A study of South African journalists’ perceptions of their roles in reporting on social conflict and how these relate to concepts of peace journalism

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Conflict Transformation and Management

1/1/2013

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i. Declaration

I, Peter Andrew du Toit, student number S187121659, hereby declare that the treatise for M.Phil Conflict Transformation and Management to be awarded is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another university or for another qualification.

Peter Andrew du Toit
01 January 2013
ii. Acknowledgements

The completion of this treatise marks a moment in my ongoing journey of discovery, learning and teaching during which I have explored how journalists can play a constructive role in reporting on conflict. In finalizing this treatise I’d like to acknowledge the courage of the many journalists I have worked with from conflict ravaged regions whose experience and ideas have contributed to my thinking.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my supervisor Dr Lyn Snodgrass and to thank her for her advice and feedback. I’d also need to thank her colleague on the Conflict Management and Transformation programme, Dr Gavin Bradshaw, for his insights and for introducing me to the field so many years ago.

My thanks go to all of the journalists who gave so willingly of their time to share their views with me, to Sarah-Jane Bradfield for her help with this project and to my colleagues at the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership and the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

Finally my special thanks to Jeanne, Braam and Cinta for gifting me the time to complete this project.
iii. Abstract

Set against a backdrop of ongoing social conflict in the country, this study sets out to explore how South African journalists understand their roles and responsibilities when it comes to reporting on conflict. The study seeks to determine whether journalists believe they have a constructive contribution to make in the peaceful management and resolution of social conflict. It also seeks to establish whether journalists see themselves as being able to contribute to creating conditions that can facilitate dialogue and constructive engagement. Furthermore, the study aims to explore the extent to which the views and perceptions of South African journalists could be said to be consistent with the ideas put forward in the emerging field of peace journalism.

In seeking to address these questions, the study begins by identifying a core set of guidelines that could be said to characteristic of peace journalism. It then draws on in-depth interviews conducted with 12 experienced reporters to gain a sense of how journalists understand their roles. The 12 reporters were drawn from mainstream newspapers from South Africa’s main metropolitan areas.

Following an analysis of these interviews, the study found that many journalists see themselves as having a positive contribution to make towards peacemaking and peace building. However, these contributions, they argue, must be seen as the product of good reporting rather than as emanating from deliberate attempts to intervene in conflict. The study then contrasted the journalists’ perceptions with the principles and normative guidelines proposed by peace journalism and found that many of the journalists’ beliefs are consistent with peace journalism. It appears that, while they may not directly call themselves peace journalists, many of the reporters interviewed saw themselves as playing roles similar to those advocated by peace journalism.
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Introduction, rationale and objectives

i. Introduction

History provides us with a multitude of examples that show the ability of journalists, from behind the shelter of their microphones or pens, to incite hatred, provoke violent mass movements, voluntarily manipulate information in the service of war-mongering strategies, and, more or less consciously or perversely, create the roots of deep divisions within society (Banda, 2008: 51).

The news media in Africa are frequently vilified for promoting or at least exacerbating social conflict in different parts of the continent. Such critiques have often been unquestionably justified. The role of Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) in stoking and ultimately directing the Rwandan genocide between July 1993 and July 1994 stands out as the most flagrant example of media provoking conflict, but there have been many others (Frère, 2007 and Article XIX, 1996). In Burundi newspapers contributed to polarisation through partisan reportage during the same period (Frère, 2007). More recently research has shown that indigenous language FM radio stations in Kenya contributed towards fermenting violence during the 2007/2008 post-election violence by broadcasting hate speech (Mbeke, 2008; and Wachanga, 2011). In South Africa the news media, in the wake of the eruption of so-called ‘xenophobic’ violence in May 2008, have also been critiqued for contributing to relationships of conflict. They have, more particularly, been critiqued for uncritically reproducing xenophobia through their choice of language and statements and for encouraging people to adopt xenophobic attitudes (Gomo, 2010; Smith, 2010).

The role of the news media in promoting conflict is seldom as evidently deliberate as these cases suggest and there are few cases where journalists are known to have actively sought to inflame tensions. Nonetheless, the absence of malice does not imply that journalists do not contribute towards the exacerbation of conflict. For Richards and King (2000: 480) the traditional conventions of journalism, with their reliance on an objectivist understanding of reality, often
result in news coverage that foregrounds tension and difference which potentially contributes to exacerbating conflict. For Galtung (1998: np) such approaches to journalism depict conflict as “a battle, as a sports arena or a gladiator circus [where] … combatants struggle to impose their goals” rather than exploring the causes of the conflict and the underlying processes.

The news media have also increasingly come to be viewed as conflict zones in their own right and are approached as “sites of powered struggle and unequal contestation” (Cottle, 2006: 20) which parties in conflict seek to dominate (see also Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005).

In response to the critiques leveled against the news media for its role in contributing to the escalation of violent conflict, scholars, NGO workers, humanitarian aid organisations and media professionals have begun to explore how media can be used to promote conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation. The different approaches to promoting conflict resolution by harnessing the communicative capacity of the media are outlined by Howard (2002) in an operational framework that sets out the different typologies of media interventions.

Howard identifies the following types:

- **Type One**: Rudimentary journalism training in environments where journalists lack basic skills or knowledge of generally accepted normative guidelines. The goal is to address “unskilled, inaccurate, conflict-obsessed, or highly partisan media” (Howard, 2002: 10).

- **Type Two**: This involves responsible journalism development which goes beyond basic skills and aims to develop capacity in specialist reporting, investigative capacity and analysis. It also seeks to promote a media environment that is diverse, competitive and sustainable (Howard, 2002: 10).
Type Three: The focus is on transitional journalism development that locates journalism on the boundary between “traditional journalism and more pro-active uses of the media” (Howard, 2002: 10). In this approach “journalists are encouraged to consciously examine their roles and to recognise conflict resolution as part of this role … to redefine what is newsworthy, to better inform and encourage reconciliation” (Howard, 2002: 10-11).

Type Four: Here the media are employed for specific and pro-active media-based interventions in which highly specific audiences are targeted with specific messages. While they may be carried on traditional media platforms the messages are not produced by journalists but by others with a stake in the conflict. Stakeholders could include NGOs, international organisations such as the United Nations and peacekeeping forces. Messages can be intended to counter propaganda or to provide practical information such as voter education (Howard, 2002: 11).

Type Five: Intended outcome programming is “specifically intent upon transforming attitudes, promoting reconciliation and reducing conflict” and the content generally takes the form of “innovative adaptions of popular culture such as radio and television soap operas, dramas, street theatre and wall posters” (Howard, 2002: 11).

These typologies clearly differentiate between journalism (Types 1 – 3) and other forms of media produced to bring about social change (Types 4 and 5) which fall directly in the categories of social marketing. The focus of this study is specifically targeted at journalism and the role of the news media. In particular it focuses on the work of reporters as gatherers and producers of news content as opposed to the work of others in the news industry such as columnists, editorial writers and political commentators.

The study is particularly interested in the third type which Howard (2002: 11) argues includes an approach to reporting that has come to be referred to as
peace journalism. Howard (2002: 11) suggests this is an apt name for an understanding of journalism that includes conflict resolution as one of its “recognised values”. The idea of peace journalism was first mooted in the mid-1960s by the prominent Norwegian scholar, Johan Galtung, and gained momentum following the war in Bosnia when the brutality and the complexity of the conflict saw many journalists re-evaluating their roles (Kempf, 2003).

Today peace journalism is understood to advocate an approach to news reporting that:

... combines journalism with peace as an external aim [and which] ... understands itself as ‘a normative mode’ of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals, and audiences towards war and peace. (Shinar, 2007: 1)

Among its many goals peace journalism\(^1\) aims to promote conflict resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation and to encourage journalists to be more reflexive in considering the impact of their reporting on conflict. Its goal is also to contribute toward a social discourse that at a minimum entertains the prospect of positive-sum outcomes to conflict (Kempf, 2003; Lee, Maslog and Kim, 2006).

### ii. Motivations for this study

This treatise has been completed as part of the course requirements for the researcher’s work toward an M.Phil qualification in Conflict Management and Transformation at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). However, the motivations go well beyond the researcher’s personal ambitions.

\(^1\) The term peace journalism has not found favour among all of the proponents of approaches to journalism that aim to impact positively on conflict and title “conflict sensitive reporting” has also gained some popularity. Critics may argue that there are subtle differences between these concepts, however the researcher is convinced that these different understandings are not significant to for this study in the two are frequently combined in the phrase peace and conflict sensitive reporting.
The study aims to make a small contribution towards the promotion of an approach to journalism that will allow for South African media professionals to assist in the constructive management and resolution of conflict.

The researcher has long been involved in providing training to journalists in the fields of peace and conflict sensitive reporting. He has facilitated courses in many parts of Africa and in southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Timor L’este and Myanmar on behalf of large international NGOs and Unesco. He has, however, been unable to identify any cases in the past 10 years in which South African journalists have been offered training in the fields of peace and conflict sensitive reporting. This is despite the fact that South Africa continues to experience levels of social conflict that in recent years have resulted in sporadic incidences of violence (see 2.2). This research thus aims, firstly, to explore the extent to which South African journalists are open to training in peace and conflict sensitive reporting. It sets out, secondly, to identify particular training needs they may have in this respect.

The treatise should also be regarded as a pilot study which will inform a more extensive research process that explores how South African journalists relate to their potential roles in contributing towards the peaceful management and resolution of conflict. This large scale study will provide insights that may inform journalism education institutions about the specific training needs of South African journalists with regard to conflict reporting and the degree to which journalists are willing to participate in such courses.

iii. Research problem

The study recognises the normative arguments of peace journalism that the news media have the potential either to exacerbate social conflict or to contribute towards the creation of conditions that facilitate non-violent approaches to the management and resolution of conflict. Against this background the study explores how South African newspaper journalists understand their roles and responsibilities in reporting on social conflict. While the focus is on conflict as a
general concept, particular emphasis has been given to protracted social conflict as a conflict type. This decision is based on the researcher’s conviction that many of the conflicts prevalent in South Africa today have their origins in the deprivation of basic human needs (discussed in Chapter One).

