

War News and Media Stereotyping

Faridah Ibrahim, UKM

*Chair/Associate Professor in Journalism of the School of Media and Communication Studies
University Kebangsaan, Malaysia*

Introduction

We “witness” war every day and everywhere. In the morning papers, in the prime time news, magazines, Internet and other communication channels - war dominates the media. We watch and read about people trapped in the war zone, vehemently praying besides corpse who may be their friends or relatives and perhaps their loved ones. They were crying in helplessness, despair and anger and no one could give them a hand. This incessant and mournful event has become a never-ending story. Since the existence of man on earth, war becomes so common to everyman, synonymous to food and clothes. Surviving and dying are common. Bombing of thousands of innocent people with sophisticated weaponry is common. But no one could stop the war. It involves human dignity, right and pride and more often than not war sometimes is a justifying cause for nation to protect their territorial rights and enduring values.

War is a conflict of human justification, indignation and ego. Because of this excessive ego, man uses his strength and weapons to undermine the enemy. War does not occur by itself. One cannot fight with one self. There must be two, three or more. Human’s survival instinct and fear of threat evokes war. “Either you are with us or you are against us” is a word of utterance that indicates differences - or may be, animosities - due to different identity, the color of one’s skin, religion and culture.

And in the midst of this modern war, is the media, which help to convey news on war to millions of world population via the technologically savvy Internet and the traditional media in the form of television and the newspapers. Media coverage is integral to shaping the course of events in war and peace. With

technology that allows transborder flow of information and visuals within seconds, war news has become routine news of the day.

Without media images, nobody will know what is going on around the world. Who is at war and how many were killed and how many people are suffering. It is the media which provide minute details about the warring states and without which, everybody will be in a state of ignorance. Virtually on whose side are the media on? On one hand, one can see the media's obligation in providing news-worthy information about war around us, and on the other hand, it is as if there is a symbiosis relationship between the media and the protagonist of war, for the media is said to benefit from war reporting. What roles are the media taking especially the media in developing country such as Malaysia, which does not experience war? In whose words do the Malaysian media subscribe to in explaining war to the people. This paper looks at the use and misuse of words where reporting is concern. Through a qualitative and interpretive analysis of war news in selected Malaysian newspapers, this paper tries to identify how war is reported, from which angles and in whose perspectives.

War News: The of Media

The war between Israel and Palestine, for example, has been going on for years without any possible sign of a halt. In this war, the concept of "mine" and "yours", dispute over territorial rights, pride, dignity indignation and ego have been preoccupied in the mind of both sides. The word "struggle" is deeply-rooted in the heart and mind of "patriots", "jingoists" and "nationalists" of both sides of the warring states.

This is only a small part of a current war but there are hundreds of other wars today (Huntington 1997) occurring in different parts of the world, from a small to a big one and to the extent that we are unable to narrate the feeling and sentiment of those involved in the situation. We could hear their desperate whispers and cries of wretchedness through the mass media but

we could not truly feel their actual agony. Our feeling of understanding about war and war victims comes through watching prime time news and reading the morning papers.

Indeed, mass media has become active and powerful players in the war game. Virtually they are playing on both sides. On one side is their obligation in telling the story of war and the other side is helping the nations that are involved in war, and nations' leaders who are the protagonists of war, to create propaganda and the spirit of struggles. Since the mass media of a particular state are the important vehicles especially in disseminating the spirit of state's struggle, their role is strictly controlled and for this reason bias reporting apparently occurred.

Who are the protagonists of war? They could be the leaders of the warring states, the leader of the faction groups, fundamentalist and terrorist leaders, the army generals in some states, or even leaders of states (the so-called Police state) which send troops overseas to help exterminate war. In the midst of these wars, war correspondents doing their duties in war zones will have no choice but to receive the information subsidy given to them by these protagonists. Gandy (1982) writing about information subsidies contends that government and authorities attempt to control media access so as to exert influence over the actions of the media as well to control the flow of information.

It is indisputable that the media played a significant role in time of war, and this can be seen during the U.S-Afghanistan war and the U.S-Iraq war (the first Gulf war, Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and the most recent U.S-Iraq war in 2003). Having learnt from the gruesome truth of the Vietnam War, the U.S government has seen the media as the *sine qua non* in war coverage. In the numerous wars after Vietnam that involve the U.S, it can be seen that the government has used the media as the conduit in their psywar strategy to gain public and political support. Undeniably, war correspondents in these wars faced enormous difficulty in obtaining accurate information. As a result they became an unwilling but necessary part of the misinformation campaign.

