

Mediated conflicts: Capacities and limitations of ‘mediative journalism’ in public diplomacy processes

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Abstract

Based on the concept of public diplomacy, this article analyses the possible contributions of journalism to international political conflict resolution processes and, more specifically, asks if quality journalism can take on mediative functions in foreign policy. The approach of this article is to consider the concept of ‘mediative journalism’, which means that first of all links and differences between journalism and mediation as a conflict resolution tool have to be recognized. An explicit link between mediation and quality journalism has not been tested yet, although both show partly similar mindsets and attitudes concerning, for example, balance, the plurality of perspectives and critical reflection, as the article clearly shows.

Keywords

conflict, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, foreign policy, mediation, political conflict, public diplomacy, quality journalism, social conflict

Introduction

As demonstrated in Habermas’s essay ‘What is Universal Pragmatics?’ (Habermas, 2000 [1976]), the issue of the role of communication in conflict situations and generally in reaching understanding is not a new one, and given current tensions in the international

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political sphere, Habermas's theories are as relevant as ever. This article, then, deals specifically with the role of journalism in public diplomacy processes and examines whether journalism can take certain mediative functions, whereby here diplomacy¹ is considered to be a public affair when it actively uses and addresses the media. Public diplomacy, among other things, is used as a conflict management tool, in which the media play a crucial role, especially in international political conflict management (Reitweger, 2004: 5). Employing journalism for public diplomacy raises the question of what role journalism can have within international political conflict management. More specifically, this article focuses on the influence of journalism on foreign policy in public diplomacy processes. To analyse the role of journalism in conflict management processes, I use the concept of mediation because it is an established, scientifically based resolution tool.

To establish a theoretical basis for generating the concept of 'mediative journalism', I begin by comparing and contrasting current concepts relating to journalism and mediation as conflict management tools. Next, I propose a synthesis of those concepts as an analytical tool. For example, although mediation as a conflict management tool and quality journalism show similar views and approaches regarding balance, the plurality of perspectives and critical reflection (Bucher and Altmeppen, 2003), an elaborate theoretical link between the concepts has not yet been tested. Elaborating similarities and differences between quality journalism and mediation may help to analyse how and to what extent quality journalism could contribute to international conflict resolution processes.

In short, this article examines the theoretical bases for a mediative journalism by comparing systems of quality journalism and mediation, and then analyses how and to what extent journalism can take on mediative functions in international political conflict management.

Conflict: Definitions and approaches

Defining international conflicts as social conflicts

Among the definitions of the term 'social conflict', some are quite broad and open, while others are more limited. In his handbook on conflict management, Friedrich Glasl lists some definitions of social conflict, and then proposes the following new definition:

Social conflict is an interaction between actors (individuals, groups, organisations, etc.), in which at least one actor experiences a contradictoriness with the other actor (the other actors) concerning perception and thinking, accordingly imagination and sensation, and intention in a way that within the realization of what the actor is thinking a disturbance by another actor (the other actors) occurs. (Glasl, 2004: 17)

Bruno Rüttinger distinguishes the relation between the conflict parties by explaining social conflicts as 'tense situations, in which two or more interdependent parties forcefully try to realize apparently or actually incompatible plans of action and are conscious of their opposing positions' (Glasl, 2004: 16). Rüttinger's definition accurately describes international conflicts where two or more governments, for example, represent opposing positions and are acutely conscious of their positions.

Determining international conflicts as social conflicts is one possible way to define the term international conflict. The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research defines the term conflict as:

... the clashing of interests (positional differences) over national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases. (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2006)

Bloomfield and Moulton (1997: 1–5), for example, explain international conflicts through international relations theory. Another possibility to clarify the complex issue of international conflicts is to integrate different dimensions of diplomacy. European diplomacy, for example, takes place on at least three levels: a bilateral, a multilateral and – what could be called – a supra-lateral level. The latter referring to the responsibilities of the European institutions with regard to external relations (Kyrle, 2004: 17–18). International conflicts can proceed on these levels or dimensions as well.

Social scientific conflict theories

The tradition of generating, developing and examining conflict theories within the social sciences can lead to an approach for analysing mediative journalism in international conflicts. Social scientific conflict theories embrace different perspectives on conflict. Three of these perspectives are introduced here.

