



Conflict-Sensitive Journalism:

A Practical Handbook for Journalists in Southern Africa

Edited by Admire Mare



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CONFLICT-SENSITIVE JOURNALISM:
A Practical Handbook for Journalists in Southern Africa

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Foreword

This e-handbook is the third in a series of special publications offering guidance to media practitioners—editors and journalists—working in conflict-affected and post-conflict African countries. It offers refreshing regional perspectives to the core values and practices of conflict-sensitive journalism in Southern Africa. The collection of essays in this volume seek among other things to draw attention to the virtues of conflict-sensitive journalism as a way of transforming the negative effects of ‘war’ journalism. Contributors to the handbook include journalists drawn from the following countries: eSwatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, who participated in a workshop in Windhoek in July 2018.

The workshop was jointly organized by the New York-based Social Science Research Council’s (SSRC) African Peacebuilding Network (APN) Program in collaboration with the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST). The chapters that follow, explore and critically analyze the engagements of Southern African journalists with the democratization project in the region. The authors capture their experiences with the varying degrees of democratic and governance deficits across various countries, and the challenges these pose to the media’s ability to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts in the region.

Edited by Dr Admire Mare of the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST), a brilliant media scholar and an Alumnus of the SSRC’s APN grants program, the handbook reflects one of the APN’s goals, which is to support the production of evidence-based high quality knowledge and the integration of such knowledge into media practice and policies in Africa. It also provides useful information and data for scholars, students, journalists, and members of the public with a keen interest in exploring the ways transformative journalism can help expand the opportunities for sustainable peace in Southern Africa.

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September 16, 2019.

Preface

This publication is based on presentations delivered at a media, conflict and peacebuilding training workshop aimed at building the capacity of African journalists to report on conflict and peacebuilding in Southern Africa. The two-day workshop on “Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Southern Africa” brought together sixteen print, radio, television, and digital journalists who report on conflict and peacebuilding in the region. The journalists came from seven Southern African countries—Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, eSwatini, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia.

It was organised in July 2018 by the Department of Communication, Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) and supported by the Social Science Research Council’s African Peacebuilding Network (APN) grant program.

The workshop adopted a combination of theoretical and practical sessions with critique and interactive exercises and was facilitated by experienced academics and practitioners who combined the fundamental theories in the field with the rich experiences of their practice to engender a holistic understanding of issues.

Journalists were introduced to concepts and key issues in conflict and peacebuilding, given an understanding of the link between peace, and conflict, as well as led to reflect on the roles, ideologies, and practices of the media in conflict and peacebuilding. The workshop looked at civil strife in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The issue of xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals in South Africa also took centre stage. Journalists were urged to adopt conflicts-sensitive journalism, which borrows heavily from Afrocentric ideals such as Ubuntu and communitarianism. The issue of ethical reporting was also buttressed. Moreover, the issue of the safety of journalists in conflict situations also received significant attention.

The workshop also provided an opportunity to link together Southern African journalists and scholars whose work focuses on conflict and peacebuilding to share experiences and learn new ways to approach their writing in the belief that this would help mitigate the risks of the media contributing to conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

The urgent need for conflict-sensitive journalism in Southern Africa

Admire Mare

The media is generally viewed as an instrumental vehicle through, which conflict and peacebuilding narratives are disseminated in any society. Thus, both and digital media platforms constitute crucial cogs in the conflict and peacebuilding toolbox. On the one hand, these platforms can be used to promote peacebuilding and social cohesion interventions. On the other hand, media can be appropriated to fuel conflict and to spread hate speech and propaganda. However, it is important to note that these media platforms can also be harnessed for both constructive and destructive purposes depending on the contextual factors at play.

In the era of media convergence, both professional and citizen journalists have an invaluable role to play in terms of raising awareness about conflict and peacebuilding initiatives. This is particularly important in Southern Africa where issues like election-related violence, gender-based violence, cultural violence (digital misogyny and trolling), xenophobia, military coups and service delivery protests. As we have witnessed in South Africa and Zimbabwe, fake news and rumours have the potential to escalate xenophobic and electoral conflict.

This introductory chapter intends to foreground the importance of conflict-sensitive journalism in a region, which has been blighted by several “democratisation conflicts¹”. All the chapters in this practical handbook are drawn from a workshop, which was held in July 2018 at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). It was funded by the Social Science Research Council’s (SSRC) African Peacebuilding Network (APN) grant program. The workshop brought together at least 20 journalists from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, eSwatini, Mozambique, Lesotho and Zambia.

In line with the goal of the APN to promote the visibility of African peacebuilding knowledge among regional centers of scholarly analysis and practical action, the workshop connected journalists and scholars working in the area of media and conflict in Southern Africa. One of the main objectives of the training workshop was to conscientise journalists on the importance of practicing conflict-sensitive journalism in a context where most of their news reports have been described as promoting “war journalism” rather than “peace journalism” (Lynch and Galtung, 2010).

¹ This refers to conflicts that accompany and are triggered by, democratic transformations like constitutional, accountability and electoral issues.

Building on the axiom that says: “*If it bleeds, it leads*”, the mainstream media in Southern Africa has promoted a divisive form of journalism based on traditional news values such as prominence, impact, timeliness, proximity, bizarreness, conflict, and currency. The absence of “peace” as one of the news values has raised serious academic debate given its importance in contemporary societies.

Although the Southern Africa region is considered relatively stable and peaceful compared to other regions, it is important to foreground the urgent need for conflict-sensitive journalism. As intimated earlier, the region has witnessed low-intensity conflicts (often linked to lack of accountability, militarisation, constitutional and electoral contestation among others).

In countries like Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique and Democratic Republic of Congo, civil strife has resurfaced in recent years. In Zimbabwe, the military’s role in the change of Head of State, which took place in November 2017, highlighted the role played by both traditional and digital media in mediating the tumultuous events that accompanied the resignation of the late President Robert Mugabe. In South Africa, Malawi and Zambia, service delivery protests and electoral conflicts have also made local and international headlines. Recurrent xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals in South Africa have also justified the urgent need for conflict-sensitive journalism.

Almost every country in Southern Africa faces some kind of governance deficit, albeit in varying degrees. This is certainly true of the majority of countries, including those that routinely hold free and fair elections and experience alternation of power, but also for the more autocratic regimes in which elections are flawed. In most countries, the ability of the independent media to play a strong, investigative and watchdog role to ensure that the three pillars of the state remain answerable to the electorate is severely curtailed by restrictive laws, overbearing state broadcasting institutions and partisan law enforcement agencies. These structural factors present systemic challenges to the realisation of independent and balanced conflict-sensitive journalism.

In the recent past, internet shutdowns and throttling, data mining and surveillance, production and consumption of fake news and propaganda have also complicated the practice of conflict-sensitive journalism in the region. Zimbabwe, for instance, has shut down the internet in 2016 and 2019 at the height of electoral and accountability conflicts. The Democratic Republic of Congo has also used internet shutdowns as an instrument for muting post-election protests in 2018.

A few countries in Southern Africa have a history of multi-party democracy and strong state institutions, which have set the pace for democratic consolidation for others through regular elections and leadership rotation. Countries like Zimbabwe, Angola and eSwatini have stubbornly resisted the pressure to democratise in the past 30 years, with dominant ruling parties

– mainly former liberation movements – barely countenancing effective opposition parties, in many cases using violence and intimidation to maintain power (Mare, 2013).

Electoral conflicts have become endemic in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa (Tsarwe and Mare, 2019). The peacekeeping mechanism of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security—has been called to mediate on a number of cases involving Zimbabwe, Lesotho, DRC and Madagascar in recent years. Despite registering some modicum of success in terms of maintaining regional stability, the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security has failed to deal to ensure durable peace in some countries.

Most countries in Southern Africa have experienced different levels of democratisation conflicts. In South Africa, accountability conflicts have taken the form of community protests which are largely fuelled by a range of issues like corruption, e-tolling, service delivery backlogs, youth unemployment and the influx of foreign migrants (Mare, 2016). These protests are born out of the frustration with the continued high levels of inequality and a revolt against a government that is increasingly seen as uncaring and not listening.

Xenophobic conflicts in South Africa have taken the lives of many innocent African immigrants who are generally accused of stealing jobs and other opportunities. Between 2000 and 2019, approximately 200 people have died as a result of xenophobic violence. The media especially the English speaking press has been criticised for regurgitating *us vs. them* discourses. Tabloid newspapers have also been singled out for normalising xenophobic behaviour. The systemic ‘otherisation’ of African foreign nationals (for instance, the use of derogatory terms like *amakwerekwere*) and the ‘criminalisation’ of their survival strategies by the media have also dominated the public domain.

Zimbabwe has experienced constitutional, accountability and electoral conflicts, which have manifested themselves through disputed elections, poor service delivery, deteriorating economic situation and worsening human rights record (Mare, 2016). Constitutional outreaches in Zimbabwe have been marred by state sponsored violence especially in areas where youth vigilante groups like Chipangano, Jochomondo and Al Shabab have established bases. Election-related violence has also reared its ugly head since the turn of the century with mostly opposition supporters losing their lives. In 2008, the country experienced one of the worst electoral violent episodes. The conflict led to deaths, forced migration and destruction of property.

Although the situation was generally calm during the 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections, cases of state-sponsored violence came to the fore in the post-election period, where the army was unleashed on defenceless citizens. At least 6 citizens lost their lives while several hundreds were hospitalised for gunshot wounds. As a result, brutality by security forces against protestors and human rights defenders has become more pronounced in the so-called “Second Republic” under the leadership of President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The country has experienced an

upsurge of service delivery protests in the post Mugabe era. For instance, in January 2019, 10 people were killed for protesting against fuel price increases.

Madagascar has also hogged international headlines following a *coup de tat*, which forced the former head of state to flee the country into exile. Although the situation did not escalate, the country remains potentially vulnerable to protest action and insecurity. SADC's Organ of Politics, Defence and Security has played an important role in coming up with the peace deal, which paved way for the holding of elections. The media played an instrumental role in terms of reporting the coup and the resultant peace deal.

Countries such as Mozambique, Lesotho, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have witnessed the resurgence of civil strife. In the DRC, there is still civil war in the eastern part of the country where rebels have a significant control over certain parts of the area. The country has also endured incidences of street protests in the pre-and post-election, where the current president Félix Tshisekedi was elected. The December 2018 elections in the DRC were marred by cases of electoral violence and voter intimidation. The main opposition candidate, Martin Fayulu, refused to accept the results citing cases of voter rigging and intimidation.

Similar to the DRC, public protest at government failure to deliver basic services has assumed violent proportions in Mozambique. These protests were more pronounced in September 2010 when a number of people were killed in Maputo. The police were accused of using live ammunition to disperse crowds. Ever since the disputed elections, which were held in 2014, Mozambique has been politically volatile especially in central and northern provinces controlled by the National Resistance (Renamo). The main opposition party refused to accept the results of elections in late 2014 that saw the return of the Frelimo party to power. In turn, Renamo has resorted to violence to channel its grievances against the government. In 2016, intermittent fighting between government forces and Renamo sparked a flight of nearly 3,500 people into neighbouring Malawi, raising concerns of a new refugee crisis in Southern Africa.

In August 2019, the government and leader of Renamo, Ossufo Momade, signed a peace deal, which is believed to be a decisive step towards ending a low-intensity that began in 2013. However, the divisions that have rocked Renamo since the last general elections are seen as a real threat to the peace deal. Renamo is now made up of two splinter groups—one led by Ossufo Momade and another headed by Major-general Mariano Nhongo (known as Renamo Military Junta). The faction led by Major Nhongo is on record as having said that soldiers under their command will not disarm until Renamo elects a new leader.

In Lesotho, political instability has seen the Prime Minister Tom Thabane fleeing to South Africa on a number of occasions. Recently, the military staged what is generally believed to be a *coup de tat* although the main protagonists claimed it was nothing more than an antiterrorism operation. The coup was prompted by months of political wrangling between the three parties in Lesotho's governing coalition. The dispute resulted in the suspension of parliament, one

party's apparent departure from the coalition shortly afterward, and SADC mediation led by Namibia, which unfortunately failed to break the deadlock. Whilst the situation has returned to normal in the last year or so, Lesotho remains susceptible to incidences of military coup and accountability conflict.

The situation remains dire in eSwatini despite the country's unexpected name change. All power is vested in the hands of King Mswati III. Through a system of royal appointments and patronage, the king maintains total control of all state and many private-sector institutions. Political parties remain banned and the independence of key state institutions is questionable. Systematic human rights violations at the hands of state institutions – especially law enforcement – targeting political, civil society and labour activists are prevalent. Freedom of speech and assembly is severely restricted and any opposition to the monarchy is met with heavy punishment. eSwatini has been described as a 'failed feudal state' with a raft of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests and detention by security forces. Accountability conflicts in the form of service delivery protests continue to be brutally crushed by the partisan law enforcement agencies.

Zambia and Malawi have also seen the shrinkage of the democratic space in the last few years. The last elections in both countries were accompanied by serious cases of electoral violence. In Zambia, President Edgar Lungu, previously elected in January 2015 to finish the term of Micheal Sata, who died in office, was re-elected to a full five-year term when he scored above the 50% + 1 mark of the vote, defeating opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema. Both parties traded accusations of inciting violence for political gain; the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) accused the United Party for National Development (UPND), of inciting unnecessary violence, and carrying out its "*Operation Watermelon*" to create tension in the country. In response, the UPND accused the Patriotic Front of politicising state entities against them. In Malawi, President Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won a second term with 38.57%. Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) came a close second with 35.41% and former vice-president Saulos Chilima of the UTM came third with 20.24%. Both of the defeated candidates, however, allege that the vote was marred by fraud and that results sheets were altered using typewriter correction fluid. The country has been embroiled in endless protests since the announcement of results in May 2019. Concerns have been raised about the ways in which the security forces handled the situation.

Botswana have also received its fair share of internal ructions especially between the former President Ian Khama and the current President Mokgweetsi Masisi. The internal squabbles within the ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party, have attracted international media spotlight in the run up to the October 2019 election. Namibia remains one of the most stable democracies in Southern Africa. However the country is also one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of income inequality. Service delivery is skewed and some of the poorest among the 14 regions lack adequate access to health care facilities and educational services (Bertelsmann Stiftung Report, 2018). As a result, socioeconomic discrepancies over the last 26 years have started to create a cocktail of service delivery challenges. Ordinary people in urban

areas have begun to question the general direction of the country and the demands for service delivery have become louder and louder (Bertelsmann Stiftung Report, 2018). Corruption and lethargic service delivery has galvanised urbanites to start questioning the political hegemony of the ruling party.

Another issue, which has caused headaches for the Namibian government relates to the unequal redistribution of land. The Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM) has used the emotive issue to push the government to adopt a more radical approach. The issue of land reform remains a thorny issue, which has triggered regional-ethnic animosities (Bertelsmann Stiftung Report, 2018). Minority groups claim that the current land policy advantages the Oshiwambo-speaking majority group, especially in eastern, central and southern Namibia where the Herero, Nama and Damara minorities mainly resident. Even the much-publicised National Land Conference held in 2018 failed to address this contentious issue. The country has registered an unprecedented spate of gender-based violence, which also justifies the need to mainstream conflict-sensitive journalism in newsrooms and journalism training institutions.

Why conflict-sensitive journalism?

It is within the aforementioned regional context that conflict-sensitive journalism must be seen as a crucial element for the building durable peace. As Howard (2004) observes, conflict-sensitive journalism is when editors and reporters make choices that improve the prospects for peace. These choices, including how to frame stories and carefully choosing which words are used, create an atmosphere conducive to peace and supportive of peace initiatives and peacemakers, without compromising the basic principles of quality journalism.

Conflict-sensitive journalism empowers reporters to report conflicts professionally without feeding the flames of conflict. It is premised on the assumption journalists understand the (conflict) context in which it operates; understand the interaction between its operations and the (conflict) context; and act upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on the (conflict) context and the intervention (Howard, 2004). Hence, journalists in Southern African newsrooms are expected to report in-depth, cover all sides and allow for an opportunity for those involved to ventilate all issues related to the conflict.

In other words, conflict sensitive journalism gives peacemakers a voice while making peace initiatives and non-violent solutions more visible and viable (Youngblood, 2016). Not to be confused with open advocates for peace, conflict-sensitive journalists are geared towards framing their stories in such a way as to “give peace a chance.” It is concerned with the contextual framing of stories, ethical treatment of sensitive subjects, and avoidance of polarising stereotypes. This is very important in light of contentious issues like xenophobia, gender-based violence, election-related violence and service delivery protests.

It is generally peace/conflict-oriented (making conflicts transparent, giving voice to all parties,

humanisation of all sides, proactive), truth-oriented (expose untruths on all sides), people-oriented, and solution-oriented (Lynch and Galtung, 2010). It thus seeks to change journalistic practices that withhold, control or limit the range of information available in the public sphere or, turn a blind eye to violence or commit the insidious sins of using blatant hate speech and name-calling (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2012; Youngblood, 2016).

Conflict-sensitive journalism has the potential to liberate African journalistic practices from the dominant paradigm of ‘war journalism’/ positional journalism. By foregrounding African values like *ubuntu*, *utu* and *harambee*, journalists in Southern Africa and beyond are encouraged to rethink their news sourcing cultures, editorial language and engaging in thorough conflict and peacebuilding analysis before publishing their stories. Instead of focusing on instant publication of stories, conflict-sensitive journalism is about patience, thorough investigation and giving all the sides involved a chance to comment. As Mare (2013) argues, it is about verifying first before publishing (posting, tweeting, recommending, sharing and commenting).

In this handbook, Moyo puts the spotlight on the relationship between media and conflict within the context of the African Union’s ambitious goal of “silencing the guns” by 2020. He argues that media can serve as agents of conflict. As such, any serious peacebuilding efforts should necessarily have a media strategy for mitigating conflict and building peace. This should start with deliberate efforts to transform media structures to ensure diversity of ownership that can create opportunities for pluralism of voices to be heard – especially the voices of the marginalised groups in society. He illustrates that the media tendency towards simplification has implications for their ability to tell stories that dig deeper and provide ample contextualisation. Rather it lends them into creating false dichotomies that forces society to perceive events in polarities and oppositions.

In their article, Chasi and Rodny-Gumede argue there are considerable similarities in the ways in which peace journalism and ubuntu journalism approach conflict reporting. For them, peace journalism and ubuntu journalism both stand as ‘challenger-paradigms’ to more conventional forms of journalism. They observe that peace journalism highlights the need for conflict resolution, conflict mitigation and common ground instead of conflict amplification and polarisation of viewpoints. Similarly, ubuntu journalism embraces ideas of mutuality, consensus, interdependence, participation and deliberation. Taken together, they argue that both approaches can form the basis for a new journalistic ethos that foregrounds human relations and participation and that promotes harmony and harmonious relationships.

In the same vein, Makamani makes a solid case for the Afrocentric notion of ubuntu as a critical imperative and success factor for peace journalism in Africa. He argues that African media can effectively contribute to the much needed healing, development, social harmony and happiness by people experiencing post-conflict realities on the African continent. Taking a cue from American, Chinese and other progressive nations of the world, the study puts to the fore the efficacy of harnessing contextual, cultural and historical realities of people in media

reporting practices.

Examining media and electoral conflict in Southern Africa, Tsarwe demonstrates that there has been a worrying trend over the years where elections have often been characterised by violence, disputed outcomes, a citizenry generally uninformed about their civil and political rights and serious questions on the credibility of democratic bodies involved in elections such as independent electoral commissions, the media, the police, the military and the judicial system. He argues that while the work of journalists is much more difficult during moments of conflict as they operate in a climate of fear and threats and with opposing sides seeking to control the media, conflict-sensitive reporting can help neutralise conflict by providing the public with full, reliable and non-partisan information, while giving voice to those suffering from brutal conflicts.

In her insightful chapter, Jaji points out that there is need for a concerted focus on cultural violence by journalists partly because direct violence cannot stop unless cultural violence, which legitimizes it is stopped. Her main argument is that the perpetration of cultural violence through language or speech is not confined to politicians as the media can also fall into the same pitfall during coverage of speeches characterized by the language of violence. Cultural violence plays a key role in normalizing and rendering direct violence acceptable. It is important to remember that language is an integral aspect of politics which provides cues to the likelihood of conflict or peace and history shows how mass murder in various parts of the world was preceded and accompanied by cultural violence in the form of hate speech and inflammatory language.

Mapudzi and Mpofo discuss the concept of fake news and also explore how fake news can undermine the efforts of peace journalism. They encourage journalists to adopt a more sensitive approach to reporting on conflict issues and foster an environment where truth telling and truth seeking inform their practice. Zooming in on the issue the safety of journalists covering conflict, Ellis argues that while safeguarding oneself always has personal aspects, successfully protecting journalists' safety is primarily a collective undertaking. Thus, the news organisation, the content creation team, and organisations representing the media industry, must all be involved in the enterprise of keeping journalists safe.

Last but not least, Peel discusses the ethical challenges associated with covering conflict and peacebuilding initiatives. Using transcripts from George Alagiah's book, *A Passage to Africa*, Peel argues that in the course of working in a conflict environment, the ethical dictates of operation related to use of sources, the filming of human suffering, keeping an objective mind, parting with money to secure access, and keeping a watchdog's oversight over how foreign and local players transacted their affairs are severely tested. He discusses how these ethical dilemmas complicate the practice of conflict-sensitive journalism in Southern Africa.

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The Role of the Media in Conflict and Peace Processes in Africa

Dumisani Moyo

Abstract

This chapter explores the various ways in which the media have been used to fan conflict in Africa and attempts to explain how and why it has been possible for various power centres to manipulate the media into weapons of hate and violent conflict. It also looks at cases where the media have been exemplary in promoting peace and conflict resolution, and argues that an end to state ownership and control of the media, a sound regulatory system and improved journalism training are critical ingredients for media systems that can promote peace.. It also makes a number of policy and legislative recommendations that can be used in Africa and beyond.

Introduction

Africa has witnessed numerous conflicts since the end of colonial rule, with huge impact on both development and democratisation in some countries. While regional and international efforts aimed at resolving these conflicts have focused on causalities and possible solutions, very little attention has been paid to the role of the media. Yet a closer look at the media and how they have contributed to conflict on the continent and how best they could be harnessed to promote peace would be critical to any drive towards “ending all wars in Africa by 2020.”

