

Mass Media and Journalism on the Edge in Violent Conflicts

- Media Freedom or Social Responsibility

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Summary:

The paper analyzes three cases from Rwanda, U.S.A., and Kosovo, in which journalists and media managers directly or indirectly have supported incitement to violence and wars. The article analyses the media's role in the March 2004 violence in Kosovo, the verdicts in April 2004 against media leaders in Rwanda, and the coverage of the Iraq war by American mainstream media with a particular view to the journalism and to the exercise of media freedom.

The cases are analysed to examine if there are any distinct differences between private and public media, and to identify the impact of political control versus audience and market priorities.

Besides identifying the role media and journalists played during the conflicts, the paper also seeks to identify possible de-escalating roles.

By using conflict management, social psychology, and communication theories the article suggests bridging the concepts of media independence media and journalism with a perspective of de-escalating content and conflict prevention. It points to the dilemma between focusing on strengthened editorial independence and maintaining a social responsibility for the media. Since the introduction of media responsibility theory by the Royal Commission in U.K. and the Hutchins Commission on Press Freedom in U.S. in the late 1940es, the media landscape has entirely changed its nature with a multiplicity of different media and media platforms. The paper concludes that there is no indication that state media by definition are inciting more to conflict than private, commercial media. It further concludes that there is a need for renewed research to establish a foundation for the normative choices related to media's independence and social responsibility as in today's context of violent conflicts.

Finally, the paper suggests to base journalism before, during and right after violent conflicts on two key terms – diversity and impartiality.

Introduction:

The mass media has become an increasingly important factor in the formation of public opinion and attitude in the course of internal and international violent

conflicts. Three recent cases – the March 2004 events in Kosovo, the verdicts in April 2004 against media leaders from Rwanda, and American mainstream media's coverage of the Iraq war in March 2003 – point to new lessons for both media and journalists. The three cases raise serious questions about the role of journalists and media as well as about the balance between media freedom and social responsibility in the context of violent conflicts.

For many years, it has been acknowledged that the mass media play an important though not decisive role in instigating violent conflicts. Often, the state media controlled by governments or parliamentary majorities have been the prime targets blamed by international donors and media NGOs. It is, however, my thesis that the journalists' personal identification and the market forces can be equally important as political control to the conflict-escalating role of mass media.

In the early days of the printing press, media freedom was closely link to private media ownership and the freedom from the state to discuss and potentially criticize the rulers' decisions, be they from the church or the government (Habermas, 1991). Media Freedom was, particularly in America and England, defined as press freedom from state control and from restrictions on free speech. In the aftermath of World War Two, the American Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press attempted to meet the challenges of media concentration as well as to protect decision makers in particular, from sensationalism by defining a social responsibility for the press (Hutchins et al, 1947). This was done with the view to increase citizens' access to the media. The commission suggested that the media should be given full editorial freedom and access to information, while it in return must give access to a pluralistic debate, providing the necessary information for the populace to actively participate in democracy, be factual, true and impartial. This became the ethical foundation for the internationally reputed American press and its own code of ethics. In parallel, however, a 'libertarian' model, as defined in 1956 by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in their publication *Four Theories of the Press*, gained ground.

The libertarian theory defined itself primarily in its freedom from government, not by possible purposes for the media and positive benefits to the populations. In principle, this approach to media freedom stresses the right for every person to establish a publication – in theory this also applies to a broadcaster – but neglects the fact that most people cannot afford it and so the editorial discretion lies with the owner rather than the journalists or editors. Furthermore, it does not take into account that the control of opinions is not only an issue of governmental control, but also that of owners. Denis Mcquail (2000) criticises the libertarian theory for identifying press freedom very closely with property rights – “the ownership of the means of publication, neglecting the economic barriers to access and the abuse of monopolistic publishing power” (p. 154).

From a market perspective, the reality is that media and journalism increasingly have undergone concentration and that journalism is measured by its commercial value – in other words its ability to attract audience for advertising or purchasing revenues. By producing news and journalism as a commercial product the pursuit of the media's own interests is a contribution to public welfare and they do not have any responsibility to society than this (Mogensen 2002).

A third track was the development of public service broadcasting. In America, the public broadcasting system (PBS) consists primarily of three hundred and fifty independent, non-profit broadcasters supported through paid memberships, financial contributions from local communities, states, business ventures and non-governmental organisations. Public Service Broadcasting in a European sense was originally an answer to the scarcity of broadcast frequencies and for many years the public service broadcaster had the national radio and television monopoly in the smaller European countries. The goals for public service broadcasting vary from case to case and commonly accepted definition does not exist¹. Generally the goals are:

- Editorial independence from all political, economic and vested interests.
- Universal reach – transmitting to and received by all parts of the population.
- In its programming, it should cater for all tastes, interests and needs, provide quality, diversity and impartiality, take minority needs into consideration as well as strengthen national culture, language and identity.