Knightley (1991:4) contends that information manipulation has progressed since the Crimea and reached deadly sophistication in modern wars. News management in the war

has three main purposes: to deny information to the enemy; to create and maintain support for the war; and to change public opinion and perception of the war itself. Of these the third is by far the most important and the most menacing.

Most of the time, wrong, fabricated information becomes news, and this distorted news transcends through the globe providing information to the world audiences. Everyone is aware with this situation. Maslog et al. (2006) found in their study of framing analysis of the coverage of Iraq war in five Asian countries, that newspapers from non-Muslim countries, except Philippines, have a stronger war journalism framing, and are more supportive of the war compared to newspapers in the Muslim countries.

The inevitable question that was often posed is why are the Muslims the target of animosity? Why are the Muslims being misunderstood easily? And why do we keep on reading and hearing about Muslims being mercilessly slaughtered, intimidated and subjected to the worst form of aggression in various parts of the world? Congressional Quarterly (1981: 99) said that the negative image of Islam is due to ignorance of the religion and because of the historical roots:

Numerous studies and books have been documented to describe the western portrayal of Islam and the Muslims, as can be traced for instance in Edward Said's numerous books. Leon Uris in his bestseller, *The Hajj* has described the Arabs and the Palestinians as lazy, boastful, deceitful, untrustworthy, double-crossing, lustful, unreliable, murderers, thieves and rapists (Uris in Syed Arabi Idid and Rahmah 1989: 6). Since the Suez Crisis of 1956, the American media have painted a negative picture of the Arab personality (Suleiman 1968 and Belkaoui 1978 in Syed Arabi and Rahmah 1989:7).

In the age of image and image-makers, every nation and its people seem to be conscious of their public image, particularly their image abroad. Boorstin (in Faridah 1984 p.40) who made a thorough study of pseudo-events said that the United States especially has become preoccupied with creating "favorable images" of itself overseas to the extent that American images today tend to overshadow American ideals. In a study of five

world superpowers, reflected in two Malaysian newspapers (Faridah 1984), it was found that the image of the west particularly America and Great Britain, is largely an image provided by the international news agencies, Associate Press (AP) and Reuters.

Media Language

Today, western influence is no longer confined to just literature and folk culture. It has spread its roots in all forms with the proliferation of new communication technology through widespread use of television and computers, hardware and software. The dissemination of information and knowledge is inadvertently in the sophisticated language of the west especially English language. Most television programs in many countries of the world, Malaysia is without exception, are direct imports from western culture. The subtle penetration of western hegemony and propagandistic models come into play, as Boorstin noted:

Abroad, some special accidental factors have been at work; our wealth, our technological ferocity, and especially our ability to make attractive motion picture. All these have enabled us to flood with American images, the people who have never heard of American ideals, and who do not know whether we have any ideals. Our images suggest arrogance; in them we set ourselves up as a mold for the world.” (Boorstin cited in Faridah 1984:41)

After the Second World War, the media became a convenient tool for propaganda that used media language in a persuasive way. Ironically, the state of the art pertaining to the word “propaganda” has been widely used under a different brand such as advertising, strategic advertising, public relations, public speaking and persuasion, effective public speaking, strategic communication planning and to name a few (Mohd Rajib and Taylor, 2006).

Indeed, the danger that confronts us now in the age of modernization and globalization is nothing less severe than in the Second World War. The words of utterances, manipulation of words, distortion of words, words inferences and fabrication of words and meaning altogether bring about the immediate danger to the world today.

Language also has some magical powers. They could mesmerize people. Of course it comes together with the content, persuading through effective public speaking, advertising, organizing human perception, propagandizing and through all sort of means; documents, words of utterances, persuasive speaking, writings and broadcasting certain issues and events that are powerful enough to change all together the perception of the receivers. All these meanings come through words and picture.

Indeed, the pen is mightier than the sword, as the saying goes, is never far from the truth especially in today's war. Words disguise thoughts, words lie and words influence said Karl Deutsch when he spoke of communication. And it is through words, written or spoken, that the ideas, feelings, thoughts and perceptions of people become clearer. General semanticist S.I. Hayakawa (1979: 80) writing about language and meaning had said "words are more than descriptions of experience. They are evaluations."

