The strategic issues of journalistic lexicon when reporting on victims of the Colombia armed conflict

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Abstract: Based on previous research which demonstrated that media plays a role in war as well as in peace-building, and that words used by journalists and their sources are directly linked to the interests they defend, this study seeks to examine the tension between professional journalists' guidelines and the discursive strategies of (armed) sources. For this purpose, qualitative observations were required to determine the subtle ways in which news reports are biased. More specifically, this paper analyzes the strategic issues associated with the ways in which journalists label the combatants and politicians being deprived of their freedom by guerillas, which demonstrate a detached discursive positioning[1] that can itself become an instrument of war.

Key words: legitimization, labeling, journalistic bias, Colombia.

Introduction

After more than 60 years of armed conflict and many unsuccessful peace talks with guerrilla groups, the Colombian government has engaged in new peace talks with the largest and oldest guerrilla organization (the FARC), which have been ongoing since October 2012. In this context, it seems pertinent to analyze the extent to which past coverage of the conflict by national media could influence the coverage of the peace talks and the peace-building process. It has been proven that the media plays an important role in wars and armed conflicts (Carruthers, 2011; Herman, 2002; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Maltby & Keeble, 2007; Robinson, Brown, Goddard, & Parry, 2005); by making visible or by obscuring the discourses of one of the parties in a conflict, the media participates in a legitimization process that is present in all armed conflicts (Carpentier, 2007; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Oddo,

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[1] The notion of 'discursive positioning' refers to the way in which journalists report news in relation to the version provided by sources and the linguistic tools reporters use in news to indicate whether or not they adhere to the sources' version of events. These tools include for instance the reported speech of sources and mentioning different and opposing sources.

2011). Actors involved in war are required to justify why they kill people; they need to undermine the morale of the enemy and gain support from decision-makers and citizens (Barreto, Borja, Serrano, & López, 2009; Géré, 1997). The discourses published and broadcast by media contribute to this process; consequently the media is 'weaponized' by armed groups, which design the war for the media, and use it as a tool for war communications (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Tumber & Webster, 2006). This is one of the reasons why actors involved in war seek to establish good relationships with journalists: they look to persuade reporters to talk about the conflict in a way that meets their strategic, political and military aims (Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Maltby, 2012; Tumber & Webster, 2006). Media could also play a role in peace building by providing support to the negotiations and post-conflict reconciliation (Golčevski, Engelhardt, & Boomgaarden, 2013; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Media can, for instance, make visible the discourses of all the groups involved in the conflict and give a voice to the victims. Media can also humanize the groups that have previously been despised by the public (because of the way they have been portrayed by the media) during the conflict period.

In the particular case of Colombia, a long-running armed conflict has seen fighting between left-wing insurgents (the guerrillas), the military, and right-wing paramilitaries. Many peace negotiations have been conducted with no success. The new peace talks between the main guerrilla group, the FARC, and the government are taking place in a context which is of particular interest to the media for two reasons: firstly, whilst the process has received massive international support, there is no consensus within Colombia. Most politicians and opinion leaders support the talks. Nevertheless, some political leaders do not. According to an opinion poll carried out in April 2013 (Cárdenas Ruiz, 2013), 79% of Colombian people support the peace process, but only 21% are optimistic about it. One of the main reasons for not supporting the talks or for having an ambivalent opinion is that FARC guerrillas are not seen as a legitimate political adversary: some people think that this group should be defeated militarily and the government should only engage in negotiations if FARC members disarm and accept a prison sentence. Secondly, the government took the decision to hold talks without a ceasefire. Thus, while the president promotes peace talks as the only means to end the conflict, he continues fighting the FARC guerrillas. In consequence, the media covers peace talks while continuing to report on the armed actions of the military and the illegal groups. One can therefore assume that the way in which journalists have been reporting news about the armed conflict could affect the way they cover the peace talks.

This paper specifically examines one particular aspect of the coverage of the Colombian armed conflict in order to determine the extent to which journalists have contributed to war: have journalists been engaged in the war effort of the armed groups or have they contributed to achieving peace in the country - as they had initially committed to doing - by taking care not to replicate the war lexicon of the armed groups? (Arizmendi, 2004; Castro, Villamizar, Restrepo, & Guerrero, 2005; Correa, 2008; CPB, 1990; Rincón & Ruíz, 2002). We first examine how Colombian journalists have decided to cover the conflict through their professional guidelines. Then, we analyze the extent to which they have honored their commitments. For this purpose, this study gives an account of two specific guidelines: the recommendation to refrain from using the war lexicon of armed groups, and the right journalists believe they have to favor civilian victims. The aim is to examine their compliance with these professional guidelines in a war context and, specifically, to consider the strategic issues associated with the way in which they refer to the combatants and politicians who have been 'deprived of their freedom' by guerrillas. Lastly, we discuss the implications of the subtle journalistic bias in the coverage of the armed conflict. Preceding the literature review and the research methodology, a brief introduction to the Colombian media context is provided.

Literature review

With regard to the mass media in Colombia, news production and broadcasting is essentially controlled by a group of private media organizations owned by the richest families in the country. In addition, the country's most important newspaper is owned by the family of the current president. Some mass media owners support the State because they are convinced that it is the only legitimate actor in the conflict; thus, they put pressure on journalists to favor official sources rather than those of their adversaries. When Colombian journalists speak to armed groups, they are aware of the fact that there are strategic interests at stake. They have explicitly expressed their concern about the role they might play in the evolution of the conflict. As a result, these journalists and some media managers have signed agreements ("Acuerdo por la discreción," 1999), written professional guidelines (Castro et al., 2005; El Colombiano, 2003; El Tiempo, 2003), organized training sessions (Arizmendi, 2004; MPP, 2006) and adopted ethics codes (CPB, 1990; Márquez González, 2003).

