Modifying the Concept of *Peace Journalism* to Overcome its Implementation Problem

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The main problem of peace journalism: It implicitly critiques "ordinary" journalists. Are those not declaring themselves peace journalists automatically anti-peace? In this essay I shall explore whether this is just a naming problem or what else eventually needs to be changed to address contemporary challenges not only in the media sector but also more generally in society.

Criticizing the Media System is too simple – Media must *Do-no-Harm*

The main task in media professional's daily business is to separate and categorize: relevant things from irrelevant, local issues from regional, international, economic, cultural etc. That is how society gets itself orientated and organizes future planning and collective decision-making. Only, sometimes media draw separation lines also between goodies – usually "us" – and "them", the baddies.

Criticising the media is en vogue, maybe because it is so simple: Enough to point at widely known negative examples like Nazi-Propaganda or the role of Radio Mille Collines in the 1994 massacres in Rwanda. But what exactly needs to be changed for real improvement? Even within the media system not everybody is happy with the way things evolve. New attributes like citizens' journalism, investigative journalism, etc. [i], that appeared over the past few years are indicating a general feeling of discontent. People inside the media sector complain about lacking (financial) resources, competition and time pressure hindering serious reporting and analysing. This essay tries to go beyond critique and look at perspectives that come along with new challenges.

What, if the *Duty to Do-No-Harm* – a broadly accepted concept in international cooperation and humanitarian aid [ii] – would apply also to media and journalism? One big problem would probably be to prove that only one specific reporting caused harm to some individuals or groups. This leads to the assumption that the biggest obstacle to such Do-No-Harm-Principles in journalism is *non-intended harming* - collateral damage that media outlets can potentially cause. To which should be added that generally, unintentional harming does not release from liability [iii]. Except in journalism?

The Implementation Problem of Peace Journalism

Already in the 60's, Johan Galtung and others developed the concept of a more responsible journalism and named it Peace Journalism [iv]. However, nowadays it's mainly the peace workers community that talks about it and I cannot recognize much of the ideas realized when consuming standard media outlets. Why? Probably not because Galtung's basic principles were wrong: They remained more or less unchanged over decades, except from some scholars enriching and detailing it [v]. The problematic in peace journalism looks a bit similar to the case of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is rarely criticized as such but neither fully implemented on a global level.

One proposal to cope with this implementation problem in peace journalism is the use of fictional content in media programming. This idea is well documented in literature, for example in an article by Ross Howard (2001) [vi]. He describes a process of five stages leading from "conventional" journalism to something he calls *"directly interventionist media programming, which includes and extends beyond conventional techniques to use soap operas, street theatre, videos and comic books – in other words, whatever it takes […] to foster society «as we'd like it»"*. The author himself uses quotation marks for «as we'd like it», maybe because he is himself not entirely convinced that it is a good idea to go out with the intention to "foster society", as this alone appears to be a manipulative concept lacking transparency on goals and values.

Personally, I am not convinced that better journalism can be achieved only by defining something like society fostering or behavioural change as an overall goal and to try to achieve it through fictional content and entertainment. Passive, catalytic information brokering needs to remain the "core business" of media. To which an important distinction needs to be added: The different perspectives for media in industrialized parts of the world reporting *on* or *from* violent conflicts in fragile contexts, in contrast to local media reporting within violence affected areas. And even more important is to emphasize that these two levels – inside and outside – are interconnected through propaganda used by most warring parties as a standard tool in their strategies[vii].

What exactly is or should be the role of media?

Media is from Latin and means "*in the middle, in between*". This emphasises the connecting and mediating role of media, basically conveying something – information in the case discussed here – from A to B, whereas both can be individuals or groups. The crucial question is about the *value* of this connecting or conveying service. And in this question lies also the core problem: *Market failure*. Some people or organisations voluntarily pay (a lot of) money to spread messages (advertisements, PR etc.) whilst other relevant information – particularly from inside violence affected areas – is difficult to get and to verify and therefore it becomes (too) expensive to be conveyed[viii]. Similar to culture, education health and other fields, market is no guarantee for media quality. This is the reason for the existence of various models of subsidies and regulations all over the world[ix].

