

Overcoming the Protest Paradigm? Framing of the 2013 Cypriot Protests in International Online News Media

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Abstract

Earlier research on media coverage of social protests has yielded evidence of a protest paradigm: framing patterns that articulate support for entrenched interests and values. However, recent studies are detecting less predictable media responses, indicating the need to identify the extent of application of the paradigm and the underlying determinants within the changing media politics of dissent. This study investigates whether and how the protest paradigm is incorporated in the portrayal of the 2013 Cypriot protests in international online news media. A framing analysis of protest coverage by the news websites of the New York Times (NYT), BBC News and Euronews reveals contrasting results. NYT demonstrates the tendency to employ spectacle frames, privilege official sources and situate the protests within strict economic analysis. Alternatively, BBC News – more sympathetic than Euronews – constructs stories with frames legitimating protestors' perspective and questioning governing institutions. Finally, in consideration of the media's orientation to the destabilising elite consensus embedded in the crisis and their representations of relevant social criticism, this article examines the possibility of international news media conditionally moving away from the protest paradigm towards multi-perspective approaches, permitting a more credible discourse to emerge from social conflicts.

Keywords: news framing, the protest paradigm, media politics, online media, BBC News, Euronews, the New York Times (NYT), the 2013 Cypriot crisis

Introduction

From the Arab Spring to the 'Indignados', from Occupy Wall Street to the food riots, citizens living in authoritarian regimes as well as Western democracies are demanding social and political change through protests, strikes and revolutions. Exacerbated by the global financial crisis, there has been a steady increase in protests since 2008 in higher

1 The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Eugene and Paul Belz for their very constructive suggestions and comments.

income countries, particularly those within the European Union (EU), against the adoption of austerity measures among other radical economic doctrines by the global neoliberal order. Using protests as a legitimate mechanism of political representation in democratic societies outside the more direct and conventional political channels, protesting citizens usually aim to achieve their objectives through either influencing particular target groups such as key decision makers and constituencies or communicating their agendas to as wide an audience as possible. In this process, protestors rely on the media to convey, amplify and sustain their messages in order to obtain validation in the public discourse, mobilise political support and broaden the scope of conflict (McCarthy, McPhail and Smith, 1996). Consequently, media portrayal of protests – or a lack thereof – influences the dynamics and outcomes of social conflicts.

As evidenced in the Egyptian revolution, the use of social media in articulating citizens' actions and mobilising social movements has challenged protestors' dependence on mainstream media to reach the public. Social media and other internet-based information technologies are indeed transforming certain aspects of political activism and civic agency as they provide access to far more information, the capability to reach out to larger audiences and the possibilities for a greater level of direct and personal involvement (Dahlgren, 2009; Papaioannou, 2013). However, despite the opportunities afforded by independent and alternative media platforms on the internet, mainstream news media especially in online format, are still largely relevant for protestors' politics of inclusion in the wider society. In the Arab Spring movement or protests in Spain and Greece related to the Eurozone financial crisis, social media proved crucial to the coordination of national and international collective actions and the promotion of new political values (Papaioannou and Olivos, 2013), yet mainstream media were essential for public recognition of the political causes (Khondker, 2011).

Nonetheless, critical theorists have proposed that representations of protests in mainstream media tend to follow a political process that is protective of dominant interests and values (Hertog and McLeod, 1995; Lipari, 1996). David Miller notes that 'Ruling ideas' (2002, p. 260) are embedded in daily practices and strategies through which normalcy is defined and propagated. In these circumstances, the media themselves are implicated in the social reproduction and coordination of power through exercising a more critical influence associated with the elite's capacity to shape the (pre)conditions for decision making within a system of governance. Media representations of social protests hence can be argued as politically constructed signals of the capacity of citizens to have their opinions represented in the public domain and challenge the control of the decision-making agenda. This contention underscores the role of the news media in structuring outcomes in democratic politics within the context that neoliberal politics has been particularly criticised for facilitating the rising power of media conglomerates and the dominance of corporate interests in the political sphere. In today's society where politics

has become extensively mediated (Cottle, 2008), how the news media depict protests and the contention that surrounds them are integral to the media politics of dissent and are consequential for overcoming (or not) possible disconnects between publics, opinion formation and policy-making. In this sense, it is critically necessary to explore the news media's coverage of protests in the Eurozone crisis which has revealed political dynamics contributing to social conflicts within a 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 and transparency.

Embedded in the processes of producing news on protests, the media often specifically resort to the 'protest paradigm', framing characteristics that articulate support for the legitimacy of the existing power structure. In the context of public protests in the 2013 Cypriot financial crisis, this empirical investigation examines whether protest coverage by three international online news media conforms to the protest paradigm. This study proceeds as follows. First, it reviews the literature on the protest paradigm within the realm of news framing and the increasingly more complex media politics of dissent. Then, it briefly describes the bailout negotiations in the Cypriot financial crisis and the public protests as a response. Following a framing analysis of protest coverage by the news websites of the New York Times,² BBC News³ and Euronews,⁴ the findings indicate varying applications of protest paradigm frames among these media outlets. To close, this article considers the possibility of international news media relaxing some conventions of the protest paradigm in favour of more constructive forms of protest coverage, contributing to the maintenance of the public sphere and underpinning democracy.

News Framing and the Protest Paradigm

The mass media constitute a crucial discursive site for the construction of reality that influences the process of public opinion formation. Media representation, particularly news framing of protests is no exception. Derived from Goffman's (1974) concept of schemas, frames are heuristic tools allowing individuals to define, interpret or construct information. Based on his research on the conceptualisation and application of news framing, Entman (1993) proposes that the process of framing entails selection, emphasis and elaboration:

2 The New York Times, available at: [nytimes.com].

3 BBC News, available at: [bbc.com/news].

4 Euronews, available at: [euronews.com].

‘To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (p. 52).

Journalists organise news stories within certain frames in the effort to simplify, prioritise and structure the presentation of opinions and facts. By presenting sociopolitical issues and controversies within selective frames, the news media legitimate – simultaneously limit the range of – the foundational causes and potential consequences of a social problem as well as possible remedies. Rather than setting the agenda, frames prompt the readers to think about these issues in a desired frame of mind (Iyengar, 1990, 1991).

This understanding certainly assumes fairly powerful media effects in both generating and harnessing public opinion and sentiment. Issues of public concern are not only represented in the news media; distinctions and connections need to be made between representation in general and that in the news media in particular. Also, frames not only overlap and reinforce each other, but also compete with each other. However, if media can be considered a key location of contestation between different social actors presenting their understanding of social conflicts in an effort to gain social currency on the topography of public discourse, news organisation’s norms and values that undergird news production as a process of media hegemony shape representation of dissent.

Critical theorists have proposed that mainstream news media support the interests of the existing power structure (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Fallows, 1997; Gitlin, 1981; Tuchman, 1978). This pro-establishment orientation usually manifests in media bias both in the selection of ‘newsworthy’ protests for coverage and in the description of the events they choose to report (Scheufele, 1999; Weaver and Scacco, 2013). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that media support for the status quo is embedded in processes of gathering and presenting information from the perspective of the elite. These informational biases lead to episodic framing of news, rather than thematic framing of news, which serves to obscure a richer, wider understanding of social problems that acknowledges political complexity – social problems that protest groups aim to bring under public scrutiny.

Support for the status quo in mainstream news coverage of protests has been well documented (Brasted, 2005; McLeod, 1995; McLeod and Detenber, 2006; McLeod and Hertog, 1992, 1998), and a set of framing patterns that articulates this support has been identified as the protest paradigm (Chan and Lee, 1984). The protest paradigm is essentially a template for the construction of a protest story, focusing on limited features of social protests to portray protestors as the ‘other’. This selection process serves to filter which protests are reported, and which are ignored and separate protestors from mainstream society. Characteristics of this reporting paradigm include the following categories:

1. use of narrative structure/emphasis of police confrontation;
2. reliance on official sources and definitions;
3. invocation of hostile public opinion; and
4. techniques of delegitimation, marginalisation and demonization.

McLeod and Hertog (1992, 1998) observe that it is common for journalists to use a violent crime story narrative that positions a protest as a battle between the protestors and the police/authorities, rather than as an intellectual debate between the protestors and their intended target. Violence, social disorder and the spectacles are typically prominent features of such coverage, even if they remained an insignificant part compared to the social criticism itself. Another major aspect of this paradigm is the inclination of journalists to rely on official sources – information from channels within the establishment including official proceedings, government or agency press releases and quotations of public officials. This reliance on official sources, as opposed to providing space for the protestors to express their opinion, gives news stories factualness and prestige and practically facilitates the dominance of the voices of those in power. The dependence on routine, official sources could reflect also issues of expediency, adherence to the rituals of objectivity, lack of reporting initiative, or a movement's inability to establish liaisons and procedures to ensure the transmission of their own frames (McLeod, 2007).

