MEDIA, DIASPORA AND CONFLICT

EDITED BY
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Foreword

In 1999, the former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in a speech delivered in Chicago, enunciated the doctrine of 'liberal interventionism' to justify Western intercession in the activities of states, such as Serbia, deemed by the international community to have crossed the threshold of lawful or ethical behaviour. At around the same period, the phrase 'information intervention' also entered the foreign affairs lexicon. It was coined by the writer and senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, Jamie Metzl, to describe the use of 'untainted' information to counter propaganda that legitimises human rights abuses. In a sense, these separate humanitarian advocacies were two sides of the same coin. One, a defence of hard power, the other of soft power.

What they also have in common, of course, is a defined Western-centric perspective. Take this comment from Metzl:

> If voices of moderation, reason and objectivity aren't adequate within a given society, then the second objective is to get news and information from outside that society into it, to create a baseline of objectivity.[1]

Media and communications scholars may smile wryly at the un-ironic use of such contested concepts as 'reason' and 'objectivity', but the thought that violence and prejudice are incubated in societies where the channels of communication are restricted and, as the Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, put it, there is "the danger of a single story", is of particular relevance to this study.[2] Metzl was writing

at a time when the Clinton-Blair axis of internationalism was dominant and assumed that Washington, London and a few other western capitals should be the preferred deliverer of news and information to regions and states embroiled in conflict. Now, 'America First' and Brexit are pulling down the shutters on Western engagement with troubled regions, so perhaps it's time to give the media of the diaspora some serious consideration.

Sierra Leone

The Blair doctrine of interventionism was first put into effect in Kosovo and then, a year later, in Sierra Leone, where British boots on the ground helped end a conflict that had killed and maimed thousands during the previous decade. For at least the first seven years of the civil war, with no direct British or US interests seemingly at stake, Western media coverage was fairly sporadic. There was a brief flurry of media excitement in 1998 when Sandline International was accused of breaching the UN arms embargo by supplying weapons and mercenaries to the government of Sierra Leone but, that apart, it was left to diaspora journalists and campaigners to keep alive in foreign policy circles the issues dividing their homeland. And, as the disaporic scholar, Dr. Zubairu Wai, writing from Canada, points out, this they did with commitment:

> The media and internet became part of the diasporic communicative spaces and avenues for networking. These spaces helped the diaspora articulate certain views and opinions regarding the conflict, while allowing them to keep in touch with events back home.[3]

According to Wai, the internet discussion forum, Leonenet, founded in 1991/2 at the start of the violence, helped demystify the origins and character of the rebel force, the Revolutionary United Front "at a time when information about the conflict and the insurgents was limited and misleading at best".[4] The online newsletter, *Focus on Sierra Leone,* published in the UK, where the largest expatriate Sierra Leonean community lived, was a valuable conduit for advocacy and lobbying for a negotiated settlement. And following the 1997 coup, two exiled Sierra Leoneans, who found refuge in neighbouring Guinea, set up a radio station, FM 98.1, as a mouthpiece for the government, which had been overthrown by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.

The history of Sierra Leone over the last quarter century is a good example of how distance often lends a measure of clear-sightedness to reporting. When the decision was taken to hold the trial of the former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, in The Hague, rather than West Africa, a challenge had to be faced: how to ensure that the citizens of the conflict region, Sierra Leone and Liberia, could be provided with a reliable and regular account of proceedings. The solution was to establish a project run by the charitable/educational arm of the BBC, the BBC World Service Trust (since re-named BBC Media Action) to train and mentor a cohort of reporters from both states who would stay in The Hague for extended periods and provide daily radio packages, in English and Krio, from the court.[5]

These journalists were native to the countries they were broadcasting to but over the lifetime of the project became a temporary diaspora in the heart of Europe, and daily proximity to the international press corps gave them a different perspective than if they had been reporting from Sierra Leone and Liberia. It was a two-way process too. Some of the foreign agency staff covering the trial came to rely on the BBC team for their intimate knowledge of places where killings had happened and of the shifting political/military alliances of the war years. So, in a sense, the impact of diaspora media can be greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The Caribbean Media Diaspora

The diasporic media eye has focused critically on Britain's post-colonial relationships with newly independent states in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. That much is to be expected, but it has also recorded and helped re-define the 'motherland's' often turbulent social interactions with a burgeoning immigrant population. Take the significant, if under-explored, role played by Claudia Jones, the Trinidadian founder of the first black newspaper in the UK, the *West Indian Gazette*. Having cut her teeth as a journalist-activist in the United States during the early phases of the post-war civil rights movement, and been jailed for her activism, she was deported to Britain in 1955. Three years later, shortly before race riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham placed relations between black and white on the political agenda for the first time, she founded a newspaper to represent views sidelined by the traditional press. "Into this

world was the *West Indian Gazette* born, like the goddess of mythology, fully armed, ready for battle."[6]