Journalists' guidelines for the coverage of the armed conflict

In addition to the "Journalists' Code of ethics and responsibility" (CPB, 1990), which is taught in journalism schools and still functions as a source of reference for journalists on the main professional principles, there is also a specific "Code for the coverage of the Colombian armed conflict". This code was written in 2003 because of threats journalists had received from armed groups in one of the regions where the conflict had been most intense (Arauca). Thus, the code mainly functions as a tool journalists can use to claim editorial independence from media organizations and armed sources, but also to justify professional errors to audiences. It established the following principles to which journalists are supposed to commit in order to cover the conflict in a responsible way:

- Maintain a professional relationship with sources. Journalists should reject any intimidation or privilege which could compromise their independence.
- Refrain from revealing the identity of sources if requested.
- Make an effort to verify information with different sources.

Regarding news format:

- Journalists commit to avoiding lexicon, qualifying expressions and adjectives used by the groups in conflict.
- Titling, editing and broadcasting or publications of a news report are the responsibility of media owners and managers, not journalists.

Regarding the victims of the conflict, and the journalists' role with regard to the media and the state, journalists commit to:

- Respect the privacy and the grief of citizens involved in or affected by the armed conflict.
- Report accurate information and to set aside any economic interest.

Besides, journalists claim the right to appropriate working conditions (salary, means of transport, etc.), in order to ensure their independence (MPP, 2006; Rincón & Ruíz, 2002). In addition to this specific ethics code, newsrooms also have specific guidelines relating to general journalistic principles of objectivity: independence from sources, neutrality, balance and accuracy ("Acuerdo por la discreción," 1999; El Colombiano, 2003; El Tiempo, 2003).

Given that previous research has demonstrated that the words used to label and describe events and social actors are not "neutral" because they reflect the particular interests of those who chose these labels (Esquenazi, 2002; Iyengar, 1991), this study focuses on the

commitment not to employ the war lexicon of the armed groups. French literature on discourse analysis provides a useful approach to the act of naming.

Naming social actors and events in news

A group of researchers in discourse analysis has demonstrated that the lexicon and labels used to refer to events or social actors influence the way in which they are interpreted (Branca-Rosoff, 2007; Calabrese & Rosier, 2004; Krieg-Planque, 2000; Moirand, 2009; Siblot, 2007; Veniard, 2011). An audience may interpret the reporting of a "terrorist attack" differently than if the media reports a "military operation". The legitimacy given to an armed group may be different if authorities refer to it as an "insurgent group" rather than a "criminal group". In addition, a journalist's job consists of preparing news reports according to what sources (authorities, victims, witnesses…) say to them. However, the words journalistic sources choose to describe and explain events result from the particular frames within which sources understand their own "reality" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1990; Goffman, 1991). These frames manifest through the language and more specifically through the lexicon used to refer to events, individuals and phenomena (Entman, 1993, pp. 51–52; Iyengar, 1991).

For instance, in the case of the Colombian conflict, a paramilitary combatant, convinced of the legitimacy of their cause, will confess that they "shot down" (*dar de baja*) a "terrorist" instead of saying that they "assassinated" or "murdered" a person suspected of belonging to the guerrillas. The choice of labels used to describe and explain the armed conflict is not a random choice. The labels are chosen with the purpose of influencing public opinion, decision-makers, troops, etc. Colombian journalists are aware of the fact that the armed groups have strategic interests when they talk to them. This is one of the main reasons why journalists commit to not relying on war lexicon. However, although there are those who honor this commitment, there are many journalists who do not. The case of combatants and politicians who are "deprived of their freedom" by guerrillas is an example of the latter.

Combatants and politicians 'deprived of their freedom': a war media strategy

In order to prove their military capacity, the FARC guerrillas and, to a lesser extent, the ELN captured and held captive hundreds of soldiers, military officers and dozens of politicians between 1996 and 2012. Some of these captives have been forcibly liberated by the military, a few of them died from diseases or in unsuccessful rescue attempts by the army, and most were finally unilaterally released by the guerrillas. The latest liberations took place in April 2012 during the secret conversations between FARC guerillas and the government

some months before the peace talks officially started. The guerrillas' objective in these captures was to show that they had sufficient resources to keep these people alive and to put pressure on the government to negotiate a 'humanitarian agreement' which would free captured members of the military and politicians in exchange for imprisoned guerrilla fighters.

The relevance of this particular case is that it illustrates well both the role of armed groups' legitimizing discourses and the role of media in the evolution of war. The military's strategy was to minimize military defeats which allowed guerrillas to capture some of its soldiers during combat. The guerrillas' strategy was to maximize successful operations by exploiting the enemy's weaknesses. If the guerrillas had obtained a humanitarian agreement from the government, they would also have gained some political recognition from being treated as a legitimate adversary with political motivations.

Nevertheless, holding the members of the military and politicians hostage for years had a considerable political cost for the guerrillas. It was difficult for them to justify depriving politicians of their freedom, as they were not armed actors. Representatives of the guerrillas stated that the military officers were armed and were taken captive during a military confrontation. However, because the FARC and ELN guerrillas are illegal groups, they do not have the same opportunity to disseminate their legitimizing discourses through the media. In fact, previous studies have reported that Colombian journalists mainly quote official sources, who are also the guerrillas' enemies: the military, the government and the representatives of the state (PAN, 2004; Author citation, 2011). As a consequence, the legitimizing discourses coming from the guerrillas receive little media attention.[2] Thus, within the Colombian conflict the military and the government have two strategic advantages: greater access to the media, and legitimacy resulting from the fact that they represent the State. One of the advantages of being able to disseminate one's own legitimizing discourses is to control the ways in which the conflict, and the actors involved therein, are referred to. In fact, the labels given to the captured politicians and soldiers were, and still remain, of major importance to both sides; while the guerrillas were seeking political recognition and the liberation of their imprisoned members, the military was using the situation to discredit the enemy.