In seeking to achieve these primary objectives, the study explores a number of related themes which are encompassed in the following sub-questions:

1. What roles do journalists believe the news media can play in reporting on conflict?
2. What roles do journalists believe the news media should play in reporting on conflict?
3. What specific opportunities do journalists recognise that can enable them to contribute constructively to the peaceful management and transformation of conflict through their reportage?
4. In what ways are these perceptions compatible with principles underpinning the practice of peace journalism?

iv. Methodology

Located within a constructivist epistemology, this study explores South African newspaper journalists’ perceptions of their roles in reporting on social conflict through a series of in-depth interviews. The study involves 12 experienced journalists employed by mainstream newspapers published in major metropolitan areas across the country. Transcripts of these interviews were analysed in order to assess the extent to which the journalists held common and divergent beliefs about their social roles and responsibilities. These trends were then brought into dialogue with a discussion of key theories and principles identified within the literature on peace and conflict sensitive journalism.

v. Limitations of the study

While the study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of theories of conflict and the principles of peace and conflict sensitive journalism it is beyond its scope to provide an in-depth analysis of the wide range of different conflicts that obtain
in South Africa or on the African continent. Instead the treatise makes specific reference to a limited number of examples with a view to providing some insights into the kinds of conflicts journalists are covering. Similarly, the study has not attempted to provide an in-depth review of the state of journalism in South Africa. It has, however, provided a brief overview of some of the important developments in the industry that are likely to impact on and influence the thinking of the participants in the study.

The primary limitation of this study is one of scale. Qualitative research does not generally seek to provide generalisable results and this is certainly true for this study. However, it is possible that by involving a wider pool of journalists the study could still generate further insights about journalists’ perceptions of their roles in reporting on conflict.

The study was deliberately restricted to newspaper journalists from large urban centres because they tend to work for organisations that set the news agenda. However, for the study to provide a more comprehensive insight into the perceptions of journalists more broadly it would need to include reporters from the rural print media, radio, television and online publications.

The study also recognises that journalists do not always have the power to decide on how their stories are used by the media organisations they are working for. However, this study has not attempted to address questions of agency, but has limited its focus to the reporters’ perceptions of their roles in reporting on conflict.

vi. Outline of the chapters

The study treatise comprises five chapters and a substantial introduction and conclusion. These are summarized below.

*Introduction, rationale and objectives*
This chapter provides a brief background to the primary focus areas for the research and introduces the overall motivations and objectives of the study. It also discusses some of the limitations of the study.

Chapter One: Protracted social conflict
This chapter provides a brief synopsis of some of the conflicts journalists are dealing with on the African continent and, in particular, in South Africa as means of locating the discussion the follows. The chapter then explores the nature of protracted social conflict and the challenges of managing and resolving such conflicts. In doing so it recognises that many of the conflicts journalists report on have their basis in the deprivation of basic human needs.

Chapter Two: Peace- and conflict sensitive journalism
This chapter begins with a brief overview of key issues confronting journalists in contemporary South Africa as they report on social conflict. It then provides a detailed overview of the literature relating to peace and conflict sensitive reporting and discusses some of the normative principles that underpin these approaches to journalism.

Chapter Three: Research methodology
This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research design, situating the study in terms of the ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations. It also describes the ethical concerns and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four: Research findings: Journalists’ understandings of their roles in conflict coverage
This chapter provides an analysis of the empirical component of the study, reporting on the particular themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview transcripts.

Chapter Five: Peace and conflict sensitive reporting and the journalists’ perceptions
This chapter brings the responses of the journalists in relation to their roles and responsibilities in reporting on conflict into dialogue with the theories and principles of peace and conflict sensitive reporting.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

The final chapter of the treatise provides a synopsis of the key findings and makes some specific recommendations about how these findings may be applied in enhancing the ability of journalists to report constructively on conflict.
Chapter One

Protracted social conflict

Introduction

One of the most fundamental factors that distinguishes peace journalism from other approaches to journalism is the fact that it is deeply informed by theory drawn from the fields of peace and conflict studies. This chapter thus aims to provide a theoretical basis in peace and conflict studies for the discussion on peace journalism in Chapter Two.

The primary focus in this chapter is on theories relating to protracted social conflict because the concerns of peace journalism so often have to do with deeply rooted conflicts with entrenched structural dimensions. Peace journalism offers normative guidelines to journalists covering highly escalated conflicts, such as civil wars. It is also understood to be of value to journalists reporting on the deeply rooted conflicts that often challenge countries such as South Africa which can still be regarded as being in transition. It is the latter of these two roles that is of primary interest to this study.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the kinds of conflict journalists might be called on to cover, both on the African continent and in South Africa. While it is beyond the scope of a small-scale study such as this to address any of these conflicts in depth, this initial discussion is intended to help to situate peace journalism in relation to some of the conflicts being experienced on the continent and in particular in South Africa.

1.1 Conflict in Africa

The sources of conflicts in Africa are multidimensional and multifaceted encompassing historical, external and internal social, economic and political factors such as the colonial legacy of ill-defined borders, ethnic, religious and cultural marginalisation or domination, struggle for limited resources, struggle for power, underdevelopment, crippling
indebtedness, globalisation, skewed distribution of resources, corruption, undemocratic governance, administrative failures and collapsed states, military dictatorships, weak systems and institutions of governance, flawed electoral systems and electoral fraud, erosion of the state power and crises of legitimacy in governance (Bukae, 2010: 6).

In the above quote, Bukae (2010) captures the complexity of conflicts in Africa by pointing out the wide variety of types and causes of conflict that confront the continent today. Francis (2006: 66) proposes that the diverse nature and complexity of African conflicts can confound attempts to neatly categorise them according to “root causes, secondary and tertiary factors”. He suggests that these causes can be dynamic as contexts and situations within which the conflicts are being contested changes over time. Since the end of the Cold War, Francis (2006: 54) suggests, conflict has taken the form of both low- and high-intensity armed confrontations that range from “identity-based wars instigated by ethnicity, religion and nationalism to conflicts over resources”. Such conflicts may involve state-actors, non-state actors and sub-national groups and have often resulted in regional contagion with conflicts in one country spreading to others. This was for example evident in the way the Liberian civil war of 1989 spread to Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire. Similarly, conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo have drawn in the military involvement of eight different countries (Francis, 2006: 54).

Francis (2006: 59-60) observes that claims have frequently been made about the impact of ethnicity on conflict in Africa with observers citing the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, ethnic killings in Liberia and recurrent ethnic clashes in Nigeria as evidence. Francis, however, draws on Horowitz in arguing that ethnicity is a social construction and that it is not ethnicity per se that is the problem, but the way it is politicised, exploited and manipulated by political elites. He suggests that:

The political class, in a desperate attempt to secure state power and its patrimonial resources, has often demonstrated remarkable recklessness and total lack of restraint in manipulating ethnicity by peddling stereotypes and prejudices against opposing groups. (Fisher, 2006: 60).
Similarly claims that conflict are simply spurred on by the greed of political elites also fall short of offering real explanations for the reasons why Africa has experienced so many conflicts over the years. In this regard Fukuda-Parr, Ashwill, Chiappa and Messineo (2008: 6) write that since 1980 more than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced armed conflict, “sometimes with multiple conflicts taking place simultaneously in different parts of the country”. The vast majority of these conflicts – 120 out of 126 – have been intrastate conflicts or civil wars and many of these have been waged over many years.

Examples of these conflicts since 2000 would include, among others:

- The ongoing confrontations between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda’s Acholi land. This conflict has “resulted in countless deaths and the abduction of almost 10 000 children” (Barnes & Lucima, 2002: 4). It has also seen more 500 000 people displaced from their villages and lands and forced into camps.
- The civil war in Angola between Unita and the ruling MPLA that saw the country pass through three separate civil wars between 1975 and 2002 before Unita leader Jonas Savimbi was killed in battle in 2002 (Barnes & Lucima, 2002: 4). The brutal attacks on people in Sudan’s Darfur region by government proxies after people in the region took up arms against the Khartoum government when protests against “economic, cultural, ethnic and political marginalisation were ignored” (El Tom, 2012: 99). Atrocities linked to this conflict are believed to have resulted in up to half-a-million deaths, the displacement of 2.5 million people, the destruction of 5000 villages and the rape of 10 000 women (El Tom, 2012: 99).
- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) experienced ongoing civil war from 1997 when Laurent Kabila launched an insurgency that overthrew the Mobutu Sese Seko dictatorship the following year. This was followed by a “concoction of intertwined conflicts” that involved troops from up to six neighbouring states. Elections in 2006 brought a brief peace, but have been followed by on-going violence in provinces remote from the capital (Tull, 2009). Most recently a rebel force that was previously integrated into the standing army broke away from the government forming the M23 rebels.
who have taken control of large parts of eastern Congo (New York Times, 4 January 2013).

In addition to these highly escalated civil wars, many African countries have experienced levels of social conflict that have not intensified to the levels of civil war, but which have nonetheless had enormously destructive implications for the people directly affected. These confrontations have taken place in countries where the media is at least partially free and where the coverage of these confrontations is likely to have impacted on the conflicts in one way or another.

Three of these confrontations broke out in countries following elections were incumbents refused to accept defeat. These included the following countries:

- In Kenya the clashes between Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and the Party of National Unity (PNU) following the disputed 2007 December presidential elections took on a highly ethnic character. The violence following this conflict saw as many as 2000 deaths and 300 000 people displaced (Kagwanja & Southhall, 2009: 259).