Jones's importance is that she straddled two worlds. As a West Indian expatriate, she acted as a conduit for future leaders, such as Norman Manley of Jamaica, Cheddi Jagan of British Guiana, and Eric Williams, of her own homeland, Trinidad and Tobago, to explain their aspirations and objectives to the British government. She also realised, perhaps sooner than any other Caribbean figure in the UK, that the West Indian islands, while nominally part of a federation, were divided by rivalries and needed an affirmation of collective distinctiveness with which to face the hostility of the host society. With her leadership, this took the form of six events held between 1959 and 1964, steel bands and calypso at the fore, which can be seen as the progenitor of the annual Notting Hill carnival that began in the late sixties.

Given its origins, it's not surprising that the *West Indian Gazette* was the spearhead of a community fund-raising drive to help Jamaica deal with the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Flora in 1963. But perhaps only a diaspora figure like its founder-editor, a citizen of the world rather than one country, could have persuaded Caribbean readers to take an interest in the Katanga revolt in the Congo, which led to the murder of Patrice Lumumba, and the South African Rivonia trials. *The West Indian Gazette* was short-lived, dying when Claudia Jones passed away in 1964, but, in paving the way for newspapers such as *The Caribbean Times* and *The Voice* and, more latterly, *New Nation* and the website, *The AfroNews UK*,[7] it has left a legacy in which seminal events, such as the murder of the black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, and the Brixton and Tottenham riots, can be scrutinised through a different lens from that used by the mainstream media.

The Diaspora and Decolonisation

Early in 2017, a campaign called "Decolonise Our Minds" was launched at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), emblem of the academic diaspora in London. It caught the critical attention of the mainstream media because of the suggestion that the philosophy curriculum should no longer rely on the traditional canon—Plato, Locke, Descartes, Kant et al.—because they represent a Euro-centric view of the world. Out of 26 thinkers, recommended for study on one course in Political Theory, only two were non-European, Fanon and Gandhi. Both, of course, were major diaspora figures, influencing political

development in their native lands by long spells abroad, Gandhi in South Africa and Fanon in France and Algeria.

Frantz Fanon, born in Martinique, an overseas department of mainland France, honed his political philosophy while working in Algeria, and the long opening chapter of his classic anti-colonial text, *The Wretched of the Earth*, called "Concerning Violence", justifies the taking up of arms by the 'oppressed'.[8] For Fanon and other supporters of liberation movements, violence was a form of communication, expressed in the slogan, "a bomb is a leaflet that goes bang."[9] Another son of the diaspora, the journalist and writer, Albert Camus, turned an unflinching existentialist gaze on the febrile relationship between his native Algeria and metropolitan France in his works, and many foreign correspondents who cut their teeth on the anti-colonial wars of the 1960s, from Algeria to Vietnam, sought out Camus as their moral compass—another example of the diasporic vision having a much wider ripple effect.

Diaspora Media Advocacy

The desire to communicate and tell a story should be in the DNA of all journalists and applies as much to the expatriate as to the home-based reporter, the more so when it is unsafe to criticize a regime from within. A vigorous Eritrean diaspora media can now be found in cities such as Houston, Toronto and London. A news-sheet called *Selam* (Peace) formerly published twice weekly in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, is distributed once a month in Houston, Texas, as a means of informing exiled Eritreans of events and issues concerning their homeland. The editor-in-chief of what was once Eritrea's biggest circulation newspaper transplanted his journalism to Toronto to publish a newsletter there, and Amanuel Eyasu, who, in a previous life, was a senior editor with the state Eritrean News Agency, used his skills and experience to establish the London-based website, *Assena:*

> Media is very important for countries like us to become civil and gain political maturity. We need lots of private media outlets representing a diversity of opinions and views. We're not opposition per se; we oppose the government because it doesn't allow any free existence of newspapers or things conducive to public debate.[10]

Supporters of the Eritrean government claim that the diaspora media, far from being dedicated to the free flow of information and public

discourse, is mainly interested in anti-regime propaganda. And, of course, diasporic journalists are just as open to the charge of partisanship as those who are home-based. News about Africa has always been susceptible to distortion and stereotyping, even more so in the internet age, which is why digital sites, such as BudgIT and Africa Check were established. The former aims to provide data about the Nigerian economy unmediated through ministerial press officers or news outlets affiliated either to government or opposition. The latter, a non-profit, set up in 2012, has editors in South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, and Nigeria, as well as London, and its remit is to:

