

Global Media Journal
African Edition
2013 Vol (2):201-225

MEDIA COVERAGE OF CONFLICT IN AFRICA

Maurice Odine

ABSTRACT

Of the many problems that face Africa, conflict is perpetual. In a continent whose land mass is one-fifth of the world, and where ethnicity is omnipresent, conflict is nearly inevitable. Africans are captive to the divisive and manipulative colonial repression that has placed hurdles toward nation building, particularly because foreign powers partitioned Africa without regard to culture or socio-economic development. Hence, Africa has been, for decades, been the battleground for East-West political and economic interests. Despite flagrant suffering and millions dead due to conflict, media coverage (championed by western media) have either been silent or selective as evidenced by the United States (US) and British media. Even reportage filed from Africa has been edited to suit Western audiences and other pecuniary interests. To counter tribal connotations not only to forestall stereotypes, but also to assure accuracy and fairness, African countries have instituted peace journalism in association with sympathetic international media organizations with focus on conflict resolution. Furthermore, the advent of “peace journalism” is intended to undercut the “CNN factor” whereby incredulous sources are paraded before television cameras.

Key Words

Africa, bias, colonialism conflict, coverage, media, peace, reporter, stereotype

Introduction

Conflict is a phenomenon that forms part of human life. In larger communities, conflict can be defined as a struggle for power or property. Crossman (2011) says conflict theory emphasizes the role of coercion and power in producing social order. The theory states that social order is maintained by domination, and that power resides in the hands of those with the greatest political, economic, and social resources. In cases where conflict is avoided, consensus prevails among people in opposing groups are united around common interests. The disadvantaged are caught in the middle as factions strive for power, often resulting in conflict. It is this conflict that festers and plunges a country into suffering and loss of human life.

Although Africa's conflicts are loathsome, they have not attracted adequate world media coverage. Mthethwa-Sommers (undated) reviewed "Ethnic Conflicts in Africa" (Nnoli, Okwudiba, ed.) with considerable attention. The writer recalls images of Albanians and Serbs ravaged by ethnic conflicts and portrayed by western media and bemoans the negligible or lack of coverage of conflicts in Africa. Mthethwa-Sommers attributes the pervasiveness of "no coverage" to the notion of a universal belief that ethnic conflicts in Africa are everyday occurrences.

Conflicts have visited Ghana, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Zaire, Zimbabwe, Benin, Egypt, Libya, and Somalia. But Mthethwa-Sommers gives reasons why conflict is more frequent in Africa than other parts of the globe. One reason is that colonists fomented divisions within ethnicities and used the segmentation of disparaged groups to foster colonial rule. Bluntly put, the "divide-and-rule" colonial policies utilized ethnic

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

segmentation as a shield against nationalism or insurrection. While pre-independence era conflict beneficiaries were colonial powers, the post-independence beneficiaries are the elites and those in power.

Shah (2009) has collated conflicts in a number of African countries. In mid-2001, the world's worst food crisis fell on Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. The heavens did not send rain and a famine swept across the land. The ensuing drought had been predicted many months before by a credible international warning system. However, the media failed to communicate the gravity of the crisis to the world community. As high food prices made food inaccessible to many people, local conflicts exacerbated the situation. Oxfam, a non-governmental organization (NGO), reported that 12 million people died due to lack of food, clean water, and basic sanitation. Media's failure to report on the drought and crisis caused human lives and adversely affected pastoralists to whom rain is an oasis.

In the Middle East and North Africa, protests took hold as a result of the global financial crisis, causing high cost of living and unemployment. Again, the media did provide wide coverage of these developments. As the elites and the privileged retained "flashy" and flamboyant advantages, the educated youth roamed the streets in hopelessness. With the use of personal mobile technology (social media), youth frustration exposed decades of living under authoritarian and corrupt regimes. Is there any wonder why the governments of Tunisia and Egypt were overthrown?

October 2010 saw elections in Cote d'Ivoire that put president Laurent Gbagbo against Alassane Quattara (opposition candidate). International observers agreed that Quattara had won, but Gbagbo refused to concede. The ground was fertile for conflict. Negotiations between the two sides failed; both sides took arms. Forces supporting candidate Quattara swept through the country; Gbagbo remained defiant.

Meanwhile, about one million people fled their homes; about 100,000 crossed into neighboring Liberia. Thousands of civilians were killed in what was determined to be human rights violations, not alone reports of massacres and discovered human graves. Fingers were pointed at both opposing camps for being responsible for the atrocities. Despite the fact that the condition had been brewing for a long time, the media coverage was so inadequate that the international community was mute.

