Socio-Cultural Contexts and Peace Journalism: A case for meso-level comparative sociological investigation of journalistic cultures

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Abstract: The article argues that through explorations of differing identity formation among journalist-groups according to socio-cultural contexts, Peace Journalism has to test the applicability and acceptability of its normative frameworks in different settings. The article identifies lessons Peace Journalism can include from other academic sub-fields to understand the professional life-worlds of journalists in post-conflict societies. The study proffers a meso-level investigation framework of journalists' awareness of and negotiation with the circulation of 'flaks', 'frames' and 'myths' through the 'feedback loop(s)' they work within and re-categorizes micro-level findings from a study conducted in Kenya with this meso-level framework as an illustration.

Keywords: Journalism, Peace Journalism, Media Sociology, Post-Conflict Societies, Peace and Conflict Studies.

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1. Introduction

Peace Journalism [PJ] as a corrective sub-discipline of journalism has identified journalists'

"critical self-awareness" as the way to "bring us to the point of journalistic revolution"

(Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: xvi-xx). But sociological studies of journalists-at-work are rare within PJ leaving open the questions of what choices journalists face, what choices they have and what choices they do make as a result. As Betz (2015:229) observes in this context:

> Thousands, if not tens of thousands of journalists have been trained over the years…to report in a conflict sensitive manner, to follow codes of ethics and such. Yet many of these journalists work in a disabling environment – an environment that simply does not support what they are trained to do.

Drawing on representative texts of the three different sub-fields of 'manufacturing consent', 'media contest' and 'media culture' (Cottle, 2006: 30) and the further 'corrective' practice/discipline of Peace Journalism, the discussion below takes a socio-semiotic meso-level approach in looking into such 'environmental' influences on journalists' work and their awareness of such influences. These can be incorporated into journalism studies in general but it is imperative for Peace Journalism in particular to be informed of what journalists 'have to know' to be 'self-aware' about their professional role since journalistic self-awareness is central to PJ's conception of itself. The next section outlines what such sociological exploration can add to Peace Journalism.

2. Sociological exploration of journalists' self-awareness in post-conflict societies

More 'self-reflexive journalists' – doing journalism which is aware of its own surroundings and shortcomings – is a goal to which not only Peace Journalism scholars and practitioners

(e.g. Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: xvi-xix) aspire but journalism studies scholars in general would also agree as we see, for example, in the call for "liaison editors" by Entman (2004: 165) and "self-conscious journalism" by Pedelty (1995: 226-227). A nuanced understanding of such consciousnesses should then indeed form "priorities in media research" as Cohen and Young (1973: 20) had pointed out decades back. Contextual differences between journalist-groups has been studied extensively in journalism studies research. But the implicit assumption in PJ has been that journalists and editors *can* make aware choices in favour of contextualizing conflicts with a peaceful frame and that existing Western public service media guidelines can provide fertile ground for PJ implementation (Lynch, 2011: 295-6) no matter which context they work in. This does not provide enough substantive material to build a case that they indeed *do* or *will*. The treatment in existing PJ literature of this central notion of PJ that journalists will take up the cudgel to change professional norms to correct systemic imbalances in conflict reportage is limited to providing a list of existing projects from across the world as examples (McGoldrick, 2006: 4; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 223; Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 195). Such existence does not prove efficacy. The present article draws attention to the assumption that lies behind PJ that it is universally applicable across the world and as such it should have a global scope.

This assumption is made within PJ especially about 'transitional' or 'war victim' societies. It is based on the idea that where media has fuelled or is fuelling violence, journalists are more amenable to take up the cause of PJ (Hackett, 2006: 11; Hackett, 2011: 45). The central idea in PJ remains that, "journalists in post-colonial societies are most ready to adapt it [PJ] as an organising principle; their own teleological journalistic ethic" (Lynch and

McGoldrick, 2005: 223; parenthesis added) without adequate or enough research-based sociological evidence provided for such 'most readiness'. This at a time when studies of journalism cultures are increasingly pointing to a messier global reality where journalists' conception of their own work differ widely across different countries, cultures and contexts and emerging research even points out specifically that the acceptance and acceptability of PJ norms is dependent on local frames, norms and contexts (Weighton, 2015).

