Bosnia's Open Broadcast Network:
A brief but illustrative foray into peace journalism practice

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Abstract

This study engages in the examination of the role of journalism in a time of violent conflict and explores the discourse that has come to be known under the umbrella term "peace journalism." Through a case study of the Open Broadcast Network (OBN) coverage of the Bosnian conflict, the study analyzes the initial lessons learned from one of the original implementations of peace journalism precepts in violent conflict. As demonstrated by the fleeting and partial success of OBN, the news media can play a role in transformation of conflict but the feasibility and accomplishments of such practice depend upon a variety of variables.

Keywords: Peace, Journalism, Conflict, Media, Bosnia; Open Broadcast Network.

Introduction

> If there is no fire, then what the wind does is not so important. But if there is a fire, then the nature of the wind – how strong, which direction it is blowing – can have a major effect on what happens to the fire.
>
> (Wolfsfeld, 2004)

Ethnic conflicts during the last decade of the 20th century have made a profound impact on all spheres of public life, not only in the societies in conflict but also in societies that indirectly engaged with their resolution. The conflicts in post-colonial Rwanda/Burundi and post-communist Yugoslavia challenged the core principles of modern journalism and prompted reexamination of the role of journalism in a time of violent conflict. The sacrosanct journalistic values of objectivity and detachment that ordained balanced coverage of victims and aggressors as the ultimate goal disappointed many in the profession and the academic sphere. In 1997, veteran BBC war reporter Martin Bell stirred up the journalistic world when he renounced the ideal of objectivity and proposed a counter-thesis of *journalism of attachment,* or engaged journalism (1998). At the same time, one of the most influential political scientists in conflict resolution, Johan Galtung (1997), promoted a similar concept called *peace journalism.* As a result, a debate

regarding the role of journalists and journalism during violent conflicts was launched and a set of postulates and recommendations emerged.

This study of the organization, mission, and impact of Open Broadcast Network's (OBN) programming in Bosnia engages in the rich discourse of the debate of what has come to be known under the umbrella term "peace journalism." Today peace journalism is part of a major worldwide media reform movement growing out of the strong critique of dominant mainstream media practices. The well-documented elite domination, ethnocentrism, nationalism, and conflict escalation of the media are particular points of concern within the field. While significant distinctions divide various proponents of peace journalism, peace journalism participants seek generally to change journalistic practices that too stringently control and limit access to the media and too narrowly define information that is worthy of broad dissemination. Hence the emerging field of peace journalism lies at the nexus of concerns about the rights to communicate *and* to receive information regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, or nationality.

Through the following case study of the Open Broadcast Network's (OBN) coverage of the Bosnian conflict, we analyze the initial lessons learned from what may be viewed as one of the original implementations of peace journalism precepts in violent conflict. To develop a thorough description of the conditions that contributed to the rise and demise of OBN, a thorough inventory of information was compiled through a triangulation of research strategies: interviews with the local experts, journalists, and practitioners; text analysis of the related news accounts; and secondary analysis of audience survey research. These data provide a detailed portrait of OBN in which the Bosnian conflict serves as a testing ground for media contributions to peace development.

As a context for the exploration of this specific case, this article begins with a summary of contemporary research on the standards and effects of traditional media coverage of violent conflicts. An articulation of the rationale for peace journalism then sets up a discussion of the continuing divide within peace journalism between advocates of a journalism of attachment (see Bell, 1997) and those who promote a journalism of greater self-reflexivity and broader inclusiveness (see Lynch, 2005). With this grounding, the case of OBN is presented to highlight both the successes and limitations of this early initiative toward peace journalism. The conclusion suggests both the theoretical and practical lessons that may be taken from the example of OBN and indicates what these lessons portend for the future of peace journalism.

Standard Journalism: A Victim of Violent Conflict

Much work examining media coverage of conflict provides support for theoretical assertions that standard media practices are more likely to perpetuate violent conflict than contribute to its peaceful resolution. Historically, news media often have been used in promotion of wars and conflicts. News media helped the Allies further their goals in World War I (Creel, 1920; Lasswell, 1927; Bernays, 1928) and enabled manipulation of the masses by Nazis (Jowett and O'Donell, Cole, 1998; Thomson, 1977). Most recently, the ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia revealed the significant role of

local journalists in promotion of violence (Buric 2000; Kirske, 1996; Taylor and Kent, 2000; Thompson, 1999) as well as the inability of the Western media to affect the course of escalating conflict (Gowing, 1994; Robinson, 1999).

Media scholars have found that the media present conflicts primarily as "a competitive win-lose process" in which an idealized, positive 'self' defeats demonized, negative 'others' (Annabring & Spohrs, 2004, p. 2; see also Bishop et al, 2007; Kempf, 1999; Hamdorf, 2000). Price and Thompson (2002) demonstrated the close link between media and violence throughout the last 15 years of the 20th century. Case studies by Metzl (1997a, 1997b), Thompson (1999), Naveh (1999), Hoijer, Nohrstedt and Ottosen (2002), Kondopoulou (2002), and others highlight the deep interconnections between media coverage and military aggression in various conflicts around the globe.

