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EDITORIAL
A common commitment: communication and the quest for peace

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the phenomenon of recurring conflict has come to play an increasingly visible role in thinking about the nature of peace and conflict, more explicitly recognising the cyclical nature of escalation and the intricate nexus between often artificially separated conflict phases of prevention, escalation and post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation (see e.g. World Bank, 2011). Even more so than before, in the twenty-first century, violent conflict seems to have become one mechanism employed in creating vicious circles, enclosing whole societies – or in the words of Paul Collier the 'bottom billion' (2007) - in a seemingly endless, self-sustaining trap.

From the very beginning of the UN system after World War II, a preoccupation with communication as the central process of human interaction can be found at the root of many efforts to create modes of exchange that would help prevent a relapse into war, foster human dignity, and eventually a global order conducive to peace.[1] As the UNESCO Constitutional Charter formulated it, "since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". This often-cited part of UNESCO's founding document might also be read

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[1] In 1946, during its very first session, the UN General Assembly dealt with the freedom of information. In Resolution 59(I), it declared freedom of information to be the "touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated". Within the context of the immediate post-war era, securing the freedom of expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (and its later codification in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966) is linked to the desire for building a more peaceful future, between and within states, and it mirrors the belief that communication has a significant role to play in this endeavour. In the past decades, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – subsequently enshrining the freedom of expression, has been complemented by various provisions in other specialised treaties. Such provisions address a variety of issues relating to communication, ranging from concerns about the 'symbolic annihilation' of women, of indigenous people, or of persons with disabilities by stereotypical portrayal in the realm of (mediated) communication, to access to information as a tool for emancipation.

as suggesting that wars – and conflict more broadly - have in fact not ended unless also the psychological preconditions that enable wars and their effects have been deconstructed. Even if this was an insight already present in 1945, it has been a relatively recent focus of communication scholars who have committed to considering the mechanisms of and potential for constructive change within the discipline of journalism reporting on conflict and violence. At the international level, during the de-colonisation process, the call for a New World Economic Order had been complemented with that for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), emphasising the importance of not only economic but also cultural self-determination through processes of communication. As the famous MacBride Commission recognised in its 1980 report *Many Voices, One World*, the "key to overcoming obstacles to peace and mobilising the resources of communication for human benefit was to make the public's voice heard by infusing communication systems and practices with the 'spirit of democracy'" (Ivie, 2007:102). Wholly congruent with the dynamics of the Cold War, the call for an NWICO was rejected by prominent Western nations for its critical stance towards corporate control of communication flows, its emphasis on change for social justice and its attack on continuing forms of imperialism. Before leaving UNESCO, and thereby effectively burying the topic within the UN system, the US and the UK had attacked critics of the one-way flow of information as diagnosed by the MacBride Commission for essentially advocating censorship and thereby going against the freedom of expression.

1. PEACE JOURNALISM

In a similar vein, contemporary critics of the call for a more aware, conflict-sensitive form of reporting – most often called *peace journalism* – often allege its inherent contradiction with what is usually implicitly assumed to be a 'global' standard for 'good' journalism, referring to a set of widely accepted standards of Anglo-Saxon traditions and definitions of objectivity, balance and impartiality, which have been largely exported through journalism training, especially in the context of post-conflict countries within the Global South (see e.g. Banda, 2002; Lynch, 2008; Murphy & Scotton, 1987).

Yet, since Galtung and Ruge's landmark study on the structure of foreign news (1965), it has been consistently shown that relatively fixed conventions govern news coverage, these corresponding to the interests of the news-media industry in specific places and moments in time and that are identified with certain structural biases (see e.g. Hackett, Robert & Zhao, 1998). Just as the vision of 'freedom' proposed by the West during debates on a NWICO focused on a negative definition of the concept[2], censure of peace journalism's critical reformulation of some of journalism's central norms is thus arguably based on a shared professional myth of detached spectatorship and a kind of objectivity that takes refuge in journalistic routines and in newsroom jargon. These routines have been vocally criticised for, as Johan Galtung put it, the media's overall tendency to "amplify the sound of guns rather than muting them" (1993: xi).

