Framing the news: from political conflict to peace. How the 'framing theory' and the 'political context model' can enhance the peace journalism model.

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Abstract

The aim of the peace journalism model is to offer a "peace oriented" way to cover conflicts. A research of the subject indicates that the focus of peace journalism has been about the benefits and details of how the model can be implemented, but without serious academic or theoretical background. This paper deals with this problem. After a brief analysis of current peace journalism theory and its limits, the article uses two theories to provide solid theoretical grounding for the peace journalism model. In first place, the 'framing theory' of Robert Entman demonstrates that this model could be considered a frame and also an exercise of framing. However, once the Entman theory provides light on framing, what kind of frame and how it is constructed, it is necessary to review the model peace journalism and analyze it with a focus on conflict coverage. So, in second place it will be studied the 'politic context model' of Gadi Wolfsfeld to include some interesting aspects of the political conflict environment.

Key words: Peace journalism, Conflict, Framing theory, Political Context.

General vision of the Peace Journalism

Johann Galtung, the founder of peace journalism, is a Norwegian academic who has developed a long career in the field of peace studies. In his famous article "The Structure of Foreign News" he says that some media contributes to polarize the conflict through some language orientations (Galtung 1965). He later called to this kind of information, war journalism. To counteract this effect there should be another kind of journalism: the peace journalism.

The war journalism has four main features: it is oriented to violence and war, is highly influenced by propaganda, it focuses on the opinion of the elites and it focuses on zero-sum game, that is, one part wins all and the other part loses all (Galtung 2002).

On the other hand, peace journalism is oriented to conflict transformation, to inform with veracity, it cares for the opinion of the victims of the conflict, and it understands peace as a solution of a conflict where all the involved parties receive some benefits. Such kind of peace journalism demands that the journalist take an interpretative approach, concentrated on the stories that highlight peace initiatives; it tones down ethnic and religious differences; anticipates later conflicts; focuses on the structure of societies in conflict; and promotes the solution of the conflict, reconstitution and reconciliation (Galtung 1997, 1998).

With regard of the practices, peace journalism implies that: information must be given in a detailed and balanced account not only about confrontation and radicalized actors, but also of the causes that explain it. It also should tend for the historical and cultural roots of the conflict, give voice to all of the actors, explain how common people suffer implicit violence, inform if there are any actors willing to negotiate and, above all, understand peace as a search for and delivery of solutions. Therefore, the journalist must present peace proposals from different actors and highlight the positive perspectives. Other practices included in peace journalism are taking a preventive stance or proposing, for example, through editorials and columns, an urge for conciliation and to focus attention in shared points instead of revenge, to overlook differences and emphasize in the invisible effects of violence such as the emotional harm and trauma for the social structure (Lynch 1999, Lynch 2002, Lynch, McGoldrick 2005, McGoldrick 2000, McGoldrick 2007).

The peace journalism model could be summarized in four normative points:

- The journalist must analyze the conflict to be able to inform about violent facts. This analysis must include the roots and causes, the confronting parties and their objectives.
- The information should present an orientation to conflict solution, giving relevance to proposals, negotiations, agreements, etc.
- The journalists should pursue truth in a symmetrical manner, that is, reality −positive and negative− of the contending parties, not just from one side.
- The orientation of the information must be towards the voice of common people and not just for the elites.

The peace journalism theory has been developing specially over the last fifteen years (Galtung 1997, Lynch 1999, Lynch 2002, Lynch, McGoldrick 2005, McGoldrick 2000, McGoldrick 2007, McGoldrick, Lynch 2000, McGoldrick, Lynch 2011, Lee, Maslog 2005, Lee, Maslog et al. 2006). An analysis of the articles on peace journalism shows that the majority are prescriptive, which means that the authors have generally explained the benefits of peace journalism and detail how it can be implemented, but do not deal with the theoretical backgrounds.

The main critic to peace journalism and the answers.