The media are a powerful force, which can be used or abused, depending on the interests of those who own and control them, as well as the nature and effectiveness of the regulatory framework in place. In the right hands, the media can be a force for peacebuilding, democratisation and development. But in the wrong hands, they can be a dangerous tool that can fan hatred and lead to violent conflict. As Puddephatt (2006) argues, “Which role the media takes in a given conflict, and in the phases before and after, depends on a complex set of factors, including the relationship the media has to actors in the conflict and the independence the media has to the power holders in society.”

The paper focuses on the following issues:

- Normative role of the media in society, in relation to how they operate on the ground;
- Empirical examples of how the media have been used as tools to fan conflict;
- Factors that make it possible for elites to manipulate the media and use them for propaganda

- or fanning conflict;
- Case where the media have been instrumental in ‘silencing the guns’;
- Reflections on policy interventions at the regional and international levels.

Normative Roles versus Practical Operations of the Media

To have a better appreciation of the role the media can play in ‘silencing the guns’ and promoting peace in Africa, it is critical to start by looking at the media’s normative role in society as well as how they operate in practice. This will enable us to see where the potential for peace-oriented media lies, and also to understand the dynamics in media decision-making processes, the challenges, and constraints that often make the media fail to meet some of society’s ideals and expectations.

There are several expectations of how the media ought to be organised and to behave in the wider public interest or for the good of society as a whole (McQuail, 2006: 162). These include the media disseminating information and interpreting complex developments; providing a platform for diverse voices and opinions; facilitating debate; being a watchdog, exposing corruption and wrongdoing in both public and private sectors; being gatekeepers and agenda setters; and being educators – and so on (see McQuail, 2006). Some of these normative perceptions have allowed a view of the media as neutral players in an otherwise complex society.

The media’s claims to neutrality and balance have reinforced their status as the ‘fourth estate’ – overseeing the performance of the other three branches of the state. Yet studies in sociology of news and critical political economy of the media have highlighted that the media are not neutral recorders of our daily reality; there are various imperatives that make them select and report events the way they do. As McQuail argues, the media in a free society are often not obliged to carry out any of the positively valued purposes that society generally takes for granted. Commercial media are driven by profit motives, and the desire to satisfy shareholders, while media owned by politicians have vested interests in pushing their owners’ political agenda: “The news we get is inevitably...the product of institutional pressures and structures, and of processes of both selection and construction” (Marris and Thornham, 2000: 627).

In particular, scholars talk about news values as being critical in informing the ways in which the media select and report on events (Schudson, 2011; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; McNair, 1998). Gadi Wolfsfeld (2004), following Galtung and Ruge (1965), observes how reporting of peace processes is shaped by news values, specifically, ‘immediacy’, ‘drama’, ‘simplicity’ and ‘ethnocentrism’ – values that tend to “favour violence, and are intrinsically inimitable to the need for calm, incremental progress and the recognition of the multisided composition and cultural complexities that should ideally inform peace negotiations” (2004: 15-23). For instance, it has become an entrenched journalistic principle that, “if it bleeds it leads” – meaning dramatic events such as violent conflict will always be the preferred lead story, and not something uneventful such as peacebuilding.

Scholars have also argued that news media necessarily play an ideological role in the sense that, “the process of ordering the ‘disorderly’ events which news undertakes, is also a process of assigning meaning. It operates by placing those events within ‘maps of meaning’ into which our social world is already organised and which it is assumed we all share” (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Numerous studies have illustrated how ideology is always embedded in the entertainment purveyed by the media.

An analysis of the role of the media in conflict could therefore look at various media genres, including feature films, soaps, documentaries, etc. But perhaps the most influential genre has been the news, mainly because of the claim to truthfulness and objectivity. This chapter therefore focuses mainly on the role of news media in conflict. While this would typically require rigorous content analysis of the news texts produced by selected media, this chapter relies predominantly on secondary literature. Most of the examples used in this chapter are specifically on radio, which Hyden et al (2002) have called “Africa’s medium.” Radio, as the paper will illustrate, has been used both for the good and the bad, and there is scope to shape it as a tool to promote peace.

Media as drivers of conflict in Africa

There are numerous examples of political mass killings sponsored or instigated by elites controlling government whose agenda is “to reduce or eliminate certain groups (ethnic or religious) that are thought to constitute political threats” (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014: 2). These elites use the mass media under their control as tools to persuade citizens to participate in violence against certain groups (ibid).

The Rwanda Genocide of 1994 has been widely used as an example of the extreme role that media can play in fomenting conflict and inciting mass violence. Media outlets such as state-owned *Radio Rwanda*, and *Radio Mille Collines* (RTML) (a private station linked to senior Hutu government officials) were used as tools of mass propaganda, fanning ethnic hatred against Tutsis, although, RTML was undoubtedly the main anti-Tutsi megaphone, providing “the most extreme and inflammatory messages” (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014). These media propagated perceptions of “them and us” between the Hutus and Tutsis, and of the latter as the enemy, thereby legitimising them as a target for extermination.

Denigrating and dehumanising language became one of the powerful weapons of exclusion. The Tutsis were called *inyenzi* or cockroaches that needed to be crushed or eradicated. While many scholars have not been able to empirically prove the extent to which these “hate radio” broadcasts influenced the mass killing of the Tutsis, there is evidence to suggest that these broadcasts played a role in catalysing the violence that ensued (Hatzfeld, 2005; Strauss, 2007 – cited in Yanagizawa, 2014: 2). Yanagizawa’s study is significant in that it establishes that approximately 10% of overall participation (in the violence), and almost one-third of the violence by militias and other armed groups can be attributed to the RTML’s broadcasts (2014: 30).

Yet the use of media in fanning ethnic hatred and violence did not begin and end in Rwanda.

Little has been written about the role of state propaganda in the post-independence conflict in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland province where thousands died at the hands of government forces in the early 1980s. Known as *Gukurahundi*, the conflict was a state-sanctioned military campaign to stem out resistance from ZAPU elements and pave the way for a one-party state. The state media, both print and electronic, became a critical player in this conflict, presenting a one-sided view that exaggerated the dissident threat and justified a military intervention. As Alexander and McGregor write,

During the conflict itself, state-controlled media reproduced and popularized the Zanu government's views on violence in Matabeleland. The media portrayed the conflict in predominantly political terms, casting the minority party Zapu and its former guerrilla army, Zipra, as the aggressors, and blaming them for instigating a violent insurgency... out of anger over their 1980 electoral loss. Zanu and the government forces...were cast in a legitimate and reactive role: they were defenders of a hard-won independence ... upholders of law and order in the face of armed dissent from former Zipra guerrillas and a treacherous Zapu (1999: 246).

As a way of simplifying the 'enemy', state-controlled media "blurred distinctions between the armed 'dissidents', the civilians among whom they lived and Zapu supporters" – branding them all as subversive and dangerous elements (ibid). As in the Rwandan case, language was also strategically deployed to justify the indiscriminate killings that took place. Alexander and McGregor relate how the Bulawayo-based the *Chronicle*, reported a Minister telling a rally that government had come to burn down "all the villages infested with dissidents...the campaign against dissidents can only succeed if the infrastructure that nurtures them is destroyed" (ibid: 252).

The dissidents were referred to as cockroaches, and the army (the North-Korean trained Fifth Brigade) as the 'DDT' – which would be used to eliminate them (ibid). The CCJP report estimates that at least 6,000 were killed in this conflict, 98% of whom died at the hands of government forces, and only 2% at the hands of dissidents (CCJP/LRF, 1997: 156-7, cited in Alexander and McGregor, 1999: 251).

An interesting dimension to the *Gukurahundi* conflict was the deafening silence from the international media, which meant that many in the international community only learnt about the conflict some years later. One reason is that Matabeleland province was closed off to the media during the disturbances. What is remarkable, however, is how business interests can trump the public interest even in cases where human lives are at stake. Then owner of *The Observer* newspaper, Tiny Rowland instructed Editor Donald Trelford to withdraw an article criticising the *Gukurahundi* campaign in order to protect his business interests in Zimbabwe. Trelford published the story anyway, and he was roundly condemned in other British media, including the BBC, which chose to carry an apology from Rowland to the Mugabe regime for

what he said was *irresponsible journalism*.

The Zimbabwe crisis that started around 2000 also provides some important insights into the role of the media in fanning conflict, and how the state has continued to use the media as a tool in navigating that crisis (see Chiumbu and Moyo, 2009; Moyo, 2010; and MMPZ reports). The crisis took on political, economic and social dimensions, and has been characterised by the breakdown in rule of law, inter and intra-party violence, and unprecedented economic decline which have led many to view Zimbabwe as a failing state.

As in previous examples, the ZANU-PF government has extensively used the state media it controls to define the crisis, persuade the nation and the international community to see the crisis from its point of view, and at the same time denigrate its “enemies” (mainly the opposition and civil society) as “sell-outs”, “Western-sponsored regime change agents”, “puppets of the West”, etc. ZANU-PF itself was invariably projected as the revolutionary party that is doing everything to defend national sovereignty, which is under threat from these undesirable elements. Regulatory restructuring, institutional rearrangements, and deployment of propaganda were at the core of the state strategy in fighting what it terms the *Third Chimurenga* (see Chiumbu and Moyo, 2010 for a more detailed analysis). This too has been a conflict in which thousands have died of curable diseases and a few hundreds from violence perpetrated by the state and leading political parties.

Another case of media as agents of conflict is the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, where both mainstream and social media played a part in fuelling ethnic violence in which over a thousand people were killed and 500,000 displaced. (Makinen and Kuira, 2008). Hate-filled radio broadcasts helped to incite ethnic violence. Some ethnic language broadcasts in local radio stations urged listeners to “take out the weeds in our midst” and referred to other ethnic groups as “animals from the West” who want to take over “our kingdom” (Myers, 2008; Musungu, 2008). As in the other cases the mainstream media simplified the post-election crisis as a Kikuyu-Luo or Mwai Kibaki-Raila Odinga issue, thus promoting the perception of the crisis as an ethnic conflict (Musungu, 2008). The international media similarly reported the story from an ethnic dimension, which several scholars view as an oversimplification of what was obviously a complex crisis.

The Kenyan government ban of live broadcasts of election results allowed new avenues of expression to emerge which were outside the purview of direct state control – notably social media (including blogs, SMS, wikis, Facebook and Twitter). While social media were a lot more dynamic than the timid and self-censoring mainstream media, providing “swifter, more subjective, and more detailed coverage during a fast-moving and changing situation” (Makinen and Kuira, 2008), they also played a role in stoking ethnic tension. As Makinen and Kuira note, The social media was not politically innocent. Although some blogs aimed to promote peace and justice, others were used as channels for biased information, tribal prejudices, and hate speech... Similarly, while SMS has been a powerful tool for good during and

after the elections, it was also used to spread rumours and messages laden with ethnic hatred. It was reported that SMS predicted attacks and called recipients to act on the basis of their ethnicity (ibid).

The Kenyan case is significant here because of the social media dimension; where new approaches are required to ensure that ‘new technologies of freedom’ do not end up becoming new avenues of amplifying conflict.

These examples are of cases of direct and more overt abuses of the media – which typically fall outside the norm. Cases of more subtle abuses of the media to fan conflict are often left out in both general and scholarly discussion on media and conflict, largely because of the difficulty of establishing causality between media coverage and violent behaviour. For instance, in the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa, the media, which many have argued were partly responsible for the attacks, did not directly advocate the attacks on foreign nationals. Rather, it was through an accumulation of particular images and reporting on foreigners over time that contributed to their hatred and their normalisation as criminals, job-stealers, etc., and hence legitimate targets of hate speech and violence.

Xenophobic violence targeting mostly African migrants in South Africa has also been mediated through traditional and digital media platforms. What is striking in all this is that policymakers have not been quick enough to see the power of the media in influencing conflict, and how that power could equally be harnessed to create conditions for peace.

Why have the media been pliant tools for fanning conflict?

The cases cited illustrate how the media have been used as tools for amplifying the sound of guns, fanning and escalating conflict in various parts of Africa. A number of factors can explain why the media have been such willing accomplices in fanning conflict and why they are prone to manipulation by various power centres, most notably political elites with an agenda to eliminate perceived threats to their ambitions. Below, I single out three major factors that have allowed the media to be handy tools in fanning conflict. I further highlight some key policy interventions that have been made at the national, regional and international levels.

1. The Bane State Ownership and Control of the Media and Absence of Diversity

Media ownership and control is a critical factor in how conflict is reported in any society. While state ownership of media institutions has become history in many parts of the world, this continues to be a dominant model across Africa. Justifications for continued state ownership include the need for developing states to have media systems that allow the dissemination of developmental messages, and the need for institutions that promote nation-building, national unity, etc. However, in reality, these media have invariably become the mouthpieces of the ruling elite, reduced to serving the narrow interests of perpetuating their stay in power. This has made these public media sites of contestation everywhere across Africa, particularly in the run-up to national elections.

That broadcasting institutions continue to be guarded by military personnel almost everywhere across Africa is proof of their perceived role as institutions of the power architecture. Voices of opposition political parties, civil society, women and other marginalised groups are systematically excluded from these media. A stark example is the statistics on access to these institutions ahead of critical national elections; where close to 100% of (positive) coverage is given to ruling parties. State media have been used by those in power as tools of domination and exclusion, often directly contributing to conflict. This confirms Yanagizawa-Drott's observation that, "Elites in control of autocratic states have repeatedly used mass media... with the intention to induce citizen support of, and participation in, violence against other groups" (2014: 2). In many countries, state ownership of media has engendered polarised media environments, creating pro-and anti-government media that are easy to manipulate in periods of conflict, as journalists get embedded in the various factions involved in the conflict.

2 Poor or Weak Regulatory Systems

The rapid liberalisation of the media sectors in a number of African countries has not been accompanied by strong, independent and efficient regulatory systems. Most countries still have statutory regulatory bodies that are subject to state control, and hence make partisan decisions on licensing (UNESCO, 2014: 21). This poses a serious threat, as poorly regulated media are prone to capture by both political and business interests. The DRC is an example of rapid liberalisation without the attendant efficient regulation. Many community and commercial radio stations are owned by politicians, who openly use them to advance their personal political interests (Freire, 2012). DRC tops the continent in terms of media diversity, whether in print, radio or television (Ibid). However, "The legal and regulatory framework does not provide sufficient guarantees and basic regulations to ensure that media outlets abandon their "informal practices" (Freire, 2012: 6).

Most regulatory bodies do not have the capacity to enforce strict adherence to regulations, especially on content. That a radio station could continue to carry hate broadcasts over a sustained period of time without the regulator intervening is clear example of this. Sadly, self-regulation has failed to take root in most countries owing to a number of factors, including continued state interference and an inability to appeal to both state and private media sectors. The lack of sanctioning powers in self-regulatory bodies has also made them more of toothless watchdogs: "Self-regulatory bodies have often lacked universal recognition and authority, and have been accused by governments of being ineffectual" (UNESCO, 2014: 21).

3. Poor or Lack of Training for Media Practitioners

Poorly trained journalists with little or no understanding of journalism ethics can also contribute to serious ethical lapses that can fuel conflict. Such journalists can take bribes or other inducements to report in certain ways. This is also linked to the challenge of poor salaries for journalists across Africa. The UNESCO study on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* further points out:

In a large majority of African countries, journalists have continued to display regular

ethical lapses in reporting, usually attributed to inadequate professional training and the willingness of many to accept or solicit bribes. Where most journalists have earned very low salaries, if they were paid at all, and where media institutions have often been politicized, journalists have reportedly regularly succumbed to accepting inducements in return for publishing distorted media reports...(UNESCO, 2014: 23).

UNESCO further points to the slow increase in the availability of education and training of journalists, both at university level and through professional development training (Ibid).

Media's role in building peace – The Case of *Radio Okapi* in DRC

Inordinate attention has been paid to the role of the media in fanning conflict, as opposed to their role in promoting peace (Bratic and Schirch, 2007; Hyde-Clarke, 2012). However, there are numerous cases where the media, particularly radio, have been used as tools for promoting peace. *Radio Agatashya*, set up by the Swiss charity Foundation Hirondelle in 1994 to broadcast regional news to hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees in Zairean camps, in their own language, is a good example.

A similar initiative is *Mega FM* in Northern Uganda, set up with funding from UK's DfID to persuade the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels to lay down their arms and return home. The UN has had a number of peace radio initiatives with varying degrees of success, including the UNPROFOR in former Yugoslavia, UNTAG in Namibia, and more recently *Radio Okapi* in the DRC - the first radio operation for which the UN has partnered with an NGO.

The DRC has, intermittently since the mid-1990s been afflicted by ethnic strife and civil war, with more than three million Congolese said to have been killed in the process. After experiencing bitter wars from 1997 to 2003, the country emerged with a power-sharing deal that was signed at the peace talks at Sun City, South Africa. The media were both a player and a site of contestation throughout this conflict, evidenced by strict government control, threats and imprisonment of journalists in the name of promoting "national security" (Betz, 2004: 43). Following the signing of the first peace agreement in 1999, a peacekeeping mission established by the UN – the MONUC, set up a radio station, *Radio Okapi*, jointly with Foundation Hirondelle, a Swiss NGO that specialises in creating independent media in countries that have experienced conflict.

Before the arrival of *Radio Okapi*, the state-owned broadcaster, *La Voix du Congo*, reached the largest number of Congolese. But like elsewhere in Africa, this was used as the government mouthpiece, and denied access to opposition parties and civil society. While the private press was more critical and outspoken; private radio was far more timid, as a result of threats from the government to shut them down (Betz, 2004; Kabemba, 2005). The private media mirrored the interests of their owners, who were predominantly politicians. During the conflict, armed groups controlled the flow of information in the areas they occupied (Kabemba, 2005). *Radio Okapi* therefore provided a much-needed platform for a diversity of voices. As David Smith, MONUC's Chief of Information, explained,

“There is no single voice that unites all the Congolese people. This radio project will allow people in rebel-held territories to speak to people in government-controlled territories for the first time since the war broke out. A big role of the radio will be to convince people that it’s in their interest to lay down their arms, and either be repatriated to their home country... or to find ways to join civil society and leave the war behind.” (Media Network, 2003) – in Betz, 2004: 45).

When *Radio Okapi* hit the airwaves for the first time on February 25, 2002, it was the first time in many years that many in rebel-held places like Kisangani and Goma listened to a radio broadcast from Kinshasa. Stephanie Wolters recalls,

“The effect was magical – instantly the country was reunited through the airwaves, bridging the divide created by the front line and re-establishing the sense that the DRC was one country. It was an emotional moment and the start of a new era in Congolese broadcasting,” (Wolters, 2011: 183).

The first *Radio Okapi* broadcast was made to deliberately coincide with the launch at Sun City of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, which created a platform for peace negotiations among Congolese belligerents. “The founders of *Radio Okapi* had been able to convince the mediators of the peace talks that everybody would benefit if the two events coincided...” (Wolters, 2011:183).

Radio Okapi journalists at Sun City enabled listeners back in the DRC to closely follow the talks in South Africa and hear the voices of the various belligerents live for the first time. The various political and rebel factions meanwhile quickly realised the power of *Radio Okapi* to connect them with the Congolese population. The station’s professional stance from the beginning paved the way for its success, making it the most credible voice on the Congolese airwaves. Wolters further observes, the station “quickly became a shining example of the positive impact that quality journalism can have on peace and nation building” (Wolters, 2011: 184).

Broadcasting in the country’s five major languages (French, Lingala, Swahili, Tshiluba and Kikongo) was crucial to the success of *Radio Okapi*. This is because language has often been used as a means of excluding other groups, and therefore a source of conflict. Language is closely associated with issues of culture and power, and can be used to dominate others (Prah, 2005).

Unlike their counterparts, *Radio Okapi* journalists are well trained and highly professional. They have reported on the peace process, its successes and failures, and given voice to the many sides in the Congolese conflict. They have earned a lot of respect among the listeners. The station has also exposed government excesses, much to the chagrin of ruling authorities. Interestingly,

Although Radio Okapi can be a thorn in the government’s side sometimes, its stance of promoting peace and democracy and the strong role it plays in promoting civic education have led to its recognition, even by the Minister of Information, as a national asset that the DRC cannot do without (Myers, 2011).

Such interventions have reportedly had positive influence on other media in the countries where

they have been set up, as other media begin to emulate their objective, fair and balanced reporting. However, these UN and NGO interventions have not been without their own challenges. Most notably, their sustainability beyond the end of a conflict has always been in doubt, as it generally becomes difficult to fundraise for them outside a conflict framework.

Policy Interventions at Regional and International Levels

There are numerous regional and international instruments to ensure that the media are transformed in a manner that enable them to play a critical role in the building of democracies in Africa, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and Articles 17 and 20 of the SADC Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport. The AU Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa (also known as the Banjul Declaration) is more illustrative here, as it broadens the provisions laid down in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

Apart from spelling out the right to freedom of expression and access to information, the Banjul Declaration (Section V) clearly articulates the need for a diverse and independent broadcasting sector; the undesirability of state monopoly and the need for an independent regulatory authority to oversee the broadcasting sector. Section VI insists that, "State and government-controlled broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters, accountable to the public through the legislature rather than the government." This echoes the African Charter on Broadcasting. The continent is replete with protocols and declarations that, if fully implemented, would make Africa's media environment more democratic and less prone to the kinds of political manipulation illustrated here.

The following SADC instruments are instructional:

1. Article 20 of the Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport, explicitly states: "State parties shall take the necessary measures to ensure the development of media that are editorially independent and conscious of their obligations to the public and greater society";
2. The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections implore member states to uphold, among others, the principle of equal opportunity for all political parties to access the state media.

Despite pressure from civil society to reform these institutions by advocating transforming state media into genuine public media, privatisating some of the institutions and opening up the sector to allow diversity of ownership and plurality of voices, state responses have either been uneven or indifferent. In some countries reform has stalled, and state ownership and control of the media remain, for example in Angola, Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Often, governments use the Rwanda and Yugoslavia cases as examples of the dangers of liberalising broadcasting. They argue that community broadcasting would lead to balkanisation of the country. It is precisely because of this lack of progress that the Midrand Declaration was passed to remind African governments to take media freedom and media reform more seriously. Similarly, *The Midrand Call to Action Document on Media Freedom and Plural Broadcasting in Africa* emphasises the same.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter has illustrated that media can be both drivers of conflict and a force for peace. Therefore, any serious peace building efforts should necessarily have a media strategy for mitigating conflict and building peace. This should start with deliberate efforts to transform media structures to ensure diversity of ownership that can create opportunities for plurality of voices, especially those of the marginalised groups.