Robert W. Cox's *conflict theory of international political economy* focuses on the historical perspective within a transnational historical materialism. He claims that the shape of the relationship between consensus and cooperation, and between coercion and conflict can be best understood when viewed in the context of historical materialism. In other words, the key to assessing the stability of hegemonic and non-hegemonic social structures lies in the evolution of a social unit's political economy (Bieling, 2005: 121–8).

In contrast to Cox's historical materialism approach, *conflict theories within postmodern theories of international relations* assess social transformation by how social actors verbally, or discursively, construct their social spheres; that is, theorists focus on what observations and reflections social actors express. Furthermore, postmodern theory posits that cultural, national, or other kinds of collective identities are not fixed but fluid. So in the postmodern framework, if one wants to know how people in a conflict-filled environment understand the world, one might observe how the actors reproduce their world view discursively at school and in diplomacy (Diez, 2005: 187–9).

A third social scientific conflict theory, *civilization theory*, focuses on a cultural dimension of conflict situated not between societies or cultural areas, but within them. Dieter Senghaas explains that cultural conflicts arise from disputes about the shape of the public order inside a society. Specifically, these cultural conflicts are conflicts of identities: that is to say, 'either/or' conflicts as identities tend not to be negotiable, unlike conflicts involving differing material interests, or so-called 'more-or-less' conflicts (Imbusch, 2005: 165–71). Of course, many conflicts combine elements of both.

Implications of cultural conflict

As already mentioned, cultural conflicts as either/or conflicts are among the most difficult to mediate because logical debate with the parties concerned about their group's identity is rarely fruitful as it does not seem possible to debate identities. Consequently, the burden of incorporating cultural identity into processes of mediation – that is, of being highly aware of groups' cultural differences and similarities – lies not only with mediators but with journalists as well. It is even more important for mediators as well as for journalists to consider cultural differences and similarities and act consciously. In other words, as an integral part of international political conflict management, journalists have an ethical responsibility to be sensitive to cultural issues and to incorporate these issues into their reporting.

As useful as theories may be in explaining phenomena and directing enquiry into, in this case, cultural aspects of international conflict, practical, empirical guides contribute perhaps much more to mediation processes. One such guide is provided by Edward T. Hall, an anthropologist and trainer of diplomats. Hall covers the issue of non-verbal communication between cultures. He distinguishes *primary-message systems* which may differ from culture to culture (Hepp, 2006: 51–3): interaction (as reciprocal action); association (alliances, collectivization); the way of safekeeping the livelihood of all members of a culture; the concept of gender; the exposure to belongings and territory; temporality, rhythm of life and the exposure to temporal relations (which means that terms like accuracy or permanence can have different meanings in differing cultures); the way cognition and knowledge is acquired (the way of learning and utilization of media); play or games, which allow testing of social interactions (the way people are socialized); the defence and protection of property; and the exploitation of nature.

International conflicts: Models and approaches

Among several approaches dealing with conflict in various social constructs, including an international level, John Paul Lederach offers the concept of *conflict transformation*, which differs from conflict resolution or conflict management:

... because [conflict transformation] reflects a better understanding of the conflict itself. ... Conflict transformation ... does not suggest that we simply eliminate or control conflict, but rather recognize and work with its 'dialectic nature'. ... It suggests that left alone, conflict can have destructive consequences. However, the consequences can be modified or transformed so that self-images, relationships, and social structures improve as a result of conflict instead of being harmed by it. (Burgess and Burgess, 1997)

Another approach to international conflict analysis is the Bloomfield–Leiss Dynamic Phase Conflict Model, which is also the basis of Computer Assisted Conflict Analysis (CASCON), a special software which is used to analyse conflicts. This model contains six phases (phase six marks the dispute as settled) and also provides a classification of the term conflict. The phases two (conflict: military option develops), three (hostilities: fighting between organized units) and four (post-hostilities: conflict remains) are classified as conflict phases, whereas a dispute also includes phases one (dispute: quarrel about

an issue) and five (post-hostilities: dispute remains unsettled). In other words, a dispute comprises conflict (Bloomfield and Moulton, 1997: 12).

Glasl's nine-phase Model of Conflict Escalation offers another tool for diagnosing the consistency or character of a conflict. The first level marks the lowest phase of conflict escalation, whereas the ninth level describes the highest phase of escalation (Glasl, 2004: 233–302):

Level 1: the hardening of different positions.

Level 2: thinking and talking in 'either/or' dimensions.

Level 3: actions instead of words, threats instead of empathy.

Level 4: creating coalitions and bad images of the other.