Hence the military and government strategy consisted of adopting discourses in which the captured soldiers and (civilian) politicians were treated as victims of the guerrillas. For

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[2] The only exception is during peace talks, when journalists are allowed to interview the representatives of guerrillas.

this reason, the government and the military have been referring to these people as 'kidnapped' soldiers and politicians or 'hostages' (*secuestrados*), whereas the guerrillas refer to the soldiers as 'prisoners of war' and to the politicians as people who were being 'detained' (*retenidos*). The problem with the label 'kidnapped people' used by the military and the Colombian government is that the soldiers and politicians were captured under different conditions, given that the soldiers are not civilians and were in an armed confrontation with the guerrillas. In addition, the term 'kidnap' is more associated with a situation in which a ransom is demanded in exchange for liberating the captive. In other words, the label 'kidnapped' is more related to economic aims. However, as noted earlier, the FARC and ELN guerrillas did not make any demands for ransom for the liberation of these people because their demands were political, and this was why they differentiated 'prisoners of war' from 'detained' politicians. In this sense, these groups make a distinction between 'economic' hostages, for whose liberation they used to demand a ransom, and 'political' hostages. In 2012, when FARC guerrillas released their last captives, they committed not to detain any more people for economic reasons.

The issue with the labels 'prisoners of war' and 'detained' used by guerrillas is that they suppose the existence of an 'internal armed conflict' and thus the recognition of the status of guerrillas as belligerents according to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. This was firmly rejected by the former Colombian government. The current government recognizes the existence of an internal armed conflict and did actually begin peace talks with the FARC in Oslo in October 2012. During the talks, some people who presented themselves as victims of FARC guerrillas argued that this organization was holding members of their family "hostage". The armed group denies these accusations, which are used by some political leaders to delegitimize the peace talks.

Because of the issues associated with the labels used by armed groups, this paper uses 'deprived of their freedom', which is the term used in the Geneva Conventions.[3]

Research question

Given that journalists have made a commitment not to rely on the war lexicon of armed groups, this paper looks at the discursive positioning of journalists regarding the war lexicon of the military and guerrillas when they refer to politicians and soldiers who were being deprived of their freedom. The first question is whether journalists maintain a detached

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[3] http://www.icrc.org/eng/war-and-law/protected-persons/prisoners-war/index.jsp

position or whether they favor one of the parties to the conflict. If journalists followed their own guidelines, they would remain detached by refraining from using controversial labels such as 'kidnapped', 'prisoners of war' and 'detained'.

This study adopts a qualitative approach which analyzes in depth the way in which journalists deal with the biased discourse of (armed) sources. This case study seeks to provide a more accurate observation of journalists' positioning. It is based upon previous research that posits that even factual and descriptive news reports that quote different sources are biased, albeit in a subtle way (Author citation, 2011). The aim of this particular analysis is to better understand that subtlety; to determine the degree to which and in what ways journalists contribute to the war between armed groups.

Method

This study was part of a larger research project that analyzed the framing of the Colombian armed conflict by national news television programs (Author citation, 2010, 2012). In that project, 452 news reports broadcast between June 2006 and June 2008[4] were examined. The sampling strategy consisted of recording news television programs from dates chosen randomly as the news program archives were not available. This kind of constraint makes it difficult to set up a representative corpus. The random choice of dates has the advantage of creating a sample that is not influenced by a particular topic or event. In addition, the period corresponds to the second term of the former president (Mr. Uribe: 2002-2006; 2006-2010), who increased military staff numbers (IISS & Hackett, 2009) and strengthened the armed confrontation against the guerrillas. He also negotiated the demobilization of paramilitary groups.[5] The two presidential terms of Mr. Uribe were preceded and followed by peace talks with FARC guerrillas. The first talks, which failed, took place between 1999 and 2002, and the second started in October 2012 and are ongoing.

For that research, all news items broadcast by four national television news programs[6] reporting on the armed confrontation between the military, the paramilitary groups and the guerrillas groups were analyzed. For the present study, all the expressions used by sources and journalists in these 452 news stories to refer to soldiers and politicians being deprived of

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[4] News television programs were recorded on June 12 – 15 2006; December 11 – 15 2006; June 25 – 29 2007; December 10 – 14 2007 and December 16 - 20 2008.

[5] Members of that government have been investigated for or actually accused of having links with paramilitary groups.

[6] Two are broadcast by the two private channels and the other two by the national public channel. The research did not find any significant difference in the way these four national newscasts frame the conflict. For this reason, the results are presented without making a distinction between them.

their freedom by guerrillas were selected. A total of nine labels (with 252 occurrences) were found.

Table 1. Frequency of the expressions used in news reports to refer to politicians and soldiers being deprived of their freedom.

