

Reporting Conflict and Peace in Cyprus: Journalism Matters

Sanem Şahin

Springer Nature Switzerland AG

Switzerland, 2023 (pp. 215)

Softcover ISBN: 978-3-030-95012-5

The book *Reporting Conflict and Peace in Cyprus: Journalism Matters* deals with a thorny issue, which we do already, and will constantly find in front of us: The role of journalism in times of conflict.

The role of journalists in conflict situations will be a matter of debate and constant redefinition because conflicts will increase more and more.

The war in Ukraine, Israel's invasion of Gaza, the political changes in the Sahel countries after the expulsion of France, and the West's (so far) verbal confrontations with China are preparing humanity for the return of conflicts and wars. The active involvement of the West, if wars cease to be a regional issue, also places European and American journalism in front of new questions and new challenges. So, what is the role of journalism in times of crisis, wars, massacres and genocides?

Sanem Şahin's book covers the entire range of topics covered by the term 'journalism': profession, industry, institution, ideology, and craft, through the prism of many years of Cypriot experience. The chapter following the introduction describes the major theories on journalism, peace, and conflict. The third chapter analyses the historical context of the conflict and the role played by the Media. The fourth chapter focuses on the profession, on its degrees of autonomy, professional organisations, and education. The fifth chapter highlights the relations between peace and journalism in Cyprus, while the last chapter, the sixth, describes the changes brought about by digital journalism in Cyprus.

The greatest virtue of the book is that the author's field research through personal interviews with professionals on both sides of the Green Line highlighted many weaknesses of Cypriot journalism. Among many apt observations, I single out the author's finding that the privatisation of the media did not bring the pluralism it had promised when the state monopoly was abolished (p. 71). I also point out, through concrete and well-known examples, the interventions of the ownership to the jour-

nalists that set the real content of the free press that typically exists (pp. 108-109). Among many others, I furthermore single out the misunderstandings and distortions created by the 'double mediation' model which is widely used by Turkish Cypriot newspapers (p. 128).

The views of journalists hosted by the author allow not only academics, but equally seriously journalists and politicians, to revisit the weaknesses of the press in all its forms (newspapers, televisions, radios, and online media).

However, the book suffers from a serious methodological weakness. The author strives to stand in the middle of the Green Line and examine both media systems with the same criteria and from the same perspective. However, this starting point is not just incomplete, it is wrong. She mentions, for example, that the Greek Cypriots present the issue of the conflict as a matter of international occupation (p. 54). Elsewhere, she states that for the Greek Cypriots, Turkey is a country that invaded and divided the island and remains an obstacle to solving the problem (p. 97).

The issue goes beyond the opinions of Greek Cypriot journalists because it is a matter of international legitimacy. In the many pages that the author devotes to describing the conflict, the UN's condemnations of Turkey have found no space at all.

Through eliminating the condemnation of Turkey by international organisations and bringing a state (the Republic of Cyprus) and a pseudo-state that does not enjoy legitimacy to the same fate, the author brings the two parties at an equal distance. Thus, the abuser is equated with the victim.

The initial - methodological bias of the author creates many additional biases in the process. For example, she aptly cites illiteracy as a barrier to newspaper reading, particularly in the past (p. 62). However, a bigger obstacle to the impact of the media, even in the occupied territories, is their colonisation by Turks who have nothing to do with Cyprus: not historically, not educationally, not culturally, not even emotionally. The planned settlement that Ankara has been perpetrating in the occupied territories has altered the composition of the population. As a result, that cultural cohesion that would allow the increase in press circulation and even the recognition of its role is missing. However, the author, making a biased reading of modern reality, loses sight of aspects of it, which, were she to incorporate into her research, would depict reality more faithfully.

The undifferentiated way in which it deals with the political elites in both parts of the island is also detrimental to the completeness of the investigation. Both in the free part of Cyprus and in the occupied part, there were politicians who have been

promoting the vision of a united Cyprus, and others who have undermined it. Considering them, in terms of context analysis, blurs the internal dividing lines that have always existed.

The author's attitude regarding the role of Turkey, in my opinion, does injustice to the serious, original, and in-depth work that she has done to highlight the management of the conflict by journalists in Cyprus.

Sofia Iordanidou