This is not to say that PJ literature offers no evidentiary basis for its claims for journalists from post-conflict and conflict-ridden countries entirely (e.g. Onadipe and Lord's 1999 study of journalists from 11 sub-Saharan African countries, quoted in McGoldrick, 2006:6). But so far within PJ the idea of PJ's applicability and acceptability rests on surmise at worst, isolated examples at best. And this at a time when journalism studies scholars have been pursuing the understanding of socio-cultural variances within journalistic awareness and identity.

3. Existing research on socio-cultural contexts of conflict journalism

Following Hallin's (1984) demonstration with the example of the Vietnam War coverage of how journalists from a certain national or cultural context work within shared assumptions – "the region of motherhood and apple pie" – as well as shared motivations and boundaries (1984: 21), studies of journalistic cultures have been an important way of enquiring about media's role in conflict. Allan and Zelizer (2004: 3-22) point out the importance of understanding the views of journalists themselves and the contexts they work within when they say "a reporter's sense of national identity, however defined, needs to be considered in

a way that sheds light both on how it can underpin journalism's strengths while, simultaneously, recognizing the constraints it can impose on the integrity of practice" (2004: 4). They stress the need to understand the "repository of adaptations by which journalists constitute themselves as responsible for bearing witness" (2004:13). These repository of adaptations by journalists are multifarious and as a result journalism is in no way conceivable as a universally agreed upon monolithic practice, instead, they are "culturally and regionally bound" or at least dictated largely by where their texts are circulated (Ruusunoksa, 2006: 95).

Most importantly for discussions on conflict reportage, Tumber and Prentoulis (2003: 220) observe that the "factor that plays a decisive role in the construction of a war correspondent's identity…is constructed around three axes: service to the public; their professionalism (which may exhibit different peculiarities compared with journalism in general); and the internalization of the values associated with reporting conflict". These three axes and related concepts have been explored within, across and between Western and non-Western journalist groups with findings of important variances in identity formation. Some examples of studies which explore these 'adaptations' to the social and national myths by conflict journalists specifically are Tumber's (journalists' identification with the military through embedding and how it relates to the 'heroic' identity of war journalists; 2004: 190-205), Bromley's (Australian journalistic identity based on national myths of the 'digger'; 2004: 224-243) as well as Rantanen's (the study of the construction of an immanent pan-European journalistic identity; 2004: 301-314). A review of such studies shows that journalism as a culture is striated with various differences, even within

the 'Western' context. The 'Digger' myth-based identity among Australian war correspondents identified by Bromley is not necessarily shared by journalists from, for example, USA, nor is the Pan-European identification found by Rantanen shared by journalists even from within Europe, e.g. UK.

Evidence also suggests that the differences between Western and non-Western journalistic identity and identification are even more fraught. Researchers of the 'Worlds of Journalism' project have been exploring how national and individual factors (Hanitzsch et al, 2011: 272-92) determine how a journalist views his or her professional norms. Hanitzsch et al. (2011: 275) measure "the three central areas in which journalism cultures materialize" namely "the perception of journalism's institutional roles, epistemologies and ethical ideologies" across 18 different countries. It is important here to break down what these three areas individually imply to show how PJ can benefit from such research by identifying areas of opportunity as well as possible resistance to itself.

Institutional role of journalism is meant to be the "normative and actual" function that journalistic texts and text-producers play in a particular country. Hanitzsch et al (2011: 275) further divide this institutional role into three dimensions: degree of interventionism (neutral/objective stance as opposed to promoting public journalism values) in a journalism culture, the position assumed by journalists to those in power in that society (adversarial or colluding) and lastly their orientation towards market (specifically whether the audience is viewed as citizens or consumers by the journalists). Hanitzsch et al (2011) seek to further pinpoint the discourses at work in a particular journalism culture through the role that epistemologies play in that culture, namely the epistemes of objectivism vs.

subjectivism, and empiricism vs. "reason, ideas, values, opinion and analysis" (Hanitzsch et al, 2011: 276). A further component of the imagined discursive values at work in a journalism culture according to Hanitzsch et al (2011: 276) is the ethical attitude and the degree of flexibility while adhering to ethical values that journalists are prepared to display in a certain culture. Each of these elements can be said to be pertinent to PJ's own concern with the difference between the 'normative' and 'actual' practices of journalism, and between providing 'contexts' beyond mere fact-based reporting. Yet, such investigations have been largely absent from conceptions of the applicability and acceptability of PJ frameworks by journalists across different contexts.

