NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE ROLES OF MEDIA IN THE BELGIAN CONFLICT: A MODEL FOR DE-ESCALATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Belgium is a country in northwest Europe. It is a founding member of the European Union and hosts its headquarters,[1] as well as those of other major international organizations, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[2] Belgium covers an area of 11,787 square miles (30,528 square kilometers) and has a population of about 10.6 million people.[3] Straddling the cultural boundary between Germanic and Latin Europe, Belgium is home to two main linguistic groups: the Dutch-speaking Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons. In addition, Belgium is home to a small group of German speakers.[4] Belgium's two largest regions are the Dutch-speaking[5] region of Flanders in the north, with 58% of the population, and the French-speaking southern region of Wallonia, inhabited by 32% of the population.[6]   The Brussels–Capital Region, home to approximately 10% of the population, is officially bilingual.[7]   The area is

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1. KOEN LENAERTS & PIET VAN NUFFEL, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 416 (Robert Bray ed., 2d ed. 2005).

2. NATO HANDBOOK 219 (2001).

3. Country Profile: Belgium, BBC News, *available at* http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/999709.stm.

4. *Id.* In one small area of Belgium, the East Canton region obtained from Germany after World War I, German is the principal language of about 70,000 Belgians. *Id.*

5. The official language spoken in Flanders is now standard Dutch, not a separate Flemish dialect, although several local dialects still exist. *See* KENNETH D. MCRAE, CONFLICT AND COMPROMISE IN MULTILINGUAL SOCIETIES: BELGIUM 56–59 (1986).

6. Liesbet Hooghe, *Belgium: Hollowing the Center*, *in* FEDERALISM AND TERRITORIAL CLEAVAGES 55, 56 (Ugo M. Amoretti & Nancy Bermeo eds., 2004).

7. *Id.*

primarily French-speaking (85%[8]) and is located within the Flemish region but near the Walloon region.

Early in the twentieth century, King Albert I was told by a Walloon political leader, "Sire, there are no Belgians anymore, only Flemings and Walloons."[9] The Belgian conflict between the Flemish North and the Francophone South is a typical multi-issue conflict that combines issues of history, culture, and identity, with strong economic dimensions. The conflict has a long history: "The heat of the discussions in the media, parliament and public opinion led foreign observers to believe that the country was about to fall apart."[10] This quote fits the present situation very well, yet it was written more than a century ago, before World War I.[11]

In this Article, we analyze the ongoing conflict in Belgium. Our focus is on the actual role of the media and possible attitudes and contributions of the media to this particular conflict. In Part II, we first analyze the different factors contributing to the division in Belgium. We then explore the role of the media in this conflict in Part III. In Part IV we examine the media's use of different styles and metaphors and their negative or positive impact on the conflict. In particular, we look at surrealism, supposedly typical for Belgium, and the use of humor. We also suggest a model to frame different approaches. We conclude with some suggestions for a more positive role of the media, applying our model for de-escalation of conflicts.

II. BELGIUM, A DIVIDED COUNTRY[12]

A. History

The conflict between the Flemish- and French-speaking communities within Belgium has deep historical roots, going back to the seventeenth-century liberation war of the so-called "Low Countries" from the Spanish rulers at that time. In the northern part of the territory that now makes up Belgium, people spoke various Dutch-German dialects, except a small French-speaking bourgeois elite. In the southern part of what is now Belgium, French was the common language. As a result of the French

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8. Kris Deschouwer, *Kingdom of Belgium*, *in* CONSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS, STRUCTURE, AND CHANGE IN FEDERAL COUNTRIES 48, 51 (John Kincaid & G. Alan Tarr eds., 2005).

9. *Id.* at 50.

10. *See* Jeroen van der Kris, *Belgium—A Praline Marriage*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE WITHOUT A UNIFIED PUBLIC OPINION? THE SWISS EXPERIENCE AND THE BELGIAN CASE 50, 50 (Dave Sinardet & Marc Hooghe eds., 2009) [hereinafter IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE].

11. *See id.*

12. For a more detailed discussion of the cultural divide in Belgium, see Robert Mnookin & Alain Verbeke, *Persistent Nonviolent Conflict with No Reconciliation: The Flemish and Walloons in Belgium*, 72 LAW & CONTEMP. PROBS. 151 (2009).

Revolution, the whole country became a province of France.[13] After the fall of Napoleon in 1815, what is now Belgium became the southern part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, ruled by King William I.[14] Soon a surprising coalition emerged, with deep resentment of Dutch rule. The liberal bourgeoisie and Francophone aristocracy resented the use of the Dutch language and "foreign control." The Catholic Church, especially influential in Flanders, was suspicious of the Netherlands because it was seen as a Protestant state.

In 1830, this coalition led a revolt against Dutch rule. In 1831, the Belgian National Congress (dominated by the Francophone bourgeoisie, consisting of Walloons and the Flemish elite) wrote a liberal constitution and created a unitary parliamentary state with a constitutional monarch.[15] Although the majority of the population has always been Flemish,[16] Francophone Belgians have dominated the country politically, economically, and culturally since the very beginning.

B. Language and Cultural Divide

In the new country, French was to be the exclusive and single language.[17] Initially, the Dutch language was suppressed in all public administration and in state-sponsored education. There was a systemic social and economic discrimination against those who spoke Dutch. The Flemish majority were treated as inferior peasants.[18] Flemish who wanted to advance in society learned French, and many Flemish bourgeois families spoke French at home.[19] Few Walloons ever bothered to learn Dutch.[20] By the end of the

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13. MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 14.

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.* The Belgian Constitution was arguably the most liberal in Europe at the time. It recognized fundamental freedoms relating to speech, press, religion, education, assembly, and languages, and also included provisions relating to the separation of powers. *See generally* BELG. CONST. arts. 8–41.

16. There were 2.4 million Dutch speakers and 1.8 million French speakers in 1846. André Alen, *Nationalism–Federalism–Democracy: The Example of Belgium*, 5 EUR. REV. PUBL. L. 41, 45 n.24 (1993).

17. *See* Deschouwer, *supra* note 8, at 49. *But see* MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 22. McRae translates the article in the original constitution as follows: "The use of the languages spoken in Belgium is optional (*facultatif*). It can be regulated only by law, and only concerning official acts and judicial matters." However, the Law of 19 September 1831 declared French to be the only official language for the proclamation of laws and resolutions. *See* ANDRÉ ALEN & KOEN MUYLLE, COMPENDIUM VAN HET BELGISCH STAATSRECHT § 383 (2008).

18. *See* Luc Huyse, *Political Conflict in Bicultural Belgium*, *in* CONFLICT AND COEXISTENCE IN BELGIUM: THE DYNAMICS OF A CULTURALLY DIVIDED SOCIETY 107, 109–10 (Arend Lijphart ed., 1981).

19. *See* MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 39–40 (referring to a "domestic colonialism" and stating that "[t]his socioeconomic dimension of the linguistic boundary *within* the Flemish region has . . . heightened linguistic tensions") (internal quotation marks omitted).

nineteenth century, a Flemish movement striving for language and culture rights emerged and achieved some success with language laws.[21] The 1898 "Law of Equality" recognized both languages in official documents,[22] and a 1921 law contemplated that municipal officials might be bilingual.[23] However, in practice the country remained largely Francophone.[24]

Turning points occurred in 1932 and 1935, when two monolingual regions were created on the basis of a territorial line dividing the country into two parts.[25] The use of language in administrative matters, primary and secondary education, and judicial matters was to be based exclusively on location—not the mother tongue of the individual citizen. In Flanders, Dutch became the only official language, and in the Walloon region, the official language was exclusively French. Brussels and certain border areas were said to be bilingual. With the exception of Brussels, the national language policy essentially became one of dual monolinguism, based on the principle of territorial location, not bilingualism, with language rights attaching to individuals.[26]

Particularly, both World Wars have left deep scars in Belgian society. Large battlefields serve to remind Belgians of the countless deaths in World War I. The story goes that French-speaking officers refused to speak Flemish, and for this reason many Flemish soldiers died. The *IJzerbedevaart* (Pilgrimage of the Yser) is a yearly gathering of Flemish in honor of those soldiers. The gathering also serves as a political meeting of individuals who are striving for Flemish political autonomy. Even more delicate and at the core of the conflict is the collaboration issue of World War II. Numerous Flemish who culturally sympathized with the Nazis were sentenced to death, while economic collaboration in the south remained largely unpunished.[27]

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20. This asymmetry persists. *See* Victor Ginsburgh & Shlomo Weber, *La dynamique des Langues en Belgique* [*The Dynamics of Languages in Belgium*], 42 REGARDS ECONOMIQUES 1, 4 (2006).

21. There is vast literature on the Flemish movement. *See generally* THE FLEMISH MOVEMENT: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY: 1780–1990 (Theo Hermans, Louis Vos & Lode Wils eds., 1992); François Nielsen, *The Flemish Movement in Belgium After World War II: A Dynamic Analysis*, 45 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 76 (1980).

22. *See* ALEN & MUYLLE, *supra* note 17, § 266.

23. *See* MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 150.

24. *See id.*

25. Dave Sinardet, *Territorialité et identités linguistiques en Belgique* [*Territoriality and Linguistic Identities in Belgium*], 51 HERMÈS 141, 144 (2008).

26. The language frontier became firm and final with the Language Act of 8 November 1962. ALEN & MUYLLE, *supra* note 17, § 271; MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 152–56.

