

Media Performance in Post-conflict Sudan as Perceived by Political and Opinion Leaders

Hind Abbas HILMI*

1. Introduction:

War and peace are made by human beings, but within the context of an overall socio-politico-economic environment that permits not only instigating violence, but also conflict resolution. As such, people may fail to come to terms on their different outlooks and conflicting interests but they are capable at least of challenging conflict or seeking co-existence and dialogue, instead of fighting, to settle their differences and harmonize their conflicting interests.

It all depends on the will of changing human behavior which may lead to either track; depending also on the capability of addressing root-causes that spring out from the existing environment. In either case, the stand adopted is largely formulated systematically by the efforts of the mass media in the society.

In this respect, arousing suspicions, hatred and hostilities, on the other hand, and the making of war may be easy, but building peace on the background darkened by violence is far more difficult, especially where, as in the Sudanese North-South conflict, the space of time by the war is lengthy, extensive assuming gradually deep ethnic regional perspectives. Laying down arms, or signing peace agreements, fulfills little promise unless beliefs, behaviors and attitudes of the general public are patiently reformulated by a capable media that help in the reformulation of people's attitudes. This research looks into the possibility of that.

During conflicts, journalists unconsciously manipulate every story they work. They do this through their choice of the frame. This "frame" is the angle from which every story filed or picture taken. Each decision over the choice of subject

* Research Fellow (June 2010 - July 2010), Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University.
Assistant Professor of Communication, College of Applied Sciences, Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman.

matter, who to speak to, what quotes to include and what order to put them in—all are subjective. When the report is an electronic broadcasting, the issue of reality is just one more point to consider. Images and sounds captured on tape may be strong enough to encourage journalists to build stories around them despite the fact that they may not accurately reflect the wider story. (Bittner)¹

Before political tension gave way to violence, the Sudanese media failed to seize the opportunity to analyze the causes of the latent confrontations in the South, East and West of the Sudan. Instead of sending “early warning” about the approaching storm, and how opposing sides might be reconciled, the Government media outlets had whipped up the worst type of intolerance and nationalist mythology. As one of the interviewees put it, the problem with the media was its total inability to understand that the issue is of critical importance at that time. ‘Not what mistakes have been made by the conflicting parties in the past, or who was guilty, but whether and how we can live together in the future’. These vital questions were never addressed.

During conflicts, unchecked rumors appeared frequently in media reports. Instead of real news and information, these incessant rumors emphasized divisions and suspicions between opposing sides. These wild unconfirmed reports thus helped to kill off any attempt at reconciliation until it was too late.

2. Objectives:

This paper is an attempt to find out the perception of the public on media performance especially in covering war and peace issues during Sudan’s major conflicts. Their opinions on how media must have covered the war could construct a guideline for the coverage yet to come of conflicts and peace processes. The study targets opinion leaders represented in eminent figures in Sudan’s politics as well as members of academia and editors-in-chief of independent newspapers.

The paper will try to:

- i. Examine the perception of media coverage in three major conflicts in Sudan; Southern, Western and Eastern Sudan conflicts.
- ii. Find out how journalists and politicians see the media’s role and

responsibilities during war and political conflicts, and to illicit the problems posed in covering war.

- iii. Invite suggestions as to how media might alter its conduct in order to avoid fuelling conflict and to help create the possibility of reconciliation and peaceful, democratic dialogue.

3. The Methodology:

The audience is selected on the basis of a predetermined set of screening requirements. Non-probability sampling procedure is utilized in this study where a purposive sample was selected, (Wimmer, 1994)². The subjects are chosen according to specific characteristics and qualities. In this study, it was obviously important to speak to members of the public represented by political leaders of prominent political parties in the scene today as well as members of academia who are active participants in the media activities i.e. writers and editors-in-chief of some independent newspapers to detect patterns of media coverage of conflicts as well as contribution in the peace processes. The study targeted 30 subjects representing the above mentioned groups.

The perception of media coverage was handled in seven major parameters which encompass other questions and relevant issues tackled elaborately in the interview namely;

- i. *The degree of satisfaction with media coverage of conflicts in Sudan (South, East and West).*
- ii. *Evaluating War Coverage: (War Coverage on the Scale)*
- iii. *The impact of socio-political situation on media performance*
- iv. *Conflict Reporting on the Scale*
- v. *The Roles and Responsibilities of Journalists in Conflict Situation: (ending conflicts, preventing conflicts)*
- vi. *Media and National Reconciliation: (peace-building)*
- vii. *Relevant Issues*

4. Mass Media Impact:

A number of scholars interested in the effects of communication have

formulated micro-theories to explain media impact. Scholars from a variety of fields such as Communication, Sociology, Psychology, Psychiatry and the arts are interested in media impact and effects. The micro-theories can be divided into three types of effects: positive, negative and neutral/mixed effects.

Media messages keep people in touch with the popular values of the society; they have massive socializing effect. Klapper traced the same theme, saying that media messages reinforce social values. The media serve as a control mechanism to keeping us in relationship to society's mainstream³.

