

Paradise Lost: Media Representation and the 2013 Financial and Political Crises in Cyprus

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Social conflicts in the form of citizen protests have historically performed a critical role in the development, maintenance and subsequent enactments of democracy, and they will continue to do so in the current climate of capitalism in decline and systems of governance in question. In liberal democratic political theory, social conflicts serve the function of bridging, overcoming and even transcending possible disconnects between publics, opinion formation and policy-making. Within the realm of more recent social theory, they provide opportunity of crystallising new collective identities and connective actions (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011). As evidenced in the 2013 financial crisis in Cyprus, the Eurozone crisis has revealed political dynamics which have contributed to the emergence of new conflicts within a European Union (EU) member state, among EU countries and between citizens and elites over the willingness and capacity of governments to enter into political dialogue and maintain public accountability. In today's society where the politics that animate dissent have become extensively mediated (Cottle, 2008), media representation of conflicting social and political interests and the contention that surrounds them, particularly against the background of the Eurozone or global financial crisis, constitutes one of the central themes in current research on media and political economy of communication (Mercille, 2015; Statham and Trenz, 2012). How does the contingent role of media hegemony and resistance co-exist as forms of economic, political and social conflict facilitate, restrict or even transform the manifestations and inclusions of the ordinary, the contentious as well as the powerful and privileged? More broadly, the debate on whether or not and in what form traditional and new media are related to the nature and practice of democratic politics has generated considerable attention.

With these questions in consideration, analysing media discourse on the 2013 Cypriot financial crisis would require reflective identification and deconstruction of the processes of media representation which unfold the deliberate (dis)connectedness between public response and national and international governance, intertwined with the media politics of dissent, as a discursive and negotiated dimension, continuously constituting, maintaining and structuring the notion of a (European) public sphere and fundamentally, outcomes of democratic politics. In particular, this special issue explores

the interception between the functions and roles of traditional and new media and their portrayal of a range of issues including the economic, political and social factors responsible for both creating and resolving the financial crisis and political division of the country as a more historical and deep-seated crisis; the current state of the financial and regulatory system which has contributed to the crisis or has played a definitive role in the unfolding of key events of the crisis (as partially presented and criticised in the media); the bailout negotiations between the government and the Eurogroup; the public responses such as the March 2013 protests and the major challenges the government must tackle in order to afford realistic and effectual recovery strategies and measures. Analysis of these political actions is especially situated within discussion of the role of social media in generating public trust and that of community media in fostering reconciliatory conflict resolution and crisis management. This issue attempts to deepen understanding of the unique Cypriot experience in the Eurozone financial crisis as well as identify some underlying themes of the global capitalist crisis and the debates of economic and political alternatives and the potential of the (networked) public sphere to engage citizens in the democratic processes. In doing so, this collection contributes to critical and analytical interpretation of the contemporary significance of the public sphere as a contingent interplay of historical, social and political conditions and practices, particularly those concerned with the relationship between media and democracy, which is crucial to the utilisation of social conflict as a resource for political change.

Media Representation and Media Power in Times of Crisis

The Eurozone financial crisis has overall brought a return to the importance of political economy and further intensification of neoliberalism and public exacerbation with the lacking of political accountability. For example, since 2008, Europe has witnessed waves of protests and demonstrations in EU member states including Cyprus which have experienced a financial crisis. On 14 November 2012, the Day of Social Protest, workers' strikes took place in Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy, and more recently in Belgium in 2014. This list is only a partial survey of the many social movements that have been described in the media as giving voice to the demands of 'the public' at a national and European level. Since the 2013 crisis, the Cypriot government has initiated and campaigned for through (social) media, some political and economic reforms, addressing issues in connection with the failure of financial institutions and their responsibility to develop and maintain a framework, supportive of a more balanced economic model beyond austerity measures. However, without providing the necessary enabling contexts to generate transparency and trust, there is no sufficient motivation among civil society to participate in any strategic restoring of the economy. So far, these reforms have produced little fundamental change in organisational functioning.