27. ANDRÉ DE VRIES, FLANDERS: A CULTURAL HISTORY 21–22 (2007).

C. Economic Divide

From the outset, the Walloon region economically dominated the new nation. With large coal reserves, this region was among the earliest in Europe to industrialize, and it experienced rapid economic growth during the nineteenth century.[28]   Flanders, on the other hand, relied on subsistence agriculture. Crop failures led to a famine and contributed to massive unemployment and severe economic hardship.[29]

For more than a century, the Walloons remained economically dominant, but World War II brought a turning point. The coal and steel industries in Wallonia started to decline. Over the years, many jobs were lost and there was little foreign investment. In the meantime, Flanders enjoyed a period of industrial modernization. The Flemish port of Antwerp prospered, and new plants were built for thriving industries, such as car assembly and shipbuilding. Flanders attracted substantial foreign investment.[30] By the mid-1960s, the Flemish gross regional product per capita surpassed that of Wallonia.[31]   Today, the Flemish region of the country is substantially richer than the Walloon region. The Flemish gross domestic product per capita exceeds that of Germany and France, and nearly equals that of the United Kingdom.[32]   The Walloon GDP, on the other hand, is similar to the poorest regions in France and Italy.[33]

D. Social Divide

These differences have resulted in a social divide in a country that in fact harbors two nations. A Belgian identity, if not entirely valueless,[34] certainly does not count for much. For many, their Belgian identity is thin, at least in comparison to their local or regional identity.[35] However, identity discussions

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28. REFLECTION GROUP "IN DE WARANDE," MANIFESTO FOR AN AUTONOMOUS FLANDERS WITHIN EUROPE 51 (English ed. 2006) [hereinafter MANIFESTO].

29. MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 23–24.

30. MANIFESTO, *supra* note 28, at 51–53.

31. Hooghe, *supra* note 6, at 57.

32. Press Release, Eurostat, Regional GDP Per Inhabitant in the EU27 (Feb. 19, 2009), http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/09/23&format=PDF&aged=O&language=EN&guiLanguage=en.   In 2006, Flanders's per capita GDP was 118% of the EU27 average, while the Walloon region's was only 85%. *Id.*

33. *Id.*; Ludo Beheydt, *The Linguistic Situation in the New Belgium*, *in* LANGUAGES IN CONTACT AND CONFLICT: CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM 48, 53–54 (Sue Wright & Helen Kelly eds., 1995).

34. *See* Wilfried Swenden & Maarten Theo Jans, *"Will It Stay or Will It Go?" Federalism and the Sustainability of Belgium*, 29 W. EUR. POL. 877, 889 (2006) ("[T]he younger [Flemish] are more willing to identify with Belgium, possibly because they lack first-hand experience with linguistic discrimination.").

35. Hooghe, *supra* note 6, at 65. One research report indicates that less than half of the Flemish feel simultaneously Flemish and Belgian; the other half feel more exclusively Belgian than

are tricky. Identity is a complex and multilayered concept and includes numerous distinct feelings.[36] Like all social phenomena, it relates to multiple factors that may vary historically, culturally, and sociologically.[37] Undoubtedly, political and media discourse play important roles in the creation of the identity construct.[38]

There are quite contrasting views on the degree to which Flanders and Wallonia differ in their identity or share a common identity. One view is that there are substantial cultural differences between the Flemish and the Walloons. This view is represented by stereotypes such as that the Flemish are disciplined and hard-working like the northern European Germanic cultures, while the Walloons take after the more fun-loving Latins in southern Europe.[39] Ideological differences follow the linguistic lines: the socialist tradition is stronger in the Walloon region, and the Flemish are much more committed to a market economy.[40] Flanders has a higher proportion of observant Catholics than the more secular Walloon region.[41] It has been argued that these differences have been embedded in a historical perspective since the origin of the country. Examples cited are the different electoral behavior since the 1880s,[42] the dissimilarity in public opinion regarding the

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exclusively Flemish. Dave Sinardet, *Politiek en pers in de Belgische communautaire maalstroom: samenleven onder een lekkend dak*, *in* MÉNAGE À TROIS: QUO VADIS BELGICA 237, 245 (Carl Devos ed. 2006) [hereinafter Sinardet 2006]. Yet another research report indicates that the Flemish feel very positive toward Wallonia and identify mostly with their Belgian nationality. Dave Sinardet, *Televisie zonder grenzen? De beeldbuis in Tijden van regionalisme en globalisering*, SAMENLEVING EN POLITIEK, Feb. 2001, at 35, 39. [hereinafter Sinardet 2001]. In the same paragraph, the author refers to the latest European value research indicating that Flemish more easily identify with Flanders than Walloons with Wallonia, but therefore do not feel less Belgian. *Id.*

36. *See* Marc Reynebeau, *Political Institutions and the Construction of a Common Public Sphere*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE, *supra* note 10, at 25, 26–27.

37. Marc Lits, *Media in Belgium: Two Separate Public Opinions*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE, *supra* note 10, at 43, 44.

38. Marc Hooghe & Dave Sinardet, *Is There a Belgian Public Opinion?*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE, *supra* note 10, at 5, 6; Dave Sinardet, *De relatie tussen media, politiek en publiek in de Belgische televisieberichtgeving over de andere gemeenschap* 8–9 (Dec. 1, 2000) (University of Antwerp Political and Social Sciences PSW Paper 2000/9) [hereinafter Sinardet, PSW Paper 2000/9], *available at* http://webhost.ua.ac.be/psw/pswpapers/PSWpaper 2000-09 sinardet.pdf.

39. *See* RUDY AERNOUDT, VLAANDEREN–WALLONIË: JE T'AIME, MOI NON PLUS: ANTIMANIFEST OVER DE VERHOUDING TUSSEN WALEN EN VLAMINGEN 17–35 (2006) (discussing the various stereotypes and their effects on Belgian culture).

40. *See* Marleen Brans, Christian de Visscher & Diederik Vancoppenolle, *Administrative Reform in Belgium: Maintenance or Modernisation?*, 29 W. EUR. POL. 979, 992–95 (2006) (discussing the evidence on cultural differences between Flanders and Wallonia regarding organizational reforms in government).

41. MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 65–66.

42. *Contra* Marc Hooghe, *Are There Really Two Public Opinions in Belgium?*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE, *supra* note 10, at 30, 31 (arguing that public opinion cannot be deduced from election results).

cultural avant-garde of the 1920s, the dealings with second-wave feminism in the 1970s, and the history of the Boy Scouts movement.[43] These examples all seem to reveal rather diverging patterns. In this view, the differences in public opinion and identity are not a result of the institutional structure, but vice versa. It is even asserted that politics in Belgium was one of the last domains to be federalized.[44] From that perspective the question is not so much why Flemish and Walloons do not know each other any more, but rather whether they have ever known each other.[45]

To the contrary, others claim that the often-invoked cultural differences between Flanders and Wallonia are not that substantial.[46] Some even feel that Flemish and Walloons are closer to each other than the Flemish are to the Dutch and the Walloons are to the French.[47] It has been said that, "The Flemish and the Walloons have everything in common, except the language. The Flemish and the Dutch have nothing in common, except the language."[48] By and large, it is argued, Belgians are just like other average European citizens.[49] In this view, there is nothing inherently Flemish or Walloon in the public opinion.

The existence of cultural differences, identity differences, or split public opinions can be debated. What cannot be denied, however, is the segregation between the north and the south. The Flemish and Francophone Belgians know little about each other, do not read each other's newspapers, do not watch each other's television, and do not listen to each other's radio; they do not have a common set of cultural references or topics of conversation.[50] And this probably has always been so,[51] except for a small Flemish elite that spoke French fluently.[52]

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43. Marnix Beyen, *The Duality of Public Opinions as a Democratic Asset: Confessions of an Historian*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE, *supra* note 10, at 20, 20–22.

44. *See infra* Part II.E.

45. Beyen, *supra* note 43, at 22.

46. Dave Sinardet, *Direct Democracy as a Tool to Shape a United Public Opinion in a Multilingual Society? Some Reflections Based on the Belgian Case*, *in* IS DEMOCRACY VIABLE, *supra* note 10, at 34, 36. Very often there are merely different sensitivities related to the different socio-economical contexts. That these differences in opinion may grow into community conflicts is largely due to the split of the political landscape. *See* Sinardet 2006, *supra* note 35, at 237–47.

47. Reynebeau, *supra* note 36, at 28. The latter part of the reasoning is very doubtful. Many agree that a greater cultural proximity exists between Brussels–Wallonia and France than between Flanders and the Netherlands. For example, fewer than 5% of Flemish watch Dutch television channels, whereas more than 30% of Francophone Belgians watch French television channels. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 45.

48. van der Kris, *supra* note 10, at 52 (internal quotation marks omitted).

49. Hooghe, *supra* note 42, at 31.

50. Reynebeau, *supra* note 36, at 28.

51. *See* Beyen, *supra* note 43, at 22.

52. Reynebeau, *supra* note 36, at 28.

The high degree of residential and workplace segregation in the Flemish and Walloon regions is stunning. Almost all commuting is to Brussels, but not to the other regions.[53] Within Brussels, there is a modest degree of residential integration. The professional integration in the Brussels workplace is much higher because numerous Flemish people who live in Flanders commute to Brussels for work.[54] Despite the country's small size, social interaction between the Flemish and Francophone people is extremely limited, except in bilingual Brussels. This may very well be a direct result of the language policies of dual monolinguism started in the 1930s.