In Libya, the conflict is far from over, amid occasional myopic or occasional self-serving international media coverage. In fact, peaceful protests against the long-running oppressive Gadhafi regime turned into a violent crackdown as citizens took up arms to extricate themselves from a brutal regime. To forestall targeting of civilians by government troops, the opposition appealed to the international community for no-fly zone to avert a possible bloodbath. Still, international reportage did not “interpret” that international action (military) would complicate the emergent picture. The lack of “interpretive” reporting has had an impact on the international intervention, namely, civil war is raging on in Libya with no end in sight.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria have received adequate media coverage. In DRC there are seven nations involved in playing a constructive role in resolving the conflict for obvious reasons. The conflict involves water, access and control of rich minerals, as well other political agendas. Mining, too, is the cornerstone of DRC’s wealth. In the late 1980s, she was the world’s largest producer of cobalt, second or third largest producer of industrial diamonds, and fifth largest producer of copper. Mining, mineral processing, and petroleum extraction accounted for 17 percent of the GDP in 1990; copper, cobalt, diamonds, and gold provided nearly 75 percent of all export earnings. So, the international community (along with a United Nations Peacekeeping Mission) is on the ground to share the “spoils.”

The Niger Delta in Nigeria has the attention of environmentalists, human rights activists, and fair trade advocates around the world. Media coverage is, therefore assured. The trial and hanging of environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of the Ogoni ethnic minority made international headlines. And so did the non-violent protest of Ogoni people. The activities of such oil giants as Mobil, Chevron, Shell, Elf, and Agip have added to media coverage of Nigeria's conflict. In November 2013, the terrorist group, Boko Haram, crossed into neighboring Cameroon, kidnapped French priest Georges Vandenbeusch, then took the priest back to Nigeria. Vandenbeusch was freed in January 2014 following a barrage of international media coverage.

Methodology

The paper reviewed studies on media coverage of Africa's conflicts. Of particular interest were studies that included references to the colonial legacy and presentation of the various obstacles that have plagued the transition to nation building and led to conflict. Secondary sources included a review of books, journals, magazines, periodicals, and reports on the subject under investigation. These sources provided a foundation for analysis and interpretation. Agenda setting and gate keeping formed the theoretical framework for the paper.

It was the objective of the paper to address seven topics. Topic one set out to catalog African countries that have seen conflict and to determine factors that make the continent susceptible to conflict. Topic two was to look at residual colonial institutions that no longer serve the colonists, but retain retrogressive tendencies that breed conflict and impede Africa's development. Topic three was to investigate western media coverage of conflicts in Africa, with particular attention to exercise of bias, selective reporting, and stereotype. Topic four sought to highlight the root causes

of African conflicts. Topic five was to compile perspectives on media coverage of African conflicts. Topic six aimed at addressing media culture in reporting Africa's conflicts, and topic seven was to identify Africa's journalistic conflict awareness programs.

In addressing topic one, it was necessary to profile African countries that have faced (or are facing) conflict. Topic two considered aspects of colonialism that have left fertile ground and intractable environments on which conflict thrive. Topic three provided in-depth analysis and foundation of western media, through agenda setting, which provide coverage that reflects the interests of foreign powers. Topic four accounted for cultural and socio-economic and political factors that instigate Africa's conflicts. Topic five took a close look at Africa's conflicts and perspectives on media coverage. Topic six reviewed journalists' orientation to reporting based on their cultural backgrounds and intended audiences, including differing dimensions of frame of reference. And topic seven highlighted Africa's journalistic conflict awareness programs.

Literature Review

Kenworthy (2011) is British, but he lives and works in Denmark and nurtures a fascination with Africa. The Briton has traveled to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, and Zambia. Referring to the Western Sahara conflict, Kenworthy, says it is a "forgotten conflict." Kenworthy likens doing nothing to protecting western financial and strategic interests.

The researcher spoke to Konstantina Isidoros, who says: "I don't like this phrase forgotten conflict. The primary concern is that Western Sahara conflict is very simple to solve, but no one is solving it." Isidoros laments that major news wires miss the point that Western Sahara is actually a geopolitical "hot potato." The US and France

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

(Spain squirming in-between) are seeking regional hegemony to control natural resources.