Scholars observe that journalists are trained to construct news within a "story" or narrative form that employs an antagonist facing off against a protagonist, engaged in dramatic tension, within a plot with "a beginning, middle and end" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 89; Ettema & Glasser, 1988; Fawcett, 2002; Lipari, 1994; Olson, 1995). This form shapes news "in a predictable way that taps into the expectations and cultural values of the audience or readers" (Fawcett, 2002, p. 219). Dominant cultural narratives reinforce the essentialist idea of a just or clean war against evil enemies and encourage opponents to press perceived advantages, however small or illusory. Media representations of conflict as a clear-cut, zero-sum game, construct government compromises and concessions as weakness or failure, prompting escalating demands (Wolfsfeld, 1997, 1997b).

Additionally, journalism serves a structural function in daily economic and cultural relations in any society. Therefore, Wolfsfeld (1997c) emphasized that "journalism is, above all, a competitive business" (p.62), and economic demands and profit motives promote and reinforce the media's event-driven, drama-seeking and conflict-oriented reporting (pp. 54-5). Annabring and Spohrs (2004) noted that "*the* decisive question" driving journalistic choices is: "Can the product be sold?" (p. 2; *emphasis added*). Violence is, simply put, good business because "conflict and war always provide self-sustaining drama" (Wolfsfeld et al., 2002, p. 190). In contrast, the inherent slowness and complexity of peace processes fail to attract attention in a business whose norms and practices favor coverage of fundamentalists with extremist views, rather than more moderate opinions that evolve slowly through time (Wolfsfeld, 1997c, pp.54 & 58-61).

From a cultural standpoint, "all journalists unconsciously reflect personal and cultural values in selecting their content (or framing their stories)" (Howard, 2002, p. 9). News coverage of political violence advances the national identity and national loyalty of reporters and editors such that "factual reporting of war is chimera; the ingredients of war – patriotism, national interest, anger, censorship and propaganda – often conspire to prevent objective reporting (see Lee & Maslog, 2005, p. 312; Carruthers, 2000; Iggers, 1998; Knightley, 1975; Nossek, 2004; Van Ginneken, 1998). While this tendency is particularly marked among journalists whose native nations are directly engaged in hot conflict, journalism from afar also exhibits a less extreme practice of identifying and

promoting one side as good and demonizing the other as bad (Liebes, 2000). Compounding this problem, news coverage of peace processes is often "an unreflective parroting of government propaganda lines" and "elite interests" (McLaughlin & Miller, 1996, pp. 128, 117). Thus, journalists and editors "tied to … the social system" (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 75) and affected by "the broader cultural-domestic environment" in which they work (Nossek, 2004, p. 346; also see Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Simmons & Lowry, 1990; Weimann & Winn, 1994; Westerstahl & Johansson, 1994; Van Belle, 2000) demonstrate a propensity for "escalation-oriented" (Annabring & Spohr, 2004, p. 2) and pro-conflict coverage.

The most prominent advocate for change of dysfunctional, standard journalistic practices is one of the most well-known conflict experts, Johan Galtung. He most famously outlined a corrective approach to conflict coverage (peace journalism) in reaction to what he calls war journalism (Galtung, 1997). He defines war journalism and peace journalism as two distinct constructs of reporting that adopt disparate normative assumptions about the power of narrative and the ideal of objectivity. The two types of journalistic practices reflect different assumptions about the role of the media in peace, conflict, identity, and the future. These distinctions generate divergent news values and reporting patterns that produce different frames of the news.

War journalism is performed through a focus on overt acts of violence and on the most prominent national sufferings. It waits for and follows events, particularly violent tragedies (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). Such war coverage employs classic bureaucratic, formal language that emphasizes a bombastic, external point of view, detailed information, and strong verbs to convey a call to duty from an informed, learned authority (Iwamoto, 1998). Violence is represented as a natural consequence of incompatible cultural differences between 'us' and 'them'. War is understood in terms of a singular, linear cause-and-effect sequence within a temporally and geographically finite arena of conflict. Thus, someone throws the first stone, and the attacked seek their revenge upon the attacker. As Lynch (2002) suggested, "The behavior of the side which 'started it' at the chosen point of origin can only be explained as irrational and evil." One side is the problem, the initiator, the perpetrator of violence, and the other side is the innocent victim who *must* respond.

Thus, war journalism constructs binaries between a gloating evil and a suffering victim. Victimizing and demonizing language is likely to be adopted. The problem of the evil entity must be dealt with or eradicated. Blame and responsibility are assigned almost exclusively to the demonized side, and violence to crush the supposed evil is depicted as understandable, legitimate, or even morally correct. 'Their' gain is often depicted as 'our' loss and vice versa in a competitive zero-sum game (Galtung 2002; Lynch, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Wolfsfeld, 1997c). In this sense, war journalism provides a systematic focus "on violence and who wins, like a soccer game, leaving out the invisible effects and the alternatives" (Galtung, 2003).