Hence, millions of Belgians cannot talk to each other. At all levels of education, up to the university level, the curriculum is typically taught exclusively in either French or Dutch.[55] A symbolic turning point in this regard was the split in the magic year 1968 of the University of Leuven into a Flemish and an independent Francophone university.[56] Since the 1988 constitutional reform, nearly all decisions regarding educational competence requirements have devolved to the communities.[57]

Ten years ago researchers found that in Wallonia, 17% of the population knew Dutch in addition to French.[58] Only 7% were trilingual.[59] The proportion of multilingual Flemish people was much higher: 57% knew French and Dutch, and 40% knew English as well.[60] It should be noted that in Flemish secondary education, a course in French is obligatory, while a course in Dutch is still not required for students in Wallonia, although most schools

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53. The vast majority (about 90%) of all commuting is toward Brussels. Commuting between Flanders and Wallonia is very limited (about 1%). MANIFESTO, *supra* note 28, at 63.

54. *Id.* at 63; MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 76–77.

55. Except, however, for an increasing number of English courses at universities. English might very well be the common language that could bring the divided Belgian people together. *See* Alain Verbeke, Op-Ed., *BHV? Let's Do Business!*, DE TIJD, May 21, 2008, at 16, *and* LE SOIR, May 27, 2008, at 16 (writing in both the leading economic newspaper in Flanders and the leading general newspaper in Francophone Belgium).

56. The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL) stayed in the ancient town of Leuven, where the university was established in 1425. The Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) had to move out of town into Wallonia where a new town was created, Louvain-la-Neuve. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, History of K.U. Leuven, http://www.kuleuven.be/about/history.html (last visited Nov. 27, 2009).

57. Limited exceptions are the determination of the start and end of mandatory education age, minimum conditions for awarding diplomas, and the teachers' pension regulation. *See* Alain Verbeke, Unification of Laws in Federal Systems: Belgium, *in* UNIFICATION OF LAWS IN FEDERAL SYSTEMS: GENERAL REPORT (Daniel Halberstam & Mathias W. Reimann eds., forthcoming 2010) (manuscript at 7, on file with authors) (originally reported at the First Intermediate Congress of the International Academy of Comparative Law on the impact of uniform law on national law, held November 13–15, 2008, in Mexico City, Mexico).

58. Ginsburgh & Weber, *supra* note 20, at 4.

59. *Id.*

60. *Id.*

in Wallonia offer and promote Dutch classes. A general impression, however, is that younger generations of Flemish speak French much less fluently now. Although part of the reason for this is the increasing dominance of English, we feel that the ever-growing segregation between Flemish and Walloons may also be part of the explanation.

E. Political Divide

The divided character of Belgium—linguistically, culturally, economically, and socially—seems to have been present from the very outset. History shows an evolution during which the ambition of a central and unified Francophone state has been gradually frustrated by the claims of a dominated Flemish majority. It is argued that this ambition to be a modern nation-state was "imbued with contradictions"[61] from the very start. The extremely liberal basis of the constitution inherently weakens the strong central power because it implies that social identities have the freedom to develop into autonomous forces that may eventually threaten the state itself.[62]

Because of this strong, unified state ideal, and the benefits it bestowed on the Francophone establishment (including a Flemish elite that historically has spoken French and allied itself with the Francophone establishment), it is hardly surprising that the political institutions were the very last to federalize. It was a long and steady process for the political structures to capitulate, with the Flemish majority searching for its lingual, cultural, social, and economic positions within the political construct. The process of political federalization was started and accepted only out of pure necessity. This may explain why the Belgian constitutional construct is so complicated and feels like improvised and hurried patchwork.[63] It was not a thought-out, consistent reform, but a series of ad hoc compromises stitched together over more than four decades and five reforms.[64]

Hence, the long-standing conflict between the Flemish and the Francophones has been embedded into a complex federal structure that both reflects and reinforces the organization of political, social, and cultural life on the basis of language. It confirms the sense that there are "two peoples" who are likely, in time, to drift farther apart and not closer together. Ordinary citizens may participate in the political process only among their own language group.

Today Belgium is a federal country with substantial autonomy for the French- and Dutch-language communities and the Walloon and Flemish

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61. Beyen, *supra* note 43, at 23.
62. *See supra* Part II.A; Beyen, *supra* note 43, at 23.
63. *Id.* at 23–24.
64. *See* Hooghe, *supra* note 6, at 62–66.

regions.[65] The federal system is not hierarchical: the subunits have exclusive legislative and administrative powers within their respective areas of competence. The regions and communities are on equal footing with the federal government, subject to the constitution. It is clear that such horizontal federalism encourages autonomous policy making.[66] Therefore, political life in Belgium is mostly conducted along linguistic lines. For more than thirty years, the three major political families—the Christian Democrats, the Liberals, and the Socialists—have been split into separate French-speaking and Flemish parties.[67] Parties do not compete across the language lines for community and regional elections, except in the Brussels–Capital Region. Furthermore, even the federal (or national) elections are, in a sense, regional. Indeed, people must vote in geographically defined areas with a choice limited to parties of the language of that area. A citizen living in Flanders can vote only for Dutch-speaking parties; and vice versa, someone in the Walloon region must choose a French-speaking party.[68] Politicians chosen for federal responsibilities are accountable only to the electorate in their community/region and not to the other half of the country.

At the national level, a variety of mechanisms ensure that neither the Flemish nor the Francophone parties, acting on their own, can impose decisions on the other language group. A governing majority in Parliament requires a coalition government, which crosses language lines and typically includes at least four of the six major parties.[69] Each deputy in the national House of Representatives is elected to a four-year term by proportional representation from party lists in geographically defined districts.   The deputies are assigned to represent either the French group or the Dutch group,

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65. These are technical constitutional concepts. Regions refer to territories: the Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels Regions. Communities refer to personal matters related to language and culture: the Flemish, Francophone, and German Communities. *See* Verbeke, *supra* note 55.

66. Jan Beyers & Peter Bursens, *The European Rescue of the Federal State: How Europeanisation Shapes the Belgian State*, 29 W. EUR. POL. 1057, 1060 (2006).

67. As early as the 1930s, the Catholic Christian Democratic Party became divided into two linguistic "wings"—one Flemish and one French-speaking—over the issue of Flemish cultural autonomy. Later, in 1967, the Christian Democrats formally split into two separate parties as a result of the conflict surrounding the Catholic University of Leuven/Louvain. Similarly, in the 1960s and '70s, as Walloon economic conditions declined, Walloon nationalist parties sprouted up with federalist–socialist agendas, which threatened the larger Socialist Party and led to its division in the 1970s. The national Liberal Party also broke up along Flemish and Francophone lines in 1968. *See* Hooghe, *supra* note 6, at 59–61.

68. The Brussels–Halle–Vilvoorde district is one notable exception that has led to enormous turmoil. *See* Mnookin & Verbeke, *supra* note 12, at 170–71.

69. *See* LIESBET HOOGHE, A LEAP IN THE DARK: NATIONALIST CONFLICT AND FEDERAL REFORM IN BELGIUM 6 (1991). Because 60% of the population is Flemish, the unstated presumption has been that the prime minister will be Flemish; not since the 1970s has a Walloon held the top position.

depending on the language of the electoral district.[70]   Constitutional amendments and certain "special laws" require concurrent majorities from each language group, as well as a two-thirds overall majority. Representatives also negotiate in the shadow of an "alarm bell procedure," which, although rarely invoked, carries with it the threat that the government will fall. This procedure enables a two-thirds majority of either language group to suspend the enactment of any proposed legislation expected to adversely affect that language group. If invoked, the procedure requires that the matter be referred to the government for further consideration and negotiation. Unless an acceptable compromise is reached within thirty days, the government falls and new elections must be held.

An important positive note, however, is that the Belgians have managed to make this five-decade evolution with practically no bloodshed whatsoever.[71] Whatever the future developments may be, history teaches that violence remains very unlikely.[72]   Unfortunately, none of these state reforms have brought stability to Belgium.   Views on the long-term consequences of federalism substantially differ. On one side is Arend Lijphart, who expects federalism to bring about a new balance: besides a loyalty toward their sub-national region, citizens will also develop a sense of federal loyalty. Opposed to that is the more pessimistic view of Donald Horowitz, who predicts that federalism merely functions as a transition phase and must lead to instability. Regions awarded autonomy will use these powers and demand ever more authority, in the end hollowing out the federal level.[73]

Since the June 2007 federal elections, the Flemish have called for various systemic changes, including more community autonomy and a reduction in the "financial support" they give to the Walloons. For more than two years the country has been in a deep institutional crisis. Months of negotiations in the second half of 2007 led nowhere. In early 2008 an interim government with the former Prime Minister was formed, and by Easter a new government had taken over. As of this writing no progress whatsoever has been made regarding institutional reforms. Although the financial and economic crises of late 2008 have pushed state reform talks down the priority list of the political

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70. Except for the Brussels–Halle–Vilvoorde district, which includes both the Brussels–Capital Region and some surrounding suburbs, all of the electoral districts are monolingual.

71. *See* Hooghe, *supra* note 6, at 57–63.

72. The closest the country ever came to widespread violent strife was in 1951. The conflict concerned the "royal question"—whether King Leopold III, who was thought to have collaborated with the Nazis, should retain the throne. There was a general strike in which a few protesters were killed. Because it appeared the country might be on the brink of civil war, a compromise was engineered in which Leopold III abdicated in favor of his son. *See* MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 111–12.