In many third world countries, particularly the editorial independence from political interests has been seriously restricted and instead of being public service the media are rather state or even government controlled media.

Today the low cost production and distribution of radio programmes has led to a widespread phenomenon of community radios, which often significantly increase the public access, and reciprocally do not claim professional standards in their programming. Together with the enhanced distribution of internet access all over the world, the community media imply that new and un-controlled agendas will rise as part of the public sphere (Cooper 2002, 11-12). Transparency increasingly governs both official relationships and relationships between public and private sectors as well as among individuals (Brown & Studemeister 2002, 26).

¹ One definition is given by Denis McQuail (2000, p. 157), though this is not an acknowledged one.

Brown and Studemeister find it a consequence of the global wired network that society political accountability no longer seems to reside in a fixed relationship between citizen and nation-state. Political responsiveness is less a matter of elected representation than of "...the capability to mobilize various networks of power according to constantly shifting interests."

From a conflict theory perspective, the new uncontrollable agendas are interesting because violent conflicts for the vast majority are "...triggered by internal, elite-level factors. In short bad leaders are the biggest problem." (Brown 1996, p.575). The conflicts are, however, says Brown (1996) and Lund (1996) rooted in structural, political, economic/social and cultural/perceptual causes.

New agendas countering political leadership might contribute to de-escalation or escalation of conflict. Still, however, it is in most parts of the world only, when they reach mainstream media that they involve the broader population. Mainstream media still means national television and in poorer nations radio.

We shall analyze cases from Rwanda, U.S.A., and Kosovo, where journalists and media managers directly or indirectly have supported incitement to violence and wars. The cases will be described with regard to the distinction between private and public media, as well as political control versus audience and market priorities.

In a comparison between these three cases, the paper seeks to identify the role media and journalists play during conflicts but the paper also seeks to identify possible de-escalating roles. Attempts to link peace and journalism have been made since the 1960's. Among the theoreticians are Johan Galtung (Galtung 1998), Kirsten Schwarz Sparre (Sparre 1998), Wilhelm Kempf (Kempf 2003), and others. However, international actors in the field of peace and media have often disregarded these attempts, primarily because they have seen them as a violation of un-restricted media freedom. This article will, however, analyze the cross field between media freedom, professionalism and social responsibility in situations of violent conflicts.

Cases of Conflicts - Rwanda

Rwanda takes an outstanding position in the history of violent conflicts. In spring 2004 the verdicts issued by the International Criminal Court on some of the Rwandan media representatives made it crystal clear that media actively helped the instigation of genocide. The root causes however go back to the social divide between Tutsi as stockbreeders and Hutu as farmers with their different social roles and prestige during the colonial times. This led to a revenge from the Hutu population, who during the colonial period had been ruled by the Tutsi minority and after independence cleansed the state administration from Tutsi employees (Article XIX 1996, 12). The trigger was primarily a totalitarian Hutu based government under pressure. After decades

of single-party control other representatives from both the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority opposed the government. It reacted by pointing to the 10% Tutsi minority as a common enemy for all Hutus. By singling out the Tutsi minority as a different and dangerous ethnic group that wanted to seize control of the country, the government ignored that Tutsis and Hutus had the same culture, religion and geographical origins.

Since the independence, the main source of information for the population had been Radio Rwanda. In the late 1980'es, political struggles started about the possibility for opposition parties to get coverage of their opinions (Forges 2002, 236-55). When exile Tutsi forces (Rwandan Patriotic Front – RPF) from Uganda in 1990 invaded parts of Rwanda, the Radio Rwanda became the scene of several power struggles up until the dramatic genocides on the Tutsi minority in 1994. The government dismissed a director general who for 16 years had been loyal to the government party, because he allegedly restricted government representatives to give hostile statements against the Tutsi. Ferdinand Nahimana, who gained fame in the later process of the International Criminal Court of Rwanda, replaced him. As director general of ORINFOR, he oversaw all media, including Radio Rwanda, and soon more virulent and distorted broadcasts took place (Article 19, 1996, p. 29).

If journalists were critical to the government's handling of the conflict with the Tutsi exile forces they were accused of being traitors (Article XIX 1996, 53). In early 1992, Radio Rwanda spurred attacks on Tutsi and members of the political opposition for the first time (Article 19, 1996, p. 53). Following an outcry among members of the opposition and pressure from international donors, Ferdinand Nahimana was dismissed from his post as director of ORINFOR in April 1992. (Article XIX 1996, 49). A coalition government was formed between the ruling MEND and the opposition parties.

