A CRITICAL INTERROGATION OF EYTAN GILBOA'S FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS FOR MEDIA AND ARMED CONFLICT REPORTING

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ABSTRACT

Based on the criticisms of the peace journalism theory, Eytan Gilboa developed a framework of analysis for media and conflict. In analyzing media engagement in the prevention as well as in the management of conflicts, Gilboa proposed the framework to improve the proposition of the peace journalism theory for the sake of ultimately reporting conflicts effectively. The focus of this research was, therefore, to interrogate Eytan Gilboa's framework of analysis for media and conflict. After a critical interrogation of the framework by the researcher in line with relevant cases of conflicts in different parts of the world, it was found that Gilboa's contribution is a more comprehensive framework for research and practice in media and conflict than the one stipulated by peace journalism theorists and other previous scholars and researchers in media and conflict such as Hally, 2017, Bill 2016 and Nang 2014. His is a multidimensional as well as multidisciplinary framework for research and practice of reporting conflict. He proposes "a three-dimensional framework for analyzing and practicing media when reporting conflict that combines and integrates the various components adopted from different yet relevant fields of science: international relations, conflict studies, communication and

journalism. The framework specifically and systematically demonstrates how research and practice can be organized to explore positive and negative contributions of the media through the two types and four phases of conflict; two types and five levels of media; and the five media functions and dysfunctions.

Keywords: Interrogation, Framework, Analysis, Media, Conflict, Gilboa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, one of the theories deployed by scholars in explaining media reportage, prevention and management of conflict, is the peace journalism theory. Peace journalism theory is widely acknowledged as one major conceptual and theoretical contribution to the field of media and conflict. it has been an important research tool for analyzing news texts on war coverage (see Ottosen's *the War in Afghanistan and Peace Journalism in Practice*). As observed by Gilboa (2009, p.599), "Peace journalism has offered interesting insights into the deficiencies of media attitudes toward international conflict." However, apart from being a normative theory that "mostly emphasizes potential positive contributions" (Gilboa, 2009, p.617) of media particularly during periods of conflict, peace journalism has been criticized for overlooking a number of critical issues that eventually expose its weaknesses.

First, peace journalism theory is epistemologically faulty because it contradicts the mass communication theory. As raised by one of its staunch critics, peace journalism theory is "at odds with mass communication theory" (Hanitzsch, 2004 as quoted by Gilboa, 2009). On the other hand, Gilboa (2009) has clarified that peace journalism theory is "based on assumptions that communication theory does not necessarily support conflict resolution." He further argues that peace journalism is based on the assumption of powerful, casual and linear media effects. Communication theory, however, has produced very little empirical support for this approach. Peace journalism looks at the audience as a single aggregate of dispersed individuals, but communication theory has identified pluralistic audiences with different characteristics. Peace journalism assumes that publishers and journalists, especially at the local media level, can disregard the interests of their specific audiences, but
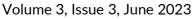
communication theory suggests that this assumption is unnatural and economically impossible. Peace journalism places responsibility on the media to prevent, manage, resolve and transform conflicts, but communication theory does not recognize this role, and sociological system theory places responsibility for these functions on political institutions and leaders (Gilboa, 2009).

The weaknesses of the peace journalism model have also been noted in Cottle's (2006, p.103) *Mediated Conflict*, as having "an overly media centric and insufficiently grounded view." Secondly and according to Gilboa (2009), the perception of conflict by peace journalism theory is in three simple and linear phases namely pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict. And according to him, this analysis of conflict is "inadequate". Therefore, he suggests "meaningful concepts and not just time frames to describe the pre- and post-conflict phases" (Cottle, 2006).