Peace journalism: An alternative rationale

In contrast, a journalism that adopts a positive peace perspective focuses on complex cultural and structural contexts and both the visible and invisible effects of conflicts. Peace journalism does not limit its role to any particular stages of conflict but pursues news in all stages of conflict including pre-, during and post-conflict (Howard, 2002). It recognizes that conflict exists in all communities but does not regard violence as *the* natural consequence of conflict. Violence is understood as the result of "oversimplifying the innate complexity of conflicts" (Hamdorf, 2000, p. 4), not as a means to reduce and address conflict (Annabring & Spohrs, 2004). The discourse of peace assumes that conflicts can be transformed constructively away from violence and the media can aid this process by expanding the number and diversity of individuals whose ideas and perspectives are shared, given credibility, and valued. A fundamental precept of peace journalism is that violence itself is the problem; peace journalism practitioners strive to systematically reject the notion of one singular, simple cause for violence, or "a certain party (the 'others')" as "the problem" (Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 485). Instead, peace journalism coverage "explore[s] conflict formations by identifying the parties, goals, and issues involved" (Lee & Maslog, 2005, p. 314) from ethnic, historical, and cultural perspectives.

The ultimate goal of peace journalism is to increase the ability of all parties to share their views as a means to find better ways to transform or resolve violent conflict. Peace journalism concerns itself with contexts, backgrounds, and the broad, negative consequences of violent conflicts, as it explores alternatives and solutions. In this way, peace journalism enhances the flow of information and opens the range of options for addressing conflict. It pursues a win-win strategy and rejects simplistic binaries such as good/evil and right/wrong (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). As articulated by Galtung, peace journalism is deeply invested in careful and detailed examination of peace, people, and solutions (Transcend, 1997).

Peace journalism adapts a discourse of principled, compassionate humanism that offers positive alternatives to the status quo and presents the complex contexts that surround "political violence" and/or "armed struggle" (Spencer, 2003, pp. 61-2). In this way, peace journalism represents a call for journalists to overcome and to provide information that allays misperceptions, "unease," and "fears" about each other (Spencer, p. 63), that uncovers "the underlying causes of conflict," and that builds shared "trust and confidence" (p. 76). Thus, scholars assert that proponents of peace must abandon the classic game of shaming, demonizing, and othering mastered by the mongers of war (see, e.g., Lazar & Lazar, 2004) to conceptualize a transnational identity of universal humanity and rally the people with invitations to act upon their essential "peace and justice sentiments" (Coles, 2002, pp. 602, 599; see also Harvey, 1991; Ivie, 1987).

Peace journalism's assertion of a broad humanistic function for the media has come under assault as naïve, biased, and impractical. Opponents argue that peace journalism is a "prescriptive orthodoxy [that] … abandons good journalism" (Loyn, 2007) and fails to recognize audience desires, owner prerogatives for profit, and human frailty. They suggest that peace journalism foolishly abandons the search for truth advanced through balanced, objective reporting without acknowledging the practical limits of time, talent,

and energy and without providing mechanisms to facilitate effective gathering of credible alternative information (Hanitzsch, 2007).

Peace Journalism – *In Search of Consensus*

The disagreement between advocates of peace journalism and those who would maintain the current values and practices of mainstream journalism is paralleled by a schism within peace journalism about media's proper role in society and the ultimate goals of peace journalism. This divide reflects, in part, proponents' grounding in and insights from a diverse range of disciplines, including mass communication, communication, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, critical theory, conflict resolution, and more. Each field's unique contributions suggest distinct understandings of the causes of and strategies to alter the prevalence of war journalism. For example, Hackett (1991) and other political economists point to the need first and foremost to alter the structure and profit imperatives of media. Grounded more squarely in critical cultural and media studies, Lynch (2002) acknowledges the significance of structural inequalities and pressures but argues that the individual journalist is the proper site for change in the field; engaging the moral agency of journalists is a vital step toward increasing the open platform of peace journalism. Clearly at the core of the debate is a line between a journalism of overt advocacy and a journalism of inclusion and engagement.

Several peace journalism scholars have pointed out that peace journalism requires a more proactive journalistic role that goes beyond war journalism's commitment to detached observation and distribution of information (Hamdoft, 2000; Hanitzsch, 2004; Howard, 2002; Lynch, 2002, Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). This pro-active role does not necessarily require peace journalists to reject objectivity. Rather, one perspective embraces an objectivity of peace journalism that abandons the belief that journalism's "representation of reality is objective in the sense of being identical with the reality" (Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 488). Instead, peace journalism's objectivity is a "methodological objectivity, which requires journalists to subject their reports to objective controls such as the careful presentation of facts, reliable and varied sources, expert opinion, supporting documentation, accurate quotations, and a fair representation of major viewpoints" (Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 488; Ward, 1998, p. 122). In this view, peace journalism seeks the objectivity obtained when all parties share the right to communicate their views and information from all sides is shared broadly.