The third framing category is invocation of antagonistic public opinion. News stories can both inform and influence public understanding of social protests through symbolic use of hostile public assertions. These voices are framed as mainstream public reactions to the protestors, often spotlighting the appearance and behaviours of protestors in a way that draws attention to their violations of law or opposition to mainstream values. By focusing more on the disruptive activities organised by social movements and the deviant characteristics of participants and less on the social criticism and the context that informs it, the mass media depict protests in ways that can undermine the agendas of these movements.

As a final point, certain news frames are employed in the effort to delegitimize and marginalise the protestors. The media often fail to adequately explain the intention and context of protest actions, leading the audience to perceive them as futile, unreasonable or irrational. Ignoring many of the potential functions of protests such as generating resources and ideas for social change, journalists may further delegitimize protests by exaggerating threats such as the violence, property damage, traffic congestion and counter-cultural elements of protests. Overall, as some of these protest paradigm frames are interrelated, and in some instances they overlap, collectively they serve to reinforce each other and can be a challenge to disentangle. Nevertheless, these practices and values, when put into use, coalesce into biased news coverage.

Conversely, it needs to be acknowledged that recent research is detecting less predictable media coverage of protests, suggesting complex mitigating factors and the changing media politics of dissent (Cottle, 2008; McLeod, 2007). A number of social, political and technological transformations might have contributed to this phenomenon. First, public demonstrations are increasingly moving from the political margins, aligned to traditional political ideologies, towards mainstream acceptance as a legitimate representation mechanism for an expanded range of causes, in the form of single issue campaigns or transnational advocacy. The politics informing these protests are becoming less confined to partisan agendas than the recent past. Globalisation, Europeanisation (alongside the tugging of re-nationalisation), the global financial crisis and the war on terrorism have also produced a new world order in which geopolitical interests and outlooks have shifted and news reporting of demonstrations taking place in different parts of the world has become more intricately interconnected and relevant to domestic politics and audiences. Such changing dynamics in turn lead to more complex media interactions with political elites and representations of dissent, dependent on the political circumstances. Further, accompanying the social and technological trend of freer and wider access to information, today's complex media ecology – comprising mainstream, alternative and independent media formations and increased communication flows and interactional capabilities – has made possible new forms and spaces for the broader dissemination of contentious politics. These improvements have opened up new possibilities of public deliberation and encouraged attempts to invest in credible journalism. Finally, with the rising of consumer-driven politics and intense media competition, it needs to be taken into consideration the media's own agenda in championing certain causes and issues, evidenced in more public ideological posturing, for example, by American cable news networks such as Fox News and MSNBC (Weaver and Scacco, 2013).

In view of these developments, research on news coverage of protests requires exploration of the complex determinants, mechanisms and meanings of the media responses. Considering the preceding literature regarding incorporating the protest paradigm in protest coverage, this study investigates how mainstream international news media frame the 2013 Cypriot protests. Specifically, this study examines protest coverage by three established, international news outlets including the New York Times, BBC News and Euronews, all of which represent preeminent mainstream news media with extensive readership/audienceship. This choice is made also because the Cypriot protests express objection particularly against international elites, and these three media organisations represent, in varying degrees, political interests and positions in connection with influential governments, corporations as well as the political elites and major issues in consideration. Last but not least, the Cypriot protests can be considered a form of

transnational advocacy, raising issues concerning several EU member states and bringing into focus the complex national and European deliberate interconnectedness – the conflict between the protesting citizens, the state and various international elites against the background of the Eurozone crisis. In asking whether and how the protest paradigm is applied in international news media coverage of such protest, it is possible to identify the extent of application, the more robust characteristics of the paradigm as well as the possible underlying determinants within the changing media politics of dissent.

The questions this research attempts to answer are the following:

RQ1: What frames are employed in the coverage of the 2013 Cypriot protests by the news websites of the New York Times, BBC News and Euronews?⁵

- What is the narrative emphasis of the news coverage?
- Does the news coverage reflect reliance on official sources and definitions?
- Does the news coverage convey cues to public opinion and social norms?
- Does the news coverage (de)legitimate protestors and their claims?

RQ2: How do frames vary in the protest coverage of these media outlets?

Finally, the following section briefly explains the background of the three chosen media organisations. The New York Times is an American daily newspaper with a broad domestic and international audience through the on-line International New York Times website. It delivers content across digital platforms including mobile, social networking sites and other e-reader applications. The New York Times is part of the New York Times Company, a global media corporation which is also affiliated with numerous businesses and corporations in the news, database and research service and television, film and broadcast industry.⁶

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a UK-based international public service. Funded mainly by the British government, the BBC's extensive radio, TV and online services cover national and international news and broadcast in 28 languages.⁷ Around one-quarter of BBC revenues come from its commercial division BBC Worldwide Limited which distributes the BBC's international 24-hour English language news services BBC World News and BBC.com.

Euronews is a news television channel that covers European and world news from a pan European perspective and broadcasts in 13 languages.⁸ In reaction to the growing

5 Available on-line: the New York Times [nytimes.com]; BBC News [bbc.com/news]; and Euronews [euronews.com].

6 The New York Times Company. Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com].

7 BBC, available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC].

8 Euronews – The European Perspective on International News, available at: [http://publicdiplomacy.wikia.com/wiki/Euronews].

influence and success of CNN, Euronews was established in 1993 with the support of public broadcasters from ten European countries among which were Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The four major shareholders of Euronews include France Télévisions (23.93%), Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI, 21.54%), All Russia State Television and Radio Company (VGTRK, 16.94%) and Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT, 15.70%). As the European Commission provides a significant portion of the channel's funding, Euronews in the past has received criticism for perceived bias towards the EU authorities.

The Bailout Negotiations in the 2012–2013 Cypriot Financial Crisis

The Republic of Cyprus is located in the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, and most of its population is Greek Cypriot. Cyprus has been historically plagued by power struggles and political conflicts and division between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island. The Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 and joined the Eurozone in 2008. Around that time, the financial crisis set in motion in the United States had begun adversely affecting both the financial stability of the region and the Euro itself. The 2012–2013 Cypriot financial crisis in particular resulted from a number of factors and events including exposure of Cypriot banks to overleveraged local property companies and the Greek government bond default, the downgrading of the Cypriot government's bond credit rating to junk status by international credit rating agencies, the consequential inability of the government to refund its state expenses from the international markets, the reluctance of the government to restructure the overdeveloped and troubled banking industry and public sector as well as the EU authorities' doubtful ability to cope with financial crisis.

Within the EU, Cyprus is the fifth country, after Greece, Portugal, Ireland and (partially) Spain, which has declared a financial crisis and reached a financial assistance agreement between the government and the Eurogroup (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund). On 16 March, 2013, a €10 billion bailout plan by the Eurogroup was announced. As part of the conditions, a one-off bank tax of 6.7% on deposits up to €100,000 and 9.9% on higher deposits was to be imposed. Unlike previous bailouts, this plan involved having depositors in Cypriot banks partially fund the bailout. It was brought into question whether such a controversial measure would even be feasible since Cypriot bank deposits were insured and thus implicitly guaranteed not to be subject to loss of value. There was also concern among other EU member states that such a bailout implementation could become the norm although the Eurogroup had stressed that the tax proposal was unique to Cyprus alone. Taxing Cypriot bank accounts initially appeared preferable to raising regular taxes because a significant number of high-value depositors in Cypriot banks were Russian

investors. Even before the March negotiations, there was the view expressed most forcibly by German politicians that the Cypriot banks had grown too large in relation to the scale of the economy, particularly with reference to Russia–Cyprus money flows which implied laundering activities.⁹

Despite public objection, the Cypriot government tried to move forward the bailout proposal which was vetoed by the parliament, and depositors started a run on the banks in order to avoid a potential bailout tax. Upon a series of negotiations, on 25 March, 2013, the officials announced a new plan to preserve all insured deposits of €100,000 or less, but shut down the Laiki Bank, the second largest bank in Cyprus, and tax all uninsured deposits there. There would be an approximate 47.5% tax on uninsured deposits in the Bank of Cyprus, the largest bank in Cyprus, which was to acquire Laiki Bank and its massive debt. Also agreed in the negotiation was the forced sale of the facilities of three major Cypriot banks in Greece within the period of a few days, costing the Cypriot banks €3.4 billion. These drastic measures no doubt were taken to reduce the size of the banking industry, but they also threatened its very viability, not only internationally but also domestically.¹⁰ The final conditions for activation of the assistance package were outlined in the Eurogroup's Memorandum of Understanding on Cyprus' Macroeconomic Programme and the Loan Agreement which was ratified by the Cypriot House of Representatives on 30 April, 2013.