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[2] This implies non-interference from the state, while a positive conception of the same concept would call for the need actively to create an enabling environment for such freedoms to be meaningful.

Peace journalism then essentially calls for a more honest and proactive kind of journalism, one that is acutely aware of – like it or not - being an intrinsic *part of* each conflict reported by creating a specific type of representation and framing events in a way that emphasises certain ideas about the nature and causes of as well as "treatment recommendations" to the problem at hand (Entman, 1993). Journalism is thereby endowed with responsibilities beyond merely informing its audiences as accurately as possible from a vantage point beyond the conflict matrix. Peace journalism in this sense calls not for an abandonment of the desire to strive for accuracy, nor does it advocate partiality – as the "journalism of attachment" (Bell, 1998) might – towards either party in a conflict. Rather, it calls for more accuracy by providing a better, more comprehensive representation of conflicts and of humanity's commitment to seek for a means of peaceful coexistence and of journalists' role in this process – without their needing to become peace activists or propagandists for non-violence.[3]

If the MacBride report did lay the foundations for the normative discourse surrounding the role of communication to make humanity both more resistant to war and susceptible to peace, nowhere, however, did it coherently theorise or conceptualise such a practice:
While the MacBride commissioners recognized the role of symbols, gestures, language, and images in the make-up of messages, they did not pursue the question of how these elements of discourse can work in the interactions of common citizens to constitute and strengthen cultural investments in peace (Ivie, 2007: 104; emphasis added).

The challenge, raised by the MacBride Commission, to further understand, investigate and interrogate our own epistemological assumptions when it comes to communication and peace is still open and ours to achieve. Media have become omnipresent – our daily lives saturated with media with which we are familiar, while new applications of ICTs emerge at a dizzying speed. Yet, merely having new tools at our disposal is unlikely to make us use their often-cited 'potentials' for achieving a more peaceful, equitable world. It will still be our choice and depend on our own capacities to create a culture of peace that will penetrate into and be sustained by our available means of communication. In other words, it is likely to be the content and quality of communication, not its distribution channels or interaction tools that will make the difference. 'New' technologies have therefore by no means rendered 'old' these discussions of how to harness media for enriching democratic culture and moving away from violence.

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[3] Yet, the concept has met similar backlashes within the political economy of global communication as did the call for a NWICO (Lynch, 2008), which then replaced the fear of censorship by non-Western governments with current accusations of journalism being blurred with propaganda and activism. However, like the Non-aligned Movement then looked upon a NIWCO as a way of resisting cultural domination, journalists in the Global South equally have alternative resources to draw from so as to formulate alternative models of journalism, relying on historically and culturally more suitable models for determining journalists' role in society and their ethics (see e.g. Motsaathebe, 2011; Shaw, 2009).

2. OPENING UP COMMUNICATION SCIENCE TO CONFLICT AND PEACE STUDIES

2.1 Peace journalism - where there is no war?

The role of communication in sustaining or alleviating not only direct, but also structural and cultural violence has thus long been on the international agenda. Yet, many of the concerns that led the international agenda in the 1970s continue to be present, if not more pressing (Mansell & Nordenstreng, 2007).[4] While today most conflicts never enter into the mainstream media (Hawkins, 2011), those that do receive coverage often end up being constructed in line with the interests of foreign elites and interpreted based on deep-seated stereotypes about a distant *Other* (see e.g. Franks, 2010). The tendency of commercialisation and 'infotainment' that comes with it, is likely to lead to yet more focus on sensationalist coverage of violent events rather than on profound analyses of processes of conflict formation, let alone transformation.