Following this logic, Kempf (2002, 2003) described peace journalism as simply "good journalism" that escapes simplistic dualisms to reduce the escalation orientation of mainstream conflict coverage. Peace journalism is not, and should not be, "characterized by perceptive distortions and misjudgments" (Kempf et al., as cited in Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 485) but should "question[] the war and the military logic" and "respect[] the rights of the enemy and an undistorted representation of his intensions as well as a self-critical and realistic evaluation of his own rights, intentions, etc" (Kempf et al., as cited in Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 485). Peace journalism must "keep its distance from *all* parties to the conflict" and "dismiss the dualistic construction of the conflict" (Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 485; Kempf, 2003, pp. 9-10). Similarly Howard (2003) and Lee and Maslog (2005) envisioned peace

journalism as the embodiment of fundamental news values and informed objectivity that attends carefully "to its own professional strictures … [of] accuracy, impartiality, and independence" (p. 1). And Holquin (1998) proposes "peace correspondents" with greater commitment to reporting the "true" causes of conflict. Greater ability to "make sense" of conflicts, less parochialism, and more divergent news sources are fundamental to any corrective to deficiencies in media coverage of peace (see Hackett, 1991, p. 271).

Thus, Kempf's (2003) "de-escalation oriented coverage" goes beyond traditional, professional norms of journalism *only* to the extent that journalists' increased understanding of conflict theory tends to generate coverage of conflict that leaves space for peaceful settlements. His "solution-oriented coverage" requires media to reframe conflict as a collabroative process. Similarly, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) and Spencer (2004) acknowledge journalists as "full and active participants in contestations and dialogues about peace" (p. 604) who affect the events they report rather than simply gathering and delivering information from some "outside" space. Critics of this position argue that even when peace journalism is defined as a reinvigoration of the deepest values of quality journalism, it crosses the line into advocacy. Hanitzsch (2004) thus broadly challenged the appropriateness of peace journalism, which he called "a programme or frame of journalistic news coverage which contributes to the process of making and keeping peace" (p. 484).

Indeed, Hanitzsch is correct in some cases; some peace journalism proponents encourage an advocacy role for the press that envisions and seeks to accomplish a conflict-free society (Bell, 1997; Botes, 1995; Chilton, 1987; Galtung, 2000a, 2000b, & 2002). While Bauman and Siebert (2000) argued only that objectivity is impossible and media inevitably engage in conflict mediation because they educate, contextualize, provide an outlet for strong emotions, offer solutions, and build consensus, "whether they intend to or not" (Bauman & Siebert, 2000; see also Merrill, 1989, pp. 10-11), Lee and Maslog (2005) said "peace journalism is normative or prescriptive." Others overtly rejected the goal of objectivity, seeking rather to embrace a journalistic mission of improving the world. These observers proclaimed their peace agenda and urged peace journalism practitioners to consciously adopt an agenda for peace in conflict reporting as the only genuine alternative to an – unacknowledged or not – agenda for war. Thus, Astorino-Courtois (1996) encouraged media to play a pro-active role in marketing peace by identifying publicly salient attributes of peace and seeking points of accord among groups in conflict. Gorsevski (1999) called for media "propaganda of peacemaking," and Melone, Terzis, and Ozsel (2002) suggested that the media should not and "cannot be neutral toward peace." Similarly, Howard (2002) conceived of "the media [as] a double-edged sword": both "an instrument of conflict resolution" and "a frightful weapon of violence" (p. 1) and pushed journalists to go "beyond the traditional disengaged journalistic role" (p. 9) to become more proactive as peace-facilitators or "conciliators in the field" (p. 11). Here, the aim of peace journalism is to strengthen the role of the media in "conflict reduction and peace-building" (p. 1).

Despite these ongoing debates, Galtung (1998, 2002), Kempf (1999, 2002), Shinar (2003) and others (see, e.g., Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2003;

Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005), including a growing array of scholars and professional journalists, continue to advance understanding and enhancement of media's role in international peace. On one hand, Fabris and Varis (1986), Hackett (1991), Kempf (2003), Peleg and Alimi (2005), and Bishop et al (2007) produced richer and more systematic empirical data and analysis of media coverage of peace and the role of the media in peace making. On the other, Shinar (2003, 2004) and others (e.g., Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Mezei, 2003) developed and employed new journalistic training programs to alter the media's pro-conflict orientation. Lynch (1998) asserted that such retraining involves no radical departure from contemporary journalism practice. Rather it requires a subtle shift in sourcing and narrative choice: a shift toward citizens and away from elite spokespeople, toward the value of peace rather than the adrenalin rush of conflict, toward mutual benefits rather than unilateral victory. Emphasis on equality and humanity that recognizes the power of symbolic representation is a vital element (Shinar, 2004).