Beginning on 19 March, 2013, Cypriot citizens staged protests outside the House of Representatives in Nicosia, the capital. On 21 March, hundreds of people, mostly employees of the Laiki Bank, gathered outside the House of Parliament, holding placards against the restructuring of the bank. In the following days, the protests expanded as civil servants and young people also joined in, many of whom were students and school teachers on contract. Much of the protestors' anger was directed to the Eurogroup and the German government who was viewed to be behind the bailout conditions. The protests lasted until 25 March when the Cypriot parliament voted in favour of the bailout.

Method

All news items concerning 'the Cypriot protests/protestors', 'bank staff and student demonstrations', 'reaction to Cypriot bailout', and the 'police clash' that appeared on the

9 M. Greene, 'To Get a Bailout, Cyprus Needs to Launder Its Reputation', 3 February 2013. Available at: [<http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2013-02-03/to-get-a-bailout-cyprus-needs-to-launder-its-reputation>], accessed on 14 April 2015.

10 *The Economist*, 'Haven Sent: The Effects of Cyprus on Other Tax Havens', 30 March 2013. Available at: [<http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21574509-effects-cyprus-other-tax-havens-haven-sent>], accessed on 14 April 2015.

news websites of the New York Times, BBC News and Euronews¹¹ during the period of analysis are examined. A total of 41 stories in the form of news reports, feature stories, editorials/analyses and commentaries are included in the analysis – the New York Times (n=14), BBC News (n=12), Euronews (n=15). The unit of analysis is the individual news story. Some photographs accompanying the news stories are also used in support of textual analysis. The time frame of data collection is from 16 March 2014 when the Eurogroup publicly announced the first bailout plan to 31 March 2014; six days after the Cypriot government accepted the final bailout conditions. To address the questions about the use of the protest paradigm, a framing analysis is performed, using the method of constant comparison against the coding schemes/categories to locate frames in the news items.

The coding schemes are derived from the definitions and descriptions of protest paradigm frames (McLeod, 2007) and they are as follows:

- Narrative emphasis: descriptive themes or positioning of the protestors and the causes/demands/drama of the protests. Spectacle frames are usually associated with the protest paradigm which focus on police confrontation, violence and civil disorder of the protests and describe the protestors as ‘hooligans’, ‘deviants’, ‘angry’, ‘irrational’ and ‘powerless’. Sympathy, injustice and debate frames are less common in protest coverage. Sympathy frames are descriptions used to provoke compassion for the protestors, injustice frames are used to convey moral outrage and the significance of the problems and debate frames focus on issues rather than events, providing description of contentious demands and their justifications.
- Reliance on (un)official information sources and definitions: All the human voices quoted directly or paraphrased are considered. Sources are considered official if they are government or authority figures, experts, or part of the media. Sources are considered citizen voices if they are quoted simply for their ‘man on the street’ perspective (i.e., protestors).
- Invocation of public opinion: References of norm and legal violations (or not), opinions of official/institutional sources, symbolic use of bystanders and the use of ‘they’ vs. ‘we/us’ in assertions.
- (De)Legitimation frames: (Episodic) description of contentious demands, justifications and contexts; (little) in-depth history, background and analysis within a story or claim; the protests being (or not) described as futile, unreasonable or marginal and (little) coverage of any criticism, explanations or remedies for the social problems (individual vs. institutional responsibilities).

11 *The New York Times* [nytimes.com], *BBC News* [bbc.com/news] and *Euronews* [euronews.com].

Results

The framing analysis reveals contrasting results of the New York Times (NYT) largely adhering to the protest paradigm but not BBC News or Euronews. The findings indicate the tendency of NYT to construct stories by using spectacle frames, relying on official sources and situating the protests in critical analysis of economic issues. Alternatively, BBC News, more sympathetic than Euronews, offers a legitimating view of the protests and criticising the role of political elites in the bailout negotiations.

The New York Times (NYT)

The results suggest that to a great extent, NYT incorporates the protest paradigm into its news coverage. The dominant narrative structure features the clashes of angry protestors with the police and authorities. Embedded in a heavy use of elite sources and invocation of negative opinions of financial analysts and government figures, the news situates the protests within economic analysis and portrays them as side effects of bailing out an insignificant economy.

Narrative Emphasis

Spectacle frames were mainly used in the news items including attention to the size, clash and despair of the protests. The majority of the articles emphasised events rather than issues by focusing on the anger of the protestors and their confrontations with the police. The reports largely ignored the causes of these protests, without much consideration of the protestors' perspective. Through the use of fight metaphors and phrases such as 'turmoil', 'angry', 'enraged', 'shouting' and 'pushing through', the stories created the image of the protestors battling against the police. For example, one story reported

'About 200 protestors faced the police Thursday in front of Parliament amid rumors that Cyprus Popular Bank could be shut down. The mood in the streets turned increasingly dark as police officers clashed with protestors'.¹²

Another report contained descriptions such as

'Thousands of students protested Tuesday outside the presidential palace in Nicosia big banks bereft of money, a government in disarray and citizens filled with angry despair'.¹³

12 Liz Alderman, 'Mood Darkens in Cyprus as Deadline is Set for Bailout', [NYTimes.com] 21 March 2013.

13 Andrew Higgins and Liz Alderman, 'Europeans Planted Seeds of Crisis in Cyprus', [NYTimes.com] 26 March 2013.

A commentary on the public response to the first bailout proposal remarked:

‘The proposal has understandably caused turmoil and anger in that part of the world. A bailout deal that was supposed to calm a financial crisis in an economically insignificant Mediterranean nation spread it wider’.¹⁴

Nearly all of the news stories were accompanied with photographs of the protests. Some of these photographs showcased confrontations between the protestors and the police and the disruptive, dark and angry mood. Others focused on the professional and political backgrounds of the protestors, isolating them from mainstream public. These photographs emphasised the appearance of the protestors, illustrating they were either well-paid bank employees (not members of mainstream society) or Russian expatriates (reminder of the connection between a greedy, opportunistic banking industry and Russian oligarchs and a chaotic Cyprus being caught in geopolitical struggles).



Police officers clashed with protestors as about 200 gathered outside parliament. ‘Mood Darkens in Cyprus as Deadline is Set for Bailout’
by Liz Alderman, 21 March 2013.
Photo: Andreas Manolis/Reuters



Protestors hold a banner reading ‘Hands off Cyprus’ at a rally against the bailout in Nicosia, the capital, on Sunday. ‘Stricter Rules but Signs of Disarray in Cyprus Deal’
by Steven Erlanger and James Kanter, 25 March 2013.
Photo: Petros Karadjias/Associated Press

14 William Alden, ‘Assessing the Cyprus Bailout’ [NYTimes.com], Deal Book Column on 19 March 2013.



At a rally outside Parliament on Friday to protest the bailout terms, a Russian woman who lives in Cyprus holds a sign written in Russian, English and Greek. ‘Russian Ties Put Cyprus Banking Crisis on East-West Fault Line’

by Andrew Higgins, 23 March 2013.

Photo: Petros Giannakouris/Associated Press

Reliance on Official Information Sources and Definitions

The news reports used mainly financial experts and official sources from the USA, Germany, the UK, the EU, the Cypriot government and EU member states also in crisis such as Spain and Greece. In addition to quoting politicians particularly from Germany and the EU, the majority of the stories centred around discussions among financial analysts from prestigious institutions such as UniCredit, Goldman Sachs, the Peterson Institute for International Economics, the University of Hannover, Global Macro, Oxford Analytica and Lombard Street Research in London. The protests were framed with economic analysis from the perspectives of financial analysts and officials, considering the protests as reactions to restructuring a troubled banking industry, unique to Cyprus alone (some experts did claim that the open breach of depositors’ guarantee by the first bailout proposal would lead to further expropriations, not ‘unique’ to Cyprus). For example, in discussing the controversy of the Cypriot bailout which the protestors objected as taxation injustice, the issue was often presented from the officials’ perspective:

‘When European finance chiefs explained their harsh terms for rescuing Cyprus this week, many blamed the tiny Mediterranean nation’s wayward banking practices for bringing ruin on itself.’¹⁵

This opinion was reinforced by some financial analysts:

‘From an economic standpoint, the European Union’s decision to impose a 6.75 percent levy on deposits in Cyprus (9.9 percent for accounts exceeding 100.000 Euros) seems sound since bankruptcy is a matter of debtors and creditors, not a taxpayers’ concern.’¹⁶

15 Andrew Higgins and Liz Alderman, ‘Europeans Planted Seeds of Crisis in Cyprus’ [NYTimes.com] 26 March 2013.

16 Stefan Homburg, ‘The E.U. Went Back on Its Guarantee’ [NYTimes.com] 19 March 2013.

In an article titled ‘Cyprus Passes Parts of Bailout Bill, But Delays Vote on Tax’, only the opinions of German officials and economists were included:

‘When you consider that there was massive resistance against involving the savings, then it is not easy to see how tapping the pension funds, which we view as socially a much more drastic step, is a very good idea.’¹⁷ ‘The German reaction to such suggestions (protests against Germany) quickly becomes emotional But looking at it rationally, it must be said that the German reaction is not stupid.’¹⁸

Furthermore, the taxation proposal was discussed in many articles by presenting strong opinions of prominent financialists without sufficient context. Below are excerpts from two articles on public response against the bailout proposal breaking the bank depositor’s insurance:

‘I would assume that anyone in Spain, Portugal or elsewhere who knows about the taxation of Cypriot depositors also would know that the Cypriot banking system is a very different animal than anywhere else in the euro zone.’¹⁹

Mr O’Neill of Goldman (Sachs) also acknowledged: ‘I am sure it will not set a precedent.’²⁰

Stephen J. Lubben, the Harvey Washington Wiley Chair in Corporate Governance and Business Ethics at Seton Hall said:

‘Cyprus can’t really be about Cyprus, can it? After all, the banking sector in that country pales in comparison to things like the London Whale trade and the amount of capital the big banks have to raise to meet Basel III. Some will say it is about depositor insurance. Fair enough. But by now, I would think investors would be smart enough to know that when you start chasing yield in small countries with outsize banking sectors, bad things will happen. And deposit insurance is only as good as the sovereign standing behind the insurance Why exactly did we restrict the Federal Reserve’s powers under Section 13(3), which used to allow the Fed to lend to all kinds of financial firms? Cyprus also shows that even an allegedly “safe” banking system can be too big and quite dangerous.

17 Steffen Seibert, a spokesman for the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, talking to reporters. See Migalhas International [migalhas.com].

18 Comment by Bernd Raffelhüschen, a professor of economics at the Albert-Ludwig University in Freiburg [NYTimes.com].

19 Erik Nielsen, chief economist at UniCredit, in a note written to clients on 15 March 2013.

20 Andrew Ross Sorkin, ‘A Bank Levy in Cyprus, and Why Not to Worry’ [NYTimes.com] 18 March 2013.

After all, the banks in Cyprus were noted for their reliance on deposits rather than other forms of dodgy short-term finance like repo and conduits and what not.²¹

The media did not provide protestors with an equitable voice, elucidating their perspective on the issues. When protestors were occasionally quoted in the articles, it was usually in the context of expressing anger and frustration. This approach in effect served to minimise the protestors' claims and elevate the importance of political and economic elites. Additional supportive evidence can be seen in the examples of the invocation of negative public opinions and delegitimation frames that are to follow below.

The Invocation of Negative Public Opinion

The analysis provided evidence of invocation of norm violation, legal transgression of the Cypriot banks and negative opinions of government authorities, financial experts and bystanders. NYT's treatment marginalised the public's motives to protest by heavily focusing on the role of the Cypriot banking industry in the crisis, ascribing Cypriot banks as greedy and weak, thus in need of restructuring (the shutting down of the Laiki Bank had triggered the protests). Many articles quoted officials reproaching the banks as 'failing banks', 'so big', 'inadequate', 'chasing high-yielding', 'dangerous' and 'bring ruin on itself.' These negative assertions highlighted the malfunction of the Cypriot banks but also implicitly supported the policy of drastically downsizing the industry regardless of its social ramifications. The Cypriot economic model was often referred to as the 'casino economy' although few articles offered concise and well researched analysis on this topic or how to improve the banking system. Overall, negative opinions of the American and European financial communities on allegations of Cyprus being a tax haven obscured, if not giving rise to ignore, protestors' advocacy of tax justice and accountability of financial and regulatory systems at both national and European levels. This can be seen, for example, in an article with comments as follows:

'... there is a strong message that if the euro zone is going to work, with a banking union that has credibility, there will be no more "casino economies," little islands like Cyprus with banking sectors many times larger than their gross domestic product, that do not follow the rules and make everyone else vulnerable.'²²

21 Stephen J. Lubben, 'Cyprus Shows How Not to Do A Bailout', In-Debt DealBook column [NYTimes.com] 20 March 2013.

22 Steven Erlanger and James Kanter Stricter, 'Rules but Signs of Disarray in Cyprus Deal' [NYTimes.com] 25 March 2013.

The news stories provided little coverage of the causes and social criticism of the protests, which facilitated the dominance of institutional views. Furthermore, the financial criticism was often presented in a dismissive or indifferent tone, reflected in descriptions of Cyprus as an ‘insignificant nation’, ‘a tiny nation’ or ‘pales in comparison to things like the London Whale trade’. Collectively, the invocation of negative opinions of institutional representatives diminished the protests and weakened the political significance of the Cypriot crisis. Another example is presented here:

‘As proponents of the Cypriot losses argue, just as it was fair that the large depositors that bankrolled IndyMac’s subprime excesses in 2008 pay the cost for the bank’s failure, so it is right that Cypriot savers – the largest of whom were Russian billionaires chasing high-yielding deposits – suffer a similar fate. “There were stories of pain, too, at IndyMac, but in the U.S., we paid little attention to it,” Mr. Kirkegaard said. “This will impose a lot of pain on Cypriot society, but the outcome will not be that much different.”²³

Delegitimation Frames

The coverage did not offer much description of the protestors’ claims as the entire crisis was portrayed significant only for its possibility of setting a precedence of asking private depositors to finance troubled economies. Few stories provided details or analysis of the protests or the problems which were deep seated in the Cypriot financial and political systems and intertwined with the political dynamics revealed in the bailout negotiations. On the contrary, the coverage was dominated with harsh financial analysis from a perspective which was generally supportive of the German stance of limiting Russian Control of Cypriot banks albeit critical of the EU by highlighting its chaotic management of the crisis and tolerating Cyprus being a tax haven for Russian investors. For example, in a story titled ‘Second Thoughts in Europe as Anxiety Rises in Cyprus’, a bystander, an employee at a trading company, was quoted questioning ‘How can I trust any bank in the Euro zone after this decision?’ An American financial analyst remarked:

‘Cyprus does show that, for all the faults with the financial crisis rescues in the United States, the European Union still finds ways to show us how poorly a bailout can be handled.’²⁴

23 Landon Thomas Jr., ‘Calculating the Impact of Cyprus’s Bailout’, *Global Business* [NYTimes.com] 31 March 2013.

24 Stephen J. Lubben, ‘Cyprus Shows How Not to Do A Bailout’, *In-Debt DealBook* column [NYTimes.com] 20 March 2013.

The same attitude was expressed in other stories with descriptions as follows:

‘But the path that led to Cyprus’s current crisis – leads back, at least in part, to a fateful decision made 17 months ago by the same guardians of financial discipline that now demand that Cyprus shape up.’²⁵

Several stories and editorials clearly offered support for the German authorities and contradicted the view of the protestors that Germany was imposing an unfair taxation. On 26 March 2013, NYT reported in a story ‘Cyprus Deal Sparks Anti-German Mood – and Defenders’:

‘Germanophobia has become a persistent leitmotiv in the crises that have enveloped the most vulnerable, and predominantly southern, economies of the 17-member currency zone. As Rendezvous wrote last June, “All the old stereotypes about the Germans are rising to the surface as frustration grows over their refusal to sign what they regard as a blank check to their less disciplined European neighbors.” Gideon Rachman, writing in the Financial Times, argued that the latest wave of Germanophobia provoked by the Cyprus crisis was unfair. “Behind all the shouting and the wrangling, German taxpayers will once again be funding the biggest single share of yet another euro zone bailout”, he wrote. “It seems a bit harsh that Germany is extending loans of hundreds of billions of euros to its neighbors – only to be accused of neo-Nazism in return.” Mr. Rachman believed the phenomenon was as much to do with the weakness of Germany’s European partners as with that country’s strength. He highlighted the diminished role of France, where President François Hollande “has let it be known that he disapproves of Germany’s insistence of austerity but he has not proposed a coherent alternative.” Brendan Simms, a Cambridge University history professor, wrote earlier this month that a surge of political and popular Germanophobia was not surprising. Professor Simms said there had been widespread calls over the past three years for Germany to take the lead in resolving the escalating Euro crisis. “That is the dilemma of German power today,” he wrote. “Germany is damned if it does and damned if it doesn’t.”’²⁶

Immediately the next day, on 27 March 2013, amid criticism of Eurogroup’s doubtful ability to contain the situation, another report once again endorsed the German policy:

‘Ms. Merkel’s justice minister, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, broke new ground on Wednesday by calling directly on European Union leaders in Brussels to do more to

25 Andrew Higgins and Liz Alderman, ‘Europeans Planted Seeds of Crisis in Cyprus’ [NYTimes.com] 26 March 2013.

26 ‘Cyprus Deal Sparks Anti-German Mood – and Defenders’, No Comments [EuronewsCloud.com] 26 March 2013.

defend Germany's role in helping the weaker members. According to the German Finance Ministry, Germany has contributed more than 220 billion euros, or \$280 billion, pledged through loans and financial support packages for Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, all negotiated with those countries' Euro zone partners. "Germany acts in solidarity so that crisis countries will have a perspective in the future," Ms. Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, a member of the Free Democratic Party, the junior partner in Ms. Merkel's governing coalition, said in an interview with the newspaper *Münchener Merkur*. "I wish that those people at the top – the president of the E.U. Commission and the E.U. president – would defend Germans against unfair allegations." Critics, however, say the Cyprus bailout was so haphazardly handled that it underscored the chaotic nature of European decision making more than it sent an unmistakable message about a new approach to bailouts.²⁷

BBC News and Euronews

BBC News and Euronews mainly deviate from the protest paradigm, portraying the protestors sympathetically and legitimating the protests as expressing grievances against national and international governance. On the latter point, BBC News is more critical than Euronews of the political elites. The protestors are depicted as having suffered economic and political injustice, not deviants against authority or mainstream social norms and values. Much of the coverage contains both official sources and perspectives of the protestors, questioning the manner in which Germany and the EU have managed the bailout negotiations. However, within an overall positive approach, spectacle frames are used to accentuate the protestors as fearful and hopeless victims rather than citizens demanding dialogue about institutional responsibility and solutions. Also, few stories offer deeper understanding of the Cypriot crisis – there is sparse discussion of issues in areas of developing alternative economic models and improving political transparency, accountability and social rights of citizens.

Narrative Emphasis

Sympathetic frames were used to provoke compassion and draw attention to unfair personal loss and job insecurity. Instead of presenting the protests as understandable side effects of bailing out a small, troubled economy as NYT did, most of the reports conveyed the severity of the austerity measures and the pending impact on the entire society – 'A Small Mediterranean Island with Big Problems' as headlined by Euronews. For example,

27 Melissa Eddy, 'Cypriots' Criticism of Bailout Rattles Nerves and Raises Ire in Germany', [NYTimes.com] 27 March 2013.

Euronews interviewed students who took part in the demonstrations and complained:

‘Obviously many of our parents will lose their jobs, all of us will lose income, some of us will even find it hard to go and study at university.’²⁸

Another story reported:

“Sales are down by around 50 percent, people don’t buy the goods they used to, just the basics, mainly potatoes”, one trader explained. The island’s banks have been hit hard, there is no trust and the rescue plan means they stand to lose huge amounts of money. Stavros Zenios, a professor of economics at the University of Cyprus, said: “The Cypriot economy is sailing into uncharted waters. The decision has had a positive effect in terms of cleaning up the banking system, however it has hit services that amounts to some 20 percent of the country’s GDP.”²⁹

Contextualising the significance of the crisis within the country’s history of political division and power struggle, the social and personal instability led by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in the 1970s were referenced against the anticipated consequences of the bailout plan. In one of the feature stories on the protests by bank employees, BBC News described the bailout as yet another looming injustice upon Cypriot citizens:

‘Cypriot savers are furious with their banks, but staff at the now-defunct Laiki Bank have been affected worse than most. Many borrowed money to buy shares in the bank – now worthless – and fear losing both their jobs and their pensions. “You wouldn’t wish this to happen to your worst enemy”, says Andreas Chrysafis. “All this anxiety, seeing your staff desperate, your kids not understanding what is happening. Everybody’s thinking about themselves”, he says. “Everybody has to figure out how to feed their family, how to send money to their children who are studying, how to pay for schools.” Fadula Voskou, who fled Northern Cyprus after the Turkish invasion in 1974, is once again bracing herself for a period of political and personal instability. “I have another two kids here”, she says. “I’m trying to keep smiling, explaining to them that everything will be OK, but I’m not sure if I believe it”’³⁰

The protestors, particularly bank employees, were positioned against the corruptive Cypriot banking system and the government’s approach of shifting the burden onto bank

28 ‘Troika Go Home’: Angry Students Protest Cyprus Bailout, *Euronews*, 26 March 2013.

29 ‘Fresh Fruit and Veg Sales Halved as Cypriots Feel the Squeeze’, *Euronews*, 27 March 2013.

30 ‘Laiki Bank: The Cyprus Bank Staff Hit Worst of All’, *BBC News*, 27 March 2013.

employees. Feature stories of BBC News on protesting bank employees shed a sympathetic light on the predicament they were in:

“Nobody cares about the bank. They have accused us of getting a lot of money, of being highly paid – they say we are bad.” “As employees we were unofficially forced – we were told that it was a good thing – to buy shares in your bank to support your bank.”³¹

In another report, BBC News exposed in more detail the intimidation and malfunction within Cypriot Banks:

“Quite a few people saw this coming”, says Andreas. “A big change occurred when the Greek company Marfin Investment Group (MIG) took over Laiki Bank in 2006,” he says. “They transformed the Bank from a conservative bank to a bank that was ambitious and expanding all over the place,” says Chrysafis. “The first thing they managed to do – they gave everybody a 2,000 euro (£1,700 or \$2,500) bonus because we ‘did a good job’. And we wondered: ‘What did we do?’ The bonus was followed by big salary increases”, he says. In the brave new world of the MIG-owned Laiki, nobody dared complain. “If you complained then you are considered to be a loser or to be a conservative or not to be part of them – so, all in all, nobody talked about it.” “Over the years, there were rumours that loans – big loans – were given in Greece without enough security,” says Voskou.³²

Similar to BBC News, Euronews portrayed the protests as expressing public demand of political accountability and articulating citizen’s social rights. Grievances and anger were directed toward the banks and members of the government as the government was the legitimate policy-making institution that should respond to citizens. The protestors were framed as asking policymakers to take public responsibility for economic failures –

‘A man protesting outside the presidential palace told Euronews: “They have forced us to take these austerity measures and the people have done nothing wrong. The banks, the banks should pay, not the people.”’³³

In a story on the Laiki Bank being merged with the Bank of Cyprus as part of the bailout deal, Euronews reported:

‘Governor of the Central Bank of Cyprus Panicos Demetriades said this would create a “very strong bank,” but enraged employees tried to push past police lines to call for his

31 *Ibid.*

32 Corruptions in the Banks: Cyprus ‘To Limit Funds That Can Be Taken Abroad’, *BBC News*, 27 March 2013.

33 ‘Government, Banks and EU Taste Cypriot Wrath’, *Euronews*, 27 March 2013.

resignation. Andros Ioannou of the “Wake up Cyprus” group said: “The major demand of the people is that a referendum is held, nothing should be passed unless the people pass it.”³⁴

In another story titled ‘The Right to Protest: Bank of Cyprus Staff Protest at Nicosia Headquarters’, the protests were described as lawful citizens exercising their social rights:

‘Another employee Andreas Vassiliou explained what the gathering at the Nicosia headquarters was all about. “It is a big demonstration. The workers of the Bank of Cyprus have shown once again that they are demanding their rights. We are carrying out a very dignified and peaceful protest and it is only to secure the rights of the employees of the Bank of Cyprus” he said.’³⁵

Contrary to the theme of greedy Cypriot banks facilitating money laundering for Russian millionaires, reports of BBC News followed an approach of presenting facts and differing opinions. In the report ‘Russian Money in Cyprus: Why There Is So Much?’, various statistics on Cyprus bank deposits of Russian origin were given alongside analysis of the German position on a close financial relationship between Cyprus and Russia. In an editorial, Editor Paul Mason analysed the political labelling of Cyprus being a tax haven:

‘Offshore finance is not a crime but a business model. Like it or not, it’s an essential part of globalised capitalism: it’s what allows rich people from heavily taxed countries avoid tax; it’s the conduit for massive business deals, and massive trade.’³⁶

The article stipulated some of the overly simplified arguments advanced by EU officials including the Cypriot banks must be restructured as they were running a banking system leveraged to three times GDP. A distinctive narrative in Euronews’ reports expressed the view that ‘It is not only the super-rich who are affected’, but also other segments of the wider society including the Russian community in Cyprus:

‘There is concern among the Russian expatriate community, which has contributed a lot to the Cypriot economy. Maria, who owns a Russian supermarket in Limassol, feels cheated that she may end up having to pay: “Cyprus is our country – we believed it was our country. I have lived here for 16 years. But this country has deceived us, stealing our money. Yes, stole it.”’³⁷

34 ‘Work Continues to Shield Cypriot Small Savers’, *Euronews*, 19 March 2013.

35 ‘The Right to Protest: Bank of Cyprus Staff Protest at Nicosia Headquarters’, *Euronews*, 26 March 2013.

36 ‘Cypriot Crisis: Will Germany’s Tough Stance Backfire?’, *BBC News*, 22 March 2013.

37 ‘Cyprus: Mixed Reactions among Islanders To Bailout Chaos’, *Euronews*, 20 March 2013.

Also, these sentiments were expressed in the photographs/videos which accompanied the reports.



‘Shame’
‘Laiki Bank: The Cyprus Bank Staff Hit Worst of All’
BBC News, 27 March 2013



‘Work Continues to Shield Cypriot Small Savers’
Euronews, 19 March 2013

However, similar to NYT’s reporting, spectacle frames were present, emphasising the size of the protests and the protestors as powerless victims of irresponsible politics.

‘My wife has been crying for three or four days now saying: “Why should we pay and not them?”’³⁸

Through such quotes, BBC News accentuated the protestors as ‘angry’, ‘outraged’ and ‘helpless’ while Euronews used phrases such as ‘blood boiling’, ‘wrath’, and ‘panic’ and published several stories with video clips depicting the protests as inflamed with nationalism by showing the Greek and Cypriot flags and anti-Germany and anti-Troika slogans. One example is shown here:

‘Answering a call put out on social networking site Facebook, thousands of young people in Cyprus took to the streets to protest against the bailout accepted by the government.

38 ‘Laiki Bank: The Cyprus Bank Staff Hit Worst of All’, *BBC News*, 27 March 2013.

Marching through Nicosia, the banners clearly show what they think of the deal struck with the EU, IMF and European Central Bank – known together as the “troika”. Some of them read: “Troika Go Home”, “Your mistakes, our future” and “Merkel, Hitler – the same s * * *.”³⁹



‘Troika Go Home’: Angry Students Protest
Cyprus Bailout’
Euronews, 26 March 2013



‘Cyprus: Blood Boiling over the Banks’
Euronews, 27 March 2013

In one report, Euronews quoted protestors expressing the feeling of uncertainty and helplessness:

‘We are trying to raise our voice to save our country. But Europe has turned its back on us, Russia has turned its back on us and Israel has turned its back on us. We don’t know, we are alone, we are a small country in the Mediterranean.’⁴⁰

In another feature story, a Cypriot architect voiced his vulnerability to the arbitrariness of Eurogroup’s decision making:

39 “Troika Go Home”: Angry Students Protest Cyprus Bailout’, *Euronews*, 26 March 2013.

40 ‘Protest amid Cyprus/Brussels Talks’, *Euronews*, 25 March 2013.

‘Architect Michael Orphanides has saved over 200,000 euros for his retirement. “You don’t save your money to the end of your life and then suddenly have it taken away from you. This is daylight robbery – in its worst form,” complained Orphanides. “Nobody knows at this present time whether it’s going to be a 40 percent, a 60 percent or a 65 percent haircut. This is the range they are talking about. I understand that it’s going to be decided in the next few days. I am completely helpless. All these events are beyond my control. We have to pay our hard earned money to bail out the banks and the politicians here,” he said.’⁴¹

Inclusion of Both Official and Citizen Sources

The coverage of BBC News did not reflect reliance on official sources; attention was also given to the voices of the protestors which was illustrated in a number of news and feature stories (examples shown above). When government officials were included in the stories, their opinions were often placed in a context of offering alternative perspectives. The reports contained the opinions of EU officials such as presidents of the European Commission and Eurogroup and Head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but they also provided remarks from opposition politicians. For example, in a story on how home politicians perceived the Cypriot protests, British conservative MP Andrew Tyrie said:

‘There couldn’t be a more vivid illustration of the Eurozone’s capacity for self-harm than its chronic mishandling of the Cypriot financial crisis over the last few days.’⁴²

In another story, BBC News quoted:

‘EU Commissioner for Economic Affairs Olli Rehn said “The depth of the financial crisis in Cyprus means that the near future will be difficult for the country and its people.” The chairman of the Cypriot parliament’s finance committee, Nicholas Papadopoulos, said the agreement made “no economic sense”. “We are heading for a deep recession, high unemployment” he told the BBC.’⁴³

Furthermore, BBC News used a reporting format that allowed input and participation of the public, permitting more diverse views on many of the issues underlying the protests and crisis. Through feature reports such as ‘Q&A Cyprus Deal’ or ‘Cyprus bailout: Your questions to Robert Peston – BBC Business Editor Robert Peston

41 ‘Cyprus Bank Levy Hits Not Only the Super-Rich’, *Euronews*, 26 March 2013.

42 ‘Treasury Committee Chairman Condemns Eurozone Cyprus Plan’, 20 March 2013.

43 Tim Wilcox, ‘Cyprus Bailout: Deal Reached in Eurogroup Talks’, 25 March 2013.

answers your questions on the Cyprus bailout plan in a live Twitter Q&A', members of the general public had the opportunity to ask questions or express their opinion on the subject matter albeit the content was rather brief. Also, these discussions were accompanied with background information often in graphics on the Cypriot crisis including the timeline of the bailout negotiations, levy basics, industrial profile of Cyprus and statistics on the Eurozone financial crisis.

Similarly, Euronews tried to present opinions both supportive and antagonistic of the EU policies such as a substantial report by the IMF which referenced that the increasingly common practice of imposing austerity in the middle of an economic depression 'has turned out to be much more damaging for those countries' economies than policymakers (though not many economists) had anticipated'.⁴⁴

Lastly, in addition to including opinions of politicians and international financial experts, protesting students, local traders and academics within the Cypriot community were also given a voice (examples shown above).

The Invocation of Sympathetic Public Opinion and Legitimation Frames

The analysis of coverage of both news provided evidence of invocation of sympathetic opinions that economic and political injustice had been imposed. Instead of using delegitimation frames, the coverage of BBC News mainly justified the protestors' claims and that of Euronews framed the protestors as having valid reasons to protest. The reports portrayed the protests as articulating economic grievances over austerity measures, issues related to taxation justice, job security and drastic restructuring of the banks. Also used in the stories were frames of political injustice by powerful elites including Germany, the Eurogroup and the Cypriot government and banks. BBC News was more critical of Germany than Euronews, questioning the proper functioning of international governance:

'The Eurozone is really turning the screw on Cyprus, and it's being led by Germany ... There is huge irritation with the way the Cypriots have handled things, and that has led to the imposition of deadlines which mean big decisions need to be taken very quickly – like it or lump it'.⁴⁵

In another story, BBC News further challenged the German stance in the bailout negotiations:

44 'Cyprus's Negotiations with the EU and IMF Have Provoked Anger among Cypriots', *Euronews*, 28 March 2013.

45 Chris Morris, 'Cyprus Crisis: Pressure Grows over Bailout', *BBC News*, 22 March 2013.

'In Germany, the citizens feel aggrieved. They perceive their country as a generous donor of hard-earned cash to peoples who have let their finances go to ruin ... In Britain, the Daily Mail newspaper talked of the way the events in Cyprus were handled as "one of the nastiest and most immoral political acts in modern times". It likened Germany to a common criminal because of the way the deposits of savers were initially targeted: "People who rob old ladies in the street, or hold up security vans, are branded as thieves." The UK's Daily Telegraph alluded to a new German empire – or "Imperium" as it put it.'⁴⁶

Also criticising the EU no longer acting as a unified and competent crisis manager in relation to the dominance of Germany, one editorial remarked:

'... but the Eurozone bankers and politicians were quite happy to renege on promises and hammer the little guy. And let us remember it is not the IMF that was overseeing emergency lending to Laiki, effectively funding its management to destruction: it was those stern faced central bankers in Frankfurt. And it was the European Banking Union that signed off both Laiki and Bank of Cyprus in the July 2011 stress tests (no-one who was at that press conference can forget the dismissive tone used to those of us who suggested the tests might be wrong). ... There is a growing fear ... that Germany is running the Eurozone in its own national interest. At every juncture where compromise, statecraft, guarded language and a care for outcomes rather than principles are called for, somebody German pops up – be it Merkel, Weidmann, Asmussen or Schäuble – and points out "the rules" dictate otherwise.'⁴⁷

Albeit expressing criticism of the international political actors, Euronews adopted a more subdued approach as illustrated in descriptions such as

'... Berlin wants a quick answer. Analysts say Cyprus differs from previous Eurozone bailouts in that there is little sympathy among German politicians for the plight of the island's banks.'⁴⁸

Further, the reports revealed the internal dissent between the Eurozone finance ministers and German politicians regarding the first bailout proposal:

'Germany, which has attracted much of the blame insists the Cypriot government, the European Commission and the ECB agreed on the levy. Eurozone finance ministers have

46 'Cyprus Bailout: Feeling Unloved in Germany', *BBC News*, published 31 March 2013, last updated 1 April 2013.

47 'Cypriot Crisis: Will Germany's Tough Stance Backfire?' *BBC News*, 22 March 2013.

48 'Mixed European Leaders Reaction to Cyprus Crisis', *Euronews*, 20 March 2013.

asked Cyprus to move the burden away from smaller investors. Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker told reporters that taxing the deposits of small savers by starting with the first euro is socially unjust.⁴⁹

This theme of incohesiveness among the political actors was also present in the coverage of BBC News. For example, one report depicted the Cypriot government, the European Central Bank and German politicians shifting public blame onto each other:

‘The Cypriot government was trying to secure a new agreement after an unpopular levy on bank deposits was rejected by parliament, amid stern warnings from the European Central Bank President Dijsselboem Mr Dijsselboem said he was “open to a more fair approach to the way the levy is structured”. German centre-right MEP Markus Ferber accused Mr Dijsselboem of “organising a massive loss of confidence in Europe”, a claim rejected by the Eurogroup chief.’⁵⁰

Finally, most stories framed the protests as expressing frustration with politics as usual and lack of trust in the existing political systems and actors. Euronews reported:

‘Anger in Cyprus is on the rise ... the government, the banks and the European Union have become hate figures. Many Cypriots are suspicious that their country has become a financial experiment in anticipation of future Eurozone bailouts.’⁵¹

The coverage described the discontent among Cypriot citizens against exclusion from the decision making – what prevented economic issues from being addressed in a more democratic manner – and the bitter disillusionment that the policymakers have not prioritised them but betrayed them. This theme was emphasised in many remarks of the protestors and bystanders in the stories:

‘As well as anger against the government and the banks, Cypriots are furious with the EU: “Why are we angry? Because this is not a Europe of solidarity, this is not a Europe of support. This is not the Europe we believed in” explained one woman.’⁵²

After the Cypriot government accepted the final bailout conditions, one report from BBC News outlined the policy issues still unsolved:

49 ‘Work Continues To Shield Cypriot Small Savers’, *Euronews*, 19 March 2013.

50 ‘Treasury Committee Chairman Condemns Eurozone Cyprus Plan’, 20 March 2013.

51 ‘Government, Banks and EU Taste Cypriot Wrath’, *Euronews*, 27 March 2013.

52 ‘Cypriot Cash Controls Spark Protests’, *Euronews*, 27 March 2013.

‘So Is the Crisis Over? Not necessarily. In the short term, the risk of the Cypriot banking sector collapsing has receded, and the bailout funds will allow the government to pay its own debts and undertake the restructuring of the banks without facing economic collapse or exiting the euro. But in other respects the outlook is less certain. Cyprus must enact tough austerity measures to rebuild its economy, and regain trust among investors in its banking sector and government. It is unclear whether the Cypriot public, angered by how the crisis has been handled so far, will support that. It is also unclear how much trust is left in Cyprus’s banks, and so when fears over a bank run will recede. Finally, the whole episode has damaged confidence in European authorities’ ability to handle economic crises. ... the deal provoked outrage in Cyprus, parliament promptly voted against it, and it is increasingly seen as a blunder by European and Cypriot authorities.’⁵³

However, within this legitimating discourse, the articles generally lacked historical, social and communication contexts as well as critical depth. Also, some of the news coverage of Euronews contained frames of personal sacrifice to give an uplifting touch to the grieving situation, justifying the bailout plan. For example, Euronews reported in one story:

‘Many in London’s large Cypriot community appeared to be resigned to losing some of their deposits, as long as their sacrifice has a positive outcome. “If it’s to save the country and to save the economy, we all have to bear it,” said one man.’⁵⁴

Once the Cypriot government accepted the bailout, BBC News promoted the notion that the political actors have managed to prevent Cyprus exiting from the Eurozone although at a heavy price. An example is shown here:

‘Eurozone finance ministers have agreed a 10bn-euro bailout deal for Cyprus to prevent its banking system collapsing and keep the country in the eurozone. IMF head Christine Lagarde said the bailout deal agreed was “a comprehensive and credible plan” to help restore trust in the banking system. Cypriot Finance Minister Michalis Sarris said he believed the possibility of bankruptcy had been averted. “It’s not that we won a battle, but we really have avoided a disastrous exit from the eurozone,” he said. There will be relief in Cyprus that small depositors have been protected, but the deal comes at a heavy price, BBC correspondents say.’⁵⁵

53 ‘So is the Crisis Over?’ *BBC News*, 28 March 2013.

54 ‘Cypriots Face up to Savings Tax Challenge’, *Euronews*, 17 March 2013.

55 Tim Wilcox, ‘Cyprus Bailout: Deal Reached in Eurogroup Talks’, 25 March 2013.

Discussion

This study examines whether portrayals of the 2013 Cypriot protests in three international online news media conform to the protest paradigm. A framing analysis of protest coverage by NYT, BBC News and Euronews reveals the different extent of application. NYT mostly adheres to the protest paradigm in contrast with BBC News or Euronews. NYT's reporting mainly emphasises spectacle frames, privileges official sources over citizen opinions and situates protestors' grievances within strict economic analysis. BBC News on the other hand is more supportive than Euronews, and constructs stories with frames legitimating protestors' perspectives and questioning national and international governance. This study demonstrates the possibility of international news media relaxing some conventions of the protest paradigm and conditionally moving towards multi-perspective approaches, hence offering more credible coverage of social conflicts.

In general, NYT's reporting has followed the protest paradigm which supports past research on mainstream media coverage of protests. Specifically, spectacle frames are mainly used in the news, emphasising the size, clash and anger of the protests, pitching Cypriot banks against financial conventions and isolating protesting bank employees from the public. Much of the coverage is framed with critical analysis of economic issues which are presented as unique to Cyprus alone, bearing little to the rest of the EU and the USA. In this regard, spectacle frames serve to hype up the geopolitical drama surrounding allegations of Cyprus being a tax haven for Russian investors and obscure the role of institutional policies and failures in the Cypriot crisis. This framing practice indicates that the struggle between political players and the excitement of EU decisions being questioned by the public are more newsworthy and have added importance than the underlying causes of the Cypriot crisis or protests. Similarly, within an overall supportive discourse presented by BBC News and Euronews, spectacle frames are present to accentuate the sheer size of the protests and describe the protestors as inflamed with nationalism and at the same time, vulnerable and powerless victims of irresponsible politics. This evidence suggests that among protest paradigm framing patterns, spectacle frames emerge as a more robust characteristic, difficult to overcome. Peaceful protests that focus on articulating issue positions are not likely to fit established news conventions for what makes a good story of conflict. As such, media coverage tends to seek out certain aspects of events and activities that provide the kind of drama, physical, emotional or political, that garners public attention. In essence, spectacle frames within the protest paradigm contribute to delegitimation of protestors and an escalation in social tensions when activist groups do not obtain the intended public visibility, leading conflicts away from healthy discourse but towards destructive outcomes.

Through invocation of negative opinions of EU and government officials and financial specialists, NYT presents the protests as understandably angry reactions to a

crisis of an unimportant and weak economy. Protestors are not given much voice or perspective, suggesting NYT is endorsing the notion that institutional sources are more legitimate and reliable. The protest coverage of NYT is largely framed with discussion among prestigious financial analysts, highlighting economic issues which separate Cyprus from the USA and other member states of the EU. This practice may be due to NYT's understanding of the role of proximity in news reporting – telling the story from the perspective of an American audience and market. NYT frames events in terms of a distant and small economy exerting little impact on the Eurozone or global crisis, therefore, a lack of relevance and significance to the American economy. The reports mainly illustrate the chaotic decision making within the EU in the context of supporting the dominance of Germany and America's management of its own financial crisis. This reflects possibly NYT's need to cater to domestic politics by distancing the American economy from the EU crisis and ignoring the notion that failures of the Cypriot banking industry had raised concerns with the functioning of international financial and political systems and ultimately neoliberal capitalism that is also challenging American society.

In comparison, BBC News and Euronews demonstrate the possibility of conditionally deviating from the protest paradigm. Using multi-perspective approaches, reports of both BBC News and Euronews mostly validate the protests and question the political actors. Contrary to the tendency of NYT to privilege and affirm elite opinions, much of the coverage contains perspectives of both official sources and the protestors, opinions both supportive and critical of the bailout in the process. The tone of coverage is not dismissive but favourable towards the protestors. Through reports featuring protesting bank employees, both media portray the protests as expressing economic and political grievances, not battles against social order. On the whole, not only is attention given to some controversies surrounding the protests and crisis, but the coverage offers a platform for alternative perspectives, particularly those of the protestors by interviewing protesting bank employees, students and Russians as well as opposition politicians and analysts in the local community. The reports put a human face and a voice on the mass of protestors even when the voice is critical. In presenting the protestors' viewpoints, the media direct their grievances to relevant players in the crisis, identifying police issues and explaining their underlying implications. Yet, the coverage does exhibit certain protest paradigm characteristics – spectacle frames are used to draw attention to the protestors as fearful sufferers rather than to the political issues at stake. Despite quoting local sources who could have provided a historical perspective on the Cypriot financial crisis and the (failure of the) protests, few stories include in-depth and well-supported analysis of issues in areas of improving the financial and legal systems both in Cyprus and in the EU and implementing reforms as long-term and alternative solutions to austerity measures.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study has found evidence that the news media under certain conditions have more latitude to deviate from the protest paradigm. The relatively positive coverage of the protests may have resulted from several factors. The size of the protests and the significance of the Cypriot bailout in relation to future austerity policies of the EU make it difficult for the media to ignore the phenomenon. At the same time, the peaceful tactics of the protests do not lend them to typical protest paradigm coverage. The absence of civil disorder or a massive bank run does not render the protestors as 'demons' provoking social unrest, hence the spectacles are limited to the sheer size and the emotional drama of the protests. And most importantly, the social criticism and geopolitical reach of the protests are consistent with the interests of the media in the context of media interactions with the political elites and issues under consideration. In examining the media's own agendas and agency in championing certain causes, the political contingencies and dynamics at work in contemporary protest and media reporting inform media interactions with political elites and their representation of relevant issues. In other words, the news media's stance towards social protests are contingent upon the immediate political circumstances, the wider surrounding political culture as well as the certainty of policies involved. These interactions often manifest in terms of the news media gauging their responses to the degree of elite consensus (Bennett, 1990; Cottle, 2008). Elite consensus or dissensus, at both national and international levels, is an outcome of economic processes of globalisation that has produced disruptive and differential impacts on national-based interest groups, which mitigates the imposition of one dominant economic or political view and opens up new representational possibilities. In the Cypriot protests, the political grievances are more relevant and acceptable to BBC News and Euronews than NYT, leading to the more progressive coverage which is aligned with the media's orientation to the destabilising elite consensus embedded in the crisis. In the struggles of reaching an agreement, the Cypriot government, the Eurogroup and Germany all attempted to defend their own positions and interests by shifting policy blame onto each other. When the first bailout proposal was rejected by the Cypriot parliament and public and had generated widespread concern within the international community, the disordered decision making of the EU in relation to the geopolitical interests of Germany and incohesiveness within the Eurogroup revealed and exacerbated policy uncertainty among the elites and made them targets of criticism of varying nature and magnitude. Regarding this point, as a public broadcaster with considerable economic interest in the European audience and funded by a politically influential state outside of the Eurozone economy, BBC News takes a more critical stance than Euronews. BBC News portrays the Cypriot protests as angry reactions to undemocratic decision making imposed by EU authorities to the interest of Germany. The Cypriot crisis has perhaps provided an occasion for validating the British

government's reluctance to join the Euro zone economy and challenging the political leadership of Germany in the EU. Euronews employs a more subdued approach, and this difference might be explained by the political dynamics within it. Supported by the European Broadcasting Union and the European Commission, Euronews was founded by public broadcasters from ten European countries, among which were Germany, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain. The last three countries have been in financial crisis and in conflict with Germany and the Eurogroup in their respective bailout negotiations. To make the matter more complicated, on the supervisory board of Euronews, there is the public broadcaster from Russia which is also one of Euronews's four major shareholders. The coverage of Euronews reflects the ambivalence of offering visibility to both sides of the arguments and a more tolerant view of allegations against Russian investors.

Lastly, the varying applications of protest paradigm frames among the media reveal a different understanding of what constitutes credible protest coverage. The reporting of NYT illustrates the approach that media credibility resides in their ability to rely on official sources and remain detached (Finberg and Stone, 2002). Most reports come from authors who serve as distant, rational observers of the protests and crisis, seeking out mainly financial issues from institutional perspectives. On the contrary, writers of BBC News and Euronews take on the dual role of commentators and observers, with BBC News juxtaposing side by side on its website news reports on protests with analysis of the events by multiple authors and from different perspectives. Furthermore, adopting a grass roots approach to invoking public opinion, through reports inviting members of the public to ask questions and enter into brief dialogue with the editors on Tweeter, BBC News encourages interaction and participation of the audience and permits more diverse and representative views in the process of public deliberation. With mainstream media outlets struggling to compete with blogs and social media as well as to maintain credibility and readership, perhaps the ongoing protest movements in the EU will offer a context for improvement. In this regard, NYT's inclination to follow protest paradigm coverage could diminish credibility by focusing mainly on institutional views and not enough on social conflicts. This suggests that one way in which mainstream media could strengthen their credibility would be to offer more perspectives on the news, thus providing their audience with more insight and engaging them in more meaningful and shared communication. More significantly, this raises a question about news media adhering to strict standards of credibility while also facilitating appreciation of protest as a viable form of democratic expression. The practices followed by BBC News and Euronews illustrate the possibility of deviating from the protest paradigm and offering not just a space for protestors' perspective but also a conditionally participatory approach to news coverage that could prompt greater credibility, social equality and fundamentally democracy.

Conclusion

This article examines how international mainstream media frame the public protests in the 2013 Cypriot financial crisis, thus offering insight on the possibility of the news media conditionally breaking away from the protest paradigm towards more constructive protest coverage. This study has shown that NYT, to a great extent, constructs protest coverage within the protest paradigm. Alternatively, the reporting of BBC News and Euronews gives the protestors a voice that could be heard within the international community. However, the coverage highlights the political drama and the emotional responses of the protestors, which generate interest among readers and as a result have news value. Contrary to the anticipation shared in the international community and fuelled by the international media, disorder and unrest did not occur in Cyprus. Nonetheless, these expectations demonstrate the 'spectacle' approach still embedded in news construction of social conflicts.

Also, both news media – quoting frequently from local citizens – are in a position to better contextualise and explain the social, political and cultural factors leading up to the protests. In this sense, many critical issues with mobilising consequences are largely overlooked. Beyond representing the public's direct response to austerity measures, the media organisations could more adequately address the issue that every protest, regardless of the particular demands put forward, is a critical reaction to established mechanisms of representation, a pre-condition for citizens' inclusion and identification as members of a political community, national or within the EU.

Finally, within the context of the Eurozone financial crisis at a time of global uncertainty, never before has the need of both the public and news organisations seeking and fostering informed public discourse been more important in nurturing the national, European and global public sphere. If it is the wish of society to promote informed citizenry, society must provide institutional support for democratic representation of contentious actions, recognising the significance of media portrayals as potential instruments of elite discourse and movement self-representation. An issue perhaps more critical than whether media are capable of conveying the voice of the protestors – which is not debated by any of the media examined – is whether political institutions are able and willing to enter into a dialogical relationship with the affected public. Only such consideration will principally improve media representation of protesting citizens in order to ensure that their concerns and visions are integrated in decisions made at all relevant levels, thus shaping new forms of democracy in Europe; the current state of which has been questioned by the public protests in the 2013 Cypriot financial crisis.

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