War news that is brought to us via television and newspapers used words and vivid visual to show what is happening at the war zones. Words have become the "weapons" of today's turmoil. In modern warfare, or appropriately termed as semantics warfare, a new language was brought into being to soften the reality of war. Bombing military targets in the heart of cities was called 'denying the enemy an infrastructure', people was labeled 'soft targets', saturation bombing was labeled 'laying the carpet', when civilians are killed they are called 'collateral damage', when smaller attacks are carried out they are called 'surgical strikes' and 'friendly fire'; when civilians are killed they become 'paramilitary' or soldiers 'disguised as civilians'. A report by journalists Michael Moran (2003) points out: "Friendly fire by American forces killed one quarter of all the U.S troops who died in that war." Thirty-five of the 146 Americans killed in 1991 Gulf War were slain by their own side.

And in the recent 2003 Gulf war, 'precision bombing' landed in Turkey Saudi Arabia, Iran and killed Syrians at the Iraq-Syria border. And any Iraqi phone booth destroyed, becomes posthumously, a 'command and control structure.' (Sainath 2003).

Hence, the story of wars has taken a new face. People do not see the gruesome face of war. They are more concern for other things – whether the war will affect them economically, socially or politically. Regardless of ethnic origins and cultures, everybody is waiting to know who the winner is and who is the looser; who is powerful and who is not powerful; who is good and who is evil. The storylines range from war, conflict, catastrophe to calamities and also all inconvenient situations, are made convenient to the readers.

These are profound advantages that media practitioners possessed, who through media language, have the power to persuade, manipulate and arrange words to make the presentation of news look greater and mightier. Readers and audiences are unable to detect the false perceptive words because they are just like needles in the haystack.

This is the most insidious part of journalism today that allows reporters' prejudices permeated into the readers' mind, where the words could either change the reader's perception or else leave them in a problem world of psychoneurosis. To borrow Lippmann's (1922) famous adage: "the picture in our heads" are absolutely true. With the advent of massive and organized persuasion techniques through the mass media the world become apart. Gerbners and his associates (1986) who have conducted an extensive research and analysis, videotaping and carefully analyzing thousands of prime-time television programs and characters, found that the world portrayed on television is grossly misleading as a representation of reality.

The construction and depiction of reality have always been surrounding the debates on media credibility. During political campaign, for instance, a typical political bigotry would be the process of persuasively expressing words of indispensable meanings confidently to confuse the masses. Because rhetorical device such as words are so common to all man, thus no one pay attention to their meaning. For example, Richard Nixon's 1968

political campaign pledged to secure “the honourable peace in Vietnam”. His slogan and his actions were extremely veered and quite confusing. However, his scandalous activities, for example continued; he still mobilized his army in Vietnam while clandestine and decoy were at the top of his administrative concern and the killing of civilians in Vietnam was continuously in progress. The words *honorable peace* became meaningless and yet the American congress got up the nerve to push the war farther and farther (see Phillip Knightley in *The First Casualty* 1975).

Early American patriots were able to increase revolutionary fervor by terming a minor skirmish with the British in the Boston massacre. Adolf Hitler used the term red menace and Jewish problem. The United States Defense Department used the term “ Low-intensity conflict” and a lot more words of propaganda and persuasion has been using by the power that be via the mass media. The psychologist, Gordon Allport (1954) in *Nature of Prejudice* pointed out that it is a nature of language to divide and categorize the buzzing boom of information that comes our way every second and every day.

Understanding War from the Perspective of General Semantics

Thus far, we may reach an understanding of the way journalists report their news and how abstract terms have been used or misused. Whether the terms are being coined by the journalists to make their writing task easy or the terms are being coined by the news sources, in this case the protagonists, to soften the reality of war, the underlying truth is that words, from spoken to written, have certain magical powers. They have power to create and to destroy; to influence and to change. In times of war, words become important tools for peace negotiations and conciliations or even making promises. Words can also create animosities and annihilations (Faridah and Mohd Rajib, 2003).

According to the general semanticists, words such as *communism, capitalist, racism, terrorism, fundamentalist, conservative, capitalist, dictator*, etc. are all based on our own

perception. Human beings build words based on abstractions. To the semanticists, these abstract terms need to be clearly defined. Journalists do have an ethical obligation – in the words of the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics – to ‘minimize harm.’ Hence, the act of determining the use of appropriate words in the news and news headlines should be one of the very crucial tasks undertaken by journalists in the day-to-day newsroom decisions.