Today thriving efforts at a re-visioned practice of journalism encompass the Filipino-based PeCoJon, "an international network of print, radio and broadcast journalists, as well as filmmakers afillind journalism teachers, who focus on implementing and mainstreaming a responsible and constructive reporting of conflict, crisis and war" (PeCoJon, 2008). Similar initiatives include a group of Colombian social organizations and community radio stations that formed a peace journalism communication network designed to build social cohesion in rural conflict areas (SIPAZ, 2008). Alongside SIPAZ (the Sistema de Comunicación para la Paz (Communication System for Peace)), MPP—Medios Para La Paz—serves as a network by and for journalists to "support the responsible coverage of armed conflict and peace efforts" through information sharing and peace journalism training workshops in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Perú, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Brasil, Venezuela y Bolivia (MPP, 2008).

Representing a different approach among the fast-emerging practitioners of alternative journalism, the international Indymedia outlets of the Independent Media Center offer online, citizen-based alternatives to the content of the mainstream media. Indymedia operate as "a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage" (Independent Media Center, 2008). While Indymedia do not define themselves explicitly as peace journalism outlets, their mission echoes the goals of peace journalists: to serve as an "outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth."

Case Study: Open Broadcast Network (OBN)

With its inception more than a decade ago, the Open Broadcast Network (OBN) in Bosnia will likely be remembered as one of the most ambitious and earliest intentional media attempts to reduce violent conflict. To this day, it remains the only television network established to promote the resolutions of a peace agreement. It was a product of the Dayton Peace Agreement reached in 1995, when the Serbs, Croats and Bosnians came under pressure to end their three-year-long violent conflict by instituting a provisional,

internationally-run governing body (the Office of the High Representative, OHR) in charge of peace implementation.

One of OHR's initial assessments of the Bosnian conflict was that propaganda through the ethnic television stations was instrumental in spreading messages of hate that incited and fueled the conflict. Throughout the war, all three ethnic groups utilized radio and television broadcasting to further their strategies and demonize their opponents (Buric 2000; Sadkovich, 1998; Thompson, 1999). In response, the OHR (supported by U.N., E.U. and U.S. administrators) developed and promoted "unbiased media", and a number of media projects were created to combat persisting propaganda. An international community expert group, headed by the Open Society Institute of New York, developed a concept for a completely new and impartial television network. As a result, the new national television network (Open Broadcast Network, OBN) was launched in 1996 just a few months after the idea was introduced.

The mission statement of the network was "to provide Bosnia and Herzegovina with a locally run but national and cross-entity TV network … and [to provide] the viewers with programming they can trust, whether locally produced or acquired from other sources" (OHR, 1999). In the beginning there was no shortage of funds and support. During the first year of operation, the station was given $10.2 million in funds and equipment (Poucher, 2001).

While the idea of peace journalism had not been clearly formulated at the time of OBN's inception, this project embodied the philosophical construct of such practice. Developing far from the academic sphere and amidst ongoing violence, OBN's original mission involved the precise postulates at the core of the discussion among peace journalists. The theoretical assumptions fundamental to peace journalism discourse are evident in the initial mission of the OBN to provide news while promoting peace and reconciliation. OBN's chief executive officer Jenny Ranson explained the tenets of peace journalism as they pertained to OBN:

> Whether there can or should be such a thing as "peace journalism" at all is an ongoing debate among humanitarians and academics… [However,] in writing the OBN mission statement the problem of maintaining independence and news objectivity was balanced with the need to promote peace and reconciliation.
>
> (2005, p. 15)

In accordance with its unquestionably peace-oriented news philosophy, OBN's main news broadcast insisted on national diversity among its journalists, and the Media Plan Institute, a local NGO, praised OBN for news programming that emphasized stories on cooperation among different ethnic groups. OBN often resisted the frames of war journalism. In one specific example, OBN followed peace journalism's recommendations by focusing on the efforts of community leaders to promote peace during violence in the city of Mostar (2005, p. 15). OBN also pioneered a number of programs aimed at promoting cross-national understanding. The program called "Telering" featured

interviews with representatives of "the other" side, and the program "Povratak," Return, provided practical advice about reconciliation and repatriation.

Although OBN's journalists and editors did not consistently implement all of peace journalism's practices, OBN editors categorically refused to employ the overt nationalistic bias of other networks, which carried verbatim, on-air reading of partisan press releases; coverage of parties' bombastic press conferences; and unedited open letters. OBN's news and information division set the standard for professional reporting in general by avoiding many similar traps of war journalism, but it took few steps toward open promotion of peaceful reconciliation. Nonetheless, given limited international experience with the new peace journalism practice (the U.N. peacekeeping mission launch of a similar radio project in Cambodia and Croatia in the early 1990s offers one additional example), the case of OBN might be considered one of the first of its kind.