Through their political in-fighting over the next two years, the radio actually ended up with fewer biased and inflammatory programmes. (Article 19, 1996, p. 49). This illustrates that state media in a transitional phase might be seen – not as editorially independent – but as a joint property of the whole political elite, whether in government or the opposition. In this case, attempts were made to secure neutrality between the different interests. The new parties in the coalition did not eliminate the prominent MRND journalists, but sought with limited success to moderate the hostile attitude to Tutsi and a less negative attitude to the on-going peace process with the RPF. It became clear to the MRND and the Hutu Power sympathisers that the state broadcaster had become a space for power struggles and was no longer a mere mouthpiece.

Consequently the dismissed director of ORINFOR, Ferdinand Nahimana, and other members of the ruling MRND engaged in setting up the first private radio station in Rwanda, Radio Télévision des Mille Collines', RTLM, which started broadcasting in April 1993. It quickly gained popularity through its modern music, informal studio talk shows, communication with the audience and phone-ins.

Up to and during the genocide, RTLM actively incited genocide. It spread false rumours, stereotypes, and hate speech but also presented individual persons as opponents of the Hutus and gave instructions where to find them. The President defended RTLM against any attempts from the Minister of Information, representing the earlier opposition parties, to use legal means to diminish the incitement. He did this by referring to the freedom of the press as a guiding principle.

In other words we have a government-controlled – Radio Rwanda – which in the transition towards multi-party elections changes to become a less conflict escalating state media, based on power sharing between the political adversaries, but it is still not an independent public service media. In parallel to the political power sharing of the public media, a new private media controlled by one side of the political spectrum unhindered incites hatred between different population groups.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was adopted in 1948 and entered into force in 1951 has long been the framework in which politicians, commanders and committers of genocide have been brought to court. For years it has been disputed to what degree media, editors and journalists could be held responsible for genocide. This had not been tested since the Nuremberg process following the Second World War.

In Spring 2004 the **International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda** contributed significantly to a clarification of the media's responsibility in relation to genocide. The case (ICTR-99-52-T, 2004) against Ferdinand

Nahimana took place in parallel with cases against two other persons involved in other media – Kangura and CDR.

The Chamber found in its examination of international jurisprudence among others the following:

- “direct and public incitement to genocide” as applied to media,
- The chamber considers international law, which has been well developed in the areas of freedom from discrimination and freedom of expression, to be the point of reference for its consideration.
- Freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination are not incompatible principles of law.
- The Chamber considers (...), that hate speech that expresses ethnic and other forms of discrimination violates the norm of customary international law prohibiting discrimination. Within this norm of customary law, the prohibition of advocacy of discrimination and incitement to violence is increasingly important as the power of the media to harm is increasingly acknowledged.

Among its legal findings the Chamber found that

- The killing of Tutsi civilians and Hutu political opponents after 6 April 1994 can be said in part to be a result of the ethnic targeting for death that was clearly and effectively disseminated through RTLM, Kangura and CDR *before* and after 6 April 1994
- The identification of Tutsi individuals as enemies of the state associated with political opposition, simply by virtue of their Tutsi ethnicity, underscores the fact that their membership in the ethnic group, as such, was the sole basis on which they were targeted.
- The media RTLM was the weapon of choice, which two of the verdict persons used to instigate the acts of genocide that occurred.
- The accused were found guilty with crimes against humanity (extermination).

The international conventions not only permit but also oblige governments to take appropriate measures to stop dissemination of racism, hatred and incitement to violence. The Rwandan government with RTLM had had very good reasons to enforce new programme standards, and if this did not succeed to forcefully restrict or close down the private radio station. However, the leading MRND-party in the coalition government was a driving force behind the dissemination of hatred and incitement to violence. While the state broadcaster was subject to political power sharing the proclaimed media freedom in Rwanda allowed alternative voices like the first and very popular private radio Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), which was used to incite genocide.

The barrier between what John Thompson (Thompson 1995, 15) calls coercive and symbolic power was so to say torn down in the case of

Rwanda. The threat of using physical force against opponents was no longer only a matter for police or military, but became an integrated element in the Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines as carrier of symbolic power for one part of the elite – the core MRND supporters. The 'media was the weapon of choice'.

Probably, the public threats was one of the explanations that broader parts of the Hutu population appropriated and acted according to the media messages, which encouraged killings of Tutsi and Hutu opponents. In other words by the very obvious and public threats of persecuting those who were not with and consequently seen as being against the radical Hutu elite, the campaign succeeded to involve large parts of the population in the killings.

The campaign, however, also ended up killing, dismissing or quietening the journalists and editors at the state broadcaster, who were reluctant to instigate violence and genocide. In the immediate pre-conflict phase it turned out to be impossible for journalists and editors to do anything but conflict escalating journalism. Private media showed the way and the state broadcaster was forced to follow when the genocide began.

U.S.A.

The second case we shall study is the media coverage of the Iraq war in 2003 and how particularly the mainstream American media reported on it. In this case, there was no direct governmental control of the media content, but the conduct of the media was a mixture of commercial market considerations, as well as journalists' and editors' personal identities.