Going back to the specialisation of media professionals in separating and categorizing, here are some thoughts about difficult differentiations. In addition to the distinction between information, advertisement and entertainment[x] described above, clear distinctions are required between sources and friends, as well as between responsibilities towards the society (in general) and responsibilities towards investors or owners of media. Different stakeholders might have different views of media quality. And why not considering the most vulnerable, those most affected by violence and power abuse as the most important stakeholders when reporting in or on violence affected areas?

The main tool for quality assessment in media is monitoring the sales of outlets. Enough? The fact that the media, per definition, relates everything to everything, somehow, is simultaneously a major problem and very helpful to find solutions: As far as I know, no large-scale surveys confirm that separating and categorizing is really what media recipients do ask for in the first place. This brings about the question, whether recipients have a choice at all: If somebody asked me, I would ask for context, not for separation in my newspaper or in my radio program. I would like to know, how things are connected, linked, what kinds of interferences or interdependencies exist between different topics, how they are linked to different opinions, options etc. Therefore, I propose to replace the term Peace Journalism by *Connective Journalism* to overcome the implementation problem mentioned earlier.

Connective Journalism

Clearly, it is doubtful that renaming a concept is enough to overcome implementation problems. In this particular case, such a cosmetic operation logically leads to the question: What is wrong with the term "peace"? In fact, this is a very relevant question that touches mainly two elements: The confusion due to various definitions and understandings of the term peace[xi] and a sort of suspicion that peace could be in opposition to the actual system of global power balance. Therefore, it appears that only renaming would not be sufficient to make the needed difference. More, the concept must answer the key question: What exactly does Connective Journalism mean?

To develop media from their passive, catalytic role as information conveyors into something that Ross Howard calls "directly interventionist media programming", some basic clarifications on goals and aims are indispensable. The following keywords of what Galtung and his followers named Peace

Journalism appear to be solid enough to conclude some more concrete guidelines specifying what Connective Journalism could look like and what is its added value: *Trust, non-violence, freedom of expression, transparency, decrease of social inequality and impunity, long-term orientation and constructive, solution oriented thinking*[xii].

As Conclusion: A set of 11 Guidelines for Connective Journalism

Starting from aspects seen as critical in contemporary journalism, I looked at what could or should be changed to achieve improvement. Johan Galtung did the same a couple of decades ago but, as described, not too much of his Peace-Journalism-Concept is implemented in the professional media world today. My proposal to overcome this implementation problem consists in replacing the term Peace Journalism by *Connective Journalism* and to expand the original concept by defining its goals much more precisely than the term peace alone could do.

The following 11 guidelines for Connective Journalism are basically a proposition for further reflections and an invitation to try it out and enrich it.

- Overall, be accurate and aim for a balanced, holistic picture
- Reach people as human beings - not as celebrities, victims, bad guys, them etc.
- Establish relations of trust - not to be confused with nepotism, elitism, power-cartels etc.
- Report by showing multiple stakeholders, their networks, interests, needs and conflicts
- Depict context, history and structure rigidly and connect it to stakeholders
- Insist on integral transparency – including your own stakes in the system
- Invite dialogue, public brainstorming etc. – specifically on controversial issues
- Be clear: Violence and impunity is not natural – don't attract with shocking stories / pictures
- Don't get stuck in analysis – highlight possible solutions and good examples
- Don't exclude, not even extremist voices - connect them to other opinions or interests
- Monitor social change and create public feedback loops on this research

The main added value in making journalism more connective is allowing it to be part of solutions. Solutions require orientation and informed decision making which again requires knowledge about how different things are connected, how they relate and interact with each other. Limiting journalism to explanations on what separates different things from each other is in my opinion anachronistic and likely to escalate conflicts.

Confronting media professionals with this type of liability-questions might end up in endless discourse on limiting freedom of expression or not. A more constructive approach would be to raise awareness about the potential of media and journalists to deescalate and to claim that these potentials are concretised in practice.

