

Vital Correspondence:

Analyzing Local and International Media Coverage of Armed Conflict

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ABSTRACT

The atrocities of armed conflicts such as those in Israel’s Gaza Strip and the Darfur region of Sudan are not reaching and affecting Westerners as clearly and potently as they should, considering the technological capabilities of today’s international news media. In this paper, I will argue that media coverage of armed conflict in the developing world is stifled by the politics of international and transnational news media organizations and the unique challenges and limitations to local news organizations at the site of conflict. Private interests, financial constraints, and physical and political limitations cause global media to emphasize mainly the violent phase of conflict instead of the build up and reconstruction, reducing public attention on prevention and long-term needs. Local media faces different challenges like governmental manipulation, lack of resources, and safety hazards. While international politics may convince journalists that there is a clear perpetrator and victim, they must emphasize the scale of human suffering, no matter who is suffering, and check facts and claims with varied, balanced sources.

I. Introduction

In a war-torn world of politics and competition, it is a common trap for Westerners to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television and read about or watch dying civilians in developing countries carried to emergency vehicles and cried over by loved ones. More often than not, the Westerners will sigh in sadness or shake their heads in frustration, but they can easily put down the paper or switch off the television and continue with their lives, essentially unaffected by such pain and sorrow.

The atrocities of armed conflict such as those taking place in Israel's Gaza Strip and the Darfur region of the Sudan are not reaching and affecting Westerners as clearly and potently as they should. If they were, the powers in the West would have been unable to ignore the problems because of public pressure and evidence of the gross scale of injustice against humanity. In this paper, I will argue that media coverage of armed conflict in the developing world is stifled by the politics of international and transnational news media organizations and the unique challenges and limitations to local news organizations at the site of conflict. Through increased media technology in developing areas and open access for transnational news coverage, attention and aid can more efficiently be directed to the most vulnerable victims.

The resources and power that can help alleviate the violence in the developing world in terms of aid and legislative attention are in the West; therefore, the information sent to wealthy, developed states should be more consistent, complete, and urgent, so as to make powers in the West unable to ignore the atrocities taking place outside of their immediate borders.

Not only is vivid media attention necessary for the international audience, but also for the local populations undergoing the violence. According to Frohardt and Temin's Special Report on "The Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies," media is a vital tool in disseminating

information and opinions in conflict zones, and it “can heighten tensions or promote understanding”(2003: 15). Therefore, local media coverage in places of armed conflict serves a different purpose than international and transnational coverage of the same conflict because the local audiences require specific information that does not foment more violence. Though the two types of reporting differ in their audience, resources, space allotted for war coverage, and main content, both demand factual, balanced information sharing that adheres to internationally accepted journalistic standards.

In this paper, the term “international media” will refer to transnational news broadcasting giants, such as the BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera Arabic, as well as reputable newspapers and wires that report on international affairs, including but not limited to *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *International Herald Tribune*, and Associated Press. Most of these media entities have an Internet presence, and this medium must also be taken into account for its global scope, though all except Al Jazeera are based in the Western, developed world. The term “local media” will refer to news media focused on a specific population within geographic boundaries, such as *Haaretz* in Israel, *Al-Quds* in the Palestinian territories, and radio stations reaching rural villages in Africa. While *Haaretz* is Israel’s most acclaimed national newspaper, the country and readership is small and specific enough to include it in the local media category. The focus will remain on developing regions where there is armed conflict and ethnic violence, with case studies for the Gaza Strip and Darfur.

II. Current State of Media Coverage of Armed Conflict

A. *International Media*

A general trend taking place in the Western media landscape's coverage of international affairs is that it is decreasing, pulling back its bureaus outside of the home country, and focusing more on local and national news (Jakobsen 2000, Gilboa 2005a). According to Jakobsen's "Focus on the CNN Effect Misses the Point," media organizations believe that their audiences in the West are more interested in events closer to home; therefore, coverage of international events has decreased in newspapers over the last 100 years (2000: 133). When it comes to armed conflict, Jakobsen argues the media ignores conflict during the pre and post-violence phases and is highly selective of coverage during the violent phases, thereby putting the international focus on short-term emergency relief, not the necessary long-term efforts for prevention and rebuilding. As tensions mount in an unstable region and preventative measures are taken to some extent, the media experiences "conflict fatigue" because a conflict that only has the potential of exploding into violence will not boost ratings, and the situation is often neglected entirely by Western media (Jakobsen 2000: 133).

Gilboa adds to Jakobsen's thesis by emphasizing that media covers only war and the violent phase of conflict as opposed to the preventative measures or the peace-building process because of the influence of ratings, the nature of conflict prevention which is often slow, complicated, and not highly publicized, as well as typical journalism practices (2005a: 10). When a conflict is resolved before violence breaks out, there is nothing for Western media to report to their audiences, based on what is considered newsworthy for today's 24-hour news cycle. The necessity to maintain attention with vivid images and bold headlines dominates the ideology of news media.

Several factors determine what will be covered by international media: geographic proximity, cost, logistics, legal implications such as obtaining visas, safety risk, and national interest (Jakobsen 2000: 133). Shabtai Gold and Ornella Guyet, journalists for international news agencies, both agreed that proximity is extremely significant in determining what gets covered. Guyet, who writes for *Le Monde Diplomatique* and is a member of the French media watchdog ACRIMED, stressed in an interview that coverage by media outside of their own borders is declining because “people are more interested in what is close to them” (2009). The public is looking for stories that will affect them, so the journalists and editors follow stories that they believe their readers prefer to read or watch.

Shabtai Gold is a reporter for Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) and has covered Gaza for the past eight years. In an interview, he said that safety is the first factor he takes into consideration before attempting to follow a lead. In war zones and areas of armed conflict, journalists must discern whether or not the situation is safe enough for the team to continue, and some even risk their lives for the sake of a story. In Gaza, a literal barrier to the foreign press was the blockade put up by Israel on December 27, 2008 (International Media Support 2009a: 5). Gold was trying to gain access to Gaza when Israel imposed the ban, and he had to enter through the Egyptian desert. Soon enough, he said, Israel realized the embargo was not keeping foreign press out of Gaza, and it was lifted on January 24, 2009.