Isidoros knows. She is a researcher at Oxford University (United Kingdom), although she lives mostly in the Sahara desert conducting research with focus on West Sahara. Her research has taught her that, Morocco occupied three quarters of the Western Sahara for almost four decades. Sadly, the invader has usurped the more fertile and resource-rich land. To enforce territorial seizure, Morocco has brutally clamped down on indigenous Saharawis who dare oppose occupation. Saharawis who fled after the 1975 Moroccan invasion remain refugees in camps near Tindouf in the Algerian desert. What can the media do? Gowing (1997) asserts that, “Media’s role in regional conflicts is ambiguous,” and that, “the role of journalists becomes ill-defined given that policy makers who make decisions on conflict do so on their own political whims.”

In the midst “murky waters,” the media are blamed for what does (inadequate coverage) and does not happen (lack of coverage). But no reasonable person can question the impassioned gruesome images of a conflict. Politicians and policy makers respond: “Something must be done.” In the meantime, “off-the-cuff” remarks by ostensibly well-informed sources do not add to the credibility of media coverage. Many ramble and are physically incoherent in fact and detail. Popularly referred to as the Cable News Network (CNN) factor, the sources usually lack background information and understanding of the conflict.

Once, former defense secretary, William Perry, noticed the instant power of CNN factor when images of a conflict pursued him from office-to-hotel-to-home. Pressed for an answer, Cohen recalls “digging in my heels” in response. The secretary also confirmed that, although vivid media reporting in conflict provides “tip-sheet”

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

coverage, government officials usually consider it “trite and crude.” Former US State Department spokesman, Nicholas Burns is more frank: “The challenge for us in government is to balance the need to feed television against the more natural and wise instinct to reflect before speaking.”

Notwithstanding, Edeani (1994) acknowledges the frequency of spontaneous and long-standing conflicts in the countries in West Africa. By the same token, the author attests that the power of media reportage cannot be impaired. Key questions have been posed that underscore the power of the media, including, a) does the press have the ability to determine what to report, b) how to tailor the reportage, c) when to report, d) how to tailor it, and e) where to publish (or broadcast). Edeani underlines certain factors that enable media practitioners to perform maximally: prevailing political systems and political culture; the level of economic strength enjoyed by media; media ownership; and the professional training of journalists. In reporting conflict, the writer’s position is that the media must understand the audience in the conflict and the time the conflict occurred (or is occurring). This is also called “contextual reporting.”

With reference to Nigeria, Edeani (1994) places the country on a “pedestal” in view of her leadership position in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Afro-centric foreign policy on socio-economic and political stability of the region. It would, therefore, be expected that Nigeria would be in the vanguard to provide media coverage of Africa’s conflicts. “Such coverage, when provided, should be conciliatory, rather than divisive in tone,” says Edeani. “All sides in a conflict are given a fair hearing in a news story or commentary . . . and constructive suggestions are made in editorial and commentaries for conflict resolution.”

Agenda setting contributes to media coverage. The theory states that, media are

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

not always successful at telling the audience what to think, but that they are quite successful at telling the audience what to think about. Theorists McCombs and Shaw (1972) interpret the theory. The authors explain that, the theory does a good job in explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. They add that, although different people may feel differently about the issue at hand, most people feel the same issues are important. Key reflections on agenda setting are as follows:

- It has explanatory power because it explains why most people prioritize the same issues as important,
- It has predictive power, with the view that if people are exposed to the same media, they will feel the same issues are important,
- It is parsimonious because it is not complex, thus easy to Understand, and
- It can be proved as false. If people are not exposed to the same media, they would not find that the same issues are important.

Thus, agenda setting research supports the hypothesis that the media play a key role in shaping public agenda (issues discussed or prioritized), and conversely, affect the policy agenda (through public debate and powerful lobby). In terms of conflict, Hawkins (2004) ponders that the media, policy makers, and the public can only, consciously, process one or two conflicts a time. Hence agenda setting will lay the ground for a “chosen” conflict (blinding spot) to be the subject of public debate and scrutiny for about one year, thereby eclipsing all other points of possible interest.

In 1999 conflicts erupted in Kosovo, followed by East Timor, and then an upsurge in

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

Palestinian-Israeli violence in 2000. When there is no blinding spot, other conflicts or developments in peace processe(s) appear on international consciousness, as did conflicts in Kashmir, Chechnya, Northern Ireland, and Africa's Sierra Leone.

An adverse effect of media agenda is competitive commercialization, along with sensationalism which takes the form of "infotainment." Under these circumstances, declares Hammock and Charny (1996), media coverage of conflict is oversimplified and forced into the framework of Hollywood-style morality play replete with villain, victim, and hero. As a product to be "bought" and "sold," conflict news must be "fresh" and "live." Any story that takes more than one or two days to reach and report is otherwise deemed stale or unworthy of reporting. Furthermore, the era of budget limitations has ushered in a reliance on local reporters without "high tech" know-how and who rely heavily on selective government pronouncements or press releases.