Clearly, Connective Journalism is a step away from the traditional, passive and catalytic role of media as information brokers. It is a step towards what Ross Howard calls "fostering society". Therefore, both – Connective Journalism and "fostering society" – must be named as manipulative concepts, despite the maybe negative connotation of the term: If transparency on goals and values is established, manipulation has a high potential to do good things – as millions of good physicians, teachers and the like prove every day. Under these premises, the concept of Connective Journalism can be used and further developed by any media worker to create media outlets oriented towards solution finding.

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United Nations (1945): Charter

Endnotes

[i] 23'200'000 hits on Google for Citizens Journalism; 14'100'000 for Investigative Journalism (both on 20.11.2012)

[ii] The Do-No-Harm-Concept is inspired by and developed from Mary B. Anderson's Book "Do No Harm: How Aid Can support Peace – or War" (1999)

[iii] To illustrate this, the Swiss Criminal Code (SR 311.0) could serve as an example. It's Art 12 states that "A person commits a felony or misdemeanour through negligence if he fails to consider or disregards the consequences of his conduct due to a culpable lack of care". Translation obtained via http://www.admin.ch/ch/e/rs/c311_0.html; 20.11.2012).

[iv] Galtung summarizes the concept in his 2008 Book "50 Years – 100 Peace & Conflict Perspectives" (p.24-25) and refers to "a theory first developed in 1961 […] with Mari Holmboe […]".

[v] An article of Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch (2001) could be cited as example. It elaborates 17 Do's and Don'ts for peace journalists.

[vi] Activate, Winter 2001 (Quarterly journal of IMPACS, Institute of Media, Policy, and Civil Society, Vancouver B.C.). The same author detailed the concept 2002 in his paper "An operational framework for Media and Peace building (same editor).

[vii] Propaganda is a huge topic, worth an essay on its own... Chomsky for example describes countless cases of distorted media reporting in order to achieve political goals in his book "Necessary Illusions" (which I consulted in the 2006 German translation). He covers mainly cases of US-Interventions in Latin America in the 80ies but also expands back to world war two, Stalinism and old England, where in 1695, 30 years after a revolution of "radical democrats" censure was released because "opinion makers now self-censor themselves" and "do not print anything that could worry the rich" (p. 166; my own translation from German back to English). Another example to think about is the well-known case of media reports declaring that Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction, which were never found after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Beham (2007) is another researcher investigating on propaganda, describing "journalism of attachment" as a type of reporting where journalists deliberately choose sides. She mentions Correspondents from the BBC (Martin Bell) and CNN (Christiane Amanpour) as supporting the war against the Serbs as "good and just" ("eine gute und gerechte Sache").

[viii] Puppis (2007, 67-84 on economic justifications for media regulations)

[ix] Puppis (2007, 85-95 on models of media regulations, 113-168 on national, European und global actors of media regulations, 170-290 on sectors of media regulations and 291-300 for a conclusion)

[x] To illustrate this, the Swiss federal law on Radio and Television (SR784.40) could serve as an example. Its article 24 describes *information* and *entertainment* as two clearly separated, while *advertisement* and *sponsoring* is covered in a separate section that states (article 9) that advertising must be separated from other content and identifiable as such.

[xi] Whereas the Charter of the United Nations as a whole could be seen as a description of peace, it does not give a short definition. The goal stated in its preamble – *"to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"* – implies that the UN operates with a definition of peace as the **absence of war and hostilities**. This definition is also used in the Free Dictionary, together with some more possible definitions: ***An agreement or a treaty to end hostilities; Freedom from quarrels and disagreement, harmonious relations; Public security and order; Inner contentment; serenity: peace of mind*** (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/peace; 20.11.2012). Going on to Wikipedia, some more elements can be found to complete the picture: "Peace is a **state of harmony** characterized by the lack of violent conflict and **the freedom from fear** of violence. Commonly understood as the absence of hostility, peace also suggests the existence of healthy or newly healed **interpersonal or international relationships**, **prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare**, the **establishment of equality, and a working political order that serves the true interests of all**. In international relations, peacetime is not only the absence of war or violent conflict, but also the **presence of positive and respectful cultural and economic relationships**. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace (20.11.2012)

[xii] The choice of these eight elements is inspired by the article of Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch (2001) and also my own previous work on media initiatives in conflict zones (Homberger, 2009).