The USA decided to go to war without a majority in the UNSC and just a few months before the time, which the UN's weapon inspectors needed to conclude, whether Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The main reasons for going to war were later proven to be groundless, as neither weapons of mass destruction nor signs of operational collaboration with international terrorism were found. Consequently, the declared war against Iraq was already from the beginning a disputed decision both internationally and internally in the USA.

The reporting from the war in Iraq shows a troublesome bias among established media in the well developed democracies. In a survey carried out for the American National Media Watch Group Fair by Rendall, Steve and Broughel, Tara (Rendall et al., 2003) of six television networks and news channels during the first three weeks of the Iraq War, they found that 64% of all sources were pro-war. 10% were anti-war voices, but only 3% of all American sources were anti-war. Among the British news sources used by the American media, 95% were government or military officials and 5%

were journalists. Though more than 25% of the Americans opposed the war, only around 3% of the sources expressed opposition to the war and only in one-sentence sound bites from the streets. Not a single show conducted a sit-down interview with a person identified as being against the war. The six networks included NBC, CNN, ABC, PBS (American equivalent to Public Service Broadcasting), FOX and CBS, with CBS being remarkably low with less than half a percentage point of its American sources opposed to the war.

The then-Director General of the BBC, Greg Dyke, said that when he was in the US watching broadcast news during the war, "If Iraq proved anything, it was that the BBC cannot afford to mix patriotism and journalism. This is happening in the United States and if it continues will undermine the credibility of the American electronic news media." (Martin 2003, May 2) Ted Turner, the main shareholder of AOL Time Warner, explains that in America "There's really five companies that control 90% of what we read, see and hear. It's not healthy". (Martin 2003, May 2)

Fox TV, which after 9/11, before and during the Iraq war was known for its "opinionated news with an America-first flair " (Rutenberg 2003, April 16) giving the American flag prominence in the studio, talking about 'our troops' as 'liberators' against the enemy. When the first statue of Saddam Hussein fell in Baghdad, an anchor delivered a message to those "who opposed the liberation of Iraq": "You were sickening then, you are sickening now." Fox TV News has since September 11th, 2001, gained a position as the premier network in the American market seemingly because of a strong use of patriotic symbols and a Pro-American journalism (Rutenberg, 2003, April 16).

What is interesting is that the American case and particularly Fox News shows that journalists in well established democracies take side and seem to break their own professional codes of conduct.

The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for the international *Radio-Television News Directors Association* mentions as several other codes of ethics the common values of Truth, Fairness, Integrity, Independence, and Accountability. The code stresses that the journalists' first obligation is to the public and that they should

- Understand that any commitment other than service to the public undermines trust and credibility.
- Recognize that service in the public interest creates an obligation to reflect the diversity of the community and guard against oversimplification of issues or events.
- Provide a full range of information to enable the public to make enlightened decisions.

- Fight to ensure that the public's business is conducted in public.

(International Journalists Network, 2005)

No matter how one looks at the American television news coverage during the first three weeks of the Iraq war, several principles in numerous journalistic codes of ethics were broken. One could simplify that by saying many journalists and editors were patriots first and professional journalists second. Mia Doornaert, in her capacity as President of UNESCO's Advisory Group on Press Freedom, made it very clear that:

Nothing is more difficult for them (journalists – ed.) than to report on a conflict involving their own country, nation or group. National or cultural identification may often be a largely unconscious drive, it is nonetheless a powerful one ...they themselves are so much a part of one of the sides (Doornaert, 2000).

Obviously, there are good reasons to believe but no certainty that market considerations have been behind the decisions of the management to change the style and priorities of the Fox News Channel after 9/11. It proved successful in market terms and other channels were tempted to follow. The president of CBS News put it this way:

I certainly think that all news people are watching the success of Fox ... there is a long-standing tradition in the mainstream press of middle-of-the-road journalism that is objective and fair. I would hate to see that fall victim to a panic about the Fox effect (Rutenberg, interview, 16th April 2003).

The American journalist and adjunct professor at Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, Tom Lansner, is clearly against governmental dictates, but also warns against increasing commercialism:

For-profit media worldwide largely operate on the lowest-common denominator principle, seeking broad commercial appeal to maximize profit. The trend towards sensationalism and exploitive coverage is clear. It is essential to acknowledge that the marketplace's demands may in effect be no less insidious than a government's dictates. Bottom-line considerations, especially in an era of rapid concentration of media ownership, can reduce the pluralism that is a key to an open media by making content no more than a servant to ratings" (Lansner, 2003, p. 12).

The indication of market considerations weighing higher than professional codes of conduct underlines, what I stated in Chapter 4, that it is very uncertain, whether commercial media have a de-escalating role in violent

conflicts. It also illustrates that commercial media's market considerations seem to predispose the roles of journalists².