From the beginning, it was clear that development of this new media organization was the domain of international administrators and consultants. The OBN board had no local representatives. The project's lack of cultural sensitivity is most apparent in the network's own title. The media project was named Open Broadcast Network, which is an astounding decision considering that English is not the native language in Bosnia. Furthermore, the Open Society representatives entrusted with the formative research were not interested in the opinions of local Sarajevo experts. Boro Kontic, a radio and TV producer and recipient of many prestigious international awards, recounts his experience with this group:

> Back in mid-1996, I was sitting with the officials of Open Society in Bosnia, as a host to a group of foreign experts, who were on a mission to launch a new TV network then known as TV-IN, later to be called OBN. In reply to our persistent explanations of how much more logical it would be to develop the new system within the existing network TV transmitters, which had been being built for 50 years then, we were asked not to burden our guests with our frustration.
>
> (Udovicic et al., 2001, p.1)

The same delegation of experts also visited another media practitioner, current director of the Bosnian NGO, the Media Plan Institute, Zoran Udovicic (2003), who was in charge of the team responsible for the coverage of the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. He offered the services of this team to the U.S. expert group, and he recalls receiving the following response:

> At the time of the visit, nine out of 12 people from the Bosnian Olympic Broadcast team were available in Sarajevo. The head engineer, the main expert for networking, the head manager, the engineer who knew all the transmitters by heart because he built them, the man who built a system for 52 local radio and television stations before the war, etc. None of these people were even consulted, let alone hired on the post-conflict rebuilding

of neither media nor OBN. The foreign experts came to hear what was in place, and once they found out, they never came back.

Even though most local experts agreed that OBN was an excellent idea, they believe that, from the beginning, its implementation as a broadcasting system was founded on the wrong premises. A common impression at the time was that the international peace brokers did not have confidence in the local experts or the local population. The refusal of the international community to include the local experts in developing OBN would have significant consequences in the future. Not only were the domestic experts familiar with the environment, culture, and customs, the local engagement could have been a direct investment in the region and a key to future sustainability.

On the other side, the international experts from the OSCE (The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the U.N., and other non-governmental organizations were instrumental in developing the media standards in support of the reconciliatory process in Bosnia. Under this mandate, *Standards for Professional Conduct for the Media and Journalism* were introduced, closely resembling some of the basics of the peace journalism approach:

- *Fair reporting* – 'accurate, complete, fair, equitable and unbiased information.'
- *Avoiding inflammatory language* – 'which encourages discrimination, prejudice, or hatred, or which encourages violence, or contributes to the creation of a climate in violence can occur.'
- *Accurate and balanced information* – 'concerning the views and activities of the political parties and candidates in the area' (Chandler, 1999).

OBN's news programming division was envisioned as a model that could serve as an example of the successful transformation of journalism in Bosnia. While the standards were straightforward, the overall mission of the network and its position in the peace process were not as clearly defined. Much like the debate on the most appropriate direction for peace journalism, OBN journalists contemplated the appropriateness of their role in the peace process. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the assessments of Jadranko Katana, the OBN news director of information programming. While he admitted that he often preferred to broadcast stories that emphasized a peace-oriented narrative, he had a clear idea about what journalism should stand for, regardless of conflict or peace:

> The motive of reconciliation is not an appropriate model for journalism. The only motive is to tell what happened, without private commentary or inclination, just raw information… Reconciliation is to be done by somebody else: religious organizations, legal representatives, etc. Our job is to convey the information whether you like it or not. And that's it. The only way to somehow approach reconciliation was to present a neutral piece of information in the sea of propaganda messages, information free of a particular point of view other than journalistic standards.
>
> (Katana, 2003)

Its devotion to high journalistic standards helped OBN build a reputation as a credible and important source (Taylor 2002, Prism Research, 2002). OBN emerged as the highly important and the most credible news source in the capital of Sarajevo in 1998 (Prism Research, 1998).[1] In 2002, despite rumors of its closing, the network was still considered the third most important source of information and the second most credible (Taylor, 2002). Building on the credibility of the network, the expectations of the transformed media were straightforward and rather ambitious – they were meant to produce a democratic and hopefully a peaceful environment. Zoran Udovicic, director of the Media Plan Institute in Sarajevo, Bosnia, explains the rationale behind the high expectations:

> The idea was that the international community would stop the armies from fighting, bring 60,000 peacekeepers, make new OBN television and FERN radio, and support about a hundred small radio and television stations. This was supposed to bring democracy to Bosnia... They wanted the national television system across the entire country, so that information can be shared among the former enemies. The information was to be free from bias and hatred, and balanced at the same time. 80 million DM was spent on the development, but in the election nothing had changed (2003).

In addition, it was believed that adopting peace-oriented media standards would bring an end to the old propaganda of conflict times (war journalism). OBN was entrusted to reform existing media by example. Belief in this transformative power rested on an assumption that war journalism cannot survive in the environment of fair, open, and balanced peace journalism. Thus, OBN was not only supposed to help the audience see what fair reporting ought to look like but also to challenge and undermine the biased war media machinery. This never happened.

