THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE IN PEACE BUILDING

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CONCEPT PAPER ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE IN PEACE BUILDING

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Jake Lynch defines Peace Journalism as “when editors and reporters make choices about what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for societies at large to consider and to value non violent responses to conflict.” Further, “Peace journalism uses conflict analysis and transformation to update the concept of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting.”

It is a remedial strategy and an attempt to supplement the news conventions to give peace a chance. Peace journalism has a huge role to play in helping societies think about non violence and creativity when dealing with conflict and it can be characterized by five main principles;

- Explorations of the backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation of all sides involved in the conflict, not just two sides as the mainstream media portrays
- Giving voice to the views of all rival parties from all levels
- Offering creative ideas for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking and peacekeeping, exposing lies, covering up attempts and culprits on all sides and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on peoples of all parties
- Paying attention to peace stories and post war developments

Still, the intricate question is whether peace journalism can be wholly incorporated in peace building efforts:

Journalism on its own cannot solve differences but it undoubtedly plays a significant role in conflict prevention. A free and responsible media platform creates cohesion and assists citizens to rebuild their society and to reduce tension – or at least not exacerbate existing division. Conflict resolution Journalism helps citizens live peacefully and move toward democratic institutions.

Should Journalists exercise objectivity in peace journalism?

Journalists, just like any human have opinions. Before a reporter drafts his story he subconsciously forms a perception at the back of his head. This, if not checked can form a bias on reporting techniques. Consequently, this poses the question; can objectivity in conflict reduction be achieved?

Objectivity has positive connotations such the pursuit of truth without fear or favor. The question of whether journalists should remain objective or impartial in their reporting remains both an ethical and a debateable issue.

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1 Lynch, J. & McGoldrick, A. (2005), P6
3 UNIVERSITY FOR PEACE, Peace and Conflict monitor, Peace Journalism; A needed, Desirable and Practicable Reform, Vanessa Bassil, July 02,2014 www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=1052
4 Stephen J.A. Ward, Center for Journalism Ethics, Journalism and Conflict Resolution
5 ANNABEL McGoldrick and Jake Lynch, Peace Journalism, What is It? How to do it?
6 Robert A. Hackett, Expanding Peace Journalism New Vistas for Peace Journalism; alternative media and communications rights,
Many experts however advocate for impartiality, objectivity and clear reporting. They believe that conflict reduction is not served by censoring voices, slanting the evidence, hiding uncomfortable facts, engaging in partisanship or communicating uninformed spin.  

In an attempt toward conflict reduction, Journalists should avoid portraying conflict as consisting of only two parties contesting the same goals, instead try to disaggregate the two parties into many smaller groups, pursuing many goals, opening up more creative potential for a range of outcomes. Further, they should try to avoid the imprecise use of emotive words to describe what has happened to people, instead, be precise without minimizing the suffering but reserve the strongest language for the gravest of situations. Above all, they should avoid making an opinion or a claim seem like an established fact.

**Exploring some of the distinguishing features of a peace journalist**

- Peace conflict oriented – this includes prevention before war or violence erupts and giving voice, empathy and understanding to all parties
- Truth oriented – Expose all truths and cover ups
- People oriented – focuses on suffering all over, giving voice to the voiceless.
- Solution oriented – peace = non violence + creativity. Highlighting peace initiatives to prevent more war and focus on structure, culture and peaceful society.

**Case Study: 2007 Kenyan Elections**

The media is a powerful platform of mass mobilization, a double edged sword capable of motivating for peace or instigating violence. The role of media in the 2007 Kenyan elections can be looked at from these two perspectives. During the run up to the 2007 Kenyan general election, the public depended heavily on the media to play its role as society’s watchdog by monitoring the election and reporting on it in an unbiased manner. Through live updates at the national vote tallying centre, the media set the tempo of public interest as a national conflict unfolded amid finger pointing and showboating by political party loyalists.

Consequently, leading Kenyan media firms created a wave of uncertainty and a sense of hopelessness in Kenyans by giving the impression that Kenya had reached a boiling point. A good example was the recurring headline “Kenya Burns” which dominated the front page of the Standard Newspaper for the first two weeks of January 2008. Similarly, the Daily Nation edition of 3 February 2008 had as its headline, “The Republic of Kenya was a Smoldering Burnt out Shell.” Radio Stations and especially the vernacular stations broadcasting in Luo, Kikuyu, Kalenjin and other local dialects further fuelled tribalism with their unguarded remarks and largely constituted to the post election violence that ravaged the Country.

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8 Conflict Transformation By Peaceful Means: The TRANSCEND Method by Professor Johan Galtung, UN publication, 1999

In the same vein, it’s utterly impossible to ignore the contribution of the media towards restraining tribalism that threatened peace in Kenya particularly post 2007 general election. Noteworthy is the fact that Kenya has long been divided along the ethnic lines and chiefly between the two major factions of the Kikuyu and Luo tribes. It is important to acknowledge the efforts of peace journalism towards fighting tribalism and encouraging cohesion.