- In Zimbabwe’s 2008 presidential elections Robert Mugabe lost the first round of elections to the Movement for Democratic Change’s Morgan Tsvangirai. However, Tsvangarai did not secure the 50% plus one majority required to avoid a runoff election. Zanu-PF then escalated the already volatile situation to the point where the MDC elected to withdraw from the elections rather than contend the second round. This period was characterised by widespread violence during which many opposition supporters were attacked and subject to arbitrary arrest (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

- More than 1000 civilian lives were lost and one million people displaced in Côte d'Ivoire incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo refused to relinquish power after the losing the 2010 presidential elections. Clashes between Gbagbo supporters and pro-Ouattara supporters continued over four months before Gbagbo was finally arrested in his bunker. Like the Kenyan clashes, the violence in Côte d'Ivoire took on an ethnic dimension with Gbagbo supporters targeting Muslims and people from northern parts of the country (Straus, 2011: 481 - 489).
Other violent manifestations of conflict that have occurred in recent years included
the use of security apparatus by ruling classes to suppress popular uprisings and
demonstrations. Examples of conflicts that have become manifest in these ways
include a series of demonstrations in Malawi over fuel shortages, unemployment
and rising inflation. The demonstrations ended violently when security forces used
teargas and live ammunition to stop demonstrations and riots. Eighteen civilians
were killed by police actions during this time (The Guardian, 21 July 2011). In
Uganda, demonstrations over similar cost of living increases saw food riots in the
streets of Kampala, with protesters being assaulted and arrested by the police in
April 2011. Nine people, including two policemen, were killed during the
demonstrations.

A further category of conflict in Africa has to do with modernisation, with
confrontations between nomads and pastoralists and conflict resulting from the
environmental degradation that accompanies the activities of extractive industries
and the environmental concerns of local communities. In recent years, conflict has
also increasingly related directly to climate change. Hendrix and Salehyan (2012:
37) suggest that climate change in Africa is likely to result in continuous rainfall
deviations which will impact negatively on food production and on the livelihoods
of rural agrarian populations. They suggest such conflicts are unlikely to occur
between affected groups and the states and are more likely to occur between
neighbouring groups competing for resources. These environments may also see
conflict occurring between rural producers and urban consumers as prices rise
due to shortages of staple crops (Hendrix & Salehyan, 2012: 37).

The central argument presented in this sub-section is that conflicts in Africa are
complex and resistant to attempts to define them in term of a single causal factor.
It is also argued that conflicts take place at a wide variety of different levels and
with dramatic differences in the degree to which parties are willing and able to use
coercive force. While acknowledging these different levels it is also clear that all of
these different conflicts, to some extent regardless of scale, impact on individuals
in devastating ways. It is evident that many of the countries described above are
in transition and that such transition has brought with it uncertainty and change which has contributed to the outbreaks of conflict.

Over the years there has been a recognition that journalists can make a contribution to the resolution of conflicts at these different levels and efforts have been made to introduce journalists to peace journalism. A brief search of the World Wide Web reveals that courses have been conducted in, among other countries, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Sudan.

Having briefly discussed some of the conflicts that have impacted on and which continue to impact on the lives of people living in different African countries, the focus of this treatise will now narrow to a discussion of some of the conflicts that have broken out in South Africa in recent years.

### 1.2 Conflict in South Africa

South Africa has been widely hailed for its transition from apartheid to a constitutional democracy where all citizens are able to participate in political processes. However, it has become clear over recent years that the transition is on-going and that the country is still grappling with a wide range of challenges. Seekings (2011: 21) argues that the “first three governments led by the African National Congress (ANC) after 1994 had only modest success in tackling the challenges and inequality they inherited from the apartheid era”. The country has also, over the years, experienced a weakening in the degree of political participation by citizens in terms of formal engagement with governing structures. Mattes (2011: 94) suggests that: “South Africans’ cognitive engagement with politics has stagnated at relatively low levels, and voter turnout plummeted by thirty percentage points between 1994 and 2004, recovering only slightly in 2009”. Continued inequalities and the seeming reluctance of citizens to tackle these issues through democratic processes have contributed to the country experiencing a wide range of conflicts. Three of these will be discussed below, namely: ongoing service delivery protests, xenophobic violence and labour unrest. Notably these three manifestations of conflict are by no means distinct from each
other. This list is clearly not exhaustive, but it does provide an indication of some of the issues that journalists reporting on conflicts in South Africa confront on a daily basis.

**Service delivery protests**

Since 2004, South Africa has experienced a massive movement of militant local political protests. In some cases these have reached insurrectionary proportions with people momentarily taking control of their townships, and it is reasonable to describe the phenomenon as a rebellion of the poor. (Alexander, 2010: 37)

Alexander’s remarks are born out in his research into the levels of social protests and demonstrations that have taken place in South Africa since 2004. Between 2004 and 2008 the number of ‘protest incidents’ recorded by the South African police in their Incident Registration Information System ranged from a low of 7000 in 2007/08 to a high of almost 10,500 in 2005/06. The list of incidents include activities such as

... mass meetings, drafting of memoranda, petitions, toyi-toying, processions, stay-aways, election boycotts, blockading of roads, construction of barricades, burning of tyres, looting, destruction of buildings, chasing unpopular individuals out of townships, confrontations with the police, and forced resignations of elected officials (Alexander, 2010: 26).

It is estimated that roughly 10% of all of these protests have involved some form of unrest-related or violent activities which might include blocking roads, stoning vehicles, destroying public buildings and the looting of shops (Alexander, 2010: 29).

It is evident that the nature of these demonstrations point to a growing impatience and frustration among people who have been marginalised in terms of political and economic development in South Africa. The demonstrations frequently involve people who feel their local representatives have little interest in their welfare and who sense that the State has lied to them, making promises at election time and then failing to listen to them at other times. Causes of dissatisfaction include both the State’s failure to provide acceptable services and resources and to maintain
these adequately (Alexander, 2010: 28 – 30). Today these demonstrations do not appear to have a racial element, but are instead addressed at issues of class. Alexander (2010: 38) suggests that if the factors that are prompting these demonstrations are not addressed there is a possibility that:

... struggles will generalise, developing more interconnections between townships and between township struggles and other arenas of conflict. This is what happened under apartheid, where the local battles of the early 1980s paved the way to national coordination.

Xenophobic violence

Xenophobia has long been a source of conflict in South Africa as local citizens vent frustration and anger against immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers who have taken up residence in this country. Attacks against foreigners in South Africa have been ongoing for years, but they came to a head on 11 May 2008 when residents of Alexandra township turned on foreign nationals. The initial attacks spread to other parts of Gauteng and then to the Western Cape, Kwazulu-Natal and to a lesser extend the Eastern Cape. More than 70 people were killed during the month-long period of xenophobic violence, of which one third were believed to be South Africans who were either married to foreign nationals or mistaken for foreigners. It was estimated that between 80 000 to 200 000 people were displaced during this time. Victims included people from Bangladesh, Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Zimbabwe as well as XiTsonga and TshiVenda speaking South Africans (Igglesden, 2008: 5-7).

Igglesden (2008: 7) writes that attacks were justified by community representatives who claimed that:

... foreign nationals had unwarranted access to government provided housing, that foreign nationals were responsible for criminal acts in the communities, or that foreign nationals were 'illegal' immigrants and were responsible for taking jobs and consuming services that should rightfully be reserved for South African citizens.
The extent to which many of these justifications are based on fact is less significant than the fact that these perceptions exist and that they are strong enough to enable people to engage in highly contentious behaviours. These attacks are also indicative of the fact that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction among the mass of marginalised people in South Africa and that this frustration is likely to find scapegoats and outlets (Alexander, 2010: 38). It is also evident that conflicts between foreign nationals and marginalised South Africans are likely to continue into the future. In 2010 the United National High Commission for Refugees reported that South Africa had the highest number of claims from asylum seekers in the world with more than 180 000 people applying for asylum in the country (UNHCR, 2010: 8). Of significance is the fact that neighbouring Zimbabwe was recorded as the country with the highest number of asylum seekers. It seems reasonable to assume that in circumstances where South African citizens were less frustrated with their living conditions the impact of xenophobia would not have been as dramatic.

**Labour unrest – The Marikana Massacre**

In August 2012 South Africa experienced its most significant moment of state violence since the dawn of democracy when police opened fire on striking workers from the Lonmin Platinum Mine in Marikana, killing 36 demonstrators, many of whom were later found to have been shot in the back. The shooting followed an earlier incident in which two policemen were hacked to death by striking workers (Wehmhoerner, 2012: 2). The shooting itself came on the back of a wildcat strike by rock-drillers at the Lonmin mine who were demanding substantial pay-hikes. These workers had brought the mine to a standstill and threatened violence against anyone who sought to challenge their cause. Such strategies have become more commonplace in South Africa as workers have turned to more militant unions to represent them. In the Marikana incident workers turned their backs on the union that traditionally represents miners, the National Union of Mineworkers, and have joined the Association of Mine and Construction Workers. Wehmhoerner (2012: 2) writes that:
Critics claim that AMCU is intentionally stirring up violence at strikes to increase the pressure on management. Patterns of strikes in the platinum mines in the Rustenberg area reveal that violence has become routine and workers feel that it is working for them.

Since the Marikana massacre it has become evident that the conflict in the mining industry is substantially more complex than it might have appeared on the surface, going well beyond a simple demand by workers for more money. Recent investigations have shown that the miners themselves have been victims of exploitative lending schemes that have seen miners losing virtually all their wages to money lender and garnishee orders (Daily Maverick, 12 October 2012).

These brief examples of manifestation of conflict in South Africa all point towards underlying structural causes that have to do with the nature of transition and the fact that processes of transformation have yet to truly address the needs of marginalised people in this country.

1.3 Protracted social conflict and human needs theory

Literature from the fields of peace and conflict studies suggest that there is a widely held consensus among scholars and practitioners that conflict is an inevitable and inescapable aspect of human existence (Van der Merwe, et al., 1990: 216). There is also widespread agreement that conflict can potentially play both a positive and a negative role in society, both providing the impetus for constructive developmental change and the source of enormous suffering and long-lasting antagonism between individuals and groups.