Examples of opportunities for PJ in post-conflict countries that can be derived from the studies mentioned above would be the observations by Hanitzsch et al. (2011: 287) that there are differences in how journalists imagine their own social function between professionals in western countries and "among journalists in developing societies and transitional contexts" and that even the understanding of such a central concept of mainstream journalism as 'objectivity' is "often idiosyncratic" across cultures and not shared universally. Another distinction between Western and non-Western journalists that Hanitzsch et al. (2011: 287) point out is that "in the area of professional ethics, non-western journalists tend to approve of the idea of contextual and situational ethical decision-making and the application of individual standards more than their colleagues in the West."

Research conducted in sites where journalists from different journalism cultures work side by side, namely international news agencies, also bear up these findings of differences in professional perceptions between Western and non-Western journalists. Bunce (2010:

527) found evidence of tensions playing out between local journalists "writing as 'insiders' on their own country, and the local criticisms that can arise of 'outsiders' perceived as exploitatively pursuing their own professional gain". "This would suggest" Bunce (2010: 527) remarks that "any claims about the dissolution of the 'inside'/'outside' cultural dichotomy in the era of global media are premature". This tension between local perspectives and global/organizational norms was also noticed and clearly spelt out in an earlier study of 'fixers' (i.e. local journalist-interpreters working with foreign journalists) and foreign journalists in Iraq by Palmer and Fontan (2007: 5-24).

To sum up, the lesson that PJ can derive from such areas of enquiry into journalistic work is that if there are differing assumptions made by journalists and which in turn shape the journalists, then viewing journalism as a monolithic practice transcending borders is necessarily flawed, and that a corrective to the norms of journalism also has to follow a more nuanced approach to contextual differences across geographical and cultural boundaries. If apple pie is not a universal favourite, then prescriptions which call for adding whipped cream might not work across the world either.

The subjective differences within international news gathering practitioners explored by Palmer and Fontan (2010) and Bunce (2010) in the studies mentioned above or the journalistic self-evaluation model of the studies by Worlds of Journalism project researchers have important implications for PJ. However, this article takes heed of Hamelink's (2015: 44) call that different academic disciplines related to conflict, peace and media need to be viewed together to form broader understanding of media's role in conflict. As such, understanding these Global/Local, Western/Non-Western differences in the work of journalists must also take into account what Pedelty called the "textual effect"

(1995: 56) of the "different social and psychological contexts" (1995: 208) of journalists –
i.e. differences in the journalistic text produced. Paterson (2011: 99-100) writes in the
context of international television news agencies that "[i]f the brain of [newsgathering] is
made up of the central newsrooms…, then the heart is made up of the hundreds of…local
journalists and photographers…." This he says (2011: 100) "raises the intriguing question
of whether local understandings of events and local loyalties ever conflict with the
established (globally oriented…) story frames…."

With the *dual* purpose of understanding the variances that subjective differences in
journalistic identity can create in 'story frames' as Paterson points out and to understand
the positions and dispositions of journalists within the 'weak field' of journalism permeated
by forces external to it in a particular context (Hackett, 2006:6), this article argues for a
meso-level exploration of journalists and their awareness of and negotiation with the
circulation of 'flaks', 'myths' and 'frames' in their particular contexts. This model,
elaborated below, merges the semiotic understandings of journalistic texts with
sociological exploration of the differences in the work of journalists in different places
paving the way for a fuller exploration of journalists working in such varying 'contexts' –
just as Shinar (2007:7) points out for the PJ research agenda to include – to test the
applicability and acceptability of PJ's norms and prescriptions for working journalists.