Expressions	Expression in Spanish	Occurrences	Frequency N = 252
Kidnapped	*Secuestrado*	218	87%
Hostage	*Rehén*	9	4%
Captive	*Cautivo*	8	3%
Seized	*Plagiado*	6	2%
Detained	*Retenido*	3	1%
Exchangeable	*Canjeable*	3	1%
Held by the guerrillas	*En poder de la guerrilla*	2	1%
Prisoner	*Prisionero*	2	1%
Abducted	*Raptado*	1	0.4%

In order to analyze how journalists deal with the war lexicon of the armed groups, a qualitative content analysis (Bardin, 2001), assisted by computer software (Atlas.ti), was carried out in three phases by one researcher. Two experts in content analysis and in television studies were asked to validate the coding process, categories and units of analysis (Leray, 2008). The first phase determined whether or not the labels imposed by armed groups for their strategic aims were the most frequent in news broadcasts: "kidnapped" which is imposed by the military and "detained" or "prisoners of war" which are imposed by guerrillas groups. In the second phase, the 252 expressions were classified according to whether the enunciator was:

- a journalist
- a source, which could be:
  o an official source: military, government and state representatives,

        o   a civilian source: representatives of non-governmental and international organizations, representatives of civilians, victims, professionals and representatives of the Church,

        o   a member of an illegal group: guerrilla representatives.[7]

Finally, the discursive positioning of journalists regarding the war lexicon of armed groups was examined. For this purpose, the expressions used by journalists, as opposed to sources, were analyzed. Journalists adopt a detached positioning when broadcasting extracts of interviews or press conferences where sources use their own labels. This corresponds to direct reported speech, which consists of quoting exactly what sources have said (Münchow, 2004, pp. 102–103). In contrast, when journalists quote sources indirectly (in other words, when they paraphrase what sources have said), they could potentially modify the discourse. We are specifically interested in this last case because it shows how journalists deal with the non-neutral discourse coming from sources. From 252 expressions found referring to the soldiers and politicians being deprived of their freedom, 192 were uttered by journalists, of which 169 corresponded to the label "kidnapped" (imposed by the military), whereas none of them corresponded to "detained" or "prisoner of war" (imposed by guerrillas). Thus, the 169 expressions used by reporters to refer to the military officers and politicians being deprived of their freedom as 'kidnapped' people were classified as follows:

-       'Detached positioning': cases in which journalists use the expression 'kidnapped' in quoting their sources, while stressing that they do not choose to label the soldiers and politicians being deprived of their freedom by guerrillas in this way.

-       'Partially detached positioning': this category includes the cases in which journalists suggest that they are quoting their sources, but where it is not possible to assert that it is the source who has referred to the military members and politicians being deprived of their freedom as 'kidnapped' people.

-       'Engaged positioning': this category includes the cases in which journalists use the term 'kidnapped' without quoting any source and without any indication that the expression was biased or controversial.

Findings

Naming the soldiers and the politicians being deprived of their freedom: a battle won by the military

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[7] The other illegal armed group (the paramilitary) is not taken into account in this category because any existing utterance from this group was made by members of the group themselves.

The research on which this study is based has demonstrated that television news programs cover the armed conflict every day: 9% – 10% of news broadcasting time on average consisted of talk about the confrontation between the military, paramilitary and guerrilla groups (Author citation 2011, p. 118). Nevertheless, some topics, such as the victories claimed by the military, were given more coverage than the situation of the military officers and politicians being deprived of their freedom. Thus, every day news reports mentioned the capture and prosecution of guerrillas, the demobilization of paramilitary groups, the dismantling of illegal groups' infrastructure and the liberation of people held captive by guerrillas. These military victories were presented as the positive consequences of the armed conflict and as proof that the government and military were winning the war.

Instead, news programs only talked about the soldiers and politicians being deprived of their freedom on very specific occasions, when an extraordinary event concerning these people occurred. Otherwise, the fact that soldiers and politicians were being held captive by the guerrillas was not considered especially newsworthy.[8] For instance, in June 2007, the military officers and politicians were on the front pages and a main item on news broadcasts because of two particular events. The first was the nationwide walk of the father of one of the soldiers held by the FARC (Mr. Pablo Emilio Moncayo), demanding that the guerrillas and the Colombian government reach an agreement to liberate all hostages. Certainly, the walk gave media visibility to the troops held by guerrillas, but it was not successful in persuading the government and the FARC to sign an agreement.[9] The second event was the announcement by the FARC guerrillas of the deaths of 11 politicians that they had been holding captive since 2002. That day and the following one (27 and 28 June 2007), the television news covered this event exclusively. National authorities (government, state and military representatives) took this opportunity to deploy discourses delegitimizing their main adversary, the FARC guerrillas. In spite of the fact that, at that time, it was not clear who had actually shot the politicians, authorities blamed the FARC. As has been mentioned previously, authorities have greater access to the media as sources; their discourses are more visible than those of guerrillas groups. In this sense, the way in which politicians, soldiers (such as Mr. Moncayo) and the deceased were referred to in news reports provides an interesting opportunity to analyze how journalists handle the relevant lexicon of sources.

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[8] Newsworthiness of events usually depends on their timing (recent and extraordinary event), significance (number of people affected), proximity (to audiences), prominence (of people concerned) and human interest (appealing to emotion) (Tumber 2000; Gans 1979).
[9] However, FARC guerrillas freed the soldier Pablo Emilio Moncayo in March 2010 and committed not to retain any more people for economic or political purposes. This announcement was made during the secret conversations, which preceded the current peace talks.

The first finding was that references to these captives are not balanced or neutral. Table 1 shows that the most frequent label, by a significant margin, is the one imposed by the military, 'kidnapped', at 87% of the 252 expressions analyzed. As has been noted, the label 'kidnapped' does not have a neutral connotation. It is part of the war lexicon of the armed groups and creates the legitimization issues that the military associates with this term in order to discredit the guerrillas. The other terms, including *captive, hostage,* and *abducted*, are only rarely used as synonyms. This finding suggests that journalists have engaged with this war lexicon to a certain extent, despite the fact that newsrooms and journalists have explicitly made a commitment not to employ the war lexicon of the armed groups, as the following quotations from professional guidelines show:

Neither the newspaper, nor its journalists will employ the terms used by armed groups[10] (El Tiempo, 2003, p. 62).