Level 5: loss of face, direct defamations and the isolation of the other.

Level 6: strategies of threat, blackmail, sanctions, issuing ultimatums.

Level 7: damage limitation; a small damage to oneself is still regarded as advantage.

Level 8: fragmentation: paralysing and disintegrating the opponent's system.

Level 9: total confrontation, destruction at the price of self-destruction.

For journalists covering international conflicts, the theoretical approaches and models just presented are potential tools for orienting themselves in investigating and presenting the complex and multifaceted issues involved. As participants in a conflict transformation process, journalists need sharp observation skills of subtle cultural clues, a historical perspective of material interests and sensitivity to cultural identities. With enough information on hand, journalists can make use of theoretical models and computer analysis programs to give their readers an indication of the direction of a conflict, and they can also propose courses of action for a public to affect an outcome. Of course, a detailed journalistic investigative phase is needed in order to recognize the conflict in all its dimensions. Mediation, which also provides the necessary cultural-sensitive perspectives for conflict resolution (Mehta and Rückert, 2004), can be a helpful instrument to reflect (cultural) conflict dimensions in journalistic texts.

In the following sections I examine the broader issue of mediation and public diplomacy, including the role of journalism, and then I present in more detail ways in which journalism can play a more conscientious role in mediation (and vice versa).

Journalism and conflict resolution

From secret chambers to the public sphere:

The influence of mass media

Since diplomacy has shifted from secret chambers to the public sphere, the press has turned into a major actor in diplomatic processes. The modern era of diplomacy is the era of public opinion and the latter is both reflected in and led by the press (Keren, 2004: 214).

Michael Keren asserts that because the press reflects and directs public opinion, it thereby has the power in some instances to pressure diplomats, political negotiators, or politicians towards certain ends.

Yet negotiators know that the outcome of their dealings is eagerly awaited by the media and will be closely analysed and probably criticized; and in this way public opinion influences even the most secretive of diplomatic discussions (Reitweger, 2004: 5).

Moreover, the media can provide an important platform for all negotiators participating in an international conflict resolution process. Through the media concerned parties can make their intentions known, or likewise learn what the opposition plans, or attempt to manipulate negotiations by manipulating public opinion.

Furthermore, 'Publicity in the age of global communications can be a powerful diplomatic instrument to encourage noncoercive compliance through its powers of, so to speak, shame, embarrassment, and ridicule' (Bloomfield and Moulton, 1997: 63). In other words, journalism and the mass media wield an extraordinary power that is implicit in their 'sanction mechanism' or 'sanction power':

This is all the more reason why, when a serious threat is building, impartial, credible information should be diffused in a glare pitiless enough to inhibit aggressive behavior, to keep responsible governments from waffling, and to encourage the offender to back down. (Bloomfield and Moulton, 1997: 63)

In this way, publicity is a common strategy for preventive diplomacy (Bloomfield and Moulton, 1997). The mass media strongly affect diplomatic processes by providing not only information to the public, the mediators and disputing parties, but also by creating a public platform on which the intrigue and drama of diplomacy can be played.

The above-quoted statements show the high level of influence exerted by the mass media and especially journalism on international conflicts. The strong effect of journalism on the political sphere implies two (opposing) possibilities: as a consequence of journalistic reporting a conflict situation may either escalate or transform towards conflict settlement. This article focuses on the latter.

Public diplomacy as more than a conflict management tool

'Traditional diplomacy is invisible and not open, nor known to the public and the media. By experience we have learned that in today's world you do not exist if you are not in the media. This is one of the reasons why traditional diplomacy has to be complemented by "public diplomacy"', as Christian Prosl, former Austrian ambassador to Germany, states (Prosl, 2004: 33–4). As in other political arenas, diplomats involved in international political conflict management have been taking advantage of the mass media to distribute and promote their ideas, plans and projects. This strategy of diplomatic actors getting their agenda (and themselves) into the mass media and treating diplomacy as a public affair is called modern diplomacy, media diplomacy, or simply public diplomacy; the latter term was coined by the American diplomat and former ambassador to the Congo, Edmund Gullion in 1965 (Hartmann, 1988: 73). Public diplomacy is a conflict management tool, but, as Reitweger states, it is:

... above all one to be used in the medium and long term perspective by diplomats working to improve understanding of the concerns of their country and to create a positive 'image' that may be conducive to favourable decisions by their host country. (Reitweger, 2004: 5)

In other words, the mass media play a crucial role in diplomatic conflict management and negotiation processes and by extension, it behoves journalists to be thorough, impartial, critical and aware of their role in conflict transformation processes.