David Loyn (2003, 2007) strongly criticizes peace journalism because of its "contempt for objectivity" and calls for the more traditional values of journalism such as objectivity and balance, highlighting that "objectivity has to remain as a goal, the only sacred goal we have" (2003, 4). However, the argument does not have a solid theoretical support because it is grounded only in the theories of Thomas Negel –of

whom he does not mention any bibliographic references- and Hammond. What Loyn tries is to demonstrate that objectivity is still an important reference point in a way, even though he himself proves that it is impossible to attain in daily journalistic practice.

Samuel Peleg answered to these critics stating that "the concept of objectivity has always been elusive", and so he says "a more realistic outline of the spirit of journalism holds that objectivity is simply unsustainable, and that journalists should aspire to something much more like a neutral perspective on any controversial matter" (Pelege, 2007: 2).

In this sense, Jeremy Iggers also points out "though few journalists still defend objectivity, this remains as one of the greatest obstacles to perform a more responsible role in the building of public life" (1998, p. 91).

The central issue of the debate is what Jake Lynch responds to the concept of objectivity, introducing instead the concept of framing, quoting Entman: "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more silent in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Lynch 2007b, p. 2).

The simple references made by Lynch of the framing theory does not provide itself the theoretical grounding for peace journalism, it is necessary to go deeper. It has to be determined if the proposals of peace journalism correspond to the framing theory, that is, to determine what is a frame, what kind of frame it is and how it is constructed.

After that, it is necessary to take into consideration the political context in which journalism is developed, especially if we know that peace journalism focuses on conflict coverage. In order to do this, it will be used the approach of 'political context model' of Wolfsfeld.

Analysis of peace journalism in light of two theoretical proposals of communication.

The framing theory

In the world of journalism the theory of framing finds strong roots in the principles of the theory of mediation. This theory states that "media" have the role of a mediator between man and society, between the outside world and the audience.

In this sense, it is important to clarify that the role of mediators between reality and individuals is not reduced to a simple transmission of messages, but it is important to consider that media messages are created when making news. As David Altheide and Robert Snow (1988) affirm media is not just a simple link, because in the communicative process, it actually, has an influence on the logics and format of the media over the contents. This means that when creating a new, the fact itself goes through a process of filtration in order to become a new. As Walter Lippmann (1950) said media transform the dimensions of events in informative products that pass through a series of filters until they reach the audience".

In this sense, Gaye Tuchman stated that the new is "a product of the informers that act within the institutional processes and accordingly to institutional practices" (Tuchman 1978: 4). It is within this process of filtrating reality where the framing theory finds support (Duze 2007).

Framing makes the mediation process operational since it provides the properties, peculiarities and own ways to turn an event into a new. Therefore, framing responds to the question on how this mediation is accomplished between the fact and the audience, and how the making of information content is made[1].

Tuchman established that the meaning of the events is given by the journalist through the news, because taken in itself an event has no significance (…) it is the imposition of a frame of other ordered events that allows recognition of facts and the attribution of significance (Tuchman 1978).

The proposal of Tuchman established a different view: that news are the representation of reality by journalists, and that representation involves an approach, a frame. Later authors will follow her reasoning, stating that through framing events are constructed, discourses are structured and meanings are developed (Gamson 1989, 1992, Gamson, Croteau et al. 1992).

It is important to clarify that there is not one single definition of frame, and that this concept is understood from different theoretical perspectives (Reese 2007). I have chosen the definition of Entman as it is the one that best suits the aim of this paper, because it points out different perspectives involved in the concept of frame:

> "Frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief systems. The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments. The frames that guide the receiver's thinking and conclusion may or may not reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the communicator. The culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames; in fact, culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping. Framing in all four locations includes similar functions: selection and highlighting, and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution. (Entman 1993, pp. 52-53).

In other words, the presentation of news is the task of the media, and therefore they create the media frame. The understanding of news takes place in the individual, from the internal mind structures, the individual frames, but for this to be possible there has to be a common frame shared by journalists and audience. I will call this the cultural frame, or the cultural dimension of framing.