Wright highlighted media effect in educating people saying that mass media help socialize by teaching, either deliberately or inadvertently, social norms and expectations⁴. Cooley said that media messages enlarge belief-systems and produce value clarification (on which values are developed, reinforced or changed)⁵.

Some theorists have emphasized the negative effect that media messages have on people. Allport and Postman⁶ described media messages as creating stereotypes by cataloging people, actions, institutions and ideas in superficial ways. Lazerfeld and Merton⁷ posed the idea that media cause "narcotizing dysfunction," making audience members mentally and psychologically "sleepy" and inert. Werthman⁸ accused the media as corrupting societies by valuing and teaching materialism, brutality, insensitivity and other antisocial behavior. Another negative effect of the media is mentioned by Van den Haag where he said that media messages are often demeaning, manipulative, depersonalizing, hedonistic, shallow or sensational; they "pull down" audience members.⁹

Other scholars pointed out that media have mixed effects; Huxley and Hiebert described media messages as teaching trivial, superficial and devoid of real substance and value¹⁰. DeFleur and Paull Rokeach explain that media messages have little or no effect on people whose social realities are adequate; however, they can alter the behavior of those audience members who need or are dependent on mass messages¹¹. McLuhan contends that media cause effects that relate to the nature of the medium, not to the messages they send¹². While Ellul said that media messages create objectives for people; organize personality traits; standardize thought patterns; and (a negative effect) harden stereotypes¹³.

Other relevant theories to this study are political communication theories of

Agenda Setting and Media Framing¹⁴. Agenda Setting Theory of Walter Lippman (1972) suggests that the political agenda does influence media agenda. Subsequent research looked at who sets who's agenda? The assumption of Framing Theory by Entman (1974) is that the context informs our actions, behavior, and understanding. According to Erving Goffman, frames are definitions of a situation that include organization and subjective elements. In other words, frames are cognitive structures that guide both the perception and the representation of reality. Tankard suggested that journalists at times utilize frames to deceive their audience. Frame analysis examines the selection of certain aspects of an issue, images, stereotypes messages and metaphors used to cue specific response¹⁵.

5. Media and Conflict Interplay in Sudan;

5.1 The Degree of Satisfaction with Media Coverage of Conflicts in Sudan by the respondents is analyzed below in an attempt to answer the following question;

1. *Are you satisfied with the way that journalists have reported on violent conflicts situations in Sudan in recent years?*

Neither politicians nor journalists expressed satisfaction with the way the media reported on recent conflicts in Sudan. They argued that the media had undoubtedly worsened the situation.

“The national media was divided into three types; government media which tend to broadcast war propaganda, playing with truth and largely used as war machine such as *Sahat Elfidda* TV. program which agitated the war, second the SPLA media which was used as a tool for mobilization of the publics and the independent media whose role was largely absent because of censorship and suppression of the government. The fourth type is the international media coverage which was characterized by its naivety” (Pa’gan Amum¹⁶ 2009)

Other participants did not agree with Mr. Amum’s views on international media coverage where they think it highlighted the issue of the war and made

the whole world alert of what was going on in Darfur specifically the number of casualties on both sides which was never reported to the public, the number of war displaced had never been reported to the public. Local newspapers, radio and television only printed or aired numbers signifying military strength (of one faction) in an attempt to intimidate the other side as noticed in the coverage of South—North conflict by *Sahat Elfidaa* tv program.

Media coverage was not satisfactory since it passes through many gate keepers and there was no field reporting, moreover, the coverage was not objective and it didn't adhere to media professional conventions" (Hashim. M. S. Eljaz¹⁷ 2009)

Media coverage of war was not satisfactory since many facts were absent and there were difficulties in reaching war zones. Politicized aspects of the media posed another hindrance, being under control of the government, along with very undemocratic press law. There were very few true field reporting, most of which was reported from official communiqués or from official news agency or military spokespersons. Journalists did little effort of their own to report the conflict as eye witnesses, thus making it possible for themselves to be billboards for the conflicting parties. The coverage lacked depth and analytical approach and was largely guided by the coverage of World Media through questioning Sudan's affairs since the National Media coverage was affected by other political and security factors. The media was abused by the conflicting parties; so the coverage was biased and they were not independent. Opinions were contradictory and it was not easy to find the accurate information. Censorship, inability of journalists to access conflict zones, were major challenges that have hindered the journalists from fulfilling their roles and responsibilities efficiently.

Politicians expressed dissatisfaction with the coverage of war by media for a number of reasons such as the limited coverage that lacks first-hand and field reporting. They also described the coverage as biased to the North and specifically to NCP. Biasness of media was described by many participants where they said that media catered for the negative aspects of the war instead of searching for root causes of conflicts in Sudan. They said that the coverage was sensational

and lacks scientific analysis and objectivity. They accused the government media of increasing the hatred among conflicting groups. They criticized the economics of the media as very poor institutions and no budget is allocated for them.