Many but not all scholars also agree that there are similarities between conflicts at different levels – ranging from the interpersonal through to intra- and interstate conflict – that makes lessons learned in one context analogous to another (Burton, 1993: 56). However, despite these commonly held views there is also a distinct position held by leading theorists – including, among many others, Galtung (1996), Burton (1990), Mitchell (1990) and Azar (1990) – that there are distinct differences between types of conflict. These theorists share a conviction
that it is necessary to distinguish between what they variably call protracted social conflict or deep rooted conflict, and low-level conflict or disputes\(^2\). They suggest that a failure to recognise these distinctions can have devastating consequences both for the immediate and long-term prospects of dealing with conflicts.

The importance of correctly diagnosing the nature of conflict is evident in Galtung’s (1996) comparison between peace-building and medical science. This comparison provides a useful heuristic or metaphorical thinking tool. He proposes that both forms of intervention involve diagnosis – identifying the problem, prognosis – establishing where the problem will lead without cure and the treatment or the intervention. When it comes to conflict, a misdiagnosis could have the following consequences: (1.) the causes of the conflict are not addressed and the conflict continues to fester and develop, (2.) the treatment may address the symptoms in the short term but conceal the underlying causes, (3.) it may aggravate the problem, or (4.) the failure of a treatment to work effectively may result in a conflict becoming increasingly resistant to intervention. This is especially true as parties grow skeptical about the prospects for finding sustainable solutions (Mitchell, 1990: 152). Burton (1993: 56) suggests that the lack of precise terminology used in everyday conversation to distinguish between deep rooted social conflict and disputes means people frequently approach conflicts incorrectly and this lack of precise terminology impacts negatively on the ability of people engaging with these conflicts to arrive at sustainable solutions that satisfy the different parties involved.

Both Burton (1990 in Anstey, 2008: 10) and Azar (1990) suggest that people experience conflict every day and that such conflict is, as observed above, endemic in all social relationships. They suggest that conflict can play a normal and sometimes necessary role within collaborative networks of people. Azar (1990: 145) argues these “low-level conflicts ... are part of the normal processes of change, and adjustment to it, which all persons and societies experience in relation to each other”. Such conflicts are largely directed at addressing the interests of groups and individuals and are generally regarded as being amenable

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to negotiation and compromise as groups find ways of maneuvering around each other. They can also frequently be addressed in an acceptable manner with groups seeking recourse by making appeals to legitimate judicial and other mutually acceptable arbitration forums (Jeong, 2010: 131). In cases of ordinary conflict groups have a range of options available to them including the approaches put forward by Ruble and Thomas (1976 in Anstey, 2008: 11), namely competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising or collaborating. Each of these options – with the possible exception of the last – has attendant risks, but they can still result in enduring solutions because the issues involved are not seen to be intractable.

This situation is largely reversed when it comes to protracted social conflict because the source of the conflicts do not have their origins in parties’ seemingly incompatible interests, but rather in needs that are the result of inherent imperatives which are, at least to some degree, deterministic. While biological needs clearly form an essential component of these needs, theorists differ on the degree to which other needs are present at birth or whether they are acquired over time (Sandole, 1990). This ‘nature versus nurture’ debate is likely to be ongoing and is not the subject of this treatise. What is important is the needs theory proponents’ consensus that needs are ontological, deep-seated and universal. These needs cannot, as Burton (1990 in Anstey, 2008:10) suggests, simply be “negotiated away”. Nor can they be “contained, suppressed or managed” as is the case with low level conflict. Azar (1990: 147) agrees arguing that:

... human needs and longstanding cultural values ... will not be traded, exchanged of bargained over. They are not subject to negotiation. Only interests which derive from personal roles and opportunities within existing political systems are exchangeable and negotiable.

Attempts to suppress needs, theorists argue, will inevitably lead to the emergence of social conflict and this conflict often becomes manifest in ways that are “likely to be intense, vicious and, from a Clausewizean perspective, irrational” (Ramsbotham, et al., 2005:86). As Azar (1990: 145) argues:

We are led to the hypothesis that the source of protracted social conflict is the denial of those elements required in the development of all people and societies, and whose pursuit
is a compelling need in all. These are security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity, and effective participation in the social processes that determine conditions of security and identity, and other such developmental requirements.

For Azar (1990: 145) protracted social conflicts the world over share common attributes that account for their prolonged nature, for the difficulties parties experience in resolving these conflicts and for the degree of violence that can accompany them. His argument is based on a recognition that needs cannot be viewed in isolation from context and that the deprivation or fulfillment of needs relates largely to structural considerations within a society. These structural faults, he suggests, include “enduring features such as economic and technological under-development, and un-integrated social and political systems” (Azar, 1990: 145). Transforming such conflicts also means finding mechanisms for addressing distributive injustice – the “elimination or substantial modification of economic, social and extreme disparities in levels of political privilege and opportunity” (Ibid.). As Jeong (2010: 131) suggests:

An interest-based framework … encourages a compromise based on the division of loss and gains … a needs-based approach seeks coexistence based on the agreement of the removal of exploitative and oppressive relationships.

Sites (1990: 29) shares this view, suggesting that the long-term resolution of conflict must involve an overarching shift in values within which a new hegemony of thought emerges that permits equality in the gratification of human needs. This hegemony of thought, he argues, must involve the substitution of the existing overarching value system which privileges the interests of economic elites over others. For these theorists, protracted social conflict will inevitably occur and re-occur in contexts of persistent structural inequality. For Azar (1990: 145), any solution that neglects structural considerations and that continually results in the economic, social and cultural marginalisation of specific groups and deprives these groups of opportunities to satisfy needs are destined to fail. Such solutions, he argues, must rest on “law enforcement, threat or power control by the more powerful party to the conflict [and] conflict is more likely to erupt once again as soon as there is any change in the balance of forces, in leadership, or in some other significant eco-political conditions” (Azar, 1990: 145).
For theorists such as Fisher (1990) and Mitchell (1990) the most fundamental feature of human needs theory relates to the degree to which structure impacts on the ability of individuals and groups to satisfy identity needs. Drawing on the field of applied social psychology, Fisher (1990: 93) suggests that it can be assumed that “individuals and social groups have undeniable needs and rights for dignity, respect, security, and ‘a place in the sun’ in both physical and psychological terms.” In short they must be able to develop and express their identities, participate meaningfully in social life and have a considerable degree of control over their own destiny. Fisher (1990: 103) proposes that:

... all social groups have fundamental needs for recognition, identity, security and participation which, when frustrated, result in an inexorable push for redress and satisfaction ... [additionally] ... a need for power, either as part of the maximisation dynamic of social systems or as the mechanism by which interests, values or needs are obtained, is a further source of the etiology of conflict.

The significance of this analysis for the South African context becomes evident when it is remembered that this country has passed through a lengthy period of protracted social conflict during the apartheid era where the realization of fundamental human rights were systematically frustrated by the National Party government. However, it should also be evident from the earlier discussion on conflict in South Africa that the political transition that culminated in the first democratic elections in 1994 has not seen this society transformed in a way that serves to satisfy everyone’s needs. For many, these needs remain unfulfilled despite the transfer of political power given that economic and political privilege continues to rest with an elite minority of both black and white South Africans (Bond, 2000).

It should be clear from the above that many conflict theorists agree that the primary difference between ‘ordinary’ conflict and protracted social conflict relates to the degree to which antagonists are motivated by needs rather than interests. That said, because needs are assumed rather than being empirically evident, there is a substantial degree of difference among theorists about what actually constitutes these needs (Bradshaw, 2008: 49). These differences are often
related to nomenclature and to the way in which theorists understand particular sets of human requirements or urges (Mitchell, 1990: 158 - 159). It may be that such distinctions are less significant than the general contribution the theory of human needs has made towards our understanding of seemingly intractable conflicts.

The next sub-section of this treatise concentrates on the dynamics of protracted social conflicts and how these, in some instances, differ from those that become manifest during ‘ordinary’ conflicts.

1.4 The dynamics of protracted social conflict

Making the link between human needs and social conflict, Roy (1990: 127) suggests that needs theorists share the common assumption that needs satisfaction is a *sine qua non* of a harmonious society. He argues that the linkages between needs theory and social harmony can be interpreted in three different ways. Firstly, there is the understanding that if needs can be fulfilled then it should be possible to address social conflicts at source. However, the suppression or frustration of these needs results in “attitudinal and behavioral distortions which, in turn, create conditions for conflict” (Roy, 1990: 127). Within this context, “social institutional arrangements may be such that they either frustrate needs satisfaction, only unsatisfactorily fulfill them, or create alienating needs” (Roy, 1990:126-127), and this can result in the distortion of individual development. These distortions can produce personality imbalances and this can in turn lead to individuals disrupting social harmony.

For the second interpretation of the link between human needs and social harmony, Roy (1990: 127\(^3\)) draws on Burton’s argument that needs frustration produces disturbing consequences for the functioning of social institutions. According to this argument, if needs analysis were made the basis of social planning, conflict would become far more easily identifiable and social institutions could be structured in such a way as to mitigate the likelihood of possible

\(^3\) The researcher understands Roy’s use of social harmony to be akin to Galtung’s (1995) idea of a positive peace.
conflicts. While this interpretation includes more than a hint of optimism, the suggestion is also that, unless needs are accommodated in social and political structures, conflict becomes inevitable.

The final interpretation offered by Roy (1990: 127-128) suggests that while conflict arises as a consequence of society’s failure to recognise and satisfy the needs felt by particular groups, once these have been recognised and acknowledged as legitimate the way is open for a conflict to be resolved.