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1 News offered by the informer are an information product that needs to be submitted to a set of production norms and to a distribution space, hence we cannot ask that a news cover all of a reality, since it is not its goal and cannot do it because of its process and space.

In this paper I will focus on the media frame elaborated by the journalist, in their mind and as contained in the text, in the news item written or transmitted by radio or TV and I will briefly explain these dimensions.

First, the media frame exists in the mind of the journalist, as ways of thinking that fix their news coverage and guide their way of understanding and telling the story. For some authors this process is intentional whereas others consider that it can be unconscious[2].

And secondly, the media frame is located within the text, in which the narrator delimits a reality in a specific manner by means of selection and highlighting. For Entman, to frame implies "selection and highlighting, and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation and/or solution" (Entman 1993).

The frames are more inferential than explicit and they are constituted by the following functions: first, the definition of the problem, which refers to the specification of what the causal agent is doing and the costs and benefits it involves, generally measured by common cultural values; the second one is the diagnosis of the causes, which consists in identifying the force behind the problem; the third function is the moral judgement or evaluation that is made on the causal agent and its effects; and the last one is the suggestion or solution that offers and justifies the way of dealing with the problem and predicts possible remedies.

As Entman clarifies, one single new can include more than one of these four functions or, at the same time, different sentences may not mention any of them. It is not necessary for a text to include all four.

As I previously pointed out, Lynch relies on Entman to affirm that peace journalism is a frame, since it analyses a conflict and it includes: definition of a problem, diagnosis of causes, moral judgement and the suggestion for its resolution. For those well acquainted with peace journalism there is an evident parallelism between frame and what Lynch and McGoldrick propose on their didactic work as the correct way to cover a conflict (Lynch, McGoldrick 2005).

As a matter of fact, the principles of framing I have just presented are related with the main proposals of peace journalism promoters. First of all, by maintaining that all news have an approach and that total objectivity is not possible. Second, by specifying a particular approach by the journalist. And third, by attributing actions suggested by Entman: the definition of a problem, the diagnosis of the causes, the moral judgement and finally the suggestion of a solution.

However, once the Entman theory provides a theoretical grounding on framing, it is necessary to review the model peace journalism and analyze it with a focus on conflict coverage. So, now we are going to study the 'politic context model' of Gadi Wolfsfeld to include some interesting aspects of the political conflict environment.

Political context model

Wolfsfeld considers the 'political context model the best way to understand the role of media within the political conflict. He views that the competition of political antagonists for media control is just another aspect within the general struggle between the political opposition (Wolfsfeld 1997).

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2 *Media frame* are also work routines for journalists that allow them to quickly identify and classify information, and "to package" it for an effective delivery to their audience.

The battle of the political antagonists focuses in promoting their points of view through media in order to prevails in the news story. This struggle takes place in two levels: access and significance. Wolfsfeld names them the structural dimension and the cultural dimension.

Access, or the structural dimension, refers to the fact that an antagonist appears in the media, gets media coverage. The second aspect, the battle for significance, the cultural dimension, consists in the attribution of significance to a fact, in order to make it understandable to a specific community. In other words, contending parties try to promote their own focus on the story so that the media present it as such to the audience. This battle for significance attribution can be seen in terms of building frames: conflict among the frames that the contending parties try to promote, and the frame that the media finally gives to the specific fact.

The building of a media frame is an interactive process that tries to fit two variables: a) professional usefulness, and b) placement of the daily events into an ample cultural context.

Professional usefulness refers to the ability to explain a complex story within a limited space –whether press, radio or television. In order to do so, it must follow the limitations and requisites of the different informative media.

Nevertheless, the building of this frame is not just limited by space but also by previous frames used in the coverage of the conflict. In other words, the building process is understood as an attempt by journalists to find a narrative that links new information to existing frames in the media. We must also take into account that the public to whom their information is addressed live within a specific cultural and political context.

As a result, he considers that "the attempt to find a narrative fit should be seen not as a mechanical process, but rather as a cultural one in which the journalist places the events of the day within a meaningful context" (Wolfsfeld 1997 p. 36).