Habermas states that mass media discourses can create an intersubjective autonomy in the public sphere, which is necessary for self-legislation (Habermas, 1992: 153–4). This autonomy is also affected by conscientious journalism.

In public diplomacy, as in most political arenas, journalists are not immune to the influence exerted by politicians, negotiators and foreign policy news services. Frequently, foreign policy journalists receive print-ready news bulletins – press releases – from political players' own media departments, which means that a conscientious journalist has not only to check the report's validity (as far as he or she is able), but must also read the subtext; that is, read into the article for implied or neglected information. To investigate a prefabricated news story, a journalist must budget time for a pre-publication phase, wherein he or she closely scrutinizes the information provided and actively collects information from certain experts, for example. Given that the events foreign policy journalists cover are frequently far removed from their readers' – and often also from the journalists' – daily lives, an in-depth pre-publication phase seems to be even more necessary.

The time constraint caused by publication deadlines and the competition to scoop each other means that journalists may lack the time to analyse press releases critically. In particular, they may not have time to detect the bias of a press release as expressed in its manipulative wording and euphemisms. For example, a press release with a bias for US interests is likely to use the term 'friendly fire' instead of saying 'a stupid accident for which the US apologizes', when its soldiers kills its allies; or it calls a weapon 'intelligent' to assuage the guilt of its readers for their military bombing dense population areas. Press releases also tend to adapt uncritically phrases and justifications used repeatedly by politicians to sway a public, such as 'good against evil' or 'war on terror' (Loquai, 2007: 56–74). Conscientious journalism requires an awareness of such biases and a commitment not to repeat them without critical examination.

So, when journalists lose their critical, reflexive distance when reporting on a conflict, then journalism risks becoming an instrument of government propaganda. When journalism is subverted into the service of propaganda, the public have no basis for adequate individual and intersubjective judgement and evaluation of a conflict situation (see, for example, Nazzari and Stuke, 2004: 30–1).

Information in the form of a press release, especially when a political player obviously wants to influence public attitudes, can be a great source for a journalist if he or she puts the press release in a larger context and recognizes what it represents – just one perspective in a complex situation. A conscientious journalist, then, asks two critical questions when presented with a press release: Who or what agency is actually providing the information; and what are the working premises and goals of the source?

Democratization of Diplomacy through Mass Media?

As previously explained, with the advent of the mass media and public diplomacy, political actors try to influence journalists to portray ideas and events in ways that favour the actors' cause. Occasionally, because it can reach the masses in a short time, journalism affects the course of mediation. With its current, unprecedented ability to reach the masses, how might journalism bring democratic input to mediation processes? The mass media and especially journalism have been democratic forces in public diplomacy for two reasons. First, the very nature of journalism and its dissemination through the mass media means that written, audio and visual historical records are produced every time a public figure steps into the limelight. These features give the public a record for scrutinizing a public figure's credibility. Second, Münch says that diplomatic discourse has become more pluralistic, that the media have expanded public discourse by including the voices of disparate groups (Münch, 1991: 257).

Summits and conferences offer a look at public diplomacy in action. For example, the G-8 Summit in June 2007 involved not only heads of government, who were the main actors in this intensive mass media discourse, but also members of non-governmental movements, such as ATTAC, and the musicians of the counter-event 'Live 8', who participated in the discourse of the summit's issues through performances and exposure via media services. Furthermore, journalists actively participated in the discourse by commenting on and analysing the summit and its consequences. If diplomacy had not, however, shifted 'from the secret chambers to the public sphere' (Keren, 2004: 214), then this pluralistic participation in the discourse of the summit's topics would not have been possible or certainly not as extensive.

Yet, the reality is that diplomatic decisions are not made in the public sphere; decisions are still made in secret chambers. Hence, to claim that the media democratize public diplomacy is an exaggeration. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, the media and their access to the public have been known to affect the course of diplomacy or conflict resolution, and their potential for more democratic processes in public diplomacy has been demonstrated.

Quality journalism and mediation

Mediation, as a culturally sensitive technique for international political conflict resolution, is recommended. In particular, the introduction of a neutral person is a common and effective method for solving international conflicts. Given the importance of mediation, can an impartial, critical and reflexive journalism – quality journalism – take on mediative functions? To answer this question, in the following sections I examine the possibilities and downside of journalism's mediative potential.