At the same time, the dominant tradition of state ownership of media institutions in Africa needs to be seriously interrogated in light of the failure to make these institutions independent from governments of the day, and their skewed coverage of political and social issues. Journalism training also needs to be broadened to include what can be termed *another journalism* – that is conflict-sensitive journalism that allows journalists to provide more contextual information and reflect the multiple dimensions in the conflicts they report. Strong and independent regulation is critical not only for registration and licensing of players, but also ensuring conflict-sensitive reporting.

Many lessons can be deduced from the aforementioned case studies. These lessons can help the media to move towards conflict-sensitive journalism rather than war journalism. Below are some key recommendations:

- Establishment of healthy media systems in a climate of media freedom, which entails the reform of the regulatory environment to ensure progressive media laws that entrench press freedom and access to information.
- Have strong, effective regulatory bodies that are independent from government and business, and that can regulate the sector in the public interest.
- African governments should decisively move away from state ownership and control of the media.
- Continuous media training and media monitoring is essential to ensure high ethical standards, balanced and fair reporting of conflicts. More specifically, training on conflict-sensitive reporting is needed.
- Give a voice to all marginalised groups.
- Monitor and counter hate speech online as well as developing ways of ensuring that social media are used to promote tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

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An ubuntu approach to Peace Journalism

Colin Chasi and Ylva Rodny-Gumede

Introduction

One of the most difficult tasks of journalism is that of covering war and conflict. Conflict reporting ranges from coverage of war and combat to open as well as latent conflicts, such as contested elections, corruption and politics of delivery and development and sadly often the lack hereof.

Much criticism has been directed towards the ways in which journalists cover war and conflicts, with attention directed to the role of the media in instigating, maintaining, and exacerbating violence through their news coverage. In a simplified and often Western model of journalism, war and conflict make headlines and sell newspapers (Carruthers, 2011).

There is ample evidence of journalists sensationalising coverage and over emphasising violence and suffering (Batic and Schirch, 2007; Carruthers, 2011; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Lynch, 2008; Lynch and Galtung, 2010). In addition coverage of war and conflicts tend to neglect or oversimplify the underlying causes for conflict and neglect sources for conflict resolution instead adding to the polarisation of view points (ibid). This with the result of distorting reality and forsaking professional ethics. This is particularly pertinent with regards to news coverage of Africa and African politics and society. One reason for this is that news coverage tends to be informed by Western confrontational norms of news that exaggerate Afro-pessimistic typecasts.

To counter such practices, the model of Peace Journalism (PJ) has gained traction. PJ emphasises conflict resolution, analysis of the underlying causes of conflict, the use of alternative and a wider array of news sources, and the use of language that doesn't over-emphasise or play up conflict (Lynch and Galtung, 2010; Galtung, 1986; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005).

'War' versus 'peace' journalism

With the outline above in mind we can juxtapose norms and practices seen as 'war' journalism vis a vis 'peace' journalism. 'War' journalism has been defined as a form of reporting that emphasise conflict over peaceful resolutions, divergent and differing viewpoints over common ground, and sensationalism over depth and context (Galtung and Lynch, 2010). The result is that audiences are given the impression that conflict is inevitable, and that peace or conflict resolution are beyond reach (ibid). 'War' journalism as set out by Lynch and Galtung (ibid 12-14) focus on expressions and examples of violence and visualizes violence through graphic

descriptions, statistics or images. It puts the focus on a victor or victorious side of a conflict, which reinforces an “us versus them” mentality. It emphasizes elites and elite voices, including official sources often emanating from the military, government or international organisations and propaganda emanating from competing warring factions and parties.

This is not strange given evidence that journalists are often ill prepared for covering conflicts, particularly in contexts geographically or culturally far removed (Rodny-Gumede, 2016:81). Journalists when covering a conflict are often deployed very quickly to locations little known and with little prior knowledge of the conflict or the stakeholders involved, and importantly, without the back-up of an editorial team and the time to reflect upon issues of the practices and ethics of journalism (Carruthers, 2011; Lynch and Galtung, 2010). Further to this, access to sources and information is often difficult and journalists therefore tend to band together to feed off each others’ networks which lead to pack journalism and embedded journalism (Duncan, 2013; Lynch and Galtung, 2010; Rodny-Gumede, 2015).

Peace journalism, instead is a form of journalism which creates “opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict” (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 5). Further to this, PJ aims to explain the underlying causes of conflict and avoid polarisation of the parties involved (Dente Ross, 2007: 80), it is truth oriented and focused on exposing cover-ups and untruths from whatever fraction or side of a conflict (Lynch and Galtung, 2010:12-14). And where, mainstream news coverage is often criticised for not utilising a wide enough array of sources, PJ instead utilise a wide range of sources and takes care to go beyond using only elite or official sources to also include ordinary people of all sides of a conflict (ibid: 52). It is thus people oriented and focused on including a wide variety of sources, including ordinary people affected by a conflict (ibid:12-14).

The juxtaposition between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ journalism has also been described as the ‘high’ road versus the ‘low’ road (Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 12-14), i.e. a choice decision in terms of how journalists’ cover conflict, where the low road signifies in ‘an easy way out’, focusing on what is already known in the public realm, often stereotypical and conformant to ideas of a victor/victim narrative that leaves little space for digging deeper and including a wider array of sources that can provide a more nuanced and accurate description of a conflict, its underlying causes and potential for resolution. PJ is thus, solution oriented in that it highlights conflict resolution and peace building initiatives short term as well as long term in the interest of reconstruction and reconciliation (ibid). In doing so it avoids frames and binaries of ‘us and them’, ‘war and peace’, ‘good and bad’(ibid).

Overall, ‘war’ journalism and PJ are two different ways of reporting the same events, in the sense that they are both descriptive of reality, with the difference that PJ tries to take in more reality (Lynch and Galtung 2010). In doing so PJ highlight the faultlines built in to reporting practices emanating from a Western normative model of journalism that leave little space for political, social and cultural expressions that do not conform to western norms. The questions

is what local African expressions and responses to conflict resolution can add to the PJ model. And whether PJ can be re-assessed and re-developed by taking cognisance of the African moral philosophy and relational ethic of *ubuntu*? This in the interest of articulating as well as expanding on existing journalistic ethics, and to develop a model of journalism that can provide news audiences with better insight in to Africa, African communities and African people, and reporting that ‘talk back’ to ideas and practices that shape reporting regarding Africa and Africans by local as well as international media (Rodny-Gumede, 2016). Most importantly, there is a need to develop a journalism that affords accuracy and dignity to the issues and people reported on, and that addresses socio-political dissonance, violence and war that beset many postcolonial African states (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede, 2019).

Ubuntu journalism

A few scholars have articulated a model of journalism that accounts for practices and ideas grounded in the African moral philosophy of *ubuntu* (Chasi, 2016; 2015; Christians, 2015; Fourie, 2011; Metz, 2015; Rodny-Gumede, 2015). Chasi (2016) sets out guidelines for an *ubuntu* approach for journalists covering war and argues that journalist must work towards fostering common conceptual grounds and promote participatory forms of journalism forged around collaboration with the communities and people it speaks for and serves. Similarly, Christians (2004: 235) argues that if taken as a normative framework for journalism ethics, *ubuntu* will encourage a journalism that “...empowers citizens to come to agreement about social problems and solutions among themselves” and in contrast to western media practices encourage a journalism of cooperation rather than a western model based on confrontation (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018).

Thus, *ubuntu* journalism contributes towards developing practices that promote justice and social welfare and contest discourses that promote unjust divisions and ill-will (Chasi 2016: 818). For journalism to do so he emphasizes the importance of journalists listening to peoples life stories, their concerns and develop an understanding of the broader context in which people’s lives are lived (ibid). Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2019) further argues that listening in African communities is a vital aspect of harmonious co-existence. Listening here refers to a wide range of sensory experiences and practices that include smell, touch, hearing, feeling and intersubjective understandings. For journalists listening must be understood as relational and dialogic practice that seek to establish mutuality.

In addition, Fourie (2011) observes that *ubuntu* journalism requires journalists to be active members of their communities and to make sure the views of the community are reflected in coverage and assessed from the impact it will have on the community and community affairs. Consequently, the public interest in *ubuntu* journalism becomes an assessment of the value of the news report to the community (Rodny-Gumede,, 2015: 115). Overall, the emphasis is on what is considered in the interest of the community as a collective.

And instead of being gate-keepers and watchdogs, journalists become mediators in community

affairs, and make room for cultural or social interpretations generated within the community itself (Fourie, 2011: 37). The latter is important and talks to participatory and cocreational approaches to journalism. Drawing on Kasoma (Kasoma quoted in Chasi, 2016: 816), who argues for an African approach to media ethics to be developed through dialog and participation among media practitioners, Chasi (2016: 822) argues that rather than reinforcing journalistic conventions and pretense at objectivity, accountability in journalism should be derived from a journalism of co-production that takes heed of social conventions emanating from the communities affected by a conflict.

This can be achieved through allowing for a wide array of perspectives to be heard including those of the journalists themselves (ibid). This would necessitate self-reflection of the part of journalists and a preparedness to reveal and confront their own assumptions and preconceived ideas. This, he argues will build trust between journalists and their audience and form “the basis of which person-to-person relationships may be formed. Both journalists and audiences may be humanized when the register of the interlocation is not dominated by journalistic pretense at perspectivelessness.” (Chasi, 2016: 822).

This also links to Chasi’s (2016) argument for a journalism that takes account of an idea of ubuntu that promotes, as well as is inclusive of, both collective and individual needs and wishes and that promotes both homogenous and heterogenous identities.

This way journalism promotes both individual as well as mutual expressions of desires and motives for action and/or inaction and allows for a wider set of voices in the news coverage whether mutual or divergent from mutual desired actions and outcomes (ibid). This also counters tendencies of authoritarianism or suppression of individual needs at the behest of the collective (Tomaselli, 2016; 2009). And contrary to ideas of a news media that promotes one common idea of a nation or national identity, ubuntu journalism leaves space for both individual as well as mutual expressions of actions and desires, that allows for individual as well as collective identities to develop (Chasi, 2016). Such a journalism he argues will at once change environments in disruptive as well as cooperative ways and contribute towards understanding journalism as a practice in which encounters are premised on growing relationships and an understanding of the other that enables us to be the best that we can be (ibid).

An ubuntu/Peace Journalism approach to reporting

Looking at the ideas of PJ as well as ubuntu journalism as set out above, there are considerable similarities in the way that they approach reporting. PJ and ubuntu journalism both stand as ‘challenger-paradigms’ to more conventional forms of journalism. PJ highlights the need for conflict resolution, conflict mitigation and common ground instead of conflict amplification and polarisation of viewpoints. Similarly, ubuntu journalism embrace ideas of mutuality, consensus, interdependence, participation and deliberation.

Taken together such approaches to journalism can form the basis for a new journalistic ethos

that foregrounds human relations and participation and that promotes harmony and harmonious relationships. Importantly and with reference to coverage of war and conflict on the African continent, such a journalistic approach would be both locally relevant as well as consistent with best practices associated with excellent news coverage locally, nationally and internationally.

Thus, with regard to coverage of war and violence, and drawing on the account of ubuntu journalism as well as the ideas of PJ as set out above, journalists should work to adopt practices that:

- Encourages cooperation and active participation of journalists in the communities affected by a conflict.
- Actively promotes justice and social welfare and seeks peaceful solutions to conflict, whether open or latent, emanating from within the communities affected by a conflict.
- Foster common conceptual grounds through dialogue and deliberation.
- Take listening as a practice that is relational and dialogical and that seeks to establish mutuality and harmonious relationships.
- Takes account of a diverse set of viewpoints, collective as well as individual.
- Allows individuals to express their unique identities and to belong to many diverse and even competing identity formations.
- Is truth oriented and contests discourses that promote unjust divisions and ill-will and avoids polarisation of viewpoints and news frames of ‘us and them’, ‘war and peace’, ‘good and bad’.
- Is accountable and credible through foregrounding truths sought out through deliberation, consensus seeking and self-reflexivity.

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Peace journalism, conflict management and Indigenous Knowledge Systems: An Afrocentric perspective

Rewai Makamani

Abstract

This chapter presents the Afrocentric *Ubuntu* existential philosophy and epistemology as a critical imperative and success factor for peace journalism in Africa. Informed by a broad-based Afrocentric theory, the study argues that African media can effectively contribute to much needed healing, development, social harmony and happiness by people experiencing post-conflict realities on the African continent. Communication by the media can be well received by target audiences in Africa should the African media in general and peace journalism in particular adopt Afrocentrism based on Ubuntu in their reportage.

Taking a cue from American, Chinese and other progressive nations of the world, the study puts to the fore the efficacy of harnessing contextual, cultural and historical realities of people in media reporting practices. For example, American journalist reportage is based on a dominant capitalist and imperialist culture whereas Chinese journalist reportage is informed by the *Yijing* philosophy which strictly dictates against opposing authority. In the study we argue that both approaches have merit for they are based on deep rooted epistemic views about existence of American and Chinese people respectively. What then should inform African media in general and peace journalism in particular? This is what the study attempts to address.

Introduction

Peace-journalism (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005, Abdul-Nabi, 2017, Ersoy, 2017, Filibeli & Inceoğlu, 2018) is essentially journalism that is pro-peace, pro-development and pro-people. This is so because where there is peace, there is development, relative happiness, social harmony and oneness. Peace does not necessarily suggest a total absence of conflict. It needs

to be conceptualized as a relative term that suggests the existence of tolerable conflict that does not impede development and social harmony.

There is no society or country without a semblance of conflict. Conflict exists in families, workplaces and so on. However, the tendency by scholars has been to research on peace restoration in post-armed conflict situations, thereby sidelining the broad understanding of peace and conflict. The reality though is that conflict can exist in ‘peaceful’ countries or nation states. Putnam and Poole (1987) define conflict as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals” (p. 552).

Conflict management involves “designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and maximize the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization etc” (Rahim, 2000, p. 5). This study argues a case for Ubuntu in conflict and peace-building processes in Africa. This position stems from the realization that the African philosophy of Ubuntu is epistemological as it is an embodiment of a way of life, thinking, feeling and existence of the African people. It is both a worldview and model of existence which can be utilized in every aspect of life including peace journalism. Further below is a cautionary expose on how journalists can perpetrate conflict.

Analytical Framework

This study utilises the Afrocentric Theory in its broad sense. The idea is to incorporate a broad range of ideas that celebrate various aspects of African knowledge Systems and epistemology. This curves the study as reflecting a deep desire to proudly continue to share with the world that Africa can solve her own problems using local Knowledge Systems, ways of seeing, sensing, smelling and ultimately knowing.

This Analytical Framework is heavily influenced by the *Ubuntu* philosophy that is variously presented by scholars such as wa Thiong'o (1986) – decolonising the mind; Mbiti (1967), - a deep belief in African philosophy of collectivism and oneness, “I am because you are”, Irene Abiola, (1987) – *In Praise of alienation* through which she sensitises Africans against denigrating and abandoning their own cultures, value and Knowledge Systems; and, Asante’s (1991) call for serious commitment to African values, cultures and Knowledge Systems among others. Through this conceptual framework, the study proffers the view that African journalists can help and facilitate healing, development, social harmony and cohesiveness faster and more effectively in post-conflict situations through the adoption of the Afrocentric philosophy and epistemology of *Ubuntu*.

This makes reportage to be more responsive to societal demands for peace, justice, development and social cohesiveness particularly in post-conflict situations where social healing is much needed to allow society to move forward.

Journalists as perpetrators of conflict

Do you know that journalists and news media can spark conflict (Baisley, 2014; Vukasovich, 2012), hence the need for responsible reporting. For example, literature shows that in 1994 Radio Milles Collines in Rwanda incited genocide by employing metaphors and hate speech (Baisley, 2014). Similarly, between 1995 and 1999 the Balkan conflicts were inflamed by biased reportage by Serbian state broadcasters (Vukasovich, 2012).

It is now known that incompetent journalism and partisan news management can generate misinformation which influences xenophobia, ethnic hatred, class warfare and violent conflict in any fragile state (Peleg, 2006; Vukasovich, 2012). The above present the centrality, and therefore need, for responsible reportage particularly in Africa where Afrocentric values should characterize *Ubuntu* journalism. This is important because in Africa journalism should be guided by African knowledge and value systems. Below we briefly look at post-conflict peace-building process.

Post-conflict peacebuilding process

Once conflict has occurred it becomes imperative to institute post-conflict peacebuilding processes in order to facilitate forward-movement of society. This involves a number of stakeholders. Journalists play a central role in information dissemination in this regard. Peace-journalism injects context and appreciation of root causes, and a new capacity to seek and analyse possible solutions to otherwise daily repeating of violent incidents as news (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005:53).

Orgeret and Tayeebwa (2016:13) add, “Post-conflict peacebuilding is a long-term process and it is multidimensional in name; the ultimate objective being to reconcile security development and justice.” Literature recognise the efficacy of the following post-conflict peace-building strategies that journalists should adopt:

- Accountability
- Aggressive culture of investigative journalism
- Use of appropriate skills to expose those responsible for human rights abuse;
- Lack of tolerance for military business mafias
- Zero tolerance to corruption
- Responsible reportage of human insecurity
- Environmental vandalism
- Reporting on people who condemn violence.
- Neither levelling blame at any ethnicity, nor repeatedly identifying combatants by their ethnicity.
- Reporting on the deeper underlying causes of the conflict (Robie, 2016).
- Use of language that unites rather than divide people.
- Use of positive images.
- Use of discourse that shows benefits of peace e.g. development and economic stability

Dwelling on conventional strategies of reporting conflict Shinar (2007) offered this antidote to

‘event driven’ war journalism dominated by official sources:

1. Exploring backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation and presenting causes and options on every side so as to portray conflict in realistic terms, transparent to the audience.
2. Giving voice to the views of all rival parties.
3. Offering creative ideas for conflict resolution, development, and peacekeeping.
4. Exposing lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides, and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, people of all parties.
5. Paying attention to peace stories and postwar developments (Shinar, 2007: 200).

Lessons from American versus Chinese ways of resolving conflict

It has been noted that American and Chinese employees used various strategies to deal with conflict, such as integrating, insisting on one’s own solution, compromising, yielding to authority, avoiding, passive resistance, dissolving the relationship, and a third-party approach (Jehn & Weldon, 1997:232). In general, American participants were more likely to confront a conflict than Chinese participants. However, both approaches have merit as they are informed by American and Chinese cultures respectively.

For example, literature suggests that Chinese ways of conflict management and reportage is rooted in the Chinese philosophy of *Yijing* which is based on *Ying* and *Yang* harmony of not opposing authority. Chin, Rowley, Redding and Wang (2018) maintain that, “The Ying-Yang harmony embodies the fundamental cognitive mode of Chinese mental programming – a distinctive, paradoxical harmonious mentality where two partially conflicting yet complementary ideas/components (i.e. Ying and Yang) co-exist and are co-dependent in everything and interact with each other forever in a dynamic, contingent and artistic manner.”

Studies indicate that cultural-specific motivations lead to the utilization of context-based and cultural-specific conflict management strategies. It emerges from contemporary scholarship that conflict-handling strategies can be more effective when rooted in cultural, social and historical realities of people.

This means conventional conflict management strategies such as integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding and compromising as proposed by Rahim and Bonoma (1979), can only make sense if socio-cultural realities of people are considered. This resonates with previous research that has shown that culture influences people’s preferences of conflict management styles. For example, Tang and Kirkbride (1986) surveyed 50 senior government executives in Hong Kong, and found that Chinese executives favoured less assertive strategies, such as compromising and avoiding, whereas British executives preferred more assertive strategies, such as collaborating and competing.

Similarly, Jehn and Weldon (1997) found that Chinese managers tended to adopt more passive conflict handling styles, such as avoiding, whereas American managers preferred direct or solution-driven styles. One views didactic logical analysis and personal force of reason as the

main driver of American approach to conflict resolution. This is related to the American binary system of legal analysis based on obiter dictum and ratio decidendi that characterize American court judgements (Cheng et al., 2008:18). In the American legal system judgement based on obiter dictum presents the court judgement that is symbolized by ‘we’ which is binding and can be used by lower courts while ratio decidendi presents an individual judge’s personal interpretation of law. The latter is characterized by the use ‘I’ and is persuasive but cannot be used by lower courts as it is not binding. What emerges from the above analysis is the centrality of logic and therefore the force of reason in the American system and worldview. It follows logic that American model of peacebuilding and consequently peace journalism is informed by the same worldview.

Other cross-cultural studies conducted by Yuan (2010) suggest that American participants used a higher degree of dominating style than their Japanese and Korean counterparts, whereas Chinese participants (from Mainland China and Taiwan) used a higher degree of obliging and avoiding strategies than American participants. As can be seen, conflict handling is more effective if social and cultural realities are brought to the fore. It cannot be the proverbial one size-fit-all approach. In Africa, therefore, it is imperative for those involved in conflict management particularly journalists who cover post-conflict situations to embrace *Ubuntu* in their reportage. We take a close look at *Ubuntu* below.

The efficacy of Ubuntu-centred conflict resolution strategies

Ubuntu is conceived as a way of life, a universal truth, an expression of human dignity, an underpinning of the concept of an open society, African Humanism, trust, helpfulness, respect, sharing, caring, community and unselfishness. In short it means: humanity, or humanness (Cilliers, 2008:1). *Ubuntu* stems from the belief that one is a human being through others – “I am because you are” (Mbiti, 1967:cf. Ramose, 1999: 49 f.; Shutte, 1993:46). Etymologically, the *Ubuntu* existential philosophy and epistemology expresses that same concept in several African languages.

For example, among the Zulu: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*; Sotho: *Motho ke motho ka batho*. The Shona proverb, *kuwanda huuya knotorambwa nemuroyi* (It is only a witch who hates the power of numbers.). In many sub-Saharan African languages the /-ntu/ is a common stem meaning human being. For example Shona: /mu/- /-nhu/; Zulu: /Umu/- /-ntu/ and Sotho: /mo/- /-tho/. This agrees with (Van Binsbergen 2003: 428) who avers: “*Ubuntu* is a combination of two morphemes viz:/Ubu-/ and /-ntu/ – the latter being a common root in most Sub-Saharan African languages, resulting in variations such as *shintu*, *muntu*, *Bantu*, *wuntu*, *kantu*, *buntu*, etc. *Ntu* as such simply means “human.” As indicated earlier, *Ubuntu* entails basic respect and compassion for others. It is both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic, both descriptive and prescriptive (Cilliers, 2008).