With physical, financial, and professional limitations to which conflicts are covered by international media, only those news organizations with the most resources and legitimacy are able to gain access to these dangerous places. Even then, while BBC and CNN may have the resources and capability to cover certain episodes, they can experience “conflict fatigue” and focus only on the violent phase and human suffering, which leads to money being funneled to

short-term humanitarian relief instead of long-term development (Jakobsen 2000: 138).

International media coverage of the post-conflict phase is just as minimal as the pre-violence phase because, in the mentality of media companies, it is not interesting to Western audiences unless there is a sense of celebrity or sensationalism to it. Any attention given to the post-conflict phase tends to be negative because it reports on fraud, mismanagement, failure, and corruption, which hurts public support for long-term peace-building projects (Jakobsen 2000: 138). Jakobsen concludes that media neglect of success stories and pre- and post-conflict phases leads the public to feel that these areas are hopeless, doubting the potential of conflict resolution (2000: 138). Without public support and funding for resolution and peace-keeping projects, the cycle of violence and humanitarian crises will continue.

B. Local Media

Coverage of armed conflict in vulnerable societies by journalists and media organizations within that society plays a completely different role than that of international media. The audience, resources, responsibility, and mentality of local journalists in the Congo lead to different content and objectives than would be found in *The New York Times*' articles about the African country, for example. Gilboa argues in "Local Media and International Conflict" that local media in regions of conflict contribute more to violence and escalation than to prevention (2005: 10). This is especially the case "in vulnerable societies where the media are susceptible to manipulation and abuse by those who wish to instigate violent conflict" (Gilboa 2005: 10).

Mark Frohardt and Jonathan Temin's Special Report on "The Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies" outlines the indicators that reveal media manipulation and misuse which can cause or inflame violence. A lack of plurality, accessibility, and far-reaching audiences

limits the influence of local media, in both a positive and negative way (Frohardt and Temin 2003: 3). Other important factors are whether the media is state-owned or private; the degree of training, isolation, and diversity of the journalists; legal protection for freedom of the press; and the presence of fear-inducing mechanisms, a negative tone, and the inevitability of violence in the content (Frohardt and Temin 2003). All of these factors can determine whether local media is susceptible to abuse. Sometimes the media can contribute to violence involuntarily; this is most common “when journalists have poor professional skills, when media culture is underdeveloped, or when there is little or no history of independent media” (Frohardt and Temin 2003: 2).

With a dearth of resources for media development in poor countries, local reporting in areas of armed conflict is often completely absent or becomes susceptible to government or single-party mismanagement as outlined above. While local media can function to spread awareness, education, legitimacy, initiatives and mobilization for resolution, and build confidence, it can also backfire and perform the dysfunctions of heightening apprehension, deterrence, creating opposition, high expectations, and a negative balance of the conflicting sides (Gilboa 2005: 37). Several non-governmental organizations exist around the world to combat the misuse of local media in conflict zones, including Fondation Hironnelle, International Media Support (IMS), and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. These organizations involve journalist training corps and projects to promote freedom of expression throughout the developing world.

The dangerous influence of local media became apparent in the 1994 Rwandan genocide when *Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) was used by Hutu leaders who overtook the government to spread messages of hate and violence and encouraged the

extermination of the Tutsis (Gilboa 2005: 11). In response to this grave abuse of information dissemination, Fondation Hironnelle was created to establish and operate independent news programming in war zones and crises areas. Now with 11 different radio stations across the developing world, Fondation Hironnelle trains and oversees local journalists to produce reliable, factual news and different perspectives to areas in conflict, according to Chief Operations Officer Caroline Vuillemin. Broadcasting in 30 different languages worldwide, the radio stations under the foundation send a message to locals that “they do not have to be literate or know French or English to receive important information,” Vuillemin said in an interview. Jean-Luc Mootosamy, a journalist and head of the Fondation Hironnelle’s Sudanese project, also stressed the responsibility of journalists to report the truth and to combat hateful messages in the media. While freedom of the press is important, he said there is a limit to what journalists can deliver to their audience, and they “must have in mind the consequences of news that will be broadcast” (2009).

Caroline Draveny of U.N.’s Office for the Coordinating of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) described her relationship with the local media while working as an information officer in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008. Because of the common U.N. logo, locals would often confuse the peacekeeping mission with the humanitarian efforts, taking out their frustrations with the peacekeepers on the aid workers even though the two had completely different mandates. Draveny stressed the importance of proper communication with the local media, mainly Radio Okapi (established by Hironnelle in the DRC), to ensure that they informed the locals why one camp was receiving aid more quickly than another and to quell tensions (2009).

Like the international media, local media in conflict zones should be present for the pre- and post-violence phases in addition to the violent phase in which information is vital and often determines life or death for those amidst the conflict. During the first year after a peace agreement is reached, reliable and trustworthy information for the local population is necessary to ensure reconciliation, so peace-builders and diplomats must take into account this role of the local media (Gilboa 2005: 21). Several of Fondation Hironnelle's current projects, such as Radio Okapi, serve the purpose of charting the peace and reconstruction process for local audiences (Vuillemin 2009).

III. International Media Spheres

A. United States

The major transnational spheres of news coverage in the world consist of the U.S., Europe, and the Arab countries in the Middle East (Doyle 2009). Beginning in the 1980s, the American cable news network (CNN) became the first transnational news media organization by expanding its broadcasting to many other parts of the world and establishing CNN International (Gilboa 2005b: 325). Thanks to new technological possibilities, CNN proved extremely successful in covering the 1990-1991 Gulf War with constant news updates and a true global reach, which inspired other networks, including BBC World TV to also venture outside their borders. As the 24/7 news cycle became normalized around the world, scholars and policymakers began debating the "CNN effect," a term referring to the new communication approach of international affairs. In "Global Television News and Foreign Policy: Debating the CNN Effect," Gilboa tries to find a definition for the ambiguous CNN effect, concluding that "global television news coverage has accelerated the foreign-policy making process," and "it can

affect the conduct of policy by showing graphic images that undermine elite and public support for specific policy goals” (2005b: 336). Though the debate about the true role and influence of CNN and its competitors remains on the table, these news organizations are major players in international relations and shape public opinion about foreign policy.