The latter of these interpretations is addressed in the next section which focuses on the contribution of needs theory in aiding our understanding of conflict resolution processes. However, the former two interpretations are relevant to this discussion on dynamics because they point specifically to the way in which needs deprivation impacts negatively on conflict. Azar (in Ramsbotham, et al., 2005: 86) certainly suggests that this is so and proposes that the deprivation of needs frequently takes place in societies characterised by underdevelopment and political oppression. He suggests that most countries that experience protracted social conflict tend to be “characterised by incompetent, parochial, fragile, and authoritarian governments that fail to satisfy basic human needs (Ramsbotham, et al., 2005: 87). The monopolising power of the state is used by dominant elites who abuse the machinery of the state to maximise their interests, whilst simultaneously limiting the range of opportunities available to non-dominant groups.

Such conflicts, writes Anstey (2008: 16), are particularly evident in nations with long histories of ethnic tension where “status, wealth or access to opportunity are determined by ethnic groups”. These factors are exacerbated when “political alignments are defined by ethnicity rather than other interests” (Anstey, 2008: 16), when there are “an absence of crosscutting cleavages along non-ethnic lines” and where “small groups of advantage in a context of large groups of disadvantage and economic inequalities [are] reinforced by public policy and social behaviour” (Anstey, 2008: 16).

Azar (in Ramsbotham, et al, 2005: 88-89) suggests that manifest protracted social conflict will be accompanied by processes that include identity group formation,
organisation of groups in order to either fight for or defend positions, and a range of choices about political goals that might include succession, demands for autonomy and the pursuit of a revolutionary political agenda. These moves will in turn provoke responses from dominant groups who must choose between tactics ranging from accommodation to deliberate attempts to destroy those whose actions challenge entrenched hegemonic positions.

Theorists argue that parties undergo changes as conflicts escalate (Anstey, 2008: 36-40, Pruitt & Kim, 2004: 30-35) and that these changes can be particularly severe in cases of protracted social conflict because they have, at their essence, a motivation founded on the denial and deprivation of needs. The escalation of such conflicts may involve the formation of much tighter identity groups, enemy imaging processes, demonization and the use of threats and force by all parties involved in the conflict. It can also result in people engaging in actions they would not otherwise have contemplated and in them turning their backs on cultural norms. As Burton (1988: 53 in Bradshaw, 2008: 49) argues:

... if the norms of society inhibit and frustrate [the individual] to the degree that he decides they are no longer useful, then subject to the values he attaches to social relationships, he will employ methods outside the norms, outside the codes, he would in other circumstances wish to apply to his behaviour.

This is particularly the case in conflicts that have taken on an ethnic dimension. In this respect Lake and Rothchild (in Ramsbotham, 2005: 121) offer an insightful summary of the dynamics of how ethnic dimensions can be exacerbated during times of conflict. They write that:

... ethnic conflict is most often caused by collective fears of the future. As groups begin to fear for their safety, dangerous and difficult-to-resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence. As information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma take hold, groups become apprehensive, the state weakens, and conflict becomes more likely. Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs, operating within groups, build upon these fears and polarise society. Political memories and emotions also magnify these anxieties, driving groups further apart. Together these between-group and within-group strategic
interactions produce a toxic brew that can explode into tremendous violence (Lake and Rothchild in Ramsbotham, 2005: 121).

The arguments made above could probably be summarised in three simple, but critical points: firstly, protracted social conflict differs from ordinary conflict in that it is not simply about people coping with change, but it is more specifically about people dealing with ontological needs and their requirements. Secondly, the ongoing denial of these needs can see people resort to behaviours that would fall well outside of the norms for acceptable behaviour that they themselves would generally regard as moral and acceptable. Thirdly, protracted social conflicts cannot simply be negotiated away, because needs are not negotiable. The challenge for the parties involved and for those contemplating interventions is to find mechanisms for ensuring that needs are met rather than simply seeking to negotiate them away. How such conflicts may be approached will be the subject of the next section.

1.5 Transforming protracted social conflict

It should be evident from the above that there are no quick fix solutions to protracted social conflicts. They cannot simply be addressed through a simple distributive process of give and take because needs are not divisible. Nor can such conflicts be indefinitely suppressed or repressed.

For Burton (1993: 57), the failure to take into account the importance of basic human needs has meant that elites have tried to control and prevent conflicts through the simple deployment of coercive force. Such political-realist approaches, he argues, fail to assist us in understanding conflict because they leave no explanation for social disturbances besides the assumption that insufficient force has been deployed. Such strategies have little long term potential to either contain conflict or to alleviate the suffering it can cause. Burton (1993: 58) observes:

> Whether we are dealing with children, street gangs, ethnic communities, or nations of peoples, we are finding that there are human problems to be solved, and that no amount of
coercion or repression can for long contain human developmental aspirations.

An acknowledgement of this point is fundamental if we are to hope that societies can find ways of resolving the conflict between groups. Human needs theory suggests that alternative strategies for dealing with conflict need to be found; strategies that have at their core an understanding of the importance of needs and how these must be accommodated.

It’s also important to note at this point that just as theorists distinguish between types of conflict, they also distinguish between ways conflict can be brought to a close. Mitchell (1990: 151) suggests that general approaches to conflict can be broken down into three categories, namely:

- Truces: these are “arrangements which bring about a cessation of mutually coercive conflict behavior … but which do little to deal with the underlying issues giving rise to the conflict” (Ibid.).
- Settlements: these involve parties in compromises and the abandonment of goals by parties who trust that through their compromises they may cease hostilities whilst developing new relationships (Ibid.).
- Resolution: this involves arrangements that “deal with the underlying issues in dispute and establish a new acceptable relationship between erstwhile adversaries” (Ibid.).

Settlements, Mitchell (1990: 150) argues, tend to be arranged or imposed by external parties or by powerful adversaries and frequently remain fragile, whilst resolution will only occur once parties have engaged in processes that have enabled them to “analyze thoroughly and together the underlying causes of their dispute”. Furthermore. Fisher (1990) argues, conflicts can only be considered to have been resolved when the agreements that are arrived at between parties succeed in providing:

... durable long-term solutions to disputes by removing the underlying causes and establishing new, and satisfactory, relationships between previously antagonistic parties.
In this respect Mitchell (1990: 150) offers a list of characteristics for a conflict that has been resolved. He suggests such a solution would be:

- Complete. The issues in conflict would disappear from the political agenda and/or cease to have any salience for the different stakeholders.
- Acceptable to all the parties to the dispute, not merely to an elite faction.
- Self-supporting and not requiring third-party sanctions or enforcement.
- Satisfactory to all parties and regarded as fair.
- Uncompromising. No party should feel they have sacrificed their goals.
- Innovative. The solution should arrive at a new and more positive relationship between the parties.
- Un-coerced. Adversaries should freely arrive at the solution themselves.

In the last decade the term ‘transformation’ has come to be used when referring to conflict outcomes that involve “fundamental attitudinal changes in relations between parties”, and a huge investment in seeking to eliminate conditions that generate conflicts (Anstey, 2008: 128).

There is general agreement that achieving such far reaching solutions requires innovative approaches and this has been an area where scholars and practitioners appear to have made a range of very practical contributions through the development of problem-solving processes. These processes, which go by various names, have at their essence the intervention of third parties who have no coercive power within the conflict and who are recruited for the expertise they can offer in helping antagonists to better understand their conflicts and the issues confronting them. Their role is to:

... bring about positive, conflict-reducing effects on conflictful relationships, which have resisted the efforts of those using more traditional means of reducing or resolving conflict, such as formal negotiation, mediation or conciliation (Mitchell, 1993: 78).

For Burton (1993: 59) the process involves a careful analysis of the relationships of conflict by the third parties who then bring the antagonists together in an interactive facilitated meeting. The initial objective is purely analytical and
exploratory. No bargaining or negotiation is entertained until the parties have arrived at an agreed upon definition of the problem and an assessment of the ongoing costs of maintaining existing policies. Only once this process has been completed will parties begin to tackle the substantial issues, but the objective is for this process of problem-solving and negotiation to happen in a collaborative as opposed to a coercive manner.

Whilst this appears to be a rational approach to addressing conflict it is also counter-intuitive for most parties because it “calls for the cooperation between antagonists in searching for outcomes that are advantageous to both. And this is what enemies are least inclined to do” (De Reuck, 1990: 185). De Reuck (1990: 186-187) suggests that it is a diagnostic characteristic of conflict for enemies to have mutually exclusive frames of reference which prevent them from cooperating. Such frames, he argues, predispose enemies toward zero-sum interpretations of loss and gain which can make collaboration appear to be synonymous with disloyalty to one’s own group. These problem-solving processes thus involve a delicate balance of parties moving from analysing and exploring conflict to situations where they actively engage with each other in problem-solving processes that can begin to resemble a form of collaborative negotiation.

The process recognises that while these collaborative negotiation processes continue, the parties will continue to engage in tactical maneuvering. However, the goal is to provide parties with opportunities for developing trust and making progress towards a point where sustained and self-sustaining processes of problem solving can be maintained. Progress made between parties involved in such workshops can then be allowed to feed into the political sphere and to inform the development of solutions designed to meet the overall concerns of all groups within a conflict. Such approaches can thus provide the impetus for further negotiations by enabling parties to recognise what steps need to be taken to ensure the needs of all are satisfactorily accommodated, even if a certain amount of direct bargaining will still occur within the broader confines of an agreement. Parties must also give attention to how such agreements can be translated into broader society-wide transformation processes that allow former antagonists
across communities to address conflicts at more localised levels De Reuck, 1990: 185).

For Fisher (1990: 89) the theory of human needs “offers additional support and a fresh perspective of the appropriateness and utility of the problem-solving approach to conflict resolution”. He suggests that the understanding and acknowledgement of basic human needs are “… essential to the improvement of intergroup relations and the resolution of protracted social conflict”. He argues, further, that the basis for moral values should be found in human experience and that we should draw on our human capacity for critical reasoning and scientific enquiry in solving problems in “a humanitarian direction” (Ibid.). At the very least, such a process must conclude with agreements that will meet the basic economic and cultural needs of all people (Fisher, 1990: 90). 