This means it does not only describe humanity as “being-with-others”, but also prescribes what the relational ethics of this “being-with-others” entail (Ibid). It is further noted that ubuntu is

point of departure; the systemic inter-connectedness of a society, and often is defined in terms of its moral structure, ritual embodiment and ideological usage (cf. Louw, 2002: 7, 8; Van Binsbergen, 2003: 450 f.). As an existential philosophy, ubuntu emphasises social cohesiveness.

Literature suggests that it has its origins in pre-colonial African rural settings, which not only operated with the moral values of caring and compassion within community, but also acted out these values through certain ceremonies and rituals (Cilliers, 2008:6). Such rituals and ceremonies were an embodied of morality and social identity. At the center of ubuntu is the notion that an individual 's existence is defined and shaped by that of others. Without others, one's existence is meaningless. Therefore, a person exists to add value to society.

This entails both dependability and responsibility. We exist together for mutual benefit as a collective. Collectivism and communalism are hallmarks of ubuntu. Such should shape the approach to peace-journalism in Africa. Just like in China, America and Japan, in Africa peace-journalism should be informed by the *Ubuntu* philosophy and epistemology. It is both believable and doable. It only calls for a paradigm shift in the way we view journalism in general and peace-journalism in particular. It is about rethinking and ultimately revisiting conventions that inform journalism in general and peace-journalism in particular. As put by Louw, (2002:15) the adoption of *Ubuntu* signals a paradigm shift “from solitary to solidarity, from independence to interdependence, from individuality vis-à-vis community to individuality á la community.” *Ubuntu* is an imperative that imposes upon all to re-engineer ways of thinking about self and others and consequently about behaving, about living, about forming and inter-forming; about inter-facing; it is about relationship building based on micro-, meso- and macro-societal challenges and needs. Ultimately, embracing *Ubuntu* in peace-journalism entails embracing an imperative for development in Africa.

The *Ubuntu* philosophy is embedded in African orature genres such as stories, proverbs, idioms and popular sayings. It encapsulates collective wisdom of the elders (*vakuru*) hence, the saying “*Vakuru vakati...*” (the elders said/the elders put it that..) foregrounds information that cannot be contested. In Africa genres of orature shape and inform African cosmology, ways of relating and ways of knowing. Makamani (2012) explains situations in which the *Ubuntu* epistemology was used to resolve conflict in the world. For example, he (Ibid:144) cites Healey's (2001, <http://www.afriproverb.org>) rendition that the Swahili proverb, “*Wapinganapo tembo nyasi huumia*”; (When elephants fight the grass (reeds) gets hurt), was used in conflict resolution activities in many conflict situations in Africa.

A case in point is when it was used in the 1970s by *Mzee* Julius Nyerere, the then president of the Republic of Tanzania, in a speech to the United Nations, as an appeal to powerful nations to seriously reflect on how their animosity and fights impacted on developing nations, and particularly the African continent.

“The same proverb was also used by the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Ambassador to Great Britain in reference to the then conflict between the United States of America and the Soviet Union which he said had been hurting third world countries in Africa” (Makamani, 2012: 144). Another cited case is the use of the same proverb in an attempt to discourage “civil wars in Somalia, Burundi and the struggle between Arap Moi of Kenya and his rivals” (Makamani, Ibid:).

Makamani (2012:145) proceeds to show how, in an address to members of the Kenya Africa Union in 1952 the late *Mzee* Jomo Kenyatta used a proverb to avert a potential blood bath. Kenyatta warned, “ If any of you here think that force is good, I do not agree with you: remember the old saying, ‘He who hits with a *rungu* returns, but he who beats with justice never comes back” (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1952>). This presents the efficacy of African knowledge systems in resolving problems on the continent. African knowledge systems (IKS) speak to the essence of being an African, of being a human being from the perspective of Africans. IKS speak to one’s conscience, one’s sense of belonging and pride,- one’s identity as an African. This implies that *Ubuntu* is an epitome of African solidarity and sense of oneness. It encapsulates ethos (character), pathos (emotions) and logos (power of reasoning) (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2013). So, in Africa the force of reason is not divorced from culture and consequently character.

The post-1994 Rwanda genocide local peace building initiatives further demonstrate that IKS can provide solution to African problems. It is noted that the “*Ingando* re-education camps” (Colomba, 2012:65) presented the former fighters who had committed genocide in the civil war in Rwanda with an opportunity to seek forgiveness from members of the community in order for them to be accommodated as active members of the community again. Similarly, the “*Gacaca* community court system” presented both victims and perpetrators of the Rwanda genocide with an opportunity to reconcile through open confessions and frank discussions (Colomba, 2012:70). The discussion has brought to the fore the fact that *Ubuntu* epistemology can and should inform peace journalism and reportage in Africa.

In Africa, peace journalists should be innovative to be able to also use stories in peace- building-oriented reportage. The Kenyan story given below serves as an example. The story showcases how a cow ownership dispute between a traditional Chief and Hare was resolved through the use of IKS. The story goes:

Hare has no bull. He wants his cow to be fertilized, so he sends it to the King who agrees that his bull fertilizes Hare’s cow. Hare’s cow finally conceives and delivers a healthy calf. The King claims it to be his. Hare sends a petition which makes it a court case. On the day of trial, Hare deliberately comes late. This surprises judges who ask as to why Hare arrives late. Hare ‘seriously’ and ‘innocently’ posits that he had been delayed by his father’s bull which was giving birth to a new calf. The judges laughed off, wondering whether Hare had lost his mind. “Since when did a bull give birth?” Judges inquired. Hare had won the case (Adagala, 1985:74 in Makamani, 1992:83)

Conclusion

African Indigenous Knowledge Systems are critical in every aspect of life of people on the continent. There can be no real development in Africa if Africans continue to denigrate and ignore their rich Knowledge Systems to proffer local solutions to everyday challenges in life including conflict. The embracing of the *Ubuntu* philosophy by peace-journalists, for instance, entails communicating effectively with African people. This enables relevant stakeholders to accept messages covered in such reportage.

Therefore, for African journalists, the case for *Ubuntu*, thus the adoption of Afrocentrism particularly in peace journalism needs to be embraced. This would enable African media to meaningfully contribute to developmental processes in Africa as aspired by African people. It would inculcate a new culture of transparency, sensitivity to corruption and other self-centred vices by critical stakeholders involved in post-conflict activities on the continent. Therefore, it would bring more accountability among various agents tasked with post-conflict intervention programmes and leadership. It would foster a new culture informed by servant-leadership and based on a true pro-Africa ethos characterised by collectivism and oneness.

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Media and Electoral Conflict in Southern Africa

Stanley Tsarwe

Introduction

How best can African journalists work in extremely challenging, emotionally involving and politically unstable contexts where electoral conflicts are rife? In Southern Africa, a worrying trend over the years has been that elections are often characterised by violence, disputed outcomes, a citizenry generally uninformed about their civil and political rights and serious questions on the credibility of democratic bodies involved in elections such as independent electoral commissions, the media, the police, the military and the judicial system.

While the work of journalists is much more difficult during moments of conflict as they operate in a climate of fear and threats and with opposing sides seeking to control the media, conflict sensitive reporting can help neutralise conflict by providing the public with full, reliable and non-partisan information, while giving voice to those suffering from brutal conflicts. In other words, journalists have a critical role to play by reporting in ways that do not fuel conflict. It is important that while journalists need to make conflict transparent so that authorities take action, they do not necessarily need to be purveyors of polarized and extreme positions taken by hardliners involved in conflict. There is high likelihood that parties in a conflict plan their next move based on what the media will cover, so it is important that journalists should avoid taking sides with warring parties.

Aims of this Chapter

This article provides journalists from Southern Africa with a formative guiding framework on how best to report during electoral conflicts. While there is no attempt to make claims of hard and fast solutions, but rather drawing from empirical international best practices, the chapter recommends a mix of approaches that journalists can use when reporting during electoral conflict. The approaches included in this chapter include John Gatung's (1986, 2000, 2002) notion of *peace journalism*, Ross Howard's (2003) *conflict sensitive journalism* as well as adherence to traditional *journalism standards* involving *accuracy and impartiality*. In addition to these, more novel approaches such as *data journalism* techniques may help making conflict more transparent, while questioning propaganda figures and data manipulated to hide the extent and magnitude of conflict. A more detailed discussion on how data journalism can be used in

conflict reporting is provided at the end of the chapter as part of the suggested recommendations to conflict reporting. As stated above, when conflict is unmasked, perpetrators are often exposed and, hopefully, brought to book. Used with care and consistency, these approaches and techniques of media reporting during electoral conflict may assist in reducing conflict, making conflict more transparent and creating an environment of common understanding.

While the approaches stated above may be viewed as autonomous from each other, they are basically consistent with the key traditional values of journalism involving accuracy, impartiality and responsibility. During electoral conflicts, media reportage that does not conform to these traditional journalism values present high chances of further widening political and ethnic divisions in a continent already troubled with ethno-political conflicts.

Role of media in elections

A major task of modern journalism during elections is providing fair and balanced coverage of all contesting political candidates to allow citizens to participate meaningfully in electoral decision-making (Curran, 2000; 2002). Ideally, a balanced and less polarised media could foster a peaceful transition of power from one regime to another (Tsarwe and Mare 2019). During democratic elections, a fair, neutral and balanced reporting of the electoral cycle and its processes increase chances of conflict-free elections with little misunderstandings. The idea of media as ‘watchdog’ follows argument that the media’s role in a democracy is to hold government officials accountable for their actions by informing the public all the times in an objective and factual manner. Some of the most central roles of journalists during elections include:

- Ensuring that all cases of human rights abuses, violence and electoral irregularities are documented and reported in the media;
- Informing the electorate on local, regional and international instruments guiding electoral conduct;
- Ensuring that all electoral laws and statutes are respected to avoid possible malpractices and future conflicts;
- Informing the electorate about their civic and political rights.

However, contrary to the common assumption that the media can help in a smooth transfer of power with more chances of peace, empirical evidence shows (see case studies provided below) that many transitions to democracy (including electoral processes) are characterised by fierce conflicts and even violence (Votmer, 2015), with the media sometimes complicit in entrenching social and political polarisation. In Africa – as indeed is the case in most democracies across the globe - the growth of party-aligned media and propaganda campaigns against opponents is rife. Many cases abound where party-aligned media have been complicity in conflicts. For example, the Rwandan media that helped stoke an appalling genocide, the Germany media’s hate speech against Jewish people during Hitler’s rule saw the persecution of Jews, while the Serbian media’s hate speech against Albanians was responsible for mobilising and propagating resentment towards Albanians (Thompson, 2007). These are all well documented empirical

cases of the media getting complicity in conflict.

In Southern Africa - as this chapter will show through a three-country case studies below – most elections are mediated by a very partisan, biased and polarised media. In many cases involving conflict, understanding the dimensions of the political context matter. For example, regime types, the obtaining media system, the role of regional and international actors, the stage of democratization etc. There are many other such variables, but for this chapter, the obtaining media system and the degree of elite consensus or differences coalesce to shape how conflicts are mediated by the media as most of the times, agenda is set by these elites.

Essentially, conflict resolution and reconciliation are achieved through communication and the transformation of language that is used to address differences, and this is the most central argument advanced in this chapter. From this point of view, conflicts are essentially communication events that crystallise around contested interpretations of reality. As Tarrow (2013) shows in his account of European history, revolutions have always been battles over words, and major social and political transformations were reflected in the use of language and the range of voices that are heard in public (see Vladislavljjevic, 2015). The reason why conflict becomes heightened during elections in Southern Africa is because conflicts are largely played out in the words and emotional exchanges traded between political actors, which the media regurgitate and publish unedited and without regard to how such exchanges only worked to further social polarization in an already imploding society.

There are reasons why media in Southern Africa finds itself in this type of predicament. Thus, media systems in Africa present particular dynamics which might make the ideals of neutral, balanced and non-partisan reportage hard to achieve. For example, limited press freedom, state monopoly over media ownership, state capture of the media, repressive media laws and government censorship as well as a media that lives off government patronage and favours all coalesce to produce a media system compromised in its inability to deliver on democratic transitions. Even though the so-called “Third Wave” of democratisation in the early 2000 paved way to processes like privatization, liberalization and commercialisation of the African media (Tsarwe, 2018; Mano ,2016; Moyo, 2004), this has not solved the structural problems affecting African media. This, however, is not to say that there is no solution to some of these problems. Objectively and transparently covering conflicts and their magnitude, with accuracy, neutrality and responsibility can help de-escalating conflict. It has everything to do with journalists taking a moral standpoint and commitment to social justice that this can be possible. Journalists still have the capacity to help de-escalate conflict if they avoid getting embedded in the politics of different centres of power.

In the section that follows, three case studies are provided from Southern African countries to show how media from those countries have reported during elections; and particularly in moments where the elections were characterised with conflict and electoral disputes. Admittedly, empirical literature on media and electoral conflicts in Southern Africa is very scarce. From the available literature, this chapter draws on the main themes common in most of the literature.

The intension is to develop a typology with which to start building common themes that are generalizable to electoral conflict in Southern Africa.

CASE STUDIES

Zimbabwe

In a recent paper on media reportage during one of Zimbabwe's most violent elections held in 2008, Tsarwe and Mare (2019) identified some themes which played a catalytic role in fermenting violent conflict that led to the death of hundreds of Zimbabweans. In summary, the study found that media bias, polarisation, practices of 'war journalism' and declining journalist welfare fuelled possibilities of journalists abandoning professional standards and becoming complicity in conflict. In addition, the 2018 Harmonised Elections also presented another dynamic involving conflict of interest as some journalists from the public press left the newsroom to join mainstream politics as parliamentary representatives before returning to the newsroom after losing in primaries. Overall, the following themes summarises key themes that characterise electoral reporting in Zimbabwe.

"War Journalism": Qualitative content analysis of the news articles written by Zimbabwean journalists who covered the 2008 Harmonised Elections showed that journalists practiced war journalism through a range of mechanisms. The notion of war journalism is largely attributed to the seminal work of John Galtung (1986). Galtung conceptualised war journalism by juxtaposing it against what he calls "peace journalism". In Galtung's (2000) typology, "war journalism" is seen as violence-orientated, propaganda-orientated, elite-orientated and victory-orientated. On the other hand, and as will be discussed further below, "peace journalism" takes a moral standpoint which is people-orientated (i.e. a moral obligation to put life first), truth-orientated as well as offering readers with solution-orientated reporting during conflict situations (Ottosen, 2010).

For example, journalists from both private and the public media used inflammatory language by regurgitating insults traded by politicians as well as using metaphors of war in their headlines (e.g. metaphors such as "political storm", "purging", "blood bath", "winner-take-all", "dog-eat-dog fight", "unleashed terror", "never-before-seen" etc.). It is important that journalists desist from wantonly and compulsively regurgitating insults traded by politicians as doing so only normalises conflict. In addition, using words and metaphors which carry with them strong images of violence and war only equated to heightening tension and insecurity to an already politically fragile environment. As already stated in the introduction, parties in a conflict plan their next move based on what the media will cover, so it is important that journalists should avoid taking sides with warring parties or regurgitating heated insults from opposing camps.

"Them" as against "us": because of the enduring socio-political polarisation characterising Zimbabwe, local Zimbabwean media has largely formed crystallised views about the country's politics, and it is hard for journalists to negotiate and construct alternative discourses about these views regardless of how such behaviour compromises journalistic objectivity. The more alternatives presented by journalists, the less likely the violence (Galtung, 2000; Lynch and

McGoldrick, 2005). During the coverage of Zimbabwe's 2008 elections, it was found that the public media complicity framed opposition leaders and their supporters as "them", while framing those of the ruling party as "us". The same goes about the private media which framed ruling ZANU PF leadership and its followers as "them", while framing the opposition as "us". Through content analysis, it was clear that journalists naturalised the binary framing of "them" and "us". An analysis of the "war journalism" concept highlighted above show that conflict-oriented journalism create clear binaries between "us" (as the good guys) and "them" (as the bad guys).

Media bias and polarisation: Media bias often manifests when the media overtly take sides with certain centres of power, and in the processes absolving such centres of power from any wrongdoing. On the other hand, media polarisation also manifested in the rise in 'propaganda journalism' (Chuma, 2013) where journalists (from both private and public media) have co-opted themselves into factional political camps, occasioned by the intense contestation of political power beginning in the early 2000s in Zimbabwe. Throughout the most violent 2008 Harmonised Election, Zimbabwean media was partly complicity in fanning political violence and conflict by showing clear allegiance and bias towards given political contestants at the expense of being neutral and objective.

Conflict of interest: During the 2018, some journalists from the public media openly participated in party politics by running for seats in the house of assembly. The foundation of journalism is premised on objectivity and neutrality, and maintaining a critical distance from centres of power means that journalists have high chances of critiquing the excesses of power by those who hold political office. However, as was accurately observed by various civic society bodies and independent stakeholders in the 2018 election, when journalists get embedded in politics to the extent of participating party politics, they are less likely to be neutral arbiters of democracy or watchdogs capable of questioning those in positions of power.

Journalists' safety: Over the years, Zimbabwean media's coverage of national issues has largely been shaped by the way in which news organisations were policed, harassed and intimidated through legal and extra-legal measures to tow particular government and ruling party-centric positions. As most of the media laws in the country have been consistently criticised for stifling the work of journalists, the safety of journalists has become compromised. As a result, a lot of atrocities and human suffering remain unreported as journalists increasingly self-censor their work and avoid what may lead them to danger and victimisation. As shown during discussion on 'war journalism' not covering conflict is tantamount to keeping war secrets uncovered, and more human life is put in danger.

Since 1980, all elections in Zimbabwe have been characterised by violence, although disputes between various stakeholders about the validity of elections became more pronounced and recurrent from the year 2000 onwards (Tsarwe and Mare, 2019; Muneri, 2012). Beginning in the early 2000s, we have noticed a gradual decline in journalism standards, and much of this

can be attributed to the increased desire by politicians and media proprietors to use the media for advancing narrow political interests. Because of declining journalism ethical standards, Zimbabwean media has become embedded in party politics, taking sides with political parties of their choice, and in the process becoming complicity in political rivalries (Mabweazara, 2010; Chari, 2006). This, unfortunately, is a recipe for possible conflict during elections when contestation for power usually becomes heated and misunderstandings become heightened.

Nevertheless, as a recommendations, it is important to note that given the risk associated with journalism, individual journalists may have to take very practical options not to unnecessarily put their lives at risk. However, not reporting atrocities involving human suffering might create dissonance and may be incongruent to both inert moral codes towards human suffering and the duty to inform. Journalists are advised to ensure that they are safe first in order for them to tell the story. The safety of journalists continue to be a global concern, and is particularly flagged in politically unstable environments where a lot of atrocities are committed under the cloak of both impunity and intimidation (including killings) of journalists.

In the context of Southern Africa, the SADC's Guidelines on Media Coverage of Elections in the region clearly state that:

Public authorities should take appropriate steps for the effective protection of journalists and other media personnel and their premises. At the same time this protection should not obstruct them in carrying out their work. Journalists reporting on the electoral process have a right to be protected from undue pressure and interference from public authorities with a view to influencing the elections.

Zambia

Just as Zimbabwe, the Zambian government enjoys dominance in the media sector, with public media often manipulated by politicians to tow political whims. The result is that the Zambian public media is often biased in favour of the ruling party, while the private media inertly see their position as that of critiquing the government and giving favourable coverage of opposition politicians. Soon after Zambia's 2016 Harmonised elections, a report by the EU Election Observation Team, showed the following:

Media bias: during the elections, the state media was heavily biased in favour of the ruling party. For example, the PF party received approximately 45% coverage in the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation's (ZNBC) TV and radio broadcasting, compared to only about 15% for the UPND (Edward and Wahman 2016; MISA Zambia 2016). Because of the partisan nature of Zambian media, a lot of human rights abuses and atrocities went unreported, and it is hard for justice to be instituted as such violent abuses of human rights go unreported. Journalists need to avoid taking sides with political parties.

"Them" as against "us": just as in Zimbabwe, Zambian; particularly the state media,

used binaries to describe “them” (members of the opposition UPND) as against “us” (members of the ruling PF). In a paper on Zambia’s 2016 general elections, which they aptly described as “democracy in reversal”, (Goldring and Wahman, 2016) found that state media was found to be heavily biased in favour of the ruling party, with PF sympathetic media such as Daily Nation almost always accusing opposition members as responsible for violence even in very questionable moments.

Restrictions of press freedom as well as civil and political rights: The closure of a private newspaper; *The Post*, on June 21 2016 less than two months before election day was indicative of the state’s heavy handed attitude towards the private press and, consequently, press freedom. In addition, the Zambian Police Service frequently applied the controversial Public Order Act to deny the opposition the right to hold rallies, thereby infringing on civil and political rights of political parties. These stand in the way of good coverage, and journalists are often powerless and unprotected.

Media polarization: as is the case during most elections across Africa, the Zambian media is largely polarized according to regional, ethnic and or political lines. This polarization has also been partly responsible for fermenting political violence and hatred among groups. In Zambia’s 2016 elections, there was a clearly regional voting pattern, and the media followed suit. There were also allegations that UPND supporters had set fire to government offices in Lukulu in Western Province despite reports that this was due to an electrical fault. Sympathetic PF media such as Daily Nation and some radio shows reported that the UPND were to blame for any tension and violence (Edward and Wahman, 2016: 116).

Mozambique

Mozambique has a free but highly polarised press. In Mozambique, media polarization means that reports tend to be for or against the governing party; FRELIMO. The state owns the largest circulation daily newspaper, the national radio network (Radio Moçambique, with good coverage and broadcasting in local languages) and a television network (largely available in urban areas). A private group has a smaller national daily newspaper and a TV network, which are seen as neutral (Nuvunga and Hanlon, 2017). And there is a large group of weekly newspapers and daily email newsletters, which largely see their role as to oppose the government and the predominant party (Nuvunga and Hanlon 2017).

