

Visual Infotainment in the political news A cultural approach in the post-truth era

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of visual infotainment, the aspects of infotainment found in visual artefacts employed in the news. Using a case study, we examine the photographs published in the digital media to report on the negotiations between the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities, which took place in 2016 and 2017. A four-level visual framing analysis is used to identify a consistent set of frames. It aims to identify the political ideologies that appear to be behind the visual infotainment in these pictorial reports, and the specific ways in which hard news can be transformed into soft news. Our research confirms the presence of visual infotainment elements of personalisation, emotion, morbidity and sensationalism. Overall, the study shows that visual infotainment serves to establish visual frames produced by and for contradictory propagandas, one of which favours ethnic nationalism while the other promotes conflict resolution.

Key words

visual infotainment, visual framing, post-truth era, political news, Cyprus

1. Introduction

The style used by news reports in the media is important in capturing the interest of, and informing, mass audiences. As a result of the commercialisation of journalism, infotainment features are one of the most common practices used by media professionals in order to attract the public. 'Infotainment' was introduced to refer to a reporting style that integrates both information and entertainment in a single news item, which are generally considered contrasting concepts in traditional journalism (e.g., Bonner & McKay, 2003, p. 119; Berrocal Gonzalo, Redondo García, Martín Jiménez & Campos Domínguez, 2014; see also, Photiou, Maniou, Eteokleous & Ketteni, 2017).

As a result of this, and because it probably originated in tabloid newspapers (Section 2.1), infotainment itself and the uses to which it is put have always been suffused with controversy (e.g., Bonner & McKay, 2003; Harrington, 2008). Its origins appear to be in the late 1980s, and certain elements can be traced back to broadcast journalism in the early days of commercial television and radio (e.g., Esser, 1999).

Despite the controversy surrounding it, infotainment has become an accepted part of journalistic practices in most western societies and media organisations, and has been important in re-contextualising public communication. In fact, there has been a general revision of its place in journalism (e.g., Bonner & McKay, 2003; Harrington, 2008).

This study coins the term *visual infotainment* to refer to aspects of infotainment embedded in the visual artefacts used in reporting political news in digital media (Nielsen, 2014), such as social media, blogs and websites. We consider the term 'digital media' to encompass any content which exists in digital format and is accessible online, including new social media, as well as 'older' internet technology, such as blogs and websites (Alvermann, Beach & Boggs, 2016).

The research focuses on analysing photographs published in the media of the 2016-2017 negotiation effort to resolve the Cyprus Problem between the Greek-Cypriot (hereafter GC) and Turkish-Cypriot (hereafter TC) communities, in order to investigate the political ideologies suffusing any possible infotainment characteristics in these newsworthy pictorial reports. We consider the material analysed herein to be news, or at least newsworthy, because it reports and/or provides evidence of (part of) real events that occurred when the photographs were taken, and/or is linked with these events. Although we do concede that not all the pictorials were produced by photojournalists and media professionals, we argue that they are no less newsworthy. Specifically, our research questions include:

RQ1: Are there elements of visual infotainment in the photographs employed when reporting the political negotiations in digital media?

RQ2: If so, how do these elements frame political news?

RQ3: Which political agendas appear to be associated with identified visual frames?

The last obviously is a question pertaining specifically to the Cyprus Problem rather than infotainment itself. It was deemed informative to explore it in the course of investi-

gating the first two questions, as its subject matter constitutes traditionally hard-hitting, political news. This work does not intend to analyse (or profile politically) specific sources and/or political players; our aim is rather to investigate how the images could be 'read' politically based on GC culture.

This article is organised as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the literature on infotainment and visual infotainment. In Section 3, we provide a brief background to the Cyprus Problem and the efforts to resolve it. Section 4 presents a selection of the photographs, outlines the methodology of visual framing and illustrates how it was used to analyse them. In Sections 5 and 6 we analyse the findings, and our conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Infotainment: Current trends and characteristics*

Traditionally, the term *infotainment* has been used to refer to journalistic techniques of personalisation and sensationalism in news stories, especially in broadcast journalism (Maniou & Papadopoulou, 2019), and *tabloidisation* is used to refer to similar practices in the press (Bonner & McKay, 2003; Photiou et al., 2017; see also Sparks, 2000). Infotainment practices have been widely studied and analysed. We focus on specific traditional characteristics of infotainment, as studied by Bonner and McKay (2003) and recently by Mellado (2014): personalisation, emotions, morbidity, personal life, sensationalism and scandal. These features have come to be part of standard journalistic practices in order to attract larger audiences (see also, Photiou et al, 2017).

In more recent years, with the introduction and development of digital media, infotainment seems to have created new characteristics and trends in media consumption. As Jebiril, Albæk and de Vreese (2013) argue, the effects of infotainment depend on the nature of its content, the audience in a particular culture, and their specific motifs of media consumption and cultural or socio-political interests, as well as the individual's interest in politics and hard news (see also Crețu, 2013, p. 126; Esser, 1999).