We will use expressions which contribute to cohabitation in Colombia[11] ("Acuerdo por la discreción," 1999).

We will use appropriate language in our news reports which disregards the qualifying expressions and adjectives used by the groups in conflict[12] (Márquez González, 2003).

Journalists' commitments to objectivity and a detached reportage of news in wartime need to be examined in depth. For instance, it is common in journalistic practice to use official sources often because they are assumed to be reliable (Berkowitz & Beach, 1993; Berkowitz, 2009). The problem is that in the case of Colombia, official sources are one of the parties in the conflict. This means that when government and military representatives talk to journalists, they are not impartial. Therefore, when journalists quote official sources, they could be favoring the interests of one of the parties in the conflict. They take sides, going counter to their own professional guidelines. With regard to official sources, previous

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[10] '*Ni el periódico ni sus periodistas asumirán los términos que usan los actores armados*'. Manual of Style of the main national newspaper *El Tiempo*.

[11] '*Utilizaremos expresiones que contribuyan a la convivencia entre los colombianos*'. The "Agreement for discretion was signed in 1999 by 32 national media managers with the purpose of improving the quality and the responsibility in the coverage of the violent events.

[12] '*Utilizaremos un lenguaje adecuado en nuestros mensajes que desestimará los calificativos y adjetivos usados por los antagonistas del conflicto bélico*'. As it has been said, the ethic code for the coverage of the armed conflict was written in 2003 by a group of journalists in response to the threats from armed groups that some of them had received.

research has shown that when reporting the armed conflict, Colombian journalists favor official sources (61%) over civilian sources (29%) and illegal armed groups (8%) (Author citation 2011). In other words, by quoting one of the parties to the conflict more often than others, journalists make discourses more visible, blaming guerrilla groups while the legitimizing discourses of guerrillas are hardly visible at all.

In the particular case on which this study focuses, journalists' contribution to the military's war communication is illustrated by the fact that in news reports the word 'kidnapped' is mainly used by journalists and military representatives. From the data in figure 1, it is apparent that 78% of the labels referring to captive soldiers and politicians are used by journalists, while official sources only employ 10% of these labels, civilian sources 11%, and guerrillas 1%. Sometimes journalists are directly quoting sources, but sometimes they are not. For this reason it is important to examine in depth how journalists position themselves regarding the use of "kidnapped" to refer to soldiers and politicians being deprived of their freedom. Journalists do not imply the same thing when they say '*the president said that the people* kidnapped *by guerrillas...*' as they do when they say '*the people kidnapped by the guerrillas...*'. In the first case, a journalist suggests that the label 'kidnapped' was used by the president, while in the second case, audiences cannot know where the label has come from. In any case, the audience is not informed of the strategic issues associated with the use of the word "kidnapped". As well as quoting the discourse of their sources directly, journalists could also adopt a detached position by using expressions that indicate that the label is controversial, such as: '*according to the Defense Minister, those presumed kidnapped...*'. The word 'presumed' indicates that somebody else has referred to these people as 'kidnapped, and suggests that this nomenclature may be controversial.

Figure 1. Who refers to military members and politicians deprived of their freedom, and how.

□ **Guerrillas = 1%** ▨ **Civilian Sources = 11%** ▨ **Official Sources =10%** ■ **Journalists = 78%**
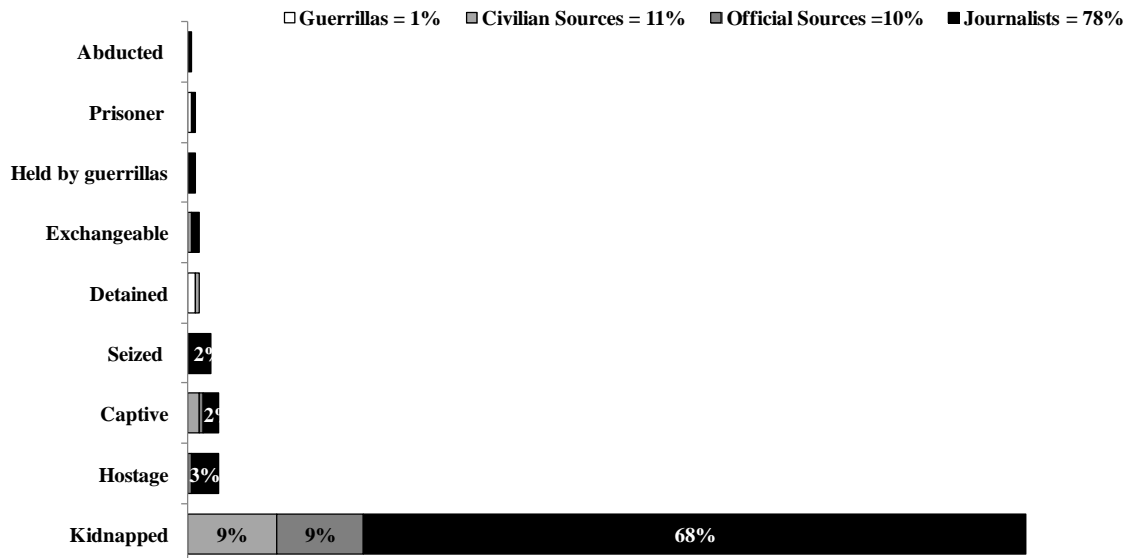
Note: In order to facilitate the reading of the data shown in this figure, only the categories comprising more than 2% are displayed

The engaged discursive positioning of journalists in the linguistic war of the military