In a review of different theories of intervention used in addressing ethnic conflicts, Ross (2000: 1002-1003) suggests that there is general consensus among theorists that severely escalated conflicts require a two-step approach. The first step involves the management of conflict:

... developing preconditions which convince competing groups that there are opponents to whom it is worth talking, that it is possible to create structural changes conducive to a stable peace, and that an agreement is possible which can meet each side’s basic concerns and needs (Ross, 2000: 1003).

A key concern during this stage of the process must be overcoming many of the widely documented negative dynamics of conflict escalation. For instance if coercive force has been used by parties, then this will likely have brought a “response of counter-coercion plus increased hostility, to be met in turn by increased coercion and further hostility” (Mitchell, 1989: 62). The on-going confrontation is likely to result in changes in the structure of the relationship between and within groups. Groups are likely to become more internally cohesive, they will develop strong hostile perceptions of opponents and this may lead to changes in group norms when it comes to considering how they will relate to members of the “other”. Dehumanisation and de-individuation become common
and these factors combine to enable groups to behave in ways they would not normally condone. Between the groups the relationships are likely to be accompanied by increased hostility, enemy imaging and breakdowns in communication (Pruitt and Kim, 2004: 105 - 112 for a detailed discussion of these dynamics). All of these factors combine to feed the spiral of escalation which makes it increasingly difficult for parties to address conflicts.

The second stage of the process Ross (2000: 1002-1003) outlines has to do with the negotiation around arrangements that will address “basic fears and core interests of the parties”. These interests would be specifically representative of the different parties’ underlying needs.

1.6 Towards a positive peace

Galtung (1995: 9) takes the idea of a two-stage approach to conflict resolution further when he proposes that a distinction can be made between two different conceptions of peace. These conceptions have implications for the ways in which parties understand conflict and conflict resolution processes. Galtung defines the first conception – a negative peace – as the “absence/reduction of violence of all kinds” (Galtung, 1995: 9). In this definition the emphasis is on violence, where the process of achieving peace is restricted to the mitigation or elimination of the party’s willingness or ability to inflict harm on each other. It suggests that peace can be understood simply as the absence of war or what Aron (in Barash and Webel, 2002: 6) describes as a condition of “more or less lasting suspension of rivalry between political units”. Antagonisms may continue to exist and underlying causes of conflicts will not have been addressed. The establishment of a negative peace is not considered a sufficient condition for conflicts to have been resolved, however, this condition can be seen as providing the space from which parties in conflict can begin to work towards the next level; a positive peace.

Galtung (1995: 9) defines this second conception of positive peace as “nonviolent and creative conflict transformation”. This more dynamic definition suggests that the work of building peace requires a much more fundamental understanding of
conflict and of the conditions that impact on peace. It suggests an understanding of peace that goes beyond the mere absence of violence. Instead a positive peace involves the creation of social conditions in which the preconditions for conflict are either eradicated or transformed into a form where they can be addressed without parties experiencing the need to resort to violence. A state of positive peace could be described as:

... a condition in which exploitation is minimised or eliminated, and in which there is neither overt violence nor the more subtle phenomenon of underlying structural violence (Barash and Webel, 2006: 6).

A framing of peace from a negative perspective focuses attention on peace-keeping – preventing parties from engaging in acts of violence and restoring some form of balance. A focus on peace from a positive perspective, on the other hand, focuses on peace-building and the “establishment of non-exploitative social structures, and a determination to work towards that goal even when war is not on-going or imminent” (Barash & Webel, 2006: 8). Underpinning the first conception is the goal of addressing the immediately evident causes of conflict, whereas underpinning the second is a deeper and more far reaching focus on identifying and addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

For Ross (2000) the essential feature of these concerns is the need to facilitate conditions within the conflict context that can enable groups to engage constructively with each other. In this respect community relations theory offers some potential because it suggests that interventions, some at a relatively low level, can help to create conditions under which settlements of a larger conflict can become more likely. The theory suggests that:

... the transformation of interpersonal or local-level relationships can offer a culturally appropriate model which can cascade into system-wide change (Ross, 2000: 1003).

Such interventions create the possibility for breaking down enemy stereotypes and creating a group-wide cognitive dissonance in which parties are encouraged to reconsider previously held images, allowing the development of new and less exclusionary narratives. Whilst the prospect of entirely changing the way in which
people who identify with particular groups see each other is low, it does seem imperative that they at least acknowledge each other’s humanity and recognise the value of opening up channels of communication between them.

It’s common that approaches to resolving protracted social conflicts begin with secretive back-channel negotiations between leaders (Pruitt, 2008) but such processes and agreements reached through them cannot be sustained without constituency mandates and buy-in. In this regard Lederarch (2002: 92) uses the concept of mediative spaces to argue in favour of an approach to conflict resolution that serves to mitigate concerns about elites reaching agreements that do not involve or include people at grass-roots levels within communities. Lederarch (2002: 92) argues that:

... building sustainable processes through which individuals, groups, and societies change from relationships defined by cycles of violent behaviour towards modalities of nonviolent interaction requires the careful nurturing of social mediative capacity.

This involves enabling antagonists to “develop social or inter-sectoral spaces infused with the same attitudes, skills and disciplines” that would normally be associated with the more exclusionary confines of the negotiation table. This, he argues, would lead to a change in the quality of the interactions that would move the “cycle of conflict from one defined by blame, reactivity, and division, toward a cycle of constructive dialogue” (Lederarch, 2002: 92-93). Such change is necessary because conflicts that are founded on historical divisions generally occur along “lines of constructed and collective identities” (Lederarch, 2002: 93) where “every set of social relationships has a connection to and is defined by these divisions”.

Anstey (2008: 325) refers to the distinction scholars make between peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building which refer to different processes in handling conflict situations. Peacekeeping involves separating and keeping antagonists apart to prevent them from inflicting further harm on each other. Peacemaking refers to “efforts designed to deal with grassroots causes of violence through the transformation of social and economic conditions and the attitudes of parties”
(Anstey, 2008: 325.). It is evident that peacekeeping relates specifically to attempts to establish truces between warring factions, while peacemaking relates to problem-solving, mediation and facilitation processes that occur between elites seeking solutions. Peace-building, finally, takes the process of dealing with conflict outside the negotiation room and engages communities in transformative processes intended to foster new relationships between parties involved in the conflict. Such processes allow for the creation of conditions that can encourage structural change within the broader society.

**Conclusion**

This chapter began by identifying a range of conflicts in Africa, including in particular South Africa. The focus was, on protracted social conflicts or manifestations of such conflicts. This discussion pointed to both the structural and affective impacts of such conflicts on the people who have been caught up in them. It concluded by focusing briefly on factors that need to be taken into consideration when it comes to the constructive management and resolution of such conflicts.

The remainder of the chapter served as a discussion of theories of social conflict that may be regarded to be of relevance to an analysis of conflict as it exists in South Africa and Africa more generally. Within this discussion, it is concluded that for meaningful resolution to occur within these environments, it is necessary to address broader issues that go beyond the concerns that are generally included in political negotiations. It is also necessary to address the need for “constructive, transformed interaction [to occur] well beyond a handful of key leaders” (Lederarch, 2002: 92-93). When conflict resolution processes are taking place at this broader level, Lederach (2002: 92-93) argues that the

… effort is not focused on producing agreements and solutions as the primary goal. Instead, it promotes relational spaces through which constructive non-violent change processes can be initiated and sustained.
Chapter Two focuses more specifically on the relevance of this theory for peace journalism and in spelling out the different ways in which journalists can contribute to peace.
Chapter Two

Peace journalism

Introduction

This chapter discusses the literature relating to peace journalism as an approach to the constructive coverage of conflict, including, in particular, protracted social conflict. In doing so it points to the normative principles that informs peace journalism as an approach and discusses the ways in which it is believed that such journalism can contribute to ameliorating the destructive impact of conflict. The chapter provides a detailed explication of peace and conflict sensitive journalism in order to facilitate a comparison between the principles on which this approach to journalism is based and the positions taken by the journalists who participated in the empirical component of this study.

2.1 The South African media environment

This section provides a brief overview of the media environment in South Africa with a view to describing the context in which the journalists participating in this study are working. It highlights some of the key issues South African journalists are dealing with, but does not attempt to discuss these issues in detail.

South Africa is known for having a plurality of public and private news platforms that include a wide variety of newspapers, magazines, national and regional radio stations, territorial free-to-air and satellite television and online news sources (Media Sustainability Index, 2010: 380). The newspaper industry is divided into a tabloid market, more ‘serious’ newspapers and a host of small community newspapers that service both urban and rural environments. A key example of the tabloid tradition is the Daily Sun, which weighs in as the country’s biggest daily with a circulation of up to 500 000 copies. The Star can be seen as representative of the more ‘serious’ tradition in newspaper journalism, with a circulation of 178 000 (Wasserman, 2010a: 2). However, many of the news publications are expensive and beyond the reach of poorer members of the community, and rural
communities in particular often have significantly less access to news (African Media Barometer, 2010: 6).

The media have faced many of the challenges that typically confront countries passing through processes of transition. Wasserman (2010b: 584) suggests that it is of particular significance that, although South Africa now defines itself as a democracy, the media continue to face threats to freedom. He argues that the democratic functions of journalism have been challenged, in particular, by “increased commercialisation and profit-seeking in a globalised market”. As a consequence of this marketisation, media have cut costs, reduced staff numbers and have elevated junior journalists to senior positions.

This streamlining of operations has resulted in a noticeable adverse effect on the quality of their output. There are many examples of inaccurate, poor quality and unfair reporting, pointing to a systemic problem (African Media Barometer, 2010: 6).

Wasserman (2010b: 568) also argues that media, despite claims of independence, still privilege an elite discourse “associated with neoliberal economic policies [and] centralised government” (Wasserman, 2010b: 485) and promotes a “liberal-democratic political agenda in which challenges from the radical end of the political spectrum (e.g. social movements) are silenced, marginalised or criminalised”.

Commentators note that, while media in South Africa are constitutionally protected, journalists are currently facing a number of challenges from the ANC-controlled government. These have included the promotion of the Protection of State Information Bill which will regulate how state information is classified, and which weighs the need for state security against principles of transparency and freedom of expression. This bill has been heavily critiqued by human rights activists, legal bodies, the media, and opposition political parties. The bill includes severe penalties for people leaking classified documents (Mail & Guardian, 28 November 2012). The ANC has also been promoting the introduction of a statutory media appeals tribunal (MAT) that would trump the self-regulation of media, in particular the print media in South Africa. The ANC’s recommendation
that the tribunal be established has, again, been heavily critiqued (see for instance Berger, 2010) by media institutions, academics and free speech activists. However, it is not clear at this stage whether the party intends to pursue the establishment of this tribunal (Daily Maverick, 3 July 2012).

It should be clear from the above that, although South African journalists are operating under conditions of relative freedom, they are also facing challenges relating to both the marketization of media and Government restrictions on media freedom.

2.2 Peace journalism’s contribution to conflict mitigation and resolution

Lederach (2002) does not make specific reference to the news media as having the potential to contribute toward the extension of mediative spaces within conflict environments. However, there are strong arguments within the conceptual field of peace journalism to suggest this potential exists. Bothas (1994: np) suggests that journalists are frequently involved in processes that:

… adhere to the first principle of mediation, which is to give all parties involved an opportunity to present their views. In the process of giving each side a hearing, several important steps toward conflict resolution can occur: the parties may be educated about each other's point of view; stereotypes are challenged; and initial perceptions can be re-evaluated and clarified.

There are equally strong arguments that suggest that while news media can contribute to, whether intentionally or not, the emergence of mediative spaces, journalists can also confound conflict resolution processes. The news media’s potential to contribute towards the exacerbation or amelioration of protracted social conflict will be explored in depth in the remainder of this chapter. The focus, within this discussion, is on the normative understandings of the media’s roles that are accommodated under the umbrella terms of peace and conflict sensitive reporting.
Peace journalism’s origins can arguably be traced back to the mid-1960s when Galtung and Mari Ruge (1965) conducted research into the media coverage of foreign policy crises in the Norwegian press (Shinar, 2009: 451). As part of this process they posed the question as to how events became news and intuitively identified a list of 12 factors which they felt were important (O’Neill and Harcup, 2009: 168). Building on this work, Galtung and Ruge (1965: 170) suggested that the media were undermining the public’s understanding of social issues. They stressed the need for changes in the conventional approach to news coverage, including more background and context in reports, a greater concentration on processes over events, more detailed coverage of complex and ambiguous issues and more coverage of non-elite people and nations.

These ideas were developed further by Galtung following a series of discussions at a week-long ‘Conflict and Peace Journalism summer school’ which brought together journalists, media academics and students from Europe, Africa, Asia and the US (The Peace Journalism Option, 1997). Synthesising his ideas into a matrix Galtung (in The Peace Journalism Option, 1997: np) distinguishes between what he terms war/violence journalism and peace/conflict journalism. He argues that journalists working for dominant mainstream media houses are largely, yet often unwittingly, located in the first classification (Galtung, 2006: 1). Also describing these classifications as the ‘low road’ (war journalism) and the ‘high road’ (peace journalism), Galtung (1998: np) suggests that, on the one hand, war journalists see “… conflict as a battle, as a sports arena or gladiator circus … the zero-sum perspective draws on sports reporting where ‘winning is not everything, it is the only thing’”. Peace journalists, on the other hand, recognise that “… in conflict there is also a clear opportunity for human progress … transforming the conflict creatively so that the opportunities take the upper hand – without violence” (Galtung, 1998: np.). War journalism, Galtung (1998: np) argues “will polarise and escalate, calling for hatred and more violence”, while peace/conflict journalism seeks to “de-polarise by showing the black and white of all sides, and to de-escalate by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence” (Ibid.).
Galtung’s thinking has since gained traction among scholars, conflict resolution practitioners and media professionals who share a normative conviction that journalists and the media organisations they work for can and should contribute to the peaceful management and resolution of conflict. The term ‘peace journalism’ has come to denote both an approach to and conceptualisation of journalism that foregrounds this potential to contribute constructively to the peaceful transformation of protracted conflicts at international, national and community level (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 5).

As a normative theory, peace journalism makes specific claims on how journalists should seek to contribute positively to promoting peace (Irvan, 2006: 34). The principles on which it is based are drawn from a variety of disciplines, including conflict and communication research, sociology and social psychology (Bläsi, 2004: 1) The approach has, in particular, come to incorporate the views of theorists arguing for a constructive approach to conflict coverage. However, just as peace journalism has gained a dedicated following, it also has its detractors who argue against its normative objectives and question whether it is practically feasible as an approach to journalism (Singh, 2011: 265).

The remainder of this chapter describes how peace journalism has gained conceptual and practical momentum over recent years. It also draws on the contributions of practitioners and scholars to explore how the approach can be seen to contribute to the peaceful transformation of protracted social conflict.

2.2.1 Peace journalism as a deliberate intervention

Hanitzsch (2007: 372) suggests that journalistic values and cultures range from those that privilege a detached and uninvolved conceptualisation of journalism dedicated to objectivity and impartiality through to a journalism that is deliberately interventionist, socially committed and normatively motivated. The former of these cultures, he argues, are deeply rooted in the history of Western and particularly US journalism which sees journalists as “disinterested transmitters of the news, who contribute mostly to vertical communication in society” (Ibid.). He suggests
that peace journalism’s normative imperatives call for a less detached approach to reporting, arguing that “the impetus behind interventionist journalism is not to stay apart from the flow of events … but to participate, intervene, get involved, and promote change” (Hanitzsch, 2007: 373).

For Kempf (2003: 2), the non-neutral, interventionist role of journalism has led to the emergence of “two opposing tendencies which try to change the nature of journalistic responsibility”. On the one hand there is the “journalism of attachment” (Bell, 2007; Ruigrok, 2008) which argues that journalists cannot remain neutral in the face of the grave violations of human rights which so often accompany modern warfare. Instead, journalists should “side with the victims of war and explicitly insist that something must be done” (Kempf, 2003: 2). Kempf (2003: 2) suggests that this understanding of journalism presents a “moral imperative [that] allows journalists to abandon their professional rules and standards of truthfulness in the name of a higher moral duty”. He argues, however, that in doing so “journalists appoint themselves judges of who is good or evil in the world … [and replace] the rules of journalism with the rules of propaganda” (Kempf, 2002: 54). An extreme version of such an approach would condone the deliberate foregrounding or withholding of particular kinds of information if this could advance the cause the journalist is supporting.

Peace journalism’s position on the continuum of journalistic involvement is one that seeks to contribute to the “prevention and constructive transformation of conflicts” (Kempf, 2002: 54) by deliberately creating opportunities for parties in conflict and the broader society to consider non-violent responses to conflict (Kempf, 2008: 18). Unlike the journalism of attachment, however, peace journalism does not seek to promote the interests of any particular party. Instead, its responsibility is to equally present the concerns and narratives of all sides involved in the conflict (Peleg, 2006: 13). Peace journalism therefore recognises that conflicts cannot be managed or transformed unless the concerns and needs of all parties involved are addressed.
The interventionist nature of peace journalism is evident in the frequently cited definition of such journalism proposed by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 5) who argue that:

Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report about and how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict.

This definition has attracted critique from opponents who argue that journalists, in making these choices, are abandoning objective values that are seen by many media professionals as being foundational to traditional journalists’ understandings of their roles (Ross, 2007: 79; Lyon, 2007: 3-4; Lyon, 2003: np). Lynch’s (2008: 3-4) response to these arguments is to propose that peace journalism is “an advocacy position vis-à-vis journalism itself, but it is not trying to turn journalism into something else”. He points out, furthermore, that although the objective of this approach to journalism is to provide societies with opportunities for peace-building and transformation, it is important for journalists to accept that there is little they can do if people elect not to take advantage of these opportunities. It is thus, as Lee (2010: 263) suggests:

... [a] goal-oriented approach premised on journalists’ active, non-objective, and self-conscious adoption of formal initiatives to promote peace [and] ... grounded in communitarian philosophy characterised by a commitment to civic participation, the understanding of social justice as a moral responsibility, and the notion that the worth of an individual is realised only in engagement in and through communities.

The general suggestion is also that peace journalism should not directly promote specific solutions to situations of conflict (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 18). Instead, it should enable people to recognise and consider non-violent approaches to resolving differences. Peace journalism’s intervention is thus one that concentrates on enabling journalists to contribute to creating conditions that enable parties to manage and transform protracted social conflicts.

Peleg (2006: 1) argues that, in order to establish such an approach to journalism, there is a need to change the norms and habits of journalists who report on
conflict. Similarly, for Cottle (2006: 100), peace journalism aims to challenge what proponents believe are shortcomings in “traditional forms of journalism which include the reliance on particular news values, dominant agendas, privileged elite access and so-called ‘professional’ journalistic practices”.

Kempf (2002: 70) suggests that traditional media do not merely reflect the mindset of a society, but that its coverage of conflict can actively contribute to stimulating the process of conflict escalation. This, he argues, happens at three levels:

- The media seldom pay attention to conflicts until violence breaks out (Ibid.).
- Journalists habitually interpret conflict from “within a win-lose framework” (Ibid.) and “rush to antagonistic conclusions without adequate analysis of the conflict constellation” (Ibid.).
- They focus on elites which makes them “especially vulnerable to official propaganda” (Ibid).