On the use of abstract term, Edward Said (in Mishka Moujabber Mourani aljazeera.info) had said, “we must dissolve worlds like ‘war’ and ‘peace’ into their basic elements to a deeper understanding of what they mean. It is time to tear language, and the experiences it communicates, away from humbling over simplifications and reinvest it with nuance, depth and dimension.” Hence, abstract terms need to be defined not just from the intentional meanings but also the extensional meanings so that they are free from manipulations.

General semanticists assert that extensional orientation provides both clues and guidance in the search for adequate and precise language habits. Like scientific method, extensional orientation utilizes discovery and verification procedures. If something has been discovered in the universe, then people using similar methods of observation should be able to conform or acknowledge it (Mohd Rajib Ab Ghani, 1984).

The use of extensional orientation in everyday language could possibly avoid the bias inherent in writing and speaking. Since one would have fewer tendencies to take what is said for granted and would question the meanings of words, there would be fewer tendencies for one to judge the behaviour of others (Mohd Rajib Ab Ghani, 1984). Hence, the journalistic maxim of the 5W’s and 1H becomes an important tool in the quest for journalistic objectivity.

A staunch follower of general semantics and former U.S statesman, S.I. Hayakawa (1974) introduced three sentence types that may help reporters avoid ‘bias’ in news reports. These sentence types, derived from the fundamental teaching of general semantics (see Alfred Korzybski, 1950), are reports, inferences and judgments. While report sentence is capable of verifications,

inference could distort meanings and judgment sentence is a taboo in objective reporting.

Hayakawa's three sentences types, also known as Hayakawa's Trichotomy have been used extensively by researchers worldwide who study media language from the quantitative and qualitative content analysis perspectives (see Bois, 1957; Merrill et al., 1965; Schiller, 1981; Mohd Rajib, 1984; Faridah, 1984; Mohd Rajib and Faridah, 1987; 1990; 1996; 2000; Bell, 1991; Chau Pao Ling, 1997; Faridah, 2003). Mohd Rajib and Faridah (1996) for instance, found in their study on human rights coverage in four Malaysian leading dailies that 74.6 percent of the 2250 news analysed used facts and 'objective' sentences comprising of 'report sentence-attributed' which contained the verbs 'says/said', 'according, to', 'told/tell', 'added' and 'informed'. Chau Pao Ling (1997) studying on the image portrayal of Malaysian and international female parliamentarians found that 73.8 percent of the 516 verbs analysed used the speech verb "say" in *The Star* sample, while *Utusan Malaysia* recorded 66 percent. In another study (Faridah, 2003) on the use and misuse of media language in 891 headlines from four Malaysian mainstream newspapers found that headlines use appropriate report sentence type about 70.4 percent, while about 29.6 percent in the inference and judgment categories. This finding suggest for a sensitization program on media language and general semantics among reporters and subeditors.

In the last decades, there have been numerous studies on the nature of prejudices, stereotypes, slants or biases from the perspectives of journalism and communication, social psychology, sociology and sociolinguistics. Here, we are standing on ground that has been well-researched, but nevertheless, needs to be continued and pursued further in every possible dimension for greater understanding among mankind. According to a renowned journalism scholar John C. Merrill (1983), stereotyping and prejudices are recurrent themes in explaining the public's image of its government; a man's image of his friends; people's image of peoples of other nations; the journalist's image of foreign people and leaders. Distrust and

misunderstanding among peoples on a global scale is a common phenomenon today.

One area of prejudice and stereotyping that has long been overlooked and needs reemphasis is the use of language and words. And central to the usage of language and words is the media where their day-to-day activities and daily offerings involved the use of words to impart information in the form of news. Language and words according to a neurologist and general semanticist, Alfred Korzybski, are only maps of reality. They are not actual territories, and that the very nature of words could lead human beings astray. In other words he and his followers such as S.I. Hayakawa and Wendell Johnson believed that words are the source of human misunderstandings.

War News and Media Stereotyping

Over the millennium, the world and its people witness all kinds of wars. World war, civil war, ideological war, religious war, guerilla war, terrorism, insurgency, brutality, conspiracy and murderous expression, and others – all these are part of the human condition. “War had been literally continuous, though strictly speaking it had not always been the same war...The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil,” says George Orwell in his book *1984*.

According to Chris Hedges, winner of 2002 Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism, “War makes the world understandable, a black and white tableau of them and us. It suspends thought, especially self critical thought. All bow before the supreme effort. We are one. Most of us willingly accept war as long as we can fold it into a belief system that paints the ensuing suffering as necessary for a higher good, for human beings not only seek happiness but also meaning. And tragically war is sometimes the most powerful way in human society to achieve meaning” (2003: 10).