73. *See* Hooghe & Sinardet, *supra* note 38, at 5.

agenda, they are issues that remain at the core of the Belgian political scene. In the June 2009 regional elections, N-VA, a Flemish nationalist party pleading for substantial Flemish autonomy, obtained a grand victory and entered into the Flemish government.[74] This undoubtedly will put the state reform back on the table.

F. Summary

The structure of a conflict can be characterized as unstable when the affected communities show little overlap.[75] A conflict develops across the fault lines between the two unrelated groups. According to Pruitt and Kim, a community is likely to polarize under these conditions, producing escalation.[76] This sort of polarization is exactly what is happening in Belgium, particularly since 2007. The fault line is the "language border," separating groups with strong historical and cultural differences. The regions differ, in terms of landscape, industry, unemployment, and political traditions and developments. The fault lines become stronger and are enlarged by the complex structure, in which no national parties and no national media exist.[77] This process of de-integration has picked up speed since the 1970s, reducing crosscutting bonds.

III. MEDIA AND THEIR ROLE IN THE CONFLICT

A. Media Divide

There was a time when Francophone newspapers such as *La Libre Belgique* and *Le Soir* sold numerous copies in Dutch-speaking Flanders. There were even Francophone regional newspapers in Antwerp and at the Flemish coast.[78] The reverse was not true: Dutch newspapers were not sold in French-speaking communities. The reason is obvious: Dutch was of no use to the French speakers, and the Flemish elite had to speak French to be part of the Belgian establishment. Indeed, the French-speaking Flemish elite happily used this as a means to confirm their superiority to the common Flemish people.

But all of this cross-consumption of media has disappeared. In 1960, the unitary public media institute INR/NIR was split into two autonomous

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74. Justin Stares, *Flanders: Possibilities for a Divided Nation*, SUNDAY TELEGRAPH (London), June 28, 2009, at 26.

75. *See* DEAN G. PRUITT & SUNG HEE KIM, SOCIAL CONFLICT: ESCALATION, STALEMATE, AND SETTLEMENT 27–36 (3d ed. 2004).

76. *Id.*

77. *See* Part III *infra*.

78. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 44.

channels: the French-speaking RTBF and the Dutch-speaking BRT.[79] At the
outset, RTBF broadcasted programs from France, while BRT broadcasted
local productions aimed at building and confirming a Flemish identity and
emancipation from the central Francophone power. The media split preceded
the political divide by a decade. It was only in 1970, with the first
constitutional reform, that powers regarding culture, information, press, and
audio-visual media were transferred away from the federal landscape to the
community level.[80]

Today Belgian media, as in almost all other areas in Belgian society,
reveal the phenomenon of the divide between north and south. No mass
media whatsoever—newspapers, television stations, or radio stations—aim at
both the French- and Dutch-speaking communities.[81] Each community has its
own public broadcasting organization regulated by its language community,
not by the national government.[82] Governance agreements for both public
channels call for the promotion of the cultural identity of their respective
language communities. There is no mention of the promotion of national
identity or cohesion, as in other federal countries.[83] The daily newspapers are
exclusively Dutch, French, or German.[84] The divide not only characterizes
public radio and television, but also commercial radio and television stations.

As mentioned earlier, Flemish do not read Francophone newspapers, do
not listen to Francophone radio stations, and do not watch Francophone
television. Similarly, French speakers do not read or watch Dutch-based
media. Within each group's local media there is almost no reporting of events
of the other group, completing the segregation. Flanders and Wallonia are
unknown and foreign territories to each other.[85] Only about 3% of the
Flemish television news is related to topics pertinent to the other language
community. By comparison, Francophone channels devote more attention to
Flanders and are also more federally oriented.[86] Of the few Francophone
politicians appearing on Flemish television, 90% are federal officials (with
virtually no attention paid to the other region or community).[87] On the

79. Dave Sinardet, Knut De Swert & Régis Dandoy, *Franstalig, Vlaams, commercieel,
openbaar: zoek de verschillen: Een longitudinale vergelijking van de thema's in de Belgische
televisiejournaals* 6 (University of Antwerp Political and Social Sciences PSW Paper 2004/1)
[hereinafter Sinardet, PSW Paper 2004/1].

80. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 46.

81. *See* MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 237–249.

82. Belgian newspapers, however, are self-regulated by a single association, the Federation of
Editors. Country Profile: Belgium, *supra* note 3.

83. Sinardet, PSW Paper 2004/1, *supra* note 79, at 7.

84. *See* MCRAE, *supra* note 5, at 250.

85. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 45.

86. Sinardet 2001, *supra* note 35, at 35.

87. *Id.* at 36.

Francophone side, more time is awarded to elections, sports, and cultural events in France than to such events in Flanders.[88]

B. Simplifications and Stereotypes

We mentioned that people of one community do not read or watch the other's media. We then saw that, within each community's own media, there is almost no reporting on the other side. In addition to all of this, when there is news showcasing the other community, it is overly simplified by use of stereotypes.[89] The mechanisms used are similar on both sides.[90] One aspect or opinion is a symbol for the entire community. The focus is on one often-caricatured feature of each community, while other features are ignored. The Freudian narcissism of the small differences, with the focus on enlarging every tiny difference to one of consequential size, is applied very skillfully. The image-building is symmetrical, with each community perceiving itself as the victim dominated by the other side. All of this is spiced up with metaphors ranging from divorce to war.[91]

Thus, Flanders is often simplified in the Francophone media into one single group of extreme right fascists who want independence from the Francophones. An extreme opinion of one person of a separatist party is regularly extended to the entire political class, and from there to the entire community. Statements highlighting the cultural divide are frequently used and amplified. Whatever is incongruent with this bias is often ignored. The same is true in the Flemish media: the Francophones are portrayed as lazy, socialist parasites full of scandals and corruption. The rich Brabant-Wallon (politically supporting the liberal Reformist Movement) and the agrarian Luxembourg provinces (with a strong Christian Democrat tradition) are regularly ignored. Here, too, sometimes the opinion of one politician is extrapolated to the entire Francophone community.

The simplifications and stereotypes that follow from news biased by the community divide may sometimes lead to misinformation.[92] Obviously, for professional media that apply high standards of objectivity and independence, this is not acceptable. One example is when the Flemish Minister-President in 2006 said he did not need the King's endorsement to make Flemish decrees.

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88. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 46.

89. Dave Sinardet, Wederzijdse mediarepresentaties van de nationale "andere": Vlamingen, Franstaligen en het Belgische federale samenlevingsmodel (2007) (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Antwerp) (on file with author).

90. Dave Sinardet, *Het samenleven van twee onderdrukte meerderheden: Vlamingen, Franstaligen en de media*, *in* WAAR BELGIË VOOR STAAT: EEN TOEKOMSTVISIE 27, 27–31 (Geert Buelens, Jan Goossens & David Van Reybrouck eds., 2007) [hereinafter Sinardet 2007].

91. *See* Part IV *infra*.

92. Sinardet 2007, *supra* note 90, at 32.

This is an accurate explanation of the constitution; however, a French newspaper portrayed the statement as breaking news that the Flemish leader had declared he did not need the King. Such a mischaracterization reinforces the stereotype of Flemish separatism.

C. Bye Bye Belgium

On Wednesday, December 13, 2006, at 8:22 p.m., the French-speaking Belgian channel RTBF interrupted its regular programs for a special news report, reporting one item: "*The Flemish parliament has declared unilaterally the independence of Flanders.*"[93] A reporter standing in front of the Royal Palace announced that King Albert II and his wife, Queen Paola, had left the country for Kinshasa, Congo, in a military plane. Pictures from the Antwerp Grand Place followed, where thousands of excited Flemish citizens were celebrating. The President of the Walloon Parliament was filmed as the news was brought to him: "*We still have Europe,*" was his depressed comment. Although after thirty minutes the RTBF did put a warning on the screen: "*Ceci est une fiction* (*This is fiction*)," and the journalist on air repeated this warning, the program left people in complete confusion. Surveys indicated that 89% of the viewers believed what they had seen for quite a while, and 5% continued to believe it despite the warnings.[94] Only 5% never believed it at all.[95] Some foreign embassies sent worried messages back home. Thousands of ordinary Belgians, 31,368 to be precise, made panicked phone calls.[96] This docu-fiction made the world news: European media outlets and U.S.-based CNBC reported on it.[97]

It is not difficult to see where this docu-fiction comes from. The whole documentary symbolizes a frame of mind, a Francophone phantasma,[98] using a rather surrealistic style.[99] It is the culmination of decades of simplified and stereotyped image-building of Flanders by the French-speaking communities.[100] The Flemish were vehemently opposed to this caricature of Flanders. But, as we have discussed, Flemish media use exactly the same strategies in their reporting about the Walloon and Francophone communities.

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93. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 45.

94. *Id.* at 46.

95. *Id.*

96. *Id.*

97. Monique Juquois-Delpierre, *Fictional Reality or Real Fiction: How Can One Decide?: The Strengths and Weaknesses of Information Science Concepts and Methods in the Media World* 5 J. INFOR. COMM. & ETHICS SOC'Y 235, 237 (2007).
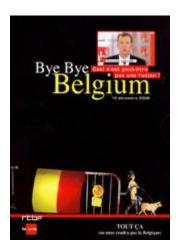
98. Sinardet 2007, *supra* note 90, at 27.