Feshbach and Kosterman are credited by Daniel Druckman (1994, p. 46) for their research on group loyalties and their distinction between *patriotism* and *nationalism*. *Patriotism* is having positive and emotional feelings about one's country, while *nationalism* involves "feelings of national superiority and a need for national power and dominance." While Feshbach suggests that patriotism or nationalism are deeply rooted in personalities, Duckitt (Druckman 1994, p. 47) indicates in his research that people with secure group identities tend to be patriots, while those with insecure group identities tend to be ethnocentric patriots or nationalists. Druckman suggests that nationalism might be just a more complex form of patriotism. Consequently, the patriotism is commitment – readiness to sacrifice for the nation, while nationalism is the commitment to sacrifice plus exclusion and hostility to others.

Whichever way we choose to look at it, some of the American mainstream journalists seemed indeed to walk the line as patriots, stressing the good case of America and stereotyping the Iraq leadership and its armed forces.

What we can learn from the American reporting on the war in Iraq is that even in well established democracies, the bare situation of one's country being involved in a war tends to, at least in the initial phases, make journalists and editors neglect their professional principles for their national identity. We also learn that the complete independence from the political

² A similar analysis was carried out in Denmark, a coalition partner. The two main television stations, both public service broadcasters two of five larger national newspapers and one niche newspaper a la *Le Monde* were analysed. The conclusions show that before the war there was a balanced representation of opposition and support for the war in Iraq, among the politicians and citizens. However, during the war Danish military experts together with American and British experts exceeded the number of Iraqi military sources by far. The same was the case for politicians, who were the most frequently used sources.

While it was commonly acknowledged, that the available sources on the situation in Iraq might be biased and reports about propaganda versus information were produced, in the general reporting there was a tendency to neglect mention of this problem. As in the US, there was an unbalanced use of sources in the reporting on the Iraq war. Another Danish study (Gulleve & Hansen 2005) shows that in the four days preceding the Iraq war, the main Danish public service television news programme had an overbalance among political and military leaders with 56% in favour of the war and 23% against. In the equivalent Swedish programme, the balance was exactly 39% to 39%. In both countries, the leading public service broadcasters tended towards the attitude of their respective governments. However, only the newspapers could explicitly be seen to take sides – in their editorials, in their editing of readers' letters and in their presentation of front page news – while this by definition could not and was not the case for the public service broadcasters (Hjarvard 2004, p. 100-111).

leadership as in the case of private media in the USA does not in itself secure a diverse and impartial reporting. On the contrary, there are clear indications that dependency on the market has had an impact on the conflict escalating reporting in American commercial media.

Kosovo:

The final case we shall look at is from Kosovo. In March 2004, three Kosovo Albanian boys drowned in the Kosovo River Iber. The main province-wide television broadcasters, the privately owned RTV 21, KTV and the public service broadcaster RTK described the death of the three boys as a result of their fleeing from two Serbs chasing them with a dog. During the riots which broke out in the subsequent days, nineteen people died, hundreds were injured and several hundred Serbian homes and those of other minorities were burned or looted (Gillette, 2004, p. 2). Peaceful demonstrations against the international rule in Kosovo had already taken place for some days. In reports from the OSCE and the Temporary Media Commissioner (TMC) in Kosovo respectively, the role of the media was described as follows:

Without the reckless and sensationalist reporting on 16 and 17 March, events could have taken different turn. They might not have reached the intensity and level of brutality that was witnessed or even might not have taken place at all (Gashi, 2004, p. 3).

While the TMC mentions that other means like mobile phones and other media reports might also have fuelled the violence, he adds that

The factual accuracy, tone and context of reports touching on any aspect of ethnicity are particularly crucial to prevent broadcasts from becoming immediate catalysts for violence" (Gillette, 2004, p. 4).

Both reports stress that the RTK, as the public service broadcaster, was most prominent in its failure to live up to professional standards. It was the first to give a tragic event an ethnic dimension, first to cancel all normal programming and to a sort of emergency programme, and still a degree more patriotic than the others. However, all three province-wide broadcasters based their stories primarily on one source, misinterpreted the source, ignored or misrepresented statements from the authorities and police and first of all presented it as a fact that the Kosovo Albanian boys were drowned because they were chased by ethnic Serbs with a dog.

Interestingly, none of the reports find any indication that the bias of RTK and the other broadcasters was a result of political interference from the Kosovo Albanian government. It was a tense atmosphere, which might have tempted journalists and editors to take sides. None of the reports, however, have analysed the internal organisational processes in detail. The criticism of the TMC concludes that:

RTK management has displayed a disturbing unwillingness or inability to understand that editorial independence from state control – which no one challenges – is associated with certain responsibilities, especially in conflict situations. These responsibilities include minimizing the inflammatory emotional content of broadcasting. Management's resistance to this ethical principle is especially surprising as it is clearly set out in RTK's own code of conduct (Gillette, 2004, p. 19).