The mainstreaming of infotainment journalism has led to the addition to its practice of a fairly new characteristic, *political cynicism*. Political cynicism is seen as a sense of powerlessness and distrust of the public vis-à-vis politics (Jebiril, Albæk & de Vreese, 2013) and is closely related to the notion of satiric infotainment (Eşitti & Işık, 2014). Although this style of infotainment involves traditional journalistic terminology, news-reporting techniques and writing styles, it combines a range of entertaining content (e.g., satiric visual artefacts). Some believe that it mocks authorities and traditional journalistic genres, and that it targets 'the powerful or challenge[s] some aspects of the status quo, especially on issues of culture, politics, race, sexuality, or class' (Alonso, 2012, p. 35).

2.2. *Visual infotainment in the post-truth era*

The Oxford English Dictionary (2016) featured 'post-truth' as the 'word of the year' for 2016, and the *post-truth era* encompasses a period in mass communication during which manufactured stories, personal beliefs and emotions tend to influence public opinion more than real facts/news (see Darnton, 2017; Flood, 2016). The notion of post-truth appeared in the 1990s, but it was not until 2016 that it started to gain recognition (Swire, Berinsky, Lewandowsky & Ecker, 2017), possibly due to two political events with global impact that happened in quick succession: the vote favouring the exit of the UK from the European Union ('Brexit') and the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017).

Infotainment seems to be evolving into a normative news practice in the post-truth era, as the digital media are now among the lead players in communication. This is due to the versatility allowed by the incorporation of digital technology in portable devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.). Visual artefacts are therefore a key characteristic of the news today (Maniou & Veglis, 2016). In this work, we introduce the term *visual infotainment* to refer to the characteristics typically employed in infotainment journalism (Section 2.1), which can be observed in the visual artefacts of news stories posted in digital media.

3. A historical review of the Cyprus Problem

The Republic of Cyprus declared its independence in 1960 and joined the European Union in 2004 and the Eurozone in 2008. Although statistics about ethnicity have been somewhat sketchy since 1974, it was estimated that at that time 85% of the Cypriot population were of Greek descent, 12% were of Turkish origin, and other large ethnic groups (Cypriots of Armenian, Latin and other Christian Catholic origins) comprised the remaining 3% (PIO, 2000, p.50). Today, large communities of European and non-European citizens also inhabit the island (Maniou, Photiou & Ketteni, 2016, p.67). The GC community is often affected by the socio-political and financial changes in Greece, due to their affiliation with the language and their shared history and religion.

The GC and TC communities have not been able to coexist peacefully. Violent confrontations between nationalistic groups of both communities marred the relationship between them as early as 1963. The island was divided in July-August 1974, when a coup against then-president Makarios, instigated by the Greek military with the involvement of GC nationalists, led to its invasion by Turkish forces. These forces now occupy the northern part of the republic, and the population has been split, with (most) TCs in the north and the rest in the south. This unstable and often violent coexistence between the two communities, which culminated in the events of 1974, is frequently referred to as the *Cyprus Problem* in the political attempts to resolve it to the satisfaction of the Republic of Cyprus, the TC community, and the guaranteeing powers of the republic, Greece, Turkey and the UK (e.g., Trimikliniotis, 2005).

Most social, economic and/or political patterns of behaviour in the Republic of Cyprus were linked, after 1974, to the military occupation of the north segment of Cyprus. Attempts to resolve this usually revolve around the crucial issue of ethnic identity, which seems to be of paramount importance for the GC community (Photiou, Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2017), and possibly most TCs as well. Today, Cyprus faces critical, multidimensional challenges (e.g., economic crisis), but the greatest one remains the reestablishment of its territorial integrity and unity (Theofanous, 2011). Despite successive and repeated rounds of intercommunal negotiations under the auspices of the UN and the support of the international community (Palley, 2005; Michael, 2009), there had not been a resolution to the Cyprus Problem as this article was written. The most recent attempts took place in November 2016 and January 2017 in Mont Pelerin and Geneva, respectively; these negotiations constitute the focus of this work and we will refer to them hereafter as the *Cyprus Talks*.

4. Methodological approach

4.1. Theoretical framework: Photography

Since its invention, photography has been associated with the documentation of the truth (Bourdieu, 2005). Photographic images are produced by capturing the light actually emitted/reflected from a subject through an optical system (camera) onto a chemical or digital detector, thereby rendering the subject with a level of accuracy and likeness that bears a closer resemblance to the real and tangible world than, for example, other arts such as painting, drawing or sculpture (*ibid*).

Nevertheless, the truth value of a photograph is often challenged, since it is affected by a number of parameters, in particular the photographer, the media editor and the audience itself. This arises from the fact that the image can encompass only a facet of the reality related to its subject, which lasts for a single instant and within a limited spatial frame. Both these fleetingly truthful aspects thus have to be specifically selected by the photographer and are subject to their personal, social and cultural biases (Bourdieu, 2005; see also Lester, 2006), in addition to elements of physicality, such as viewpoint, lighting, composition, personal aesthetic, etc. (Lester, 2006). Furthermore, in publishing, editors make subjective choices from a number of possible images based on a number of factors (e.g., political alliances, potential for commercial success), thereby further manipulating meaning towards the subjective consumption of photographs (Watney, 2005). Finally, when reading an image, audiences spontaneously distil their perceptions of its narrative from a number of culturally and socially accepted meanings, subject to several individual parameters, such as nationality, political stance, gender, education, etc. (see Barthes, 1977; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Photographs therefore constitute static interpretations of events, despite the fact that they 'capture' their subjects in transiting 'truths' (e.g., Sontag, 1977).

