



## **Exploring Media Interventions in Peace Building and their Challenges**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Informing the mass is one of the fundamental roles of the media universally. This role becomes more essential during conflicts and wars because their interventions are either in de-escalating or in escalating the violence and situation in the volatile areas. Many scholars agree conflict is inevitable and now becoming parts of life. The problem will be when the conflicts do not go on to the predetermined directions. In changing the conflict either of the direction (good or bad result), media play their own role. Peace-oriented scholars described that the responsible journalists in media institutions are aspiring to play the positive role in transforming conflicts to resolution. However, these journalists are facing internal and external challenges. This essay is therefore attempts to discuss the media intervention in conflict situations and their challenges in peacebuilding and peace promotion. By exploring the challenges of the media in conflict reporting, there can be large possibility to use the media for the maximum advantage. While the role of the media in various aspects (including war and conflicts) has been the subject of the discussion on a numbers events and papers, scant attentions have been given not only for the role of the media in conflict transformation\peace promotion, but also in identifying their challenges in the attempts of intervening in peace building.

### **A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON THE ESSENCE OF MEDIA**

In many events that discussion conflict resolution and peace building, I have been observing that the media's role has been given scant attention, even sometimes ignored or overlooked. Commonly, the media has either positive or negative contribution for either conflicts or peace. If it is properly managed, the positive contributions outsmart. I here want to emphasis the prospects and challenge of the media in peace building. In discussing these points, first, I will look at the essence of media in a broader perspective to provide some points about the basic role of media. I will also briefly discuss the relation between media and conflict, the conflict sensitive reporting and peace journalism, and challenges that affects the positive role of the media in transforming conflicts and bringing peace.



In mass communication field, the role of the media has been described in different ways. For example, Herman & Chomsky (2008) stated that the mass media serves as a system for communicating messages and symbols to individuals with value, beliefs, and codes of behaviours that will integrate them into the institution's structure of the large society. This statement includes the basic roles of the media such as informing, educating and entertaining. In the current trends, from the conglomerate media company to a mini-media, all share responsibilities of disseminating credible information to inform, educate, or entertain the public. Through the credible media contents, the mass become aware of what is happening to their surroundings, and they know what to do or how to do it. This carries out so fast. These immediacy and accessibility not only make the media more powerful but also preferable to tell people about new events. Experts, politicians or any other concerned parties are usually approaching the media to get public's attention, whenever there is a new idea or issues or decision. As stated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), by setting the agenda to inform an issue to the large community and presenting it repeatedly through the media, there are better possibilities of making the issue salient. They further noted that the mass media force attention to certain issues. They constantly present issues/objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, have feelings about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In such a way, the media have the power to influence the public about the social reality, like conflicts, health, and other issues.

From this, the role of the media is so magnificent and becoming parts of the social, economic, and political system for most of the countries, (Herman & Chomsky, 2008). As summarized by McNair (2011), the role of media can be presented in five functions in the democratic world. These are to informing citizens about what are happening to them, to educating them as to the meaning and significance of the facts', to provide a platform for public political discourse that must include the provision of space for the expression of dissent, to give publicity to governmental and political institutions, and finally, to serve as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints, (McNair, 2011, pp. 19-20). These functions of the media are definitely playing their own contributions to the creation of an informed critical citizen. In such a way, I want to look at how the media functions in peace building and conflict resolution. Thought, the role of media during conflict and peace period are not necessary the same, I want to discuss the positive and negative impact of the media, and the challenges to the media in building peace.

## **MEDIA AND CONFLICT REPORTING**

I, first, want to mention what conflict means in this essay to link the vitality of the media intervention. It is because to talk about the peace-building role of the media, it has become imperative to define conflict. Most of the definitions of conflict stated it is a



serious disagreement on ideas, goals, or principles among people. Scholars, such as Blackman (2003), Lynch (2007), Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), Abozaglo (2008), Tahir (2009), and Galtung (2009) defined conflict as a disagreement of people or groups or parties who have incompatible goals, needs, interests, beliefs, and values. Galtung (2009) described conflict as a social system of actors with incompatibility between their stated goals. Tahir (2009) also explained that conflict is a state of opposition, disagreement, or incompatibility between two or more people or groups of people, which is sometimes characterized by physical violence.