On the other hand, editors-in-chief and members of academia though showed discontent with media role during Sudan's conflicts, yet they posed different reasons for dissatisfaction such as describing the media as partisan media rather than national media. They described the news as inaccurate and conflicting which is largely affected by the political and security situation in Sudan.

Media must respect our brains, if there is war; then what is happening? What are the causes? They do it as a piece of work without bothering themselves to obtain the least information about the background of the conflict. (Hassan Mekki¹⁸ 2009)

The coverage was described as limited to the news released by spokespersons of the military rather than first-hand reporting where journalists are denied the right to go to war zones except for the sake of war propaganda where war correspondents accompany the army to air *Sahat Elffida* program.

I am not satisfied with media coverage of conflicts in Sudan for a number of reasons; the electronic media coverage reflects the views and policies of the government since media are owned and controlled by the government. The print media suffers an inherent weaknesses represented in lack of sources in conflict zones. Their coverage was confined to news released by military spokespersons and they engaged themselves in the daily politics in the capital. (Ali Shummo¹⁹ 2009)

5.2 Evaluating War Coverage:

Evaluate the coverage of the war by the media in a scale of 1 to 5, with one being the worst and 5 being the best.

Only one respondent evaluated the coverage of war by four out of five while the majority of respondents evaluated the coverage below three which shows the general discontent of the respondents with the coverage of war and the way

Sudanese media have handled it. Some of the views are quoted below to show how participants evaluated the coverage.

“The degree of professionalism of some journalists is quite good but it was largely hindered by the security ties. The press is fought economically by advertisement and by security through censorship”. (Elsadig Elmahadi²⁰ 2009)

“The coverage was characterized by being a one-sided coverage that lacks honesty and expressed the government’s opinion. The social situation of journalists had hindered them since they confined themselves into ethnic and religious loyalties and were not able to see the other and his dreams”. (Arman²¹ 2009)

Members of academia described the coverage as tending to dramatization rather than truthful accounts, it was generally characterized by the fear from government suppression.

5.3 The Impact of Socio-political Situation on Media Performance:

2. *Do you think that the political/social situation in our country helps or hinders journalists from carrying out their roles and responsibilities? (How?)*

“Censorship is a major obstacle; others are lack of training which undermines media role and lack of technical and financial capabilities” (Faddl Alaah Mohammed²² 2009)

Both the political and social environment in Sudan have hampered journalists from carrying out their roles and obligations and limited the capacities of the national media to do their professional work. The environment is not good for independent and objective journalists to provide reliable information or to uncover wrongdoing.

Both the political and social situation have hindered journalists; political due to limitation of movement to war zones along with press laws and censorship, socially; poor funding and financial support for journalists infrastructures and communication technology” (Elshafie Khidir²³ 2009)

“The social situation helped in adopting views that are supportive to the government, while the political situation hindered some of the journalists from revealing their real views about the conflict.” (Mutasim Abdualah Osman²⁴ 2009)

The Political environment had hindered the performance of the media because the ruling party was involved in the conflict and tended to brand the other party as rebels whose activities should not be publicized.

The culture in Sudan was blamed by some politicians as residing behind the situation;

“The common culture does not help in providing specific information and the journalists are abided by their political and social biases in their reporting” (Ghazi Elattabani²⁵ 2009)

“The security measures made it difficult for journalists to perform first-hand reporting and the professional capacities of journalists are inadequate.” (Fadul Alaah Mohamed²⁶ 2009)

The political realities are always a hindrance. Bias, impartiality, and pressures on the journalists are among the reasons.

When we have an internal armed conflict in any country, governments tend to brand the other party as outlaws whose activities should not be publicized. (Mahajoub. M. Salih²⁷ 2009)

The socio-political situation in Sudan does not provide enough space for performing regular or normal journalistic duties. Journalists are caught between the pressures of public responsibility in one hand and political expectations on the other. The socio-economic situation along with poor funding and financial support for infrastructures and communication technology is another challenge.

Journalists describe their dilemma as suffering from “security intervention, media control and censorship, banning of newspapers along with media poverty, logistics and lack of professionalism.” (Murtada Elgahali²⁸ 2009)

They accused politicians for not being interested in revealing the truth and tribalism along with political and legal pressures blind journalists from objective and conflict-sensitive accounts along with lack of freedom and intimidation are blamed for the situation of the media by many participants.

Weak institutional economies and the fact that there is no support for media institutions along with the pressures through advertisement that are given to loyal newspapers affect the quality of work produced by them. “Media institutions are paralyzed by the economic situation and lack of resources.” Said Rabie Abdul Atti²⁹

5.4 Conflict Reporting on the Scale:

3. *Has the way journalists reported the conflicts improved the situation or made it worse?*

“Media coverage has worsened the situation since it was characterized by sensationalism, it propagated views that created bitterness and enlarged the causes of the conflict. It engaged itself in idiomatic war rather than objective reporting and coverage. (Ghazi Elattabani³⁰ 2009)

When journalists reported objectively and drawing attention to the facts, they play positive roles and the coverage improved the situation since civilians were protected and humanitarian aid was granted for affected people in Darfur. Also, public awareness was raised. It helped in deterring the conflicting parties from violating others’ rights and in providing truthful accounts.