In a paper titled “*Local media monitoring of Mozambique elections*” presented at the London School of Economics & Political Science Africa Summit 2017 on 31 March 2017 <https://www.lseafricasummit.org/>, Adriano Nuvunga and Joseph Hanlon, noted that publishing news that exposed violence during Mozambique’s 2014 general election helped de-escalate violence in some instances. More specifically, referring to an election monitoring newsletter: *The Mozambique Political Process Bulletin*, published by the Maputo office of AWEPA (European

Parliamentarian for Africa), Nuvunga and Hanlon (2017) noted that:

Publication [of violence] seems important in curbing the spread of violence. On 23 and 24 September 2014 at the height of the presidential election campaign, the car of an opposition presidential candidate Daviz Simango was attacked repeatedly by organised groups with bottles, stones and machetes in Gaza province, with damage and injuries. The newsletter was able to confirm and detail the violence. The President of the Elections Commission promptly issued a statement calling the violence “disgraceful” and calling on party leaders to stop it. Frelimo presidential candidate Filipe Nyusi then called on his supporters to stop the violence - and they did. One cannot be sure of the role of the newsletter, but it seems reasonable to assume that credible reports that could not be challenged as exaggerated spurred official action. (p, 7).

From the above quotation, it is evident that credible media reports can actually nudge leaders and authorities from warring parties to intervene by calling off its members involved in conflict to make peace. As will be shown in discussions on recommendations provided below, unmasking conflict, giving voice to all parties and reporting with a sense of responsibility and sensitivity to human life can be a magical solution to some of the electoral conflicts in Southern Africa.

While Mozambique is not free from electoral violence, the country enjoys a fairly diverse media, with journalists from community radio and other local media continuing to report violence both for their local stations, but also for the national media (Nuvunga and Hanlon, 2017). Because of this, reports of local violence and misconduct are quickly reported and escalated nationally, usually bringing rapid responses. In other cases, evidence from local journalists and continued media pressure forced elections to be re-run, and led to changes in the electoral law and reduced misconduct (Nuvunga and Hanlon, 2017). What proved pivotal in good electoral reporting in Mozambique (of course, despite evidence of violence incidents), was that of fair levels of accuracy and local knowledge. Local journalists are known and trusted, so people come to them with complaints, and journalists have the contacts to verify or refute claims.

From the foregoing, there are common themes that run throughout the three-country case studies highlighted above. These themes are media bias, the growth of party-aligned media, limited journalistic freedoms, media’s complicity in violence, and journalists’ limited appreciation of conflict sensitive reporting. A combination of these themes creates a fertile ground for electoral conflict.

Is the African media alone in compromised relationships with state power?

Albeit using different tactics, the African media are not lone culprits where the media are embedded in party politics. Media bias and complicity with powerful centers of power could certainly be true even for nations like the United States of America and Britain.

For example, the run-up to the 2016 USA elections reflected the bifurcated nature of the press and its partisan orientation. In Britain; the Brexit debate was mediated by a divided media with most newspapers reporting on one side or the other. While we might not expect the African media to fall far away or outside of this purview, it is imperative that African journalists bear in mind that they have an enormous role in democratising African political institutions, particularly institutions that are stakeholders in elections. They can do this by providing space for real debate and allow the most superior ideas to determine electoral outcomes, and not by propping up certain political parties and candidates.

Suggested Recommendations

This article makes the following set of recommendations after considering local experiences and lessons from international best practices. As stated earlier, while these recommendations are not an end in themselves, they are meant to give formative guides to approaches that might assist journalists in reporting elections where conflict is involved.

Adopt Peace Journalism

According to Galtung (2002); a founding scholar in peace journalism, peace Journalism stands for truth as opposed to propaganda and lies. For him, ‘truthful journalism’ is one aspect of peace journalism, where journalists adopt a moral standpoint of reporting the truth in a balanced fashion. To shine more light on peace journalism, Galtung’s juxtaposes ideal types “peace journalism” from “war journalism” accurately by stating that:

The task of peace journalism is to make conflict transparent; the task of war journalism is war secrets. In peace journalism we give a voice to all parties... The peace journalist focuses on suffering — maybe particularly on women, the aged and children — give voice to the voiceless and name the evil on all sides (1986).

In point form; the following are some of the ways through which peace journalists can report during conflict:

- Ovoid inflammatory language,
- Uncover the secrets of conflict,
- have an understanding of history so that your reports are backed by strong contextual understanding,
- Report on, and magnify, peace efforts,
- Offer solution-oriented reporting.

Invest in data journalism

Because of the continued improvements in technology, as well as the sheer amount of information accessible online, it has increasingly become easy for journalists to use maps, graphs, photos, video, and audio to describe a range of things such as the occurrence and

spread of conflict, violence, murders, disease, political votes, corruption, and political lies and propaganda. Accurate graphical coverage of areas affected by violent conflict can equip those with capacity to intervene (e.g. state security agents, aid workers and other stakeholders interested in human rights) with information on the extent and spread of conflict. However, data journalism requires massive investment in information and communication technologies as well as in training journalists. Armed with data journalism competencies, journalists can report, graphically (but with due regard for ethics), the spread of violence, conflict and murders in ways that can communicate accurate information. Some of the tasks of data journalism may include the following:

- Show conflict-prone areas in format readable by audiences;
- Investigating figures meant to manipulate the electorate;
- Compare results announced at the district and provincial levels with those announced as official at national level and to look for discrepancies.

Use Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

Many of the attributes of conflict sensitive reporting echo those of peace journalism and, ultimately, speak to the traditional standards of journalism. According to Ross Howard, the following summarises the attributes of conflict sensitive journalism:

- Avoid reporting a conflict as consisting of two opposing sides. Find other affected interests and include their stories, opinions and goals. Interview merchants affected by the general strike, workers who are unable to work, refugees from the countryside who want an end to violence etc.
- Avoid defining the conflict by always quoting the leaders who make familiar demands. Go beyond the elites. Report the words of ordinary people who may voice the opinions shared by many.
- Avoid only reporting what divides the sides in conflict. Ask the opposing sides questions which may reveal common ground. Report on interests or goals which they may share.
- Avoid always focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side. Treat all sides' suffering as equally newsworthy.
- Avoid words like devastated, tragedy and terrorized to describe what has been done to one group. These kinds of words put the reporter on one side. Do not use them yourself. Only quote someone else who uses these words.
- Avoid emotional and imprecise words. Assassination is the murder of a head of state and no one else. Massacre is the deliberate killing of innocent, unarmed civilians. Soldiers and policemen are not massacred. Genocide means killing an entire people. Do not minimise suffering, but use strong language carefully.
- Avoid words like terrorist, extremist or fanatic. These words take sides, make the other side seem impossible to negotiate with. Call people what they call themselves.
- Avoid making an opinion into a fact. If someone claims something, state their name, so it is their opinion and not your fact.

- Avoid waiting for leaders on one side to offer solutions. Explore peace ideas wherever they come from. Put these ideas to the leaders and report their response.

Observe journalism ethical standards

Traditional canons of the media such as neutrality, objectivity and responsibility are central in mediating elections in ways that does not inflame violence and conflict. In sections above discussing experiences from Mozambique, it was clear that if journalists report incidents of violence with neutrality, objectivity and responsibly, leaders and political actors are forced to take action to stop violence. However, in other case studies (such as Zimbabwe and Zambia, a lot of what were identified as enablers of conflict was media bias, polarisation, lack of neutrality by siding with political parties and hate language. Journalists are compelled to abide by the traditional journalism standards that are the foundation of the profession. As part of their objectivity, media workers were considered professionally disengaged from, and insensitive to, the outcome of their work. Traditional journalism values help in reducing conflict through the following:

- Helping journalists to be neutral, objective and responsible in their reporting;
- Helping journalists in producing evidence-based reports that are verifiably accurate;
- Helping journalists to be meticulous with figures and interpreting them well

Conclusion

Most importantly, instead of competing, media houses need to work together through pooling systems. This is because no media organisation has enough of their own staff to cover all polling stations and counting centres, necessitating the need for media organisations to work together in various pool systems. In Europe and America, media organisations cooperate and agree to send reporters to different counting centres and then share the information (Nuvunga and Hanlon, 2017). Press agencies usually use “stringers” - reporters who usually work for local media and are paid to also report to the agency. While these recommendations are not conclusive, they offer a starting point for journalists who report during electoral conflict in Southern Africa.

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Gendering Cultural Violence, Victimhood, and Peacebuilding in Zimbabwean Media

Rose Jaji

Introduction

Violence is predominantly understood in its physical or direct manifestation. In many conflict situations, physical or direct violence has a gender dimension by which it is often linked to manhood as a biological category and masculinity as a sociocultural construct. Physical violence tends to draw more attention because of its visual nature which jolts people into action whether in academia, the media or humanitarian and political circles.

Yet, violence also takes other forms that are arguably as harmful as its physical manifestation. Galtung (1969, 1990) draws attention to other forms of violence that he identifies as structural and cultural. He explains that structural violence which is embedded in social organization is “silent” but it “leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and the spirit” (Galtung, 1990, p. 294). Structural violence is as harmful as direct violence and aims to hamper resistance to exploitation and oppression. He defines cultural violence as “any aspect of culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form” (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). Cultural violence which is the subject of this chapter is embedded in language, ideology, religion, art, and science among others.

As Althusser’s (1971) notes, the media and institutions such as schools, churches, and the family are examples of ideological state apparatuses that buttress the coercive role played by repressive state apparatuses such as state security institutions and the courts. Cultural violence is also embedded in Gramsci’s (1971) theory of cultural hegemony by which the state and the ruling class use cultural institutions to promote specific values, ideas, and social relations and assert their hegemony. Cultural violence can thus be considered as a form of “soft” coercion that plays a complementary role to repressive state apparatuses. It legitimizes structural and direct violence by rendering them “acceptable in society” (Galtung, 1990, p. 192).

However, cultural violence is not confined to the state or the ruling class’s quest to perpetuate

its hegemony because non-state actors can also engage in cultural violence. For example, the media can perpetrate cultural violence against the ruling class and the same violence can also be found in social and interpersonal relationships.

Cultural violence can be observed in many countries around Africa and beyond. This chapter focuses on Zimbabwe where this author has conducted research on gender, conflict, and peacebuilding. The chapter's goals are twofold. Firstly, it draws attention to forms of violence that are often overlooked in academia and media coverage of violence. Secondly, it critiques assumptions on gender in relation to violence and peacebuilding.

The chapter departs from the predominant interpretation of violence as physical or direct and association of violence with men. It challenges the normative depiction in academia and the media of women in political conflicts as victims. Although women can engage in direct violence, in Zimbabwe they are mainly involved in cultural violence. This chapter discusses the nexus between women and men's perpetration of cultural and physical violence respectively. It also discusses men's victimhood in violent conflict and their participation in peacebuilding which is often feminized at community level.

Drawing from Althusser's (1971) and Gramsci's (1971) work on ideology and its role in the exercise of power and authority, the chapter specifically identifies language as a channel through which ideologies that perpetuate subordination of the ruled by the powerful are propagated and sustained. Language as a form of cultural violence is intertwined with the physical violence that characterizes Zimbabwe's politics. It legitimizes physical violence such that it is difficult to end physical violence without addressing cultural violence.

Zimbabwe's recent political history has largely been characterized by perpetration of cultural violence through hate speech and incendiary language by politicians, sections of the country's citizenry, and the media. In most cases where physical violence is perpetrated in the country's politics, it is accompanied or preceded by cultural violence which legitimizes physical attack or murder of the targeted individual(s). This situation mirrors the broader social environment in the country where language as a form of cultural violence has become characteristic of a music genre known as Zimdancehall (Kufakurinani & Mwatwara, 2017).

This broad sociocultural environment influences the media which have adopted the same language that is used by politicians and has exacerbated the overall atmosphere of political polarization and violence in Zimbabwe's recent history. It is therefore important for the media to rise above the prevailing sociocultural and political environment in which they operate in order to provide balanced coverage on violence regardless of their political or ideological leanings. In a context where women's participation in politics is still limited, the media sometimes downplay women's involvement in cultural violence due to failure to recognize that cultural violence reinforces physical violence.

The media need to give balanced coverage of both men and women and their involvement in

violence without trivializing certain forms of violence that they may deem less harmful as is the case with cultural violence which remains engrained in both interpersonal communication and national political rhetoric. Lasting peace in Zimbabwe calls for reporting on both women and men's peacebuilding activities especially at community level where much of the violence occurs.

The Media, Language, and Cultural Violence

As a precursor to physical violence, cultural violence is mainly perpetrated through language as a medium through which ideology is disseminated and entrenched. Cultural violence as conveyed through language includes use of hate speech which uses disparaging and dehumanizing images and metaphors against political opponents or targets for direct violence.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda provides an example of how the media, specifically Radio Rwanda and Radio-Télévision Libre des Milles Collines (RTL), played a key role in perpetrating cultural violence and fueling the physical violence that left close to a million people dead at the end of the genocide (see Baisley, 2014). The propaganda broadcast by Radio Rwanda and RTL shows how these media got caught up in the animosity between Hutu and Tutsi and aggravated the conflict where they could have de-escalated the simmering tensions. The media can therefore intentionally or inadvertently perpetrate cultural violence and aggravate physical violence where reports eschew neutrality, facts, and fairness.

In Zimbabwe, the contention that characterizes the country's politics can be traced back to its political history. Colonization was a brutal experience and the racial grievances that it created culminated in a protracted guerilla war which led to independence in 1980. Violent contention in Zimbabwean politics persisted in the post-independence era as exemplified by Gukurahundi massacres in the early 1980s in the Matebeleland and Midlands provinces which remained outside the scope of the media's gaze. Political violence continued in the 1990s pitting supporters of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the opposition Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) formed by Edgar Tekere.

Violence against opposition political parties persisted after the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 and with the inception of the fast track land redistribution program which took a violent character. As the country's politics increasingly became intolerant to dissenting views, the complementary role of cultural violence subsumed in ideological state apparatuses to repressive state apparatuses became clear.

As Zimbabwe's political terrain became more polarized, so did the media which many Zimbabweans saw as divided into pro-ruling party state media and pro-opposition private media.

The middle ground and tolerance disappeared as the country's politics took hardline and uncompromising positions. Cultural violence in the form of hate speech and inflammatory language became dominant in politics, the media, and the wider society. Former president

Robert Mugabe reminded the nation on numerous occasions that his party had “degrees in violence” (see Blair, 2002).

The leader of the MDC, the late Morgan Tsvangirai, declared in September 2000 in remarks directed to then President Mugabe, “If you don’t want to go peacefully, we will remove you violently” (Norman, 2004, p. 128). As recent as 2017, the former First Lady Grace Mugabe’s choice of words shocked many Zimbabweans who described her language as abusive, hate-mongering, toxic, and out of line with decency.

The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) gave her rallies live coverage and featured them after the 20:00hours television news bulletin. Both state and private media reported on Mrs. Mugabe’s rallies. The former took a supportive slant while the latter took a critical tone which prompted Mrs Mugabe to praise and excoriate them respectively. Her verbal attacks on the private media in October 2014 prompted the privately-owned Daily News to retaliate in an article entitled “Grace Mugabe’s Blitz: 10 Mad Points” which described her language as “ugly, un-motherly and unFirst Lady-like”.

The fact that the state media and private media reported on the same speeches but reacted to them in different ways is illustrative of the polarization alluded to earlier in this chapter. Cultural violence should be censured regardless of its source and the media contribute to conflict when they disregard, normalize or selectively report on hate speech and other forms of cultural violence manifest in language and images or metaphors. By normalizing and promoting hate speech, the media become as culpable as the people who perpetrate direct violence emanating therefrom.

As noted above, cultural violence is not limited to politicians because it is also observable in media reports. An example is a female journalist (name withheld) who titled her piece on a ZANU PF female politician, “G40 attack dog [M]andi Chimene prostituting herself to Mugabe for gravy.” Below the headline was a picture of the female politician in question captioned “Mandi Chimene has assumed the role of attack dog for Mugabe’s G40 faction in Zanu PF. A prostitute by nature, she is opening opening [sic] her legs to Mugabe for gravy.” While the journalist made important and reasonable points, her piece was marred by her use of the very language for which she condemned the female politician in question.

There are a couple of ironies in this piece both of which were lost on the journalist herself. Firstly, misogynistic language which is a form of cultural violence is often associated with men but in this case, it was expressed by a woman. Secondly, the journalist wrote that anyone who harbored ambition to take over from President Mugabe was subjected to “public verbal lynching” by women when her own language can be described as a transcript of “verbal public lynching” of Mandi Chimene.

In language that sounded as if it was meant to stoke the flame between Mandi Chimene and then Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa who was the target of Chimene’s attack, the journalist wrote, “Ah, if it were me, with all the presumable power that the croc[odile] [Mnangagwa] is

alleged to have, I would surely respond. I am beginning to doubt whether the croc[odile] in question is indeed a croc[odile]; it could just be a frog.”

Language as a form of cultural violence is conveyed through labeling directed to political opponents and dissenting voices especially when they fall out of favor with the party. In 2014, former Vice President Joyce Mujuru who was viciously attacked by former First Lady Mrs. Mugabe and accused of witchcraft by then President Mugabe. Similarly, MDC youths labeled Thokozani Khupe, former Vice President of the MDC, a prostitute after when the MDC-T slip after Tsvangirai’s death.

Newspaper columnists express hate speech with reckless abandon and there is no sign of editorial effort to tone down the rhetoric. For the greater part of the MDC’s existence, its politicians have been portrayed as “puppets of the imperialist West” by ZANU PF politicians and supporters and the MDC has also retaliated by calling ZANU PF politicians thieves. When the media mimic this kind of rhetoric, they fuel direct inter-party violence and the line between the media and political parties becomes blurred. If the state media conforms to Althusser’s (1971) classification of the media as a form of ideological state apparatus, the private media is no less an ideological apparatus though non-state in orientation. The media in Zimbabwe is entangled in the battle for hegemony between the ruling party and opposition parties.

Cultural violence uses language to cast opponents as enemies as conveyed in ZANU PF slogans in which opponents are denounced by chanting “down with the enemy”, “down with the MDC” among other groups and individuals regarded as enemies of the party. Opponents are cast in negative terms that depict them as dangerous and therefore deserving of physical violence and elimination.

This is achieved through categorization of politicians in terms of patriots and non-patriots. When former Vice President Mnangagwa took over from President Mugabe in November 2017, many Zimbabweans who had expected him to usher in a new era of political rhetoric were dismayed when he chanted “pasi nemhandu” (down with the enemy) during his first post-Mugabe address. Even currently under the “new dispensation”, it is still difficult to separate reporters from political party supporters. However, through critical comments from the public at large, this rhetoric has been toned down.

It is not surprising that as hate speech wanes in Zimbabwe, so does direct violence against political opponents thus illustrating the mutually reinforcing relationship between cultural and direct violence.

The media’s responsibility is not limited to how they report on politicians’ language of violence. It extends to ensuring that they are not coopted into ideological apparatuses state or otherwise or do not legitimize cultural violence regardless of their own political position.

The media can exacerbate the problem of political violence by justifying and extolling politicians

who use hate speech or by using counter-hate speech against such politicians. With use of the Internet, journalists or media houses at large are increasingly aware of how ordinary citizens feel about individual politicians and political parties because of online platforms where readers and the audience comment and give feedback on news articles.

While readers and the audience use their anonymity to spew hate speech, journalists need to refrain from using the same speech. In the age of emotional incontinence, journalists have an even more difficult task staying out of the fray and protecting their professional integrity.

They must deal with the hypocritical situation that readers and the audience do not hold themselves to the same standard to which they hold news reporters and will easily condemn reporters who stoop to their level. The desire to be the first to report and to “go viral” needs to be tempered by professional integrity instead of being pursued through expression of the unpalatable, indecent, and outrageous.

Maintaining professional integrity remains important even when the report is on politicians loathed and despised by ordinary citizens. However, with the suffering that many citizens including journalists have experienced in Zimbabwe, rising above hate speech or degrading language is something that not all journalists have been able to do.

The main lessons that arise from the example provided by state and private media in Zimbabwe are:

- The media should treat incendiary language and hate speech as such regardless of the political status of the speaker.
- They need to extricate themselves from the battle for cultural and political hegemony between political parties.
- In contexts where the media are under pressure to tow the line, it is important to simply report the story truthfully and let readers and the audience interpret it for themselves.
- The impact of cultural violence on the political environment should not be underestimated as cultural and physical violence are mutually sustaining.
- The media need to maintain professional integrity even when they are emotionally invested in the stories that they report on and pay attention to constructive criticism from readers and listeners.
- In conflict situations, journalists’ choice of words is a choice for violence or peace.

Violent Conflicts, Gender and Media Coverage

Physical violence in conflict situations is predominantly perpetrated by men who constitute most of the political protagonists. The more armed conflicts encroach into civilian spaces, the more the violence is perpetrated on women’s bodies as the space where men inscribe messages of dominance.

The rapes in Rwanda during the genocide and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)'s civil war attest to this. At the same time, civilian men are also vulnerable to physical violence. In March 2011, women constituted 27% of victims of violence and 15% of perpetrators (Zimbabwe Peace Project Report, 2011). These figures suggest that men who constitute most of the perpetrators in political violence correspondingly constitute the largest number of victims of the same violence.

However, much of the language used in media coverage seems to suggest that violence is more repugnant when it is directed to women and children than to men. Media coverage of violent conflicts usually conforms to normative interpretations of masculinity and femininity that depict men as perpetrators and women as victims.

This male perpetrator/female victim binary emanates from the assumption that power and violence are a male monopoly buttressed by feminization of disempowerment and victimhood which overlooks female perpetrators and male victims of conflict (see Apperly, 2015). Women emerge from conflict as victims (see Newbury, 1988; Mzvondiwa, 2007; Issifu, 2015) while male victimhood is underreported (Christian, Ramazani, Burnham, & Glass, 2011).

Instead of homogenizing men, it is incumbent upon the media to understand that civilian or unarmed men are as much victims as women and children. Men's pain and suffering deserves equal coverage. In many conflict situations, civilian and unarmed men outnumber their armed counterparts which means that more men are likely to be victims rather than perpetrators. The media need to report on men's individualized victimhood as much as they report on men's culpability in perpetration of direct violence.

For example, media coverage of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated on men in the DRC conflict sets a good example. Most men who are ordinary citizens do not actively participate in violent conflicts and it is such men who become victims of violence by state or non-state actors who exercise a rampant and gun-toting masculinity which relies on physical violence for control and subordination of unarmed civilians.

Instead of accentuating women's experiences of violence and obscuring those of men, the media need to use language which desists from condoning violence on men and overlooking their suffering. As stressed earlier in this chapter, language which legitimizes violence, in this case through gender ideologies, constitutes cultural violence regardless of the gender of the victim. The media usually cover stories of women's losses during violent conflicts, for example, losing their husbands, their sons, and their homes without giving corresponding coverage of men's stories of loss.