There have been criticisms of the peace journalism approach to the resolution / management of conflicts and calls for more comprehensive approach have been advanced. The essence of this review therefore, is to ascertain whether or not the Eytan Gilboa framework of analysis for media and conflict is a more comprehensive framework for research and practice in media and conflict than the one stipulated by peace journalism theorists and other previous scholars and researchers in media and conflict such as Hally, 2017, Bill 2016 and Nang 2014.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peace journalism theorists such as Hally, 2017, Bill 2016 and Nang 2014 have proposed a peaceful and conciliatory approach to media coverage of conflicts particularly armed conflicts. They contend that the media should be seen as contributing to the

resolution of conflicts instead of the traditional responsibility of reporting events as they occur. This no doubt, comes with some fundamental weaknesses such as the safety of journalists, compliance with the principle of objectivity, as well as fairness. These weaknesses were significantly addressed by Gilboa in his proposal of a more comprehensive framework for research and practice in media and conflict (Melvin, 2021).

In response to peace journalism theory's weaknesses and shortcomings, Yusuf (2020) notes that Gilboa suggested a different integrative approach that may yield better normative and empirical results by developing a much more systematic and cumulative theory that combines and integrates communication and conflict theories: the functional theory of communication and the life-cycle theory of conflicts (Yusuf, 2020).

First, unlike the peace journalism framework, Gilboa's framework of conflict communication borrows the five media functions from the functional theory of communication, namely: surveillance of environment (news coverage), correlation of the parts of society (interpretation of news and information, commentary and editorial opinion) and transmission of culture (history, values, religion, language, etc.) (Snag, 2021). These aspects are lacking in the peace journalism approach which makes Gilboa's framework more comprehensive than the peace journalism framework (Edgar, 2022). Other aspects covered by Gilboa's framework which were not properly taken into consideration are entertainment and mobilization (the campaigning for societal objectives in the sphere of politics, war, economic development, work and sometimes religion) (McQuail, 1987; Wright, 1960; cited in Yonga, 2022).

The functional theory looks at the functions and dysfunctions. Some scholars such as Graig, (2021) and Brita (2022) have explored the two but the most important is Wright's (1960) distinction between functions and dysfunctions which Gilboa (2000) also borrowed from the functional theory of communication. In Wright's distinction, he states that much as the media have useful intentions when used in conflict interventions, we should not ignore also its unintended consequences. This implies that even if the media are sincerely interested in a positive contribution to prevent, manage, resolve, or reconcile international conflict, the results may backfire (Gilboa, 2009). This consideration of Gilboa's framework which did not receive such required attention by the peace journalism framework/approach further points to the fact that Gilboa's framework standards as a more comprehensive framework for media and coverage of conflicts (Dotun, 2021).

Secondly, in the quest to affirm that Gilboa's framework is more comprehensive in media coverage of conflict, Lang (2020) asserts that Gilboa adopts the life-cycle theory. In applying this theory of conflict, Gilboa perceives conflict as a process that undergoes four stages instead of the former linear, "chronological and highly simplistic" three phases of pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict, which had been described by previous scholars and researchers. According to Gilboa (2009) as cited by Lang (2020), a conflict "is a dynamic process that begins and ends at a particular period of time and that it is not always easy to pinpoint the exact beginning and ending of conflict (Lang 2020).

In further showing why Gilboa's framework is more comprehensive than peace journalism approach and others, Aygre (2021) observed that Gilboa's framework suggested

distinguishing four phases or stages of conflicts "based on a critical condition and a principal intervention goal where each phase has distinctive characteristics and ends in specific outcomes which are: the onset phase, the escalation phase, the de-escalation phase and the termination phase (Aygre, 2021).
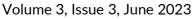
3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the fact that the study entails the review of documents, the document review method was used for the study. Sources such as journal articles, books, etc. were reviewed in accordance with the broad objective of the paper which has to do with interrogating Eytan Gilboa's framework of analysis for media and conflict with the aim of ascertaining whether or not the Eytan Gilboa framework of analysis for media and conflict is a more comprehensive framework for research and practice in media and conflict than the one stipulated by peace journalism theorists and other previous scholars and researchers in media and conflict such as Hally, 2017, Bill 2016 and Nang 2014.