Defining mediation and the mediator's job description

Mediation as an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) tool is used to resolve different kinds of disputes, such as interpersonal, organizational, commercial, legal, community, public, ethnic and international conflicts. (Moore, 2003: 14). Mediation 'may not be the

oldest profession, but it surely must be close. As long as people had disputes with each other, mediators have emerged to counsel the use of reason over arms' (Kolb, 1985: 1). Aspects such as power, hierarchy and authority are especially significant within political mediation² (Michal-Misak, 2003: 268, 271). In contrast to other fields of mediation, in political mediation, one-on-one talks between a mediator and a conflict party representative are often highly recommended before the conflict parties' delegates meet for face-to-face negotiations, especially when a conflict has greatly escalated. According to the political scientist Johan Galtung, mediators' ignoring the one-on-one talks procedure seems to be a common mistake in diplomatic processes (Galtung, 2003: 92).

Moore further defines the role and the advantageous qualities of the mediator as:

... the intervention in a negotiation or a conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power, which assists the involved parties to voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute. In addition to addressing substantive issues, mediation may also establish or strengthen relationships of trust and respect between the parties or terminate relationships in a manner that minimizes emotional costs and psychological harm. (Moore, 2003: 15)

Moreover, a mediator needs to be accepted by all parties involved in the conflict, which means that only a trustworthy, competent and credible person can be a good mediator.

Although a mediator is responsible for the structure of the negotiation process, she or he does not develop the contents or the topics of the talks. A mediator always works in a results-oriented way, which means that he or she focuses on clear and practicable solutions elaborated by the conflict parties. A mediator also provides a communication platform for clarifying the pertinent issues in conflict situations. Yet, however much a mediator facilitates negotiation proceedings, solutions must come from the conflict parties concerned (Duss-von Werdt, 2005: 20). Haynes et al. (2006: 21) specify this aspect of mediation – where mediators are responsible for the process, not the content of negotiations – as *procedural justness*.

Elucidating mediation: The mediator's attitude

As just mentioned, the mediator does not create the agenda or topics of a negotiation; the content is, rather, decided by the conflict parties with the assistance of the mediator. Thus, this part of mediation – selecting and deciding the topics – entails a level of personal, or individual responsibility, in that the conflict parties (the political actors and diplomats) must bring their willingness and the appropriate disposition to negotiate into the mediation process (Duss-von Werdt, 2005: 267–8; Haynes et al., 2006: 22). If, however, a conflict has escalated to phase eight or nine, as shown in Glasl's model of escalation, then mediation may not be possible, precisely because the parties involved are no longer disposed to finding non-violent means for resolving a conflict.

In addition to mediators' assisting disputing parties to establish relevant topics, Christopher Moore (2003) lists a variety of roles and tactics a mediator can adopt to assist conflict parties. In his book *The Mediation Process*, he lists nine roles and ways in which mediators facilitate negotiations (Moore, 2003: 19):

- The *opener of communication channels*, who initiates communication or facilitates better communication if the parties are already talking.
- The *legitimizer*, who helps all parties recognize the right of others to be involved in negotiations.
- The *process facilitator*, who provides a procedure and often formally chairs the negotiation session.
- The *trainer*, who educates novice, unskilled or unprepared negotiators in the bargaining process.
- The *resource expander*, who offers procedural assistance to the parties and links them to outside experts and resources (for example lawyers, technical experts, decision-makers, or additional goods for exchange) that may enable them to enlarge acceptable settlement options.
- The *problem explorer*, who enables people in dispute to examine a problem from a variety of viewpoints, assists in defining basic issues and interests, and looks for mutually satisfactory options.
- The *agent of reality*, who helps build a reasonable and implementable settlement and questions and challenges parties who have extreme and unrealistic goals.
- The *scapegoat*, who may take some of the responsibility or blame for an unpopular decision that the parties are nevertheless willing to accept. This enables them to maintain their integrity and, when appropriate, gain the support of their constituents.
- The *leader*, who takes the initiative to move the negotiations forward by procedural – or on occasion, substantive – suggestions.