4.2. Theoretical framework: Framing analysis

We have employed visual framing to analyse the photographs of the 2016-2017 Cyprus Talks in our sample. Framing does not have a universally agreed definition. Although its origin is in cognitive psychology (Bartlett, 1932; van Gorp, 2007) and anthropology (Bateson, 1955/1972), it has been used in many fields, including sociology (e.g., Goffman, 1974), linguistics (e.g., Tannen, 1979) and communication science (e.g., Tuchman, 1978). The appreciation of what constitutes a frame has thus been adapted to the needs of each discipline and the work of specific researchers (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; also, Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011 for visual framing). There is consensus that frames constitute an effective tool in news reporting. In communicating actions and/or events to a community, a massive amount of often sophisticated or specialised information must be refined to the cognizance level of the average individual in the audience (and the body of journalists), and fitted to the temporal and/or spatial limitations of a news report (Gans, 1979; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing devices essentially filter such detail into abstractions that are culturally easy to 'read' and recognise, thereby enabling individuals to interpret, appreciate and deliberate on events in (possibly multiple, but not limitless) culturally shared, socially endorsed ways (van Gorp, 2005; 2007; Tuchman, 1978). Here, we adopt a definition for framing that highlights this purpose: a frame may be any conceptual tool or abstraction that enables the media and their audiences to communicate, decode and appraise information by choosing and/or highlighting some of their aspects and downplaying or omitting others (Gitlin, 1980; Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Photiou, Papadopoulou, & Maniou, 2017). Framing devices in visual media (in this case, photographs) typically comprise images. Since pictures are quicker and more practical to 'read' than words, they require less conscious thought and are often processed subliminally (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 59). Furthermore, images are considered 'harder' evidence than words and thus evoke more immediate and deeper emotional responses (ibid). Ostensibly, they may imprint more readily than words (ibid; also, Rogers & Thorson, 2000). Images can operate as quite powerful framing devices, as they can highlight and/or obscure the required aspects of an event often more effectively than text (Wischmann, 1987; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

During framing, the news is edited, which means that it is not presented in its basic form. Choosing, coding and decoding frames is subject to the cognizance of the source, communicator (media and journalists) and audience, as well as on their shared cultural experiences and knowledge (Goffman, 1974; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992). Nevertheless, all parties choose from the shared possible meanings (Goffman, 1974; Gamson et al., 1992).

The first step in the communication process of a news story is production. During this stage, *frame building* takes place 'in a continuous interaction' between the professionals who report the news and the elites and/or social movements that have (political, social, financial, etc.) stakes in them, and functions as an internal gambit in promoting the socio-

economic and/or political agendas of both (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52; Scheufele, 1999, p. 109). Specifically, first the source and then the communicator choose to centralise 'some aspects of a perceived reality' while excluding or downplaying others, thereby promoting 'a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' that best facilitate(s) their interests (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 94; Vliegthart & van Zoonen, 2011, p. 105).

Interaction between media and audience prompts the second step of the process: consumption. *Frame setting* necessitates a synergy of socio-cultural and/or other relevant 'background' knowledge, as well as individual personality traits, in order for each member of the audience to interpret the media frames. Multiple possible outcomes may result from this, and not necessarily those desired by the builders of the frames. The interpretations are not limitless, however, given the common background of all parties involved (e.g., de Vreese, 2005).

News frames have been studied with a variety of desiderata in different social sciences, leading to the categorisation of frames as *thematic* and *generic* (de Vreese, 2005). Thematic frames relate to and develop over time, to encapsulate information usually for a long-lasting and socially significant issue. Conversely, generic frames may be encountered in news with different foci (e.g., political, financial, criminal, humanitarian) and are thus known *a-priori* (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; de Vreese, 2005).

Both categories have been explored in qualitative and quantitative research (de Vreese, 2005). Since our work undertakes qualitative (visual) framing analysis, we will not describe quantitative investigations, except to say that both categories of frames have been considered as dependent or independent variables in the whole spectrum of news reporting, using various methodologies (for television news, examples include: Iyengar, 1996; de Vreese, 2004; Mendelsohn, 1993; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

A number of studies have utilised the qualitative analysis of visual frames (for television news, see Avraham & First, 2010; Lazitski, 2014). Typically, a qualitative methodology is employed to analyse the text and images of the reportage, scanning them for patterns, which are subsequently linked to the identified frames. The specific agendas that lead to the production of these frames are often at the heart of these investigations, as is the case here. Qualitative framing analyses are either inductive, in which the investigation is conducted without *a priori* expectations of the frames to be encountered, or deductive, in which the reverse occurs.