The tenets of peace journalism represent one avenue of opening up the debate about the (in-) adequacy of dominant modes of communicating conflict in our world[5], and to open it up specifically to the insights of and developments within the field of conflict and peace studies. In its earliest formulation, the critique that peace journalism levelled against the mainstream reporting of conflict originally focused mostly on the coverage of visibly violent armed conflicts, such as wars. Consequently, this style of journalism was termed *war journalism* as juxtaposed to its alternative proposal of *peace journalism*.[6] Labelling its counter-part *war journalism* may however not have done the debate much service, since it seemed to limit its usefulness and applicability, at least at first sight, to situations of all-out warlike situations, defined as the violent confrontation between nation-states, or at a minimum, armed clashes between belligerent groups. Yet, this may precisely be one of the most valuable insights taken from peace and conflict studies and emanating from Galtung's original analysis, namely that violence is just the tip of the iceberg. What usually remains invisible is the much larger part that remains submerged in most reporting: that is conflict; including its pre-escalation and post-escalation phases, its root causes and backgrounds and therefore also the possible avenues for its transformation. That is where peace journalism as a practice perhaps has the most to contribute: in the phase before conflicts escalate into direct violence. This point can also be deduced from the most widely accepted definition of what peace journalism is:

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[4] For example, while the emergence and growing influence of ICTs risk replicating old patterns of exclusion (Hamelink, 1998; Hamelink & Hoffmann, 2008), intensified concentration of media ownership, continuous pressures on the public service broadcasting model, further concentration in the leading international news agencies, the emergence of global media conglomerates, increased commercialisation, coupled with the reduction of the foreign correspondents of many major news outlets have all but intensified concerns in respect of misrepresentation, specifically when it comes to conflicts in the Global South.

[5] In addition to peace journalism, other normative journalism paradigms have been formulated, including those based on notions of media democratisation, communication rights or alternative journalism (for an overview see Hackett, 2010).

[6] Yet, the deeper insights that inform the peace journalism critique make clear that, in fact, this may not have been the most fortunate choice of terms. Not least, because it has invariably nurtured the critique of confusing journalism with peace activism and thereby exposing its valid criticisms of professional journalism, even within its own paradigm, to reflex-like condemnation for alleged bias and even proneness to propaganda and manipulation.

> Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report, and how to report them – which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value *non-violent responses to* conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 5, emphasis added).

In other words, peace journalism seeks to create avenues both for parties to a conflict and the audience at large to contemplate responses other than violence to conflicts, clearly also, if not most importantly, *before* such a route has already been followed.[7] In this sense, one quality hallmark for journalists becomes "not to advocate what should happen but to reveal what can happen, *including* peace" (Howard, 2009: 4; emphasis added). In a similar vein, Dente Ross puts it like this:

> Peace Journalism is not simply interested in improving the reporting of conflict and in enhancing peace ... peace journalism is an ongoing effort to transcend the bounds of reified practice *to open our public mediated discourse to a more inclusive range of people, ideas, and visions* that *includes* space for voices of peace (2007: 78; emphasis added).

2.2 What is violence?

Importantly, another insight of peace and conflict studies has been explicitly integrated within the theoretical edifice of peace journalism:

> [There is a] strong argument in peace research for broadening the concept of violence to encompass exploitative social relations that cause unnecessary suffering […] (Ramsbotham, 2005: 29).

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[7] This is also mirrored in the many critical analyses of the vulnerability of leading media organisations to propaganda *preceding* the invasion of Iraq, as has been documented widely, also from a peace journalism perspective.

The desired style of reporting argued from a peace journalism perspective then explicitly seeks to address not only the visible effects of direct violence, but also to attend to and analyse other forms of violence including, as distinguished by Galtung, structural and cultural violence. The critique thus extends far beyond the working routines of 'classic' war correspondents. This understanding has also inspired more recent expansions in the current research agenda on peace journalism to include issues such as reporting on human rights, poverty, gender or controversial political figures in public discourse (see e.g. Hyde-Clarke, 2011; Söderberg Jacobson, 2011).

This makes the application of the concept of *peace journalism* specifically fruitful – also in contexts where there is not (yet or no longer) violent escalation, but where 'cold' conflicts continue to loom in a society, especially in societies that have in the past experienced violent conflict and/or are in transition, or indeed to representations of 'the Other' more broadly. This, in this author's view, makes a focus on cultural and structural violence of pivotal importance and peace journalism a potentially emancipatory tool to address concerns that have been on the international agenda for so long. It is also the reason why they should be seen in their historical context, considering change and continuity.