Once the analysis had established that "kidnapped" was the most frequent label used by journalists to refer to politicians and soldiers being deprived of their freedom, the second step consisted of examining to what extent journalists were directly quoting sources, to establish whether the label was chosen by a source or whether the journalists chose it themselves. As set in their professional guidelines and shown in figure 2, in 61% of cases, journalists said "kidnapped" while quoting a source (direct speech = 54%; reported speech = 7%), as in the two following examples:

The president (...) has argued that the military has not conducted any military operation in the zone where the *kidnapped politicians* were.[13]

Every 15 days in Colombia one *kidnapped person* dies, according to the Foundation *País Libre* (Free country).[14]

Nevertheless, in more than a third of cases (39%), journalists used the word "kidnapped" without quoting any source, which means that they have integrated this label into their own discourses, as in the following example:

The whole country feels the pain of the *kidnapped* [people]'s families.[15]

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[13] '*El jefe de Estado argumentó que la fuerza pública no realizó operaciones militares en la zona donde permanecían secuestrados los diputados*', *Telepaís*, 28 June 2007.
[14] '*Cada 15 días muere en Colombia un secuestrado, según la fundación País Libre*', *CMI*, 29 June 2007.

Figure 2. Discursive positioning of journalists when referring to captive soldiers and politicians as having been 'kidnapped'.
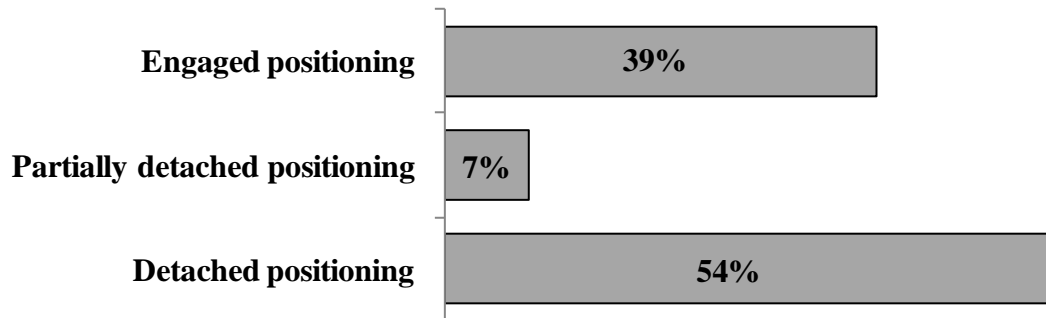
Following this first quantitative finding, one could conclude that references in news reports to military members and politicians being deprived of their freedom are mainly detached (figure 2). However, this preliminary finding needs to be completed with qualitative observations. For example, there are cases where, even when journalists appear to adopt a more detached position, their news reports as a whole are still biased: the most frequent case is when direct quotations of sources are inaccurate. The examples quoted below not only show inaccuracy in quoting sources but also how this inaccuracy favors one of the parties to the conflict. When the deaths of the 11 politicians were announced on June 27, 2007, the news presenter of *Telepaís* started the report by saying that:

> Sad news has plunged Colombia into mourning. The central command of
> the FARC guerrillas confirmed the deaths of 11 of the 12 deputies who were
> *kidnapped* in Valle del Cauca. The armed group stated that the political leaders
> lost their lives in an armed confrontation.[16]

By quoting the source (in this case the central command of the FARC guerrillas), the news story suggests that this source actually said '... the death of the 11 deputies who were *kidnapped*...' Nevertheless, during the same news report *Telepaís* had broadcast a sequence in which a reporter read the press release from the FARC guerrillas. In this sequence, notably, the guerrilla did not say 'deputies who were kidnapped' but 'politicians being *detained*':

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[15] '*El país entero sufre el dolor de las familias de todos los secuestrados*', *RCN*, 28 June 2007.
[16] '*Una triste noticia enluta a Colombia. El comando central de la guerrilla de las FARC confirmó la muerte de 11 de los 12 diputados secuestrados en el Valle del Cauca. El grupo armado aseguró que los dirigentes políticos perdieron la vida en un enfrentamiento armado*', *Telepaís,* 27 June 2007.

The command of the FARC [guerrillas] announces that on 18 June, 11 deputies from Valle, who we *detained* in April 2002, died in crossfire [from] an unidentified military group (...). Sigifredo López survived because he was not with the rest of the detained [politicians] at the time.[17]

The following day, on 29 June 2007, the *RCN* television news announced that:

The letter signed by Raúl Reyes and addressed to Fabiola Perdomo, wife of one of the deputies, and to the former minister Álvaro Leyva, confirms the deaths of the 11 *kidnapped* [politicians].[18]

This journalistic comment was also followed by the dissemination of the original press release published by the FARC guerrillas:

I am writing to certify the veracity of the information provided by the [FARC] Western command, dated the 23rd of this month, which communicates the tragic deaths of the 11 deputies.[19]

Once again, it is not the FARC guerrillas who use the word 'kidnapped', but the journalists, while suggesting it came from the source. The strategic function that the labels 'kidnapped' and 'detained' have for the military and guerrillas has already been discussed. When the military talks about the soldiers and the politicians who have been 'kidnapped' by guerrillas they seek to hide the political claims of the enemy and to portray their colleagues as victims in order to gain the support of the population by condemning the adversary. When guerrillas talk about 'detained' people, they seek to be seen as a political adversary. Nonetheless, these examples illustrate that even when journalists quote their sources, and thus lend their reports an objective and detached quality, they integrate the war lexicon of the military in their own discourse.