These factors do not favor, say, media coverage of the conflict in DRC. Hawkins (2004) reasons that, "the odds are stacked against DRC making an appearance on the media agenda." First, the conflict is too far complex for media coverage that fits the "morality play formula" or to be marketed as a product that can easily be understood in 30-second bite. Second, its location does not allow its stories to reach the market as "fresh" news. The lack of infrastructure discourages media organization that would spend days, endangering the life of cameraman and reporter. Third, the media industry is responsive to compassion fatigue in the West (saturation media coverage of famine in Ethiopia in 1980s) with regards to the suffering of black Africans. Finally, since DRC is not on the radars of Western governments, it is not an agenda setting item.

Findings

Root Causes of African Conflicts

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

It is often said that there is no smoke without fire. Likewise, there is a genesis to African conflicts. id21, a renowned international organization, bemoans that at least 28 sub-Saharan countries have faced conflicts since 1980. Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Desmond Tutu, speaks on the origin of conflict from a “religious” point of view. Tutu certainly does not dismiss the impact of early missionary work. But the bishop makes one significant distinction about ownership: The missionaries owned the Bible and the African owned the land. “Let us pray,” Tutu credits the missionaries’ call. Tutu goes on, “We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.”

The legacy of European colonialism has left deep scars on the continent. Let us face it. Europeans did not go to Africa as tourists. They sailed to Africa to dismember Africans of their possessions. In so doing, they put in place colonial “control” that worked for them, but against Africa’s interests. Moreover, the artificial boundaries that were created when they ruled (and after they left) were totally at logger heads with the African culture and values, and void of any regard or recognition of cultural diversity.

Actually, in the 1870s, European nations were bickering among themselves about the “spoils” of Africa. Put in another way, they were fighting over plans to partition Africa through the prism of their respective desires. Between 1870 and World War 1 (Wikipedia) alone, the European “scramble for Africa” garnered one-fifth of the land area of the globe. The arbitrary territorial boundaries responded to the colonists’ avaricious intent that African states would not be sovereign. This further explains why the transition from colonial/imperial power was (and still is) rocky, making it tortuous conflict-girded for African nations to rally to nation building.

Wikipedia states that, as colonial administration(s) solidified, European countries

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

were encouraged to settle in the colonies and created dominant minority societies. Certainly, France developed a plan to incorporate Algeria into the French state! The classic “divide and conquer” technique to extort subservience and heap subjugation were invigorated. Compliance was merely to prevent bodily harm or “torture.”

Some raise the point that colonialism is not to blame for Africa’s conflicts because colonialism ended decades ago. What they fail to recognize, retorts Robbins (2002), is that, the process of nation building (with decades of ill effects of colonialism) cannot be completed in just a few short years. Robbins, professor of anthropology, alerts that Canada has been struggling to accommodate different groups. It would be more tedious and challenging, the professor argues, for Africa where the problems are more complex.

“We must remember that European agreements that carved up Africa into states paid little attention to cultural and ethnic boundaries and ethnic groups had little opportunity or need to form political alliances or coordination under repressive colonial rule,” concludes Robbins. Geldof (2004) agrees. The author reports that in some parts of Africa, slavery and/or colonialism had almost erased cultures and community. Colonialism implanted an “education” and “civilization” program that gave Africans only a minimal skill tailored to European colonial interests. Geldof admits that rebuilding from decades and centuries has been a tough struggle for Africa.

Anan (undated), UN secretary general, concedes that African countries have different histories and geographical conditions, different states of economic development, different sets of public policies, and different patterns of internal and international interaction. Sources of conflict, claims Anan, reflect the diversity and complexity of Africa. The differences in the sources of conflict, nonetheless, have

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

common themes and experiences. One is a historical legacy drawing upon the 1885 Congress of Berlin during which the colonial powers portioned Africa. In the 1960s (the eve of independence) the challenge to achieve national unity was compounded by the framework of inherited colonial laws and institutions. There are internal factors, with a growing recognition that Africans must look beyond its colonial past to address conflicts.

External factors, too, contribute to Africa's conflicts. Although the cold war (East-West) is over, competition for oil and Africa's natural resources present an appetite for staging interventions with external aims and gains. No doubt, conflicts breed suffering and devastation for Africa's population. But foreign interventionists amass profits through the sale of arms sanctioned by foreign governments. Control of these mammoth profits perpetuates conflicts because any exit would signal closure to pocket-full profits.