In terms of ratings, OBN underperformed, and its audience share lingered around 5 percent in the market of only four major networks (Udovicic et al., 2001). Despite the low audience share, the network was in third place during the June through September period in 2000, following RTVBiH with 29.9 percent, and RTRS with 11.8 percent (Jusic, 2002). The most watched OBN program in November 2001 was its nightly news program. However, the program was in 67th place on the top TV programs list, with an 8 percent share, according to research by the local associate of Gallup International (Mareco Index Bosnia, 2001). The reasons for the relatively low ratings are multiple and ambiguous. First, the penetration of the signal to the entire territory was lower than expected; almost 30 percent of the audience said they were unable to receive the signal. But most importantly, at this time the two-year-old station was in tough competition with the three ethnic broadcasters that had long-established roots and audiences (Prism Research, 1998). Zoran Udovicic (2003), director of the Media Plan Institute recalls:

> During the spring and summer of 1996, the main international powers that were behind the Dayton peace agreement decided to set up an alternative system to the national television stations which was going to be different, much better, more democratic, and cover the entire country. This was supposed to erase the impact of the already existing national television

> stations. This is how OBN… came into being. This is an excellent idea. What was wrong was that this was the single effort. One isolated project never had a chance to combat the influence of powerful national stations.

Furthermore, OBN television management overestimated the appeal of their non-news programming content. While the station arguably had the most reliable and professional information programming, the rest of the programming lacked appeal. Because the bulk of the network's efforts and finances were invested in informational programming, the rest of the schedule was filled with low-quality, low-appeal programming donated by public broadcasters around the world. The station's CEO said OBN could not afford first-rate programming and relied, of necessity, on B-rate movies and 20-year-old sitcoms (Ranson, 2005). According to some studies, almost 70 percent of OBN's programs were foreign products, such as TV series, science programs and sports events (Udovicic, 2001). Donated entertainment shows (45 percent) and commercials (5.6 percent) filled the bulk of air time, and the locally produced 30 percent of content was split between information programming (news, interviews, and debates) and entertainment.

The station's image was built on entertainment and documentary as well as information programming (Udovicic, 2001). Despite its commercial status, OBN offered more public service programming (42.5 percent was news, educational and documentary programs) than the public broadcasters. Nonetheless, the network's 5 percent audience share might be a consequence of insufficient high-quality informational content (which amounted to about 60 minutes of the schedule a day) while the other 23 hours lacked appealing content.

Compounding the problems of fierce competition, failing credibility, and the lack of programming appeal, OBN never managed to compete with the popularity of the nationalistic broadcasters in the region. After a relatively short time, management, low ratings, and the withdrawal of international funding led the station to an almost complete halt. Projections indicate that $20 million was invested in the five years before the project was abandoned (Poucher, 2001). In 2003, the station changed ownership, its infrastructure became privatized, and it now operates as a commercial television project.

The brief history of this early and partial implementation of peace journalism in violent conflict offers the insights of an imperfect test of media's potential to contribute to peace development. Clearly, the OBN project is by no means an evaluation of the broad practice of peace journalism or a test of its potential performance. It is instead an isolated study of one media project featuring a unique set of circumstances. However, this experience offers an opportunity to examine the theoretical assumptions of academic studies of peace journalism and their intersection with the practical implementations of projects such as the OBN. As a result, a few assertions can be made about the feasibility and accomplishments of this innovative practice.

1) While the practical implementation of the OBN project incorporated many of the assertions from the peace journalism literature, it significantly emphasized the relative immaturity of peace journalism practice and an inconclusive theory. At a

time when questions asked in theory demand further discussion, the practice responded with additional questions rather than answers. This points out that the theory is in its infancy and it requires further elaboration. Such broadening of inquiry should be welcomed not as a negation of journalistic performance but as an appeal to its improvement.

2) The experience of OBN injects a new series of questions into discussion of the discourse of peace journalism. The most significant question regards adjustment of universal theoretical assertions to unique regional contexts, media circumstances, and conflict environments. While the dominant discourse in the literature and subsequent practical implementation rests in the domain of Western practices, values, and theories, a prominent lesson of the OBN experiment is the need for flexibility to adjust to local preferences and realities. Issues of regionalization and localization with regard to the development, structure, and ownership of existing media, with regard to citizen access, uses, and dependency on such media, and with regard to economic and political sustainability must become the domain of peace journalism research and application.

3) The low ratings of OBN, compared to the ethnic broadcasters, might be said to confirm fears of the low initial audience appeal of peace news especially in contrast to war journalism. Further, while OBN's credibility outmoded the jingoistic reporting of the ethnic broadcasters, OBN's modeling of responsible practice neither erased nor altered pre-existing conflict-oriented journalism. The hoped-for rapid, broad, and permanent diffusion of the new values and practices did not occur, and further study is needed to help identify reasonable expectations for adoption and transfer of peace journalism as an innovation.

4) Furthermore, considering the aggressively competitive media business, the question of the financial sustainability of peace journalism projects must be addressed from the outset. Market strategy was not a primary concern in the foundation of OBN. The project was funded by donations and was never forced to contemplate eventual integration into the competitive and established media market. In the end, OBN became a victim of a poor financial strategy.