The aforementioned definitions have indicated that while we are talking about conflict, there is disagreement of idea, emotion or on physical entity. There are different types of conflicts. For example, Galtung (2009) categorized conflicts in to five major groups based on their geographical formation. They are center vs. periphery, center vs. center, periphery vs. periphery, intra-country formations, and non-territorial formations. In relation to the extent of violation, Blackman (2003) categorized conflict into four, such as No Conflict, Surface Conflict, Latent Conflict, and Open Conflict. Unlike the first three of Blackman (2003) grouping of conflicts, the last category (open conflict) can cause clear damages on physical, social, psychological and environmental than the other types. It may affect people who are not involved in the conflict as well as those who are (Blackman 2003, p, 03). The conflicts are visible in all types of classification of Blackman (2003), except 'No Conflict'. The Heidelberg Institute International Conflict Research (HIIC) also made other classification in two main categories (violent and non-violent) and five sub categories (latent, manifests, crises, sever crises and war). On the other hand, the Uppsala Conflict Database Program<sup>1</sup> (UCDP, 2014) has made its own categorization of type of conflicts into three such as war and minor conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided conflict.

These various classifications and definitions of conflict showed that conflict can go with many disciplines. Most of the scholars agree that conflict is common, inevitable and a fact that exists at all level of the societies (Lynch 2007, Reuben 2009, Abozaglo 2008, Tahir 2009, and Blackman 2003). The problem is outcomes of conflicts are unpredictable. The conflicts might escalate and lead to non-productive results or bring some intended solutions to the large community. In these cases, it has become essential to look at how the media play their role in bring peace, which is the centre of this essay.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php>



## **THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN CONFLICT (PEACE BUILDING)**

The role of media has become so essential in building peace or bringing sustainable solution for the particular incidences or conflicts. Media have the power to shape the idea of the public, however, its impact is highly determined by the extent and the way issues of conflicts are reported. This illustrates that when the media cover specific issues constantly, there can be better chance to get attention and then there will be possibilities of bringing some impacts. Howard (2002) described these impacts of the media as a double-edged sword. It can be a frightful weapon of violence when it propagates messages of intolerance or disinformation that manipulate public sentiment, (Howard, 2002).

In the case of conflicts (Pre, during and post conflict\war), the importance of media is in maintaining mass mobilization for either of positive or negative contribution. In that sense, Carruthers (2000, p. 5) described that governments generally seek to harness mass media in wartime to persuade citizens of a war's justness and the enemy's implacability. This means that the role of media is not only serving as a conduit between those fighting and those more distantly participating in the war but also to demonize the other side, (Carruthers, 2000). That is the reason many elites of autocratic states are commonly rushing to control the media when they come to power. Most systems are also established in a way to manipulate the media for their own propaganda purpose easily. As it was mentioned by Herman & Chomsky (2008) that the 'societal purpose of the media is to inculcate and define the economic, social, and political agenda of privilege groups that dominated the domestic society and the state. In order to use the media either in form of propaganda or other positive matters, the interested groups are mostly approaching the media in getting the services in various forms. Generally, the media serve them through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis, and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises, (Herman & Chomsky, 2008, p. 279).

These elements can be used for either facilitating peace building or aggravating and/or intensifying the conflicts. When media have been wrongly handled and written stories in an irresponsible manner during conflict, there will not be possibility of de-escalating the conflict. The people in the conflicts remain in hostile. It means that the media are playing negative roles in disseminating fear and incites violence among the community. A single story will lead to bleeding the mass. As an institution, media are involved in conflicts in the society in a different ways, but mainly through releasing of information and analysis that is based on one side (Wayeta, 2013). He further mentioned that, in that case, media is fuelling existing conflict or creating a news conflict. This has been shown in Rwanda,



Bosnia and Serbia. In short, the media can be used to simulate emotions of the hostile groups that lead to loss of life and property destruction of the mass.

On the other hand, the media can also initiate peace idea and develop positive mind to bring sustainable solution. With the purpose of this essay to look at how the media play its role in peace building, I prefer to assess the prospects and challenges of conflict sensitive reporting. Many agree that as it is possible to use the media for mass mobilization in the wartime, they shall also play their contribution for peace building during conflicts. Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, (2002) discussed that as a result of their (Media) ability to reach and influence large numbers of people, the media carry immense power in shaping the course of a conflict. This immense power shall be used for the positive contribution to de-escalate of violence or conflicts or to stop the conflict by solving the problem. Howard (2008) noted that a reliable, independent and diverse media would inevitably enable democratically-inclined societies to better resolve conflicts without violence. Moreover, according to the emphasis of Melone, Terzis, & Beleli (2002) that if there are fair and accurate journalism and developing media content that builds confidence and counteracts misperceptions to the public, they(the media and the journalists) have potential in conflict prevention and transformation.

It is possible to use the potential of media in creating a common basis and transform conflict in to peace through a variety of ways. For instance, the media can serve the public in informing and educating functions by securing a free flow of accurate and constructive information, counteracting misperceptions, identifying the interests underlying the issues and helping to build a consensus (Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, 2002, p. 3)". In other words, the content the media are covering in general and the frame the stories are written in particular can have the possibilities to loosen the tension of the two sides. This can also be done by generating alternative options to violent conflict, reflecting the ordinary person's desire and need for peace, communicating the process of negotiations to the constituencies involved and providing a forum for on-going dialogue (Siebert 1988) cited in (Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, 2002). This role can be further consolidated that the media play with somehow keeping the interest of the large publics. They may act as a watchdog on leaders to ensure long-term accountability, monitor human rights violations, and, in a broader sense, provide some early warning on potential escalations of the conflict (Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, 2002). On the other hand, (Wolfsfeld, 2004) described four impacts of the news media in peace process. First, they can play a major role in defining the political atmosphere in which the process takes place. Second, the media can have an important influence on the nature of debate about peace process. Third, they can have an impact on antagonist's strategy and behaviour.



Fourth, they can raise and lower the public standing and legitimacy of antagonistic involved in the process and their positions.

In a different way with similar aim of the media, Galtung, Lynch, and McGoldrick have mainly focused on the peace journalism and conflict sensitive reporting that can play in conflict resolutions. The founder of Peace Journalism-Galtung focuses on the positive values of journalism in ensuring peace during conflicts and wars. According to Galtung, the concerns of journalists in reporting conflict are in maintaining sustainable peace and bringing resolution for the conflict. Galtung (1986, 1998, and 2002) indicated that PJ focuses on stories that promote peace initiatives; tone down ethnic and religious differences; prevent further conflict; give attention to the structure of the society; and advocates conflict resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) explained that it is when journalists make choice of what stories to report and about how to report them - that create opportunities for societies at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflicts. This definition of PJ tells us that reporting conflicts need special attention and curiosity in selecting, writing, and sourcing when journalists write the stories. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) well described PJ as a broader, fairer, and more accurate way of framing stories, drawing insights of conflict analysis and transformation. In a normative role of peace journalism, they have to be peace orient, people oriented, solution oriented, and truth oriented. Moreover, Lynch (2007) considered the conceptual framework within which journalism in relation to conflict can be considered, in order to allow for journalistic agency and creativity, and to map the effects journalism has on the course of conflicts. These ideas clearly showed the importance of understanding conflict and violence by journalists because what they report contributes to the momentum towards war or towards peace (Maslog, Lee, and Kim 2006). As the main proponent of the peace journalism, McGoldrick and Lynch (2005) noted that peace journalism is the best to frame stories in conflict analysis and transformation.

Similarly, Haward (2003) noted that a conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. The journalist's reports focus on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved, (Howard, 2003). A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides, but is engaged in the search for solutions. Conflict sensitive journalists choose their words carefully. He further strongly stated that by providing the information, a journalist makes the public more well-informed about the conflict beneath the violence and case assist in resolving it. Then, it will become part of the conflict resolution.



It can be an instrument of conflict resolution, when the information it presents is reliable, respects human rights, and represents diverse views. It's the kind of media that upholds accountability and exposes malfeasance. It's the kind of media that enables a society to make well-informed choices, which is the precursor of democratic governance. It is a media that reduces conflict and fosters human security, (Howard, 2002, p. 01).

In most cases, whatever the words used by various scholars, like peace journalism, conflict sensitive reporting, and peace building media, the centre of the issues are how 'stories of conflict are presented' and how salient issues are reported by the media, Entman1993. In addition to framing the story, showing the real situation of the others can have an advantage in bring them very close and bring some sort of peace. This leads to have a forum for public discussion, and eventually report underlying and explanatory facts and issues, that are what the conflict-transforming media work, (Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, 2002). The conflict-transforming media, for example, reveal the political and social realities of the 'other' and they should also adopt an in-depth and analytical approach to reporting the conflict (Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, 2002).

In general, scholars are describing that the media are playing both the constrictive and distractive roles during conflict, (Melone, Terzis, & Beleli, 2002), (Reuben, 2009), (Moala, 2011), (Howard, 2002)and others. The media can play the positive role in peace-building so long as the stories have been written in the way they bring positive changes, the media content wisely managed, and the media set suitable agenda.

### **CHALLENGES OF MEDIA IN PEACE BUILDING**

While the media can play central role in promoting peace by using various techniques, as mentioned above, they are facing some challenges to do so, and even sometimes, they are playing destructive roles in the peace building process. These challenges are described differently. For example, Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p 64), outlines the challenges in five hierarchical levels such as individual level, media routines level, organization level, extra media level, and ideological level. By taking cases of Turkish media system in reporting conflicts, Tiliç (2001) cited in (Irvan, 2006, p. 31) presents other five interrelated levels of challenges. These are the media atmosphere, media ownership, media institutions, the journalists, and the receivers. In addition, (Irvan, 2006) summaries challenges that hinder the media in playing peace-promoting role. They are the individual, the media institution, and the ideology, (Irvan, 2006).In viewing analysing the challenges of the media from the general perspective, for the sake of simplicity, I reduced into two. These are internal and external to the journalists/ media.



When I say internal, all the challenges are in the journalism and within journalists who are working in the media. For example, the interest of the journalists towards peace promoting issues and conflict issues are quite different. It is a mere fact that some journalists are hungry to report about conflicts than peace process. It is because conflicts and clashes are largely appealing issues in the news selection criteria to the journalists' worldwide (Garrison 1992, Galtung and Ruge 2001, and Fair 2000) and these issues are by themselves attract the attention of both the media and the public. Wolfsfeld (2004) also indicated the news media are attracted to war and conflict, while peace processes make for paltry news footage.

It is not only the interests of the journalist that consider the peace building role of the media as an extra agenda, the news selection criteria itself give much attention and priority to conflict than peace. In the common criteria of story selection, the editors or journalists prefer to report the most sensitive issues or events, such as war/conflicts. Moreover, the common trend of story selection in the media is -"bad news is the good news". The bad news comes first, and then later news stories tell us about 'developing' aspects of the event. If developments of issues are becoming negative, then they are more likely to become news. Stories develop until the problems are resolved. Problem resolution is good news, which most of the time means no news, (Shoemaker, 2006).

In a general story selection, such as immediacy, dram, simplistic, ethnocentrism (Wolfsfeld, 2004), are directly affecting the peace building role of the media. He illustrated that these criteria have influenced how stories are selected for the news, the tone of coverage and how political actors adapt themselves to get into the news, (Wolfsfeld, 2004). These interests of the journalists search uniqueness affect the peace promotional role of the media. "Journalists' obsessive search for drama contributes to the problematic relationship between media and peace. This need for excitement can have a devastating impact on the course of a peace process. Every act of violence, every crisis, and every sign of conflict is considered news. Areas of calm and cooperation, on the other hand, will be ignored because they are not considered interesting" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 18).