Media attitudes have negative effects; biased reports on one hand and lack of sensitivity to factual reports. (Mahjoub. M. Salih³¹ 2009)

Although some positive aspects of the coverage were depicted by the respondents, yet, fifteen respondents declared that the coverage has worsened the situation. Since it was not done right, the journalists’ contribution was more harmful. Journalists were used to help the war effort and not to disseminate the culture of peace. Their coverage was sensational; it hammered on negative aspects, deepened the conflict and caused bitterness. They committed themselves to war

propaganda rather than to objective reporting. Moreover, they presented misleading accounts that portrayed the war zones as peaceful camps thus confusing the publics.

Criticism has been directed by many participants to the TV. Program entitled *Sahat Elffida*, they accused the program for agitating the war and depended on ethnic and religious mottos as yardstick for the coverage of war.

4. Can you provide specific incidence of negative (or positive) media treatment of conflict?

Negative: There were many incidents of biased reporting on the one hand and lack of sensitivity to factual reports on the other. Both attitudes have negative effects.

Media shouldn't have tampered with two major issues; the first is the professional objective reporting of news through presenting facts and revealing the root causes of conflicts, and the second is conflict analysis. (Arman³² 2009)

During the North/South conflict, the media used to run mere propaganda instead of factual reporting. The war has been portrayed as a war between the Muslim government and non-Muslim enemies not as differences in opinions, social and political views. During Darfur conflict, the media was banned from reporting about the war, the situation was not clear until the first glimpse of news on Darfur came from Al-Al-Gazeera news channel and the local media repeated afterwards what was said there.

Darfur conflict has received a coverage that superseded all the national, regional and international conflicts regarding the space and time that were allotted to it. (Elsadig Elmahadi³³ 2009)

There was no objectivity and the publics didn't know the real situation there in Darfur. Ethnic cleansing issues and Arab superiority over other tribes in Darfur was never disclosed to the public and the conflict was discussed in terms

of conflict between farmers and nomads. People didn't know whom to blame. The reporters sometimes take sides of this or that party for personal or financial gains.

Media must help in forming the public's opinion, and in helping people understand the root causes of the conflict. In addition, it must be biased to peaceful solutions and it must suggest means and ways for conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence. (Faisal M. Salih³⁴ 2009)

Positive: the call for full implementation of the CPA, after Naivasha, the press entertains some degree of freedom and the number of civil casualties was revealed. The development efforts in the South were reflected in the Media to show that social peace is a fact now.

In the western region conflict, the call for political solution for the conflict in Darfur through negotiations and peaceful constructive dialogue was a positive act of the media. Also during the Eastern Sudan conflict, Asmara Peace Agreement is emphasized by the media though the conflict itself had not received any coverage in the media. Some of the participants minimized the role played by the media during conflict as Elbonni³⁵ put it: Media coverage neither made the situation better nor worsened it. Since the conflict zones in Sudan were out of media influence unlike the international media which have access to the war zones.

5.5 Road Map for War Coverage:

5. How should journalists have reported conflicts over the past few years?

The discontent of the participants with media performance during conflicts lead to posing a question that can present a road map for how conflicts must be covered according to the interviewees. The history usually repeats itself and journalists must have learned the lesson of how to cover conflicts.

The media should report what is the truth of an event, and file stories with verification and balanced views, by using as many different sources as possible. If only one source is cited, the other side will be agitated, which will lead to further confrontations and the violence can be provoked easily. Media should be

a tool to serve the society, all the society. In the countryside, people are generally less informed, less educated and are therefore more gullible. Whatever is seen in the media is regarded as an uncontested fact.

Journalists must investigate the truth. They must have varied sources of news and should not base their reports on one side accounts. They should go to the areas of conflict in the South, Abie, Darfur in the West, and in the East and report from there.

Better coverage can be sought through being faithful to the universal values of the media which include and not limited to accuracy, objectivity, credibility and fairness and for their institutions to instill the value of professionalism. They must reject political biases which made journalists take sides to the extent that it was easy to know where each journalist stood on the war issue. The reason is basically the absence of professionalism and the complete takeover of politicization in the Sudanese press. Little professionally impartial reportage of war and politics are found in the press. Journalism education is still in its infancy, and hence ethical standards are very much comprised. The media must have spoken out before foreign media denounced the crises in Darfur so as to break the silence and not to dwell on government discourse talking about the war as mere casual conflict over grazing and farming. Journalists must rely on accurate information and avoid reporting non-existing and sensational events.