Perspectives on Media Coverage of African Conflicts

Media coverage of the conflict in Darfur (Sudan) has raised grave concern in certain regions of the Arab world. Pintak (2007) accepts that Sudan is not Iraq where more than 52 Arab journalists have lost their lives. Nor is Sudan Palestine where journalists are caught between Israel and Palestine and between Fatah (West Bank) and Hamas (Gaza). In fact, Sudan is not Lebanon where media coverage has centered on armed rivalry between rival factions.

Yet, Darfur was formerly a hot-button conflict. In 2003, two Darfuri rebel movements (Sudanese Liberation Army and Justice and Equality Movement) took up arms against the Sudanese government, complaining about the marginalization of the area and failure to protect sedentary people from attacks by nomads. In reaction, the government of Sudan and Arab militias (Janjaweed) known as "devils on horseback,"

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

destroyed hundreds 400 villages throughout Darfur. Millions civilians were forced to flee. Farmers in Darfur were systemically displaced and murdered.

Pintak (2007) reports on conference at the American University in Cairo (Egypt) where Khaled Ewais (Arabiya political producer) commented on media coverage of Darfur, “The Arabs see the victims are not Arabs, and we don’t care.” Fayeze el Sheikh Saleik, Khartoum *Al-Hayat* correspondent, concurred: “Sudan is a marginal country when it comes to the Arab region.” Al-Gizouli was quite sympathetic: “If we say there are violations of human rights in Darfur, we are not denying violations by Israel; and the US in Iraq and Palestine.” Al-Gizouli then explained that, it is very hard to give a Darfur stories the media consideration that is often accorded Arab stories. Some conference participants made known that, in “other” regional conflicts, Arabs are the victims; but in Darfur, Arab militias are the perpetrators. There was hardly an acknowledgment that Darfur (Sudan) is in Africa!

It is pointless arguing the impact of media coverage in Africa’s conflicts. Nwosu (1987) is a firm believer in the notion that media coverage contributes significantly to starting, continuing, and terminating a conflict. The author has examined the coverage of three US newspapers (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*) and three British newspapers (*London Times*, *the Guardian*, and *the Daily Express*) of the Angolan conflict. The 1986 UN declaration of the International Year of Peace (IYP) would amount to window dressing in the absence of matching fortitude to speak to pestering conflicts. Nwosu is adamant that, the theme that dominated international media coverage of the Angolan conflict was ideology: Soviet/Cuban Communism and Western Democratic capitalism, metamorphosing into a pseudo East-West conflict fought on African soil.

Data analysis of the coverage by six US and British newspapers of the Angolan

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

conflict was generally low or inadequate when frequency and volume are considered. For instance, the newspapers published 164 stories on the conflict in one and a half years. Specifically, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Christian Science Monitor* published 28 stories (17 percent) during the same period. *The New York Times* led with 26.5 percent of total news space; *Washington Post*, 16.8; and *Christian Science Monitor*, 11.9 percent. On the British side, *The Daily Express* led with 30 stories (18.3 percent) out 164 stories published by the six newspapers. *The Guardian* came second publishing 26 stories (15.9 percent), and *London Times* published 24 stories (14.6).

When Kenyans went to the polls on December 27, 2007, to elect a new president, they never expected the democratic process would, instead, lead to conflict. Nor did they imagine the exercise of their franchise would be diminished to the term “tribal.” The conflict was sparked when Mwai Kibaki of the Kikuyu ethnic group suddenly pulled ahead of challenger, Raila Odinga of the Luo ethnic group. Consequently, protests and violence broke out, and intensified after Kibaki had himself hastily sworn in as president in the face of vote rigging.

Hollar (2008) followed the election and recalls that, no sooner did voting end than US media quickly invoked a familiar refrain: “African tribes are savagely tearing each other apart.” The critic observes that although the violence occurred along ethnic lines, many US journalists looked no further for their analyses. The *Los Angeles Times* (January 1, 2008) described the conflict as, “savagely tribal killings.” CBS Early Show (January 1, 2008) reported that, “This is a tribal situation,” and that, “what is terrifying is that the veneer of this country is so thin, and there’s so much tension and hatred that’s been here all along.” NBC Nightly News (January 3, 2008) informed that, “The election crisis has taken off the lid off tribal hatred,” while CNN (January

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

10, 2008) noted, “Charges of vote fraud ignited tribal hatred.”