> …to promote accuracy in public debate and the media in Africa. The goal of our work is to raise the quality of information available to society across the continent.[11]

Conclusion

We are living in an age where the line between fact, opinion and rumour has been blurred, often deliberately, and where untruths are being sanitised and redefined as "alternative facts".[12] Serious, ethical journalism has been on the defensive from the free availability of unsourced information via the internet for more than a decade, but the implications for democratic accountability of this fresh assault on veracity hardly need spelling out. As war and poverty stimulate population movements and global access to channels of information proliferate, the need for rigorous academic scrutiny of the deliverers of news and comment has never been more urgent. By illuminating a little studied genre of reporting, this collection performs a valuable task.

London, UK   Jon Silverman
March 2017

Notes

1. Mark Thompson, "Defining Information Intervention: An Interview with Jamie Metzl" in *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights and the Management of Media Space,* eds. Monroe E.Price and Mark Thompson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 42.
2. It was title of her TED Global Talk 2009, 18.49, filmed in July 2009.
3. Zubairu Wai, "Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: The Role of the Sierra Leone Diasporas" in *When The State Fails: Studies on Intervention in the Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed.Tunde Zack-Williams (London, Pluto Press, 2012), 234.

4. Ibid., 234.
5. The project, under the umbrella title, "Communicating Justice", ran for the length of the trial, 2007–2010. The author was the mentor/consultant.
6. Donald Hinds writing on the website of the Institute of Race Relations, 3.7.2008—www.irr.org.uk/news/claudia-jones-and-the-west-indian-gazette/ Accessed on 1.3.2017.
7. http:// www.theafronews.eu/.
8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (London, Penguin, 1967), 27–84.
9. Attributed to the National Liberation Front of Algeria which began a campaign of bombings in 1955.
10. Cited by Mohamed Keita in "For Eritrean expatriate press, intimidation in exile", blog by the Committee to Protect Journalists, http://www.cpj.org/blog/2010/06/for-eritrean-expatriate-press-intimidation-in-exil.php Accessed on 2.3.17.
11. Africa Check: sorting fact from fiction—https://www.africacheck.org/about-us/.
12. This was the term used by Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the US President, during a "Meet the Press" interview on 22.1.2017.

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Editor and Contributors

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Introduction: Communicating Conflict from the Diaspora

Ola Ogunyemi

This anthology examines the articulation and representation of conflict in the diasporic media, thereby bridging the hiatus in media and conflict studies about media's mediation of conflict. The diasporic media are the media for and by the diasporic groups, which provides background contexts and alternative perspectives about conflicts while adhering to journalistic norms. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand how diasporic media represents conflict to the diasporic audiences. This includes the roles they play in escalating or deescalating conflict, their appropriation of journalistic norms, and their engagement with audiences to mediate conflicts by acting as a 'window on the world' in providing up-to-date information and as a 'mirror' in reflecting back to the audiences the consequences of conflict.

The term diaspora refers to voluntary and involuntary relocation and displacement of a group of people from their Homeland. But the term does not mean they are totally disconnected from events in the Homeland. In fact, their closeness to the sources of conflict invokes emotional feelings and collective memories of the good times when they

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were at Home and of the bad times when they depart the Homeland. Moreover, they are connected through linkages such as remittances to families and business transactions, on the one hand; and through re-enactment of cultural practices and activities of diasporic media in the host country, on the other. As a result, they use their particularistic media to garner general information about what is happening in the countries of origin and to express their views about those events.

The diasporic media cover conflict not only because it is culturally relevant to their audiences but also because 'the world is characterised by endemic and multifarious conflicts' (Cottle 2006: 1). A conflict is generally perceived as a dispute 'involving a certain class of individuals, groups, or entities' (Reuben 2009: 50). The dispute can escalate or deescalate depending on the emphasis the diasporic media gives to any or some of the five dimensions of conflict, that is, 'the number of participants involved in the conflict; the amount of resources, such as time, money, and energy that the parties devote to the dispute; the number of issues at play in the conflict; the intensity of the tactics; and the goals of the parties with respect to the dispute' (ibid: 55–56).

Conflict also appeals to the diasporic media because of its news values, such as drama, sensationalism, adventure and human interest. Though conflict reporting has a chequered history, as seen in the coverage of the Crimean War in the 1850s when William Howard Russell, *The Times* correspondent, gave a vivid account of the war and in James Russell's letter to his family to let them know that he had survived the Battle of Waterloo (Rodgers 2012: 9). These accounts depict that conflict reporting is not just about factual account of war but also about journalists' experiences, which respond to personal, political and technological forces. For instance, 'the personal forces are those which affect the journalist in the place where they are working: access; the company in which they find themselves; and the journalist's own involvement in the action' (Rodgers 2012: 10). The political force refers to the 'international political and diplomatic situation at any given time' (ibid). And the technological force 'permitted moving images of the conflict to be brought into the lives of non-combatants thousands of miles away on an unprecedented scale' (ibid: 16).

The media scrupulously apply journalistic norms in conflict reporting to maintain journalistic authority as more and more conflicts engulf the world. According to the Global Conflict Tracker (GCT 2016), there are 27 worsening or unchanging conflicts in the world. These are categorised

as civil war (raging in Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, Libya and Yemen); territorial conflicts (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, South China Sea, Kurdish conflict, East China Sea, conflict in Ukraine, and Israeli-Palestinian conflict); transnational terrorism (Islamist militancy in Pakistan, Islamist militancy in Egypt, destabilization in Mali, Islamist militancy in Russia, and Al-Shabab in Somalia); sectarian conflict (raging in Central African Republic, Myanmar, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and Uighur conflict in China); political instability (raging in Burundi, refugee crisis in the EU, Lebanon and DR Congo); interstate conflict (raging in North Korean, India/Pakistan); and criminal violence (raging in Mexico).

Transnational terrorism seems the most prevalent because it 'occurs in times of peace rather than war' (Farnen 1990: 104). Moreover, it is endemic and a preferred option by combatants because it 'requires few resources, involves violent coercion, and is intended to compel a change in an enemy's behaviour by affecting his will' (Crenshaw 1987; Farnen 1990: 104). In post-9/11, however, some critics argue that 'what we know as terrorism is actually a media creation; mass media define, delimit, delegitimize, and discredit events that we have not actually seen, but that we all instantly recognise as terrorist acts' (Farnen 1990: 100).

Besides the news values attributes of conflict, there are other reasons why diasporic media cover conflicts. First, because the western media cover wars in which Western powers are major players; some wars are ignored or marginalised, and the perspectives of media of diaspora are not evident. Hence, Thussu and Freedman (2003) argue that the western media 'tend to cover only the conflicts where the West, led by the United States, is seen to be a peace-maker' (2003: 1). Second, because 'the coverage of the pre-and-post violence phases is negligible at best and only a few armed conflicts are covered in the violence phase' (Hawkins 2008: 105). And third, because 'throughout history, many of the world's deadliest conflicts, particularly those in Africa, have been frozen out of the mainstream media' (Harvey 2012: 40) such as the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which has claimed the lives of more than five million people (see ibid: 40–41). These suggest a pervasion of the news values as the media panders to western national interests, that is, 'political significance and proximity, both geographically and culturally, to the nation covering' them (Harvey 2012: 41).

Therefore, this anthology focuses on the representation of conflict through diasporic media in order to redress the invisibility of some conflicts and the omission of diasporic media as objects of empirical studies

in media and conflict studies. These reasons are pertinent because it is 'war—not peace—that has momentum' (Guehenno 2016) in the world today. Hence, this anthology theorizes the mediation of conflict within the context of diasporic media from the prism of roles, journalism cultures, representation and audience engagement.

The Roles of Media in Conflicts: A Symbiotic Process

The perception of media as a mirror or illuminator of society emanates from the conceptions of democracy. According to Skovsgaard et al. (2012), 'this conception is connected to the idea of journalism as providing citizens with the necessary information to cast an informed vote' (ibid: 6), on the one hand, and 'connected to the idea of journalism as providing a public forum' (ibid) in order to enable 'a lively public debate and democratic involvement from citizens' (ibid), on the other. However, this conception is diluted by editorial dilemma between a passive approach that emphasises 'that events and occurrences in the real world can be observed and reported as they are' (ibid) and an active approach that acknowledges that 'news does not just emerge by itself— rather it is the product of active intervention by the journalist' (ibid).

Journalism as an offshoot of democracy also impacts how journalists perceive their professional roles. According to Casssidy (2007), there are four professional role conceptions, that is, the 'interpretive/investigative which emphasises the importance of investigating, analysing and interpreting complex problems; the disseminator who aims to convey information quickly to the public and avoid stories with unverifiable information; adversarial which is constantly sceptical of both government and business interests and; populist mobiliser who tries to entertain people as well as develop cultural interests of the public' (Cassidy 2007). However, some scholars warn that 'journalists adhere to several more or less contradictory role perceptions at the same time' (Deuze 2002; Weaver and Wilhoit 1996; Weaver et al. 2007).

