

## Chapter 9

### Conflict reporting and peace journalism: in search of a new model: lessons from the Nigerian Niger-Delta crisis

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Conflict is a clash between hostile and opposing elements, ideas, or forces. It occurs at all levels of human interaction – in homes, institutions, and among groups. At some levels, these kinds of conflict are usually taken for granted and, most of the time, go unreported unless they have a bizarre nature to them. And when they are reported, it is usually in the local media as crime or as human interest stories. This chapter looks at conflict at an intra-national level in the context of peace journalism.

Such conflict occurs all around us today. Indeed, in many parts of the world, such conflicts have been transformed into a cultural norm. For so many years, conflict was the norm in such places as Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nicaragua and Colombia. In some of these countries, a generation would grow up knowing conflict as normalcy. For the most part, these were intra-national conflicts, although at times, the hands of foreign sponsors could be detected. But conflicts that are clearly international include what has occurred or is occurring in places like the Middle East, including the Iraqi and Afghan wars, and the Falklands/Malvinas war of 1982. These exemplify conflicts whose impacts were noticed and felt around the world.

Although the most recognisable conflict situation is war, all conflicts, to varying degrees, tend to threaten group, local, national and/or international peace. To deal with conflict, we must understand its nature and character, which implies an identification of the salient

## Expanding peace journalism

issues at play and the adoption of appropriate methods. There is thus, a need to focus on the causes of conflict, its nature and dynamics. Although it has been argued that the resolution of conflicts is only a 'minimalist condition' for the achievement of peace (Hansen 1987, p12) it is nonetheless a major effort in that direction. A more focused thought on conflict will elicit a couple of attempts at definitions that will offer a handle for understanding the phenomenon.

### Definition of conflict

Over half a century ago, Coser defined conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure and eliminate the other (Coser 1956, p8). Almost 20 years later, Kriesberg (1973), in his treatise on the sociology of social conflicts, defined conflict as a relationship between two or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals. Later definitions have tended to build on these earlier attempts. Bonta defines conflict as 'the incompatible needs, differing demands, contradictory wishes, opposing beliefs or diverging interests which produce interpersonal antagonism and, at times, hostile encounters' (Bonta 1996, p405). He then goes on to define the resolution as 'the settlement or avoidance of disputes between individuals or groups of people through solutions that refrain from violence'.

The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK 2005, p2) defines conflict as:

the clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between, at least, two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases.

Some other definitions are more focused on violent disputes or armed conflicts. Singer and Small in their Correlates of War Project (CoW) define conflicts as violent disputes in which at least one of the combatant parties is a state, and there are at least 100 battle deaths. This definition focuses on the military (Singer & Small 1972, p8). Such a

narrow construct of violence is also demonstrated in the definition by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) when it defines armed conflict as:

a contested incompatibility that concerns [a] government or territory, or both, where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least 25 battle related deaths. Of these two parties, at least one has to be the government of a state. (Wallensteen & Sollenberg 2005, p635)

The point to note in these various attempts at defining conflict is that, as the Jean Monnet Group (2006) notes, no limiting definition should be allowed, in order not to predetermine the analysis of conflicts; and that we should be aware of the need to not reduce conflicts' contextual characteristics, since this would not suit the complexity of the notion.

No matter how many definitions there are, there is a common thread containing elements of disagreement, either on points of principle, perception, policy, ideology, culture or expectation. But beyond this, a very important element in the discussion of conflict is that it occurs and progresses in stages. It is a cycle that can be broken or divided into a number of stages.

Anstey (1991) notes that the definition of conflict centres on two issues: relationships, and the fact that conflict is rooted in people's beliefs about goals as opposed to objective facts. Anstey then offers a two-part definition of conflict that is pertinent to this discourse. His definition essentially differentiates between 'latent' and 'manifest' conflict:

Conflict exists in a relationship when parties believe that aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously, or perceive a divergence in their values, needs, and interests (latent conflict) and purposely employ their power in an effort to defeat, neutralize or eliminate each other to protect or further their interests in the interaction (manifest conflict). (Anstey 1991)

Eric Brahm (2003) draws a normal curve of progression of conflict which he breaks into seven stages/phases which include: the latent conflict stage, the conflict emergence stage, the conflict escalation stage,

the stalemate stage, the de-escalation/negotiation stage, the dispute/settlement stage, and the post-conflict peacebuilding stage.