4. DISCUSSION

Below is a critical interrogation of Eytan Gilboa's framework of analysis for media and conflict.

4.1 Onset-prevention Phase

The onset phase is the initial stage of any conflict which is simply characterized by the "surfacing" or the "beginning" of the misunderstanding between parties. It is usually evident or visible or experienced through gradual increments of both verbal and behavioral hostile exchange (Gilboa, 2009). Bright (2021), notes that two things may happen at this stage of a conflict. If effective and constructive measures are taken, a
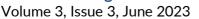
hostile situation and a tense atmosphere will be prevented from escalating into a violent one. Conversely, if effective and constructive measures are not taken, the situation will deteriorate into violence including a war of physical confrontation of a similar kind. This is why it is as well referred to as the 'onset-prevention phase'.

One of the effective measures expected or commonly used and preferred at this stage is media coverage of the conflict. According to Gilboa's framework, the media can affect the conflict at its initial stage in two ways, through structural factors and/or through editorial content. The former refers to non-editorial factors at the societal, organizational, and institutional levels or context which however influence the processing and production of news, especially the coverage of the conflict. They include media variety and plurality, media accessibility, the degree of journalists' isolation from their domestic and international colleagues, and the legal environment for the media (Kassan, 2019). This is very fundamental in conflict coverage because the way conflict is handled at the onset will greatly determine how soon it will end and this is well taken into consideration by Gilboa's framework with very clear specifications on how the media could handle conflict at the very beginning to ultimately prevent escalation of such conflict as opposed to the negligence of peace journalism framework with no clear specifications or direction of how to tackle conflict at the onset phase (Edward, 2021)

Furthermore, Edward (2021) in interrogating the framework asserted that it considered the editorial factors at the professional and individual levels, especially how journalists and editors choose to represent or portray the conflict in their reportage which were not well taken into account by some other frameworks such as the peace journalism approach. For

example, a journalist or editor, through the selection of news angle and choice of words or sentence structures, may end up creating fear of an imminent attack by the other side based on past conflicts; "manipulation of myths, stereotypes, and identities; and overemphasizing grievances, inequalities or atrocities...also...creating the inevitability and resignation through the portrayal of the conflict as an eternal process and discrediting of alternatives to the conflict" (Edward, 2021, p.11).

More so, Frank (2018) in a critical analysis of Gilboa's framework asserts that the editorial factors may contribute positively (by preventing violence or war at the surfacing or beginning stage of the conflict) or negatively (by escalating the disagreements and misunderstanding at the surfacing or beginning stage of the conflict into violence or war), and are also reflected in Galtung's classical table where peace journalism (which is essentially peace-oriented, truth-oriented, people-oriented and solution-oriented reporting) and war journalism (which is essentially conflict-oriented, propaganda oriented, elite oriented and victory oriented reporting) may respectively lead to resolution (positive contribution) or escalation (negative contribution) of a conflict at its early stage (Frank, 2018).

4.2 Escalation-management Phase

If effective measures are taken at the 'surfacing' phase, a conflict will be solved. If no effective measures have been taken at the beginning stage of the conflict, then the latter will escalate into the next phase, namely the escalation phase. This phase is usually characterized by efforts and strategies to control information and manipulate the media with the aim of limiting and halting violence to relatively tolerable levels which led to the term "escalation management" (Gilboa, 2009). As

noted by Kell, (2017), the assumption is that if left uncontrolled, media can lead to defeat, just as the media were responsible for the US defeat in Vietnam in the 1960s (the CNN effect). So, it is up to the policymakers, parties in a conflict and governments within conflict areas to control the media, especially by limiting "their access and ability to report from the battlefield" (Kell, 2017). And this is why Gilboa's framework gave significant attention to this phase of conflict to effectively manage conflict escalation unlike some others like peace journalism framework to was not specific on how conflict at this stage could be effectively managed by the media (Albert, 2019).