As CNN constantly searches for news to fill its 24/7 broadcast schedule and simultaneously deals with the global economic crisis, some are critical that the channel’s news coverage is becoming less informative and more personality-driven. Colum Murphy, a former UN diplomat to Bosnia and Somalia and founder of the Geneva School of Diplomacy, discussed in a meeting that Europeans are shocked at how little information Americans seem to get from television news, as compared to what they watch in Europe. Murphy shared an anecdote that in the past, when he has been asked to do an interview for CNN, they ask him to do two separate interviews: the first one is for the international audience and involves detailed, complex questions, while the second is only for the American audience, and the questions are shorter and simpler. He acknowledged that foreign policy coverage is shrinking in the U.S. and that he believes CNN has become part of the “celebrity culture of personality news” (2009). This view is supported by media scholars Seib (2005) and Hanley (2007).

In the American sphere, CNN dominates international news coverage, reaching more than 260 million households in the U.S. (Potter 2007). But as discussed earlier, various factors such as proximity, financial constraints, and national interest determine whether or not the news media will cover an international story, even such atrocities as those taking place in Darfur and Gaza. Potter asserts that both CNN and the BBC have Western perspectives and cover the same major international stories (2007).

B. Europe

In the European sphere of news coverage, BBC dominates. The transnational version, BBC World, reaches 254 million homes in 200 countries, while their Web site is available in 43 languages (Seib 2005: 608). BBC Radio is also translated into 43 languages and reaches 150 million listeners worldwide, and according to Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the U.N.'s OCHA, radio is strong across Europe, especially for news about humanitarian issues. However, while it is Byrs's job to deliver information to the media about humanitarian crises where the U.N. is involved, she said that since the end of the Cold War, media interest in the U.N. in Geneva has decreased dramatically, with important media outlets removing their U.N. correspondents. There are currently 140 journalists accredited to the U.N., but the BBC correspondent for example is based in Bern and covers all of Switzerland, meaning that the BBC no longer has a U.N. beat for humanitarian affairs (Byrs 2009).

Furthermore, despite the BBC's international presence, conflict coverage has focused on that within Europe, namely Chechnya, Kosovo, and Northern Ireland (Hawkins 2002: 229). These conflicts were relatively minor compared to conflict in Africa, which has been responsible for 90 percent of deaths in the world due to war since the end of the Cold War (Hawkins 2002: 229). According to Hawkins, global media coverage of the violence and deaths in Africa has been incredibly insignificant, with the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which resulted in over 1 million deaths in 2000, being the eighth most-covered conflict by international media including BBC, CNN, and *Le Monde*. The most heavily-covered conflict in both U.S. and U.K. media in 2000 was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and considering the deaths that took place in the region that year, it was a disproportionately greater amount of coverage compared to the weak attention given to other conflicts (Hawkins 2002: 229).

Euronews is a pan-European channel started in 1993 to compete with European consumption of American news media, primarily CNN (Garcia 2007: 80). Its purpose is to broadcast news about European institutions and has partnerships with national television channels; it is broadcast 24 hours a day in seven languages (Garcia 2007: 86, 91). The broadcast aims at a European audience with an income in the top 20 percent, and according to Garcia, has a neutral tone so as not to overemphasize one country's view (2007: 94). After watching and reading several online transcripts of conflict in Gaza and Darfur on euronews.net, I deduced that the coverage is sparse and always connects back to its European audience, highlighting the role of European governments in the U.N. mission in Darfur for example.

C. Middle East

A more recent development for global media has been the rise of Al Jazeera and its offspring, Al Jazeera English, signifying the end of Western media's monopoly on international news. Al-Jazeera began broadcasting in 1996 after moderate Arab leaders decided an independent news organization would compliment their attempts to modernize (Seib 2005: 601). Both Al Jazeera Arabic and English have royal charters from the Emir of Qatar, freeing them from the economic pressures suffered by American private media (Hanley 2007). Eight hundred employees from 55 countries work for Al Jazeera, many of them former journalists with CNN and BBC, such as David Frost and Riz Khan. While other media organizations face financial limitations and have been cutting their foreign correspondents, Al Jazeera has bureaus and permanent correspondents in underreported regions, allowing the journalists to become familiar with the local sources and dimensions of their stories (Hanley 2007). While the station's link to the government of Qatar might make it seem deferential to the state, the Emir is more

“progressive” than other Islamic state leaders and tolerates Al Jazeera’s independence, which has angered other governments in the region (Seib 2005: 601).

According to Waddick Doyle at the American University in Paris, the creation of Al Jazeera changed everything about international media, shifting the balance of power held by Western media such as CNN and BBC, which are broadcast into homes in the Arab world. While Arab news consumers have access to American and European news, Al Jazeera English is available to only a handful of communities in the U.S. (Hanley 2007). Because of its graphic depictions of war, exclusive footage from figures like Osama bin Laden, and sometimes anti-American tilt, enough government officials and cable subscribers have effectively kept the channel off U.S. cable and satellite systems (Hanley 2007). In North America, only Toledo, Ohio, and Burlington, Vermont offer Al Jazeera English on their cable TV stations, limiting the channel’s influence in the country that would most benefit from its Arab perspective (Potter 2007).