How do men feel when their wives are raped or killed in armed conflict? This skewed reporting on gender reflects feminization of victims of conflicts and construction of asylum seekers and refugees as female. This has been to the detriment of young men seeking asylum in Europe

whose claims are dismissed by sections of the media as spurious.

The inference embedded in this unbalanced focus on asylum and gender is the idea that men do not flee but stay to defend their countries, a perspective which explicitly questions fleeing men's masculinity. Men's quest for asylum is as legitimate as that of women and children. Societies can only be peaceful if both genders are safe and secure and there is need to avoid normalizing violence when its victims are men.

Another important factor in media coverage of conflict through a gender lens is the tendency to obscure women's role in violent conflicts. In politics, women are often depicted as followers of male politicians and even when they assume political office, they are portrayed as pawns in a male political game.

For example, women's ascendancy to high political office in Zimbabwe is usually dismissed as a favor from male politicians or an outcome of a *quid pro quo* sexual liaison with male politicians.

While it is a fact that women get attacked in violent conflicts as collateral damage or as proxies for spouses or male relatives who cannot be found, the assumption that women are passive victims in violent conflicts needs to be interrogated. Women can exercise political agency and participate in intelligence gathering and clandestine communication in addition to working as spies and decoys in conflict situations. Their participation in these areas is historical (McIntosh, 1989; Daybell, 2011).

Women do not perpetrate much of the direct violence, but they are implicated in perpetration of cultural violence which legitimizes direct violence by men. For example, women can fuel direct physical violence through hate speech and inflammatory language. Zimbabwe Peace Project (2011) notes that as more women enter the political space in Zimbabwe, there are increasing numbers of women participating in political violence.

This participation takes the form of cultural violence exemplified by cheer-leading and encouraging and inciting male perpetration of direct violence on political opponents. While physical violence is culturally associated with masculinity in Zimbabwe, cultural violence in its ideological manifestation is as much observable among women as it is among men. There is a symbiotic relationship between physical and cultural violence which the media need to be cognizant of in their coverage of politics.

For instance, *The Standard*, a privately owned newspaper, published articles such as one in which they quoted Shuvai Mahofa, a ZANU PF female politician who died in August 2017 and was declared a national heroine, as saying, "You will find Mudavanhu in a coffin." The newspaper directly linked her use of hate speech and incendiary language in her home province of Masvingo to physical violence which was perpetrated against her political opponents thus showing the link between cultural and direct violence. It is thus important to acknowledge women's role in exacerbating political violence. The media have a responsibility to report in a

balanced manner on women and men's involvement in violence.

The media treads a political correctness minefield when reporting on women's participation in violence. There is a fine line between reports that are critical of women and those that are sexist and misogynistic. Journalists sometimes end up not reporting on women's involvement in cultural violence and other anti-peace activities for fear of being accused of sexism.

For female journalists, their reporting can easily be mistaken for the stereotype "women pull each other down". As a result, journalists sometimes exercise self-censorship by not reporting on stories that negatively portray female politicians. Journalists require constantly evolving skills to navigate situations where being critical of women can easily be misconstrued as attacking them. Such skills should enable journalists to report objectively on female politicians without launching into personal attacks which would become a case of such journalists perpetrating cultural violence as already illustrated earlier in this chapter.

It is possible to produce reports that are critical of female politicians who advocate violence without using such politicians' private lives to make the point; their political conduct is enough to discredit them. Blurring the line between women's conduct in politics and their private lives has proved to be a major challenge for some journalists in Zimbabwe as it has for male politicians some of whom resort to the default mode of labeling women in politics prostitutes.

The following key issues are important for reports on women and men in conflict situations:

- Gender is about both women and men whose experiences should receive equal coverage.
- Notwithstanding men's dominant role in perpetration of direct violence, male victimhood in violent conflict deserves coverage as much as that of women and children.
- Media reports should be critical of gender ideologies that mask women and men's lived experiences in conflict situations.
- In the age of the Internet and social media, the mainstream media needs to understand that their credibility can easily be undermined by "fake news" and availability of alternative of sources of information.

Women and men in Peacebuilding

Reporting on conflicts is intertwined with reporting on peace. Various feminists take different positions on women's participation in peacebuilding. There are feminists who argue that women's socialization makes them more caring and nurturing (Chodorow, 1978). This viewpoint supports women's engagement in peacebuilding activities, and these enable them to play an active role in the public sphere. Others argue that this essentialist perspective of women is over-exaggerated. Feminists who are critical of essentialization of femininity and motherhood argue that women's peacebuilding activities conform to the male-biased view that removes women from active politics by arguing that women are naturally peace-loving and gentle.

This argument further states that depiction of women as peaceful or peace-loving reinforces subordination of women and perpetuates patriarchy or the ideology that enables men to play a dominant role in society (hooks, 1985). These two different views on women influence how women's participation in peacebuilding is assessed in terms of whether this participation is consistent with or contrary to femininity. Whichever side of the debate journalists may choose to agree with, it is important to remember the importance of peace and report responsibly on women involved in peacebuilding.

In many African countries that have experienced violent conflicts, women's peacebuilding activities entail security risks and personal sacrifice which cannot be equated with the passivity that some feminists associate with women in peacebuilding.

Across the continent, women have borne the brunt of building peace yet much of the focus on peacebuilding is directed to high profile national activities in which men are often the protagonists. Women in peacebuilding in Zimbabwe experience structural and cultural violence and are labelled prostitutes like their counterparts in politics. These labels are a form of "strategic language" (John, 2006) intended to "discipline" them for "encroaching" into spaces that are presumably male. The generally hostile language directed to women paves the way for direct violence in the form of abduction, arbitrary arrest and torture. The case of Jestina Mukoko, the director of Zimbabwe Peace Project provides a good example of how women play active roles in peacebuilding. Jestina Mukoko was abducted in December 2008 from her home before she was eventually brought before the courts on charges of recruiting bandits for training in Botswana with the goal to overthrow the government. After her release, she narrated her suffering which involved physical and psychological torture. While Mukoko's ordeal received extensive coverage in the private and international media, it is important to extend reporting beyond her experience and report on her work and counter the narrative that criminalizes and politicizes peacebuilding by associating it with illegality and gender politics.

The tendency to dissociate women from political agency corresponds with the absence of reporting on ordinary men's peacebuilding activities. Media coverage tends to have a bias towards high profile activities, and this extends to peacebuilding. A lot of reports adequately cover men's role as fighters but there is limited coverage on their role as peacebuilders especially at community level. Men in traditional cultures of what is now known as Zimbabwe not only fought in wars but also built peace. Although abuse of power happened, men were culturally expected to refrain from wanton and arbitrary exercise of power especially where this resulted in violence. This is reflected by Zimbabwean men involved in peacebuilding who call for an end to violence in the country and engage in activities intended to end violence in its various manifestations. It is equally important for men's peacebuilding activities to receive as much media coverage as possible and challenge the dominant view that legitimizes male violence by associating it with culture. The idea that traditionally men were expected to be peacebuilders is illustrated by the fact that male politicians seek to retain dignity by delegating violent activities to men who are subordinated by lack of resources to aspire to the same dignity that more economically stable men aspire to.

The media can support women and men in peacebuilding and in the process contribute to peace by:

- Reporting on women and men's peacebuilding activities so that their work is not distorted by political actors with vested interest in the absence of peace.
- Normalizing both men and women's peacebuilding activities and appreciating that peacebuilding does not emasculate men or render women docile.
- Reshaping the political narrative by adopting the language of peace in their reports.

Conclusion

There is need for media reports on cultural violence because direct violence cannot stop unless cultural violence which legitimizes it is stopped. Perpetration of cultural violence through language or speech is not confined to politicians as the media can also fall into the same pitfall during coverage of speeches characterized by the language of violence.

There is a gender division of labor in the violence matrix in Zimbabwe by which women predominantly perpetrate cultural violence which legitimizes direct violence principally perpetrated by men. Cultural violence plays a key role in normalizing and rendering direct violence acceptable. It is important to remember that language is an integral aspect of politics which provides cues to the likelihood of conflict or peace and history shows how mass murder in various parts of the world was preceded and accompanied by cultural violence in the form of hate speech and inflammatory language.

As aspects of ideological apparatuses, cultural and direct violence are mutually sustaining; one cannot be eradicated without the same measures being taken against the other. As the main tools used in both politics and the media, language and images, if not checked, work as a medium of cultural violence which is as destructive as direct violence itself. In the battle for political and cultural hegemony in Zimbabwe, language and images have the potential to either fuel or neutralize direct violence.

Detoxifying Zimbabwe's politics calls for not only acknowledging the seriousness of cultural violence but also balanced reporting on gender and violence. Most media reports tend to feminize victimhood by highlighting women's suffering and loss and normalizing and trivializing men's experience of the same. Long-term peace in Zimbabwe requires the media to reconsider their current role as state or non-state ideological apparatuses and refrain from exacerbating the cultural violence that pervades Zimbabwe's social fabric and naturally finds its way into the country's politics. Reporting on women and men's peacebuilding activities especially in countries where peacebuilding is politicized and entails personal risk is an important journalistic contribution to peace. Negative stories of violence and suffering need to be balanced with the positive stories of peacebuilding.

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Fake news and peace journalism: What are the implications?

Hatikanganwi Mapudzi and Nkosinethando Mpofo

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is manifold, it aims to highlight, among other things, the following issues: the role of the media in instigating and mitigating conflict and violence, as well as an analysis of peace journalism as an alternative model for reporting conflict and violence. Essentially, the paper discusses the concept of fake news and further explores how fake news can undermine the efforts of peace journalism. This is done by contrasting the characteristics of peace journalism and fake news. The paper also discusses the concept of fake news in Africa, with specific attention given to the Zimbabwean context. We end the discussion by highlighting the need for going back to the basics of good and ethical journalism. In doing so, we encourage journalists to adopt a more sensitive approach to reporting on conflict issues and foster an environment where truth telling and truth seeking inform their practice.

Key words: fake news, media, conflict, peace journalism

Introduction

The role of the media in instigating violence, conflict and war has been clearly documented. Extensive research on the role of the media in society has concluded that the media plays a significant role in influencing public discourse and behaviour (see Ross, 2007; Rodny-Gumede, 2015; 2016). Disturbingly, there is a paucity of research examining the role of the media in mitigating conflict. Conflict has characterised many African countries (e.g. Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria and Burundi), particularly during the election period. This period has always been characterised by conflicts, violence and bloodshed, as a result of political, religious and ethnic differences.

In the process of such political polarisations, human rights abuses, in the form of electoral violence, are often imminent (Aslam, 2014). Important players in such a political landscape include the media, although they have consistently received criticism on how they cover the issues of conflict, violence and war. As a powerful mass mobilisation tool, the media are a double-edged sword capable of either instigating conflict, violence and war, while at the same time they can also mitigate these and motivate for peace. The reason for this assertion is that the

society depends on the influential media for information, in which case the media set the agenda as to what the citizenry gets to consume as news.

In view of this, we discuss the role of the media in instigating and mitigating conflict and violence, as well as analyse the concept of peace journalism as an alternative model for reporting conflict and violence. We also deliberate on the concept of fake news and further explore how it undermines the efforts of peace journalism. We contextualise the concept of fake news by looking at how it has manifested itself in Africa and specifically, in Zimbabwe. Prior to describing the concept of fake news, it is essential to highlight the theoretical framework underpinning this discussion, the agenda setting theory.

The Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda setting theory explains how the media influence public thinking (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In other words, what this means is that the media reports (agenda) are transformed to public agendas. Contrary to the magic bullet theory which suggests that the media inject attitudes and behaviours in the public's minds, the agenda setting theory highlights how the media influence the scope of the public's thinking. Cohen (1963) summarises the influence of the theory this way: "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963; cited in Rogers & Dearing, 2001).

Putting this theory in the context of a conflict environment, what it implies is that the media mirror the chaos and disorder inherent in the society. This assumption therefore refutes the notion that the media directly stimulate conflict, but they present a scope in analysing the socio-political set up of societies.

There are two assumptions underpinning the agenda setting theory. The first one is that the media do not mirror the reality, but they filter and shape it, while the second assumption is that the concentration of the media on certain issues result in the public perceiving those issues as more important than anything else (McQuail & Windhal, 1993). In many instances, the media succeed in getting the public to talk about the issues that they prioritise (the agenda).

However, in other cases, the public may also refute the issues being considered as important by the media, then the people tend to "co-construct" what they hear, read, or see from the media, based on their own personal experiences. An example of this is when the state controlled Zimbabwean media reported that the ZANU PF had won the 2018 Presidential elections, while the majority of the public rejected this, arguing that the opposition MDC had actually won the elections.

In this case again, the public thinking was also informed by their own personal experiences in which the ruling ZANU PF has always been blamed for 'rigging' the elections. When it comes to political information, it is often the urban people who are more critical of the media, as

well as the political regime. Having deliberated on the theory underpinning this discussion, we discuss the concept of fake news.

The concept of fake news

Although it is generally agreed that ‘fake news’ is not a new concept, it has gained remarkable attention since the election of Donald Trump as the President of America in November 2016. Fake news has been exaggerated by the accessibility to social media, by the public. Seidenberg (2017) cited in Watson (2018: 93) defines fake news as the

“deliberate and strategically constructed lies that are presented as news articles and are intended to mislead the public. Fake news is used to manipulate public opinion and because of its sensationalist nature, it tends to appeal to many people”.

Watson (2018:93) also adds that fake news is:

primarily authored by opportunists who seek financial gain or hyper-partisans who want to influence political beliefs. Its dissemination is often aided by social media, automated bots and especially by humans responding to inflamed emotions. Whether the pernicious authors seek to influence public opinion or generate advertising revenue, the content is cleverly designed to provoke outrage and reinforce prejudices.

Fake news has been used during elections to disseminate propaganda and influence political beliefs. Furthermore, particularly through social media, it has been effectively used to provoke outrage and reinforce prejudices, especially during election periods. The manipulation of public opinion through fake news has undoubtedly led to rivalry and in some instances, to “unfortunate and disastrous events” (Soll, 2016). Fake news undoubtedly has a corroding effect on society. It has become a destructive armament to people’s rights by inciting violence through manipulating and misrepresenting facts on several issues. This type of reporting has compromised the moral and legal principles of the profession of journalism, as well as that of human rights.

Numerous factors have contributed to the proliferation of fake news, particularly in newsrooms. These include artificial intelligence, the need to report the story first (breaking news), the speed at which information is to be verified, newsrooms interested in more traffic- more online clicks and use of analytic tools to gauge readership, as well as amateur journalism. Artificial intelligence supports the use of technology to dictate fake news. However, this can be undermined by the imperfections of technology which may result in the failure to dictate fake news in some instances.

The need to provide breaking news story has also forced media practitioners to report on stories without verification and this means that the media run the risk of publishing false stories. Sadly, despite being fake news, the consequences are often real.

Now, the question is, how does fake news become a destructive weapon of conflict and violence? Using the various social media platforms, fake news mobilises the public which is often desperate for information, especially in conflict situations.

This is in contradiction to the social responsibility role of the media, particularly during conflicts, to accurately report events in a balanced and fair manner. The presence of the free and democratic structures in society has resulted in the public using the social media platforms to inflame conflict by circulating negative and sometimes false messages.

Although the use of outright fake news is not common in mainstream media, it is the failure of media practitioners to maintain accuracy, report in context, uphold objectivity and verify sources that has arguably created a breeding environment for fake news. The result is that it gives rise to an ‘uncivil society’. Propaganda is also common in some mainstream media, particularly in state owned entities. News becomes fake if any information presented is incorrect or does not represent the facts that it is expected to bear.

Thus, the undermining of ethical journalistic practice, among other factors, can also be blamed for the spread of fake news. Therefore, the pursuit of fake news can significantly undermine efforts of peace journalism. The characteristics of fake news contradict those of peace journalism in many ways, some of which are indicated below.

Comparing peace journalism and fake news

| Peace Journalism | Fake news |
|----------------------------------|--|
| It is truth oriented | Deliberate and misleading information Focuses on propaganda |
| Oriented towards a peace process | Provokes outrage and reinforces prejudice |
| People-centred | Supports the ‘us’ and ‘other’ |
| Solution- driven | Seeks the interest of others. |

As indicated earlier, fake news undoubtedly has a corrosive effect on society, as it can mislead people by propagating messages which manipulate public perceptions. In this view, criticism has been laid on people who spread fake news, as well as the journalists who cover conflicts while emphasising polarising views, violence, sensationalising the coverage and oversimplifying the root causes of conflict.

This distorts reality and compromises their professional and ethical standards. Instead of advancing a peace agenda in conflict situations, fake news propels conflict in various ways. Therefore, the ever-increasing tendency of media-instigated violence and the call for peace during all forms of conflicts have seen advocates advancing peace journalism as an alternative model for conflict reporting. In the main, peace journalism advocates for accuracy, fairness and balance in news reporting. On that note, it is thus essential to deliberate on the characteristics of peace journalism.

Peace journalism

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, p. 5) define peace journalism as a process

“when editors and reporters make choices, about what to report and how to report it, which creates opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent actions and develop positive responses to conflict”.

Peace journalism is further perceived as “an alternate professional paradigm for the journalists to enable them to view, interpret, source and narrate conflicts in ways that seek non-violent responses in society” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2012). From the definitions given above, we realise that peace journalism assumes characteristics that challenge the principles of war journalism. On the one hand, war journalism focuses on violent events and propaganda, while on the other hand, peace journalism focuses on the peace process and is oriented towards the truth (Rodney-Gumede, 2012; 2015; 2016). Lynch and Galtung (2010) noted that war journalism focuses on the “us versus them” approach and aimed at violence and the final victor, while peace journalism revolves around conflict-orientated analysis of the causes of conflict and aims to find solutions to that. Mogwethu (2011, p. 247) argues that peace journalism is one that “encourages conflict analysis and non-violent responses in society”. It is perceived as an approach that provides “a set of tools, both conceptual and practical, with the aim of equipping journalist to offer better public service” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005, p. 5). Peace journalism is characterized by its orientation towards a peace process, truth, people and solution (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Peace journalism rather advocates for framing stories in ways which encourage investigating the underlying causes of conflicts, analysing the conflicts, as well as reporting them in certain ways which “create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, peace journalism supports the truth and it is an ethical expectation of journalists to report truthfully the facts they encounter.

If peace journalism is oriented towards the truth and not propaganda, it is appropriate for one to conclude that, in the era of post-truth, the efforts towards peace journalism can be heavily undermined. This is further compounded by the rise of fake news or propaganda. Because ‘fake news’ is not truth oriented, it has the potential to influence public opinion and behaviour in ways that support conflict and not peace. In this view, the discussion that follows highlights the role of the media in conflict and peace building

The role of the media in conflict and peacebuilding

Prior to discussing the role of the media in this regard, it is important to first of all understand what we mean by conflict and peace. Conflict is defined as the struggle among individuals or groups, over issues such as power, claims to status, values and resources (Goodhand & Humle, 1999), to mention a few. Thompson (2007) notes that media incite conflict in society by pronouncing offensive remarks based on ethnic differences, for instance. The reason for the conflicting parties is often to assert one’s claims over those of others. The post-election crisis of Zimbabwe indicates how individuals and groups struggled for power, with political parties pursuing agendas which would enable them to control resources.

The notion of peace is on the other spectrum and is conceived as advocating for efforts towards addressing the fundamental causes of conflicts. The media have also made efforts to push peace and security on the global agenda.

An important role of the media is to provide objective information to the citizens of the country. The nature of the contemporary society is such that the public relies on the media for information on the socio-political platform. Among other issues, the electorate gets information about the electoral process, national and foreign policies, as well as international developments. This shows how the public relies on the media to make informed decisions. From the agenda setting theory described earlier, we can argue that the media do play a role in reporting issues of conflict and peacebuilding.

Thus, the media can thus instigate conflict or violence, while at the same time it can also arbitrate for peace. In this view, Bratic (2006) argues: “if the media is often found to support forces that lead to violent conflicts, it should also have power to support forces to peace”. This highlights the “double edged sword” nature of the media, whereby on one end, the media can act as weapons of conflict and war, while on the other, they can in fact mediate for peace. The ‘information failures’ of the media in providing timely and credible information can become a major contributor in escalating conflict. Similarly, the constructing and reinforcements of simplistic and negative portrayals of others in the media may contribute to conflict. If used responsibly, the media can create well-informed societies which respect human rights and liberties, yet in dictatorial societies, the media often become dangerous devices aimed at spreading misinformation and manipulating public opinion. An important question to ask at this point is, to what extent are the media reports instigating conflict and violence? In most African countries, the media have been perceived as perpetrating violence, especially before, during and after elections.

A recent example of post-election violence occurred in the Zimbabwe’s 2018 elections, where six citizens were killed by the country’s military, following reports that the opposition party MDC had won the elections. This unfortunate event clearly indicates that the effects of the media on society cannot be undermined. During and after elections in Zimbabwe, the local and international media served as sources from where the public gathered whether the election was legitimate or not, whether it was declared free and fair by the observing bodies. In order to achieve this, the media presented interpretive frames which led to the public making conclusions regarding the fairness of the election. The state-owned media reported that the ZANU PF had won the elections, while other forms of media reported that the election had been rigged, which saw the populace protesting in the streets of the capital city Harare, thereby leading to the tension between the supporters of the two main opposition parties. Following that, the media instigated violence by showing graphic pictures of the members of the public being attacked by the military officials while they were exercising their human rights. The reprisal attacks allegedly from the aggrieved ZANU PF officials led to more violence which resulted in the brutal death of some ordinary citizens.

Essentially, we could argue that what caused this post-election violence was fake news: that the opposition party MDC had allegedly won the election, yet officially, the result of the election was not yet announced. In line with this assertion, fake news can also be seen as news that does not represent ‘facts’ or ‘truth’. However, it has to be noted that the legitimacy of the election was also contested, as it was alleged that the election was ‘stolen’ by the ZANU PF. The fake news led the supporters of the opposition MDC to prematurely celebrate their victory, which then turned into violent behaviours and the military was discharged to disperse the public from the streets. On that note, we discuss the concept of fake news in Africa.