4.3. Data collection and methodology of analysis

The artefacts studied here consist of 168 photographs deriving from various online national, international, private and/or public archives on the Cyprus Talks. We aimed to acquire specific but random results to document the wide range of expectations, the talks themselves, and the reactions to the outcomes of the negotiations. We thus decided that our search should extend from October to December 2016 for the talks that took

place in Mont Pelerin, and from December 2016 until February 2017 for the talks in Geneva. Furthermore, we allowed sources to include websites, blogs and social media without limitations in origins and nature (i.e., political or not).

In order to properly implement these parameters, we used the image search option by Google, first adjusting the settings to the specified periods and then inserting in the search tab '#montpelerin talks 2016' and '#cyprus geneva talks 2017'. Hashtags are a widespread feature of online discourse that have proliferated with the growth of social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) as a means of categorising posts and making them more visible in searches (Heyd & Puschmann, 2017). Hashtags have developed to convey content information, and are also utilised in numerous digital media and platforms, as an effective way to organise and categorise content (Scott, 2015). We thus used hashtags before our keywords in our searches in order to focus our search effectively on the relevant pictures. Results yielded the photographs from various digital media (websites, blogs and social media – i.e., not only Twitter) that used hashtags to organise and categorise content. English (rather than Greek) was used as a search language to sample data from international as well as national sites; the use of Greek is limited (almost non-existent) even on local sites, especially concerning the Cyprus Problem.

We argue that using this search technique allowed the gathering of online images that formulated collective, spontaneous and public visual archives, which would readily be located by, and thus considerably inform the first impression of, an interested party researching the particular negotiation effort (casually or specifically). Obviously, the search returned thousands of photographs. We selected our sample based on relevance to the topic. The topic in question was the Cyprus Problem and the negotiations underway to address it. Various (cultural, social, or otherwise unrelated) pictures of Cyprus from both communities, images of previous negotiators and from past discussions, etc., were removed from the sample in an effort to focus on those addressing – even indirectly – this specific effort.

We then analysed pictures at random until achieving saturation in the conclusions. Saturation was achieved when the analysis of each new image yielded the same results, in this case (one of the same) frames, as those we had already found by analysing previous images. As there was no prior political bias in image selection (which is why we refer to our sample as 'random'), we argue that the analysis produced most/all the frames associated with the political ideologies at play. Since this work focuses on visual artefacts alone, we refrained from reproducing and analysing any text (short captions or longer passages) that might accompany these images, unless it was part of, or embedded in, the photograph itself (for example, the text in banners if a picture of a banner was displayed), as it could influence the (initial) impression with which the pictures were viewed. We feel that this targeted omission makes the analysis fairer, as there were some artefacts that were not accompanied by text at all.

An inductive, qualitative visual framing analysis (see van Gorp, 2005, 2007) was undertaken on the images using a four-level methodological model (also, Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). The first level focused on denotation. Specifically, we considered the photographs as denotative systems, identifying their various key visual elements, including (where applicable) the subjects' postures, gestures, facial expressions and gaze, and the backgrounds, colours, slogans and banners embedded in the image. In the second level, a stylistic analysis was conducted, whereby the stylistic features of the images (e.g., range, angle and shading of the shot) important in conveying meaning were identified. We distinguished the photographs into two main categories based on the period in which they were produced: images that were photographed in real time and those that were published from past databases. We used the first two levels of analysis to split the former into three subsets and the latter into two subgroups (Section 5).

In the third level, we attempted to decode the possible connotative meaning(s) of the photographs. Specifically, we examined the attachment of each visual element to socially endorsed and/or culturally produced notions, thereby investigating the signified content of these elements and the symbolic association between them. Finally, in the fourth level, we considered the ideological representation(s) in the connotations. We integrated both the significance of the visual elements and stylistic features of each image to decode the use of the elements of visual infotainment and to identify the ideological agendas that might have informed the selection of the representations (as described in Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Our methodology was inductive in that we did not base our analysis on *a priori* expectations of the frames to be encountered, but let the procedure guide us to our findings (see van Gorp, 2005, 2007).

5. Analysis and Discussion

As previously mentioned, the photographic archive on the Cyprus Talks was split into two main groups. The first comprises the real-time photographic coverage of the talks, and as such was concurrent with the daily events and activities that took place in Switzerland and the corresponding reactions in the Republic of Cyprus. The second collection of images was published predominantly by foreign media, and features non-temporal photographs stripped of any references to the events occurring in the Cyprus Talks, serving more as a background storyline to the Cyprus Problem. Whether these photographs were actually taken during the period of the talks or were chosen from an existing archive is unknown, but even if they are from an archive, their publication speaks to the specific (political, financial and/or social) interests that drove their selection.

5.1. Exploration of the non-temporal images: Frames of Abandonment and Nationalism

Although perhaps unorthodox, we start our analysis with the images in the second group, as we argue that they were chosen – consciously or unwittingly – to generate a specific

socio-political 'atmosphere' for the reporting of the talks. In fact, we discern two subcategories of non-temporal images among our sample, which serve political agendas that are polar opposites, but we find that they both employ the same (infotainment) characteristics of sensationalism, emotion and at times morbidity to address and even frame the Cyprus Problem. In both groups, most images are clearly taken around the *green line*, a demilitarised buffer zone established in 1964 after the bicomunal strife and enforced in 1974 after the Turkish invasion (see Broome, 2005). The green line is thus emblematic of conflict and division, since it has kept the two communities isolated from each other (until 21 April 2003, when the TC authorities eased restrictions in the movement across the line).