Different information management techniques/policies have been adopted in the past by warring parties in different parts of the world. They enabled policymakers and governments and their military forces to control information and manipulate the media during conflicts, especially wars. This includes the 'pool system' deployed by the British government and its military during the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982; the Media Reporting Teams (MRTs) by the coalition nations – US, UK and France – and their militaries during the Gulf War I in 1991 and the 'embedded journalism' during the Gulf War II in 2003 (Cottle, 2006).

Interrogating Gilboa's framework at this stage of conflict, Calvin (2016) and Cottle (2006) averred that of critical concern to the media and journalists if the escalation phase presents a dilemma to media professionals and the media in general on one hand is the information management approach whereby the media primarily functions as a tool in the hands of policymakers. The argument is always that media coverage of violence has tremendous effects on public opinion at home (ref: the Vietnam War Syndrome in the US), on the soldiers at the front and on the enemy. Therefore, journalists and citizens are expected to

provide for the common defense in order to win the 'battle for hearts and minds' and conduct 'the propaganda war (Calvin, 2016; Cottle, 2006). In this case, the right to win wars and to save human life is regarded as more important than the public right to know.

On the other hand, as considered by Gilboa's framework, is the CNN effect approach (Cottle, 2006; Gilboa, 2006 as cited by Calvin 2016) whereby media determine the national interest and usurp policy-making from elected and appointed officials, just like the CNN effect causes the US and Western humanitarian military intervention in Iraq (1991), Somalia (1992 - 1993), Bosnia (1992 – 1995) and Kosovo (1999). In this case, media are supposed and expected to "fully expose and evaluate government policy and activities ... forcing them to take actions they otherwise would not have taken, such as military intervention (Cottle, 2006; Gilboa 2006; cited in Calvin 2016). This also points to the more comprehensive nature of Gilboa's framework when compared with some others in media coverage of a conflict.

4.3 De-escalation-resolution Phase

This is a phase of formal negotiations and peace agreements, otherwise known as a phase of negative peace (Gilboa, 2009b) or absence of violence. It is usually characterized by politicians' and policymakers' attempts to negotiate an agreement to end violence (Gilboa, 2009a) hence the word 'resolution'. A critical discussion of the provision of Gilboa's framework at this stage of conflict by Rammel (2019) indicates that the media may perform at least two functions during this phase: the media diplomacy or the media-broker diplomacy function. The former involves "the use of media' in trying to end violence and the
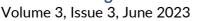
latter refers to the actual involvement of the media in attempts to end violence (Rammel, 2019).

In the former, politicians and policymakers use the media to advance negotiations, build confidence and cultivate public support for negotiations and agreement, and in the absence of direct channels of communication, official use of media, with or without attribution, to send signals and messages to leaders of rival states and non-state actors. However, in the case of the latter, journalists "assume, directly or indirectly mediation roles where journalists can practically help parties "to begin official negotiations; realize the values of negotiations to resolve their conflict" or "secretly explore a possible solution" (Gilboa 2009a). This constitutes a very potent approach to handling conflict at this stage because politicians and policymakers as well as other leaders of a society have the priority responsibility of protecting lives and properties and ultimately instilling orderliness and peace in such society. So it was imperative for Gilboa's framework to have taken into consideration these key actors in media coverage of conflict (Chukwuma, 2022).

In other words, the media at the de-escalation phase are "actively and directly engaged" in the mediation process, either through their own initiative or by request from one or more parties of the conflict, and in so doing, they can "talk to the two sides of the conflict, transmit relevant information and suggest detailed procedures, proposals, and ideas that may advance official negotiations. If a formal agreement is reached, leaders may end the violence and facilitate transformation; if no formal agreement has been reached at this stage, then the parties in the conflict may resume violence or create a stalemate (Gilboa, 2009b). This is also a very fundamental conflict stage that the media should give attention to as specified by Gilboia's framework of media and conflict which detailed specific steps
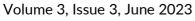
to be adopted by the media for such engagement, unlike other frameworks. As well indicated, the media can de-escalate conflicts through their own initiative or by request from one or more parties of the conflict to ultimately accommodate the de-escalation messages that would appeal to all parties to the conflict (Wuan, 2018