Similarly, established by the Irish government in May 2014, a national Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis has been investigating the factors and policies which impacted on or contributed to the systemic crisis in Ireland between 2002 and 2007, including the role of the media during the property boom.¹ The committee is formally empowered to conduct an inquiry by the Houses of the Oireachtas, the National Parliament, and all hearings have been broadcast live on TV and online in an attempt to engage the public. Regardless, the inquiry does not intend to provide solutions to the most critical challenges in government responsibility and accountability, but to act as a fact-finding mission to inform the restructuring implemented in the wake of the crisis and changes in approach after the crisis. In view of these developments, it must be asked how willing and capable democratic institutions are of responding to citizen's demands for policy change within concern about elite interests and the pluralist role of media and public opinion in politics. A critical issue at stake is to discern whose voice has been represented and legitimated in (the absence of) public dialogue in times of crisis.

This contention underlines the implications of media representation of social conflicts for progressive social change as it reflects upon the role of the media in structuring outcomes in democratic politics within the context that neoliberal politics has been particularly criticised for facilitating the dominance of media and financial institutions in the political sphere (Fenton, 2014). Nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged that the current state of media in facilitating political dialogue and underpinning democracy is complex. Globalisation, Europeanisation, neoliberal market fundamentalism, consumer-driven politics, media pluralism and the accompanying social and technological trends of freer and wider access to information all impinge on media consumption and influence on forms and spaces of public deliberation and concerted attempts to invest in political transparency, citizen participation and credible journalism (Cottle, 2008). As such, the current financial crisis has provided a context attesting media's functions and capacities of providing resources for processes of information, analysis and deliberation of complex and differing economic and political policies, interests and voices that enable democracy to function.

Pertinent to these complex relations is the potential of new media in transforming certain aspects of political activism and civic agency. Evidenced by the role of social media in articulating citizens' actions in 'We are the 99%' Wall Street demonstrations and M15 protests in Spain, digital technology has challenged more traditional citizen participation in political life and public deliberation practices in recent years. Facilitated by Facebook, Tweeter and citizens' blogs, connective actions among citizens have demonstrated that

1 Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis. Available at: [<https://inquiries.oireachtas.ie/banking/>], accessed on 20 April 2015.

civil society is a potentially powerful place for resistance and opposition (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011). In this sense, social media present great opportunities to foster citizen participation in society. However, for those who are willing and able to take advantage of the networked sphere, sustaining these participatory opportunities afforded by online media – beyond the significance of investigating concrete practices, ideologies and technological mechanisms – would principally require institutional support. Independent, new media are often connected to the ideal notion of public interest and democratic renewal, but critical to the understanding of (new) media and participation is the issue that participation through/in media will reach a limit circumscribing the exercise of power and its distribution and reproduction within a system of governance (Carpentier, 2011). Hence, the conceptual framing and immediate as well as broader societal contexts of participation need to recognise this political nature as ‘a situation where the actors involved in (formal or informal) decision-making processes are situated towards each other through power relationships that are (to some extent) egalitarian’ (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali, 2014, p. 124). In the process of strategic struggling for more participation and equality in each individual context within society of enduring political preconditions, one of which being the role of media, what matters is not whether society should have citizens willing to participate by means of technology or whether new media are capable of representing the voice of the public. What matters is whether ‘political institutions are able and willing to enter into a dialogical relationship with the public’ (Coleman, 2007, p. 375), providing opportunity structures that enhance citizens’ participation and their potential public influence.

In relevance of political dynamics at work in contemporary protest and media reporting, citizen protests and demonstrations still largely depend on mainstream media to amplify and sustain their message as well as mobilise and encourage support. It should be noted here that protests or crises are often news-worthy items, when journalistic norms and practices concerning gathering and presenting information are taken into careful consideration. The ‘watchdog’ analogy, the nominal role of the media as a force of opposition to those in power and as a defender of the rights of the public are still valid in some circumstances. Conversely, in a media system dominated by financial reward and political influence, media representation of social protests does not necessarily ensure consequential and meaningful participation; rather, it can be understood as a politically constructed signal of the capacity of citizens to have their opinions represented in the public domain and challenge the control of the decision-making agenda.