The first cluster of non-temporal images mostly depicts the abandoned ruins of a derelict city, often behind barbed fences and aging barricades. In these underdeveloped, technologically devoid cityscapes, we commonly observe the presence of a lone figure, such as a child pushing a supermarket trolley in a deserted street, a mother moving a pram peacefully (Figure 1), an old man riding his bicycle quietly (Figure 2), a UN soldier addressing the camera in a relaxed manner, a middle-aged woman gazing pensively into the demilitarised zone, a melancholy middle-aged man sitting on a sunbathed bench while a sign above reads the word 'peace'. The dilapidated state of the buildings portrayed (with old dirty facades and even bullet holes) attests to a violent event that caused their sudden abandonment and the termination of life as it once was, thereby infusing the images with morbidity. Juxtaposed with the everyday and seemingly peaceful subjects of the photographs, the images of the green line emphasise, and even overplay, an emotional state of nostalgia and loneliness. The commonality of the protagonists and their eerie presence in the deserted zone hints at various storylines, thereby connotatively encouraging empathy, and even sympathy. Even in pictures without human subjects, the focus is often on fences and rusted barricades, which act as signs of longing and separation. The location, protagonists, lighting, layout and colour palette in these images suggest a grim atmosphere and insinuate a temporal immobility in a region and people untouched by technology and economic growth. This suggests that the Cyprus Problem is actively stunting progress and prosperity on the island, thus inducing extreme emotions regarding its state.

This sombre visual representation contrasts vividly with the reality of Cyprus today. A simple stroll in any city in Cyprus (at least in the southern portion) reveals modern, lively communities enjoying growth in real estate, tourism and light industry, and where everyday routine is no longer compromised by the direct aftermath of the events in 1974. Although the Cypriot economy and commerce do have their (often dramatic) ups and downs (see Maniou & Photiou, 2017), particularly in the midst of an economic crisis, the images and people one encounters are not honestly represented by this group of photographs selected to portray the Cyprus Problem.



Figure 1: Untitled (Reuters/Kourtoglou, 2017)



Figure 2: Untitled (Reuters/Kourtoglou, 2017)

Given this contrast with reality, we argue that at least some of the images aim to prompt a feeling of abandonment and longing in a dramatic manner. There is a host of non-temporal images published during the Cyprus Talks that represent the division in the same light, and so we argue that this subcategory of images generates and/or feeds off a specific point of view of the Cyprus Problem, which we refer to as the *frame of abandonment*. We find it important to hypothesise about the political, and even ideological, motives behind the establishment of this frame. On one hand, it may constitute an effort to breed an emotional, even adversarial response against the 'other,' the 'opposing' community, to blame 'the others' for what each community has lost in the division. On the other hand, the desolate visuals could serve as an emotional reminder for both communities that they have both suffered losses during this division, and that it may be time to put the past behind them and work towards a resolution of their conflict. We suspect that how the images are received largely depends on the personal views of the members of both communities; it is not in the scope of this work to conduct audience studies to address the question of reception.

In perhaps a contrasting view of this frame, a considerable proportion of non-temporal images depict nationalistic symbols. Often ethnically specific, GC and TC flags, along with the respective affiliated national flags of Greece and Turkey, are portrayed against barbed wire, barricades and other politically charged signs and landscapes, such as the Pentadaktylos Mountain, the deserted city of Famagusta, etc. For example, a specific image displays the Turkish and TC flags as they are waving in front of Pentadaktylos; in the background, the same flags have been painted on its slope by the TC authorities. Large enough to be seen from a distance and illuminated at night, the mountainside flags are accompanied by the motto 'How happy is the one who says I am a Turk' (translation). The creation of the flags on the slope of the mountain has been the subject of a bitter dispute between the two communities. The appearance of the flags indicated the claim of the TC community to be recognised as a sovereign state,¹ while GCs saw the act as a provocation to the Republic of Cyprus. The photograph thus encompasses the conflicting political and nationalistic narratives extensively used in the divisive rhetoric of the TC community. We argue that this is the reason the image features the overlaid text 'The what and the why of the Cyprus Talks'.

We claim that the GC community has produced its own dramatic, divisive visual rhetoric. For example, in Figure 3, the flag of the Republic of Cyprus, is seen waving next to the flag of Greece through barbed wire in a cloudy sky. The visual elements are vividly symbolic. Specifically, the proximity of the two flags implies the ethnic identification of the Republic of Cyprus as Greek, or at least serves as a reminder of the historical closeness of the two countries, a point of contention for TCs. The background in the image is equally symbolic of the division of the two sides: the image of the barbed wire and the cloudy, dark sky insinuates the imprisonment of the Republic of Cyprus and the Greek element of the island, clearly laying the blame for the division on the 'enemy', namely Turkey and

the TC community. In view of the fact that we have found a significant number of equally nationalistic images produced by or for (the consumption of) both communities, we claim that these images are informed by a *frame of nationalism*.