Tribal labels were present in western media coverage of Rwandan genocide as well. With references cropping up everywhere, media left out the most illuminating parallel, namely, their own simplistic, racist coverage of both. *Time* magazine (April 18, 1994) published an analysis that was echoed across the media as the conflict unfolded: “Pure tribal enmity was behind the bloodshed.” *Rocky Mountain News* (April 14, 1994) was more forceful: “Tribalism is the curse of Africa,” the paper elaborated. “Every conflict in post-colonial Africa, from the state of emergency in Zululand to the current Bloodletting in Rwanda, is the tribal origin ideology. Politics and economies are merely modern-day complications.”

Sad as it may be, certain journalists “embargo” stories on Africa’s conflict, or at best, give it “lip service.” Such is the case when Safari (2011) wrote a front page opinion in the *New Times* (Rwanda’s first daily) with the headline, “Skewed media coverage on Africa impacts.” Lloyd Garrison, a *New York Times* correspondent in Nigeria, filed a story about the West African country. Safari writes that a few days later, Garrison was shocked when the article was published, but his editors had inserted a whole new paragraph on “Primitive” Nigerians. Garrison (African-American) expressed displeasure with the papers’ editorial decision. The Nigeria-based correspondent stressed that, he had not encountered any “primitive” Nigerians, as the paper purported.

Media Culture in Reporting African Conflicts

Media coverage takes a certain kind of journalist. It takes a journalist who understands conflict and the journalist’s role in reporting conflicts. In fact, a media culture would be very much in order, if at all possible. It is for this purpose that the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (University of Sydney, Australia) organized a

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

conference on September 13, 2012, under the title, “New Media, New Journalism: Challenges and Opportunities Conference.” A three-year project in partnership with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is underway to formulate a global standard in media coverage of conflicts.

Another reference to media culture is peace journalism, by which editors and reporters make choices about what stories to report and how to report them. Ultimately, peace journalism creates environments in which people accept to share experiences, respect differences, employ ethics, and to focus on non-violent actions that lead to conflict and, above all, simply to love one another. It is rather a tall, almost unattainable order, to ask of mankind in matters of conflict resolution. (Can the world replicate Nelson Mandela?)

It is the journalist’s role, therefore, to provide well thought out conflict analysis and transformation to reflect balance, fairness, accuracy, and sensitivity in reporting conflict. The concept is peace journalism. It provides a new road map, which traces the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover, and the consequences of their reporting. Conversely, peace journalism amounts to “ethics of journalistic intervention,” by bringing awareness of non-violence and creativity to the practical job of everyday reporting on conflict. The e-journal, *Conflict and Communication Online* (www.coo.regener-online.de/) has taken the lead in publishing scholarly-refereed research papers on peace journalism.

In the meantime, van de Veen (undated), in the article, “Better media, less conflict,” supports peace journalism in that it is critical in resolving conflicts and forging peace. Ten years ago, the Center for Conflict Resolution and the Media Peace Center in South Africa started the Mediation Project for Journalists. The centers run workshops aimed at imparting conflict resolution journalistic skills. Proponent of

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

peace, van de Veen stresses that, the practice of peace journalism is not about taking sides in reporting a conflict, but to report on the side of peace.

Western media have a journalistic culture that spans more than 50 years. This culture permeates in the form of biased reporting on Africa. In 2005, Boston University did a study (1994-2004) on the coverage of Africa by five major US newspapers: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Conflict, war, famine and disasters dominated coverage. Safari (2011) is steadfast in his belief that, the reporting is grossly unbalanced and always negative on Africa's conflicts with no regard to areas of progress or achievement. "It is like there is a desire to maintain an archaic and dire image of Africa, an image that western media helped establish in the minds of viewers, readers, and listeners since pre-slavery times," complains the African-American journalist.

In certain circles, what is usually not talked about (but known) becomes a favorite topic for discussion. This notion should, of course, be off limits when it comes to deadly conflict. Stroehlein (2005) decries the European journalistic culture that does not cover the war in DRC, and asks the question, "Why aren't the media covering Congo?" Stroehlein is fully aware that about 1,000 people die there every day due to hunger and disease because of the conflict. Notwithstanding, the writer is filled with incredulity at the absence of media coverage on radio and television, the Internet, and in the newspapers.

Stroehlein's mind goes back to March 2005 when Reuters organized a seminar on "Forgotten Crises" and DRC topped the list. A British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) presenter had asked days before, "Shouldn't this (DRC) be getting more attention?" It is an absurdity, notes the author, that a non-lethal car bombing in Iraq, or kidnapping in Afghanistan, gets more western media coverage in a day than DRC

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

gets in a typical month of 30,000 dead.