Crucially, scholarly enquiry needs to determine whether these role conceptions are reflected, combined or compromised during conflict situations. For instance, the role of populist mobiliser was evident 'in fuelling the fires of hatred that led to the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust and Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide' (Reuben 2009). This suggests that role perception can be compromised during conflict situations. And the media played an adversarial role in the coverage of

the Iraq War as Lewis and Brookes's (2004) study found that the British government attacked 'the role of particular news organisations in undermining its case for the war: its targets being Al-Jazeera and other Arabic media, and most significantly, the BBC' (ibid: 283). However, the media played interpretive and disseminator roles 'in helping to secure peace in Northern Ireland' (ibid). This suggests that the media could 'serve as arbiters of conflict management…and perform watchdog or surveillance functions' (Farnen 1990: 100) and support the achievement of positive outcomes during conflict situations.

As a result, scholars argue that conflict reporting 'is beset by an array of problems associated with allegiance, responsibility, truth, and balance' (Allan and Zelizer 2004:3). This denotes that the media struggles to maintain a balance between the role conceptions. For instance, 'the gatekeeping and agenda setting functions of the media are most relevant to the subject of terrorist news' (Farnen 1990: 100). So, the aim of organised terrorists groups is to pander to the disseminator role knowing fully well that media needs violence and sensational news increase sales or audience ratings. That is why in most conflict reporting 'seldom do the media provide their readers or viewers with the background, context, or parallel information needed to follow a story over time or to understand a topic in depth' (ibid: 108).

Another downside to an unmitigated disseminator role is that it makes the media fixated on the first stage of crisis coverage, thereby, enhancing its capacity to escalate conflict. According to Graber (1989), the first stage of crisis coverage is 'when background information on the crisis is announced, basic details of who, what, when, where and how are revealed and a kind of ordered panic or chaos prevails while news (frequently distorted and inaccurate) is spread throughout a "wired" society' (ibid: 306). In such scenario, the media is unable to transition to either the second stage, which is 'to provide context for the crisis and to supply rational and coherent explanations for the event' (ibid), or to the third interpretive stage, which 'takes a coping posture and a longer range view. Its goals are tension relief, morale building, panic prevention, and reinforcing the viewpoint of "everything's under control" in this unique situation' (ibid).

It is evident that the disseminator role usually overrides other roles during conflict situations because terrorists groups are able to package incidents to meet news criteria of timeliness (critical, crisis, recent); unique (new, fresh); entertaining (drama, pathos); adventurous (dangerous, a horse race, unfolding, risky, a life-or-death battle); and relate to the reality of the viewer (human identification, everyday life, innocent

victims) (Farnen 1990: 109). This made Keinan et al. (2003) observe that 'the world has come to witness a new type of terrorism characterised by a blatant orientation towards the media and designed to attract its attention' (ibid: 150). Moreover, 'terrorists use dozens of sophisticated media techniques, such as direct public communication of their grievances, demands, and requirements for compliance. They also seek to form public opinion by disinformation, "confessions" from hostages, criticisms of the government, direct broadcasts over open network channels, and appeals for help' (Farnen 1990: 112).

However, the media could mitigate this trend by balancing the interpretive, adversarial and populist mobiliser roles. One suggestion is to 'provide useful and valid information, consider consequences of past or hypothetical acts, improve the public's capacity to deal with large crises, aim to reduce attendant public fears, and increase the public's understanding' (Farnen 1990: 114). Another suggestion is to 'resist manipulation, dissuade imitators, and use proportionality, balance, objectivity, context, and minimum intrusiveness in their terrorist coverage' (ibid: 130).

But we have limited understanding of the roles of diasporic media in deescalating conflict because they are overlooked in scholarly studies. However, their unique position as platforms for diaspora groups to express opinions on political and socio-economic problems in their Homeland makes them a relevant object of study. One area of scholarly enquiry is to know whether they engage in conflict sensitive reporting, that is, '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' (Galtung 1986, 1998, 2002; Lynch 2007). Another area of enquiry is to know whether they apply 'conflict analysis and search for new voices and new ideas about conflict. The journalists' 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). This anthology attempts to fill the hiatus in literature by addressing some of these issues.

Journalism Cultures and Conflicts

Conflict poses challenge to professional values causing journalists to re-evaluate their practice. Hence, Rodgers (2012) argues that objectivity and ethics fit into the personal and political forces that shape journalism