The second case of an inaccurate quotation involves the ELN guerrillas, which further illustrates this tendency. In 2007, the ELN group held a series of peace talks with the

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[17] '*El comando conjunto de occidente de las FARC informa que el día 18 del presente mes, 11 diputados de la asamblea del Valle que retuvimos en abril de 2002 murieron en medio del fuego cruzado cuando un grupo militar sin identificar hasta el momento atacó el campamento donde se encontraban. Sobrevive el diputado Sigifredo López quien no estaba en este instante junto a los demás retenidos*', *Telepaís,* 27 June 2007.

[18] '*La carta firmada por Raúl Reyes y dirigida a Fabiola Perdomo, esposa de uno de los diputados asesinados y al ex-ministro Álvaro Leyva, confirma la muerte de los once secuestrados*', *RCN*, 29 June 2007.

[19] '*Con la presente me permito certificar ante ustedes la veracidad de la información suministrada en el comunicado firmado por el comando conjunto de occidente, fechado el pasado 23 de los corrientes, dando cuenta de la trágica muerte de los once diputados de la asamblea del Valle*', *RCN*, 29 June 2007.

Colombian government which ultimately failed to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. On June 27, 2007, the four national news television programs announced that the spokesman of the ELN guerrilla group, Mr. Beltrán, had said that the group was committed to releasing all of the 'people who had been kidnapped' by the group. Nevertheless, in listening to the sequence of Mr. Beltrán's speech broadcast only by *Noticias RCN*, one can note that he did not use the term 'kidnapped', but 'detained':

> When the ELN signs the [agreement], it commits to releasing all the people being *detained* by the group up to that moment.[20]

At this point, it is useful to refer back to the journalists' guidelines, which state that they should avoid using the war lexicon of armed groups (Castro et al., 2005) and follow international humanitarian law. If journalists used the international humanitarian law to report news, they would refer to soldiers and politicians held captive by guerrillas as people being 'deprived of their freedom'. However, in the 452 news stories analyzed, only two occurrences of 'deprived of their freedom' were found to refer to the politicians who had died while captive:

> According to the information provided by [the website] Anncol,[21] the deputy Sigifredo López is the only survivor of the group of politicians who were being *deprived of their freedom.*[22]

> After 5 years and 3 months of being *deprived of their freedom*, far away from their relatives (...) [they passed away].[23]

In the context of these two news reports, the rarity of use of this expression suggests that it is used more in order to avoid the repetition of terms than as a decision not to relay the war lexicon of the armed groups. The term 'deprived of their freedom' also appears in a news report that is of interest when looking at war communication via the media. It involves the

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[20] '*El ELN cuando firme el [acuerdo], se compromete a liberar los retenidos que tenga en ese momento*', *RCN*, 27 June 2007.
[21] Anncol is a website which publishes FARC guerrilla press releases.
[22] '*De acuerdo con la información suministrada por Anncol, el diputado Sigifredo López es el único sobreviviente del grupo de políticos vallecaucanos que fueron privados de su libertad*', *Caracol,* 28 June 2207.
[23] '*Luego de 5 años y 3 meses privados de la libertad, lejos de sus seres queridos y con la esperanza de volver a verlos algún día, a estos 11 hombres, padres, hijos, esposas y amigos, se les apagó la luz de la vida*', *Telepaís*, 28 June 2007.

case of a woman (presented by the army as a former guerrilla fighter) who ran away from the FARC guerrillas with a little boy:

> They had told me to look after him, to give him everything he needed, but I didn't know that he was being *deprived of his freedom.*[24]

This last example should be given special consideration not only because the military use civilian victims (in this case the little boy) as an instrument for discrediting the FARC guerrillas, but also because in this news report the journalist reveals one of the war communication practices of the military. In December 2007, a military officer interviewed a woman presented as a former guerrilla fighter who had escaped from the FARC. Any journalist was invited to cover the interview or to interview the young woman. The video of the interview was shot by the military and then sent to the media. Regarding the relationship between sources and journalists, professional guidelines highlight independence from sources as one of the most important principles. The journalists' ethics and responsibility code states:

> It is important to maintain an analytical attitude regarding sources and to verify their statements (CPB, 1990).[25]

The code for the coverage of the armed conflict is much more specific:

> We will maintain a professional relationship with sources. We reject intimidation (…) [or any privilege] that could compromise our independence. We will make an effort to compare the information with different sources. We will verify the statements made by sources in interviews, press conferences or press releases. If we were not witness to the events and had only one source, we will explain [to audiences] that [news reports provide] only one version [of these events] (Márquez González, 2003).[26]

Even media managers committed to independence from sources:

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[24] '*Me dijeron que lo cuidara y que lo que él necesitara que le diera, más no sabía que él estaba privado de su libertad*', *Telepaís*, 12 December 2007.

[25] ' *El periodista debe adoptar una actitud crítica frente a las fuentes, confrontarlas y comprobar sus afirmaciones. (...) La independencia y la credibilidad del periodista son indispensables para su ejercicio profesional (...)*'

[26] '*Mantendremos una relación estrictamente profesional con nuestras fuentes de información, fundamentada en una actitud reflexiva y crítica. Rechazaremos tanto las discriminaciones y actos de coacción o intimidación, como los favores o privilegios relacionados con la difusión de información que comprometan nuestra independencia. Realizaremos un particular esfuerzo por contrastar la información con los puntos de vista de distintas fuentes. Igualmente confrontaremos y comprobaremos afirmaciones hechas en entrevistas, ruedas de prensa o comunicados. Cuando no hayamos sido testigos de los hechos y accedamos a una sola fuente, explicaremos que se trata de una versión*'.