5) As with the debates over peace journalism in the literature, OBN became the terrain of wavering commitment and uncertain standards of journalistic engagement in conflict resolution. Yet OBN also suggests that the quest for *the* appropriate method of peace journalism may be simpler than it appears. OBN journalists and editors demonstrated that as long as primary emphasis is placed on pursuit of the most responsible approach to news, an absolute consensus on the unifying approach may be unnecessary. In other words, the discussion itself may be more important than a finite, unanimous answer on how to practice peace journalism. The ongoing process of self-examination and self-reflexivity may just be sufficient to keep journalists from regressing toward conflict-prone war journalism.

Conclusion

The extent to which the OBN experiment provides useful insight into the principles of peace journalism is, in large part, a reflection of the degree to which OBN successfully embraced the practices of peace journalism. It is clear that OBN offered neither a complete nor a perfect embodiment of peace journalism precepts. Yet, the OBN experience brings to light the realities that arise when a benevolent concept (peace-oriented media) meets malevolent conditions (Bosnian). Despite the exigencies of management, profit-orientation, limited budget, and somewhat unrealistic short-term expectations, OBN did exercise the essence of peace journalism philosophy in its news programming. At a minimum, OBN pursued peace journalism by resisting the traps of war journalism, but it also went further by modeling reconciliatory coverage, ethnically integrating the newsroom, and shifting the focus of news away from problems toward solutions.

We acknowledge the shortcomings of applying the OBN experience to peace journalism. Without a doubt, the theoretical construct of peace journalism influenced the station's journalistic agenda; the network was established on and guided by the general principles of peace journalism. However, we also understand its disengagement from both the theoretical discussions and trainings of peace journalism. Inexperience and inadequate journalistic education and training imposed significant conceptual and practical limitations on OBN's practice of peace journalism in Bosnia. Thus, it cannot and should not be assumed that the failure of the new peace journalistic practices embraced by OBN caused the failure of the network. Rather, our analysis outlines a series of critical events that contributed to the OBN collapse. Many experts view the peace journalism model favorably and attribute the failure of OBN to mismanaged funding, lack of a developmental strategy, and political circumstances.

As with all media, the structure of OBN— its organization, logistics, procedures, and political context— carried significant weight in shaping the journalistic operation. At OBN and elsewhere, the real execution of (peace) journalism depends to a great degree upon the severity of both internal and external obstacles. Some obstacles (direct violence, ownership philosophy, financial sustainability, journalistic education and training, etc.) evidenced in Bosnia may be, to differing degrees, both global and endemic. If so, the most prominent lesson of the OBN foray into peace journalism may be to acknowledge that conditions on the ground—including the demands of commercial profitability—are likely the most important contributor to any practice of peace journalism. If so, OBN does not provide an optimistic example. However, it remains to be seen whether a more careful, deliberate, and financially stable experiment in peace journalism could experience greater success and long-term viability. Emerging peace journalism experiences in Colombia and the Philippines, to name only two, give reason for hope and suggest that dedicated individuals can bring peace journalism to the fore despite the most severe structural constraints.

A second, and obvious, lesson to be gleaned from the OBN example is the all-too-familiar assertion that journalism as a practice can benefit from the analysis and the

critique outlined by theorists, academicians, and researchers. The normative assumptions and myths that guide the everyday routines of journalism would benefit from close evaluation and revision. The taken-for-granted of the journalistic enterprise needs to be unpacked and reassembled if journalism is to serve the needs of people to receive fair, full, and accurate information in a context that gives meaning and empowers the people to act. Such a re-construction of journalism does not blindly advocate peace at all costs; rather, it opens the door to peace as an opportunity and to reconciliation as a human choice.

Finally, though, the OBN experiment demonstrates that peace journalism as a rhetorical exercise needs to grapple more effectively with the significant direct and structural threats to thoughtful practice in the midst of a violent world. As in most attempts at change, moving beyond denial is a critical first step. Thus, it is encouraging that journalists are aware of government control and spin of war coverage and have become somewhat self-critical about press participation in propaganda efforts (Hoijer, Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2002, p. 7). The dominance of the discourse of compassion among audience members is also a potential resource for those seeking to transform media coverage toward praxis of peace. As demonstrated by the fleeting and partial success of OBN, the news media can play a role in expanding and possibly transforming the public dialogue.

The OBN experience suggests the very real potential for professional journalists to expand their narrative vision to challenge acculturated story lines and to reflect a reality in which difference is not inherently threatening, conflict is not inevitable, and violence is not the logical and necessary means to resolve difference. The commercial viability of such a project remains to be seen, and the future of peace journalism remains to be written. Today that future is being written every day around the globe by dozens of journalism networks such as Indymedia and PeCoJon, hundreds of media initiatives from NGOs and civil society organizations like Sweden's Kvinna till Kvinna (Woman to Woman), and thousands of journalists striving individually and independently to remake media to serve the needs of the people. Those stories tomorrow will provide the necessary data for a fuller analysis of the power and limitations of peace journalism.

Notes

[1]   It is important to note that the better educated and ethnically more diverse audiences in the state capital, Sarajevo, were likely to be more open to this kind of message than rural viewers.

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