Figure 3: Untitled (Associated Press / Karatzias, 2017)

We argue that this frame perpetuates and exploits traditionally accepted feelings and attitudes of conflict and mistrust in (at least) a proportion of the members of the two communities, thereby serving to provoke or enhance strong public reactions. Clearly, the photographs would not have worked as representative of at least the nationalistic viewpoint of the Cyprus Problem, if such an opinion did not exist in the cultural, historical background of the two communities, since '[a] photograph that brings news of some unsuspected zone of misery cannot make a dent in public opinion unless there is an appropriate context of feeling and attitude' (Sontag, 1977, p. 17). The purpose of emphasising these sensitive issues and arousing intensified or sensational responses is to create bias against the stated aims of the Cyprus Talks, which include the settlement of the conflict and ultimately the re-unification of the island. As this conclusion would be against the perceived political-ideological interests of the nationalistic factions in both communities, we further argue that the *frame of nationalism* is a powerful media tool of a specific propaganda, used in the coverage of the talks despite (or because of?) its use of the infotainment elements of sensationalism and dramatisation.

5.2. *The real-time images: Frames of progress and conflicting nationalities*

The photographs captured during the period of the Cyprus Talks constitute the more populous group of pictures. The images that were produced in Switzerland fall into one of two main subsets: those that were staged with most/all the delegates, and spontaneous images that focus on specific key players, usually catching them unawares. A third collection of photographs taken in Cyprus presents the local political reactions to the negotiations.

In the first subgroup, typical high-quality photographic techniques are used to capture UN, EU and state officials in posed activities that are generically symbolic of the conduct of politics, such as entering conference rooms or buildings, sitting behind negotiation tables and gathering together in workgroups and in crowded places. Saturated colours, good lighting and directed compositions give the photographs a sense of official value and convey authority. For example, in Figure 4, the wide-range, high-definition photograph shows most delegates at the Geneva talks seated at the same table as the talks are about to commence. The GC and TC teams are sitting across from each other, with the 'neutral' mediators (UN and EU delegates) seated between them. All representatives are displayed maintaining eye contact and smiling. We argue that the shot serves to establish the socio-political connection between the officials in a single image. The two main sides of the Cyprus Problem are sitting across from each other, at a 'safe' distance, but at the same time able to look at each other in the eye, which signifies their honesty



Figure 4: *Untitled* (Di Nolfi, 2017)

and good will in the process. The UN and EU teams create enough distance between the two sides to safeguard and mediate the process. These compositional elements are meant to establish that not only is there activity in the Cyprus Problem but, in fact, possible progress.

There are also staged images in this subcategory of photographs, of the delegates enjoying each other's company in unofficial, social settings and gatherings. The protagonists in these pictures include political personas who carry strong national significations and have considerable responsibilities during the talks. Yet, as shown for example in Figure 5, these photographs portray the social contact of the delegates as if they are ordinary people coming together, often in casual outfits, to converse, relax and enjoy themselves, smiling and posing in each other's company, over dinner kitchenware, at restaurant tables and in homely settings. The personal focus evident in these photographs 'humanises' the delegates, allowing them to portray a sense of everyday normalcy, and encourages empathy with them, not only politically but also personally.



Figure 5: *Untitled* (PIO, 2016)²

The unofficial, personal pictorials also clearly suggest that the private relationship between the leading figures of the Cyprus Talks may have a role to play in the way the political events unravel. The austere separation established right after the bicomunal strife and especially after the Turkish invasion probably provoked ideas of a 'demonised otherness' in both communities. Nurtured further by the politics and the educational systems of the GC (and possibly TC) communities, the rhetoric of the 'vicious other'

raised suspicion and fear among the public (Spyrou, 2006). The personal moments of the officials were thus possibly also captured in the hopes that they may contribute to the de-mythologisation of the long, bitter suspicion between the two communities, as their representatives have been able to overcome both the boundaries of the serious political developments and the formal contact between them.

The multitude of similar staged images conform to the sensational and/or personalised visual symbolism displayed in Figures 4 and 5. Their careful composition, symbolic visual elements and subtle meanings conveyed through the (infotainment) elements of sensationalism and personalisation possibly generate excitement, or turmoil and problematisation (depending on personal political ideology), about whether the negotiations might produce a solution. Staging these photographs in this precise and calculated manner is ideologically significant to all the parties present at the talks: solving a problem which is now more than 40 years old would boost the popularity of the neoliberal GC government (which was facing elections in early 2018 with the economy still seen as substandard) and the social-democratic party of the TC community. The EU would finally be rid of a problem involving the entry process of Turkey, and the UN would eliminate any political issues arising from the de facto entity of the self-styled Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Since most, if not all, the images classified in this group generate the same suppositions to a lesser or greater extent – i.e., that the negotiations are moving the Cyprus Problem forward and that the delegates are optimistic and perhaps excited about an imminent solution – we argue that the photographs that were under the control of the delegates were staged on purpose in the above manner. We thus identify a *frame of progress* contextualising these photographs. Whether the solution would be acceptable or not (which in the GC community depends on individual political ideologies and party preferences), and whether it would lead to the (many) social benefits implied in some of the non-temporal photographs (Section 5.1) and result in the political gain of the delegates involved, are not aspects of this frame.

