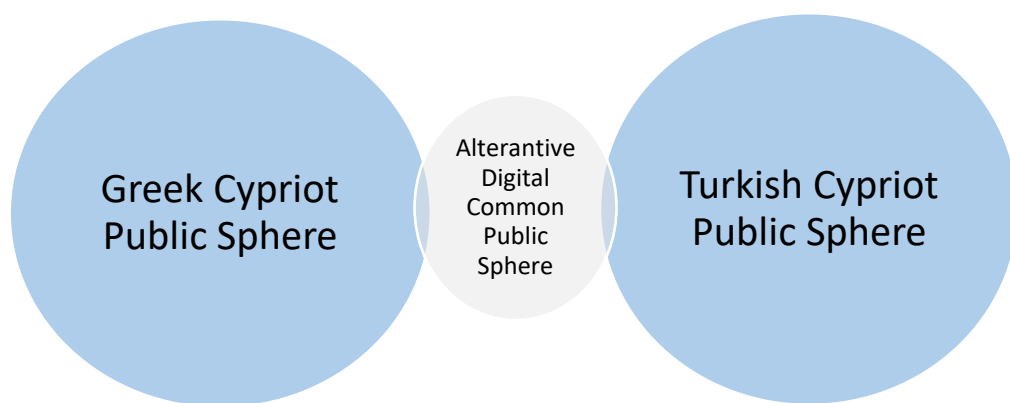
Finally as regards to the possibility of reinforcing the rise of Citizen Journalism: one can notice the creation of bi-communal groups on social media, especially on Facebook. This groups enable a direct discussion between members of the two communities, fact which is very important for the creation of synergies. Furthermore the last years one can observe the formation of few groups and synergies which their focus is not only the Cyprus problem, but other issues, mainly environmental.

These initiatives of course hold the promise of reviving the autonomous public spheres since they fill political discussion with information otherwise unavailable in the public sphere. Also these social media and alternative online media may contribute, in a long term, to create of a Common Public Sphere.

But at the same time, we need to mention that new media literacy and language barriers compromise the representativeness of social media in the digital sphere. Finally, internet-based technologies, may enable discussion between people both sides of the island, but frequently fragmentize political discourse though (Zisi Papacharisi 2002), in the sense that

these discussions and synergies stay out of the ordinary coverage of the mainstream corporate media and thus of the broader audience and citizens.

We need to take into consideration the dynamic of this process of formation of a Common Public Sphere. It is relatively a new phenomenon that we try to observe and analyse in movement. So this request further exploration and careful study in order to start building substantial and evidence-based knowledge about the Digitallity of the public sphere, its promises and its boundaries for the process of conflict resolution in Cyprus.



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