Media scholars Potter (2007), Hanley (2007), and Seib (2005) admire Al Jazeera’s provocative edge and commitment to bringing the story straight from the ground to their audience. Dave Marash, who co-anchors Al Jazeera English’s Washington, D.C. studio, said that the channel aims to “give the most sophisticated, most nuanced and most global view of the day’s events” (Hanley 2007). The channel’s news is dominated by coverage of the Middle East and Muslim world, but picks up stories that competitors neglect and gives more time and depth to the well-known stories (Potter 2007). In addition, Seib says that Al Jazeera provides a semblance of unity among Arabs, who struggle to find a perspective with which they can identify. Since the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the consistent violence in Israel and Palestine, Muslims around the world have turned to Al Jazeera instead of Western media

because they feel it is more reliable and representative of their positions on the issues. For example, when the second Intifada took place in Palestine, Arab satellite channels had replaced Western channels, and Palestinians finally “felt that they were no longer subjects of an outside narrator. They felt their story was being told and narrated by themselves”(Seib 2005: 604-605).

Doyle shared an interesting anecdote of a recent visit he made to Morocco. His former student sells television sets in one of the North African country’s cities and when Doyle asked him if he was experiencing the strains of the financial crisis, the student responded by saying that his business has never been better since the increased violence in Gaza. Everyone wants to buy televisions to watch news coverage of the conflict. Doyle pointed out that this shows the influence of armed conflict over media production and popularity; as violence escalates and coverage of the conflict by Arab media outlets increases, so does public interest (2009).

From a more localized point of view, Arab media in general is revolutionizing, with Al Jazeera at the forefront of the movement toward freedom of expression and independence. Daoud Kuttab, founder of an online radio station in Jordan and chairman of Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, noted the influence that technology has had on Arab media, which has often been stifled by governments and elites. While changing technology is damaging the traditional business structure of Western media, he said, it is making information accessible for the first time in the Arab world, as radio audiences listen through their cell phones and online news services overcome governmental control and censorship (IMS 2009b).

Kuttab gives an interesting perspective on Al Jazeera that differs from that of the scholars noted above. As the only news broadcaster to report live from inside Gaza when violence broke out in late 2008, Al Jazeera seemed to “push an agenda” and the audience began to feel turned off (IMS 2009b). Consequently, Kuttab encourages young journalists to focus on fact-based

reporting and hopes to see Arab media steer more in this direction than that of Al Jazeera. On the contrary, Shane Bauer from *The Nation*, an American news magazine, writes favorably of the channel's live coverage from hospitals in Gaza, believing it was the only source providing the real details about the humanitarian disaster that other journalists and media organizations have not been able to convey because of the Israeli blockade (2009: 5). The two perspectives, those of Kuttab and Bauer, reveal a divide between Western and Arab expectations for media coverage in general. While Kuttab stresses that the content must be steeped in factual, unbiased information only, Bauer applauds the ability of Al Jazeera to gain access to hospitals in Gaza and produce high-intensity reporting on location. This could be a reflection of American obsession with action and sensational images, even in news coverage.

IV. Cross-Cultural Journalism Standards

Journalism has several defining factors that are expected to be present in credible news media around the world. These include but are not limited to objective and unbiased reporting, truthfulness and accuracy, balancing different and opposing perspectives, and timeliness. Tuchman's classic article, "Objectivity as a Strategic Ritual" describes four strategic procedures that American journalists follow to claim objectivity. First, by presenting conflicting claims, a reporter does not favor one viewpoint over the other and allows the reader to decide which claim they consider to be truth (Tuchman 1972: 665). Second, journalists present supporting evidence, usually deeper research on a claim or tangible details like statistics and death tolls (Tuchman 1972: 667). Third, "judicious use of quotation marks" removes the journalist from the story and frames possibly his own opinions as the opinions of others (Tuchman 1972: 668). Fourth, the structure and sequence of information usually start with the most important information at the

beginning, with subsequent information decreasing in significance (Tuchman 1972: 670). While Tuchman challenges the actual objectivity behind these media practices, the rituals tend to be implemented in news media worldwide, unless the media is manipulated or abused in ways detailed by Frohardt and Temin above.

While the typical American journalism standards may be the aim for media everywhere, different parts of the world have different concepts of “bias” and “authoritative sources,” for example. Doyle pointed out that in some Arab media, the term “freedom fighter” is used in place of “suicide bomber,” the term that would most likely be used in U.S. media. Each is exhibiting a bias by using the term of their choice, the former being a term of support and martyrdom while the latter carries the connotation that the individual is a terrorist.

Guyet doesn't believe that the term “objectivity” exists for news media anywhere. She says that selection and ordering of information presented in news is an automatic bias that gives readers only what the journalist chooses to provide. In France, the idea of objectivity only came about in the nineteenth century when the commercial press replaced the party press to appeal to larger publics in order to appease advertisers. The same was true in U.S. history. Guyet insists that French news media follows the position of the French government for the most part, and editorial decisions, even in the country's leading daily newspaper, *Le Monde*, suggest a political orientation (2009).

In terms of international news, the French press, according to Guyet, is reducing its coverage along with the rest of the world. Despite the colonial history between France and Africa, the majority of French media ignores the continent. Guyet used the term “*Françafrique*” to describe the relationship between France and Africa that suggests a continuation of colonial practices by the French. Several African dictators are framed by the French press as working

toward democracy in their respective countries but in reality the dictators are only serving French interests. For example, there are links between the French and Sudanese governments, but in the French media, the conflicts in Sudan are only presented as a humanitarian war and there is no criticism of the questionable relationship. Guyet says that the media will report only on the positive things that the French are doing in Africa (2009).

Frohardt and Temin suggest in their report that international journalist networks exist to connect journalists operating under difficult circumstances to seasoned professionals. Such networks would help struggling journalists feel part of a larger community, strengthening their resolve and commitment and also informing them of international journalism standards. The report also recommends making international media such as CNN and BBC accessible to journalists in vulnerable societies to increase their information intake and to expose them to different perspectives in order to improve their own reporting (2003: 11).