4. Lessons for PJ from other academic sub-fields of media and conflict

This section makes use of the heuristic convenience afforded by the categorical clusters
delineated by Simon Cottle in *Mediatized Conflict* (2006:30) to identify three academic sub-
fields which deal with conflict journalism: 'manufacturing consent', 'media contest' and

'media culture'. An important distinction to be pointed out here is that while Cottle's preference is to find commonalities among these three clusters in their points of view of the constitutive effect on public discourses and opinions – indeed the *'private life-worlds'* of audiences (Cottle, 2006:3) – the goal here is to form an understanding of the discussions of journalists' work, i.e. their *professional life-worlds*, among these three clusters of academic sub-fields.

This idea of treating journalists' "daily being and consumption practices" (Cottle, 2006: 3) as recipient of and constituted by the same public discourses and opinions as their audiences is not discrepant with the discussions in the academic sub-disciplines themselves: they acknowledge much the same, e.g. in Scheufele's (1999:118) understanding of framing which recognises the effect of frames on 'journalists as audiences' or the understanding in Hall's (1993:94) encoding/decoding model that 'encoders' of media messages are also subsumed by social "knowledge frameworks" and "relations of production" as much as 'decoders'.

4.1 Views on journalistic works within 'Manufacturing Consent' cluster

Discussions in this cluster of criticism of conflict reportage focuses on news media's compliance with powerful elite and corporate interests (Herman and Chomsky,1988) in a way that media 'interests' and 'choices' serve elite class interests "on a consistent basis"

(Klaehn, 2002:148-149). Without going into detailed discussion about the 'propaganda model' that has been proposed (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 11-96) and demonstrated with examples (1988: Ch. 2-6; 97-348), one important distinction of this model is broadly representative of the category itself. The propaganda model concerns itself not in how "decisions of particular editors and journalists influence news production and news selection processes" (Klaehn, 2002: 150) but in structural inadequacies and imbalances of news media in general. This stress on the structural is also to be found in the earlier study 'The Structure of Foreign News' by Galtung and Ruge (1965). This assessment of its 'structuralist' formulation is Galtung's own (Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 188).

Both these studies work on a very broad basis to find generalizable 'factors' – called 'filters' by Herman and Chomsky (1988:2) – which distort representation of the world in news. The commonality that links these two studies together when viewed from the perspective of understanding journalistic work is that both take news-making "*in abstracto"* and news organizations as non-divisible entities (Galtung and Ruge, 1965: 65) preferring to view them as "linear processes of message transmission from senders to receivers without much reciprocity" (Rantanen, 2004: 303). The journalists are seen to simply "internalize" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 355) the values and beliefs both external (in the case of Herman and Chomsky's analysis) and internal (in the case of Galtung and Ruge's study) to the practice of journalism.

This form of criticism of news media's complicity with power in structural terms has formed a long tradition of important critical work. Such criticisms proceed from the standpoint that "in general, the media are likely to privilege and publicize official versions

of conflict" and "attempt to identify the range of constraints – both organizational and ideological – that prevent the media from reporting conflict in a truly critical or independent way" (Thussu and Freedman, 2003: 8). But at the same time, scholars within this sub-discipline also point out an internal limitation of the tradition they follow in broad terms when they stress the need to foreground the "significance of agency" of individual and organizational news-making (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998: 3; also Boyd-Barrett, 2015) or profess the need to start a conversation between professional journalists and academic scholars for both to understand the other's points of view (Paterson and Sreberny, 2004: 20-21).

4.1.1 *'Flak' and the work of journalists*

The lesson drawn from the wide-ranging discussions of this categorical cluster is the most direct manifestation of constraint in the form of 'flak' in a journalist's work – criticism and censure (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2). However, the understanding of flak proposed here is a bit broader, following Cohen and Young's (1973:20) call for understanding the effects of both "sanctions and rewards" in the "socialization" of journalists and Hackett's (2006) call for a 'weak field' model of understanding journalism. In decreasing degree of harm for journalists and hampering of their work, 'flak' in this model encompasses violence (murder/physical violence) (e.g. see Webster, 2003: 58-59), coercion (imprisonment/threat) (e.g. see Allan, 2011: 147-167), censorship (direct censorship by governments and indirect, such as corporate censorship or censorship through information limitation) (e.g. see Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Tumber, 2004: 190-205), public criticism and professional censure and self-censorship as a result of them (challenging the

credibility/patriotism/motives/morality of journalists concerned) both from higher ups (e.g. see Bennett et al., 2008: 72-107) as well as their immediate work environment (e.g. see Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003: 222-227). At the same time such sticks have their carrots, i.e. the 'rewards' like job promotions, pay raise (as economic capitals to vie for) as well as prizes, awards and recognition for professional excellence, i.e. symbolic capital or prestige assigned by other 'consecrating agents' (Hackett, 2006: 7; Bourdieu, 1993:76-77). While some of the other filters, factors and constraints discussed in this cluster have more nuanced theoretical parallels in the other sub-fields, the control over professional journalists' work through 'flaks' and its reverse, 'rewards' is not mentioned in such clear theoretical terms.

4.2 Views on journalistic works within Media Contest cluster

The 'manufacturing consent' and 'media contest' clusters share the conceptual concern of understanding the relationship between the state/elite and the media. But a significant departure between the two categories is in the way they formulate the role played by the media in the face of elite coercion and manipulation. Taking into account the internal logic of journalism as a practice of speaking truth to power or at least appearing to do so for the sake of their own credibility (See for example, Entman's delineation of journalistic motivations within broader media industry motivations; 2004: 14) studies from the latter have developed nuanced models of understanding the push and pull of information exchange between the media and elite sectors of the society.

However, the conceptual term that is especially pertinent for the present discussion is the idea of 'framing': the "unofficial exchange of information" (Entman, 2004: 12) between the

powerful and media and the "professional management of contact between reporters and officials" (Bennett et al., 2008: 5). Entman (2004: 26-28) differentiates between schema (mental frames or knowledge frameworks) and frames (informational frameworks) where frames are seen as "selecting and defining some facets of events and issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution" (Entman, 2004: 5). Journalistic 'frame' as distinct from 'schema' is the conceptual term to be carried forward in the present discussion.

4.2.1 *Frames and the work of Journalists*

Whether news-framing studies follow an 'indexing' model of understanding the media-powerful nexus (Bennett et al., 2008: 49-55) where the media is seen to be able to reflect dissenting opinion only when there is lack of agreement at the elite level or 'cascading activation' model described by Entman (2004: 9-10), where both the public and the media are shown to have some measure of influence on the frame imposed on an event or issue, at the heart of both these ways of approaching 'framing' within media, lies the understanding that journalists are "cognitive misers" and "satisficers" (Entman, 2004:12; Scheufele, 1999: 118). Another important aspect of journalistic frames that has lessons for understanding the work of journalists is that frames are culturally and socially bound in both their formation and acceptance. In his discussion of how frames interrelate with mental schemas of journalists, Entman (2004: 14-15) points out "cultural congruence" between the frame and existing schema as one of the variables affecting frame acceptance by journalists. Frames resonate best when they follow schemas which are 'habitual schemas' i.e. networks

of schemas which together form 'the common sense' of the society concerned (2004: 24).

This concept of culturally congruent frames of understanding events or issues which form

the building block for the manufacture of news but also are built out of more general ideas

and ideologies prevalent in a particular society or culture, leads to the next categorical

cluster.

4.3 <u>Views on journalistic works within Media Culture cluster</u>

This third cluster stresses the importance and role played by the socio-cultural beliefs

which form the basis of frames – that which is paralleled in Entman's mental 'schemas' of

understanding events or issues – or 'myths'. The interrelations between media and

prevalent myths of a society all point to the central idea that the "so called objectivity" of

news media is not objective to the paradigms within which it functions (Cohen and Young,

1973: 19) and thus unable to see the "idiomatic shorthands" (Hall, 1973: 85) it performs

and perpetuates. In Hall's words (1973: 89) the criticisms from this cluster can be precisely

set out as follows: the incidence of "unwitting bias" in news of a society "can be mapped by

plotting the areas of consensus (where there is mutual agreement about the terms in which

a topic is to be treated), the areas of toleration (where the overlap is less great, and the

terms have to be negotiated as between competing definitions) and the areas of dis-sensus

or conflict (where competing definitions are at play)".

In so far as this, the parallels to framing studies are evident but what criticisms from this

cluster point out is how the probity of journalism does not extend to the "underlying"

assumptions and agreement, toleration and dis-sensus about these assumptions. If the

areas of agreement, toleration and dis-sensus *within informational frames* are well-trodden

by studies from the media contest cluster, then the "unconscious and unstated" (Hall, 1973:

97) distortions because of the schemas i.e. *the prevalent myths of a society* about certain

segments of that society and other societies are not as well covered. While Cohen and

Young's (1973) edited volume looked at the interpretation imposed upon segments of

society within a society, Said's (2008) study of how Islamic societies are interpreted by "the

academy, in the government, and in the media" (2008: 161) looks at the same underlying

assumptions in the case of distant societies. While the former looks at 'others' within, the

latter looks at 'others' without. While Said's analysis can be read as showing how

assumptions underlying 'expert' and 'elite' opinions ultimately affect media coverage of

issues and events, his idea of how and what this relationship is, is differently defined from

that of the exchange of informational frames model discussed in the last section. The

"central consensus", according to Said (2008: 48-49), "shapes news, decides what is news

and how it is news" and this process is not the result of "deterministic laws, nor of

conspiracy, nor of dictatorship. It is the result of culture; better it *is* the culture".

These assumptions are called 'myth' here following Barthes (1991:107-164) because

Barthes's term captures subtly the false-yet-rings-true nature of the paradigmatic

assumptions that Cohen and Young (1973) or Said (2008) point out.

4.3.1 *Myths and the work of Journalists*

Studies included in this categorical cluster of Media Culture also pay attention to the

identity formation of news professionals in and through shared 'myths', as Cottle (2006:30)

observes in his description of this cluster. The most thorough example of such from-the-

ground-up approach to understanding news-making is perhaps Pedelty's sociological investigation of the culture of foreign correspondents (1995). What is added to analysis of media's role in conflict through such studies is a coming full circle of academic understanding. We are able to form an inductive understanding of the top down constraints and contexts on journalistic work *and* their resultant "textual effect" (Pedelty, 1995: 56). For example, the analysis of US media's coverage of the conflict in El Salvador from the 'top down' in Herman and Chomsky's (1988: 105-116) study and Mark Pedelty's (1995) more in-depth exploration of the people who supplied this coverage from El Salvador (and so from the 'bottom-up'), when read together, can provide a fuller picture which includes both what coverage was to be found and how that coverage came to be skewed or not skewed in favour of elite actors and policies both in US and El Salvador, with a fuller understanding of all the steps in between that the process involved.

5. **Broadening the 'Feedback Loop' in Peace Journalism**

Peace journalism has been defined as "when editors and reporters make choices – about what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict" (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 5) . This definition of Peace Journalism is further clarified by Lynch (2008: 3-4) that "if 'society at large' is provided with such opportunities, but chooses not to take them, then there is nothing else journalism can do about it, while remaining journalism. On the other hand, there is no concomitant commitment to ensuring that violent responses get a fair hearing. They can take care of themselves, because the reporting conventions (still) dominant in most places, most of the time, ensure that they seldom struggle for a place on the agenda"

(Lynch, 2008: 4). PJ's normative principles, though rooted in Galtung and Ruge's "classic" (Rantanen, 2004: 303) study from 1965 – are derived largely from Peace and Conflict Studies (see Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 39-59, Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 41-49). However, as Lynch and Galtung (2010: 26) contend, Peace Journalism does not constitute a theory in itself but it has theoretical aspects. As such, PJ has an inter-disciplinary tendency of adapting various theoretical standpoints to PJ's normative frameworks as a "set of tools" (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 5). Given the inter-disciplinary nature of PJ, the social exchanges in meaning-making processes i.e. 'myths' as in the Encoding/Decoding model developed by Hall (1993) as well as the exchanges in informational 'frames' as in the Cascading Activation model developed by Entman (2004:10) have been discussed extensively within PJ literature (for a summary see Lynch and Galtung,; 2010: 30-33). Framing studies have also been the preferred operationalization in content analysis studies within PJ literature (Galtung and Lynch, 2010: 32) starting from textual content analyses with Lee and Maslog's study in 2005 to visual content analyses by Fahmy and Neumann (2012a, 2012b). Also frames and myths have been connected to each other and operationalized together in PJ research (e.g. Winter, 2010; Chow-White and McMahon 2011; Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2011). But such joint operationalization has almost always been for textual analysis and in-depth sociological exploration of journalists at work has been largely absent from PJ in recent years though the beginnings of the normative understandings current within PJ can be traced back to such a project – Reporting the World (Lynch, 2004: 261-274). As such, it is important to hark back to Shinar's (2007:7) delineation of areas of research where more investigation is needed within PJ. Out of the areas he identifies for PJ research to pursue, the most important for the argument in this

current exercise is the need Shinar points out for "meso-level research" into the "process of organized news production" involving systematic investigation of "structural, economic, professional, and normative constraints in media" as it plays out within the interaction of the factors of the conflict in question, the form of media in question, the journalists as well as the political climate, among others.

5.1 *Feedback Loop and the work of Journalists*

One of the ways that the exchanges between journalists, reporters, their sources of information, and audiences' frames of understanding is conceptualised within PJ (based originally on observations by journalists themselves as part of the Reporting the World project) is the 'feedback loop' (Lynch, 2004: 263-264; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: xix). The concept of "feedback loop effect", as it has been defined within PJ, means that a news-text "depends on the reception of key messages by readers and audiences [based] on assumptions how they are likely to be received" (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 216). Awareness of the feedback loop for journalists is seen as a pre-requisite for journalists' "critical self-awareness" (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: xvi-xx). However, the feedback loop effect have so far been mostly studied within PJ in studies of audience reception of news-texts (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2012, 2013, 2014; Lynch et al. 2015).

When applied to the work of journalists by PJ scholars, the 'feedback loop' has been equated with "frame contests" (Lynch, 2010: 79) or as "extra-linear explanations" (Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 29) of journalists' relationship with their "information sources" or has limited itself to understanding the influence of "previous patterns of news reportage" on current reportage (Hackett et al., 2011: 14). But even though the formulation of feedback

loop by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: xvi-xx; 2010:96) mention that journalists are part of the chain of the feedback loop, the in-depth studies needed to understand the negotiated and contextual reception of information frames as done for audiences (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2010: 96) have not been undertaken for journalists extensively.

Not only are such sociological exploration of journalistic self-awareness an unfinished endeavour within PJ but such exploration has to include – along with understanding of journalistic frames – also the idea already current within PJ that "news values, the criteria that govern news selection and framing, cannot take hold without purchase in popular culture" (Hackett et al., 2011: 15). Such an approach has been applied for content studies of media coverage within PJ but not applied to form understandings of journalists' work and their informational frame contests as well as *their* 'purchases in popular culture'.

The unified understanding of myths and frames that this latter entails in the context of the work of journalists, is however already present in the normative prescriptions of PJ, e.g. in the call for peace journalists to produce "unfixed meanings" in texts which enable "negotiated or oppositional" reading (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2010: 92-6; Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 164-197). But understanding *if* and *how* journalists themselves – across social, economic, geographical and cultural contexts – are negotiating or are oppositional to the 'fixed' meanings in their day to day work is absent from discussion. There is clearly the precedent, the scope and the need for the concept of feedback loop within PJ to be broadened beyond 'frame contests' of informational exchange between journalists and their sources to include other conscious and unconscious exchanges within journalistic work.

The first step to such a broadening is by spelling out categorically what exactly circulates within the feedback loop affecting journalistic production to pave the way for the kind of 'meso-level research' into journalists' work and their contexts that Shinar (2007) calls for. This article proposes that the threefold 'exchanges' which occur within the feedback loop of sources of information or the elite, reporters, editors, news-texts, audiences and society at large can be said to be that of 'flaks', 'myths' and 'frames'. These three conceptual terms are both representative and derivative of the various constraints and motivations acting upon the professional life-worlds of journalists that the academic sub-disciplines discussed above identify.

6. Applying Flak + Frame + Myth to understand journalistic cultures

Based on the discussions above, these influences on journalistic work are then defined as follows:

1. flak (including corporate censorship because of ownership structures of employers; government censorship – direct and indirect, imposed or self-imposed through public criticism and censure) as well as economic and social rewards (job-promotions, pay raise, awards, professional recognitions),

2. frames (reliance on official sources for information by journalists; other forms of information dependence such as inclusion/exclusion from press 'pools', through manipulated spectacles, or manipulated socialization of journalists with the military through embedding),

3. myths (the unconscious 'common senses', 'affiliations' and 'affinities' of journalists).

To provide an example of how such a meso-level investigative framework can help in building understandings which are easily interchangeable between cultures, countries and contexts, below is a re-categorization of Weighton's "results from the ground" (2015: 88) from her recent sociological research with Kenyan journalists.

Weighton (2015: 66-81) finds in her study that Kenyan journalists were aware of and negotiating within their work with structural constraints related to the ownership of the media organizations and the limitations it imposes upon unbiased reporting of events, issues and actors. They also faced advertisement-related self-censorship within the media organizations as well as financial constraints of various kinds – both organizational and individual. These constraints then would be in the category of flak within the framework proposed here. But Weighton also found evidence of what she calls "societal constraints" (2015: 70-74) including 'tribalism', 'ethnic identity' and perceived societal expectations relating to the journalists' ethnic identity (Weighton, 2015: 62). This would fall within the category of 'myths' or cultural consensuses according to the model proposed here. Weighton also found evidence of 'historical constraints' and existing frames of reference for conflict reportage for that particular society (for Kenya in 2013 about which the research was conducted: the post-election violence of 2007) which influenced the journalists' work during the more recent election to a large extent leading them to avoid reporting issues, events or actors in a way which could incite violence. This last would fall under the category of 'frames' within the current model. What the terminology of the proposed model offers beyond Weighton's micro-level findings is easy application across different contexts because of their meso-level formulation. While 'tribal' identity might not be applicable as a

term to describe the 'digger' identity of Australian journalists or a nascent Pan-European identity found by other scholars in other societies, the affiliations and affinities of journalists within such social 'myths' of shared identity is easily comparable across cultures. The same is true for the conceptual terms of flaks and frames – they will differ in their manifestations in different societies but their nature and journalists' awareness of them may be compared still.

Understanding how journalists view, negotiate or conform to these threefold exchanges of frames, myths and flaks is key to a nuanced and comparative understanding of self-awareness of journalists across contexts. Such views, negotiations and conformities have already been noted by researchers to be not the same everywhere in the world. PJ scholars need to pay adequate attention to these different social, cultural and economic unevenness(es) to journalistic self-awareness(es) before calling for Peace Journalism to be practiced and applied across the "post-aligned mediascape" (Lynch and Galtung, 2010: 164-196) of the world or to be constituted "as coordinated and organized reforms with a global scope" (Ottosen and Nohrstedt, 2015).

7. Conclusion

So far within PJ, the best examples of research which explores the journalists' perception of their work has been that of Bläsi's (2004) study based on interviews with German journalists and more recently and more pertinently for the present argument about societies outside the Western countries, that of Weighton's (2015). Bläsi (2004: 11)

observes that "[t]heoretical 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." Weighton (2015: 86) "emphasizes the fact that Kenyan journalists work within an environment that exerts very specific constraints upon their agency" which go beyond the specific 'political climate' and 'conflict situation' (Bläsi, 2004:4) within which the 'media reality' in question functions. These "'ghost[s]' in the room" (Weighton, 2015:76; parenthesis added) leads her (2015: 88) to the conclusion that "PJ theory translates only in part". The current article echoes these less discussed arguments within PJ to stress the need for categorically investigating the environment in which journalists work, and offers that studying the currencies of exchange within the 'feedback loop' for journalists is one way this can be done. These currencies – punishments and rewards, exchange of information and ways to process such information as well as meaning-making within and between socio-economic contexts as circulated between the elite or powerful of a society, the journalists as well as the public – understood in terms of flaks, frames and myths circulating in the feedback loop of each context can help locate the sites of tension within mainstream journalism cultures and the opportunities and resistances it might pose for PJ. PJ as a cause would be better served if it didn't again make the leap from normative discipline to practice-related implementation of PJ training projects in diverse post-conflict countries – as Lee and Maslog (2005: 313) had complained of before in a different context – "without the benefit of research".

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