Douglas Noll (2000) identifies five phases of conflict escalation, each with its own characteristics and triggers. He argues that, as conflict escalates through various phases, parties tend to show behaviours indicating movement backward through stress. For Noll, the first phase is part of normal life in which people seek objective solutions in a cooperative manner. If at this phase, a solution is not found – especially because one of the parties sticks obstinately to his or her own point of view – the conflict escalates. In the second phase, the parties fluctuate between cooperation and competition and each party does everything possible to not show weakness. In the third phase, the parties each fear that the grounds for a common solution is lost. Interaction becomes hostile. As the conflict escalates into the fourth phase, each party is aware of the other's perspectives, but is no longer capable of considering the other's thoughts, feelings and situation. If not halted here, the conflict undergoes a dramatic increase in intensity. In the fifth and final phase, Noll notes that the conflict assumes mythical dimensions in which the parties sometimes have fantasies of omnipotence.

Johan Galtung, one of the founders of peace and conflict studies, developed a model of a conflict triangle in which he describes the architecture of conflict. According to Galtung (1996, p72), a conflict consists of behaviour (B), assumptions and attitudes (emotions) (A), and a contradiction (C). While the B-component is manifest (behaviour, by definition, is observable), both A and C are latent. Thus, conflict takes the form of a triangle and there are flows and interactions between the three corners of the triangle, which illustrate the dynamic nature of conflicts. To Galtung, conflict appears almost organic – in that it has its own lifecycle.

When we look at the various definitions and the stages and progression of conflict as enunciated by various scholars, we notice a gradual rise of conflict from a manageable level to a crescendo – where it essentially slips out of control. At this level, the best result that can be expected is that parties try to pick up the pieces, as it were, and go back to where the conflict began.

Noll's five stages, Brahm's seven stages, and Galtung's triangle, can be conveniently merged to produce two broad levels of conflict analysis, as suggested by Anstey: latent and manifest conflict. The latent level incorporates Noll's first two stages in which the parties seek objective solutions in a cooperative manner and later fluctuate between cooperation and competition; Kriesberg's first two stages of latent conflict and conflict emergence; and Galtung's attitude (A) and contradictions (C) elements of the conflict triangle. The manifest conflict level would include Galtung's behaviour (B) element and the later stages of the other models. The latent/manifest division is helpful in understanding how journalism can play a meaningful role in the pursuit of peace.

It is posited here that when conflict is confronted at the stage where its management is the least complex and unwieldy, where emotions have not peaked, and where attitudes and contradictions have not congealed into behaviours that are difficult to break, resolution is relatively easier to achieve. At Galtung's 'attitude' and 'contradiction' levels, ideas can still be suggested and considered and stand a better chance of preventing behaviours that translate into violence or manifest conflict.

It is important that such a distinction has been made between the two levels of conflict. More often than not, when we read about conflict, it is conflict of the manifest kind. Latent conflict is usually ignored because it is often not obvious enough to attract attention. It flies below the radar and is not recognised or appreciated for what it really is. On the other hand, manifest conflict is the stuff that makes for 'good' news and makes 'good' reporting. It does not call for much critical thinking. It is easier to describe and report than latent conflict, which calls for more profound understanding and analysis.

### *Conflict reporting*

In the first journalism course in any journalism curriculum, a journalism student learns the elements of newsworthiness. These include elements of conflict, oddity, proximity, magnitude, prominence, and human interest. Most of these elements can be identified in wars. Manifest conflict is the prime element of war. In wars, the high casualty

figures make them very attractive to reporters. It is one element that elicits the 'wow!' reaction in news: for example, the bomb that was dropped has killed over 200 people! The combatants are usually prominent in their own merit, having acquired prominence prior to the war. In addition, different segments of the global audience can often identify with one or other of the fighting parties either because of cultural or religious affinities or by virtue of physical closeness, thus meeting the proximity element. Put together, these will create some human interest to which the reporter will cater. Thus, war, which is easily the highest level of manifest conflict, is very attractive to journalists. This is where the problem lies.