99. *See* Part IV *infra*.

100. *See generally* LE VRAI-FAUX JOURNAL DE LA RTBF. LES RÉALITÉS DE L'INFORMATION, (Marc Lits ed., 2007).

This docu-fiction has made very explicit what is often implicit: that television and other media confirm and reinforce identity values based on the focus of oneself and intolerance for the other.[101]   These identity values in the two Belgian communities both influence and are influenced by political and cultural thoughts.

DVD Cover, Bye Bye Belgium (2007)

Bye Bye Belgium and the discussions that followed were released on DVD by the Walloon public television station RTBF. The DVD cover depicts a reproduction of the painting *Pornocrates.* The painting shows a naked and blindfolded woman walking a pig. It was painted in 1896 by Félicien Rops, a well-known Belgian artist.[102] This painting fits well with the absurdism and surrealist approach of the docu-fiction, and it symbolizes the cynical view of politics often observed in Belgium.

Philippe Dutilleul, the maker of the documentary, worked on the project for more than two years in total secrecy. Right after the documentary aired, there was a live debate with five representatives of the Flemish community and five from the Francophone community. Some but not all of the panel members were politicians. The debate was disappointing. Rather than a dialogue between people trying to listen to each other and develop some empathy for each other's perspective, it was merely a positional verbal fight with each person defending his or her own view,[103] never really listening to

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101. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 46.

102. Félicien Rops Paintings, Art in the Picture.com: An Introduction to Art History, http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Felicien_Rops/ (last visited Nov. 29, 2009).

103. *See* Robert Mnookin & Alain Verbeke, *Bye Bye Belgium? A Shaky Union*, INT'L HERALD

the other side. In terms of negotiation theory, there was no active listening whatsoever,[104] with each panel member listening only to his own voice and opinion. The day after the docu-fiction aired, on December 14, a book appeared under the same title.[105] The book documents many conversations with leaders in politics, business, and academia. Many of these people were informed of the plans to make a docu-fiction, solicited for their advice, and asked to keep full confidentiality. All of them complied. Together with Professor Robert Mnookin, who at the time was International Francqui Chair at the University of Leuven, Verbeke met with Philippe Dutilleul and his assistant.[106] Mnookin appeared in the docu-fiction as the U.S. expert from Harvard Law School and was interviewed in front of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Mnookin and Verbeke also wrote a chapter in the book, analyzing the Belgian conflict through the apparatus of negotiation theory.[107]

Based on this first-hand involvement, Verbeke can confirm that in his experience the intentions of Dutilleul were genuine. By interrupting the regular primetime programming and showing a report that had some credibility,[108] he clearly aimed at shocking people. He wanted to break through the Francophone audience's comfort zone in order to create an atmosphere of openness and dialogue. We think the filmmakers fully expected the substantial impact of the docu-fiction. However, we believe that they underestimated the amount of negative feedback generated by the film, and the film's contribution to escalation of stereotypes on both sides. Intended to create awareness and dialogue, this incident fostered further fears and negative sentiments between the Flemish and the Walloons. Barely six months after the film aired, during the June 2007 federal elections, a stalemate started that has kept the country hostage for more than two years.

TRIB. (Paris), Dec. 21, 2006, at 8.

104. *See* ROBERT H. MNOOKIN, SCOTT R. PEPPET & ANDREW S. TULUMELLO, BEYOND WINNING: NEGOTIATING TO CREATE VALUE IN DEALS AND DISPUTES 62 (2000).

105. BYE-BYE BELGIUM (OPÉRATION BBB): L'ÉVENÉMENT TÉLÉVISUEL (Philippe Dutilleul ed., 2006) [hereinafter BYE-BYE BELGIUM].

106. For the interview with Professor Mnookin, see *id.* at 304–08.

107. Robert H. Mnookin & Alain Verbeke, *La théorie de la négociation. Utile pour la Belgique*, *in* BYE-BYE BELGIUM, *supra* note 105, at 589–616.

108. Professors Mnookin and Verbeke, both during the interview and later in written comments, strongly suggested making the scenario more realistic. Because the documentary seemed to be used as a serious mode, see Part IV *infra*, they felt it should not be a caricature. Although some of these recommendations were followed, several elements remained exaggerated. In the view of the makers, however, this was not so. This illustrates again the different views and perceptions in both communities.

D. *Framing and Gatekeeping*

News can never be neutral.[109]   Reality is always looked at through a specific perspective.[110] The same is true for journalists.[111] They necessarily frame news facts in a particular way.   Research indicates that journalists commonly use a dual-conflict scenario to frame facts, which necessarily leads to simplifications.[112]   Journalists frame the news through the lens of a reference scheme that is based on an often implicit consensus of the dominating discourse of the moment,[113] influenced by politics and other social, cultural, and ideological organizations.   This dominant frame determines how the media looks at reality and the terms of the debate. Politics and media influence and reinforce each other in this dominant scheme that does not necessarily correspond with public opinion at large.[114] However, public opinion is to some extent a construct of the political elites; maybe not top down, but circular, mediated by the intervention of mass media.[115]

Indeed, as gatekeepers of information, and by constantly publishing various survey results, the media determine in a substantial way what is embraced by public opinion and what is excluded from it. As gatekeepers they may not decide what people think, but they influence to a large extent what people think about. They set the agenda in a constant interaction with the political and public agendas.[116] Even in a closed partitocracy system like Belgium, research has found that mass media has important political agenda-setting power.[117]   The effects in Belgium are greater on symbolic than on substantive policy issues. Newspapers' influence is larger than television's, and the effects are different according to the issue types.[118]

The media's gatekeeping function not only involves the process of

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109. Sinardet 2007, *supra* note 90, at 31.

110. Negotiation experts know this very well. Both in a negotiation or mediation, we aim at bringing our story and the other side's story to the table and hope that the parties realize that there is no single truth, but several perceptions or stories of a complex reality. *See* DOUGLAS STONE, BRUCE PATTON & SHEILA HEEN, DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: HOW TO DISCUSS WHAT MATTERS MOST 25–43 (2000).

111. *See* Richard Reuben, *Constructive and Destructive Coverage of Conflict*, 93 MARQ. L. REV. 45, 83 (2009).

112. Dave Sinardet, *De communautaire koorts: symptomen, diagnose en aanzet tot remedie*, SAMENLEVING EN POLITIEK, Mar. 2003, at 14, 17.

113. Dave Sinardet, *Politiek, media en tijden van crisis*, SAMENLEVING EN POLITIEK, June 2006, at 1, 1.

114. *Id.*

115. Beyen, *supra* note 43, at 23.

116. Sinardet, PSW Paper 2000/9, *supra* note 38, at 6–7.

117. Stefaan Walgrave, Stuart Soroka & Michiel Nuytemans, *The Mass Media's Political Agenda-Setting Power: A Longitudinal Analysis of Media, Parliament, and Government in Belgium (1993 to 2000)*, 41 COMP. POL. STUD. 814, 814 (2008).

118. *Id.* at 819, 831–32.

selecting the news that passes through the gates of a news medium, but this function also includes all aspects of transferring the message—the means, frequency, priority, timing, and format of transfer. All of this is influenced by different levels of gatekeeping, ranging from the individual journalist to the type of organization and the communication routine of the organization.[119] Public channels are supposed to be more normative, and commercial channels more utilitarian. But in Belgium, with the liberation of the market at the end of the 1980s and the reorganization of the public channels in the 1990s, the distinction between public and commercial channels is fading away and has been since the start of the new millennium.[120] Only the Francophone public channel RTBF remains somewhat faithful to the traditional typology.

E. Media Responsibility

Because of this impact, all mass media bear a responsibility toward society. On the continuum of objectivity and independence, they must critically assess their position and function. They owe a duty of full information, including different perspectives and nuances, to the public and to democracy in particular. Putting aside the popular media, who are driven by economic ratios and tend to present only *faits divers* and stories focusing on simple or popular topics, the responsibility falls almost entirely on the shoulders of public media. Public media cannot escape the duty to deliver hard news and should do so in a multi-perspective, non-radicalized, and non-caricaturized manner. Belgian media, embedded in the larger divide of society and the political-institutional split, seem to have engaged on the slippery slope of advocacy journalism. Be it Flemish or Francophone media, they are biased by the political consensus of their community and primarily use the lens of that particular perspective.

As mentioned, this leads to simplification, stereotypes, and even misinformation. Numerous examples illustrate that the same facts are reported diametrically differently in Flemish and Francophone media. Conclusions made in Flemish media sometimes dramatically differ from those made in Francophone media. It is stunning to unravel them and to identify the interpretations and judgmental biases on both sides and data selected by each side to support those conclusions.[121] In the next section we will elaborate on some examples.

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119. Sinardet, PSW Paper 2000/9, *supra* note 38, at 4–5.

120. Sinardet, PSW Paper 2004/1, *supra* note 79, at 7–11, 30.

121. Julie Badisco, Berichtgeving over BHV. Een vergelijking van Nederlandstalige en Franstalige nieuwsmedia (2008) (unpublished masters thesis, Erasmus University College Brussels) (on file with author) (analyzing the differences between Flemish and Francophone media), *available at* http://www.scriptieprijs.be/nl/index.php?page=44&jaar=2008&id=988 (click on "Berichtgeving over BHV.pdf").