International Media Support and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting are two organizations that have the central goal of training local journalists, particularly those in conflict zones, to adhere to principles of objectivity, credibility, accuracy, and balanced reporting. As discussed earlier, a sense of responsibility for the protection and respect of humanity should also be a standard for news media worldwide. This is a goal of Fondation Hirondelle and other media NGO's that work to combat violent or dangerously biased messages and to increase the professionalism of journalists everywhere. This commitment was also expressed by Shabtai Gold, who says that sometimes reporters, especially those covering wars and armed conflict, "will have an opinion and may become (emotionally) involved, but you are striving to tell the story....First and foremost, my job is the report the news" (2009).

V. The Role of Technology: Differences between Local and International Media

It goes without saying that technology has expanded the horizon for media around the world, though the most palpable effects are in the developed, Westernized world where the Internet and satellite broadcasting allow for 24-hour news cycles and immediate news updates all day long. In developing countries, especially those amidst armed conflict, technology is scarce and often controlled by the government. Overall, accessibility of media for the average citizen in developing countries is a major issue and is one of Frohardt and Temin's indicators that media is susceptible to abuse and manipulation. Fondation Hironnelle's Caroline Vuillemin said that in conflict zones, language barriers, widespread illiteracy, poverty, and limited distribution make newspapers almost useless. For example, in Sudan and many other African countries, newspapers are not distributed outside of the capital city, though many people live in rural villages far from the capital.

Fondation Hironnelle uses radio as their preferred medium for reaching as many people as possible in crisis zones. Vuillemin said communities spread the times of programs provided on their radio stations by word of mouth, and though each village may have only one receiver, it can become a communal event for everyone to gather around and listen to the news together. Hironnelle implements shortwave transmitters which they can broadcast in English, French, and as many local languages as necessary. Shortwave transmitters can reach much further than FM waves, which cover only a 100 kilometer radius. Though it is more expensive to use shortwave, Hironnelle's goal is to reach as many people as possible, even those in rural villages, and FM does not transcend most city borders because the transmitters are usually located within the city. Also, governmental authorization is required for FM transmitters but not for shortwave (Vuillemin 2009).

Frohardt and Temin suggest “enhancing the physical resources available to journalists (such as computers and vehicles)” as a way of structural intervention in areas where media is weak and underdeveloped (2003: 9). They say that if journalists do not have these resources, they are more likely to be susceptible to corruption and bribery, for example, accepting rides from outside actors with the intent of manipulating the reporter’s output. The report also stresses the importance of journalistic training, because “even with the latest technology, ultimately it is the quality of the journalist that determines the quality of the journalism. Improving the technical or material components of the medium does not, in itself, improve the message” (Frohardt and Temin 2003: 9).

With more advanced resources and money, international media doesn’t face the same challenges as local media in terms of distribution and technology. On the contrary, the technological capacity of international media has overwhelmingly expanded in the past 10 years. The major news organizations like CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, *The New York Times*, and *Le Monde* have in-depth Web sites that publish stories produced in their original format. Visitors to the sites can find video clips, images, and blogs that are not published in the paper version or aired on television. The rise of media technology has opened access to news for more people worldwide, and the results have been both positive and negative for large media organizations.

Among the positive influences of the Internet on traditional news media are the immediacy with which they can reach vast audiences and the limitless space for archived material. While print newspaper faces severe space limitations, they can publish additional stories and commentary online that were not able to make the print version. Bardoel and Deuze also note the possibilities for audience interactivity, customization, and the vast array of resources now at the disposal of journalists due to the rise of the Internet, all of which

contribute to increased creativity and possibilities for in-depth and investigative reporting (2001: 2).

However, the media industry does not only reap the benefits of the technological revolution. The new online medium has hurt the traditional business structure of news organizations because readers can access the same story online for free instead of paying \$1.00 for a copy of the newspaper on the street corner. Shrinking profits are a serious issue for traditional media, as new competition has also emerged with technology. Negative implications on content include the need for speed and the desire to scoop a story before the competitor puts it up on their Web site. Bardoel and Deuze list the potential for online news to become more “market-driven,” with greater opportunities for targeting specific populations and feedback, as well as the threat of increased “infotainment,” or “the blurring of editorial and commercial contents and of formulas and formats” (2001: 10).

Gold provided the journalist’s point of view, saying that the Internet has not changed the content of print news. As a writer for the German press agency DPA, his articles are both published in print and online. He said that “the 24-hour news cycle hasn’t affected newspaper coverage so much as it has the reception of news,” with reputable papers still holding their journalism to the same standards as they did 20 years ago. While he said reporters may be expected to have an increased output because of the possibility to add articles to the paper’s Web site, he doesn’t believe this makes the content any less informative or accurate.

VI. Case Studies: Darfur and Gaza

In December 2006, Alexander Cockburn, a columnist for *The Nation*, wrote a column about international media coverage of both Darfur and Gaza and proposed that throughout the

year, Western media focused more on Darfur than on Gaza because it is a more comfortable issue for Western news consumers. According to Cockburn, coverage of Darfur increased around June, when violence escalated in Gaza, because readers in the U.S. and Europe have no reason to feel responsible for the conflict in Darfur – they view it as an interethnic, distant problem not involving them. In Gaza, however, the offenses of the Israeli government against the Palestinians can be seen as directly connected to the financial and political involvement of Western governments, therefore causing a painful sense of responsibility among Americans and Europeans. Cockburn believes that news organizations have made a conscious editorial decision to keep Gaza low on the radar, covered up by the atrocities in Darfur, to, in a sense, protect the American people and government from facing the reality of the horrors taking place in Gaza and their connection to the situation. It is also for this reason that Israel was restricting the entrance of foreign press into the territory (Cockburn 2006).

While both Murphy and Gold disagreed with Cockburn’s “conspiracy theory,” as Murphy termed it, it raises an interesting comparison of the international media coverage of each conflict. Both take place in the Muslim world, they are both in developing countries, and they have both seen the loss of hundreds of thousands of innocent lives over the years. Darfur and Gaza are humanitarian crises in their own right, and the Western powers have done little to intervene or alleviate the suffering. Therefore, I want to examine both the international and local media coverage of these conflicts and how each has played a role in the political process and also suggest new approaches for better coverage in the future. For Gaza, I will focus on the recent violence that has stirred the region since late 2008, though it will be in the context of the media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole.