### *Manifest conflict reporting*

Reporting about manifest conflict is less intellectually demanding than reporting on latent conflict, and journalists are more comfortable in doing so – just reporting the facts as presented (by spokespersons for different combatant groups) or as observed in the environment. Counting (dead) bodies is not much of an intellectual exercise. In fact, accuracy of casualty figures is not always of vital importance. Approximation is acceptable, especially as each group presents its own figures – usually more or less than the actual figures.

Some journalists who are involved in manifest conflict reporting may also see the positive incentives that derive from such reporting, such as the career recognition and, at times, prestige that may be accompaniments.

Because journalists are so intrigued with manifest conflict, this often results in them reporting on territoriality claims as in the Middle East, consequences of genocide as in Rwanda, fallouts of xenophobia as in South Africa and some European countries; actions of occupation forces as in Iraq and Afghanistan, insurgencies as in Sri Lanka, and civil wars as in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. All of these situations provide easily reportable material for journalists. Such conflict reporting attracts attention. It is adrenalin-pumping for both the journalists and the audiences who have been conditioned to expect this kind of reporting to justify their patronage. Conflict reporting treats news as a commodity – something that has to sell. And as long

as news is viewed as a commodity, especially by the mainstream media, manifest conflict reporting will be the most attractive variety. And as a principal revenue generating strategy for the media, it will be difficult to convince journalists to focus on events that have not reached the point of explosion. Such events would have to be spectacular!

When Saddam Hussein's Iraq was attacked, it was the spectacular 'victories' of the forces of the 'coalition of the willing' that were newsworthy and therefore were reported with enthusiasm. The toppling of the statue, the killing of different militia members on both sides, the killing of the two sons of Saddam and the display of their bullet-riddled bodies were enthusiastically reported for the satisfaction of media audiences and consumers. In the Israel-Lebanon war, the physical destruction of structures on both sides and the magnitude of casualties were what made front-page news, and top segment broadcasts. The Indian-Pakistani conflict thrived on the tension that the media helped generate with regard to the relative military/nuclear strength of both sides and the possibility of mutual destruction. The body count in Afghanistan done on a daily basis has been the core of the conflict reporting from that war.

As Lynch notes, 'objective news has three conventions in particular that also predispose it towards war journalism as [the] dominant form. They are: a bias in favour of event over process; a bias in favour of official sources; and a bias in favour of dualism' (Lynch 2008, p63). There is, of course, an economic dimension to consider. The economic interest of the media would dictate an emphasis on event over process. Process is obviously more time-consuming to report on than event. Also, getting information from official sources is less complex than seeking out possible view points from all stakeholders in the conflict, just as dualism is easier to deal with than pursuing different groups' perspectives and interests involved in the conflict. As Lynch concludes, 'the media are thus constrained to confine reports of conflict to violent events and ... this can lead or leave violence to appear, by default, as the only colourable solution' (Lynch 2008, p63).

In most wars, the goal of journalists appears to be predicting the victor and the vanquished, the winner and the loser – if these roles are

## Expanding peace journalism

not discernible, it is assumed the conflict has been in vain. The no-winner, no-vanquished perspective is unattractive to the kind of conflict reporting in the media today. The conflict would have lost its appeal. It is important to emphasise that media alone do not have the capacity to resolve conflict – at whatever level. But the role and contribution of the media to the resolution of these conflicts can be invaluable.