The second subset of photographs produced in Switzerland seems less digitally manipulated, often slightly out of focus and rushed, conveying the impression (either purposefully or unwittingly) that they are neither staged nor acted out. We dub these images ‘action shots’ as they seem to ‘catch’ the protagonists – often the leaders of the communities, Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci – while they are deep in discussion or debate (presumably on issues pertaining to the Cyprus Problem) and seem indifferent to or unaware of the camera.

Due to their presentation as ‘unintended,’ these pictures draw the attention of the audience and may even convey meaning to every little detail of body language. For example, in Figure 6, Akinci leans close and gestures in an explanatory manner towards a carefully listening Anastasiades. The two leaders, preserving intense eye contact, almost lock hands and knees in an effort to come closer. In another image, the two leaders have

their backs to the camera and lean close to each other, in a similarly intimate conversation. The close-up cropping and blurred background of the photograph does not reveal the surrounding setting, thereby forcing focus on the two delegates. The image insinuates doubt about whether other people were present during the conversation. Both figures convey the impression that the photographer 'intruded' while capturing these 'action shots.' In the former, the angle implies that the camera is outside the small intimate circle peering in, and the latter conveys the impression that as the two leaders are conversing, a photographer approaches from behind, perhaps stealthily, and photographs them in an off-the-record, or at least unplanned, moment. Whether on or off the record, both images suggest that what is said between Anastasiades and Akinci is vital.



Figure 6: *Untitled* (PIO, 2016)³

The voyeuristic, tabloid-like style of capturing these images, and many other 'action shots' like them, evokes a sense of authenticity that increases their truth value. Specifically, since the subjects seem to be captured close-up and unaware, from 'the outside' in (supposedly?) real and unintended scenes, the camera appears to be 'uncovering' the truth

invested in these scenes, which would otherwise be concealed or kept away from public view. Whether the authenticity of each scene is real or intended, these 'action shots' prompt re-interpretations of the Cyprus Talks, thus inducing speculation and sensationalising the effort. When the protagonists are captured in concordance the frame of progress is facilitated, and when they appear problematised the frame of nationalism is evoked. Since such 'action shots' were used to 'bombard' audiences during the Cyprus Talks, it is evident that their employment is intended to generate a rollercoaster of emotional ups and downs in audiences that both favour as well as oppose a solution to the Cyprus Problem alike, increasing the saleability of the news by using these infotainment techniques.

The final subgroup of real-time photographs identified in this work includes images taken in Cyprus and representing the variety of public reactions to the talks, both for and against. For example, a specific wide-angle photograph captured young, male GCs who carry Greek (as opposed to Cypriot) flags, alongside pickets displaying a divided Cyprus with a blue southern piece and an orange northern one. The labels on the banners read 'No to a federal solution' and 'Federation = Division' (translation). The angle of the camera shows a large number of flags and suggests a well-attended demonstration. Nevertheless, the focus of the image is on the flags and the symbolically divided island.

All these politically charged signs establish this as a Hellenocentric (Philippou, 2009, Spyrou, 2001; see also Photiou, Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2017) nationalistic demonstration. There is a divisive rhetoric between a Hellenocentric and Cypriocentric view of the Cypriot national identity in GC news reporting (e.g., Philippou, 2009, Spyrou, 2001). Although this is discussed extensively in the analysis, it is important to note that this rhetoric has been produced and continuously recontextualised throughout the last century or more in Cyprus. No single specific sender or group has therefore used this rhetoric; it is at this time part of Cypriot culture, which is the reason it pervades news (text and pictorials) with various frames (Philippou, 2009, Spyrou, 2001). A sizable portion of the GC community have traditionally adhered to the Hellenic history of Cyprus as one of the most significant aspects of their identity; this group maintain that Cyprus should be a homogeneously Greek island. (Similarly, in the TC community a considerable portion of people are traditionally attached to their Turkish origins and maintain that the island should be homogeneously Turkish [Vural & Peristianis, 2008].) The aforementioned photograph (and others like it) is thus ideologically charged, with the Greek flags conveying a strong sense of (nationalistic) pride and thus an emotional response. The symbolic division of the island in colours other than blue also conveys an aspect of morbidity within this propaganda, as it signifies not just the loss of a life, but the loss of an element of (Hellenic) identity. Similar, real-time and non-temporal (Section 5.1) images use these infotainment elements to further the frame of nationalism that constitutes an effort to promote this nationalistic propaganda against a federal state, which is advertised as contrary to the island's Hellenic identity.