Africa's Media Conflict Awareness Programs

Africa's conflicts have not entirely gone off the world's radar, despite little or no media converge in certain regions. Soul Beat Africa (January 22, 2008) has published "Communication for Conflict Prevention and Resolution" as reference for African nations in their plans to minimize conflict and opt for peace.

Darfur Is Dying (Sudan)

mtvU (MTV's University) started in 2006 in partnership with the Reebok Human Rights Foundation and the International Crisis Group. It is an online game designed to increase awareness of, and activism toward the conflict in Darfur. The game places players in the shoes of a Darfurian refugee, and then requires that players keep their refugee camp functioning, in case of possible attack by Janjaweed militias.

Eyes on Zimbabwe

A project of the Open Society Institute (OSI), Eyes on Zimbabwe is a web-based advocacy campaign designed to raise awareness of the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Zimbabwe. In anticipation of the country's 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections, the project launched a blog and an online social networking outreach program intended to inform and involve people around the world to speak out against rights abuses in the country.

Cellular Technology to Monitor Rights Violations (DRC)

In April 2005, Ajedi-Ka and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (CAC) began work on a pilot project using mobile phones and Internet technology to facilitate existing Village Committees for Child Protection (VCCP) in DRC to monitor and report children's rights violations. The program is to empower local organizations and community members to use the technology in the context of armed

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

conflict and to enable timely reporting of conflicts.

Media and Rwanda Genocide By Allan Thompson (ed.)

The collection of essays reflects on the crucial role of media in the 1994 Rwanda genocide as follows: local media fuelled the killings, while the international media either ignored or seriously misconstrued what was happening. The book is based on a symposium hosted by the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada) and explores both sides of conflict. The book has contributions from local reporters, Western journalists, and media theorists. The book examines how local radio and print media were used as a tool of hate, encouraging neighbors to turn against each other. It also presents a critique of international media coverage of the conflict in Rwanda.

Communicating Justice – Burundi, DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda

Launched in 2007, this is a two-year project between the BBC World Service Trust and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to raise awareness and debate on conflict and justice in Burundi, DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. The project aims to promote conflict media reporting through the training of broadcast and print journalists.

Radio Talkshows for Peacebuilding: A Guide

The guide is becoming an influential form media in Africa's conflicts. Shows feature disagreements as a way of attracting listeners, risking doing more harm than good. The shows sometimes features hot debate discussions on conflict. The guide is designed to help talk show hosts and producers learn new skills to deal with conflict, effectively, on air. It also offers techniques and skills to enable presenters to talk about conflict in a way that is non-confrontational, and offers positive alternatives to conflict.

Liberia Media Project

Launched in 1998, the Liberia Media Project aims to enhance communication for peace building across the country through radio, with the hope of transforming the conflict through dialogue. A program of International Alert and three Liberian groups (Press Union of Liberia, Center for Justice & Peace Studies and the Justice and Peace Commission) enables groups that feel marginalized and alienated to articulate their views through media, rather than resorting to violence. The project also trains journalists in conflict reporting.

Radio for Peace Building (Africa)

Radio for Peace Building Africa is set up to develop, spread, and encourage the use of radio broadcasting techniques and content that has a constructive impact on Africa's conflicts. The vast majority of broadcasters interviewed and surveyed have made a compelling case for the ongoing need to support radio stations to contribute to peace building efforts in their communities.

Conclusion

Africa's conflicts are more rooted in sundry socio-economic and political factors than they are in the alleged propensity to engage in tribal strife. That African nations are still struggling to extricate themselves from colonial yoke is not an understatement. To comprehend Africa's dilemma is to surmise that the continent's conflicts are not as simple as arithmetic. Indeed, they are as complex as algebra and calculus. It is the lack of understanding that brings to the forefront media bias, raising questions about credibility and agenda setting. Why should conflicts in, say, Iraq and Afghanistan command wide international coverage compared to conflicts in DRC, Rwanda, or Sudan? The rationale is easily drawn that Western media, with tremendous interests in these regions, dictate or shape media coverage. This reasoning

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

gave birth to the caption that “one’s freedom fighter is another’s terrorist.”

Sometimes the media turn a blind eye on Africa’s conflicts. They even perpetuate the conflicts in order to benefit the powers that be. For instance, the Saharawis (West Sahara) are mostly refugees in their own land as a result of a 35-year old Moroccan occupation. But instead of harnessing media and their pervasive role to resolve the conflict, leading French politicians and elites have bought homes and vacation “havens” in Morocco. The latter, in turn, shower on the colonial “master,” avaricious charm meant to keep the media in abeyance, and the plight of non-Moroccan human beings out of international radar.