### *Latent conflict reporting*

Almost as a rule, latent conflict hardly attracts attention. Yet it is at this level that conflict can best be managed by those whose interests are being considered and reported. For journalists and scholars who advocate peace journalism, the focus tends to be manifest conflict. I argue here that the application of peace journalism at the level of latent conflict reporting will more effectively help prevent the conflagration that manifest conflict usually exemplifies. Indeed, other scholars have noted the potential for such early intervention in interstate conflicts. Karl Deutsch proposed ‘an early warning system’ to register the amount of media attention given to a conflict area or an enemy country because ‘continuing hostile attention in the mass media may tend to harden public opinion to such a degree as eventually to destroy the freedom of choice of the national government concerned’ (Deutsch 1957, p202). His idea was ‘to measure quantitatively the relative shares of attention allotted to particular interstate conflicts and issues in the general flow of news, the extent to which these are retained or forgotten by leaders, and the extent to which they have cumulative effects (Deutsch 1957, p204). Later, Cees Hamelink suggested an International Media Alert System (IMAS) to monitor media content in areas of conflict. ‘This system would provide an “early warning” where and when media set the climate for crimes against humanity and begin to motivate people to kill others’ (Hamelink 1997, p381).

Latent conflict is essentially a situation in which persons or groups or nations express differences in positions over values or ideas. It is at this level that protagonists are probably more likely to listen to one another and communicate more effectively. It is at this level also that mediation and negotiation have a greater chance of working. At the



higher (manifest) level, violence would have been introduced and that constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to negotiation that could lead to peace. At the latent conflict level, it is even possible that one party does not know or acknowledge that a problem exists. This is similar to what occurs at the interpersonal level of human interaction (see Donahue & Kolt 1992). Therefore the need for face-saving is not as intense as it would be in manifest conflict where there would already be 'spectators'. This absence of the threat of 'losing face' in latent conflict makes it the preferred context for peace journalism.

### Peace journalism (today)

Since the introduction of peace journalism in the 1960s in Johan Galtung's article 'The structure of foreign news', in which he critiqued the prevailing style of journalism at the time (Galtung & Ruge 1965), other scholars have also focused on the phenomenon – many of them agreeing on some of its fundamental aspects. In a general sense, peace journalism is a form of journalism that frames stories in a way that encourages conflict analysis and a nonviolent response.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) have written that peace journalism concerns the choices of editors and reporters of what stories to report and about how to report them, that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict. Lynch and McGoldrick's evaluative criteria provide us with some tips about what a peace journalist might try *not* to do, including a series of attitudes and behaviours that should be avoided, such as: portraying a conflict as consisting of only two parties contesting one goal; accepting stark distinctions between 'self' and 'other'; treating a conflict as if it is only going on in the place and at the time that violence is occurring; letting parties (to a conflict) define themselves by simply quoting their leaders' restatements of familiar demands or positions; concentrating always on what divides the parties; imprecise use of emotive words to describe what has happened to people; demonising adjectives and labels; and making an opinion or claim seem like an established fact.

Majid Tehranian has also identified similar issues regarding peace journalism. He describes peace journalism as:

## Expanding peace journalism

a kind of journalism and media ethics that attempts ... to transform conflicts from their violent channels into constructive forms by conceptualising news, empowering the voiceless, and seeking common grounds that unify rather than divide human societies. (Tehrani 2002)

Similarly to Lynch and McGoldrick, Tehranian has also prescribed a '10 commandments' of peace journalism. He stressed that these 'commandments' are negotiable and suggestive rather than exhaustive. They include:

- Never reduce the parties in human conflict to two. Remember that when two elephants fight, the grass gets hurt. Pay attention to the poor grass.
- Identify the views and interests of all parties to human conflicts. There is no single truth. There are many truths.
- Do not be hostage to one source particularly those of governments that control the source of information.
- Develop a good sense of skepticism. Remember that reporting is representation. Bias is endemic to human conditions. You, your media organisation, and your sources are not exceptions.
- Give voice to the oppressed and peacemakers to represent and empower them.
- Seek peaceful solutions to conflict problems, but never fall prey to panaceas.
- Your representation of conflict problems can become part of the problem if it exacerbates dualism and hatreds.
- Your representation of conflict problems can become part of the solution if it employs the creative tensions in any human conflict to seek common ground and nonviolent solutions.
- Always exercise the professional media ethics of accuracy, veracity, fairness, and respect for human rights and dignity.
- Transcend your own ethnic, national, or ideological biases to see and represent the parties to human conflicts fairly and accurately.

Some of Tehranian's 'commandments' can be seen in Lynch and McGoldrick's prescriptions, and vice-versa. For instance, the advice to not portray a conflict as consisting of only two parties is common to both. This is an important point because, very often, mainstream media would often construct a conflict as between two major parties; for example, the US/Coalition forces against Iraq, or the Israelis against the Palestinians. Also, another point of similarity is the need to identify views and interests of all parties, realising that there are many truths, which need to be reported. And yet another is the avoidance of reporting and concentrating on violence, as this could become part of the problem. They also agree that journalists should go beyond reporting sources that control information, such as governments, instead giving everyone a voice.

However, Lynch and McGoldrick go beyond Tehranian's 'commandments' by advising against reporting that will do more to exacerbate than reduce the tension. This includes avoiding the use of emotive words such as 'genocide', 'massacre', and so on. They are powerful and may do more harm than good. Similarly, they advise against the use of demonising labels, such as 'terrorists', 'fundamentalists', and the like. The use of such adjectives, labels and emotive words go a long way in moulding negative (public) perceptions of the parties so described.

Taking a slightly different angle, Mayumi Futamura (2010) looks at peace journalism in relation to spirituality. He argues that society needs social dialogue in order to fundamentally change our values and norms. He believes that we as a human family need to adapt our focus on material wealth to incorporate inner experiences and spiritual wellbeing. He discusses journalism as a critical factor in this social equation:

In order to create this kind of dialogue, I would like to look at the potential of journalism. Journalism already plays a key role in identifying important issues for people, but it can be used as a tool for creating value in people's lives only when the motivational forces behind it focus on the value of human life before financial gain. Journalism can make people apathetic, powerless or fearful, but at the same time, it can inspire people, make people reflect, and help people learn about others. (Futamura 2010, p1)

## Good journalism as peace journalism?

Some scholars and practitioners will argue that journalism concerns itself with reporting the facts 'as they are'; recognising the need for objectivity and reporting as many sides of a story as possible; working within ethical parameters; and recognising the newsworthy elements of news. These are all useful. But when journalism is limited to these, it tends to become mechanical and less instrumental in bringing about peace in a conflict situation.

The kind of journalism that helps bring about peace is that which is discerning and can understand the mood and context in which an event occurs. It is journalism that understands the people involved in an event, their psychology and sociology, religion, and psyche, and the nuances surrounding the event as well as the consequences and ramifications of the conflict. This kind of journalism (as Futamura pointed out) inspires people, prompts them to reflect and helps them to learn about others.

If traditional journalism that mainstream journalists practise, with its emphasis on the rules mentioned above, is seen as 'good journalism', then the position of this chapter is that good journalism is not necessarily the same as peace journalism.

Peace journalism must be devoid of some of the parameters that tend to restrict mainstream journalism practice. It must free itself from the mainstream journalism straitjacket to be able to focus on bringing about change, preventing the escalation of crises, and doing its utmost to institute dialogue among people with conflicting ideas and values on any given issues at an intra- or international level. It should not be overly concerned with the showmanship and excitement of traditional journalism. It should not hide its goal, which is the prevention of violence. The promotion of peace should be its mission statement.

Obviously, this kind of journalism is a departure from traditional journalism and therefore requires a different mindset for journalists. It does not accommodate the brushfire approach to journalism that has been the modus operandi of mainstream/traditional journalism. This mindset is not expected of journalists who go through traditional journalism education and training. Peace journalists may still be trained in some fundamentals of journalism, such as good writing, accuracy,

fairness and being guided by ethical standards. More importantly however, peace journalists must be well grounded in such areas as psychology, sociology, cultural studies, conflict management and resolution, indigenous knowledge systems of the local communities where they may be practising, and in similar disciplines that will help the journalist have a broad understanding of issues, persons involved and the contexts in which those issues are evolving. This will lead to a greater ability to discern and therefore a more effective intervention into issues that have the potential to explode into serious crises.

Traditional or 'good journalism' has not helped much to prevent manifest conflict. So a new approach should be tried. Peace journalism cannot be just *good* journalism. It is *determined* journalism. It is a serious endeavour and must be seen as such. It is patient and long-suffering and does not give up easily. Peace journalists must understand this and be comfortable with it.

The next important thing about the peace journalism advocated here is that, for the greatest impact, it has to operate at the level of latent conflict. That is the idea stage, where protagonists are most likely to listen to one another. Peace journalism that has been practised or advocated in literature so far concentrates more on manifest conflict – the stage at which war has already replaced negotiation, and the ability to work out a win-win solution becomes greatly diminished. In fact, when journalism focuses on manifest conflict, it tends towards war reporting or conflict reporting that is far removed from peace journalism.

Some of the suggestions and prescriptions mentioned in the literature noted earlier may have some relevance for the peace journalism advocated here. For instance, the suggestion not to reduce the parties in human conflict to two is very useful. There are many participants to any conflict and limiting them to two will prevent the journalist from looking at all the positions that have a bearing on the issues in question. We need to identify the views and interests of all parties. In this brand of journalism, we should be able to give voice to the oppressed and to peacemakers to represent and empower them. All of Tehranian's commandments would apply. From the prescriptions of Lynch and McGoldrick, the peace journalism advocated here should

## Expanding peace journalism

avoid concentrating always on what divides parties, and focus instead on efforts to reveal areas of common ground and goals that may be shared, or, at least, compatible. Similarly, peace journalism can heed the prescription of avoiding imprecise use of emotive words as being counterproductive to the goal of peace journalism.

So, what is peace journalism?

In essence, peace journalism can be described as the kind of journalism that strives to *prevent* conflict from moving from a latent to a manifest level in order to avoid the violence that is often the main characteristic of manifest conflict. It also applies some fundamentals of traditional journalism. It is the stage at which the peace journalism I am describing here is applied that differentiates it from other forms of peace journalism described elsewhere by other scholars.

Peace journalism must be local and community-based and, as such, peace journalists cannot afford to be aloof. Journalists are involved because they are part of the community even if they are not part of the 'warring' parties. In intervening, journalists are also trying to protect their own interests. Maintaining a conducive environment for continuous and productive activities and interaction is in everyone's interest, including the media's. The rule of detachment (emphasised in mainstream journalism for the sake of 'objectivity') would not apply here because the media are corporate citizens of the locality. They must be determined to initiate and promote dialogue. But even as they pursue this goal of initiating dialogue and sustained conversation on the issues in question, they are simultaneously bringing the issues to the attention of national and ultimately international media.

When the issues become part of the national and international agenda, while still remaining below the level of manifest conflict, peace journalists are working to maximise peace prospects without getting involved in the kind of conflict reporting to which we are now accustomed. The local and community-centred nature of the peace journalism enunciated here is necessary because it is only in that state that the practitioners can feel drawn to the issues in contention. Distant media would neither be interested in local events nor feel the need

to report on them until they have exploded, threatening national or international peace.

Peace journalism is persistent. It needs to carefully deconstruct all activities to make sense out of them and construct viable options out of the dilemma to 'sell' to the various parties. This endeavour can only be meaningfully pursued if the journalist is local to the environment.

Peace journalism should be interventionist in character. It aims to do at an earlier level what the fighting parties and mainstream media struggle to do after the conflict has become manifest and destruction has been perpetrated against groups. It works at winning the hearts and minds of people involved in a conflict. Hearts and minds would be more receptive to such overtures if serious harm has not yet been done. The intervention of peace journalism at the latent level would make this much easier.

Peace journalism should be considered a genre of its own – with rules, standards and ethics. Practitioners must appreciate the demands of this genre and be prepared to adapt. It should initiate its own curriculum for training and it should stand out as a journalism specialisation area.

The peace journalism advocated here could have been useful in many troublespots across the globe and in developing countries in particular, where initial grumbles and complaints have been allowed to fester into very serious violence. The Nigerian Niger-Delta situation is a good example of this, which will now be examined.

### *The Nigerian Niger-Delta crisis*

The Niger-Delta region of Nigeria occupies the portion of the country made up of the nine states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. The country has 36 states. This region provides the petroleum that generates over 60 percent of the country's GDP. But despite the fact that the region provides what has turned out to be the country's economic livelihood, the indigenous peoples of the region have continuously seen less than a trickle of the wealth.