Critical theorists have long viewed (mainstream) media as pervasive and potent ideological artefacts that tend to promote hegemonic values and ideas in order to create society-wide consent over specific constructions and definitions of reality (Fallows, 1997; Gitlin, 1981). The media have a direct role in legitimating existing power relations albeit not exclusively. Entrenched values and interests are becoming more embedded in everyday

practices and strategies through which ‘normalcy’ is defined and propagated (Miller, 2002). In these circumstances, the media themselves are implicated in the social reproduction and coordination of power and inequalities through exercising a more critical influence associated with the elite’s capacity to shape the preconditions for decision making.

As ‘the machinery of representation in modern societies’, (Hall, 1986, p. 9), Stuart Hall argues that the media exercise great power to represent realities in certain definite ways and orient the public toward a set of limits and constrictions on knowledge. This understanding certainly assumes fairly powerful media effects in both generating and harnessing public opinion and sentiment. Correspondingly, power and resources can be distributed in a process where the media play a minimal role. Consent is not always needed to legitimate decision-making, or it can be obtained as described in Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) model of propaganda or manufacturing consent. Powerful governments may, and can, ignore even the strong and popular protests portrayed in the media. That said, the hegemonic character of media plays a significant role in shaping public perception of dominance and opposition and political influence and participation. In addition to the importance of institutional ownership, political culture, the nature of the economy and the market, direct and indirect censorship and societal conditions of media plurality, media representation surfaces as part of the structure of access where the validity of a system of governance is maintained. A validity that is called into question particularly in times of crisis and requires reinforcement (also evolvment), not in a separate sphere of ideological struggle, but throughout daily discourse and narratives which ultimately define and redefine ‘the area of what is considered as “reasonable talk” about anything, as the appropriate and inappropriate registers, as the intangible boundaries which rule the inclusion or exclusion of certain things’ (Hall, 1986, p. 12). This opens up the possibility of a struggle for hegemony in representation and the multi-acculturality of a media and political discourse alongside the material facts of conflicting power and interests as evidenced in the 2013 financial crisis in Cyprus.

The 2013 Financial Crisis in Cyprus

The Financial Crisis in Cyprus did not just land on the island, unannounced, one fine day in March 2013. Additionally in trying to analyse the causes of the crisis different answers come from different people who played a key role in the economic and political governance of the island during the period 2008–2013. Ex-President, Dimitris Christofias, leading the first elected Communist government in Europe, blamed the crisis on bad decisions by banks.² Athanasios Orphanides, the Governor of the Central Bank of

2 ‘President Christofias Attributes the Banking Crisis to Speculation and Wrong Moves’, *London Greek Radio* available at: [<http://www.lgr.co.uk/president-christofias-attributes-the-banking-crisis-to-speculation-and-wrong-moves/#sthash.RbdxG80j.dpuf>], accessed on 20 April 2015.

Cyprus, in complete contrast blamed the crisis on Dimitris Christofias' government for a 'total reversal in fiscal policy' that increased public expenditure to unprecedented levels.³

Clearly this crossing of wires and swords did not help in the development of a different strategy. There was short-sightedness as well with regard to the global recession and the unfolding Eurozone crisis. Many people try to pinpoint the origins of the crisis in Cyprus in ways that can best be described as dogmatic and one-sided without considering a range of factors which led the island to the point of requesting a €10 billion 'bailout' on 25 March 2013 from the Eurogroup, European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF): The triumvirate, more commonly known as 'The Troika' which is ironically a Russian noun meaning 'trio'. During the lead up to the bailout the term '*H Troika*' ['The Troika'] in media discourse was converted into '*Oi Troikanoi*' ['The Troikans'] which became a common word in the vernacular of the Republic of Cyprus. The appropriation of the term in everyday discourse carried diverse meanings. From the mouths of numerous politicians the 'Troikans' were 'our' last hope, and the essential bailout was the least painful option as 'Cyprus was one step away from collapse' according to newly elected DISY President Nicos Anastasiades.⁴ Two days after his rather short Presidential address to the people of Cyprus, other voices of dissent regarding the 'Troikans' and what they had to offer could be heard through different media representations. 'Exo i Troika apo tin Kypro' ['Troika out of Cyprus'] echoed from a protest outside EU house in Cyprus with a familiar melody to the four-decade old chant against the occupation of Cyprus 'Exo oi Tourkoi apo tin Kypro' ['Turks out of Cyprus'].⁵