Cognizant of the fact that media coverage of Africa’s conflicts requires more than just ordinary skills, peace journalism has taken hold as a means to instill journalistic standards in reporters covering conflicts, including identifying of sources for stories and consequences of media coverage. To be effective, training emphasizes non-violence and creativity as reporters’ imperatives. Another cultural journalistic trait is “embargo” or convenient editing to reflect popular readership or audience’s frame of reference. These tendencies are known to propagate stereotypes and bias over fairness, accuracy, and objectivity.

That a handful of Western media organizations choose the “blinding spot” of a given conflict, totally eclipses other conflicts (as remote as Africa) and dislocates an honest debate about media coverage of conflicts. It is, in effect, because of the “blinding spot” that many conflicts have gone unreported, underreported, and simply sidestepped or ignored by the media. In reversal, researchers urge reporters to treat news on conflicts to be “fresh” and live, making sure that adequate analyses and interpretation lend additional meaning to their reportage.

Data reveals that the mantle of reporting with a view to providing coverage of

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

Africa's conflicts has been passed on. There is a call for shedding a contextual, and cultural framework to conflicts, as opposed to dealing with them from the alien's "tribal" undertones. There is also a call for on the spot African reporters who are, themselves, familiar with the environs so as to assure accuracy and fairness.

These journalistic measures would refute the CNN factor that parades mostly ill-informed sources before the television cameras, most of whom are devoid of real facts or details. A case in point is the 'iReport' syndrome that metamorphoses novices into reporters. This is definitely of paramount importance given the fact that Western media have shown bias and used stereotypes in their coverage of African conflicts.

Unfortunately, Africa's conflicts have a long road to tread. It is quite likely conflicts will persist considering the long-standing and recognized ill will of the technologically advanced foreign powers to manufacture and sell weapons of war that fuel conflicts. May God save Africa.

References

Anan, K. (undated). Causes of Conflict and he Promotion of Durable Peace.

London: Adonis & Abbey. www.adonic-abbey.com

Chatora, A. (2011). Libya: Mainstream Media Coverage Disturbing. Institute for

Security Studies, Tshwana/Pretoria, South Africa.

Crossman, A. (2011). Conflict Theory: An Overview. www.about.com.

www.sociology.about.com. Visited November 2, 2013.

Edeani, D. (1994). Nigerian Mass Media Handling of Conflict Situations in the

West African sub-Region, *Africa Media Review*, Vol. 8(1), 25-39.

Geldof, B. (2004). Why Africa? Geldof speaks at St. Paul's Cathedral, April 24.

www.DATA.org. Visited May 20, 2013.

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

Gowing, N. (1997). *Media Coverage: Help or Hindrance in Conflict Prevention.*

Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, New York.

Hammock, J. & Charny, J. (1996). *Emergency as Morality Play: The Media, the*

Relief Agencies, and the Need for Capacity Building, in From Massachusetts

to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crisis (Rotberg &

Weiss, eds.). Medford, MA: The World Peace Foundation (The Fletcher

School, Tufts University).

id21 Development Research Reporting Service – Eldis. www.eldis.org.

Visited January 2, 2013.

Hollar, J. (2008). “Tribal” Label Distorts African Conflicts: Ethnic framing

may obscure political contexts. FAIR: Fairness & Accuracy in

Reporting. www.fair.org. Visited June 2013.

Kenworth, P. (2011). Western Sahara: Saharawi cause gaining coverage, but still

lacks action. www.freeafricamedia.com. Visited August 30, 2012.

McCombs, M. & Shaw, D. (1972). The Agenda-setting function of the mass

media, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176-185.

Mthethwa-Sommers, S. (undated). Comments on Ethnic Conflicts in Africa.

Nnoli, O. (ed.), 1998.

Nwosu, I. (1987). Foreign Media Coverage of African Liberation Struggles: A

Content Analytical Case Study of the Angolan Crisis. *Africa Media Review*,

Vol. 2 (1), 76-103.

Pintak, L. (2011). Dardur: Covering the “forgotten: story:” Arab Media and

Society.

Safari, G. (2010). Skewed media coverage of Africa impacts. *The News Times*

(Rwanda’s first daily), Monday, October 3.

<http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/>

Soult Beat Africa (2008). Communication for Conflict Prevention and Resolution, January 22.

Strohlein, A. (2005). In Congo, 1,000 Die per Day, Why Isn't It a Media Story? *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 14.

Van de Veen, H. (undated). Better media, less conflict. People Building Peace: European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation.