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## Peace journalism and the news production process<sup>1</sup>

*Kurzfassung:* In den vergangenen Jahren wurden von Vertretern unterschiedlicher Disziplinen Modelle eines „Friedensjournalismus“ bzw. „konstruktiver Konfliktberichterstattung“ präsentiert. Darin werden Wege aufgezeigt, wie Medien zu Prozessen der Deeskalation, Friedensschaffung und Versöhnung beitragen können anstatt Konflikte durch ihre Berichterstattung weiter anzuheizen. Solche theoretischen Modelle bleiben für die praktische Arbeit aber irrelevant, wenn sie nicht mit der Realität der heutigen Medien in Beziehung gesetzt werden. Von großer Wichtigkeit ist daher, den Produktionsprozess von Konfliktberichterstattung mit in den Blick zu nehmen. Die Frage, welche Faktoren das Zustandekommen journalistischer Produkte in Konflikt- und Krisenzeiten beeinflussen, ist zugleich die Frage nach den faktischen Ausgangsbedingungen für jeden Versuch konstruktiver Konfliktberichterstattung.

Basierend auf qualitativen Experteninterviews mit deutschen Journalisten wird ein Modell der Einflussfaktoren von Konfliktberichterstattung vorgestellt.

Der Produktionsprozess von Konfliktberichterstattung lässt sich demnach als Resultat einer komplexen Interaktion von sechs Faktoren darstellen: (1) institutionelle und informelle mediale Strukturen; (2) spezifische Konfliktsituation vor Ort; (3) Merkmale des einzelnen Journalisten; (4) politisches Klimas, innerhalb dessen die Konfliktberichterstattung vonstatten geht; (5) Lobbyismus verschiedener Interessensgruppen, (6) Medienrezipienten.

Nach der Entfaltung des Gesamtmodells und einer kurzen Diskussion seiner Begrenzungen wird exemplarisch der Faktor „politisches Klima“ eingehender dargestellt und anhand der Erfahrungen deutscher Journalisten nach dem 11.9.2001 veranschaulicht.

Der Autor vertritt den Standpunkt, dass Modelle konstruktiver Konfliktberichterstattung nur dann für eine kritische Masse von Journalisten attraktiv werden, wenn realisierbare Vorschläge vorliegen, wie mit den Hindernissen umgegangen werden kann, denen Journalisten bei der Umsetzung solcher Modelle in ihrer täglichen Arbeit ausgesetzt sind. Das Modell der Einflussfaktoren von Konfliktberichterstattung könnte dafür einen brauchbaren Ausgangspunkt darstellen. Einerseits wird dadurch eine Systematisierung und Spezifizierung der bisherigen Versuche der Implementierung von Friedensjournalismus ermöglicht, zum anderen vermittelt es Anhaltspunkte für eine umfassendere Strategie, die alle relevanten Faktoren des Produktionsprozess beinhaltet.

*Abstract:* In recent years various models of „peace journalism“ or „constructive conflict coverage“ have been proposed. These models suggest alternative ways of conflict reporting in order to contribute to processes of de-escalation, peacebuilding and reconciliation instead of escalating, exaggerating or neglecting conflicts. However, these models will remain irrelevant for the practical work of journalists unless they are connected to the reality of today's media.

Therefore it is of great importance to also direct our attention to the news production process.

At the same time, studying the factors that influence the production of journalistic reporting in times of conflict and war means learning about the actual preconditions for any effort of constructive conflict coverage.

Based on qualitative expert interviews with German journalists, this paper presents a model of the production process of conflict coverage. According to this model, the production process can be described as a complex interaction of six factors: (1) structural aspects of the media, (2) conflict situation on-site, (3) personal features of the individual journalist, (4) the political climate, (5) lobbies, (6) the audience. After presenting the general model and the discussion of its limitations and possible benefits, the influence of the „political climate“ factor is explored in more detail and illustrated with the experience of German journalists in the aftermath of 9/11.

The author argues that peace journalism can only attract the critical number of journalists needed for a noticeable change in conflict coverage, if there are realizable suggestions for how to meet the obstacles journalists face in their daily work. The model of influencing factors affecting conflict coverage could be a good starting point for this undertaking, as it enables us, on the one hand, to systematize and specify attempts to implement peace journalism and, on the other hand, to develop a more comprehensive strategy that takes into account all the relevant factors of the news production process.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years various models of „peace journalism“ or „constructive conflict coverage“ have been proposed (Bilke, 2002; Galtung, 2002; Kempf, 1996, 2003). These models suggest alternative ways of conflict reporting that can contribute to processes of de-escalation, peace building and reconciliation instead of escalating, exaggerating or ignoring conflicts. They are rooted in the theoretical assumptions of different disciplines: conflict and communication research, sociology and social psychology. At the same time, some practitioners of journalism have been developing guidelines or even detailed manuals for „peace journalists“ (e.g. Cornelius, 2001; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000).

However, neither theoretical models nor practical manuals can fulfill their potential to bring about change if they do not take into account the reality of today's media, on the one hand, and if they focus only on the skills of the individual journalist, on the other hand. Therefore, it is very important to also pay attention to the news production process, to the conditions under which journalists actually work in times of conflict and war and to factors that impact on the process of producing conflict coverage. Studying the factors that influence news coverage means nothing less than learning about the actual preconditions for any attempt at constructive conflict coverage.

While there is a considerable amount of research available on factors that influence coverage in general (e.g. Staab, 1990; Ronneberger, 1988; Weischenberg et al., 1994), things are quite different when it comes to how conflict coverage is actually produced. Moreover, it is mostly the particular factors of the news production process that are studied in detail (e.g. the news selection process and the concept of news value), while there is a lack of more comprehensive theory building.

This paper tries to fill this gap by presenting an empirically-based model of factors that influence conflict coverage production. In addition, it will show how this model could improve efforts to implement peace journalism and constructive conflict coverage.

## 2. Method

This study was carried out within the methodological framework of grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Briefly, grounded theory is „an inductive theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data“ (Martin & Turner, 1986, 141). In contrast to much other research, grounded theory is not about testing previously formulated hypotheses, but about discovering the theory implicit in the data. The main characteristic of grounded theory is the constant comparison of data with other data and of data with the emerging theory. The process of constant comparison involves the construction of codes, categories and subcategories and the exploration of their dimensions and of the relations among categories. Step by step it leads to the development of a theory that illuminates the subject of research. For the analysis of data, specific techniques are recommended (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that were also applied in this study.

The study is based on an analysis of thirty qualitative expert interviews with German journalists who were actively engaged in producing conflict coverage. The subjects worked as foreign editors at home (i.e. in Germany), as regular correspondents on site, or as freelance journalists. The journalists interviewed worked with both print and electronic media. Their expertise in the subject under study originated in the coverage of conflicts and wars in different parts of the world, including the Gulf war (1991), the Balkans, Chechnya, Rwanda, Liberia, Indonesia, Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq (2003).

Working with grounded theory implies a continuing interplay between data collection and analysis. Thus, also in this study the analysis of previously collected data guided the choice of the interviewees, in an effort to obtain the information still needed to „saturate“ the theory.

## 3. Conflict coverage: A model of influencing factors

The following section presents a model of factors that influence conflict coverage production. The model is grounded in the interview data, but also meshes with previous research on individual aspects of the news production process.

With this model we suggest that there are six main factors that influence conflict coverage production: structural aspects of the media, the situation on site, the personal characteristics of individual journalists, the political climate, lobbies, and the media audience.

### 3.1 Structure

The first factor combines a variety of structural aspects. These include legal parameters; type of media (print media or electronic media, daily paper or weekly magazine, etc.); existing formats and spaces within the specific medium; editorial

strategies and procedures; publishers' strategies and expectations and their impact on editors; the criteria of news selection in general; and the overall issue of the media economy. The latter is in turn associated with current developments in the media, such as the merger of media companies and the tendency of media to become faster, more commercial, more entertaining, more dramatized and more internationally interconnected (Löffelholz, 1995). All these aspects exert an obvious influence on conflict coverage production. A journalist employed by a TV station must submit pictures, and if he has no pictures, there will be no coverage (or old and often meaningless pictures will have to be used instead); if space is limited, it will be impossible to include much background in a story; if the editorial strategy is „always be the first to get the story – anything else comes second“, then there probably won't be much stress on thorough investigation; if publishers – to use a contrasting example – have a special interest in „ethical journalism“, then probably more attention will be paid to the fair treatment of the subjects reported on and to the possible side-effects of coverage. The fact that media products have to hold their own in markets means that they must at least attract a reasonable number of readers or viewers and that in the end every story must sell.

Finally, the process of news selection is very much determined by the news value that journalists attach to certain events, and research has shown that there are some general news factors that guide journalists' selection of events, e.g. proximity, surprise value, personalization, reference to elite-nations and elite-persons, negativity, etc. (Allan, 1999). While one might still disagree on the extent to which these news factors are natural and invariable, many journalists regard them as practically the „ground rules“ of journalism, inherent in the structure of their profession. Thus, they also have great relevance for conflict coverage production.

### 3.2 Situation on-site

This factor encompasses all the conditions that correspondents or reporters are exposed to in a specific conflict area. It begins with the geography of the conflict area, which sometimes determines whether there will be any coverage at all. At the beginning of the Afghanistan war, for instance, many journalists waited for days just to get a helicopter to fly over the mountains to the locations that interested them. As one can see from this example, whether geography is a problem or not often depends on a country's infrastructure, e.g. the availability of air links, suitable roads, etc. Also of importance is the question of logistics and equipment. TV correspondents in particular strongly need the technical possibility to transmit their material, but print journalists must also be able to communicate with their editors at home at any given time (something that has become much easier through the invention of sat-phones).

A major issue on site is the security situation. Armed conflicts are by their very nature unsafe for journalists. At the latest the recent wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that journalists are no longer always treated as „neutral observers“ (as they occasionally have the misfortune of coming under direct fire), but can also become strategic targets for conflict parties. Hence it may be that there will be no coverage of an event or of a certain conflict party simply because it is too dangerous for a reporter to be present.

This leads to the next aspect, the accessibility of places and sources. Accessibility may be impossible for security reasons, but conflict parties may also explicitly refuse to allow access. Informants may not be available for the same reasons, but also because local people may fear personal disadvantages if they talk to journalists, because they don't trust foreign reporters, for cultural reasons (e.g. in cultures where women are not allowed to speak in public), etc. Even if there are sources, journalists still face the question of whether they are credible and whether it is possible to check statements against other sources. Again, the consequences for conflict coverage are obvious: no access to conflict locations and credible sources means coverage without direct observation and own investigation, thus „second-hand journalism“ and not uncommonly coverage based on uncertain and dubious information.

As mentioned above, the restrictions imposed by conflict parties can consist in denied or limited access to information sources, but can also include more or less rigid censorship, the threat of expulsion, or other harsh consequences in the case of „uncooperativeness“.

Sometimes it is the conflict constellation itself that has effects on coverage: the more complex a conflict is (in terms of history, culture, number of conflict parties, issues at stake, etc.), the more difficult it can be for journalists to understand the real causes of the conflict and/or the real interests of the conflict parties, and to distinguish promising from unpromising approaches to conflict resolution.

### 3.3 Person

Almost self-evident is the journalist's influence. The way he or she reports is affected by personal and professional values, beliefs and motives, socialization as a journalist, professional self-image (e.g. the journalist as pure observer vs. the journalist as actively involved party), as well as knowledge and personal experience in the field.

More specifically, for conflict coverage we can identify three kinds of necessary competencies:

(1) *Journalistic competence* is what any good journalist should have: the knowledge and skills needed to investigate an issue thoroughly, the ability to structure a report, to write an interesting text, to fit personal coverage into the given formats and spaces, to produce suitable reports despite the unavoidable time pressure, and so on.

(2) *General conflict competence* means, on the one hand, the theoretical knowledge a journalist has about conflicts: types of conflicts, conflict dynamics, typical conflict processes and their outcomes (escalation vs. de-escalation), methods and techniques of conflict resolution. On the other hand, it denotes practical knowledge of how to behave as a journalist in a conflict area. This includes knowledge of necessary security precautions, the ability to weigh the risks and opportunities of a situation, to investigate under difficult conditions and to respond to concerted attempts at influencing coverage by the conflict parties.

(3) *Specific conflict competence* is the knowledge a journalist has about the concrete conflict and the conflict parties. This includes knowledge of a region's history, culture, religion, language, society, political system, economic system, actors and their interests and motives.

The quality of coverage depends to a great extent on the markedness of these competencies. Typically, the markedness of each competence differs depending on the type of journalist. Specific conflict competence is usually high among long-term correspondents who know „their“ country very well, whilst general conflict competence can still be low. The typical war reporter, however, normally has a high level of general conflict competence (at least in terms of practical, if not necessarily of theoretical knowledge). For instance, he is usually experienced in coping with dangerous situations and in moving around in a war zone without being wounded, killed or kidnapped. On the other hand, his specific conflict competence can be rather low, because he often „jumps into“ a conflict in periods of high violence without much background information and leaves the area when the violence subsides.

Needless to say that the best coverage could be expected from a journalist who combines a high level of journalistic competence, general conflict competence and specific conflict competence.

### **3.4 Political climate**

Each country has a certain political and societal climate regarding a conflict in another country. The political climate is characterized by the kind of public attention the conflict receives, by the amount of political activity elicited, the amount of coverage given, the diversity of opinions, the degree of polarization and also the potential sanctions imposed on dissenters.

The political climate depends strongly on the degree of involvement of the country in terms of current policies, current interests, economic, historic and cultural relationships, etc.

For editors and particularly for the individual journalist, the political climate can exert great influence on the prospects of coverage. If, for instance, there is a strong mainstream view shared by both the political elite and the media (as in the USA during the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq), a journalist who takes a different stance may face a quite difficult challenge. If he persists in expressing unpopular views, he runs the risk of being denounced by his colleagues or even of losing his job (Kondopoulou, 2002; Neuber, 2002; see section 4 below). On the other hand, if the political climate is characterized by only modest political and media interest, it normally has no special influence on the content of journalistic reporting. The major problem then consists rather in managing to get the conflict into the news at all.

In section four of this paper this factor will be elaborated in more detail.

### **3.5 Lobbies**

Conflict coverage is mainly not about abstract issues, but rather usually deals with the concrete actions of people, statesmen, parties, organizations, etc. Therefore those who are the subjects of coverage normally have a vital interest in being covered in a positive way. At least this applies to conflict parties that want the support or approval of the public or at least of segments of the public. This is usually the case in democracies, but also dictators and even terrorist networks like Al Qaeda try to convince at least a small segment of the public that their cause is just, as can be seen from the frequency with which new Bin Laden videos keep turning up.

The desire to be covered positively motivates attempts to influence conflict coverage and to use the media for own purposes, hence to publicize one's own opinions and own interpretations of a situation.

In international conflicts, the main lobbying groups are typically policy makers and the military, but other groups, like business associations, NGOs (especially peace and aid organizations), churches, trade unions, etc., also try to influence public opinion.

Lobbying comes in quite varied forms: it may consist merely in the provision of new or alternative information, but it can

also mean a sophisticated system of information management which leaves no doubt as to who will receive what information at what time, who will be given access to relevant locations and persons, what information will be withheld, which pictures will be shown and which not, how one's own actions and those of the enemy are to be interpreted, and also when deliberately misleading or inaccurate reports will be promulgated (cf. Luostarinen & Ottosen, 2002).

Examples of professional information management are the press conferences held by NATO spokesman Jamie Shea during the Kosovo war or the briefings given by the US central command in Qatar during the war against Iraq. In contrast, misinformation attempts by Iraqi information minister Muhammed Saeed al-Sahaf were utterly amateurish and transparent to any journalist – and thus became notorious only due to their absurdity.

### 3.6 Audiences

Media products must be successful in the marketplace, for otherwise they will disappear sooner or later. As with any other products, their success depends on the laws of supply and demand. Demand is dependent on the interests, knowledge, habits and expectations of the audience. If we consider how much money the media spend on consumer research just to identify their readers or viewers and what they are or are not interested in, it is clear that audience interests have a considerable impact on media coverage.

The audience probably has no direct effect on the opinions of journalists regarding a given political issue. It rather affects their choice of topics, decisions about which issues are to be covered to what extent and which are to be covered at all, and choices in regard to the layout and presentation of reports.

In Figure 1 the six main factors influencing conflict coverage production are depicted in a single scheme.

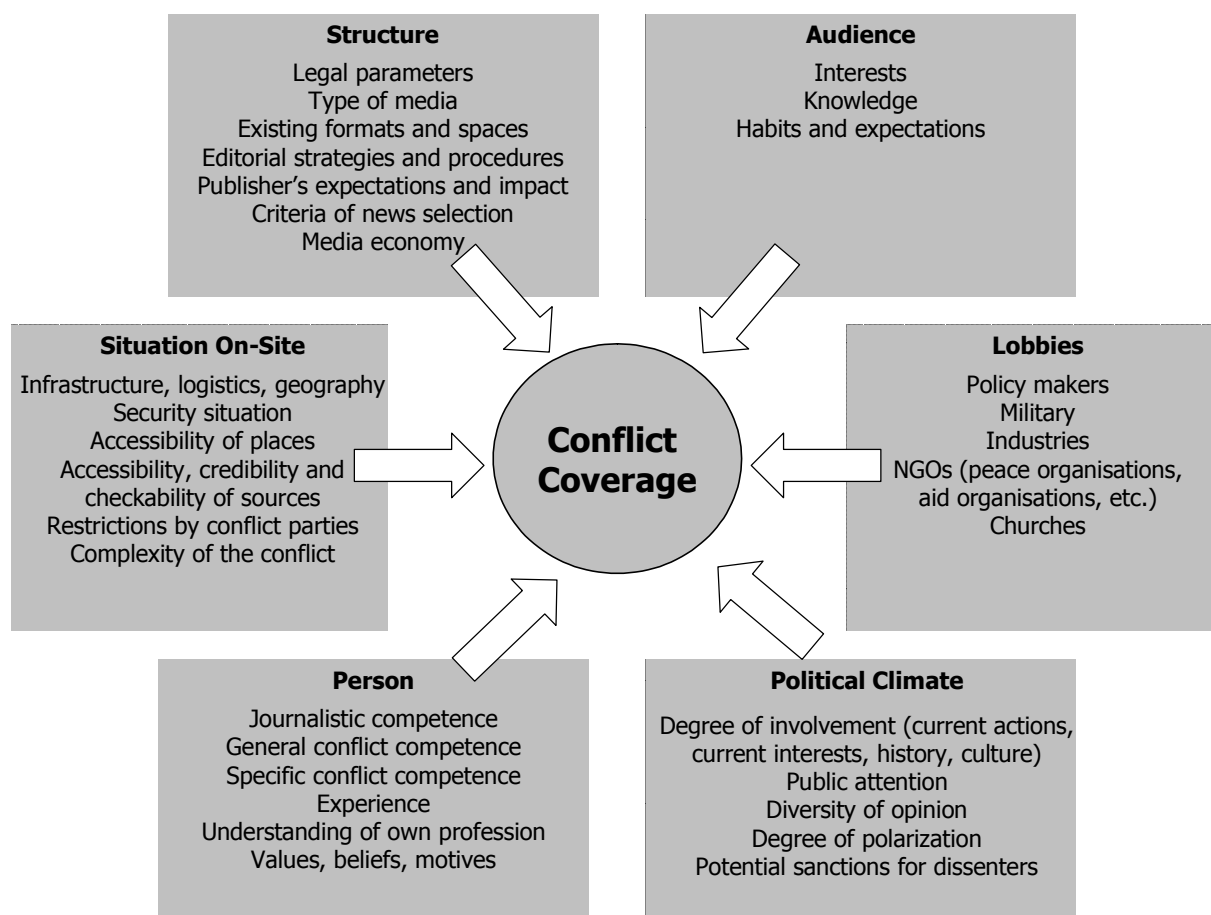


Figure 1: Factors influencing the production of conflict coverage

### 3.7 Some explanatory remarks

The model of influencing factors outlined above is of course simplified. The relations among influencing factors are much more complex than indicated here. In fact, many factors interact and mutually influence each other to different degrees, e.g. one factor's influence can depend on the markedness of another factor.

For example, it is obvious from the perspective of supply and demand that the relation between audience expectations and interests and editorial strategy is not a one-way street. On the one hand, audience interest does influence media coverage, as noted above. On the other hand, audience interests and expectations are also influenced and shaped by the media through previous coverage, by both the content and style of coverage. So, for example, if there is never any coverage of the situation in Guinea-Bissau, then it should hardly be a surprise that the public will not be very interested in this country, since they know absolutely nothing about it. If by chance an article about the country should appear, readers will have no basis for relating to this topic, and thus it is likely that the article will receive little attention. So if consumer research then reveals that readers are not interested in Guinea-Bissau, but prefer to read about President Bush's next election campaign or some other current topic, then this clearly is (not only, but) also a result of previous media coverage.

In order to clarify the way factors interact, we can examine the factors „situation on site“ and „person“. An experienced journalist with high general conflict competence might still find ways to obtain the information he wants in spite of restrictions imposed by conflict parties. A correspondent with high specific conflict competence should be more likely to comprehend the complexity of a conflict and should not be as vulnerable to the information management tactics of the conflict parties. An inexperienced journalist working for the first time in a conflict area, to the contrary, might find it much harder to cope with difficulties on site, or might not even be aware of the potential hazards.

Some aspects of the news production process may not be clearly attributable to only one influencing factor. For instance, in our model „lobbies“ are classified as an additional influencing factor, though certainly lobbying strategies like information management are part of the situation on site as well, and as lobbies also try to exert influence on editors and publishers, the process is also related to the factor of „structure“.

### 3.8 Advantages of the model

Despite these simplifications and shortcomings, the model can help us to understand the complex factors that influence the conflict coverage process. An understanding of the complexity and intermeshing of different factors is crucial when one tries to change the end-product of the news production process: the actual conflict coverage.

So far there have been different proposals for achieving more peace-oriented, more constructive conflict coverage. Using our model, these proposals can be systematized in terms of the factors focused on.

A growing number of researchers and also practitioners have started to offer training for journalists who cover conflict and war. In one type of training program, journalists are taught how to report in a more constructive and peace-oriented way (e.g. online courses in peace journalism offered by the Transcend Peace University). There are also other kinds of training where journalists explicitly learn how to deal with the security situation and how to protect themselves in dangerous war zones. Training programs that do not usually aim at more constructive coverage are mostly offered by the military (e.g. by the German Armed Forces, which conduct one-week training programs on a regular basis) or, especially in the USA, by private companies, often run by former military personnel. Nevertheless, they may also be able to provide essential skills to „peace journalists“, who have the same security problems as other journalists covering war zones. Accordingly, there are also an increasing number of handbooks available on both constructive conflict reporting (e.g. McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000) and the security issue (e.g. CPJ, 2003). All these different kinds of training programs and handbooks can be seen as efforts to enhance journalists' competencies in conflict coverage; thus, they attempt to change the „person“ factor.

Others suggest that we should primarily concentrate on the structural aspects of media production. This manifests itself in calls for more independent media corporations and preventing the growth of large media conglomerates. One can also focus on the structure of the news itself, e.g. on the fact that peace events normally seem to have no news value and thus are seldom given extensive coverage. Thus, the strategy proposed here is to find ways of adding news value to peace events (Shinar, 2004).

Krotz (2001) maintains that the media should achieve the same standards of communication technology as the military. He recommends that media corporations from different countries should join forces in operating their own communications satellite so that the media will have an independent source of information and not have to rely so heavily on information provided by conflict parties. Hence, this would mean a change in media structure (improved technology and international cooperation) to change the power balance on site.

Ottosen (2003) holds that the prerequisite for changing conflict coverage is a social movement within audiences. Only when the public demands alternative conflict coverage, only when there is a real market for something like peace journalism, will

it be possible to achieve constructive conflict coverage. The assumption is that if the market were there, everything else – such as journalistic guidelines and strategies, interest in specific competencies, changes in media structures – would follow.

This brief survey shows that to date almost all proposals concentrate on the change of only one influencing factor. There is no comprehensive strategy that addresses all or at least most of the factors involved in the process of producing conflict coverage.

This is unfortunate, because it can be assumed that no one factor is the key to a more peace-oriented journalism, but that real and lasting change can only come about if all factors are tackled. This is not to say that current attempts are futile. It is certainly a sign of progress when increasing numbers of journalists begin to supplement their knowledge of conflict dynamics and learn strategies of constructive conflict coverage. However, one should not be surprised if the overall effects on conflict coverage remain limited due to the influence of other factors.

#### 4. Political climate

##### 4.1 Climatic zones and climatic conditions

In this section the factor of „political climate“ is further elaborated.

For a given country, the political climate surrounding a conflict in another country depends strongly on its type of involvement. On a scale of possible kinds of involvement, six types of conflict can be identified that constitute six different „climatic zones“. Possible types of involvement range from the direct involvement of one’s country (climatic zone I) to no direct involvement of one’s country or allies and no other reasons for interest (climatic zone VI). From the German perspective, examples for „climatic zone I“ are the Kosovo and Afghanistan conflicts, for „climatic zone VI“ most conflicts in African countries can be used.

Climatic Zone	Defined by	Examples (German perspective)
I	Direct involvement of own country	Kosovo, Afghanistan
II	Direct involvement of allies and support of own political leaders	Gulf War
III	Direct involvement of allies but disapproval of own political leaders	Iraq
IV	Direct involvement of allies, no clear-cut support or disapproval of own political leaders	Israel/Palestine
V	No direct involvement of own country or allies, but other reasons for interest	India/Pakistan, Rwanda, East Timor
VI	No direct involvement of own country or allies, no other reasons for interest	Sierra Leone, most African countries

Table 1: Climatic zones: defining features and examples

The six climatic zones are distinguished by different „climatic conditions“. Among other things, these climatic conditions can be characterized by the amount of political activity, the amount of coverage, the kind of political discourse and the potential negative consequences for dissenters. Comparing climatic zones I and VI, for instance, the amount of political activity is enormous vs. modest; the amount of coverage is enormous vs. practically non-existent; political discourse is highly emotional and highly polarized and often escalation-oriented vs. no real discourse at all; potential negative consequences for dissenters are severe vs. non-existent. In Table 2 the characteristic features of all six climatic zones are summarized.

<b>Climatic conditions</b>				
<b>Climatic zone</b>	<b>Amount of political activity</b>	<b>Amount of coverage</b>	<b>Political discourse</b>	<b>Potential negative consequences for dissenters</b>
I	enormous	enormous	highly emotional highly polarized tendency for strong mainstream tendency for escalation-orientation	severe
II	enormous	enormous	highly emotional highly polarized tendency for escalation-orientation	marked
III	large	enormous	emotional, polarized	modest
IV	large	large to enormous	emotional, polarized, but higher chances to find balanced views	modest
V	modest	can be large for a short time span, but normally modest	matter-of-fact/rational or emotional, but usually not polarized	–
VI	modest	practically non-existent	no real discourse at all	–

Table 2. Climatic zones: climatic conditions

It must be emphasized that the attributes listed in the table should be seen as general tendencies rather than as exact definitions. Furthermore, other variables that impact on climatic conditions are not mentioned in the table. For instance, the duration of a conflict and the occurrence or non-occurrence of certain political events, often connected to political success or failure, can change the climatic conditions of coverage to a considerable extent. (A prominent example of change in climatic conditions over time is the war in Vietnam). Last but not least, this model of climatic zones and climatic conditions is primarily based on the experiences and opinions of the journalists interviewed in the course of this study and on own theoretical consideration. Hence, it is a model that will have to be tested in the future. However, it is also based on and supported by other research findings.

The assumption of a strong mainstream within the media that supports the actions of the political and military elites in the case of the direct conflict involvement of one's own country is consistent with Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1988). Their approach in a general sense suggests that the media inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agendas of the privileged groups that dominate their domestic society and state. Furthermore, the existence of such a mainstream is consistent with the finding that even among newspapers with distinctly different political orientations there is a considerable degree of consonance when it comes to issues of external relations (Eilders, 2001). According to Kempf (1998), mainstream reporting and escalation-orientation are at least partly influenced by the fact that journalists are themselves members of their society and thus vulnerable to the same psychological processes that occur whenever a conflict is conceptualized as a competitive rather than a cooperative process. These psychological processes include social commitment to antagonism, to portraying conflict as a zero-sum game pitting good against evil, or to denouncing attempts at third-party mediation or the search for compromises (Kempf, 1996; Deutsch, 1976). Comparative studies of how the Gulf War and Bosnian conflict were covered in the American and European media support the hypothesis of a connection between a country's degree of involvement and the degree of polarization and escalation-orientation of media coverage: „the more a society is involved in a conflict itself and the closer it is to the conflict region (in historical, political, economic or ideological terms) ..., the more escalation-oriented will be its media coverage of the conflict“ (Kempf, 1998, 7).

Even if we accept that there are very diverse „climatic zones“ of coverage depending on a country's degree of involvement, we can still ask about the extent to which political climate exerts an influence on the individual journalist's activities. In climatic zones VI and V there is usually either no polarized discourse or no discourse at all. Thus, journalists who report on a conflict under such „climatic conditions“ are to the greatest possible extent free in the choice of the issues they cover, in their assessment of the situation and in the stance they take with regard to the conflict parties. They are usually in the agreeable situation of being among the few experts on the given conflict and thus normally need not fear any challenge



from their colleagues. And even if they make controversial reports and their coverage provokes disagreement, it mostly remains limited to expert discourse and goes unnoticed by the general public – because the public and also mainstream journalists know too little about the conflict or are simply not very interested. Accordingly, journalists who cover neglected conflicts do not have to worry about any negative consequences, no matter what they actually report (as long as they meet normal journalistic standards).

Things are already different for climatic zones IV, III and II, and even more so for zone I.

The higher the degree of conflict involvement of their own country, the more severe will be the potential negative consequences for dissenters. This again is due to the climatic conditions of the conflict. The greater the mainstream coverage and the more polarized the discourse, the more likely it is that dissenters from the mainstream view will be sanctioned in one way or another.

This may seem like a description of a totalitarian society. Actually it is also the case in democratic societies. Certainly there are important differences. Dissenters in totalitarian societies often risk their lives and welfare, no matter whether they succeed in reaching a public audience. In democratic societies, to the contrary, dissenting opinions normally are not completely suppressed from the start. Usually non-mainstream opinions are also published or broadcast in some form, even if the country is at war. However, they are often framed in a way that makes them appear irrelevant, absurd, incompetent, idealistic, or naïve (something that continually happens to the positions of the peace movement). Even if it is impossible to dismiss dissenting opinions in this way, it is still possible to sanction the individual journalist. Such sanctions are effective in two ways. Dissenters will think twice before they publicize their dissent again, and other potential dissenters will be deterred.

Democratic societies do not automatically impose sanctions in every case of dissent. Whether or not a journalist is sanctioned depends not only on the climatic conditions of the conflict, but also on his employer and on the degree and persistence of his dissent. For example, Ulrich Wickert, one of the most prominent journalists on German TV, quickly retracted his comparison of the mindsets of George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden after he was harshly criticized and after a leading politician even called for his dismissal. It was only due to his public apology that there were no further consequences.

Moreover, we can assume that there is also a considerable number of undetected cases of sanctioned dissent that never becomes known to the public. This supposition seems reasonable, because even the victims of sanctions are not necessarily interested in drawing public attention to their cases. After all, they want to continue to work as journalists and are usually dependent on their present employer.

The motives behind sanctioning mechanisms can be diverse. One can again argue like Herman and Chomsky that the mainstream media serve dominant societal groups by furthering their agendas and therefore will attack anyone who questions this agenda or even their dominance itself. (We can assume that the vast majority of journalists would indignantly reject this thesis – though this does not by any means disprove it). In some cases journalists may even welcome an opportunity to vent their ill feelings toward a highly unpopular colleague. Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly in most cases, the social psychological processes referred to above can also account for the sanctioning of dissenters when war is on the domestic agenda. A process of creating social commitment to victory over the enemy is typical when group conflicts are constructed as competitive processes; this in turn encourages the condemnation of actors on one's side who question their country's position and propose alternative forms of conflict resolution. Often they are denounced as disloyal. Journalists, as they are also members of the domestic society that is at war, can easily become part of these processes if they are not aware of them. Thus, journalists do not have to consciously decide to join in punishing dissenters, they may simply be swept along by group processes within the journalistic community and also by general societal processes.

## 4.2 Examples of negative consequences for dissenters

To illustrate the different kinds of negative consequences that dissenters may face, in the following section some typical examples are presented from the interviews conducted in this study.

The following quotations refer to the aftermath of 9/11. The mainstream German media supported the war against Afghanistan and backed the position of the German government. Moreover, in the weeks immediately after 9/11 practically any criticism of US policy was dismissed as „anti-American“ in Germany. As the examples will show, in such a climate negative consequences for dissenters are highly probable, but they will differ in their severity.

Quotations 1 to 3 stem from a prominent German journalist who made himself vulnerable through his outspoken disapproval of the 2001 war against Afghanistan.

One consequence can be personal downgrading by other members of the journalistic community. In this case colleagues stop responding to the dissenter's arguments and instead attack him personally, e.g. by making him into an object of ridicule:

For example, R.M. wrote that given my commitment to Afghanistan I would howl if so much as a fire-cracker exploded at my feet.

Yet, this still seems fairly harmless, and no doubt anyone who takes a controversial stance in such a debate must be able to tolerate such remarks. Particularly if one takes into account that denouncing antiwar activists as weak, cowardly or disloyal is one of the traditional tactics of war enthusiasts.

However, if the media mainstream is aroused, it may even start outright campaigns against dissenters:

The next thing was that the Springer Group,<sup>1</sup> with all its possibilities for mobilization, classified me as anti-American. The interesting thing was that for this purpose they had to falsify quotations, they had to take quotations out of context; they first had to make hateful what they claimed to hate. If they had printed what I had really said, then everybody would have thought, okay, actually that seems to make sense. But my experience was that in this situation no one is interested in letting the other side say what it really thinks.

Especially if – as in our case – the dissenter is well known, and if his arguments usually reach a large audience, he seems to face a higher risk of becoming the victim of a defamatory campaign. There are at least two good reasons for this: firstly, in such cases it is more advantageous for other media to attack a prominent colleague, both in terms of general public attention, thus of circulation and viewing figures, and in terms of discrediting the whole anti-war movement by deconstructing a prominent supporter. Secondly, it is often the only real sanction that can be imposed on prominent journalists, because their reputation normally protects them from other (probably more common) sanctions like disciplinary measures or dismissal.

Another possibility is the sheer suppression of dissenters' opinions. For the dissenter himself this may not be as unpleasant as a defamatory campaign against him, but with regard to basic democratic principles like freedom of press and freedom of speech, it can be even worse:

The Biolek Show<sup>2</sup> was interesting, at first, because initially I was supposed to answer entirely different questions. Before appearing on this program, they normally tell you in advance what you will be asked about. This time I was very surprised that on the show I was asked only one of the many questions I had received in advance. All the other questions were new ground. And then suddenly I was obviously the intellectual being exploited by the anti-American intellectual culture. The next thing was that typically enough I was the last one to speak, and moreover that my speaking time was cut short. ... And the next consequence was that when the show was rebroadcast, four minutes of my statement were deleted. Which had never happened before.

If a dissenter is not prominent, suppressing his opinions can endanger his very livelihood. The quotation below comes from a freelancer who filmed a documentary about a German teacher who was transferred for disciplinary reasons because he had harshly denounced American foreign policy at a student rally after 9/11. In the end, the journalist also had a similar experience with the channel he formerly worked for:

There were several attempts to submit the film, and on every occasion new objections were raised. Objections in general are nothing unusual; you can't just assume that the editor will immediately accept everything as it is. What was unusual was that any changes I made at the editor's request always led to new demands for changes. And at a certain point it finally became clear that it was no longer a question of changes, but about making the whole production impossible. In the end it went so far that some parts of the script – that we had initially agreed on – were completely eliminated.

As this journalist was unwilling to cut his film in a way that would have altered its overall message, the film was never shown on TV. Moreover, the affair had a considerable negative long-term effect:

I was already preparing the next production, and before the contract was concluded, the editor in charge told me that it wouldn't come to anything. Later I learned that there was an order that productions with this writer – no matter what they were about – should not be broadcast on this channel anymore. ...That was the bitter consequence of this film. And since then I have never worked for this channel again.

### 4.3 Consequences for the implementation of peace journalism

Considering these experiences and our model of „climatic zones“ with specific „climatic conditions“, what can be learned with regard to the practice of peace journalism?

First, we can assume that the realization of peace journalism should be easier in conflicts where neither one's own country nor its closest allies are involved. In this case, the chances look better for balanced, all-sided, truth-oriented, win-win oriented coverage.

In contrast, if one's own country is involved, and possibly also if close allies are involved, then peace journalism will be more difficult. This is due to the generally more polarized and emotionalized political climate and to the severe negative consequences (personally and/or professionally) that dissenters can face.

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1. The conservative Springer Publishing Group is one of the biggest German media enterprises.
  2. This was a popular talk show on German TV hosted by well-known TV personality Alfred Biolek.

These difficulties should not be underestimated. However, in spite of, or rather exactly because of these obstacles, we should give thought to strategies that support peace journalism. Some possible strategies for tackling the problems that go with bad climatic conditions are the following:

- Encourage journalists to be dissenters (something that can also be learned in training courses, e.g. in the form of realistic role playing)
- Enhance journalists' sensitivity to processes of group dynamics and the resulting cognitive distortions – between correspondents, within the media, within a society (e.g. a basic understanding of social psychology)
- Support independent media structures instead of the conglomeration of media corporations
- Publicize cases of sanctioned dissent; discuss the real state of freedom of the press

These are only a few suggestions, and some of them may even be controversial. For instance, journalists may not be interested in becoming publicly known as „dissenters“, precisely because of the potentially negative personal consequences. Hence, attempts to publicize cases of sanctioned dissent may be necessary in order to start a public debate about this issue, but at the same time this can be disadvantageous for the affected journalists.

Thus, further consideration and research are needed in order to develop a comprehensive strategy to handle different climatic conditions in a constructive way.

## 5. Conclusions

Anyone interested in furthering peace journalism should be well aware of the factors that influence the news production process. The six main factors identified in this study are structural aspects of the media, the situation on site, the individual journalist, the political climate, lobbies, and the audience. Only if these factors are taken into consideration can effective strategies be developed for furthering peace journalism.

Any factor that influences conflict coverage also has aspects that can impede the realization of peace journalism. What follows from the diversity of influencing (and impeding) factors is that researchers and practitioners also have to think of more specific strategies to overcome these obstacles. Developing guidelines for constructive conflict coverage, enhancing reporters' conflict competencies, and teaching young journalists how to report in a peace-oriented way are certainly a good start. However, now we are at a point where general models and strategies need to be specified in more concrete terms. Theoretical models of peace journalism should be operationalized and adapted to the complexities of media reality. Otherwise they are likely to inspire at most a few idealistic reporters, but not the critical number of journalists needed to bring about major changes in the production of conflict coverage.

Thus, there is a need for more specific suggestions for the implementation of peace journalism. How can peace journalism be realized under a variety of political, historical, cultural, and geographical conditions? How can it be implemented within the different structures, procedures and „cultures“ of media corporations? How can we overcome the obstacles that arise in journalists' daily activities and vary from conflict to conflict?

These questions are still to be answered. The model of influencing factors affecting conflict coverage presented here could be a starting point for exploring the respective aspects in more detail, as was indicated with regard to political climate.

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