It is difficult to give a coherent explanation to the failure of RTK, which has received substantial international support to its capacity and institution building. It might indicate that the international assistance to media in Kosovo has focused on the editorial independence from the state/politicians, and that the aspect of social responsibility for the media has gone. It is further clear that the Code of Conduct for Broadcast Media as formulated by the Temporary Media Commissioner is very broad in its definitions. By nature the Code of Conduct in Kosovo has been formulated by the international community and does not leave much sense of ownership and commitment with Serb and Albanian journalists in the province.

In the Kosovo-case, we learn again that the national or patriotic identity of journalists is crucial for the media's contribution to conflict escalation or de-escalation. We can see that the state media has adhered less to the professional codes of conduct than the private, commercial media. But, it is not easy to provide an explanation for this.

Conclusion:

What we learn from the three cases of media and journalist behaviour is quite interesting. One might have expected that state media due to political control would be more conflict escalating in their programming than private, commercial media. This is, however, not the case. Among the involved broadcasters is only Radio Rwanda a state broadcaster under solid political control, but as the radio also reflects in its organisation and management the political power struggles within the government and between government and opposition Radio Rwanda turns out to be less biased and inciting to violence than the private, commercial radio RTML. In USA, private, commercial and independent public service broadcasters tend to take the government's side in the reporting on the Iraq war. What we can see, is that this bias is partly due to the patriotic identity and bias of journalists and editors, partly market

considerations by competitors are seen as a driving force. In other words, if the population finds it easier to identify with the government's perspective on the war, the media seem to gain audience by biasing towards the same perspective. Also in Kosovo the editors and journalists did bias towards the Albanian ethnic majority. The most biased was the state media, but it was according to all sources without any political interference in the concrete case.

In other words, there is no indication in the three cases that state media before and during conflicts is more conflict escalating in their content than private, commercial media. In these cases, one would rather say on the contrary. However, the cases illustrate that the journalists and editors link closely to the expectations of the political interests behind the media organisations. As such, it seems as if a mixture of self-censorship, fear, personal bias and patriot identification determines the conflict escalating bias of journalists and editors.

The Journalist's Role

The cases we have looked at lead us to discuss two key terms of particular relevance for media in areas of violent conflict. One is the discussion of journalism. We have seen that journalists in mainstream media of both weak democracies and in democracies with a strong tradition of free and independent media, breach most professional codes of conduct in favour of their own group or nation in a conflict. In these cases, most professional journalists actively support their own side - not only through their reports, but also by mixing personal attitudes with factual reporting. The professional codes of conduct generally stress the impartiality, factual reporting and truthfulness of professional journalism. These demands do not imply that reporting does not reflect personal choices - first in selecting the stories, and secondly in framing them through choice of interview persons, point-of-view and premises for the story. Individual journalists and editors make these choices, and often do it in line with the editorial policy of their given media.

However, where it becomes problematic is if all stories and reports from a given broadcaster or print publication were to reflect identical choices and only one part of reality, the same interviewees, points-of-view or premises are produced. Most media avoid this by claiming a balance of views, implicit attitudes and stories over time.

To ensure diversity and impartiality is important for journalists in a democratic political landscape, but even more necessary as a mean of de-escalation reporting in times of violent conflict. It is a challenging task for journalists to work professionally before, during and after a violent conflict or war. As a part

of a social or ethnic group, they face severe pressure from their fellow citizens and the political leadership. This makes it difficult to maintain just a neutral, professional and balanced role while a crisis in one's own country escalates. This was clearly the case in Rwanda and Kosovo, and it is as we have seen also the case in the USA. Conversely, the international community often wants the journalists to stay neutral and take responsibility for working to prevent or solve the conflict.

We shall discuss in the following the very normative choices, which the media, journalists and international actors have to make during a crisis or conflict. To what degree is it possible to practice journalism without encouraging a discourse of conflict and maybe even develop a discourse of peace, which does not violate professional standards nor is obstructed by the local authorities?

In a thorough analysis of the development of the UK's print and broadcast media, Kirsten Schwarz Sparre (1998) shows how the journalistic understanding of impartiality as a key characteristic of the journalist's role has emerged over time as a result of economic, social and political developments.

In her study on journalists as peacemakers, Sparre seeks not to violate the values of professional mainstream journalism. She rejects the identification of peace-making roles for journalists by looking for the effects of their programmes on public opinion, hereby opposing John D. Downing's (2001, p. 69) belief in the Agitprop model. Instead, Sparre chooses to see communication as a collaborative-constructive process, as a tool to build a shared understanding. She suggests a number of

peacemaking functions which will allow journalists to stay neutral on parties and outcomes of conflicts, appreciated that peacemaking will always be subordinate to the main task of news production, and understands that journalists can make contributions to peacemaking processes in society but are not solely responsible for bringing about peace (Sparre, 1998, p. 323).