In the 1990s we witnessed various wars via the mass media: death of thousands in several warring states and millions in others. The media, both local and international, had showed war in Afghanistan, Sudan, Rwanda, Angola, Bosnia, Guatemala,

Liberia, Burundi, Algeria, border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, fighting in Colombia, the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, southeastern Turkey, Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, and the latest Iraq. We also witness numerous acts of terrorism for instance 911 in America and the 7/7 bomb blast in the British capital.

Indeed, war reporting by the mass media has enormous implications for government, commerce and industry in many of these warring countries. Their local and international investments as well as bilateral relations are mercilessly shaped by news reports. Often times, because of lack of sensitivity towards local culture, media reports are bias and full of stereotypical generalizations. Of course, favourable news coverage is a key factor in determining the success or failure of a country's development efforts.

So how does a non-warring country such as Malaysia report the war? On a quick glance of media content, over a period of two months (March and April 2002) – in both print and electronic media alike - it is found that war coverage is definitely not missing in the daily news diet. The two-month period in 2002 was purposively selected because of its representation of peacetime period, months after the U-S Afghanistan war and months before the U.S-Iraq war under the administration of President George W. Bush. News about war come mostly from the international news agencies, Reuters, Agence France Presse (AFP), Associate Press (AP), to a lesser extent from the Malaysian national news agency, BERNAMA (basically non-combat military news) and also from other news agencies such as Xinhua of China, Yon Hap of South Korea, ANTARA of Indonesia, not forgetting Cable News Network (CNN) and Al-Jazeera. But of course, based on interviews with several media practitioners, the western international news agencies are the most popular among local media diet where war news are concerned. Reasons for the choice is basically the news coverage from these western agencies are very advanced with accompanying up-to-date and superb visuals, news reels and actualities.

How do we identify war news? Basically war news comprise of events pertaining to military actions and acts of terrorism.

Military actions include issues on combat, armed invasion, military talks, supplies and provisions, armed deployment and the like. We also looked at efforts undertaken by governments and leaders, and also world organizations to resolve conflicts and try to achieve peace through diplomatic talks, relations and missions. Over the period of study, about 138 or 15.8 percent out of 898 news items contained war news coverage. A closer look at the coverage of war news by these newspapers demonstrate that there are more issues pertaining to “terrorism” in the *New Straits Times* (NST) while more military news comprising of military actions and combat are covered in *The Star* (TS), *Utusan Malaysia* (UM) dan *Berita Harian* (BH) as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of news in four Malaysian national dailies

	NST	TS	UM	BH
Military	7 (18.8%)	23(74.2%)	23(53.5%)	12(46.2%)
Diplomatic relations	12(31.6%)	2 (6.5%)	6(14.0%)	7(26.9%)
Terrorism	19(50.0%)	6(19.4%)	14(32.6%)	7(26.9%)

Issues pertaining to “terrorism” highlighted by these papers, especially NST were more on international discussions or talks on the issues and lesser on the act itself. Some of the areas touched were efforts to define terrorism, global conference held to discuss issues on terror, the role that the United Nations should play to stop blatant aggression while other news were on acts of terrorism such as suicide bombing and bomb blast. Top coverage of war news in the Malaysian media are the long-time Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the aftermath of war in Afghanistan and also on Iraq, being the next target of the U.S to exterminate terrorism (as the world had witnessed several months later).

During this period of analysis, Malaysia came out as an active country expressing views on “terrorism” and suggesting strategies to tackle “terrorism” without aggression, and Dr Mahathir Mohamad (then, the Prime Minister) was seen to use international forum such as the OIC to champion the cause.

Countries frequently mentioned in the news pertaining to terrorism and war news were the United States, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Indonesia, Philippines, Iraq which was in the midst of a continuous crisis, while the Philippines was encountering problems with the Abu Sayyaf group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Indonesia with its Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

The electronic media also showed similar trends as the print media during the period of study. Like the Malaysian dailies, the electronic media in this country is dependent on the dominant four international news agencies for foreign news with AFP and Reuters remaining their favourite suppliers of news, news reels, actualities and visuals. One news producer told the writers in an interview that these two agencies are popular among Malaysian media organizations because of their “more or less” unbiased coverage.