So, I will focus on the elements that Wolfsfeld thinks contribute to the building of the media frame: "While events normally serve as the starting point for the construction of media frames the attempt to find a narrative fit is also influenced by professional and political considerations. These considerations help define the range of existing frames, the search for information and events, and how the frames are applied to a particular conflict" (Wolfsfeld 1997 p. 36)

He defines three factors that affect the choice or building of a particular frame: facts, professional considerations and political environment. That is to say: the nature of the information and of the events that are processed; the need to create a good story; and the need to create a story that resounds politically within a particular culture. I will explain the last two.

Professional considerations or professional culture

The journalist professional culture is the system of values, norms, beliefs and practices of the profession. The are four variables that influence the professional culture: first, journalists hold a series of routine frames for conflict coverage that are based on their definition of what makes a good story (news criteria). These criteria imply, for instance, the power of negative images on the victims of war attacks.

The second variable is an understanding of the journalist obligation to serve the public as a watchdog against the government. Third, the different beliefs, priorities and practices among news media. The latter, for instance, focuses on good visuals and short stories for television, whereas the written press holds different priorities. And

the last factor that Wolfsfeld underlines is the total sum of the different beliefs and values held by each news body.

"These variations will have a significant impact on what stories will echo within each culture, and how information will be processed in the construction of news. This dimension should also be considered when examining the struggle over meaning" (Wolfsfeld 1997 p. 33).

Political considerations or political culture.

The political culture is about standards, moral values, beliefs and practices that define the manner in which each media interacts with political environment. The level of those beliefs can be as general as the affirmation that democracy is better than totalitarianism, or as specific as to say that the United States should not have declared the second war in Iraq.
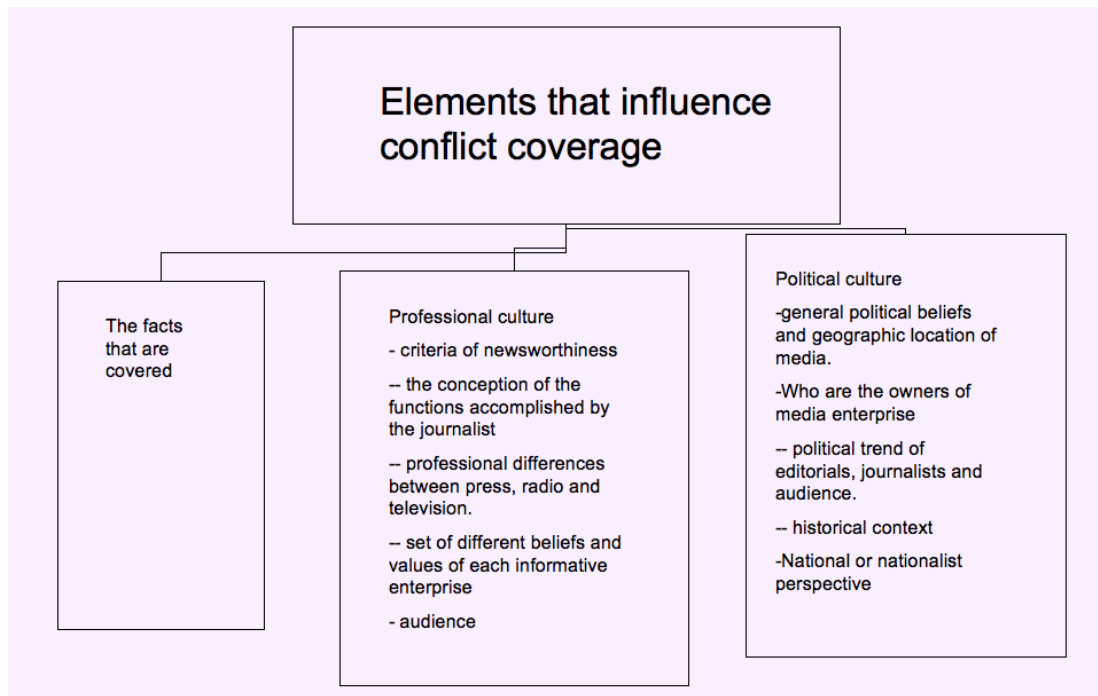
The Wolfsfeld theory affirms that each media exists within a particular cultural ground that defines the frames that could be used to interpret political events. Following (Shoemaker, Reese 1996) he states that the variables that influence political culture in the media are: geographic location of the mass media; ownership of the media and/or who directs them; political leanings of the editors and journalists; type of public and historical period in which conflict is being covered.