It seems logical, but is problematic that journalists should deliberately contribute to peace-making, or that they would deliberately support one political party or person because the election of one of the political opponents is seen as a way to secure media freedom and democracy. In both cases, the journalists choose not to present the events or facts for the judgement of the audience, but instead interpret the stories into a given framework, which is obviously more constructive than incitement to violence or support to totalitarian rulers.

The British journalists Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch question the belief that journalists "just report the facts", the problem being that many people and governments know how to create and tailor facts for journalists to report.

They argue that all journalism is an intervention between the story originator – in this case the government – and the audience – the public. And journalists make choices about the ethics of each intervention (2001).

Their suggestion is to make use of Peace Journalism in conflict areas, in which the basic question to ask before crafting any story would be, “What can I do with my intervention to enhance the prospects for peace?”

The arguments put forward, firstly that journalism affects the events and secondly, that an industry of spin-doctors provides the selection of facts, which tend to bias the journalism in favour of the government or the best spins, are perfectly tenable.

However, in a crisis situation, the accountability of all media is questioned by their audiences and a personal choice to draft stories for the enhancement of the prospects for peace is questionable, and for good reason. In a later development towards democracy, the principles of independent media and journalism are much easier to defend if these principles have also been maintained in times of crises and conflicts.

Howard Ross (2003), Research Coordinator for IMPAC’s Media and Peace-building Framework, has written a handbook on *Conflict Sensitive Journalism* following a conference for reporters and editors, co-organised with International Media Support (IMC). His point is that reliable reporting during violent conflicts requires journalists to understand more about causes, development and ends of conflicts. By providing this information, journalism makes the public far better informed about the conflict beneath the violence, and can assist in resolving it. In the IMPACS/IMS handbook, Howard Ross gives the following definition:

A conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides, but is engaged in the search for solutions (2003, p. 15).

Practicing conflict sensitive or de-escalating journalism might be accepted within media organisations and society in a distant pre-conflict phase, but hardly in non-democratic countries during the immediate pre-conflict and conflict phases. This is seconded by Wilhelm Kempf (Kempf 2003), who is a psychologist and peace researcher:

The feverish search of good and evil that the media engage in once they are aware of conflicts can, in this respect, also be seen as a liberating blow which now releases journalism, too, from the burden of the internal conflict.

Wilhelm Kempf never the less suggests a 2-step model, in which the second step according to Kempf only can be realized in a post-conflict situation. On the way from a war discourse in the media towards a peace discourse the first step must be to work along the lines of, what Kempf (Kempf 2001) calls a *de-escalation oriented conflict reporting*. In a later post-conflict phase he suggests to work with *solution oriented conflict reporting*.

The Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung takes quite a different starting-point in his attempt to define peace journalism. Galtung distinguishes between *war journalism* and *peace journalism*. In war journalism, the conflicting parties are viewed as combatants struggling to impose their goals. The reporting model is that of a military command: who advances, who capitulates short of their goals and what are their losses. For him, war journalism is seen as having sports and court journalism as models.

Peace journalism stands for truth as opposed to propaganda and lies. It is not 'investigative journalism' in the sense of only uncovering lies on 'our' side. The truth aspect in peace journalism holds for all sides, just like exploration of the conflict formation and giving voice (*glasnost*) to all. Peace journalism is a 'journalism of attachment' to all actual and potential victims; war journalism only attaches to 'our' side.

Peace journalism tries to depolarize by showing the black and white of all sides, and to de-escalate by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence (Galtung, 1998, Ch. 5).

Galtung stresses the professional standards of impartiality and truth, an approach that is very similar to Sparre's, in which news journalists should remain impartial and not promote specific outcomes of the conflict.

The key question is whether peace journalism as defined by Johan Galtung in practise is anything but journalism according to professional standards. I do not think that they as defined above are different. Peace journalism seeks the truth; it is impartial between the two conflicting sides, balances between stories on conflict resolution as well as violence and looks to the formation of conflict and to the potential victims from both sides. That is in my view, what I perceive as pure, professional journalism. Only one can question whether journalists should be attached – whether the attachment is to all actual and potential victims or only to 'our' side.

However, support to this kind of journalism will still prove difficult to implement in the immediate pre-conflict, during conflict and even post-conflict phases as an option cultivated and promoted through international support. Substantial assistance, including professional training for journalists and editors, has been given to both private and public media in Kosovo since 1999. Yet, like the failure during the first three weeks of the Iraq war by professional

American journalists from a long tradition of independent media, also the Kosovo journalists and media more or less failed in March 2004.

Kirsten Schwartz Sparre, however, points to another aspect – namely the norm of social responsibility, which was laid down on the British media in the aftermath of the Second World War.