They must report facts and draw attention to atrocities and highlight peace initiatives as well as reflecting the opinions of both conflicting parties. As a policy, media have to be neutral and reconciliatory. They must reveal facts and unfold tragedies, and seek to enlighten public opinion and identifying responsible solutions and stop publishing material that agitate ethnic and tribal sensitivity.

6. Which conflict, or which issue in the conflict received more negative (or positive) coverage by the media?

Many ideas have merged as positive or negative coverage by the media. The ideas are categorized as positive/negative rather than that of politicians and academia/journalists.

5.5.1 Negative Coverage of Conflict in Sudan by the Media:

One-sided coverage in North/South conflict in which the war was portrayed as *Jihad* (sacred war between Muslims and non-Muslims) is considered by some respondents as one of the most negative themes in the conflict. The respondents think that the crises had been minimized by the media. Darfur conflict received negative coverage as the interviewees disclosed, especially in the issues of burnt villages, rape, ethnic cleansing, war crimes which violated the International Humanitarian Law and the empowerment of Arabs over Fur tribes, the displacement camps and the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in displaced camps. These issues have not been tackled in the media as if the agenda is not a pure Sudanese one which negatively affected people and State alike. The root causes of the conflict in Darfur, the South, and the East have not been addressed by the media, as lack of development, marginalization and civic rights that have been ignored since the colonial powers decided to empower the center over the peripheries.

The situation has been worsened by the manipulation of the rebels of the international media which intensified the crisis situation in Darfur and the issue became an international issue within eight months although the conflict started in 1998 yet it reached its climax in 2003.

5.5.2 Positive Coverage of Conflict in Sudan by the Media:

The positive aspects that were depicted by the respondents are; the positive coverage of the CPA proceedings and its significance in stopping the longest war that the world had witnessed. Also the coverage of affected people in the North of Sudan where Merawi Dam affected people's voice reached the public through the media for the first time.

5.6 The Roles and Responsibilities of Journalists in Conflict Situation:

(Ending conflicts, preventing conflicts)

7. *What, in your view, are the roles and responsibilities of journalists in conflict situation?*

Valuable guidelines were set by the interviewees as the roles and responsibilities

of journalists in conflict situations. Though objectivity, as seen by one of the respondents, as understood from the academic perspective is less real when applied, yet he calls for applying a more understanding approach to the issues of their own societies, thus treating the conflict from a more national rational approach. Presenting objective information is one of the main factors in improving a conflict situation. They must be objective and do not base their reports on the matrix of the respective ideological clique they were serving.

Factual reporting is another issue that respondents raised. They criticized journalists for not presenting the truth as seen in the field. Journalists must present spontaneous and factual reports from the field. Journalists must not take sides because that will dismay all the efforts of presenting the truth.

Media must educate, entertain and act as early warning systems. Respondents believed that media are able to warn the public of moves that are likely to escalate a situation, while avoiding unnecessary and negative dramatization of events. (They cited the ruling partners' dispute in Dec. 2008 as an example of dramatized negative coverage which complicated the situation). The role of education is a prerequisite which necessitates journalists to educate themselves first through gaining deep understanding of the social, historical and cultural realities that govern the society so as to be able to cover sensitive issues in the conflict such as the war in the South and that of the West of Sudan.

Although provision of reliable information is especially important in a conflict situation, yet the media should also speak to people who don't like war and allow them to express themselves and react to what the leaders are doing in their name. Political leaders might start listening in due course to what the public think. Media must enlighten people about the real situation and the sufferings of civilian victims.

Establishing well-informed sources was another issue that had been raised by the respondents. In countries like Sudan, journalists should cultivate sources to expose the causes of conflict. How did this conflict happen? What kind of conflict is it? How many parties are involved? The media must identify solutions and establish opportunities for both sides to talk about what divides or agitates them. Journalists should be watchdogs for the public; they must be investigative

because a government source is not always accurate. People with first-hand accounts of events being reported should be cited, eye witnesses must be quoted. They should create and maintain a balance between the conflicting parties and within the society.

Practical obligations for journalists include rejecting hate-speech mentality (a good example of that is *Alintibaha*³⁶ newspaper which calls for secession of the South but not for the war.)

Media must encourage dialogue to help efforts of resolving the conflict and encourage peace efforts. They have to reflect the civilians' opinions who are not involved in the conflict. That could be done through providing in-depth analysis of ideas from different components and think tanks which are related directly or indirectly to the issue.

8. Can or should journalists have a role in ending conflicts? If yes, how? If no, Why?

Nine respondents of the politician's group asserted that journalists can have a role in ending conflicts while one respondent said no and the others said not directly. Those who accepted the role, provided a description for that role such as; revealing the truth and uncovering hidden events and agenda for different groups and conveying this information to different media outlets. Also through addressing root causes of the conflict as well as presenting or suggesting solutions that are based on interviews with experts in conflict resolution.