Virtually on whose side are the media on? Looking at the Malaysian media, it can be seen that the media reflect the situation of the government and the society in which they operate. The principle of non-aligned remains intact within Malaysian foreign policy and this is reflected in the mass media. Malaysia within the non-aligned group, has assumed an active and assertive role. Today in Malaysia non-aligned does not mean just a passive adherence to the sanctimonious declaration of the principles and ideas of the non-aligned philosophy. It has long been the hope of Malaysian leaders that the non-aligned movement must not remain mere ideals but must be translated into effective action to free the world from domination by the strong over the weak in all fields (Munir Majid quoting Mahathir Mohamad, 1983). The principles of non-aligned, termed simply as neutral, are reflected in the newspapers. There is a tendency within the media to combine news from the international news agencies, namely Reuters, AFP and AP and publish it under the, *Agencies*. An editor said that this is one way, the gatekeepers try to increase neutrality and reduce biases (Ahmad Tali, b 2003).

In whose words do the Malaysian media subscribe to in explaining war to the people? With the shortage of trained staff, funds and equipments, the Malaysian newspapers, like their

counterparts in most developing countries are still dependent on the dominant four international news agencies for foreign news especially war news. Only of late, after the 2003 Iraq War that the Malaysian editors see the need to train Malaysian journalists to be war correspondents. We can see that Gandy's information subsidy model is applicable here. Basically, war news sources come from the protagonist of war quoted by the news agencies. The following are several headlines that indicate this trend: *'Osama e-mail slams Saudi peace plan'*; *Britain boleh serang Iraq tanpa mandat PBB – Hoon/ translation: Britain can attack Iraq without UN's Mandate – Hoon'*; *'Bush tuntutan Yasser henti pembunuhan/translation: Bush demands Yasser to halt killing'*; *'Amaran keras Putera Abdullah kepada Powell/translation: Hash warning from Prince Abdullah to Powell'*.

Obviously most headlines, reflect what are being said in the news and sub-editors take queues from the lead paragraph to help them write the lead. However, sub-editors can choose the right words and terms and not trapped with labels and judgments. But sometimes due to insensitivity, we get such headline that could create more animosity, such as one particular headline published in *Utusan Malaysia* 13 April 2002 based on and AFP's news: *Dunia kian marah kepada Israel*, translation: "The world is angry with Israel." The question we may ask is what connotes the word 'world'? Is it representative of the whole world? After reading the whole news, we found that 'the world' means only France, Germany and couple of Southeast Asian countries as suggested in the AFP's story.

This study has shown that while care is taken by local gatekeepers to create a more presentable and objective war news by combining news from Reuters, AP, UPI and AFP and place them under 'Agencies', there are instances where the choice of "facts" in news and headlines can be badly assembled as shown in the AFP's news. By applying Hayakawa's Trichotomy, the analysis show that all the four newspapers had achieved about 55 to 66 percent objectivity in presenting their war news but the remaining 36 to 45 percent of non-objective coverage remained questionable. Using news from the international news agencies, the local media are still far from propagating world peace. It can

be seen that the option for peace journalism among local media practitioners is still at an infantile stage.

How does the options of peace journalism entail? According to Galtung (1986), the concept of peace journalism acts as a timely and welcome antidote to much of what passes for war journalism. His classification of war and peace journalism is based on four broad perspectives namely peace or conflict, truth, people and solutions. Hence, peace journalism is an alternative, not polemic. The elements of peace journalism are not new; part political analysis, part investigative journalism, part socially responsible reporting, part advocacy journalism in the interests of peace.

Peace journalism proposes that journalists take up the role as educators who could well inform and educate the public on the background, contexts and origins of global media content, providing a multidimensional setting in their reports. These, of course need training, media literacy and sensitization programs, conducted among journalists and the public.

Recommendations

Based on some observations and a prescriptive analysis of media stereotyping in war reporting, initiatives could be taken to minimize prejudices and stereotypes, based on the following approaches:

The educational approach or media literacy: This approach addresses the need to make people be critically aware of how media, especially the local and global media are organized; how they select and construct their media content, and what are the contents and why they are the way they are? Media education or media literacy helps to sensitize media audience in terms of which global players and global media that are responsible media institutions and which are not. This also applies to local media institutions and practitioners. Media literacy should begin from primary schools till the universities. In relation to this, the media and universities could help educate the masses on the roles of the media and media practitioners, both local and global.

Understanding how the media operate, will help sensitize people on the hidden agenda highlighted through selected issues. Educating the media and the masses on peace journalism should be an immediate step to be taken.