Moreover, the media reinforce segregation in Belgian society. Hence the media landscape does not offer a true federal political forum. Political debates on federal themes are held only among federal politicians in their respective communities. There is no dialogue with the other communities; there is only talk *about* them.[122] This contributes to the democratic deficit. Indeed, there is a federal level, with still very important powers, and yet there is no true federal debate. Federal politicians remain unaccountable to one or the other half of the population.[123] Politicians cleverly use or abuse this situation to their own benefit, holding a different conversation with the media of the other side than with the media of their home audience, or even sending representatives to the other community's media to give a more moderate view there than that espoused within the politicians' home market.[124]

IV. HUMOROUS AND SERIOUS MODES: A MODEL TO CLASSIFY MEDIA ACTIONS IN CONFLICT

A. Surrealism as a Key Element of Belgian Culture

In this Part we focus on a specific feature of the communication style used in the media; that is, the *mode* in which the media act. The production of *Bye Bye Belgium* represents to some extent a surrealistic approach to the Belgian conflict. In its form and presentation, this docu-fiction plays with realities. Surrealism can be seen as an essential part of Belgian culture. As Aubert, Fraiture, and McGuinness write in their overview of Belgian modern art: "*[W]ho could imagine a Belgian culture without Symbolism and Surrealism?*"[125] Surrealism is a movement in art and literature that flourished in the 1920s and '30s. It is characterized by a fascination with the bizarre, the incongruous, and the irrational.[126] It was closely related to Dadaism. Both Dadaism and surrealism are strongly anti-rationalist and much concerned with creating effects that are disturbing or shocking. But whereas Dadaism is essentially nihilist, surrealism is positive in spirit. *Bye Bye Belgium* has very surrealistic features in its anti-rationalist approach and absurdist characteristics. The image of Rops's *Pornocrates* fits within this theme.

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122. Sinardet 2007, *supra* note 90, at 33.

123. *Id.*

124. *Id.* at 34.

125. Nathalie Aubert, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture & Patrick McGuinness, *Introduction: Distance, Doubleness and Negation in the Belgian Avant-garde*, *in* FROM ART NOUVEAU TO SURREALISM: BELGIAN MODERNITY IN THE MAKING 2 (Nathalie Aubert, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture & Patrick McGuinness eds., 2007) [hereinafter FROM ART NOUVEAU TO SURREALISM] (emphasis added).

126. *See* Bibiane Fréché, *Surrealism in Belgium Between the Wars*, *in* FROM ART NOUVEAU TO SURREALISM, *supra* note 125, at 161–72 (detailing the advent of surrealism and its emergence in Belgium).

Though it was painted before surrealism emerged, it shares the same irrational and bizarre features.

Surrealism can be defined as a humorous mode of communication, in contrast with a serious mode.[127] In a *serious* communication mode, the world is approached from a rational and congruent perspective in which clarity and objectivity are important.[128] The assumption here is that we are "living in a coherent world, consistent across different people and situations."[129] Sorensen explains:

> This is the world based on reason and logic, and contradictions are considered problematic, where something cannot "be" and "not be" at the same time. Contradictions are treated as failure to communicate properly, and assumed to be based on misunderstandings. In this mode, they *have* to be treated as problematic, otherwise they threaten to undermine the perception that we share the same world.[130]

In a *humorous* mode incongruity, paradox, and ambiguity play central roles.[131] Contradictions are not problematic, but a necessary feature of the humorous mode, where we play with duality, incongruity, and misunderstandings. Humorous communication modes often present things upside-down or in different frames simultaneously.[132] In media, humorous communication is presented in many different forms, varying from the classic cartoons, to YouTube messages, to documentaries like *Bye Bye Belgium*. Communicating in a humorous mode can serve different functions and can be done in different ways, contributing to either conflict escalation or de-escalation.

We first discuss different functions and ways of using humor. We then apply both serious and humorous modes of communication to the media portrayal of the Belgian conflict.

B. Different Functions of Humor

Humor serves different functions. These functions can be differentiated between internal and external functions. Internal functions of humor serve the

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127. *See* MICHAEL MULKAY, ON HUMOUR: ITS NATURE AND ITS PLACE IN MODERN SOCIETY 22–25 (1988).

128. *See id.* at 23.

129. Marino Bonaiuto, Elio Castellana & Antonio Pierro, *Arguing and Laughing: The Use of Humor to Negotiate in Group Discussions*, 16 HUMOR 183, 185 (2003).

130. Majken Jul Sorensen, *Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression*, 33 PEACE & CHANGE 167, 171 (2008).

131. Bonaiuto, Castellana & Pierro, *supra* note 129, at 185.

132. *See id.*

person or group to enhance the self-image, cope with and reduce stress, and promote well-being.[133]   The external functions serve to communicate with other parties, outsiders, or bystanders, and can contribute to the development of a conflict, either in escalating or de-escalating social situations.[134]

1. Internal Functions

There are more than 100 theories on the functions humor serves for the individual or group.[135]   These theories have been summarized in three broad categories: theories of *superiority*, *relief*, and *incongruity*.[136]

The theory of *superiority* is based on our fundamental need for social comparison between self and others, and between our own group and other groups.[137]   Through social comparison, one recognizes differences and sees one's self and one's group as superior over another group. The other party is strange and shows weaknesses that we do not have, or have overcome or overgrown. This feeling of superiority is a fundamental need in groups. An important element of the concepts of self and identity is defined by the groups to which we belong. According to the social identity theory, we have a strong need to belong to a group that outperforms other groups.[138]   The mere fact that groups are defined as "different" facilitates rivalry and conflict. Humor helps to emphasize this feeling of superiority.

The second function humor can perform is to reduce stress and tension. Theories of *relief*, drawing on psychophysiology, explain that humor helps people to regain pleasure, as energy is needed to suppress anxiety, fear, or anger.[139]   A simple remark or joke can result in loud laughter, reducing tensions. In this way, humor is an important instrument used to cope with stress in many domains, including intergroup and societal conflicts.   As conflict is usually a major stressor, both for groups and individuals, humor helps to reduce the inner tensions.[140]

The third function of humor, embodied in *incongruity* theories, is to cope

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133. Elizabeth E. Graham, Michael J. Papa & Gordon P. Brooks, *Functions of Humor in Conversation: Conceptualization and Measurement*, 56 W. J. COMM. 161, 161–66 (1992).

134. *Id.* at 164–66.

135. *Id.* at 161.

136. SIMON CRITCHLEY, ON HUMOUR 2–3 (2002).

137. *Id.* at 2.

138. Henri Tajfel & John Turner, *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict*, *in* THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS 33, 40 (William G. Austin & Stephen Worchel eds., 1979).

139. *See* CRITCHLEY, *supra* note 136, at 2–3.

140. Rod A. Martin & Herbert M. Lefcourt, *Sense of Humor as a Moderator of the Relation Between Stressors and Moods*, 45 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 1313, 1313–24 (1983); John B. Nezlek & Peter Derks, *Use of Humor as a Coping Mechanism, Psychological Adjustment, and Social Interaction*, 14 HUMOR 395, 395 (2001).

with conflict through cognitive work.[141] Reframing situations, focusing on incongruities, and highlighting the strange elements or absurdities in a situation help to cognitively cope with complex situations. Drawing attention to the incongruities offers people and groups the possibility to redefine their reality, including conflicting realities, so as to better cope. Humor criticizes assumptions about a situation, proposing an alternate reality, in an ambiguous way.

2. External Functions: Four Styles of Use of Humor

Humor, and particularly humorous communication, serves not only internal functions, but also social functions.   The *social* functions of humorous communication can be directed toward the other conflict party, as well as to others involved, or they may influence outsiders. The intention of the communication should be differentiated from the effect. All too often, the use of humor, although intended to de-escalate and to bridge, results in escalation. Humor researchers usually differentiate between four styles of humor, based on the intention of the user: affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, and mildly aggressive humor.[142]

Affiliative humor is used to promote social interaction, reduce interpersonal or intergroup tensions, build a relationship by bridging, and seek common experiences that can be seen as humorous for both parties.[143] This type of humor can have a constructive function, both in breaking the ice and reducing tensions, as well as in agenda-setting. Drawing attention to a conflicting issue in a humorous and playful way is often less threatening than addressing the issue in a direct and "serious" mode.[144]

Self-enhancing humor is typically used to cope with stressful situations. In conflict, self-enhancing humor is used to empower one's own group, as well as to strengthen resilience in coping with the conflict.[145] This type of humor also can be used to strengthen both parties, if they are willing to work through the conflict. It supports a positive attitude, by creating a good mood among the parties, and the feeling of "yes, we can."[146]

Aggressive humor is related to the previously mentioned interior theory of superiority. Aggressive humor is used to make oneself feel better at the

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141. *See* CRITCHLEY, *supra* note 136, at 2–3.

142. Eric J. Romero & Kevin W. Cruthirds, *The Use of Humor in the Workplace*, 5 ACAD. OF MGMT. PERSP. 58, 59–60 (2006).

143. *Id.* at 59.

144. Bonaiuto, Castellana & Pierro, *supra* note 129, at 185.

145. Romero & Cruthirds, *supra* note 142, at 59–60.

146. *See* Viveka Adelswärd & Britt-Marie Öberg, *The Function of Laughter and Joking in Negotiation Activities*, 11 HUMOR 411, 426–27 (1998).

expense of the other party and to gain or maintain status.[147] Also, aggressive humor aims at manipulating others through threat or ridicule.[148] Sarcasm and cynicism are different forms in which aggressive humor can be expressed.