A. *Darfur*

In November 2007, IMS published a report on the state of the media in Sudan, where violence and civil war have ravaged the country for 21 years. Several conflicts are raging in different regions, but the most covered in international media has been the violence in Darfur in the West, which came into the public sphere in 2003. Despite the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by warring parties in 2005, which was meant to pave the road for a transition to democracy and thus freedom of expression and media independence, challenges to media actors in the country still exist. IMS deduced by their assessment that the following are the main challenges facing Sudanese media and their coverage of the conflict in Darfur:

- Severely low academic and professional journalistic standards despite many media schools in Sudan
- Poor working conditions that cause the strong journalists to leave
- Media operating with a political agenda and trying to influence public opinion
- Restrictions on a free and pluralistic media, which means that reporting is biased and the public is not well-informed, as there are no laws assuring access to information
- Technical and financial restraints (IMS 2007)

After assessing these deficiencies, IMS outlined a strategy for media support in Sudan:

- Policy and legal reform for freedom of expression and the safety of journalists
- A network of media professionals and associations throughout different regions
- Development of innovative media formats
- Higher quality journalism that must come about from a coordinated approach to capacity building and training
- Public service programming and media diversity

- Cooperation with international agencies (IMS 2007)

These suggestions fit appropriately with the general suggestions for media in vulnerable societies outlined in Frohardt and Temin's Special Report, as well as those described by similar media NGOs. Five months after IMS issued the Sudan report, they reviewed progress and found that censorship, harassment, and persecution of journalists by the government still existed, especially for those covering the conflict in Darfur, placing limitations and parameters on media workers. Furthermore, different political situations in the different regions altered the degree of freedom of expression throughout the country. IMS stressed that "media are a decisive player in Sudan's transition into a democracy and therefore need to play a strong supportive role in helping to inform the public about the peace agreement and its implications" (IMS 2008a). Strong, independent media can encourage public participation and acceptance of reconciliation and alleviate the threats to the peace process (IMS 2008a). The observations and deductions by IMS place a sense of responsibility on the Sudanese media, but two years after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, little improvement had taken place. The local media situation in Sudan on covering the conflict in Darfur is still under government scrutiny and not adhering to international journalism standards, as reported by IMS in another review in September 2008.

In its most recent report on the state of local media coverage in Sudan and specifically of the Darfur crisis, IMS participated in a round table discussion of Arab and Sudanese media coverage of Darfur. Local journalists had performed a content analysis of their colleagues' coverage of Darfur and they concluded the following:

- Coverage fell short in the implementation of professional journalistic standards, such as objectivity, accuracy, and balanced reporting
- Inadequate attention was given to the conflict overall

- Too much focus on the political aspects, neglecting humanitarian needs and human interest stories
- Did not provide comprehensive coverage, failing to include all aspects of the dispute
- Some media lacked a clear editorial policy, showing weak professionalism and a lack of training in covering conflicts
- Self-censorship (IMS 2008b)

It is interesting to note the third bullet point, in which the researchers found coverage of the political process a negative media approach to the conflict. While diplomats and media NGOs stress the need for more international coverage of the political process, local media should include an emphasis on humanitarian need and human interest stories because their audiences are more closely associated to the victims and may even be victims themselves. Therefore, by reading or hearing about the human suffering taking place not far from them, the public should be moved to support reconciliation and peace. Also, coverage of the political situation in local media must not be too daunting or complex for audiences but should present a comprehensive portrayal of the process.

In November 2007, Silvio Waisbord interviewed Jan Eliasson, U.N. Special Envoy to Darfur, about the international press coverage of the conflict and his suggestions for the media that would assist in the diplomatic process. Eliasson says that the main reasons for tension in Darfur in late 2007 had not been highlighted in the world press. He cites new tribal tensions and the fact that the refugee camps are a “ticking bomb,” with 2 million people inside, some of them there for three or four years (2008: 76). International reporters have extreme difficulty in getting permits to go to Darfur so they have to enter with humanitarian organizations, and once they are there, the security inside the camps is complex, he said.

Eliasson is critical of the world press for confusing the situation in Darfur with the North/South conflict. While the real problem now is that the opposing sides have splintered into factions and that tribal clashes present a security threat, the dominant news frame for the conflict has been that it is a religious war. However, Eliasson corrects that it is not a problem of religion because all parties are Muslim. Furthermore, the important role played by regional actors – countries bordering Sudan – is not brought out in the press, most likely because international media have been cutting back on their regional bureaus (2008: 77).

Waisbord asks Eliasson about the local coverage of the conflict, to which Eliasson responds that there is wide coverage within the country but the press is dominated by the government, as discerned above by IMS. Eliasson comments that there is more local coverage of the internal forces in Sudan, the movements, and views from civil society than what is found in international news, except for Al Jazeera, which he notes has covered the situation closely. However, he calls for more attention on the political process, which is pushing for power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and security, as opposed to the current coverage of only peacekeeping operations and the humanitarian situation. Eliasson doesn't want the public to think that peacekeeping can solve all the problems because the problems are bigger than the deployment of troops to the region. By covering only the peacekeeping mission, the press is suggesting "the wrong medicine for the problem" (Waisbord 2008: 79).

The diplomat notes that international coverage has been erratic and inconsistent and has not acknowledged the positive achievements made thus far. He calls for media attention on progress and successful prevention, supporting Jakobsen and Gilboa's call for the pre and post-conflict coverage instead of just the violent phase. The "political solution needs attention and visibility," in order to gain international support and understanding (Waisbord 2008: 79). His

final suggestion for media covering Darfur is that they offer an analysis of the three forces that must work together for a peaceful solution: the U.N. Security Council which must all be on the same page; the neighboring countries which should coordinate with the African Union and U.N.; and the Sudanese government which must commit to non-military negotiations. Also, the media should indicate dangers for the future, such as the mounting tensions in the refugee camps and land seizure by warring tribes. Eliasson believes that this type of coverage could set the stage for positive public debate (2008: 79-80). As a diplomat immersed in the intricacies of the conflict, Eliasson's input for international media is extremely valuable. His suggestions correlate to the work undertaken by IMS and Fondation Hironnelle in the region.