The mass media approach: Media practitioners should be sensitized on the evaluation and selection of news and entertainment. They need to develop their own model and guideline in order to package their own media content . They need to come out with their own formula in packaging foreign and local content effectively. They also need to identify (via research for instance) effective ways to package news for the IT-savvy younger generations. War reporting should not be looked from a perspective that will perpetuate more animosities and divide warring parties into two dichotomies - the good and the evil. It is the responsibility of the media and their war correspondents to highlight facts and events that could bring peace between the parties at war. War journalists should be given special training and exposure on peace knowledge and negotiations.

The societal approach: Local association at the community level and NGOs should be active in distributing information via various media and multimedia channels (e.g. Internet and Blogs) and through campaigns, to educate societies on social issues and problems with regard to efforts to institutionalize peace journalism and the role of global media and their content. Cultural, Religious and Educational Roadshows should also be organized to publicise and sensitize people on these issues.

The governmental-policy approach: The government need to review some provisions with regard to media conglomerates and mergers and identify relevant policies that will create a balanced media system that are beneficial to both the media and the audience. At the local level, the Ministry of Information need to create sensitivity programmes for the people where awareness training on media related issues, such as ownership, laws, social, economic, political and cultural influences of the media are being discussed continuously. Knowledge obtained from all these

sensitivity training enhanced society's understanding and experience, and hence will allow wiser media decisions and media consumption in the future. These sensitivity programmes should also be supported by research and development activities and statistical data should be collected continuously to gauge the effectiveness of these programmes.

The scholarly approach: Universities, scholars and researchers should team up in collaborative works and networking as well as undertake research on the various perspectives of global media. Through research and development activities, they will be able to update information and knowledge, as well as to create a data base with regard to the global media and peace journalism option. With these data they will be able to make recommendations and offer guidelines to various institutions, governmental and non-governmental bodies. An important outcome from these research activities, would be the setting up of a Peace Journalism Center in every country where monitoring of the development, operations and contents of the media, both local and global, can be done.

Conclusion

While it can be seen that peace journalism is an option that media organizations and their war correspondents could take in drawing the line between good and biased news reports, it should be noted that news and information via the media is part of a larger industrial model that is being actively perused by local governments to develop their nations' economy. A nation cannot progress and industrialise without information.

On a positive note, various research by media and communication scholars have shown that the media are the catalyst that spearheaded progress. Their important role in building a country's national image and economy can no longer be denied. The question we are here to answer today is whether the invisible baggage i.e., the culture of news and information consumption among local people, that comes with the global media cost too much? This is where media literacy comes in. It

is thus important that the media help to keep people on top of current issues. The media also are the vehicles by which people debate issues and participate intelligently in public policy discussion and make wise decisions. The media can help the NGOs and community groups as well as activists and citizens at large to sensitize people regarding global media, global journalism and peace journalism options through campaigns and advocacy efforts. The media practitioners themselves should be sensitized on the importance of packaging news. They need to develop their own model and guidelines on how to propagate peace via news and information. Media organizations should also be made aware of the use and misuse of media language vis-à-vis appropriate use of media language. They should be sent for short courses on general semantics in the media. Only then, will they know how two-value orientation, of good versus evil, could create war and turmoil in societies and among nations.

In democracies, people like to believe that what they are doing for themselves and or other people are right and what their countries are doing are generally good. To go to war, and not go to war or refrain from any kind of involvement in war - all these have their own legitimate reasons. But when the media report war, under the notion of public's right to know and upholding their social responsibility goal, the 'story of war' takes a different turn. Parties to a conflict behave differently because the media is there, and will try to influence war news coverage to their advantage. Managing public opinion and controlling people's perception in time of war, through words maneuvering becomes a matter of great concern for the protagonists of war. But the media through words monitoring can even play a greater and more noble role.

It is indisputable, taken together, the proliferation of new media technology, growing media conglomerates, professionals, norms and values and the onset of globalisation, the media is one powerful force that shape the lives and destinies of peoples and nations. And for the media, to be aware of the use and misuse of language, to be aware of what they say, what they do, how they say it and how they do it, they can achieve enough impartiality for practical purposes.

No one in this world wants to admit that he or she has a prejudice mind and are sometimes or most of the time, involve in stereotypical generalizations. Any individual or citizens of a country tend to have a strong sense of belonging to one's country and people. Whatever terms that are used be it patriotism, nationalism or jingoism, they are only words and symbols, that are considered the most sophisticated kind of language. Through an in-depth understanding of the meaning of words and languages uttered or used by the mass media, would make people or journalists more aware of the presence of prejudice and stereotypes. If people are aware of their prejudices, they are able to gauge and evaluate the intensity and try to reduce it before they express through human behavior that could be detrimental to the human race.