According to Emeka Nkoro (2005), the conflict in the Niger-Delta region can be traced to the deep-seated neglect and marginalisation

## Expanding peace journalism

by the government and oil companies in supporting critical human development, infrastructure and provision of basic social amenities. The inhabitants in this region live in poverty in the midst of plenty. They have watched as oil was extracted from their land and the wealth derived used to develop other parts of the country far removed from their region. Most of these inhabitants are (small-scale) fishers and therefore dependent on the waters in the creeks for their livelihood. When the oil companies started exploring for oil, there was a lot of environmental degradation from spillages that the companies did little or nothing to rectify. The water was polluted, fishing was adversely affected and poverty deepened. Water-borne diseases, malnutrition and poor sanitation increased mortality among the ordinary people. Nkoro noted that one ethnic group in particular – the Ogoni – suffered from deprivation and poverty as their land was exploited and their source of livelihood seriously compromised:

A practical case ... is that of the Ogoni community in the Niger-Delta of Rivers state whose case is being spearheaded by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the then human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. They pointed out like other communities in the Niger-Delta region that their lands have been devastated and degraded, their atmosphere has been polluted, water contaminated ... these as a result of the activities of the oil companies in the area. (Ngoro 2005, p1)

For years, the Ogoni people complained to authorities at all levels of government regarding the deprivation they were experiencing – lack of infrastructural amenities in their communities such as electricity, potable water and access to roads. But no one would listen. Then, slowly, the sense of deprivation led to frustration, which, in turn, led to anger. This was drawn out over many years. By November 1999, the Ogonis were incensed. As Nkoro notes:

The Ogoni people issued a bill of rights which was sent to the federal government of Nigeria, demanding political freedom that will guarantee political control and use of Ogoni economic resources for



Ogoni development ... and the right to protect Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation. (Nkoro 2005)

At this point, the Ogonis had been forced to draw a line in the sand. All they wanted was a change in their condition, but no one had listened to them. The government, at all levels, did not enter into any kind of dialogue with them. When they felt they had done all they could, violence was introduced. The Ogoni situation became a serious conflict. It attracted other minority groups who joined in the agitation for resource control. This eventually led to what has now been referred to as the Niger-Delta crisis that has claimed so many lives and heightened the sense of insecurity in the country as a whole.

Obviously, the Niger-Delta story is more complex than has been described here. But the idea of this narrative is to show how latent conflict, when left unattended, can manifest itself in more serious, violent forms.

At the earlier stages when the people started complaining about the degradation of the environment, the authorities did not pay attention. If they had, the killings, maiming, and kidnappings could have been avoided. Apparently, their concerns were not well-articulated or sustained in ways that could attract the kind of attention they deserved. Peace journalism could have done this – intervening at the level where dialogue would still have been a viable option.

The Niger-Delta case is emblematic of crises in different parts of the world that could have been avoided if necessary intervention had occurred at the appropriate (latent) stage of the conflict.

Of course, it would be an overstatement to argue that the media in itself could have been a sufficient counterpoise to the escalation of the crises in the Niger-Delta or similar crisis areas around the world. However, one could still argue that the media could be an effective dialogue initiator. But most conflicts, especially at the latent stage, are essentially local affairs. How would national and international media intervene in a strictly local environment? This is a valid question that helps underline the fact that preventive peace journalism must start as a local endeavour. Externality is not necessarily a prerequisite for peacebuilding if the local media intervene at the appropriate level.

The local media – print and broadcast – closest to the conflict should take up this responsibility of promoting dialogue among the parties. They could do this not only by repeating the ‘event’, but also by doing some analysis and confronting the relevant parties with facts that should be considered and discussed. Because the media are local, they understand the issues and all of the attendant nuances. Thus they are able to get involved and be persistent.