Mildly aggressive humor is a style in which parties are criticized through humor, for example, through irony or teasing.[149] This style can have positive effects, particularly by appealing to and reinforcing shared norms. The humor makes clear what is expected and who can deviate from the norms. This might result in more agreement over what is acceptable. This can be true both within the group, as well as for conflicting groups in society that share the same values.[150] Furthermore, this form of humor might challenge existing ideas about reality and provoke parties to look at the conflict in more ambiguous ways. This is a strong feature of Belgian media, who like to ridicule the "in" group. Boasting the self-image is rare in Belgium, therefore, surrealism is used in comic strips, television shows, and radio programs to deal with the dualities in society.

C. Humorous Communication in Conflicts Is Risky Business

Using humor in conflict communication is a double-edged sword. Humor can facilitate interactions, create an enlightened atmosphere, and challenge negative stereotypes of the other group, or a group's own overly positive images. The use of humor can also contribute to escalation, be it intentional or not. People can easily feel provoked by the use of humor in conflicts, particularly in intergroup conflicts. On the other hand, humor can be a deliberate strategy to achieve social change in a nonviolent way.[151] Media often combine serious and humorous modes in dealing with conflicts, and such contributions can have either an escalating or de-escalating effect. The Danish Muhammed cartoons have demonstrated this.[152] According to Reuben, constructive coverage of conflicts by media can contribute to better communication between parties, and more problem-solving behaviors, when it provides reasons for hope, enhances trust, and leverages power between the conflicting parties.[153] Therefore, better communication can be realized

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147. Romero & Cruthirds, *supra* note 142, at 60.

148. Leslie M. Janes & James M. Olsen, *Jeer Pressure: The Behavioral Effects of Observing Ridicule of Others*, 26 PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. BULL. 474, 484 (2000).

149. Romero & Cruthirds, *supra* note 142, at 60.

150. John C. Meyer, *Humor in Member Narratives: Uniting and Dividing at Work*, 61 W.J. COMM. 188, 200 (1997).

151. Sorensen, *supra* note 130, at 184–86.

152. *See* Colloquy, *The Muhammed Cartoons and Humor Research: A Collection of Essays*, 21 HUMOR 1 (2008).

153. Reuben, *supra* note 111, at 78–79.

through serious and humorous forms of coverage.[154]

D. Serious and Humorous Roles of the Media: The Belgian Case

The different roles media can adopt, both in serious and humorous modes, are presented in Table 1. Theoretically, the concrete dealings of the media with a conflict may be classified in one of these quadrants.

Table 1: Roles of Media Contributing to a Conflict

	Serious Mode	*Humorous Mode*
Escalating	Representing one party	Ridiculing one party
De-escalating	Platform for dialogue	Adding new frames

The four different forms are illustrated in the Belgium conflict and the roles media play in this conflict.

Escalating through a serious mode can be seen whenever the media report in a biased way about the conflict, either by presenting the perspective of one party more than the other, giving voice to only one side, or through the media's own comments. The way incidents are framed also can easily contribute to escalation. In Part III we discussed many characteristics of the Belgian media that contribute to this biased presentation. There is a lack of interest in the media for "the other party." Very often, only acts or behaviors that fit the negative stereotypes are presented. For example, every sign of corruption or clientelism in Wallonia receives considerable attention in the Flemish press. Besides this negative stereotyping, the media also emphasize differences between the communities, thus contributing to the separate identities that characterize a "conflict group" identity.[155] A group's own identity is strengthened through the contrast with the other community. The media regularly report "differences" between the Flemish and Walloon communities, on all kinds of subjects that are often trivial. Headlines such as "Walloons consult specialists more often than Flemish," "Less speed limit controls on highways in Walloon provinces," and "More tax inspections in Flanders" all focus on the differences, and contribute to negative

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154. Lisa J. LaPlante & Kelly Phenicie, *Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue: The Media's Role in Transitional Justice Processes*, 93 MARQ. L. REV. 251, 280–84 (2009).

155. PRUITT & KIM, *supra* note 75, at 31–32.

stereotyping.[156] The media regularly report in terms of community division (for example, "the Flemish front" or "the French-speaking riposte"), reflecting typical intergroup conflict perceptions.[157] Furthermore, there is active framing in terms of the existing conflict. A clear example is the framing of soccer riots. These happen regularly among different teams in the Belgian soccer league; however, they are framed by the Francophone RTBF in terms of Flemish aggressors, against "Walloon" supporters, thereby feeding the feelings of fear amongst their audience.

Escalating through a humorous mode is the most classic form that media use in conflict. Propaganda in intergroup conflicts typically uses humorous forms to communicate negative images, ridiculing one party to promote the feelings of superiority of one's own group and feeding the fears of the other. This is also widespread within the Belgian media.[158] Two examples may illustrate the perspectives. The first is a cartoon depicting a robber, walking away from the reader. On top is the text: "The French socialist party ran off with a lot of votes." A second picture is a good example of how French-speaking media feed the fears of the Flemish community. One mother asks the schoolteacher (in French) where her children are. "They spoke French" is the answer (in Dutch), as two punished kids are shown in the background.[159]

The *Bye Bye Belgium* case[160] also can be qualified as escalating through a humorous mode. The intentions were aimed at creating shock and contributing to dialogue, but the effects clearly escalated the conflict. Though unintended, this program fed anxiety on the French-speaking side and irritations on the Dutch-speaking side. A constructive dialogue did not emerge from this program.

One might question what precise form was used here: humorous, serious, or both? As we already pointed out, in our view the maker of the docu-fiction identified rather strongly with the fears of the French-speaking community. Therefore, what may appear as a program in a "humorous" and absurdist mode is in fact based on serious feelings and thoughts. The Francophone audience, too, building on many years of stereotypes, largely perceived the docu-fiction to be a serious mode. There may have been a mismatch in the subjective perspective of a serious mode mixed with the objective frame of a more humorous mode. This incongruity might explain, to some extent, why the film's effects did not contribute to mutual respect and understanding but instead escalated the conflict.

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156. van der Kris, *supra* note 10, at 50.

157. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 45.

158. Sinardet 2007, *supra* note 90, at 27.

159. Pierre Kroll, LE SOIR (Brussels, Belg.), Sept. 1, 2006 (on file with author).

160. *See* Part III *supra*.

Analyzing *Bye Bye Belgium* from the perspective of functions and styles of humor, we see that this form might meet a *superiority* need. Not in a sense of the most powerful, but rather expressing the feeling of a group that feels morally right. The Flemish are pictured as a disloyal group that shows no respect for the federal constitution, whereas the Walloons are the evident victims in the scenario. This was perceived by the Flemish as a "bad joke," an aggressive and insulting form of humor.

Another internal function of humor is, as mentioned, *stress relief*. In this case, the intention was apparently not to reduce stress, but to increase it, though the level of added stress might have been underestimated. The stress level could have been positively influenced by the film's emphasis on its absurdist features, and by the inclusion of more affiliative and self-enhancing humor, empowering both groups. *Bye Bye Belgium* could have contributed to the realization of ambivalent and dualistic reality through playing with incongruities. But, by excessively playing on fears, and taking the scenario too seriously, we feel that the film has somewhat missed this potential. Though it might appear that the King and Queen fleeing the country into Africa is absurd enough, many people actually believed the story. Here, the filmmakers could have better utilized the cornerstones of surrealism, as we will discuss in our final paragraphs.

The Belgian media have undertaken several attempts to contribute to *de-escalating through a serious mode*. Acknowledging that the majority of the Belgian population speaks Dutch, in March 2009 the Walloon parliament unanimously agreed to replace voice-over dubbing with subtitling when Dutch-speaking people are interviewed for French-speaking state television.[161] This decision represents a symbolic gesture, and it also helps signal to the French-speaking community the importance of the Dutch language within Belgium.

The daily newspapers *Le Soir* and *De Standaard* tried several common operations, aimed at achieving a better understanding of each other and contributing to a shared Belgian identity. The newspapers sent journalists for one month to survey each other's area, reporting on their observations.[162] Going one step further, the newspapers *exchanged journalists* to work temporarily with each other's media. The two newspapers also organized several common public debates in both languages, aiming to bridge the points

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161. *Franstaligen vragen ondertiteling op RTBF*, HET NIEUWSBLAD (Groot-Bijgaarden, Belg.), June 5, 2008, http://www.nieuwsblad.be/Article/Detail.aspx?articleID=dmf05062008_066.

162. The journalist exchange was reported on the web site of each publication. *See* Bernard Demonty & Olivier Mouton, *Destins croisés du Soir et du Standaard*, LE SOIR (Brussels, Belg.), Mar. 17, 2007, http://www.lesoir.be/dossiers/Face_a_face/enquete/notre-route-commune-est-un-2007-03-17-517373.shtml; Bernard Demonty & Olivier Mouton, *De Confrontatie Noord-Zuid*, DE STANDAARD (Groot-Bijgaarden, Belg.), Apr. 17–21, 2007, http://standaard.typepad.com/noordzuid/.

of view considered to be so distant. These efforts represent attempts by the media to play their part as citizens, inflect the separatist speeches, and cause a shared national conscience to emerge.

These attempts were embedded in a national strategy to strengthen a national identity. At the start of 2007, the editors in chief of the two newspapers had a meeting with King Albert II. The intentions were clearly aimed at bridging and building more understanding and dialogue.