References

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *Nature of prejudice*. New York: Random House.
- Black, J.J. (1974). General semantics, beliefs systems and propaganda: Interrelationships in journalism. *PhD Dissertation*. University of Missouri-Columbia, USA.
- Bois, J. S. (1957). *Exploration in awareness*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Chau Pao Ling (1997). Citra ahli parlimen wanita. Satu kajian semantik umum. (Translation: Images of female parliamentarian. A general semantics study). *BA thesis*. Department of Communication, UKM.
- Chua, Amy (2004). *The world on fire*. UK: Arrow Books.
- Cicero. (1949). *De inventione*. Cambridge, MA: Leob Classic.
- Congressional Quarterly Inc.* (1981). The Middle East. 5th Edition. Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc.
- Faridah Ibrahim (2003). *Penggunaan dan salahguna bahasa dalam tajuk berita: Kajian semantik umum*. (Translation: The use and misuse of language in news headlines: A study on general semantics). Paper presented at the Research Symposium organised by School of Media and Communications Studies, UKM. Sept. 7- 8 2003.
- Faridah Ibrahim and Mohd Rajib Ab Ghani (1987). Objektiviti bahasa dalam kewartawanan (Translation: Language objectivity in journalism). *Jurnal Komunikasi* Vol. 3. No 3, pp 60-67.

- Faridah Ibrahim (1984). The image of superpowers as reflected by two Malaysian national dailies, *The New Straits Times* and *Utusan Malaysia*. MA thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA.
- Galtung, J. (1986). On the role of the media in worldwide security and peace. In T. Varis (Ed.), *Peace and communication*. San Jose, Costa Rica: Universidad para La Paz.
- Gandy, O. (1982). *Beyond agenda setting*. New York: Ablex Publications.
- Gerbner, G., Gross L. Morgan, M., Signoreilli, N. (1986). Dynamics of cultivation process. In J. Byant and D. Zillmann (eds). *Perspectives on media effectiveness*. Hillsdale, N.J: Erlbaum, pp 102.
- Hayakawa, S.I. (1979). *Through the communication barrier – On speaking, listening and understanding*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Hedges, C. (2003). *War is a force that gives us meaning*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hindley, G. (2003). *The crusades*. London: Constable and Robinson, Ltd.
- Knightley, P. (1975). *The first casualty*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Jovanovich.
- Knightley, P. (1991). Here's the patriotically censored news. *Index on Censorship*, No. 4 & 5, p 4 – 5.
- Korzybski, A. H. (1950). *Manhood and humanity: The science and art of human engineerings*. 2nd. Edition. Lakeville, Conn.: Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co.
- Kurzman, C. (ed.) (2002). *Modernist Islam 1840-1940. A sourcebook*. Oxford: University Press.
- Maslog, C.C., Lee, S.T. and Kim, H.S. (2006). Framing analysis of a conflict: How newspapers in five Asian countries covered the Iraq War. *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol 16, No. 1, March, pp 19-39
- Mohd Rajib Ab Ghani (1984). *Semantic analysis of objectivity in two Malaysian newspapers*. MA thesis. University of Missouri-Columbia, USA.
- Mohd Rajib Ab Ghani and Faridah Ibrahim (2002). *The nature of prejudice. Analysis of symbols, labels and words in straight news reporting*. Paper presented at IAMCR Conference, Barcelona, Spain, 21-24 July 2002.
- Orwell, G. (1977). 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Merrill, J.C. (1974). The imperative of freedom. *New York: Hastings House Publishers*.
- Munir Majid (1983). *New virility in Malaysian foreign policy*, *New Straits Times*, August 31, 1983, p.7.

- Moran, M. (2003). (<http://man.sarai.net/piperman>).
- Said, E. (2003) (*In Mishka Moujabber Mourani* aljazeera.info).
- Sainath, P. (2003). (<http://man.sarai.net/piperman>).
- Syed Arabi Idid and Rahmah Hashim (1989). *Muslim media: Some considerations*. Paper presented at National Conference – Communication from the Islamic perspective. Organised by the School of Mass Communication, ITM, October 5 – 7 1989.
- Westerlund, D. and Svaubers, I. (eds) (1999). *Islam outside the Arab world*. London: Curzon Press.
- Interviews with media practitioners from *NST, NTV7, TV3, Bernama, The Star, Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian* and *RTM* in April and May 2003 by Faridah Ibrahim.