Journalists must be accepted by the society as socially committed persons with deep understanding of the complexities involved in the post-war era and a real commitment to the truth. They can utilize their tools to reflect the truth 'specially the camera', when used professionally it plays a vital role in conveying the truth more than words can do.

"Not their business! They can only help through accurate reporting and sound objective analysis." (Al Tayeb Zain Al-Abdin³⁷ 2009)

Members of academia and editors-in-chief on the other hand, expressed that

it is the role of the media to help in ending conflicts. Nine respondents said yes, and one said; “no it is not their role” while others remain in the grey area. They envision the possibility through objective reporting and conducting forum for discussion as well as reflecting the positive sides of the conflict and stop sensational coverage. They expressed that media is a major tool in constructing and building public opinion through setting the agenda for them and through framing their priorities and opinions, so, it must not be used in disseminating hatred and agitate war. Media must call for peace and highlight the effects of war without directly being involved in the war.

9. Can or should journalists play a role in preventing conflicts? If yes, How? If no, Why?

Although conflict prevention is a role that is characterized by its complexity yet, six of the politicians interviewed, accepted that media have a role to play. Media can raise and create awareness making use of the experiences around the world. They can disseminate the culture of peace and call for peaceful co-existence among the different groups. Media, they said, can draw attention to crisis situations before they reach critical stages, they must reflect the opinions of those who are not involved in the conflict but have vision of how to deal with it. Finally, media must enlighten the publics with the nature of the conflicts and highlight practices that lead to confrontations and thus conflicts.

Journalists and media experts, on the other hand, expressed that the role of the media must be limited to intelligent coverage since reconciliation needs specific details that are not usually available for journalists. They can help through early warning of conflict situations and enhancing peaceful co-existence through disseminating the culture of peace, and reconciliation.

Media practitioners say that they can call for unity and cohesiveness of the society and highlight issues that lead to marginalization both socially and politically which can breed conflicts. They admitted that media have a very effective role as early warning systems to the publics and to the leaders as well as policy makers of places of tension. They can help in raising the awareness of publics regarding the consequences and negative effects of wars.

5.7 Media and National Reconciliation: (Peace-building)

10. Should the media contribute to national reconciliation of conflicting parties?

Ten of the politicians accepted that media can contribute to national reconciliation of conflicting parties saying that the sole solution to conflict is through national dialogue to reach shared vision and national accord. Media must not interfere directly in conflict situation since mediation is a role that is quite difficult for the media to fulfill, but through creating healthy atmosphere for reconciliation. That can be done through conducting forums and sending positive messages to both conflicting parties. Media can give advice and support public opinion. It is the only outlet through which the culture of peace can be disseminated. Some respondents were skeptical about what media can achieve without democracy and freedom of expression. They said that the role of the media does vary according to the political atmosphere in which media operate and the margin of freedom that is allotted to them. In countries that undergo civil conflicts, media have a vital role to play before, during and after conflict to reach to national reconciliation. Thus lack of democratic values has made it impossible for the people to assert their political will as well as expressing their opinions overtly.

Media practitioners and members of academia expressed that national reconciliation must be the role of responsible media that can classify opinions, provide information, and propose reconciliatory opinions through conducting forums. Reconciliation can be possible if media can reach the silent majority to express and reflect their agonies in the conflict zones. Media can encourage conflicting parties to sit for negotiations and urge the process of national reconciliation though posing the dangers of war.

11. Should the media act as a go-between or peace-builder between conflicting parties?

Politicians' answers were reserved on the possibility of media to act as a go-between conflicting parties. Some of them agree that media can help in peace building through presenting the opinions as well as positive views but not

through direct intervention. If journalists present truthful accounts without bias to any party, that will be a valid role in peace building. Journalists can provide trust and instigate intellectual support from the publics, they can conduct press conferences, forums, and reject isolated voices that call for hate but not act as mediators. Media can mobilize the public opinion for peace.

“Peace building is not only mediation; it is a cultural process that needs to be disseminated among the publics along with peaceful co-existence, and acceptance of the other. It is a social philosophy that requires media efforts to be engaged in” (Elzahawi³⁸ 2009).

Some of the respondents agreed that national media could and should play the role of mediator. Media should make it their business to contact the opposing sides in a conflict and ensure that their views and interests have been reported impartially. Others say that media can not play the role of political mediators but they may facilitate communication between conflicting parties and serve the issue of peace through influencing public opinion.

Media practitioners and members of academia were very optimistic of their role. Ten of them said that media can mediate. The means vary as they contend, from; using traditional means but not as active participants. They can encourage peaceful talks between the parties and disseminate the culture of peace but not directly involved in mediation. Media can encourage parties to talk and breathe the hot air out of their chests. They admit that media have significant roles to play in all peace processes such as peace making, peace building and peace keeping efforts.

The journalists argued that such scenario would not come to fruition any time giving the limitations of electronic media and the financial insecurity plaguing media organizations generally. There is no doubt that media lack analytical reporting. They expressed their concerns that, until the economic situation becomes more favorable for the media, journalism can hardly be expected to serve as an effective instrument for peace. Financial pressures produce more sensational and aggressive journalism.