To keep citizens sufficiently informed about events to be able to carry out their civil duties through the provision of full and up-to-date information with explanation and comment, accuracy and the clear separation of fact from comment (Sparre, 1998, p. 54).

While impartiality for decades has given legitimacy to the journalistic enterprises and prevented government intervention in news production, Sparre believes that a real possibility for change in the way impartiality is understood lies in the social contract between the media and society. While acknowledging that journalists have an impact on conflict processes they could and should make certain that their impact is positive while keeping the spirit of the social responsibility theory.

The public service idea, which largely is connected to the European public service broadcasting system, is an other answer to social responsibility. As briefly stated in Denis Mcquail's Mass Communication Theory (Mcquail 1994, 127) the public service idea implies "Universal service, Diversity, Editorial independence, Social responsibility and accountability, Cultural quality and identity, Public financing and/or non-profit operation".

The development towards new information and communication technologies and the rise of numerous new local media will increasingly fragment civil society and its political mobilizations. This might cause periodic crises for the mass-media public sphere and be exploited by groups in civil society (Downey & Fenton 2003, 189). Thus, there are good reasons to believe that the coherence of local, national and global societies consequently will be diminished.

The notion that media have obligations to society is a contested one, since it appears inconsistent with principles of freedom of expression. It is certainly rejected by libertarian theorists, except perhaps for the view that media should do all in their power to protect and exercise the right to freedom.(McQuail 2003, 46)

McQuail never the less attempts to find some kind of coherence between media accountability and freedom. Freedom of speech and editorial independence for the media are unquestionable rights. But the well documented conflict inciting roles taken on by media and journalists across the Globe do demand an answer, whether as part of pre-conflict prevention or as a way to secure that

media will not be a hindrance to peace building through conflict transformation and reconciliation.

Denis McQuail does in his book *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication* (McQuail 2003) make a comparison between the theories of Free Press, the Press as the Fourth State, the Partisan Alternative, Social Responsibility, Public Service, Development, Critical, Emancipatory, Communitarian, and Public Journalism with a view to break them down in straightforward and coherent theories. Not surprisingly this is difficult but three concepts are crystallised – the *Free market Place of Ideas, Professionalism and Democratic theory*. McQuail brings the concept on media accountability a step further. However, from a conflict perspective there are all good reasons to develop further research in this field.

For the journalists it is not a simple thing to work professionally before, during and after a violent conflict or a war. They are as part of a social or ethnic group under severe pressure from their fellowmen and from the political leadership. This makes it difficult just to maintain a neutral, professional and balanced role without taking side while a crisis in one's own country is escalating. This was clearly the case in Rwanda, U.S.A., and Kosovo.

On the other side the international community often wants the journalists not only to stay neutral, but also to take responsibility for working to prevent or solve the conflict, like we saw it in the report from the Temporary Media Commissioner in Kosovo.

The journalist is under tremendous pressure – in the balancing of professionalism and group identity; working in an environment of tough editorial pressure and restrictions; being part of the mutual struggle for agenda-setting from the conflicting counterparts; and being under pressure from third parties, who try to prevent war and build a sustainable peace. It has been said that during crises it is a personal choice whether to adhere to the professional principles as a journalist or to give in to the pressure from one's own management or identity group. As good as it sounds as difficult it is to consider it a realistic choice.

It was indeed very difficult for individual journalists to breach the group loyalty at the most patriotic broadcasters. The success of some of the American broadcasters during the beginning of the Iraq war was closely observed because it had led to strengthened positions on the market. McQuail, who looks at it from a general perspective points to the fact that media from a pure self interest often identify with a nation, region, town or community (McQuail 2003, 46)

Conclusions:

From the 3 cases we have examined it is clear that it is not possible to state that either private or public media is better and more suited to refrain from journalism inciting to violence than the other. As seen in Rwanda it often depends on the power balance at the political level, how public broadcasters in countries without strong democratic traditions react to crises situations. In Rwanda, U.S.A., and Kosovo we have seen mainstream private broadcasters ignore traditional social responsibilities for the media, like we have seen the public broadcaster do this in Kosovo. Except for Rwanda this has not been because of political control, but due to market priorities or journalistic identities and group loyalties.

Media in a conflict situation is under pressure from two sides. On one side it is evident that changes in the media behaviour and journalism in a conflict situation can be crucial for transforming the conflict into a sustainable peace. On the other side it is necessary to find a balance between media freedom and social responsibility, which also will remain valid and desirable in a post-conflict democratic development. The building stones for mid and long term transformation of the conflict are as John Paul Lederach (Lederach 1999, 77) describes it put in place already during the short term emergency.

Consequently, an approach towards a change away from a war discourse must be based on professional standards of impartiality and diversity in reporting of a de-escalating nature. These values can and should last during a later development towards democracy. They should leave room for new interpretations of social responsibility or accountability in the public sphere without excluding media's potential role as a watchdog – barking at all sides.

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