Returning to issues of 'blame' and 'responsibility' it would be simplistic and inaccurate to play out roles attributed to specific politicians and banking officials by repeating their opposite calls for who was responsible. Politicians, bankers, and media are all somehow connected, even if they blatantly deny their connectivity. The relationships between different sectors in ruling hierarchies that influence public opinion and manufacture consent have been well argued by Chomsky and Herman, and Cyprus, like many societies, is no exception to this. Indeed such an approach is pertinent in the context of the financial crisis due to the intricacies of governance and the clientelistic character of many interactions in Cyprus (Mavratsas, 2003; Faustmann, 2010;

3 'If Christofias Had Only Taken Five Minutes', *Cyprus Mail*, 23 August 2013, available [on-line] at: [<http://cyprus-mail.com/2013/08/23/orphanides-says-euro-zone-crisis-may-flare-up-again/>], accessed on 20 April 2015.

4 'Cyprus Bailout: Anastasiades Speech to the Nation', 19 March 2013, available at: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elp-SEQ2meY>], last accessed on 20 April 2015.

5 'Cyprus: Cypriots Call on Troika to "Get out of Cyprus"' RT Reportage, 24 March 2013, available at: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXheDHscJMo>], last accessed on 20 April 2015.

Charalambous, 2014). Thus apportioning total blame to any one factor, person, institution, event or bad financial decision, runs the risk of inaccuracy, simplification and the creation of rhetorical one-sided dogma.

A further dimension is the subsequent relevance of Cyprus joining the EU in 2004 and the Eurozone in 2008. These two factors, whether one agrees/or disagrees with them ideologically or with hindsight are of high political and historic importance because they changed the way that governance and fiscal affairs operated, and brought Cyprus into a wider ‘amalgamation’ of countries, namely the European Union, along with the implementation of additional new laws, regulations, institutions and the decision-making bodies that resulted in the process. In vernacular terms, the ‘ordinary’ citizen was led to believe that there was much to ‘gain’ from both these historic events. Cyprus would become stronger in a geo-political sense, particularly in light of the fact that part of the island was, and still remains, occupied by Turkish military forces. Cypriots would be able to engage in EU-funded initiatives and programmes too. The Cyprus Pound would be replaced by a stronger more stable currency, the Euro, and generally the inhabitants of Cyprus would feel more secure, stable and prosperous as a member state in the EU. At the same time, little thought was given to the rhythm of politics and clientelism. Perhaps political parties (used inclusively here) thought they would simply carry on, business as usual. For instance, an institution like the Cyprus Central Bank – of which the Governor was often a political appointment from whoever ruled the Presidential Palace – was now accountable to the European Central Bank as well. This represented a significant change in personnel. The previous Governor of the Central Bank, Christodoulos Christodoulou, had a long political career, which included serving in three different ministries, Agriculture, Interior and Finance, until he was appointed Governor of the Central Bank in 2002 by President Clerides. In October 2014 Christodoulou was jailed for five months for tax evasion.⁶ From the moment Cyprus joined the EU and Eurozone respectively, such crucial appointments needed to be perceived differently. Christodoulou had been a successful politician and businessman whereas others who followed were distinguished academics specialising in economics. Christodoulou began life as a teacher in 1962, qualified as a lawyer by 1972, and then graduated from the University of Wales by 1992 with a PhD in labour law. It was not the same educational path as that taken by Athanasios Orphanides who served as Governor of the Central Bank of Cyprus between 3 May 2007 to 2 May 2012 with a PhD from Massachusetts Institute of Technology University in Cambridge, USA. Orphanides also served as a member of the Governing

6 ‘Former Cypriot Central Banker Begins Jail Term’, *Ekathimerini*, 28 October 2014, available [on-line] at: [http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsate2_1_28/10/2014_544100], last accessed on 20 April 2015.

Council of the European Central Bank during his time as Governor of the Bank of Cyprus, a clear indication of how things had changed as far as fiscal accountability stood after Cyprus joined the Eurozone.⁷ Similarly, Panicos Demetriades, selected to the post of Governor of the Bank of Cyprus following a series of public differences between the former Orphanides and newly elected President Dimitris Christofias, is likewise a distinguished academic with a PhD in Economics from the University of Cambridge. Demetriades served as Governor for two years (including the bailout period) after which he returned to being a Professor at Leicester University.⁸

Additionally, the bailout in Cyprus presents many questions around issues of legitimacy, which concern the role of the nation state in the EU as well as the role of the EU and a member state and the role of politics in that state. Loukas Tsoulakis explains this as a dilemma:

‘One of the problems in Europe is that in some areas policy decisions are taken either at the European level, yet our political discourse at the national level takes place as if Europe did not exist. So there is an illusion, obviously. We talk as if our governments have much more powers than they actually have. And that is dangerous because it can also lead to enormous frustration and disappointment with the political system.’⁹

As a political issue the legitimacy of a newly elected political leader, Nicos Anastasiades, was questioned because he will always be remembered in history as the President who, on 12 February 2013, declared ‘I will not sign a haircut’ but then two weeks later actually did the opposite.¹⁰ Many citizens questioned the wisdom of joining the EU and the Eurozone analogous to the aforementioned point about the ‘gain’ factor which now seemed more like a ‘pain’ factor. Questions were raised about the EU as an alliance of nations set up to avoid the conflicts and wars of the past. This unique partnership between 28 countries was now overseeing bailout projects financed by its own taxpayers to the further detriment of citizens throughout the EU, triggering rising

7 Details from Central Bank of Cyprus profile page on Governor Athanasios Orphanides, retrieved 20 April 2015 from: [http://web.archive.org/web/20110628234911/http://www.centralbank.gov.cy/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=6656].

8 Panicos Demetriades Academic Profile page, Department of Economics, The University of Leicester, UK, retrieved 20 April 2015 from: [<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/economics/people/pdemetriades>].

9 Paul Rohan, ‘The Nation State: Is it Dead?’ *BBC World Service* available at: [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/theneweuropa/wk18.htm>], last accessed on 20 April 2015.

10 ‘Anastasiades: I Will Not Sign a Haircut’, 12 February 2013, *Cyprus Economy* ‘Stockwatch’, available at: [http://www.stockwatch.com.cy/nqcontent.cfm?a_name=news_view&ann_id=166931&lang=en], last accessed on 20 April 2015.

unemployment together with significant welfare and spending cuts as a consequence. Some of the measures implemented in Cyprus had never been witnessed before in the EU. Immediately after the bailout was voted in the House of Representatives in Cyprus a maximum limit was imposed on cash withdrawals of €300 per day from any bank account in Cyprus; a move which lasted for two weeks. Moreover, banks were closed during this period as well. It was a strained fortnight for the ‘ordinary’ citizens of Cyprus who now experienced the ‘pain’ of a bailout. Some key factors in the crisis in Cyprus were interlinked with what happened in Greece. A badly managed high risk-taking banking sector and successive governments who relied on additional loans to pay back previous loans – rather like taking out a mortgage and then asking the bank for a second mortgage which would be paid back via a credit card – are two dynamics that both countries share. While many people claim that the countdown to doomsday in Cyprus was joining the Eurozone, what they fail to recognise is that joining the Euro itself was not the factor that steered Cyprus to financial meltdown in March 2013.

Cyprus joined the Eurozone on 1 January 2008 on the same day as another island in the Mediterranean, Malta. The two places have many commonalities in terms of a shared colonial past and heavy reliance on the tourism sector. However, aside from Malta not being a divided island, another key difference relates to banking sectors. The Governor of the Central Bank of Malta, Josef Bonnici stressed:

‘The problems facing Cypriot banks included losses made on their holdings of Greek bonds, whereas Maltese domestic banks have limited exposure to securities issued by the programme countries.’¹¹

In Cyprus the banking sector invested heavily on high risk assets abroad. Greek government bonds turned highly toxic following the bailout in Greece in 2010 making the Cyprus banking sector completely unstable. Reflecting on such realities one could pose the question that surely, Cypriot banks were not so naïve; could they not actually see this coming?

But as stated earlier, the bailout did not land in Cyprus one day in March led by an Alien species called ‘Troikans’, it was the culmination of many factors, events and poorly managed scenarios which reflect an overall lack of vision by political leaders and their parties, not only in Cyprus but more so in Greece, who for decades had worked on clientelistic relationships and manoeuvrings, dealing and exploiting their constituents. The demise, for instance, of the former leading party, PASOK, that won 43.9% of votes

11 Kurt Sansone, ‘Don’t Compare Malta to Cyprus’, *The Times of Malta*, 27 March 2013, available at: [<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20130327/local/Don-t-compare-Malta-to-Cyprus-bank-chief.463152>], last accessed on 20 April 2015.

in the 2009 Parliamentary elections in Greece but then disintegrated to an astonishingly low 4.68% in the general Parliamentary elections of 2015, is indicative of a rejection of previous establishment politics.¹² Yet whether this shift is telling of a different, new Left wave, as expressed through SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), could be viewed as too pre-emptive. After all 'New Labour' under Tony Blair in Britain appeared consolidated in its power but declined in the space of just over a decade.¹³

SYRIZA is, nonetheless, very different contextually due to the economic crisis in Greece which is comparable only to the hardship and strife of the Great Depression of 1931. Indeed, in their fascinating analysis Chouliarakis and Lazaretou (2014) bring home a number of empirically validated comparisons on the crises in Greece which are expressed in the following terms:

'Comparisons with the interwar period show that the current crisis of the Greek economy should be classified a great depression rather than a great recession and that the inability of the national authorities to credibly adhere to their commitment to a nominal anchor was at the root of the country's failure.'¹⁴

Additionally, this kind of comparison would be interesting to explore through future research on the impact of the Great Depression on Cyprus, which was then a British Colony, although it must be noted that the severity and extent of the current debt is much higher in Greece.

Political shifting is likewise notable in Spain with Podemos – a movement established in 2014 – taking 8% of the votes in European Elections within 4 months of its creation, and likely to improve on its share of the vote in the near future.¹⁵ But Cyprus, as is often the case, proves to be an exception as the 'left' alternative was actually in power, in the form of AKEL, the Communist Party, before the bailout was agreed. So while it is tempting to reflect on the rise of a new left in Europe that may be opening a new parliamentary road to socialism, it is also clear that people who are dissatisfied across the EU want results; they want to experience an improvement. Syriza, as a movement like its predecessors PASOK, will be evaluated by the Greek electorate at the ballot box, just as

12 Statistics on Elections in Greece taken from 2009 and 2015 respectively from sources available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_legislative_election,_2009] and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_legislative_election,_2015], last accessed both sites on 20 April 2015.

13 Justin Parkinson, 'The Rise and Fall of New Labour', *BBC News*, 3 August 2010, available at: [<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-10518842>], accessed 31 January 2015.

14 G. Chouliarakis and S. Lazaretou (2014) 'Déjà Vu? The Greek Crisis Experience, the 2010s versus the 1930s. Lessons from History', Working Paper No. 176, *Bank of Greece*, February 2014.

15 Presentation by Miguel Vicente, 'Political Disaffection, Media Coverage and Social Protests' at *The Media and The Crisis Cyprus Workshop*, Altius Hotel, 18 March 2015.

AKEL in Cyprus when Conservative DISY Candidate, Nicos Anastasiades was elected shortly before the bailout in March 2013.

What these parties do share, however, is a stigmatisation as ‘extreme leftists’ by numerous political opponents (in key positions of power in the EU) and this is similarly reflected through some international media outlets. For instance, a few days after the election of the Syriza government in Greece, conservative Derk Jan Eppink, a former journalist and author of the book *Life of a European*, drew a parallel between the rise of what he called the ‘extreme left’ and the ‘extreme right’ and how these form the core of today’s Euro-sceptics.¹⁶ In the same week in early February, the BBC journalist, Emily Maitlis, interviewed the newly appointed Greek Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis. The interview could be seen as an example of how not to conduct an interview, or a case of bias for Media Studies students to observe as a specimen study.¹⁷ It is worth noting that this video literally went viral globally in the space of its first 24 hours with 357,985 plays on *YouTube*.¹⁸ This statistic does not include the millions of people who may have viewed it through its original source via the BBC.

To close, it should be argued that both movements, SYRIZA and Podemos represent a spirit of citizens’ indignation to austerity measures that are simply submerging debt-ridden economies into further debt upon debt, and these measures – a result of a succession of badly negotiated bailout agreements in different countries such as Greece and Cyprus – could well become a political boomerang. The disturbing upswing of far rightist and openly racist groupings in many countries across Europe has a certain historical resonance with the failures of the Weimar Republic in Germany and the rise of the Nazi party. What the EU created so that future war and division could be avoided may be in danger of making an unwelcome appearance. This is by no means scare mongering but a reality check. The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn are now the third largest party in Greece, and the prospect of them ever coming to power would have a dramatic impact also on Cyprus.

16 Speech by Derk Jan Eppink MEP European Parliament, seminar on ‘EU Journalism and the Way Ahead’, 4 February 2015.

17 Greek Finance Minister interviewed on ‘Newsnight’ by Emily Maitlis, 30 January 2015, *BBC 2*, was available at: [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0512kdk>], last accessed on 2 February 2015.

18 Yanis Varoufakis Newsnight interview hosted by Sphaera21 available at: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiIO4YciewU>], last accessed on 2 February 2015, unfortunately the clip is no longer available but the interview can be accessed on Vimeo at: [<https://vimeo.com/119911142>].

This Special Issue

This collection of articles aims to investigate representations of the Cypriot financial crisis and complex political realities including the long-standing political division of the country in various media: national and international, mainstream and alternative, online and offline. Specifically, this issue explores media discourse on a range of issues such as citizens' articulation of discontent against the failing institutions and systems and lack of political representation in the context of the financial crisis, the bailout negotiations between the government and the EU, the public reactions including the March 2013 protests and institutional strategies to contain the crisis and the aftermath.

In the lead article, 'Overcoming the Protest Paradigm? Framing of the 2013 Cypriot Protests in International Online News Media', Tao Papaioannou examines whether portrayal of the 2013 Cypriot protests in international news media conforms to the protest paradigm, framing characteristics that are protective of dominant values and interests. A framing analysis of protest coverage by the New York Times (NYT), BBC News and Euronews reveals contrasting results. In consideration of media interactions with political elites and their representations of relevant social criticism, this article discusses the possibility of international news media conditionally deviating from the protest paradigm in favour of multi-perspective approaches, permitting a more functional discourse to emerge from social conflicts.

Juxtaposing a framing analysis of coverage of the crisis in national newspapers, Lia Spyridou analyses the dominant frames of 'drama' and 'inevitability' which diminish protestors' potential to affect policy-making. Although the political orientation of the papers proves a factor of diversification, media coverage is mainly elite-sourced, episodic and lacking in-depth analysis. Finally, the findings provide some insight on how the politics of futility and fear coupled by the 'responsible politics' discourse articulated in the media contribute to the development of modest protest dynamics.

Radio is actually an under-researched area in Cyprus, despite its pervasiveness as a media platform in our everyday lives. There are currently over 60 radio stations in the Republic of Cyprus, possibly one of the highest ratios in terms of population size in Europe. George Pavlides' empirical study on radio news broadcasts in the days preceding and following the bailout decision is a pioneering piece of research since it is the first time anyone has attempted to undertake a detailed analysis of radio news content. One of the major findings of this essay is the comparative lack of knowledge by radio stations on the terminology of 'the haircut' [*to kourema*] which was not referred to until it was announced on 12 March 2013. Pavlides' study also indicates a number of tendencies, for or against the 'bailout' and an overall absence of real alternatives.

Among many issues which will have significant influence on any possible solutions to the Cypriot financial crisis and their successful implementation is the political division of

Cyprus as the more persistent and deep-seated conflict and crisis. The Cyprus problem, the prevailing political discourse and public perceptions and even prejudices associated with the notions and processes of conflict resolution and crisis management, underline the public's dependence on the political system for solutions and the urgent need to seek theoretical and media alternatives. Beginning with a discussion on the material and discursive components of conflict transformation, Nico Carpentier argues for the need to complement the dominance of material and psychological approaches with a more discursive-cultural approach. Situated within Mouffe's theoretical understanding of antagonism and agonism, analysis of the broadcasts of three programmes by MYCYradio, the Cypriot web community radio station, reveals themes supportive of agonistic discourse.

Immigration is an important topic of contestation across Europe. Since the 1990s, the retreat of multiculturalism and the current financial crisis have resulted in pressures exerted on immigrants to conform and integrate. Dimitra Milioni, Lia Spyridou and Konstantinos Vadratsikas employ framing analysis of online articles and television news stories about third-country immigrants that appeared in the Cypriot media in 2013 when the consequences of the financial crisis were most strongly felt by the Cypriot population. The findings reveal the explicit discursive and sourcing mechanisms by which immigration is constructed as a problem and immigrants are 'othered' in the media discourse.

Online social media and the role they play in protest and during times of crisis have been explored extensively by many scholars such as Bennett, Castells, Valenzuela, Anduiza, Cristancho and Sabucedo. Yet their function in terms of Cyprus and the bailout has not been explored to date. The contribution by Vasiliki Triga and Venetia Papa is valuable in terms of the context of Cyprus and the formation of collective identities through the social media platform Facebook. They examine these constructions methodologically in terms of online identity, political formation and different notions of collectivity. The connections for action between online/'virtual' and offline/'reality' in terms of impact/effectiveness are also explored regarding the bailout in Cyprus and its aftermath. Their research raises important questions on passivity/activism and the stereotype that civil society is an aggregator for change, when in fact, very little change actually occurred in Cyprus with regard to questioning austerity and the authorities which advocate it as a remedy.

Furthermore, social media are becoming progressively more important in the role they play in increasing political participation nationally and internationally. In times of crisis, social media offer a different approach to stimulate citizen engagement in political life, reshaping creative structures and methods of contemporary political communication in the way that politicians and citizens can interact with one another. Marcos

Komodromos investigates the current role of the social media used by Cypriot Members of Parliament and politicians to reach out, communicate and network with their audiences in times of political change and crisis in Cyprus. A qualitative study is adopted using face-to-face interviews in order to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individual participants in Cyprus.

Popular Music Studies has a limited bibliography in Cyprus to date and Mike Hajimichael re-addresses this imbalance with reference to three songs from Cyprus about crisis. Fort Bravo, Monsieur Doumani, and Haji Mike & Dub Caravan made songs from three different musical genres all of which have some connection contextually through their references and reflections on contemporary life in Cyprus. These links are explored through a number of themes relative to the economic crisis and understanding songs as commentary, narrative and alternative critique on everyday lived experiences as echoed by musicians. This, it is argued, empathises closely with Les Back's notion of sociology as 'the art of listening' (2008).

Looking backward and forward, the key issue regarding the economic crisis in Cyprus is why the system failed its citizens in such a tumultuous and catastrophic way. Interlinked with who is held responsible and what punitive actions were taken has led many people to raise countless questions on legitimacy, populism and political rhetoric and transparency. Nicos Pavlides poses these questions with regard to the legal and regulatory system, and how it allowed the banking sector to plummet in such a self-destructive manner. In his detailed article he addresses such critical concerns and questions what should be done, and what specific changes and improvements should be made to the legal and regulatory system to avoid the repetition of such calamitous events occurring again in Cyprus.

Finally, as an afterword, Suman Gupta takes the preceding different specificities of the Cyprus conjuncture to a wider context based on the exploration of what the two broad concepts, namely crises and media representation can mean. The key argument in terms of crisis and media is contemplated between issues of 'framing' (often associated with intended bias) and the 'watchdog' role assumed/expected from the media. Such an approach has certain catalytic qualities not so much by providing clear cut answers but through raising key questions on media as 'practice' and media as 'pedagogy'. That media have a 'watchdog' role is undeniable, the challenge is how can this be transformed into teaching media as a practice or even praxis – something which generally in a synoptic sense, this special edition, has contributed to.

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