In addition to the hungry appetites of the journalists towards conflicts, the media people not only give lesser attention to the peace initiatives but also do not consider that peacebuilding is as parts of their responsibilities. They considered that the peace building obligation is given for somebody else. However, as stated by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), it is the responsibility of the journalists to create the society to consider and value not-violence response to the conflict. This is not an external goal that imposed on





journalism from outside; rather it is the obligation of the media to create the opportunities results directly from the role assigned to journalism in democratic societies, (Kempf, 2007).

The second challenge can be described external to the media. These are how far the media are independent from the government control and other exterior interference. In most cases, media are under the control of external body such as the governments, owners, political parties, advertisers and others. These groups are able to determine the media content, working situation and finance. The smooth working environment of the media in most parts of the world is depending on the relationship between the media and the state. The relationship of the two certainly has great impact not only the conflict issues but also other reporting specially in developing countries. One of the influence is the government has the chance to limit the information. Based on their relation (the media-state), there can be open access to the media without discrimination, and/or controlled access to the media with screening and selection of messages, (Nordenstreng, 2006). As I stated above, the open access of the information either related to conflict and war or other public documents are determined by the level of the smooth relationship between the media and the state. It means that the political environment and the media situation (how the media are free) limit the media's role in general and the peace building process in particular. One of the essential elements of peace building process is a calm political environment, (Wolfsfeld, 2004). The political situation, the level of freedom of expression and the media expansion in a given country have direct impact in the peace building process.

On the other hand, the peace-building role is usually hampered by the media economy. If the media institute is profit oriented, then, the journalists have to write stories that can be sold as a commodity and generate profit. It is common that conflict stories can get better market and they have the value of their commodity, (Tumber, 2009). In addition to the media owners and the interest of the media, the external factors like advertisers' interests are becoming contributing factor in the story selection and production. Due to that, the space and time that are allocated to cover conflict and peace are not equal. As I mentioned earlier, the dramatic issues like conflict are getting better coverage than peace. By its nature, peace process and peace building are not as dramatic as conflict, (Wolfsfeld, 2004). It means, the drama part of the stories has great impact for the income of the business-oriented media. It is because the commercial media are profit oriented, and the peace process, does not likely produce profit. Most the media are totally depend on the incomes from the advertisements and other related financial



sources. In the case of conflict, it is becoming problematic to cover the issues in a fair and neutral ways, when the media is focusing only profit.

The media orientations in a given country are also the factors that limit the role of media in conflict transformation. For example, liberal media orientation and conflict sensitive media are quite different in setting the agenda and framing the issues of the conflicts. The conflict sensitive media are more focusing on transforming the conflict into the solution, whereas the liberal media are mainly focussing on reporting the fact and the truth objectively. By respecting the professional standards, journalism in the world shall have certain rooms for peace-oriented mentality. Unfortunately, there are many places where journalists have to work under different rules imposed by governments or by powerful groups.

Accessing the issues due to its remoteness and unavailability of the information are the other that limits the coverage of the conflict. Most conflicts are happening at the remote or not easily accessible areas. The journalists need to go long distance and wait longer period which cost much amount of money. This definitely does not work for the profit oriented media that want to earn much money than serving the large public.

## **SUMMARY**

I can fairly say that though there is a paucity of attention given by the media practitioners, scholars and the decision makers, the journalistic intervention is so magnificent in promoting peace values and peace building. Its intervention in peace building or conflict resolutions mainly focuses on setting the agenda, framing the issues and selecting stories to work closely in solving the problem. The way stories are framed and the wise agenda set by the media, and the stories selection have their own impacts in the media's role. Based on the journalists' inclination towards peace or towards conflicts, the media will remain as a double-edge of sword. However, in viewing the peace mission of the media, it has to play the tone down, conflict de-escalation. But, it has been facing many challenges that was summed up internal and external in the media.

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