Fake news in Africa

The idea of fake news is not a new phenomenon in the African context. For a very long time, the news media in Africa have struggled on the credibility index. One of the reasons is that the news media have been used for propaganda and as a mouthpiece for repressive governments. Ogola (2017) argues that “the idea of a post-truth era in Africa, which by implication, presupposes the existence of an era in which truth was self-evident, is folly”. He further asserts that the post truth era is anything but new within the African context (Ogola, 2017). Thus, the idea of fake news cannot be treated as a new concept, but an idea that has of late become very pronounced due to various reasons. Bajo (2019) mentions four factors that have contributed to the growth of fake news in Africa, namely:

- The constant presence of mobile phones which have led to mass availability of instant communication channels
- ‘Dizzying’ growth in access to the internet- Africa has seen the doubling of the numbers of users and of the internet penetration.
- Youthfulness of the continent, which means that half of the population is below the age of 18 and the propensity to share fake news is high.
- The frequency with which political actors are trying to instrumentalise ethnic, religious and cultural issues.

Bajo (2019) further argues that the growth of the digital environment in Africa has led to the rise of fake news, which has taken the form of hoaxes, rumours, propaganda and misinformation. Explicit but manipulated photographs of extreme violence have been shared on digital platforms and in many instances led to violence between ethnic groups (Bajo, 2017). Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018) are also of the view that disinformation in Africa has been characterised by extreme speech in some cases inciting racism and violence. A case in point is the circulation of xenophobic images in South Africa via WhatsApp, which led to sporadic xenophobic attacks. Fake political news has also been shared via social media to discredit other political parties. Basson (2018) states that misinformation campaigns are also popularly used in advancing political agendas and these scenarios have, in some countries, forced governments to embark on some control measures of restricting online spaces. For instance, in Egypt, Togo, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Zimbabwe, the governments were once forced to temporarily shut down the internet, in an effort to contain the politically influenced misinformation.

This phenomenon (fake news) is especially common towards or during elections, in both the global north and south. Along with bots, fake information is inserted or sometimes leaked with genuine information, often by groups and individuals intending to advance their agendas. The use of bots or automated accounts is playing the centre stage in setting the news agenda by amplifying fake news and false information (UNESCO,2018).

A case in point is that of the then Nigerian Presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar. Soon after his confirmation as a candidate for the 2019 Presidential election, a fake Twitter account was created in his name, where he allegedly posted a message in which he thanked the “Association of Nigerian Gay Men (ANGAM)” for supporting him. The message further claimed that if he won the elections, he was going to scrap the controversial anti-gay legislation which was endorsed by the former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2014. This piece of misinformation was meant to undermine Abubakar’s presidential aspirations, especially in the face of many Muslim and Christian followers who support the anti-gay legislation. Another popular case from the north is during the 2016 US Presidential election, where voters were targeted by fake information on social media, alleging that Hillary Clinton had died, while the other messages alleged that the election date had been changed. It is thus evident that the proliferation of fake news is mainly intended to manipulate the unsuspecting online public sphere. UNESCO (2018) indicated that dis- and misinformation is becoming a global crisis affecting societies in general, as well as the journalistic fraternity in particular. In this view, social media platforms have become the battle grounds and tools used for the spread of political misinformation.

Although not much research has been done on fake news in the African context, some research has shown that Africans are generally exposed to fake news more than Americans. In their findings, Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018) explain how participants felt they experienced a high degree of exposure to misinformation and contributed often unknowingly to its spread. Their research also found that participants were exposed to fake political stories, which some have argued to have consequences for democratic processes in Africa.

One of the downsides of fake news is how they undermine legitimate news and threaten the notion of truth, while at the same time eroding trust. This is toxic for the mainstream media as well. Essentially, fake news also builds and actually feeds on already existing divisions in communities, especially people of different political affiliations. The worst-case scenarios to result from such divisions include violence, deaths and the fuelling of hate speech.

“The spread of fake news in Africa has been blamed for igniting ethnic violence, sowing confusion among voters and even causing currency fluctuations” (BBC Africa, 2018). Because of false information, citizens sometimes make irrational decisions which are not based on facts. Despite understanding some of the consequences of spreading false news, it is clear that the ordinary citizens understand this only on a conceptual level and they do not necessarily consider the bigger picture, for instance, electoral manipulation and the threat to democracy.

The low levels of digital literacy, particularly in the rural Kenya and Nigeria, often make citizens believe everything they see on Facebook (which, according to them, is synonymous with the internet), then they begin to spread the false information (BBC Africa, 2018). Those who share the news find it to be socially validating, especially when they are the first to break the news to their friends on Facebook or WhatsApp groups, so the idea of verifying the information before sharing it is not important to them (BBC Africa, 2018). This way, people also find a way of entertaining themselves with fake news, despite knowing that it is false information.

In the main, it is a fact that fake news is crippling the role of the media in enhancing democracy. Sibanda (2019) argues that fake news is literally disintegrating the pillars of democracy in the society, with citizen journalism taking the centre stage in the circulation of false information. Arguing on the notion of democracy in the era of disinformation, Sibanda (2019) reiterated:

... instead of enhancing democracy, all this information - the fake stories, the disinformation - is actually working against us, and the media is no longer able to play its intended role which is to educate, inform and entertain, because how do you educate your readership or your listeners when you are dealing with false information. What you are instead doing is raking up emotions, you are denying people a chance to critically engage with issues, because the starting point is not solid as it were... So as a result, its taking away from the intended purpose of democracy where you are supposed to make informed decisions. How do you make informed decisions, when you are being informed by lies, as it were.

The above sentiments clearly indicate the fact that despite bringing in some opportunities, the advent of social media is also, to some extent, undermining democratic processes, as well as the credibility of the media, as some citizens go on a mission to deliberately disinform the society.

Contextualising fake news: the case of Zimbabwe during crises

The effects of fake news are particularly evident when there is a crisis, which is characteristic of many African countries. Zimbabwe is not spared by the phenomenon, especially as the country is embroiled in a serious economic turmoil: rising inflation, no electricity, increasingly high prices of fuel and other basic goods under the Mnangagwa administration. In the face of all these, fake news has gained an unprecedented appeal continues to thrive, while inducing panic and fear among citizens, a situation which has forced the government, several times to cut off internet access so as to shut down social media and the now dubbed “tsunami of fake news” (Mare, 2018).

In the context of Zimbabwe, digital platforms have been celebrated for democratising public discourse and in the process, expanding sources of information for citizens (Mare, 2018). This is in direct contrast to an era where laws were enacted to stifle debate and decapitate journalists from fulfilling their mandate. However, despite the opening up of more platforms for public deliberations, digital platforms have also resulted in negative consequences.

Although fake news has presented itself in different forms in Zimbabwe, it has mainly become prevalent on political matters. Online platforms have arguably assumed an integral role in political processes. For some, online platforms have contributed to the further polarisation of politics in Zimbabwe. Various sources concur that false news/information became more prevalent during and after the 2017 military intervention in governance processes (Mungendi & Ndlovu, 2018; Moyo, 2018; Mberi, 2019). Information from unverified sources was shared on digital platforms and this led to panic, fear and anxiety among citizens. False information led to the political attacks on opposition parties in the lead up to 2018 elections. It is also believed that President Mnangagwa paid pro-government commentators on social media to defend the new administration and attack opponents online (Freedom House, 2018).

According to Moyo (2018), the spread of fake news is also a sign that the mainstream media are not engaging in the act of verification. In the quest to publish first, the mainstream media have also contributed to the spread of fake news. Moyo (2018) contends that false documents bearing logos of political parties have been shared on social media to push a particular political agenda. These documents gained popularity and credibility after they were circulated by mainstream media. Of importance to note is the fact that most of the political claims circulated via social media have been proven false and some found to be misleading and inconclusive. For instance, the ruling and opposition political parties allegedly used manipulated

images of rallies from the past, or from totally different contexts, to project the false impression of overwhelming support. Supporters of the MDC-Alliance, which shares the red colour with South Africa's Economic Freedom Fighters EFF, have been sharing doctored images of EFF rallies – and claiming them as their own – to give the impression of large crowds, according to journalists I interviewed in Harare (Moyo, 2018).

In view of the above, Moyo indicated the need to guard against social media abuse and essentially, the undermining of democratic processes. In an effort to fight the proliferation of fake news, the Zimbabwean government approved the Cyber Security Bill, as a way to ensure that the “internet and related technologies are used for the good of society, not to violate national security” (Mutsvangwa, 2019). The media and civil society organisations became concerned that this law would allow the government to intercept communications without court warrants, which is a threat to democracy and a breach of human rights. On that note, we discuss what the media can do to mitigate the influence of fake news, while at the same time promoting ethical journalism, which basically entails going back to the basics of the profession of journalism.

Curbing the influence of fake news

In order to pursue the mandate of peace journalism in an era of fake news or post-truth, it is of paramount importance that journalists reconnect with the basics of good and ethical journalism. One of the essential principles of ethical journalism is truth. Peace journalism leans on the truth and provides an opportunity for journalists to report the truth, which in this instance will require fact-checking, objectivity and reporting stories in their right context. Fact checking in journalism will ensure that truth telling and truth seeking assume their rightful place in the

practice (Graves et al., 2015). Through accurate reporting, the media can be able to pursue its watchdog role in society. The truth, reported in its right context, will not steer up conflict, but will create an environment for progressive debates and informed public opinion.

The media have a mandate to facilitate peace initiatives, particularly in conflict zones. One way in which the media can contribute towards this is through credible reporting, presenting fair and balanced opinions, as well as democratising the communication channels amongst the conflicting parties. In the Zimbabwean situation, the media have reported that the clergy had made efforts to bring the main opposition parties for a dialogue, with the aim of consolidating the current power struggles during the post-election phase.

In order to pursue peace journalism in an era of fake news, newsrooms need not rely solely on artificial intelligence to verify the authenticity of stories. The human factor still plays a critical role in ensuring the accuracy of stories. Thus, the basics of good journalism require that journalists constantly double check and verify the reliability of their sources. Further the training of journalists, particularly amateur journalists, will go a long way in addressing the problem of fake news. Through training and continuous professional development, journalists will be well equipped to practice responsibly and ethically. Journalists will know how to deal with citizen journalism, a concept that has presented peculiar challenges to mainstream journalism.

Second day journalism can also be a viable response to the need for being the first to report a story. This may be an unpopular approach, but it is necessary in order to avoid the spread of fake news or even misrepresenting facts. Berryhill (n.d.) maintains that second day journalism can still allow one to provide a lead story. This can be done by “approaching the story differently. Either you emphasise something that hasn’t been emphasised or find something new that can be used as the lead” (Berryhill, n.d). This approach can be used in curbing the effects that come with the need to report the story first (breaking news). Last but not least, newsrooms can also diversify their sources of income such that there is no over-reliance on online traffic to generate income.

In the main, what we are advocating for is conflict-sensitive and non-violent kind of reporting. Reflecting on how some journalists report on conflict issues clearly indicates their lack of conflict-sensitive reporting skills. Indeed, not many journalists have received training in conflict reporting, meaning that they are not well-equipped to function in conflict zones where they report on issues which might compromise societal peace. As part of efforts to advocate for peace journalism, several countries like Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe endeavoured to engage journalists, training them how to report conflict related issues. In Kenya, the Peace Journalism Foundation (PJF) conducted trainings for journalists in the build-up to the country’s 2013 elections.

In Zimbabwe, towards the country’s 2013 elections, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), in partnership with the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA)

also mobilised journalists to attend their workshops in which they aimed at equipping them with the essential conflict-sensitive reporting skills. Perhaps this contributed to the non-violent environment in which the 2013 elections were conducted. In Nigeria, the 2015 elections were regarded as more peaceful than the previous one, in which more than 800 people were reportedly killed during the electoral violence. Towards the 2015 election, the journalists attended peace journalism training, with the aim of avoiding a repeat of the 2011 violent elections. The instances described above bear testimony to the importance of emphasising peace journalism (Cramer, Goodhand & Morris, 2016; Schoemaker & Strelau, 2014; Deane, 2013).

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have argued about how fake news is framed in ways which accelerate certain perspectives or political ideologies, thereby instigating violence in society. Essentially, we highlighted how the mainstream journalists are also tapping into the fake news bandwagon, thereby moving away from the basics of ethical journalism which includes verifying facts, as well as being truthful and objective. In the process, it is the unsuspecting ordinary citizen, hungry for news, especially during conflict, who is misinformed and eventually made to make uninformed decisions. The result is often conflict, as people often react and act according to the ‘half baked’ information presented to them by the media. The point therefore is, as argued earlier, that the media have the responsibility to desist from instigating conflict and violence, and rather focus on consciously enhancing their capacity for conflict-sensitive reporting. The fact therefore is to emphasise peace journalism in all aspects, ranging from the curriculum for the prospective journalists, as well as in the media institutions themselves.

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Journalists' safety in conflict zones: protecting the profession, protecting yourself

Hugh Ellis

As a journalist in an armed conflict zone, protecting your own and your colleagues' safety is essential.

In this chapter I argue that, while safeguarding oneself always has personal aspects, successfully protecting journalists' safety is primarily a *collective* undertaking. The news organisation, the content creation team, and organisations representing the media industry, must all be involved in the enterprise of keeping journalists safe. This collective effort should not just include and support news organisations' permanent staff, but also stringers and freelancers (and other independent journalists such as bloggers), who often take the greatest risks in covering conflict.

Furthermore, women and gender-non-conforming journalists are also in particular danger and the media industry should take steps to ensure that these marginalised newsmakers receive greater support and advocacy.

How safe are journalists?

Alas, the most obvious answer to this question appears to be, 'not very safe at all'. According to the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s *Global Report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* (1997):

- Worldwide, a total of 530 journalists were killed on the job from 2012 to 2016.
- The majority of these – 131 – were killed in the Arab world and North Africa, with the on-going civil wars in Syria and Libya accounting for much of this carnage.
- despite a notable decrease in the five years from January 2012 to December 2016, Africa

nevertheless recorded a total of 73 journalists killed in the line of duty.

- Impunity for the murder, mistreatment and harassment of journalists remains a serious issue, with 9 out of every 10 cases reported to State judicial authorities worldwide remaining unresolved.
- Digital security – including the prevention of unauthorised access to data, safeguarding of digital whistle-blowers and defence against theft of journalists’ online identities – has become an increasing concern.
- Women journalists face a number of unique threats, on top of those faced by journalists regardless of sex or gender. However, they often play a unique role in conflict situations, and their contributions, regardless of risk, should not be underestimated.

What is more, the situation, though it reflects patterns of privilege to some extent, also shows that being attached to a rich, global-North based news organisation, long thought to confer a measure of protection, is no longer an absolute guarantee of a journalist’s safety. However, being an actual citizen of a large Western democracy seems still to have some benefit.

The case of three *Al Jazeera* journalists detained by the Egyptian Government from 2013 to 2015, Australian Peter Grete, Canadian Mohamed Fahmy, and Egyptian Baher Mohamed, is interesting for what it suggests about these issues.

The three were taken into custody December 2013, and after a four-month trial, were found guilty and sentenced to between 7 and 10 years imprisonment.

Although all served some time in prison, it is instructive that Grete, a white Australian, was released well before the others, and that the Australian and Canadian governments both intervened diplomatically on behalf of Grete and Fahmy. Grete was able to use his relative privilege as a Westerner, and his fame as the most publically known of the three journalists, to campaign for the release of his colleagues.

What does media theory say about journalists’ safety?

Media theory has often approached the issue of journalists’ safety from two perspectives. The first starts of from the point of view that the safety of journalists is necessary to ensure the media’s work as a social actor - that is, a democratic agent informing the public in a balanced manner - continues uninterrupted.

The second, from the ‘peace journalism’ school of thought, essentially asks what journalists are doing to bring an end to violent conflicts and to protect minorities and vulnerable people in conflict zones. Much research has been done on the question of whether journalists who adopt

a peace journalism approach are safer or more vulnerable than those who report mere military movements, or even those who actively take sides in a conflict.

For freedom of expression to be a global reality, it is obvious that journalists, as public expression-gatherers, must be protected. It is for this reason that media researchers Lisosky and Henrichsen state that violence against journalists, and impunity therefor, is ‘one of the greatest threats to freedom of expression around the world’. At the same time, they state, the 24-hour news cycle and the massive expansion of globalised news networks have contributed to more public demand for news from (including conflicts in) far-flung parts of the world, more and more journalists are being sent ‘into harm’s way’.

International law has evolved several key legal instruments that protect journalists in times of armed conflict, so they can continue their role as a ‘public sphere’ through which the global community can be informed about and debate what is going on in these countries. These legal instruments include the Geneva Conventions on acceptable conduct by states in times of war, which state that journalists, as non-cohabitants, should be protected from harm during military action, as well as the Hague Conventions, which specify that embedded journalists detained as prisoners of war may not be mistreated. However, the reality is that such conventions have not always been followed, particularly not during civil conflict, and obviously do not apply in other dangerous situations, such as for reporters dealing with organised crime and state corruption.

A further way to examine the situation, however, would be to talk about war versus peace journalism. War journalism is what commonly comes to mind when we think of reportage from conflict zones - stories about ‘who is winning’ or ‘who won’; vivid portrayals of dramatic battles. Peace journalism is, as the name suggests, about the underlying causes of the conflict, about the sufferings sustained by the ordinary people involved, and about how, despite the current conflict, a more harmonious order may be re-established.

It is hard to establish with any certainty whether journalists practicing peace journalism are safer or more vulnerable than those practicing war journalism. It has been suggested that operating from a specific, well-defined ‘peace journalism perspective’ allows journalists greater leverage when it comes to advocating for their protection. This advocacy, this chapter argues, is an essential first step in securing journalists’ safety.

Women Journalists

It should come as no surprise that women and gender-non-conforming journalists face unique challenges in conflict zones. One of these is an increased risk of sexual assault and harassment, as well as restrictions on women’s movement in some cultures. Cases of women being vulnerable not only to armed factions, but also to their male colleagues, have been documented, especially in situations where the rule of law cannot be relied upon.

However, this is not to say that female reporters should avoid armed conflict zones. In fact

women's ability to enter women-only spaces in such areas enable reporting on the human cost of war, violence, and terrorism, an essential part of peace journalism, which may be difficult for solely male-staffed news media.

In an atmosphere of widespread ignorance on the part of men concerning such issues as women's safety and sexual harassment, it is vital that every news organisation takes an active role in advising women and educating men who are part of mixed-gender news teams.

Impunity

One of the biggest concerns around journalists' safety is that very few murders, assaults or victimisations of journalists reported to State authorities ever results in a conviction in a court of law.

According to UNESCO, from 2012 to 2016, no region of the world recorded more than 50 per cent of cases of killings of journalists referred to countries' judicial authorities being resolved. 'Resolved' in this context means that either (a) the perpetrator(s) of the crime has been brought to justice and been convicted by a court of law, or (b) the suspected perpetrator(s) of the crime died before a court case could take place or be completed, or (c) the judicial process has revealed that the death was not related to the victim's journalistic practice. The 50 per cent figure was for Western Europe and North America, with 15 per cent of cases resolved in Latin America and the Caribbean, 42% in Central and Eastern Europe, 7% in Asia and the Pacific, 2% in the Arab States, and 13% in Africa.

This is clearly an issue where all countries need to do better. Even countries traditionally thought paragons of democracy cannot claim much credit for safeguarding their media if killings of 10 out of every 20 journalists go unpunished.

Media organisations should be proactive in advocating for greater accountability for all those who commit crimes against journalists, no matter how minor. A key component of this, of course, is the multigenerational battle for impartial and independent judiciaries, something that it can only be in media organizations' long-term self interest to advocate.

Prevention and harm-reduction

The question remains, how does one safeguard oneself as a journalist in an armed conflict zone? If you are an editor or publisher or broadcast executive, how do you guarantee your duty of care towards your employees?

The organisation Reporters Without Borders lists eight critical best practices for news organizations and reporters to improve journalists' safety:

1. **Advocacy** for freedom of expression (including for legal protections, the incorporation of media freedom in army rules of engagement, etc., and punishment of perpetrators of violations

against journalists) is of critical importance. Indeed, it can be argued that all efforts to protect journalists start with advocacy for freedom of expression.

Ironically, the recently murdered Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi titled his last-ever column 'What the Arab world needs most is free expression'. In it he argued that free expression was essential to the region's stalled democratisation process since the so-called 'Arab Spring', and that this would not happen without safe conditions for the media. He was never to see it published, as he was killed in mysterious circumstances, allegedly by agents of the Saudi state in its consulate in the Turkish city of Istanbul.

It has, in fact, been widely argued that the abuse of journalists globally thrives where freedom of expression – not just of the press - is absent or under threat. Obviously journalists and media houses do not dictate government policy in this regard, but they do have a critical role to play as opinion leaders. Where freedom of expression is not supported by most of a country's people, it becomes easier for politicians to justify the banning, imprisonment and even killing of journalists, writers and artists promoting controversial ideas.

2. In-depth **risk assessment** is another global best practice. Reporters Without Borders recommends that journalists new to an area, country or assignment, especially one where an armed conflict is taking place, reflect upon the following questions:

- Do I know enough about the place where I am going?
- Is the subject sufficiently newsworthy to justify the risks that I am taking?
- What are the potential risks and how well prepared am I to cope with them?
- Have I worked out a procedure to stay in contact with my newsdesk and my family?
- Do I really want to go and am I psychologically ready?

A newsdesk should also consider these matters at an organizational level, for example, asking if they have put in place procedures and services (e.g. encrypted telecommunications) for journalists to stay in contact with families and editors. They should regularly ask if their journalists have considered these matters, and should make sure regular freelancers working for them are aware beforehand of the risks they will take in their work. They should also interrogate what the organization does to ensure the safety of freelancers working for it. For example, will they pay legal expenses if regular freelancers are jailed? Have they assessed the risk of this happening?

3. **Training and equipment.** This bridges the gap between media training and what might be called survival training. Make sure you learn about what sort of weapons are commonly used by the opposing sides in an armed conflict, and what their ranges and effects are. Learn about the buildings and terrain in the area and the degree of cover (meaning protection from the effects of weapons) and/ or concealment (meaning merely that combatants will not be able to see you) they may offer. If abductions of journalists are commonplace in the area where you are to work,

find out where they most commonly occur, at what times, and in what circumstances.

Consider whether using personal protective measures (bullet-resistant vests, helmets) would be a good idea, bearing in mind that these may also draw attention to you and your team, and that no body armour, etc., is 100 per cent effective. Also, having basic medical first aid equipment, and being able to use it, may prove critically important.

4. Teamwork and supervision. It is important that senior journalists advise more junior reporters on how to reduce the risk of danger, and on appropriate behaviours in the field. ‘Teamwork’ also implies respect for all members of the team.