In general, then, the qualities that effective mediators need in face-to-face negotiations are impartiality, equidistance and an ability to balance participants' needs and concerns – the cornerstones of diplomacy. Moore (2003) and Haynes et al. (2006) each add voluntariness as a criterion that effective mediators take into negotiations. Moore emphasizes a mediator's need to remember the voluntary nature inherent in the mediation process: 'Voluntary generally refers to both freely chosen participation and freely made agreements. Parties are not forced to mediate and settle by either an internal or external party to a dispute' (Moore, 2003: 19–20). According to Michal-Misak (2003), the ascribed voluntary nature of mediation processes may be only an ideal goal. Michal-Misak states that especially in political mediation and thus in international conflicts, voluntariness often takes a back seat as the conflict parties often work under external pressure (Michal-Misak, 2003: 272).

Haynes et al. (2006) recommend that mediators also focus on the parties' future by assessing the sustainability of an agreement. In other words, a results- and future-oriented technique or focus helps the involved conflict parties develop concrete ways of organizing their future (Haynes et al., 2006: 38).

Mediation in practice: The mediator's methods

Although a multitude of methods are available to mediators, in this section I discuss only some of the established methods of mediation. I also explain the structure of the mediation process.

One central theme of every mediation process is the fact that the mediator concentrates on (hidden) *interests*, needs and perceptions instead of on the conflict parties' positions; he or she scrutinizes what attitudes lie behind the hardened positions presented on the surface. When mediators peel away the rhetoric to reveal another level of concern for the parties, empathy may develop as the parties step into one another's shoes. So, mediators try to discover the unstated attitudes and intentions to elucidate the underlying reasons for conflict. Analysing one's own as well as the other's interests is also an approach of the Harvard Concept, a well-established negotiation technique, which is – like mediation – used for resolving international conflicts (Fisher et al., 2004; Watkins and Rosegrant, 2001: 17).

The Harvard Concept and other negotiation techniques for mediation processes occur in structured phases or stages. Moore (2003: 68–9) presents one of the more elaborate models of the stages of 'mediator moves':

- Stage 1: establishing a relationship with the disputing parties.
- Stage 2: selecting a strategy to guide mediation.
- Stage 3: collecting and analysing background information.
- Stage 4: designing a detailed plan for mediation.
- Stage 5: building trust and cooperation.
- Stage 6: beginning the mediation session.
- Stage 7: defining issues and setting an agenda.
- Stage 8: uncovering hidden interests of the disputing parties.
- Stage 9: generating options for settlement.
- Stage 10: assessing options for settlement.
- Stage 11: final bargaining.
- Stage 12: achieving formal settlement.

Contrary to mediation in some other fields, in international conflict the mediator may conduct one-on-one talks with each party's representative in turn before the conflict parties meet face-to-face, especially when the conflict has escalated. Such one-on-one talks are often practised concomitantly with 'shuttle mediation': that is, the mediator takes on a role comparable to a postman; he or she goes back and forth between the conflict parties to communicate the parties' proposals to each other (Bilek et al., n.d.: 33).

Another approach, or rather 'philosophy', of mediation, called 'Transcend', was developed by Johan Galtung, the well-known peace analyst and founder and rector of the Transcend Peace University (www.transcend.org). As stated on the TPU website:

Transcend has developed the United Nations' training manual for Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means and is one of the world's most recognized professional training organizations in the fields of peacebuilding and development. (Transcend, n.d.)

According to the Transcend approach, the process also starts with one-on-one talks, but before that, all parties that are involved in an international conflict have to be defined precisely, so that everyone involved is really able to participate in the process. For example, in 2001 Galtung worked in Yugoslavia with 27 conflict parties. Like other

mediation methods, Galtung's Transcend approach focuses on developing creative options (Galtung, 2003: 90–2).

Quality journalism: Definitions and models

In 2006, 196 internal and 76 interstate conflicts were counted by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (2006: 3). Given the high number of instances of conflict in one year, not every conflict receives journalistic coverage. On the other hand, conflicts as strong news items in combination with quite prominent negotiators have a good chance of being selected as mass media issues. In any case, even if not all international conflicts receive mass media attention, or not all receive equal consideration, how journalists report conflict can, nonetheless, have important and critical outcomes. What follows is an examination of what constitutes quality journalism.