4.4 Termination-reconciliation Phase

This is the last phase of conflict in line with Gilboa's framework. And this is no doubt, critical to the end of any conflict. Resolution is one thing and reconciliation is another. The former refers to the formal negotiations and peace agreements and usually involve only leaders and certain elites who surround them whereas the latter goes beyond conflict resolution and peace agreements, and addresses psychological and cognitive barriers to stable peace. The two must not be confused although they appear to be the same or similar. The conflict does not stop at the resolution stage; neither is it the end solution of a conflict. Instead, it has been argued that, for 'real' and true conflict resolution, and in order to achieve what Gilboa in his framework called 'true normalization and stable peace' or 'positive peace', or 'transformation' of a conflict. The peace process has to ensure the conflicting parties have been reconciled. Chukwuma (2022) gave credence to the above assertion when he opined that Gilboa's specifications on his framework stand to be superior when compared to others particularly when you critically look at the conflict stage of termination and reconciliation with the indication that sustainable conflict resolution must include a genuine reconciliation of the conflicting parties.

Scholars have warned that there is a danger when a peace process in a conflict does not go beyond the resolution stage;

that is, when parties, particularly only leaders and certain elites, are satisfied with only signing peace agreements without addressing the grievances, mistrust, hostility, and fear among the people. The danger is "the public may reject both the process and the results of their efforts (Wuan, 2018; Gilboa, 2009).

So, what is the role of the media in facilitating and bringing reconciliation? Making reference to Gilboa's framework, Rammel, (2019) notes that media support, especially local media, is very crucial to ensure or realise reconciliation. He argues that media communicate messages about peace and reconciliation... media frame the news and favourable framing can help reconciliation ... changing the cultural norms and policy of actors. As provided by the framework, the media can contribute to reconciliation in two ways. First is through media events. These are "spectacular celebrations of peacemaking and peace agreements...broadcast live, organized outside the media, pre-planned, and presented with reverence and ceremony" (Rammel, 2019, p.8). Second is through reconciliation events which refer to turning points leading to improving relations and lessening the chances of a recurrence of violence such as direct physical contact or proximity between opponents, usually at a senior level; a public ceremony accompanied by substantial publicity or media attention, that relays the event to the wider national society; and ritualistic or symbolic behavior that indicates the parties consider the dispute resolved and that more amicable relations are expected to follow (Rammel, 2019).

5. FINDINGS

The following findings were revealed based on the outcome of a careful interrogation of the framework as can be seen in the literature review and the discussion of findings:

a) The framework is more comprehensive for research and practice in media and conflict than the one stipulated by peace journalism theorists and other previous scholars and researchers in media and conflict.

b) It is a multidimensional as well as multidisciplinary framework for research and practice of reporting conflict.

c) It proposes "a four-dimensional framework for analyzing and practice of media when reporting conflict which combines and integrates the various components adopted from different yet relevant fields of science: international relations, conflict studies, communication, and journalism.

6. CONCLUSION

As can be clearly seen in the literature review and the discussion of findings, Gilboa's contribution is a more comprehensive framework for research and practice in media and conflict than the one stipulated by peace journalism theorists and other previous scholars and researchers in media and conflict. It is a multidimensional and multidisciplinary framework for research and practice of reporting conflict. The framework is very helpful in the practice and analysis of media when reporting conflict which combines and integrates the various components adopted from different yet relevant fields of science: international relations, conflict studies, communication and journalism. More so, Gilboa's framework specifically and systematically demonstrates how research and practice can be organized to explore positive and negative contributions of the media through the four phases of conflict; five levels of media; and the five media functions and dysfunctions as were clearly discussed.

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