In fact, this notion of ‘localised’ journalism is nothing new. Community journalism that was promoted in the 1970s through the 1980s is locally oriented, yet professional in its coverage. It focuses on local neighbourhoods and, when it has to cover events outside, it focuses on the effects such events have on the local community (see, for example, Batten 1990; Broder 1994; Lauterer 2006). Similarly, civic journalism, which began to appear across the US in the 1990s, was seen by its proponents ‘as central to the reconstruction of public life’ (Friedland et al. 1994). Therefore, if local journalists in the Niger-Delta region had taken up the responsibility of helping to manage the crisis at the level where listening would have been a crucial factor in resolving the issues raised by the indigenous peoples of the region, the eventual violence might have been avoided.

In suggesting a way forward in the Niger-Delta conflict, again Nkoro noted that genuine conflict resolution efforts in Niger-Delta could be achieved by popular participation, equitable distribution of resources and free flow of information. This is very instructive. These suggestions would easily work at the latent conflict level, which should be the domain of the kind of peace journalism advocated here.

## Conclusion

There is resistance to the genre of journalism espoused here, especially from ‘traditional’ journalists. But it must be noted that this proposal does not call for the jettisoning of traditional, mainstream journalism. In fact, it calls for a different approach that should still work hand-in-hand with existing journalism practice. Journalism programs and institutions in countries should consider developing curricula that would take into consideration the need for producing practitioners of

this genre of journalism. With continuous interaction and dialogue among various stakeholders such as government, civil society, journalism professionals, educators, various opinion leaders, and social and cultural organisations, the notion of peace journalism and capacity building endeavours for peace journalists will begin to crystallise.

Although the mass media do not necessarily start conflicts, they have been known to exacerbate them. The Rwandan conflict is a classic example. As Moge kwu (2000) noted:

In 1992, Leon Mugesera, chairman of Habyarimanas (MRND) party in Gisenyi, known as the 'prophet of genocide', called for the Tutsis to be thrown into the Nyabarongo river so they could be 'sent to their Ethiopian fatherland'. *Radio Mille Collines* was used to make this call. Later, the dead Tutsis were indeed thrown into the river and swept into Lake Victoria. This extremist radio station continually broadcast violent xenophobic propaganda in a cruel and calculated plot to ethnically cleanse Rwanda.

Meanwhile, the extremist newspaper *Kangura* became famous when it published the '10 Bahuta commandments', ordering the Bahuta to break off all social contact with the Tutsis (Misser 1995). The message of hate continued unabated and is believed to have inflamed passions that led to the eventual massacre of over a million people in Rwanda. There are many other examples elsewhere. But just as the actions of the mass media play a serious role in affecting some kinds of behaviour, the media (and journalists) also aid and abet social and political conflict and disorder by their inaction. Peace journalism cannot afford inaction. Its practitioners should be the first on the scene of potential conflict, facilitating the right kind of action immediately. Journalists are getting used to being first responders when covering violent or mass tragedies. They arrive as early as other first responders such as police and fire trucks. They could also be first responders in conflicts that are still latent. But it would take the kind of peace journalism proposed here to do that.

Finally, it should be noted that, at this time, peace researchers have not yet produced a peace journalism welldefined enough that it could

help to prevent conflict. Much of the discourse on peace journalism focuses on conflict resolution: that is, what journalists can contribute to the resolution of conflicts. These are conflicts that have gone through the various stages and phases of progression to the point where major damages have already been done. The question is: shouldn't peace journalism begin to turn its attention to the beginning stages of conflict where intervention will prevent escalation? The discourse production and search for peace journalism should continue until more satisfactory pictures emerge. No proposal should be seen as too outrageous or outlandish. History and experience have taught us that sometimes what looks crazy or improbable at one point becomes the norm at a later point. Citizen journalism would not have been given any credence two decades ago. Today, it is a reality. We must create spaces to accommodate new ideas. The peace journalism advocated here is one such new idea. In relation to mainstream journalism, this genre of journalism that I advocate here is not an 'either/or' but, instead, a 'both/and' proposition. There are ways of integrating both for the good of society. The discussion of whether peace journalism should continue to be mostly concerned with conflict resolution, or whether it should turn its hand to conflict prevention, is of great importance. I have argued that the latter makes more sense and calls for more attention than it has received thus far.

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## Expanding peace journalism

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