In 2006, the U.N. Mission in Sudan and Fondation Hironnelle established Miraya FM, which broadcasts to the whole country via shortwave transmitters and to the south using FM transmitters. According to Jean-Luc Mootosamy, Hironnelle's project officer for the venture in Sudan, local media in Darfur is non-existent; reports come only from the capital, Khartoum, or officials and tend to be wrought with inaccuracies. While locals can receive BBC and CNN on their radios, Miraya sends freelance Sudanese journalists to Darfur about every two weeks to gather information from the camps and the situation on the ground. They verify their sources and bring the material back to Khartoum for editing and broadcast one-hour per day of programming on the status of Darfur. The program called "Darfur: The Road to Peace" charts the peace process for local audiences. However, Mootosamy cited the restrictions placed on journalists by the government for free movement inside Darfur (2009). Miraya FM, with the support of Hironnelle and the U.N., is the only independent national broadcast based in Sudan that disseminates necessary information to those most directly affected by the conflict.

According to Cockburn, *The New York Times* ran 70 news stories on Darfur between March 1 and December 18, 2006, while a column by Brian Cathcart says that England's *Independent* newspaper "carries about twice as many articles about Darfur as any of its rivals and publishes an editorial on the subject roughly once a month" (Cockburn 2006; Cathcart 2007). Cockburn tries to say that Western media puts an emphasis on Darfur over other conflicts like Gaza for political reasons, but Shabtai Gold says that in 2006, coverage of Darfur increased because the conflict reached critical mass and had gained U.N. and ICC attention by then, therefore making it more appealing and important to journalists. Either way, Cathcart puts a more somber tone on the debate, saying that no matter how much coverage the conflict receives in the West, nothing has stopped the killing thus far (2007). Cathcart's pessimistic view must not discourage Western journalists from pursuing consistent, comprehensive coverage of the conflict, for only through the dissemination of accurate, solid, valuable information can political and legislative powers in the West do anything to end the killing of innocent lives in Darfur.

B. Gaza

In November 2008, new violence broke out after a ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which is home to about 1.5 million Palestinians. Now tens of thousands of Palestinians are homeless, 400,000 have no running water, and at least 1,300 have been killed and 5,500 injured; a reported 13 Israelis have been killed. The recent Israeli military offensive against Gaza has been the largest in the Palestinian Territories since 1967, and media attention has become not only vital but also an issue of its own concern. Israel placed a month-long ban on foreign journalists' entry to Gaza and has denied their own Israeli reporters entrance since October 2006. But even more pressing is the violence toward journalists and targeted bombings of media outlets in Gaza, which is, according to the International Federation of

Journalists (IFJ), a violation of international law and of the Security Council resolution 1738 “which provides protection of journalists and media personnel in conflict zones” (IMS 2009a: 5-8).

Palestinian journalists claim that Israelis have deliberately targeted journalists and media headquarters in Gaza, with four media workers killed and 15 seriously injured since December 2008. IFJ says the attacks are proof that Israel is trying to intimidate media into staying away from the territory to prevent the truth of the humanitarian disaster in Gaza from reaching the eyes and ears of the rest of the world. Both journalists working for international news agencies and local reporters are facing perilous situations in Gaza, having to choose between potentially losing their lives or their jobs if they choose not to report for fear of being a target of Israeli bombs. Sakher Abou El Oun, a journalist for AFP, tells IMS that there are about 800 journalists in the Gaza Strip, only 100 of which are permanent staff and the rest are freelancers. The greatest challenge for the freelancers and the reporters working for local media outlets is the lack of safety equipment, which is provided for foreign correspondents by their international media organizations (IMS 2009a: 9).

Shabtai Gold also emphasized the importance of being backed by a credible news agency. As a reporter for DPA, he is provided with the necessary safety equipment, but his colleagues and friends who report for local Palestinian news sources do not have the same security and protection as he does. He said that most journalists killed or kidnapped every year are locals. Their sense of security is different from that of foreign correspondents because “they have a dampened sense of danger,” considering they are more familiar with the area and feel less at risk than a foreigner. But these reporters are even more susceptible because their families could also be at risk (Gold 2009). Currently, the most pressing situation for international and local media

workers in Gaza, primarily freelancers, is their safety and ensuring their ability to do their jobs and disseminate essential information without losing their lives in the process.

In “Reporting Palestinian Casualties in the Israeli Press: the Case of *Haaretz* and the Intifada,” Alina Korn analyzes the reputable Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*’s coverage of the Palestinian uprising in the early 2000’s. The newspaper is considered to be Israel’s top quality daily paper, circulated among the elites but not as widely read by the general population. According to Korn, *Haaretz* was the only paper to employ a journalist living in the West Bank Palestinian territory to provide a first-hand account of the violence there during the early stages of the uprising. Unlike the Israeli tabloids *Yediot Ahronot* and *Ma’ariv*, *Haaretz* actually reported the Palestinian casualties instead of ignoring the mounting death tolls. The articles often presented Palestinian perspectives of events, conforming to the accepted journalistic standards of balance and diversified sources (Korn 2004: 247, 251).

However, upon closer scrutiny and detailed content analysis, Korn concluded that Israeli coverage “contributed to the militarization of the conflict” by framing “the uprising as an outburst of unexplainable violence and terrorism” (2004: 248). The media, she says, played down Israeli violence by describing it as self-defense even though the Israeli Defense Forces were using force against unarmed Palestinian demonstrators (2004: 248). *Haaretz* in particular, while it did report on the number of Palestinian deaths consistently, only put details further down in the story, not in the headlines, which, along with the first few paragraphs, are the only part of a story that most news consumers read. The low placement reduced the factual quality of the reports (Korn 2004: 259).