According to Harald Rau (2004: 65), a consistent definition of quality journalism does not yet exist. However, journalism that is reflective, profound, investigative and opinion shaping is essential for assuring social coexistence and democratic discourse (Kilz, 2004: 111). Rau further proposes four factors of quality in media offerings, which can be understood as the 'goods' that quality journalism provides (Rau, 2004: 79–80):

- Information (breadth, depth, selection and selectivity).
- Presentation (understandability, variability of the description).
- Reflection (to what extent are different/not-known positions taken over, questioned and examined?).
- Education (opinion-shaping and widening of perception: politically, culturally, economically and scientifically; creating the precondition that the readers/audience can attend, follow and 'reconstruct' developments and decisions in different social fields; creating a basis for individual developments).

Another model deals with journalistic quality assurance. In this model seven factors are identified that describe quality journalism: timeliness, relevance, originality, interactivity/dialogue ability, transparency/reflexivity, objectivity and understandability/reduction of complexity (Held and Russ-Mohl, 2004: 55).

Both models introduced here may need a more detailed elaboration. On the other hand, for a field such as journalism, definitions must be fluid according to the situations it encounters. Journalism – dynamic as it is – is permanently developing and changing. What is relevant thus cannot be an absolute norm (Fabris and Renger, 2003: 80).

Of course, many other approaches, perspectives and models of journalistic quality exist that concentrate, for example, on journalistic education and journalistic working conditions, but they cannot be discussed here (see, for example, Altmeyden, 2003: 113; Wilke, 2003: 47).

Mediative potentials of quality journalism

As its title suggests, this article focuses on the capacities and limitations of 'mediative journalism', whereby an emphasis is put on the capacities in order to distil the mediative

potentials of quality journalism, but without ignoring possible obstacles and incoherencies. So, in this section I synthesize the attitudes and processes of mediation and quality journalism to answer the primary research question: Can quality journalism take mediative functions and thus potentially contribute to international conflict transformation processes?

As already mentioned, mediators take responsibility for the mediation process but not for the contents. On the contrary, journalists set the agenda, or decide which aspects of a situation to report; that is, journalists decide on the contents of a report. On the other hand, journalists, like mediators, can provide procedural justness as defined by Haynes et al. (2006), in that journalists can decide which perspectives of the conflict parties and which aspects of a conflict merit their and the public's attention.

Both journalists and mediators can definitely impact conflict resolution processes, but in very different ways and with different approaches. As the concept of public diplomacy elucidates, journalists can influence conflict resolution processes because journalism in its fundamentals is strongly connected to the political sphere. Although journalists certainly are not political decision-makers or serve as professional mediators, they can assist disputing parties indirectly by critically recognizing and exposing every side's position and hidden interests and provide a broad and interested public with in-depth information about the conflict and the conflict parties. In contrast to journalists, mediators directly assist the conflict parties involved and remain discreet vis-a-vis the public.

Nevertheless, given the tasks with which mediators contend, journalists on the whole are similar to mediators: they 'open communication channels'; they can facilitate 'better communication'; and they also act as 'legitimizers' and 'process facilitators' (Moore, 2003: 19). But unlike mediators, journalists cannot provide training for 'unskilled or unprepared negotiators in the bargaining process' (Moore, 2003: 19). However, journalists can be 'resource expanders' by providing an 'expansion of discourse', which is activated by journalistic reporting (Münch, 1991: 257) and by letting non-involved experts contribute, as 'problem explorers' and as 'agents of reality' (Moore, 2003: 19).

Journalists do not lead negotiations directly, but by setting an agenda for reporting or choosing what to report, they can, of course, influence the process just as mediators do on occasion as well. Yet, to say that journalists are possible leaders in negotiations is an exaggeration in this context.

Mediators sometimes act as 'scapegoats, who may take some of the responsibility or blame for an unpopular decision that the parties are nevertheless willing to accept' (Moore, 2003: 19). Journalists sometimes also assume this role, not, of course, for unpopular decisions made by politicians or negotiators, but for their critical reporting, which is their main task. Nevertheless, parties involved in a conflict must, however reluctantly, accept journalists as a critical authority in the process. That is, the very nature of journalism subtly coerces the political actors to justify and legitimize their attitudes and actions because of the permanent, public record journalism creates (Münch, 1991: 257). As a consequence, the ideal situation in mediation whereby the conflict parties willingly participate in negotiations and accept the presence of certain parties does not apply to journalism. In this case, journalism has only a subordinate, not active part in negotiations.

| Mediation (attitude of mediator only): limitations of quality journalism | ⇐ Potential mediative qualities in journalism ⇒ | Quality journalism (attitude of journalist only): limitations of mediation |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scapegoat for unpopular decisions ● Leader ● Trainer ● Future-oriented (not past-oriented!) ● Voluntariness (to some extent) ● Direct influence on conflict transformation processes and discretion towards public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Influence on the process – ‘procedural justness’ (facilitating the process) ● Focusing on interests (more than on positions) ● Future-oriented ● Opening communication channels ● Legitimizing ‘the other’ ● Expanding resources ● Exploring problems ● Agent of reality ● Originality (creating options and alternatives) ● Reflection ● Impartiality/objectiveness/multi-perspectivity ● Timeliness ● Relevance (for conflict parties and for journalistic agenda) ● Interactivity/dialogue ability ● Transparency/reflexivity ● Reducing complexity/creating understandability ● Information/in-depth research/investigation (pre-negotiation phase/‘pre-publication phase’) ● Widening of perceptions/new perspectives on a conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agenda-setting ● Past- (rather than future-) oriented ● Indirect influence on conflict transformation processes and fundamental connection to public |

Figure 1. Potentials and Limitations of Conflict Transformation in Quality Journalism and Mediation

To some extent the mediator’s focus on the future consequences of present negotiations is shared by journalists. Part of a journalist’s critical analysis of conflict negotiations includes projecting outcomes based on proposed courses of action. If a journalist is truly well grounded in aspects of the parties’ material history and cultural identity, he or she proposes possible options to effect certain future consequences.

Figure 1, which is to be understood as a preliminary result of a work in progress, summarizes the capacities and limitations of ‘mediative journalism’, considering also the approaches of quality journalism and mediation discussed in this article.

Conclusion

In this article I have proposed a concept of 'mediative journalism' whereby journalists conscientiously play a part in international political conflict management. Although the nature of the mass media by default draws journalists into the arena of public diplomacy, to play a more effective role I propose that journalists actively incorporate some of the established approaches to conflict resolution employed by mediators. In this section, I briefly mention some areas for further investigations of mediative journalism and the role it can play.

Mediative journalism contributes to social and cultural constructions and reconstructions when applied to issues of globalization processes. For example, Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen (1998) explore the phenomenon of the globalization of news agencies, which also affects journalism. During the 18th NordMedia conference on 'Generations, Communication and Media Philosophy' in Helsinki, Rantanen, a Finnish researcher, exhorted the audience to think about the concept of *global mediation* in terms of information and knowledge transfer and exchange. Keeping global political tensions in mind, a concept of global mediation should also consider possibilities of conflict management and thus the role of the mass media, especially journalism. Mediative journalism also aims to contribute to the scientific discourse on quality journalism as the concept of 'mediative journalism' could provide a catalogue of criteria or checklist on journalistic quality.

The concept of mediative journalism also has to focus on the *systemic preconditions*, or the current working environment for many journalists that prohibits an adequate pre-publication phase; in other words, journalists often lack support from the media institutions that employ them to do adequate research to present critical perspectives in their reports. In fact, in an article about research journalism Leyendecker (2004) laments the systemic problems that produce good reporters but few research journalists.

It cannot be evaluated here if mediative journalism is always and on principle desirable and preferable. On the other hand, a more or less institutional incorporation of mediative journalism would necessitate support for the crucial pre-publication phase that, in turn, aids in producing not only quality journalism but also a more instrumental role for journalists in public diplomacy.

For all that mediative journalism can contribute to public diplomacy and potentially democratize the process, democracy is defunct if the potential audience and readers do not accept responsibility and participate. Habermas's concept of *deliberative democracy* is understood as when 'citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings'.³ Thus deliberative democracy can exist only in a critical and equally deliberative public sphere. To some extent the processes of mediative journalism can address deliberative democracy by conscientiously presenting quality journalism and, like mediators, by being highly aware of their audience's biases, stakes, historical knowledge and critical thinking abilities.

Notes

1. Beside representation and reports on political developments by ambassadors, envoys, observers or other diplomats, the third and maybe most important task of diplomacy is the leading of or

participation in bilateral or multilateral negotiations, which mostly take place within an international conflict that has to be resolved (Hartmann, 1988: 61–9). This article focuses on the last task.

2. 'We talk about Political Mediation, if sociopolitical interests are touched in a conflict and if actors from the political system are involved as ordering parties and/or as conflict parties in the mediation process' (definition of POLITEIA: www.politeia.at; cited from Michal-Misak in Mehta and Rückert, 2003: 268).
3. At: www.deliberative-democracy.net/deliberation/

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