The media project under Uwiano platform for peace was crafted in a manner that allowed the media to carry out their mandate but at the same time promote peace. The project infused sensitivity in media coverage by conducting conflict sensitive reporting trainings with journalists from all over Kenya. The program linked peacebuilding principles and practice with media practice in a pragmatic session that allowed for dialogue between the two sectors. The journalists, editors and reporters were encouraged not to contribute to the weakening of local capacities for peace but reinforce Kenyans’ inclination towards peace. During the 2013 general election, the media made a strategic and deliberate effort to approach the coverage of election process not as outsiders but as insiders. This approach changed Kenyans’ perspectives and attitudes towards conflict. 10

So is peace journalism feasible?

As we have seen above, whereas war-focused journalism leads readers and audiences to over-value violence, as a response to conflicts and crises, peace journalism creates opportunities for society to consider non-violent, and development-oriented responses. But is this approach feasible?

As Lynch points out, peace journalism can help to bring about the 'conceptual reform' necessary to modernize the study of journalism, especially when taught to students, thus creating a new generation of peace-oriented journalists. Peace journalism shows backgrounds and contexts of conflicts; hears from all sides; explores hidden agendas; highlights peace ideas and initiatives from anywhere at any time. And what is more, we have seen it work across the globe. Peace Journalism is now a global reform movement of reporters, academics and activists all around the world. Academic courses are now being taught in the UK, Australia, the USA, Mexico, South Africa, Costa Rica, Norway, Sweden and many others. There are many examples of situations in which peace journalism has been used successfully, such as in Balochistan11 and Kenya, as discussed above.

Journalistic practice is continuously faced by many challenges. It is attached to political determinants, economic imperatives, newsroom structures and working routines. It is thus not only shaped by political influences, but also by economic, organizational and institutional ones, and peace journalism is no exception to this, but it is aware of this and works to counter this within its structure. This makes it an effective, self-conscious and ultimately feasible form of journalism.12

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10 Peace Journalism In Post Election Kenya, 14, New Routes 2/2013 by Shamsia Ramadhan
12 http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=1052
Finally, what are our recommendations and conclusions?

As peace journalism shows, there are many aspects of a conflict, besides the violence, which merit reporting, but remain unreported or under-reported because of journalistic conventions.\(^\text{13}\)

Journalism is not just about “reporting facts”. It is about “what” to report and “how” to report, which implies selection and responsibility and hence, high standards of ethics and principles, especially when reporting on conflicts, and peace journalism confronts and embraces this.\(^\text{14}\)

Attempts to maintain impartiality are of course crucial, and awareness of how to counter biases, are important in execution of effective peace journalism. The essential objective is to tell the audience what is really happening by providing them as much context and background as possible and presenting them the sides of all parties involved.\(^\text{15}\)

Peace journalism offers an ethical framework for the production of reports and stories. It also provides hope and positivity to the communities in conflict zones. Thus, peace journalism enables journalism to become a positive force in negative situations. Thus, we recommend that a peace journalism that is very self-evaluative should be adopted more widely by the international press when covering conflicts, as it enables a more balanced picture to be portrayed, as well as providing hope where it is most needed.

\(^{13}\) http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=1052
\(^{14}\) http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=1052
\(^{15}\) https://www.transcend.org/tms/about-peace-journalism
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Contributing Team

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Molly Price (Contributor): Molly is an undergraduate student at the University of Melbourne and has just finished her second year of a Bachelor of Arts majoring in International Studies and German, as well as a Diploma of Spanish. Molly has a passion for international development and has a strong belief that the education of children, in particular girls, is one of the best ways to strengthen international development. Molly wishes to do all she can to further girls rights to education and sexual equality.

Rachel Nduta (Contributor): Rachel is a mother, a journalist, a volunteer, car enthusiast and a Diploma graduate in Business Management. She co-partners in managing Combat Child Labour, a media-based organization in Kenya that fights for the rights of youth and children through documentary films and photography. Keen on education and economic empowerment, Rachel works on various projects that highlight the need to keep children in school and creating youth employment. An avid reader, Rachel enjoys writing comprehensive pieces and is currently learning Spanish.

Sophie Dowle (Contributor): Sophie is an undergraduate at Oxford University, studying Arabic and Islamic Studies. She spent a year studying in Jordan as part of her degree. She works for various projects increase access to education for all. She is interested in gender and education, especially in the Middle East region. When she isn’t
studying she enjoys running, hiking, playing the flute and writing in her spare time. She also loves to travel but still thinks her home country of Wales is one of the most beautiful parts of the world.