The politically opposite viewpoint is also represented in our sample, with photographs that demonstrate the opinion that the establishment of a federal state would constitute a resolution to the Cyprus Problem. For example, Figure 7 is a wide-angle photograph showing a joint GC and TC demonstration that displays a variety of people of all ages, one of whom waves a Cypriot flag. The displayed banners favour a (federal) solution; the one in Greek reads 'Yes to the future. Solution now.' (translation). The angle of the camera shows a large number of attendees again. The darker shading of the image draws focus to the contrastingly brightly lit Cypriot flag and the two pickets.



Figure 7: Untitled (Associated Press / Karatzias, 2017)

These symbols are also politically charged, although they identify this demonstration as a display of Cypriocentric propaganda (Philippou, 2009, Spyrou, 2001; see also Photiou, Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2017). Another sizable proportion of both communities has traditionally subscribed to the common history of the two groups in a united country as a significant characteristic of their identities (Lacher & Kaymak, 2005). Figure 7 and similar real-time images – as well as a proportion of non-temporal photographs set with the frame of abandonment (Section 5.1) – ideologically promote sentiments of solidarity between GCs and TCs. The longing in the banner labels serves as an emotional source, encouraging support for a federal solution to the Cyprus Problem and the notion that it would not divide the island but rather lead to the formation of a bond for the future. The almost bipolar contrast between the ideologies represented in the last two images is one that is established from a host of published photographs. We thus argue that there is a frame in the pictorials of the media via which these differing Hellenocentric

and Cypriocentric views of GC national identity are understood as conflicting with one other. Although images produced by the media in the north have not been analysed, we suspect (from the presence of TCs in the demonstrations favouring a federal solution) that this *frame of the conflicting nationalities* exists similarly against Turkish and Cypriot perception of identities in the TC community.

6. Conclusions

Infotainment has been criticised for most of three decades, since its conception, and only in recent years has its contribution to journalism been reconsidered. As audiences may be more effectively drawn to sensationalised, emotion-, morbidity- or even scandal-driven, personalised and/or entertaining news, infotainment can function as a powerful selling technique for hard news, particularly in highly competitive markets. This work has constituted an effort to determine whether various characteristics linked to infotainment journalism may pervade photographs related to and published on political events – which we have called visual infotainment – and what effects these may have on ‘reading’ the news.

Our research dealt with the Cyprus Problem and, specifically, with the 2016-2017 negotiations to resolve it. We most resoundingly found that visual infotainment elements suffuse the photographs published during the Cyprus Talks (RQ1). In fact, by analysing the compositional elements and content of all real-time and non-temporal (background) photographs using a four-level visual framing analysis, we have been able to identify one or more of the features of personalisation, emotions, morbidity and sensationalism in various images. It is thus apparent that, in this instance at least, visual infotainment has been employed in the digital media to dramatise and report on a hard-hitting, political issue.

Furthermore, we argue that visual infotainment has not reduced the political issues to ‘softer’ news, at least in as much as soft news is considered socially light and not crucial to the public dialogue, survival and/or prosperity of a society. Specifically, in considering RQ2 – the framing of the political photographs through the use of visual infotainment elements – our analysis has revealed at least four consistently recurring frames: the frame of nationalism, the frame of abandonment, the frame of progress and the frame of conflicting nationalities.

While exploring the consequences of the use of visual infotainment, we also examined which political agendas which appear to be associated with these frames (RQ3). We find that they arise from two seemingly conflicting socio-political interests: a dedication to solving the Cyprus Problem by establishing a federal republic versus a desire to purify the island from a demonised ‘enemy.’ In the GC community, the former is endorsed by a significant group who highlight their Cypriot roots as an important aspect of their identity, while the latter is ‘fuelled’ by another populous consortium who perceive their

identity through their Hellenic ancestry instead. We suspect that there is a similar conflict between the Turkish and Cypriot ethnicities in the TC community.

As these agendas are clearly paramount in the social and political identities of considerable portions of GCs (and TCs?), we claim that regardless of personal ideologies, visual infotainment has not made light of any political meanings behind the published images. In fact, despite their almost polar opposition, visual infotainment techniques are used to enhance the respective communication of both propagandas, the Cypriocentric one using the frames of abandonment and progress, and the Hellenocentric and Turkish-centred ones via the frames of nationalism and abandonment. We speculate that their dramatisation not only 'feeds' support for each set of propaganda but augments their conflict as well, which manifests in the frame of conflicting nationalities that has been identified as permeating the media. We suspect that this conflict, and the frame by which it is encoded in the public dialogue, has been (and will probably continue to be) a major polarising factor in public opinion about the Cyprus Problem in both communities.

It is interesting to consider whether elements of infotainment exist in written and audio-visual accounts of the Cyprus Problem and any (past and future) negotiations on it. In future research, we aim to analyse these issues and compare and contrast our findings with those presented here.

Notes

1. Although the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus declared independence on 15 November 1983, it is formally only recognised as a sovereign state by Turkey. The United Nations considers the northern part of Cyprus as part of the Republic of Cyprus (Ioannides & Apostolopoulos, 1999).
2. The photo was posted by Espen Barth Eide, the Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Cyprus Problem (2014-2017).
3. The photo was posted by Espen Barth Eide, the Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Cyprus Problem (2014-2017).

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