However, it appeared difficult to conduct these "cross-border" activities without reinforcing feelings of irreconcilable differences. For example, journalists working in each other's region sometimes used a tone as if they were sent to remote and dangerous regions.[163] Also, the presentation of joint activities differed considerably. For example, both newspapers had a double interview with Flemish singer An Pierlé and French-speaking rapper Baloji. Analyzing the presentation of the interviews in both newspapers shows remarkable differences. Baloji is asked if he thinks there are fewer contacts nowadays between Walloon and Flemish Belgians. In *Le Soir* his answer is "yes," whereas in *De Standaard* his answer is "no."[164]

Using a humorous mode to de-escalate conflict in the media can be done in different ways. For example, humor can contribute to a better understanding of cultural differences. The exchange of journalists and cooperation between newspapers is an easy basis for humorous reflections on differences between the communities, and for mirroring. In January 2009, a Walloon reporter, Christophe Deborsu, received training in cross-country cycling. Though it is one of the most popular sports in Flanders, it is almost unknown in Wallonia. Deborsu presented his training in a humoristic way, while challenging the self-image of the Walloon.[165]

The recent Belga-vox initiative aims to contribute to a shared national identity, with media playing an important role. On May 17, 2009, the Belga-vox concert was held in Brussels: a free concert with many well-known local and international artists. The concert was the start of a program that aims to promote solidarity, dialogue, respect, cohesiveness, and multicultural diversity in Belgium. Among the organizers are also several national media organizations. This form can be classified as serious, given the clear rationality of the initiative. The potential exists for these initiatives to take different creative forms, fitting a more humorous mode.

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163. Lits, *supra* note 37, at 47.

164. Mark Grammens, De Standaard, Le Soir, en het wederzijdse begrip, LVB.net, May 2, 2007, http://lvb.net/item/4590.

165. Cathérine De Kock, *"Ik begrijp niet dat er nog geen doden zijn gevallen": Waal Christophe Deborsu proeft van oer-Vlaams fenomeen: veldrijden*, Het Nieuwsblad (Groot-Bijgaarden, Belg.), Jan. 28, 2009, http://www.nieuwsblad.be/Article/Detail.aspx?articleID=gmo25muti.

E. Metaphors in the Media of the Belgian Conflict

In communication about conflicts, metaphors are often used by media to simplify realities, construct meaning, and influence emotions. Our classification model can also help in ordering metaphors that are used to describe the conflict, initiatives within the conflict, and the probable outcomes. The metaphors can communicate either a serious or humorous mode, and either an escalating or de-escalating view on the conflict. Analyzing the different metaphors offers another approach to understanding whether the media cover a conflict in escalating or de-escalating terms, and whether they contribute in a constructive or destructive way.

Metaphors have been used in the most destructive ways, describing parties as non-human "cockroaches" or evil. However, metaphors can also communicate hope: "we see light on the horizon" or "at the end of the tunnel." Current use of metaphors in the Belgian media, whether more serious or humorous, generally seems to escalate the conflict.[166] The metaphors clearly represent a rather pessimistic, cynical, or surrealistic approach to the conflict (Table 2).

Table 2: Metaphors in the Media

	Serious Mode	*Humorous Mode*
Escalating	Divorce War, time bomb Reanimating a dead patient The orchestra playing on the Titanic (federal government)	A praline divorce Varied menu, no fat fish or big steak Bad slapstick comedy Kafka Jack Bauer in *24*
De-escalating	???	???

Metaphors that are often used in the media to represent the current developments in Belgium at the federal level are divorce, war, and a time bomb. Also, clearly pessimistic images include "the government tries to reanimate a dead patient" and "the government acts like the orchestra on the Titanic; it plays on while the ship sinks." More humorous metaphors refer to a bad slapstick comedy and restaurants where no clear menu is served.

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166. This is based on personal observations of Belgian media by the authors over the past years. These observations are merely anecdotal and are not based on a scientifically sound methodology.

Constructive coverage of conflicts,[167] including metaphors, is possible when hope is fostered, power differences are reduced, and trust is enhanced. We have not found metaphors in the Belgian media that contribute to these elements. We could not find metaphors expressing de-escalating tendencies, or an optimistic image of Belgium as an integrated nation with a clear identity. On the contrary, the metaphors reflect a rather pessimistic view on the future. The most optimistic view is probably that the situation is hopeless, but not too serious. Typical responses given by Flemish people when interviewed by international media on the constitutional crisis are that they do not have time to answer the question because they have to eat their French fries, or that they do not care about the crisis, as there is always some government left, if another one is in crisis.[168]

V. TOWARD DE-ESCALATION

Belgian media are an inherent part of the country's basic divide between North and South and also contribute to this divide. We have concluded that the media have on many occasions become players in the game and have crossed the tricky lines of advocacy journalism. Most of the communication contributes to conflict escalation. Both in serious and humorous modes, stereotypes are reinforced. The metaphors that are used express pessimism and feed the conflict. Hence, some press coverage of the Belgian conflict has been destructive, to use the framework of Richard Reuben.

Nevertheless, there have been several constructive initiatives taken by media on both sides to create empathy and mutual respect.[169] They have done this either through a serious mode (promoting knowledge of each other, organizing and facilitating debates and dialogues, or promoting a shared identity), through humorous modes (challenging stereotypes or producing a docu-fiction), or a combination of both (such as concerts and cultural events). Their impact has, however, remained very limited. It is clear that genuine de-escalating intentions by no means guarantee social change in the direction that the media, producers, and journalists seek.

We believe that our classification model is not only a useful means by which to examine media action—offering a quadrant model through which different media actions can be broadly viewed and systematically analyzed—it also may be a preparatory tool in exploring how to act, communicate, and cover conflict in the future.

The media in general and individual journalists should first question

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167. Reuben, *supra* note 111, at 78–79.

168. This is based on the authors' personal observations of television newscasts on Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS), a leading Dutch public broadcaster.

169. *See* Part IV *supra*.

themselves and critically reflect on their position in society at large and in a conflict in particular. Our quadrant model may be helpful in structuring such reflection. When preparing an article, interview, radio or television news item, or documentary, the journalist can review his draft through the lens of our model. If the upper left or right quadrant colors heavily, he should step back and rethink the article, because he might be engaging in an escalating mode. A clear challenge for the media, in the Belgian case and perhaps for many other cases as well, is to try to minimize these escalating communications. The Belgian case illustrates the complexities and difficulties in achieving this, given that media have their own audience, usually limited to only one of the conflicting parties. We accept that media can never play a truly neutral role. But we plead for a more conscious and self-reflective attitude, with which the media transparently acknowledge their own positions, reference schemes, and perspectives, and use that information to try to create constructive and de-escalating coverage of conflict.

This path is never easy. This, too, is taught by the Belgian case. Even with the best intentions, journalists are caught in their old frames, thus reinforcing stereotypes.

But the situation is not black or white. We have seen brave attempts, both in a serious and a humorous mode, to walk on the path of constructive and de-escalating conflict coverage. The attempts have been made through cooperation between media, including journalist exchanges, "human interest" stories, joint productions between representatives of both conflicting groups, and promotion of boundary-crossing role models, such as artists, pop stars, and athletes.

To us, it seems very much worthwhile to further explore these constructive initiatives. We should support media that are willing to set up these experiments with expertise, skill, and, perhaps, coaching. As conflict scholars are very well aware, considering perspectives from two or more sides in a conflict is challenging and almost impossible when one is personally involved. Cooperation with conflict scholars and practitioners indeed might be helpful, both in the design of constructive initiatives and in developing attitudes and competencies, as well as in providing concrete support and advice on the job.[170]

Whether one is working through a serious or a humorous mode, the essence is to focus on de-escalation. At the core of de-escalation is the creation of hope and enhancement of trust, mutual understanding, and respect. This is the best argument against radicalization and reasoning on the basis of

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170. This fits well with Susan Hackley's suggestions to promote cooperation between conflict scholars and journalists. Susan G. Hackley, *In the Global Village, Can War Survive?*, 93 MARQ. L. REV. 25, 40–43 (2009).

exclusiveness. If one comes to understand that the world has many faces, that all stories have value, and that the situation or conflict is never unidimensional but carries in itself an inherent doubleness or multiplicity, then de-escalation would follow naturally. Coping with this doubleness, managing it as a permanent tension of life that cannot and should not disappear, is a skill we believe that Belgium should be familiar with.

Indeed, a typical characteristic of Belgian culture and art might bring hope for the Belgian conflict. In Belgian art, a quest for self-determination is expressed, seeking "a resolution of its own doubleness that does not entail the erasure of that doubleness."[171] This quest is not accompanied by uncertainty or agonizing discomfort; in fact, the opposite is true.[172] In Belgian art, particularly surrealistic forms, the artists use the complexities and paradoxes to create new and hybrid forms. Such an approach might inspire the media to cover the community conflicts creatively and in de-escalating ways.

We therefore hope and plead for more humor in media coverage of conflicts. Dealing with conflict in a humorous mode can contribute to social changes in a nonviolent way, as has been demonstrated in several situations.[173] Our wish for the Belgian media is that they may explore intensively and self-critically the use of a humorous and de-escalating mode to approach the Belgian conflict, and that they may contribute to the creation of many options and possibilities for a more positive climate and transcend long-defined fault lines. A humorous mode in approaching conflict may help the Belgian media consider new perspectives and create new frames for looking at enduring tangible relations.

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171. Aubert, Fraiture & McGuinness, *supra* note 125, at 2.

172. *Id.*

173. Sorensen, *supra* note 130, at 184–86.