5.8 Relevant Issues:

12. Are there any other issues surrounding the media and their role in reporting conflict that you want to?

Many ideas merged out by interviewees to relevant issues that can enhance the mission of media generally and during conflicts. Among these issues are media credibility, transparency, first-hand reporting and objectivity.

Media practitioners must reject biased accounts, hate speech, cultural—sensitive expressions and stereotypes that are quite detrimental to the national role of the media. Media is a very pervasive tool in forming and framing public opinions if they call for change whether positive or negative, so, their messages must encompass a degree of national awareness. Media education is among the issues raised by most of the participants. Conflict reporting needs a special training on conflict-sensitive journalism and on the International Humanitarian Law since journalists report without differentiating among war crimes and crimes against humanity. They do not know their rights in war zones. Capacity building workshops must be conducted for journalists who cover conflicts.

As for the social role of the media, interviewees expressed the potentiality of media to bridge the atrocities and bitterness of the war and help in national reconciliation and in conflict transformation. National media must call for national unity through reflecting the different views of different political parties with out bias regardless of the financial benefits or gains. The ethnic and political diversity in Sudan must be catered for by the media as agreed upon in the CPA³⁹.

Media practitioners and members of academia offered different prescription for media in Sudan. They admit that censorship posed a real hindrance to media in Sudan, since pre and post publishing censorship along with penalties are all applicable today.

They attributed weak performance of the media to poverty of media institutions and lack of government support to the section itself. The role of media has been marginalized by the government though the electronic media is owned and controlled by the government. The economic conditions of media institutions

stand behind lack of training, absence of suitable tools and equipments. They admitted that conflict coverage is among the most expensive activities of the media and war correspondents cost is beyond imagination and capabilities of media institutions.

Media regulations are criticized by this group who complained that there is no access to information and the information law has not been approved. Also the Press Law of 2004 is still valid though the constitution calls for media freedom and freedom of expression in article 39 (1, 2, 3) of Sudan Interim National Constitution of 2005⁴⁰. It stipulates that; 1. Every citizen shall have the right to the freedom of expression, reception and dissemination of information, publication, and access to the press without prejudice to order, safety or public morals as determined by law. 2. The state shall guarantee the freedom of the press and other media as shall be regulated by law in a democratic society. 3. All media shall abide by professional ethics, shall refrain from inciting religious, ethnic, racial or cultural hatred and shall not agitate for violence or war.

6. Conclusion:

Media performance during Sudan wars was unsatisfactory. It lacked objectivity and factual, first hand field reporting. War coverage was characterized by dramatization and sensational coverage that ignored the root causes of conflicts. That was due to the fact that media is partisan rather than national. Also the socio-economic and political situation in Sudan, represented in political censorship, pressures, bias, impartiality, lack of training and poor technical and financial capabilities have hindered journalists from doing their job professionally.

On the other hand, media must reject hate-speech mentality and address the causes of the conflicts. They can contribute to national reconciliation and confidence building through responsible national dialogue. Media have a vital role to play in all war stages; before war to brain wash, persuade, convince and mobilize through war propaganda messages, during conflict media is used to conceal, and intoxicate and after the conflict to legitimize what had happened, to shape perceptions and to silence any criticism. Also media is crucial in all peace processes such as peace making, peace building and peace keeping efforts.