South Africa, with its legacy of apartheid and its continuing struggle to build a democratic, peaceful and equitable society, is therefore a fitting focus for this special issue. It seeks to combine the theoretical examination of the epistemological tenets of peace journalism with issues of its practical applicability to the particular context of journalism in South Africa so as to contribute to the ongoing debate and further evolution of the concept and its operationalisation (see e.g. Lynch & McGoldrick, 2010: 95).

3. STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENT EDITION

The issue before you will start with two contributions that focus on the theoretical foundations of peace journalism. First, Pieter Fourie engages in a thorough and challenging theoretical analysis focusing on media semiotics, in which he sets out to sketch an alternative understanding of peace journalism as a "kind of journalism informed by a world and life view in which peace and respect for human dignity are central" (p. depending on print set), which he suggests may also alleviate peace journalism's vulnerability to ideologically motivated criticism. In proposing to refocus our inquiry to consider journalists' *a priori* values underlying their world and life view (describing a comprehensive set of values underlying cognition and representation), he further suggests that a resulting awareness among journalists of their work as being a semiotic act may be a way of making the profession more aware of the ethical dimensions of their profession, specifically when it comes to the signification and representation of world and life views that may underlie war and conflict.

In the second contribution, Nathalie Hyde-Clarke focuses the debate on the local South African context by reporting the central findings that emerged from a gathering of South African media scholars and practitioners reflecting on the usefulness and applicability of peace journalism specifically in the local context. Thereby, she addresses an important lacuna within the debate: the conspicuous underrepresentation of African media scholars actively engaged in the peace journalism debate and how this applies to specific localities within sub-Saharan Africa.

Turning to empirical analysis of local media scholars and activists, the remaining two contributions address South African journalism and media performance, highlighting different elements of the peace-journalism perspective.

Ylva Rodny-Gumede here examines journalists' use of sources, specifically looking into (potential) changes brought about by the availability of online sources that promise to 'democratise' the access of non-elite sources to the mainstream media, while at the same time posing new challenges to the norms of credibility and representativeness within journalistic practices. Having engaged a broad group of media scholars, monitors as well as journalists, she finds that the use of online sources does indeed broaden journalists' use of available sources – and so also stories that might now actually make the media agenda in spite of elite consensus or more blunt mechanisms of agenda-setting such as information blackouts. At the same time, a perceived bias inherent in non-official sources is also reported within the online environment and may thus indicate a certain tendency to replicate journalistic sourcing routines offline, in addition to a possible decline in first-hand reporting, both of which would not necessarily be conducive to practices of peace journalism.

In the final contribution to this special issue, Wellington Radu, Kgalalelo Morwe and William Bird set out to present and interpret the empirical findings in the context of Media Monitoring Africa (MMA)'s daily qualitative monitoring of the South African mainstream media coverage of various human rights-related issues. Specifically, they dissect coverage of municipal protests between 2009 and 2011 and the extent to which media offered a holistic picture of events, including not only the causes and effects of violence but also the alternatives to violence in their coverage. Their critique of "narrow and partial" coverage, often highlighting graphic and simplistic accounts of violence, is further specifically linked to a rights-based argument, recalling that the nature of our communicative environment not only has repercussions for our lives also beyond the public sphere, but is moreover the site of a struggle for the realisation of human rights, which has been fought for in these terms since Jean D'Arcy's call for a human right to communicate in 1969.

As the authors propose:

> We may not agree on the role of the media in offering alternatives to violence but we may agree that one of the fundamental traits of a democratic society is non-violence. So, if we are to build a democratic South Africa then there is need for the media, among other cultural institutions, to offer alternatives to violence, or at least to report on them. (p. depending on print set)

Normative reflections on the role of journalism in the local, national and global dynamics of conflict are far from consensual; the nature of both conflict and journalism is continuously changing and there remains a dearth of voices from the Global South within this ongoing debate. In this sense, the present issue's focus on peace journalism and its explicitly South African perspective ought to be seen as a contribution to and furtherance of a debate within the context of its historical precedents.

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