Diversity of sources is imperative in order to take into account all
viewpoints: the official version, the guerrillas', [and] the paramilitary version.
Each source must be assessed in terms of credibility, reliability and historical
record (…) (El Tiempo, 2003, p. 61).[27]

Furthermore, only one news television program chose to broadcast the video which
was recorded and sent by the military: *Telepaís*. The news presenter did say that 'in an
interview conducted by the army, the woman told her story',[28] but did not question the fact
that the interview was conducted without any journalists present. The news report did not
offer the version of any alternative source. Audiences had no way of knowing if the
information had been verified. In this sense, the news program gives total credibility to the
video sent by the military.

In the interview, the woman, whose face was hidden, affirmed that she had decided to
run off because she wanted to liberate the little boy. According to her version, the boy had
been 'kidnapped' by the FARC guerrillas and then she was asked to look after him. The issue
with this news report is that it uses the story of a little boy as a vulnerable civilian victim of
the guerrillas. The FARC are shown here as monsters capable of depriving a little boy of his
liberty. None of the other three news television programs broadcast any news report about
this woman. Instead of using the video sent by the army, a journalist working for the
television news program *Noticias Caracol*, which has the second highest ratings, made a
journalistic comment in which she complained about the cases where the army and the
government representatives interview sources without allowing journalists to be present:

It seems that the government and the military are imposing the [practice]
of conducting their own exclusive interviews without allowing access to
journalists. They did so with the police officer Pinchao[29] and now with the female
guerrilla fighter who defected with a boy who had been *kidnapped*. She was
interviewed by a press officer from the army, who sent the tape to the media. It
would be great if journalists could have direct access to the main actors involved
in news stories.[30]

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[27] '*Es imperioso diversificar las fuentes y hacer todos los esfuerzos para incluir todos los puntos de vista en la
información, no sólo el oficial, el guerrillero o el paramilitar. Cada fuente debe ser constantemente evaluada en
términos de credibilidad, confiabilidad y trayectoria*'.
[28] '*En una entrevista realizada por el ejército nacional relató la historia*', *Telepaís*, 12 December 2007.
[29] John Frank Pinchao is a member of the Colombian police. He was captured by the FARC during a combat in
1998 and held captive until 2007 when he managed to escape.
[30] '*Parece que el gobierno y las fuerzas militares están imponiendo la moda de hacer sus propias entrevistas
exclusivas sin permitir el acceso a los periodistas. Ya lo hicieron con el intendente Pinchao, entrevistado en
exclusiva por dos funcionarios de la Presidencia y ahora la guerrillera que desertó de las FARC con un niño*

This kind of journalistic commentary in news broadcasts is very rare in the Colombian armed conflict. Journalists usually report the news from the material provided by official sources (interviews, records and press releases). Sometimes chief editors decide not to use these, but they do not inform their audiences about this kind of decision or about the reasons therefore. It is actually quite normal in journalistic practice not to use most of the material and information that arrives in newsrooms (Gans, 1979; Tumber, 2000), which is why this journalist's comment is interesting. It informs the audiences that there are some cases involving the guerrillas where the government and the military do not respect the freedom of the press. Indirectly, it also says that even if the news appears to be factual and detached, the reportage may be inaccurate, unbalanced and thus biased.

These particular - but not statistically representative - cases, remind researchers that detailed observations are essential in terms of bringing to light certain subtle journalistic practices, which are not visible from quantitative analysis.

Conclusion

By analyzing the way in which soldiers and politicians being 'deprived of their freedom' by guerrillas are referred to in news broadcasts, and specifically by completing quantitative findings with qualitative descriptions, this paper has discussed the strategic issues related to two specific journalistic guidelines: the act of naming/labeling, and the way discourses from sources are quoted by journalists. Results show that, despite journalists' commitments to maintain an independent relationship with sources and not to rely on the strategic expressions used by armed groups, even when news reports appear to be detached and thus "objective", the way in which Colombian journalists report news often shows support for one of the parties in the conflict in a subtle way.

One reason that can account for this is that journalists are more likely to transgress their professional guidelines when the events involve victims. In these cases, journalists are less prudent and rely more on the war lexicon of the military. Hence, it could be hypothesized that in the case of members of the military and politicians being deprived of their freedom, journalists feel more sympathy for the people that they see as victims of one of the armed

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que estaba secuestrado, la entrevistó la jefe de prensa de la Brigada 30 que luego repartió las cintas a los medios [mini extracto de la entrevista] Que bueno que los periodistas pudiéramos acceder directamente a los protagonistas de la noticia', *Caracol*, 12 December 2007.

groups. In fact, the only time journalists show engaged positioning is when they side with the victims, because they are the ones who suffer the most from the armed conflict (Rincón & Ruíz, 2002). The problem with this kind of positioning is that showing sympathy for victims is not neutral; it also means that the group responsible for the tragic situation that the victims find themselves in is indirectly accused (Charaudeau, 2008).

In this sense, the interest of our findings is to contribute to a better understanding of journalists' practices during wartime. One could assume that these practices could also affect the role media plays in the peace-building process. In the case of Colombia, news media seems more likely to contribute to war than to peace because media has been used as a weapon by armed groups for many years. The role of media in war has consisted in delegitimizing the adversaries of the military and the Colombian government. For this reason journalists' guidelines would need instead to take into account the war communication practices of journalists' sources and to examine the consequences of journalists' factual and detached discursive positioning for the conduct of the conflict.

However, it is necessary to point out the limits of this study. The main limit concerns the sample, which is not statistically representative of the coverage of the armed conflict and does not include coverage of the peace talks. Consequently, further research would be welcome to develop this approach consisting of completing quantitative analysis with detailed observations and analysis of journalists' practices in wartime which affect journalists' practices during peace talks.

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