Notes

- 1 Bittner, John. (1981). *Professional Broadcasting: An Introduction*. Englewood Cliffee, Prentice Hall.
- 2 Wimmer, Roger and Dominik. (1994). *Mass Media Research*. Thomson Information Publishing Group, California, USA.
- 3 Klapper, J. (1960). *The Effects of Mass Communication*. Free Press. p.20.
- 4 Wright, Charles. (1986). *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective*. New York, Random House.
- 5 Cooley, (1964). in Merrill. J. (1993). *Modern Mass Media*, Harper and Row Publishers. pp.78-97.
- 6 Allport and Postman. (1947). in Merrill pp.78-97.
- 7 Lazerfeld and Merton. (1960). "Mass Communication Popular Taste and Organized Action" In W. Schramm (ed.) *Mass Communication*.
- 8 Werthman, (1954). in Merrill pp.78-97.
- 9 Van den Haag, (1973). in Merrill pp.78-97.
- 10 Hiebert, R. (1988). *Impact of Mass Media* p.83.
- 11 DeFleur, and Paull Rokeach. (1989). *Theories of Mass Communication*, Longman Inc. New York pp.420-22.
- 12 McLuhan, Marshall. (1964). *Understanding Media The Extensions of Man*, New York. McGraw Hill.
- 13 Ellul, Jacques. (1973). *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York Vintage Books.
- 14 Graber, D.A. (1993). "Political Communication: Scope, Progress and Promise" in A. W Finifter (ed.) *Political Science: The State of Discipline* pp.305-332.
- 15 Bryant J. and Dorina Miron. (2004). "Theory and Research in Mass Communication" in *Journal of Communication* Dec. 2004 vol.54 No.4. p.677.
- 16 Mr. Pa'gan Amum is the General Secretary of the SPLM.
- 17 Dr. Hashim Eljaz was the General Secretary of the National Press and Publications Council (The regularity body on the press performance in Sudan.)
- 18 Professor Hassan Mekki is the Dean of the Center of Research on African Studies and the editor of *Dirasat Ifriqiyya* a research journal and political analyst.
- 19 Professor Ali Shummo is the chairman of the National Press and Publications Council and a university professor of communication.
- 20 Elmahadi is the leader of Umma Party and their Imam. He signed in May 2008 the National Accord with the government after more than two centuries spent on peaceful opposition.
- 21 Yasir Arman is the deputy to the secretary general of SPLM Northern Sector and a member of the political bureau and the head of SPLM parliamentarian Bloc.
- 22 FaddlAlaah Mohammed is the editor-in-chief of *Al Khartoum* daily newspaper.
- 23 Dr. Elshafie Khidir Saeed is the secretary of the cultural committee in the Communist Party of Sudan.
- 24 Professor Mutasim Abdualh Osman is the Head of the Department of Communication at Africa International University.
- 25 Elatabani is the an advisor for the President.
- 26 Faddl Alaah Mohammed is the editor in chief of *Al Khartoum* daily newspaper.
- 27 Mahjoub Mohammed Salih is the editor-in-chief of *Alayaam* newspaper.
- 28 Elgali is the editor-in-chief of *Ajras Alhuria* daily newspaper.
- 29 Dr. Rabie Abduatti is the councilor to the Minister of Information and Communication and the Director of Sudan News Agency.

- 30 Elattabani is one of the councilors of the president and one of the political leaders of NCP.
- 31 Mahjoub Mohammed Salih is the editor-in-chief of *Alayaam* daily newspaper.
- 32 Yasir Arman is the deputy to the secretary general of SPLA northern sector.
- 33 Elsadig Elmahadi is the leader of the National Umma Party.
- 34 Faisal M. Salih is the ex editor in chief of *Aladdwa* newspaper and a daily columnist in *Al akhbar* newspaper.
- 35 Prof. Elbooni is a university lecturer of political science and a daily columnist in *Al Ray Al Aam* newspaper.
- 36 *Alintibaha* newspaper is a political daily newspaper which supported the secession of Southern Sudan.
- 37 Prof. Al Tayeb Zain Al Abdin is political analyst and an advisor to the vice-president of University of Khartoum. He is a regular writer in daily political newspapers.
- 38 Elzahawi Ibrahim Malik is the current Minister of Information and Communication in the Government of National Unity and leading one of the factions of Umma Party.
- 39 The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005) 34 National Media and 17 Media in GOSS p.43-45
- 40 The Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan 2005 article 39 (1, 2 & 3) Freedom of Expression and Media. p.16.

References

- Allport, and Postman. (1947). in Merrill pp.78-97.
- Bittner, John. (1981). *Professional Broadcasting: An Introduction*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall.
- Bryant J. and Dorina Miron. (2004). "Theory and Research in Mass Communication" in *Journal of Communication* Dec. 2004 vol.54 No.4. p.677.
- Cooley, (1964). in Merrill. J. (1993). *Modern Mass Media*, Harper and Row Publishers. pp.78-97.
- DeFleur and Paull Rokeach. (1989). *Theories of Mass Communication*, Longman Inc. New York pp. 420-22.
- Ellul, Jacques. (1973). *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York Vintage Books.
- Graber, D. A. (1993). "Political Communication: Scope, Progress and Promise" in A. W Finifter (ed.) *Political Science: The State of Discipline* pp.305-332.
- Hiebert, R & Reuss, C. (1988). *Impact of Mass Media*. NY, Longman p.83.
- Klapper, J. T. (1960). *The Effects of Mass Communication*. Free Press. p.20.
- Lazerfeld and Merton. (1960). "Mass Communication Popular Taste and Organized Action" In Schramm (ed.) *Mass Communication*, University of Illinois Press pp.78-97.
- Mcluhan, Marshall. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York. McGraw Hill Books.
- Merrill, J. C, John Lee, Edward Friedlander. (1997). *Modern Mass Media*. Adison-Wesley Publisher.
- Schramm, W. (1973). *Mass Communication*, 2nd Edition. Illinois Press.
- Van den Haag. (1973). in Merrill pp.78-97.
- Wimmer, Roger and Dominik (1994) *Mass Media Research*. Thomson Information Publishing Group, California, USA.
- Wright, Charles. (1986). *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective*. New York, Random House.
- Werthman (1954) in Merrill, pp.78-97.
- The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005), 34 National Media and 17 Media in GOSS p.43-45.
- The Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan 2005 article 39 (1, 2 & 3) Freedom of Expression and Media. p.16.