He considers that the effect of political culture in frame building is more evident in the coverage of foreign conflicts, because from that point of view one can appreciate that media in each country interprets the world from a national or even nationalistic perspective.

Political influence is not limited to the voicing of support or opposition by the media. The frame is reflected not only explicitly but also implicit in the telling of the facts. Thus, for instance, a frame favourable to a political candidate will take shape not just in the positive adjectives used, but also in the effort to better explain the reasons of a specific international conflict, and the position adopted by some of the parts involved.

In this sense, Wolfsfeld states that local authorities will have greater difficulties when promoting their frames about conflicts in the media of other countries because of cultural differences.

The following graphic shows those three factors that should be taken into consideration to understand how to construct a frame. Getting to know these factors is very important to evaluate the frame of peace journalism.

GRAPHIC 1. INFLUENCING ELEMENTS ACCORDING TO THE 'POLITICAL CONTEXT MODEL'.

Elements that influence conflict coverage

The facts that are covered

Professional culture
- criteria of newsworthiness
-- the conception of the functions accomplished by the journalist
-- professional differences between press, radio and television.
-- set of different beliefs and values of each informative enterprise
- audience

Political culture
-general political beliefs and geographic location of media.
-Who are the owners of media enterprise
-- political trend of editorials, journalists and audience.
-- historical context
-National or nationalist perspective

Source: G. Woldsfeld. Graphic made by the author

Conclusions

The peace journalism could be supported in the framing theory as a starting point. Both proposals –peace journalism model and framing theory- are grounded in the argument that every new has a specific frame. The news are a representation of reality, with a determined frame or approach.

In light of framing theory, peace journalism can be considered from two perspectives: the first, as a set of tools to elaborate a specific frame; and the second, as a type of frame called peace framing. This means that the implementation of peace journalism model is a way of coverage (framing) and the result or the new has a particular approach directed to peace (frame).

However, I consider that one weakness of the frame implementation in the peace journalism is that it does not consider some key aspects of the political context. That is why some aspects of the 'political context model' provide information to complement the peace journalism model.

The first aspect is the frame struggling context. This struggle refers to the competition between authorities and opposition for the news, both parts "fight" to promote its frames, points of view through the media.

This struggle takes place in two levels: access and meaning. Wolfsfeld names these structural dimension and cultural dimension. The first one refers to get access in media; the second level consists in promoting a specific frame.

The second aspect is to consider the three elements that influence the construction of a frame: the events that are informed, the need of the journalist to create a good story and that such story has political impact in the particular culture.

When reading the research on peace journalism, it is impossible to find in an explicit way which elements are important and necessary to construct a frame. Even though, for those researchers a good new is a new based on their model, they do not appoint other professional criteria in the construction of the frame. Moreover, there is not

explicit reference of how to create a good story that takes into consideration the political culture.

The following research on peace journalism will have to deal with the matter of frame building and how to generate peace news taking into consideration the professional environment and the political context of the conflict covered.

Regarding the professional field, I consider necessary to incorporate peace journalism proposals following the media practices, and for this there must be flexibility. Such flexibility will imply the understanding of the operation and editorial line of the media. Concerning the political field, I consider the journalist should be aware of the specific historical context of the countries and of the political culture of the audience.

To move further on the subject of peace journalism I propose to use the graphic on this article, which could be useful as a tool to create peace frames and to analyze the news about conflicts. Therefore, it is a tool for information building and analysis.

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