Furthermore, *Haaretz* did not give the same credibility to the Palestinian accounts of events as they did to Israeli military voices, illustrating the journalistic tendency to favor official

sources. Palestinian civilian perspectives were considered “additional information” and did not challenge the dominant Israeli position (Korn 2004: 259). This is an example of how internationally accepted standards of journalism, such as the strict use of authoritative sources as described by Tuchman, can damage the accuracy and credibility of news reports.

On the international level, live coverage of the war in Gaza has not reached Western television audiences because of the Israeli blockade on foreign journalists. The one exception is Al Jazeera, who has brought cameras inside Gaza’s hospitals to show viewers firsthand what the destruction looks like, having already been stationed in Gaza before the Israeli blockade (Bauer 2009). As the dominant broadcast program in the Middle East, Al-Jazeera’s competitors have labeled it as unnecessarily provocative and overdramatic in its coverage (Seib 2005: 605). The channel’s continuous coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has an obvious pro-Palestinian slant, for example, referring to suicide bombings as “commando operations” (Seib 2005: 602). As the leader of Arab television, Al Jazeera brings that unifying perspective to its audience across the world because it has more credibility to viewers than Western media, which is seen as solely supportive of Israel.

Due to its inability to reach American audiences via satellite television, Al Jazeera uses innovation and technology to reach their desired viewers. Al Jazeera English puts their footage online – it is found on both their home Web site and on YouTube. The network even has a live feed called “war on Gaza” on Twitter, the social networking site, to update viewers of new material available online (Cohen 2009). Al Jazeera officials say they are blamed by the U.S. and Israel for “accuracy in reporting what is going on in the world from an Arab perspective” (Cohen 2009). The censorship imposed on Al Jazeera by the U.S. government, by not allowing it to

broadcast across the country, has caused it to look for other, more innovative methods made possible by their lack of financial restrictions.

A content analysis done by Leon Barkho in November 2007 found that coverage of Gaza by the BBC and CNN decidedly favored the official Israeli accounts, legitimizing Israeli attacks but not those of the Palestinians through their sentence structure and lexicon (15). While the Palestinian attacks were framed as irrational and not given adequate background context, BBC and CNN provided adequate follow-up information to explain why the Israelis launched their attacks on Palestinians. Al Jazeera on the other hand exhibited a Palestinian tilt, identifying Israelis as the clear perpetrators in the headlines and using urgent and personalized quotes from Palestinians (Barkho 2007: 21). The English version, though aware of the cultural divide of its audiences from that of the Arabic audiences, tries to remain loyal to the Middle Eastern “collective conscience” in order to present the news from a different angle than those of their competitors (Barkho 2007: 23).

The biggest challenge to media coverage of the conflict in Gaza from both a local and international level seems to be the inability for the news to remain objective and completely unattached from the political implications of the violence. Gold said that a conflict as volatile and sensitive as that of the Israelis and Palestinians means that everyone has an opinion; therefore, anything he writes is bound to be criticized by one side or the other (2009). Just as Western governments tend to support Israeli politically, the Western media coverage tends to follow suit. But as Arab media, especially Al Jazeera, catches up to their Western competitors, the dominant angle of the media in covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might no longer match that of the world’s dominant political powers.

VII. Conclusion

Since the rise of international broadcast technology and the ethnic violence in developing nations during the post-Cold War period, the sheer power of the media in reporting on these disasters is palpable from both a local and international perspective. Though global media organizations like CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera can be accessed around the world, they originated in home countries with specific political agendas and therefore tend to color what should be objective, non-biased reporting with noticeable motivations and undertones when reporting on armed conflict. As CNN and BBC lean in the way of Western governments, Al Jazeera is a new competitor offering viewers news from the Arab perspective. If the U.S. continues to block Al Jazeera English from reaching American televisions then it is effectively blocking communication between cultures – something that is urgently needed between the American and Arab spheres.

In an evolving media landscape that opens doors to new, innovative methods of reaching more people at greater distances, the quality of international news coverage of armed conflict is not necessarily improving. Private interests, financial constraints, and physical and political limitations cause media to emphasize mainly the violent phase of conflict instead of the pre and post-violence phases, reducing public attention on prevention and long-term needs. Cathcart's somber column about the powerlessness of journalism to stop unexplained killing will prove fatefully true unless media make a concerted effort to increase and intensify consistent coverage of conflict before the violence even breaks out. There must be an extra effort on behalf of media originating in the West to influence governments to intervene in whatever manner possible to prevent innocent civilian deaths. Unfortunately, humanitarian intervention is often more complex, with the intervening country weighing the incentives and the financial and potential

human costs of intervention. However, if the media incites urgent public support for intervention, the governments will be more willing to acquiesce.

There is also the question of which element of journalism is more important when covering armed conflict: access and intensity of reporting, such as Al Jazeera's access to hospitals in Gaza; or objectivity and accuracy, which might not captivate and resonate with audiences as much as the former. In violent situations, it is difficult for journalists to remain completely objective when there is a clear perpetrator and victim, but they must emphasize the scale of human suffering, no matter which side is suffering, and be very careful about checking facts and claims with various sources. As all of the journalists I spoke with reaffirmed, the main purpose is to report on the story exactly as it happened for everyone who wasn't there to see for themselves.

The current state of journalism in Sudan and Gaza threatens to add to the humanitarian disaster, as journalists become bomb targets and tools of government propaganda. But the efforts of Fondation Hironnelle, IMS, and other media training and monitoring agencies provide hope for journalists in developing countries that only want to do their job to inform their communities. With continued resolve to ensure freedom of expression and to combat hateful messages in local media, coverage should assist the peace process by informing and teaching communities who have the right to understand how the process will affect their lives. Just as media requires the right to inform, the public has the right to be informed by accurate and trustworthy news sources.

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