Members of news teams in positions of social privilege, for example, men and members of ethnically favoured groups, should be made aware of the difficulties that those without such privilege face. What’s more, they should obtain education about how they may be complicit in, for example, the sexism, racism, tribalism or religious discrimination that their colleagues have to deal with on a daily basis. This may be uncomfortable information to assimilate, but having done so will enable all journalists to function more effectively.

Leadership in a news teams and media organisation will need to assist in these potentially difficult endeavours. It is also one of the key functions of leadership in a team working in a conflict situation is to ensure that everyone shares information that can keep journalists safe generally, both within the news organisation and the media corps as a whole.

5. Post-assignment debriefing of all journalists working in conflict zones allows a news organisation to become aware of possible psychological trauma that may need treatment/counselling, as well as pinpoint dangers that can be avoided by newer staff in the area.

Such a debriefing is needed because without it being compulsory, many journalists who finish an assignment in conflict area may assume they are ‘fine’, or simply want to ‘get out’ of a situation and never speak about it again, and this may serve to hide psychological trauma, as well as mean that lessons valuable to safeguarding other journalists in the field are lost.

This debriefing ‘service’ is a vital one, and should be offered not only to full-time staff members of a news organisation, but also freelancers, stringers and ‘fixers’ working independently but submitting or organising content for a news outlet.

6. Ensuring digital security, including protection for whistle-blowers, prevention of hacking and safeguarding journalists’ digital identities, has become an issue of conservable importance. Journalists, in fact, ignore it at their – and their sources – peril.

Confidential sources must be able to know that their personal data is safe. Many journalists are bad at safeguarding data on their phones and computers, and the situation is exacerbated in a

conflict zone, where returning to a location to retrieve a lost mobile phone, for example, may not be possible, and computers may have to be left behind in the midst of a hasty evacuation.

At the very least, journalists and news organisation should ensure that all email communications are encrypted – a range of proprietary and open-source encryption software can now be obtained relatively easily – that important documents are password protected – a feature available in software such as Adobe Acrobat – and that passwords are changed at regular intervals. This kind of security should also be applied to one's personal communications. Cases of journalists' families being traced and targeted are by no means uncommon. Journalists should also implement a secure backup system so that important data, including photo, sound and video footage, cannot be destroyed through breaking-and-entering and other violent means.

7. Gender awareness is an increasingly important consideration for news organisations with female and gender-non-conforming members of staff. Women and gender-non-conforming (e.g. intersex, transgender) journalists often face threats to their safety that men do not.

These include higher risks of sexual assault in certain situations, but also less obvious threats, such as sexual shaming in public discourse (being falsely accused of accepting sexual favours from sources for stories, for example). Doxing (having one's personal details such as place of residence revealed) and trolling (being subjected to vexatious 'debates' and attacks on social media) are common online threats. Women working in certain areas of journalism may be attacked as 'culturally inappropriate' (such attacks often contain a particularly masculinist 'spin' on culture rather than an accurate reflection of cultural traditions). Sadly, some male journalists have participated in some of this harmful treatment rather than protecting their female colleagues against it.

This does not mean that women and gender-non-conforming people should not be sent to report from conflict zones. Quite the reverse. Women and gender-non-conforming journalists have broken many stories from conflict zones that men would not be able to, not least through winning the trust of female sources, civil society actors, and people traumatised through sexual violence in wartime.

However, for women and gender-non-conforming journalists to feel safe, some precautions must be taken, starting with making sure the entire newsteam is aware of the above gender-related issues. Issues such as risks of assault and cultural dynamics should be discussed when planning stories, on a case-by-case basis. The entire news organisation should stand against online shaming of women journalists, including making complaints to companies like Facebook and Twitter and calling for the blocking of users. Women and gender-non-conforming journalists should 'trust their instincts' as to when to stay in a situation and when to withdraw for their own safety.

8. Managing psychological trauma. Reporting conflict often involves dealing with the worst things humanity is capable of doing, and some degree of psychological trauma may be inevitable for most journalists. It is important that this trauma is acknowledged, openly spoken about, and that mechanisms are put in place for journalists to access treatment or counselling in ways of their choice that they feel are culturally appropriate.

Some have argued that many newsrooms currently follow the direct opposite of this approach, with psychological trauma laughed off and reporters encouraged to take a ‘manly’ approach of ‘grinning and bearing it’ and getting on with the job at hand. According to Reporters Without Borders, studies have shown that such an approach, while it might seem to save resources, is ultimately harmful for an organisation, leading to burnout and absenteeism among journalists, and higher turnover of both full time staff and regular stringers/ freelancers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When I presented this paper at a workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, one journalist in the audience remarked that, in his opinion, ‘some stories are worth dying for’. Others were less convinced that this was the case.

At least, news organisations should not assume that every journalist is ready to die for his or her story, and should do as much as possible to ensure that their employees do not die or suffer injury or trauma in pursuit of the truth and the public good.

In order to do this, I recommend all news outlets take the following steps:

- Implement an advocacy strategy in whichever forums are open to them, stressing and promoting the rights of journalists to practice their profession safely, in order to safeguard journalism as a source of public information and debate.
- Adopt a peace journalism, rather than a war journalism, approach to reporting conflict.
- Pay special attention to the needs of women journalists, in light of the widespread violence and harassments that has been targeted towards them. This should also include training for journalists themselves, including male journalists, on women’s rights issues.
- Make sure journalists sent on risky assignments are thoroughly briefed beforehand on potential dangers and how these risks can be minimised.
- Make sure journalists undertake compulsory debriefings at the end of, or at regular intervals during assignments to identify any potential concerns and dangers.
- Provide for journalists’ mental health, including opportunities for counselling and treatment of any mental disorders they may face. Newsrooms should normalise

conversations about mental health, trauma, depression and other issues journalists' frequently face.

- Provide equipment and training as necessary to journalists entering conflict situations, bearing in mind that no equipment or training is guaranteed to keep journalists 100 per cent safe.
- Obtain life and medical insurance where possible, to ensure that journalists can obtain medical treatment if injured, and that their dependants are taken care of should the worst happen.
- Cultivate a culture of care towards journalists and their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Although positive outcomes can never be guaranteed when sending media practitioners into the volatile atmosphere of an armed conflict, media houses, and the industry as a whole, should always do the most to improve journalists' chances of coming home alive and well, and living to report another day.

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Ethical dilemmas of reporting in a conflict situation

Clayton Peel

Abstract

This article presents a summary of primary and secondary observations of reporting in a conflict situation, based on extracts from the experiences of the journeyman British Broadcasting Corporation international correspondent, George Alagiah. Although Alagiah covered conflict situations in diverse African destinations – from Rwanda to Somalia, Ethiopia to South Africa, and Liberia to Zimbabwe, among others – the focus of the reflections in this article were on his two stints in war-torn Somalia in 1991 and 1992, shortly after the fall of the government of Siad Barre. Barre's overthrow had left the country in the hands of rival tribal groups who warred with each other, and even splintered and fought each other within the tribal groups themselves. The demarcations of loyalties were unclear, and for foreign journalists and aid workers, navigating the labyrinth of authorities and their unruly militias which held sway in different regions of the country was a headache which could so easily become a death trap – and did, for a number of journalists and aid workers. The challenges of reaching such a population are manifold. In the course of working in such a lawless environment, the ethical dictates of operation related to use of sources, the filming of human suffering, keeping an objective mind, parting with money to secure access, and keeping a watchdog's oversight over how foreign and local players transacted their affairs were sorely tested, and for the purposes of prompting feedback and discussion, I presented these ethical conundrums to 20 assembled Southern African journalists at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) and African Peacebuilding Network (APN) workshop held in Windhoek, Namibia. The ensuing article captures the responses of the journalists, together with a snapshot of the horrors that Alagiah experienced and at least one ethical dilemma he encountered as he tried to be true to his profession, his audience, and the various stakeholders working in Somalia.

Keywords: aid; Alagiah; Africa; BBC; conflict reporting; correspondent; donor funds; ethics; famine; peace journalism; security; terrorism; Somalia; warlords.

Introduction

I write and speak as a journalist. When engaging media professionals about the practical choices which confront journalists in the course of news reporting – amid the tangible fear and anticipation, the determination not to get the story wrong, the incidents themselves, often

filled with unspeakable horror and tragedy ... When I engage with these sleuths of our time and their work at the coalface of society's trials and troubles, I realise that a university lecture from an inspired don using encyclopaedic language may not be the best conversation in which to discuss the challenges of a journalist reporting in a field of conflict.

I was a journalist in Zimbabwe for 13 years. I learned enough there and then to know that you do not theorise too absolutely on the manner in which situations that challenge moral practice should be resolved. It is for the practitioner, working by his or her wits and informed by a sense of moral courage (and sometimes moral outrage), who must ultimately fashion the "right" journalistic response. Remembering parroted theories from bygone media ethics classes may not cut it in desperately inhuman and inhumane contexts of conflict, where journalists often find themselves reporting. Deploying dogmatic strategies to deal with a live, life-threatening situation may not help you dodge the bullets. The journalist is all too keenly aware of human mortality, and reporting in the line of fire in some of life's most dangerous episodes could land the sleuth in a coffin, their most ethical convictions notwithstanding.

That is why my approach to the session with 20 Southern African journalists from seven different countries on the ethical dilemmas of conflict reporting during the NUST-APN workshop in Windhoek in July 2018 sought to provoke the discussion with realism as opposed to the instructions of ethical dogma. The distance between content in the media ethics of lecture rooms and what may be taken for *praxis* at the workplace is a gulf. Did not Lando correctly opine that in the bigger newsrooms of her country, Kenya, journalists have found a disconnect between the academic and confessional knowledge of the classroom, and the realities that confront those in the craft when they go to the field? It takes some modesty for an academic to accept – but one respondent in Lando's qualitative study of newsrooms found that "[a]cademic institutions' approach to ethics is misguided. Most of them teach about [the] ideal situation and not the application of ethics in the real working environment" (Lando, 2013, p. 23). Some have even found Johan Galtung's "peace journalism", a paradigm committing the journalist to an active agency in conflict resolution (Galtung, 1998; Galtung, 2007), as too "normative and advocative, based on simplistic epistemological assumptions", and "being impractical due to inherent contradictions between the requirements of journalism and [the] peacemaking process" (Hussain, 2019, p. 1).

And so, to avoid a doctrinaire monologue in my engagement with journalists, I used a practical contrast between ethical conviction and the reality of the situation on the ground in war-torn Somalia in the 1990s, when British Broadcasting Corporation reporter George Alagiah was despatched there for two stints in 1991 and 1992. It was at the height of lawlessness in a country with at the time no central government, following the overthrow of President Siad Barre in 1991. And so my interactions with journalists reflected on a little of the trauma Alagiah found in that scarred land. To get the full picture, you would have to buy and read his book, which bared all – more, I daresay, than what he revealed in his daily dispatches to the BBC in London.

Here, I was only using a fraction of the experiences of anguish Alagiah and others faced as they came across terror and suffering in the flesh, and what surely must have been the most hideous secret kept by journalists and those involved in relief efforts by international organisations working in Somalia at the time: that a good part of the aid money and food so arduously raised worldwide for the starving people in Somalia was actually being handed over to bandits in order that the feeding, medical care, and other philanthropic work could be allowed to continue – under the “protection” of the bandits.

Materials and Methods

I distributed handouts of extracted material from George Alagiah’s book, *A Passage to Africa*, to the participants at the APN workshop in Windhoek. My objective was to stimulate small-group engagements (five groups of four people in each) so that the participants could explore, digest, discuss, and empathise or disagree with Alagiah and the relief workers’ media blackout of practices where tens of thousands of dollars in relief aid was paid to armed escorts – some of whom looted the food aid even after being paid; fake airport workers; and other “helpers” whom foreign aid workers relied on to “get by” in a lawless and stateless Somalia of the early 1990s (Alagiah, 2008). In this way, active learning and interpretation of experiences of a veteran scribe of international repute could be derived from group reading and discussion of the text. My role was restrained: I wanted the workshop participants to wrestle with the professional dilemmas in that context, and to draw their own considered conclusions. I endeavoured to circulate among the groups to stimulate their focus on the dilemmas Alagiah and other foreign workers faced, particularly in response to the following questions:

1. From p.92, the struggle of journalists and aid workers to “get by” in stateless Somalia by paying armed escorts, fake airport workers, and other “helpers” resulted in some conventional rules of journalism being broken, namely, you do not pay your sources nor anyone who facilitates your access to them; and you do not suppress any information that may be newsworthy and of public interest. Given the insecurity that practically forced these concessions on journalists and aid workers who were under constant threat of death, what would *you* have done in the same situation?
2. In your opinion, was there any virtue in the aid workers’ “diversion” of aid money to pay protection fees to the gunmen in Somalia (pp.96-106)?
3. Was there virtue in Alagiah’s decision to NOT report on the diversion of aid money, due to the aid workers’ argument that it is better to pay, and get some of the help to starving Somalis, than to antagonise the gunmen and get kicked out, or killed, thereby ending international relief work in Somalia?

Results

Group 1 – Generally empathetic and sympathetic with the choices of the journalists and aid workers.

Group 1 were a mixed group of academics (with experience working as journalists) and current journalists. They understood the difficulties of the situation, and why the aid workers agreed to pay bandits, who were the nearest to law enforcement and security in a lawless environment,

tens of thousands of US dollars over a period of two years for safe passage, and to get food supplies to deserving and starving villagers.

But put in the same situation, three of the four group members said they would not pay the bandits money, which was raised to support relief efforts, nor would they pay the gunmen for protection. They would rather pack up shop, and not be in Somalia to report on the unfolding human catastrophe, nor would they stay to distribute food and medical relief to the desperately deprived population. “You cannot commit evil to do good”, one of the participants said.

The fourth group member said she had no idea how she would handle the situation. She wished she never had to report on the misery and terror that Alagiah and his crew witnessed, and she would certainly not relish being a relief worker in such conditions. “Professional commitment to a cause has its limits”, she said.

Group 2: “We have no idea what we would do!”

Group 2 offered an interesting collection of reflections based on their own journalistic experiences in conflict situations rather than on the situation in Somalia, which was the subject of the text they had read. They recounted the incidents and the ethical dilemmas confronting Alagiah’s crew, but then diverted their reflections to experiences of their own: one, a murder crime of passion in eSwatini, where the female reporter was able to survey the ghastly aftermath of the crime before police took the body away; another, a massacre in Zambia of illegal settlers on public land who had refused government instructions to vacate, and defied several deadlines. In fact, the journalist took to her phone, and, right in the midst of the group discussion, retrieved the graphic footage of the shootings and its aftermath as well as her voice-over report for the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation in Lusaka. The footage included the journalist’s interview with an eyewitness who questioned how state agents could shoot to kill their own unarmed citizens at close range in the process of an “eviction”.

“These are not foreigners”, the eyewitness in the footage said, gesturing towards the fallen men and women as the camera panned to give viewers another grisly view of some writhing and other motionless blood-spattered bodies. “These are Zambians. They all have Zambian identity documents. Why would a government kill its own people?”

Grisly images, tragic stories – but none of the journalists in Group 2 would commit to answering on how *they* would have conducted *themselves* in the Somalia situation. “That one is just too traumatic. I hope I never have to be in that situation”, said one of the journalists. Another just shook her head. “I don’t know,” she said.

Group 3 – “We could not answer any of the questions!”

Group 3 members did not appear to have applied their minds to the discussion questions as energetically as other groups had. “We could not answer any of the questions,” one participant said. “But we appreciated the format of discussions and the chance to reflect on George Alagiah’s professional experience”. I asked the group if they thought that Alagiah or any of the others

mentioned had perhaps fallen short of good practice, by not ending or exposing the channelling of donor funding to bandits in exchange for “protection”. “Well,” one of them answered, “that one is hard to say...”.

Group 4 – “Both Alagiah and the aid workers did the moral thing. The work had to continue.”

There was substantial reflection and debate in this group. Participants were aware of the ethical dictates against overlooking dishonesty and not disclosing it where publicly sourced aid and relief efforts funded by taxpayers were concerned. However, relief agencies’ “deals with the devil” in Somalia’s conflict were viewed by participants in this group as expedient in keeping alive operations to transport aid to needy civilians. It was the quintessential utilitarian argument: the good end of saving the lives of thousands of villagers was seen to justify the rotten means of doing it by handing to terrorists the arduously-raised capital collected from people who believed that every penny they donated would go towards a plate of food for starving Somalis. Alagiah’s professional experience has similar resonances with Sorious Samura as captured in his award-winning documentary *Cry Freetown* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu4jWN3B1Vg>). On his part, Samura was caught in between two competing loyalties—filming for the rebels (the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and siding with the West African peacekeeping force, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). To film or not film the civil war became Samura’s wartime headache.

“True, the money was paid to bandits,” one journalist reflected. “But in that kind of conflict, where the food aid could have been looted any way before it got to deserving beneficiaries, we think it was wise to let the bandits benefit, in exchange for keeping open safe passages for the donations to reach the needy”.

On the issue of journalists not reporting on the shenanigans of shameless and greedy rogues masquerading as “security escorts” who fed off the desperation of aid agency personnel and the people who desperately needed that aid, the participants in this group said one could not easily fault journalists like Alagiah who were clearly appalled by what they saw, but at the same time did not want their reporting of it to jeopardize the whole relief programme in Somalia. They pointed to the extracted material that informed their discussion, saying it showed that Alagiah’s moral compass was in the right place when he expressed his moral repugnance, relaying in his book a conversation he had with a senior aid worker:

“But someone should have a go at these bastards,” I insisted. “I mean, you should talk about it, expose them; tell the world that while you’re busy trying to save lives, they are destroying them and making a profit on the side”.

David’s response was the response of an honest man trying to do his job in an environment where there was scant regard for truth and justice. “Look, let’s face it, we have a dilemma,” he explained. “If you tell the world about the level of diversion, you will end up putting people off helping the Somalis”.

It was the first time I'd heard the word "diversion" used in this way. It is a neutral word, carrying none of the moral repugnance of the activity it purports to describe.

All of us, journalists included, played our part of turning this diversion into an industry. The money siphoned off from aid agencies and reporters replaced the pre-war economy of trading. It also fuelled the conflict.

(Alagiah, 2008, p. 96)

Group 5 – "Absolutely not – That is not journalism!"

The last group was the most categorical in stating that journalism had no room for convenient secrets, nor for neglecting to report gross immorality and corrupt misappropriation of resources of the kind witnessed in Alagiah's experiences in Somalia.

"I cannot find peace with it," one South African journalist in the group said. "That is not how I was trained – that's not journalism. I wouldn't do it." So what would you do were you in Alagiah's shoes, I asked him? "I'd go ahead and report the story in the public interest. Absolutely I would." And risk destroying the work aid agencies were doing in precarious circumstances, work which was helping destitute people and saving lives?

"I am speaking as a journalist, not as an aid worker," the South African journalist said. "Aid workers may make their own calculations based on the situations they have to negotiate. That is their own process. We are there to report the story, period. I would have reported the story on diversion of aid money into the hands of bandits. That is my job in a conflict situation. My job is not to contribute to the security of the other parties."

The South African's compatriot agreed. "If we cut corners in our ethical decision making just because we felt certain conflict situations merited it, where would we end up as journalists? Would we not end up saying there is one ethical code for conflict reporting, and another ethical code for other situations? Would that not mark the end of standards of ethical reporting as we have learnt them?"

Discussion of findings

All three questions presented for discussion by the participants at the workshop on conflict reporting in Windhoek could be consolidated into the following line of inquiry, with a summary of the participants' responses given below.

Given the insecurity that practically forced these concessions on journalists and aid workers who were under constant threat of death, what would you have done in the same situation?

The focus groups of workshop participants were not in agreement on how they would have dealt with the two key factors confronting Alagiah and other journalists in Somalia: whether to pay bandits for their own security escorts, and whether to steer clear of reporting the extortion of aid workers, who paid sizeable sums of donor money to the bandits to ensure the aid workers' protection as well as the safe passage of food and other supplies to villagers in urgent need of them. While journalists in groups 1 and 5 would not have succumbed to pressure to line

the pockets of the bandits, neither would they have left the use of donor funding for the same purpose go unreported, Group 4 participants were adamant that the practical reality of the situation required the co-operation of the gunmen, and so they would have to be paid. Reporting on this arrangement to the world's media outlets would not fairly reflect on the motivations and difficult negotiations of the players on the ground. The aid work had to continue, and so too did the news reporting. In the absence of a stable government, a regular Somali police force and army, both journalists and aid workers needed the gunmen's protection to be able to stay and work in Somalia. And practical needs of all concerned dictated that the protection would not come without cost: it had to be paid for.

That the payment of these gunmen would in fact contribute to the treasure chests of whichever warlord controlled the area in which the journalists and aid workers were operating, thereby prolonging the banditry and civil war which made millions of Somalis' lives a misery, was a tragedy which, however, did not remove the practical need of the gunmen's services for the aid work and journalistic access to continue.

Meanwhile groups 2 and 3 did not directly address the questions presented for discussion, but in a useful translation of their own experiences of reporting in conflict situations in their own contexts, participants in Group 2 especially were able to introspect on their reporting of stories in diverse conflict scenarios. These experiences were relayed to other members of the group and in the plenary feedback, and served as useful testimonies of on the job experiences by participants themselves.

Conclusions

It was not the intention of this writer to expose to scorn the noble motivations and efforts of journalists and aid workers operating in a very dangerous situation such as Somalia was in the early 1990s. A reader of Alagiah's enthralling account would likely make some concessions in retrospect as to the heroism of those who braved life and limb to work in those terrible conditions of conflict, cruelty, and deprivation. What this presentation undertook was to use Alagiah's reflections to provoke up-and-coming southern African sleuths to examine where their priorities would lie when faced, as they most surely will be in their careers, with abnormal human circumstances which require more grit than a simple learning of the norms of ethical reporting. In this qualitative evaluation, some journalists empathised with Alagiah, and with other journalists and aid workers based in Somalia at the time. But others stood by their convictions that putting money in the hands of the purveyors of the very insecurity they were now being asked to protect the westerners from was a dereliction of moral and professional practice. Yet such a verdict is not by itself the sum of the exercise. The real benefit of these reflections was in yanking the young journalists out of their comfort zones by bringing them face to face with the abnormality of conflict situations in which journalists and other professionals must sensibly fulfil their calling and responsibilities. "Sensibly", of course, means preserving lives where possible – not least, the lives of the journalists themselves!

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