McGoldrick (2006: 1) supports Kempf’s argument, suggesting that in general conventional coverage privileges official sources, offers a dualistic construction of stories and generally focuses on events over processes. In response to these critiques of traditional media, peace journalism seeks to play a “corrective” role by promoting an understanding of, and an approach to, journalism which seeks to mitigate these concerns (Cottle, 2006: 100).

Peace journalism aims, then, to contribute to conflict management and transformation by challenging accepted journalistic conventions and by providing journalists with conceptual and practical tools they can draw on in reporting on conflicts more constructively. In summarising the overall approach, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005:4) suggest that peace journalism:

- Uses the insights of conflict analysis and transformation to update the concepts of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting.
- Provides a new route map tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their journalism – the ethics of journalistic intervention.
- Builds an awareness of non-violence into the practical job of everyday editing and reporting.

The remaining sections of this chapter will explore proposals made by proponents of peace journalism with regard to specific ways in which this approach can be adopted by journalists in order to report constructively on conflict.

### 2.2.2 Peace journalism and the framing of conflict narratives

The traditional understanding of objective news coverage is founded on the notion that journalists approach the selection of information from a normative position of neutrality drawing on a set of conventionally accepted news values in making decisions. In this respect Lynch (2007: 2) argues that:

> Journalists report the facts, and good ones set out to do so truthfully. But ‘the truth’ and ‘the facts’, whatever one thinks of the epistemological basis for such concepts, are, by their very nature, larger categories than ‘the news’. Some process of framing is inevitable in journalism – some facts are allowed through the gate, others are kept out.

His argument is developed further by McGoldrick (2007: 2) who argues that:

> The choices facing reporters and editors are endless. Why this story, and not another? Then, once you have decided that, why interview this person, or use that organisation as a source of information and not another?

Implicit in these arguments is the peace journalism advocate’s contention that news reports will never provide an objective representation of a conflict, its causes and how it is unfolding. Decisions about the interpretation of situations of conflict will always need to be made and these decisions will be taken by fallible people with their own ideological and cultural imperatives.

Peace journalism’s proponents suggest, furthermore, that the assumption of objectivity leaves journalists blind to the interests and assumptions that inform the decisions that they make when reporting on conflict. These decisions have to do with how journalists frame news stories, which Entman (1993: 52) defines as the process of selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them
more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993: 52).

Framing also has to do with the process of organising a news story thematically, stylistically and factually and with the specific story line that the journalist seeks to convey (Lee, Maslog and Kim, 2006: 502). Tankard, et al. (1991: 3) describe a media frame as:

... the central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.

Mandelzis (2007: 2) suggests that the traditional mass media contribute to the “reproduction of socio-political and ideological discourse by framing different issues, especially the news, with a strong bias towards conflict and violence”. Richards and King (2000: 480) agree, suggesting that the traditional method of conflict news coverage involves seeking out a disagreement between two parties and working with this tension to create a sense of drama. Journalists will seek to cover the conflict objectively, without favouring either side, but the approach neglects the fact that “often, in reality, there are many sides” (Ibid.). Shinar (2009: 452) supports this view, arguing that traditional coverage tends to promote the idea of conflict as taking place within a simple dichotomy resembling a tug-of-war. This results in a dangerous oversimplification of the issues that can create the impression that conflicts are only amenable to win-lose and zero-sum outcomes (Lynch, 2005: 7-8).

Drawing on agenda setting theory, Mandelzis (2007) suggests that such approaches to the framing of stories serve to limit the degree to which media consumers are encouraged to consider alternative approaches to conflict that fall outside these frames. Supporting this view, Biazoto (2011: 3) draws on Cohen’s (1963) argument that although journalists may not explicitly tell their audiences what to think, they “…certainly tell them what to think about”. He also argues that the way the media uses language and presents certain topics can “…alter the perception of audiences and subconsciously encourage certain interpretations of
the facts” (Biazoto, 2011: 3). In contrast, Shinar (2009: 452) suggests that peace journalism would seek to achieve the following in framing a conflict:

- Recognise the importance of understanding the relationships that exist between the contending parties.
- Identify all of the stakeholders involved in the conflict.
- Recognise the difference between underlying interests and stated demands in conflict.
- Identify voices that offer alternative solutions to conflict that do not necessarily involve the utilisation of contentious and sometimes violent tactics.

Galtung’s (1995) distinction between ‘positive-peace’, with its broader focus on conflict, and a ‘negative peace’, with its more restricted focus on violence (see 2.6), also has significant implications for the conceptualisation of peace journalism. Galtung (2000: 163) suggests that many journalists fail to “distinguish between conflict and violence” and that they lack the conceptual tools to detect the conflict which causes violence. The underlying assumption of this critique is that journalists are only likely to begin paying attention to an event when it has reached crisis proportions and where the conflict has become overtly violent or at least confrontational. They are also likely to represent the conflict in a distorted way, showing only the outcomes of violence and framing the conflict in terms of ceasefires and victories.

Peace journalism’s advocates argue that when the media do not report on emerging conflicts until they escalate beyond a dramatic threshold, journalists provide distorted and de-contextualised accounts of conflicts. Such representations do not explain the underlying causes of conflict or help people to understand how such conflict may result from the protracted deprivation of human needs. Most stories only deal superficially – if at all – with the ‘why’. It is pointed out that, although many journalists argue that an exploration of the underlying causes of conflict would make stories ‘too long’, people can only begin to think themselves out of a conflict if they consider these causes. An exploration of the causes of conflict is, in fact, essential – given that, without such an emphasis,
violence can be left to appear, by default, as the only response that “makes sense” (McGoldrick, 2007: 4).

Arguments for peace journalism suggest that unless journalism is informed by theories of social conflict, journalists’ questions are likely to be restricted to the causes of violence, rather than probing more deeply for the sources of conflict. They are thus also unlikely to question whether outcomes are sustainable or not. As Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 47) suggest:

Stopping people from fighting does not bring a sudden outbreak of harmonious relations; nor does it mean that the root of the conflict, the issues they were fighting over, has been resolved.

For Galtung the critical issue in focusing on different conceptions of peace simultaneously is that these ideas should expand the field of peace studies – and one can assume the range of journalistic coverage – from the “prevention and control of war to the study of peaceful relations in general” (Galtung, 1985: 145).

Peace journalism can be understood, then, to be based on the contention that it is only by framing conflict as a complex process involving multiple stakeholders that people will begin to understand conflict. If conflict reportage is going to make a contribution towards the creation of a mediative space, then it must present a more diverse understanding of conflict through its framing. Journalists should not assume that conflicts need inevitably conclude with winners and losers, rather they should also show that alternative solutions are possible.

The next section explores how peace journalism proponents suggest that, through exposure to peace and conflict theory, journalists can be encouraged to consider alternative and potentially more constructive ways of framing news.

2.2.3 Peace journalism as theoretically informed journalism

Peace journalism’s advocates share a common conviction that if journalists are going to contribute constructively to conflict they need to be equipped with conceptual and analytical tools to better understand how conflicts are unfolding.
(Lynch, 2008). In this respect Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) suggest that the field of peace and conflict studies provides a valuable set of tools that can assist journalists in understanding conflict causes and dynamics and the different approaches that can inform the management and transformation of conflict.

Peleg (2006: 2) proposes, similarly, that peace journalism encourages journalists to contribute as “motivator[s] of peace and as a promoter[s] of depolarisation and de-escalation” by drawing on their knowledge of peace and conflict studies. Armed with this knowledge, he argues, journalists will be better equipped to understand that:

… successful conflict resolution process[es] must be based on genuine and honest interaction between antagonists, whereby unmet human needs are frankly discussed and interests and motivations rather than positions are candidly aired (Peleg, 2006: 23).

Advocates of peace journalism generally agree that, based on such understanding, journalists will be able to recognise that conflict is not inherently destructive. Instead, it can, as Hamelink (2008: 75) suggests, be a source for “creativity, growth and productivity”. Kempf (2002: 60) takes this argument further, arguing that:

Typical mainstream coverage reduces conflict to force and violence. It contains little knowledge of the dynamics of conflict and no ideas for alternatives to violence. Even journalists who feel committed to traditional standards of truth and objectivity tend to paint pictures in black and white, often reducing conflicts to simple antagonisms in order to make news stories more thrilling and the conflict more understandable for their public.

Kempf (2002: 60) suggests further that the tendency to opt for a simplified ‘war journalism’ approach is heightened in conditions of intractable conflict where journalists frequently share the beliefs of the society to which they belong. Peace and conflict theory, peace journalism’s proponents argue, offers an antidote to such proclivities by allowing journalists to understand how they can make a constructive contribution towards the mitigation of conflict without being aligned to a particular group. Kempf (2008: 20) argues that:
Professional norms are necessary, but not sufficient to guarantee good journalism and a more constructive mode of conflict coverage … To produce good journalism, journalists need knowledge, competencies and qualifications that go beyond traditional journalistic training and enable them to counteract the escalation-prone misperceptions of reality.

The argument follows that when journalists have an enhanced understanding of conflict it can become apparent to them that, by contributing towards the overall conflict resolution effort, they are also able to benefit their own communities.

This view is shared by Howard (2010) and Du Toit (2010) who both argue that, while journalists who specialise in fields such as health, environment and business are expected to have a background knowledge of those fields, those who report on conflict are often ill-prepared to understand their subject matter. Howard (2010: 5) argues that:

Conflict is a curious blind spot in journalism education and training … traditional journalism skills development has not included the study of how best to cover violent conflict, and has ignored any understanding of violent conflicts as a social process (see also Bläsi, 2009).

In response to such concerns Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) provide an extensive review of how different theories and concepts from within the field of peace and conflict studies can enhance the journalist’s ability to report comprehensively and constructively on social conflict. Among the concepts they suggest journalists should be familiar with are the different theoretical explanations for conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 36), tools for diagnosing conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 38), the importance of understanding conflict dynamics such as the impact of partisan perceptions (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005 :46) and approaches for mapping conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 43).

What should be clearly evident from the first part of this chapter is that, according to the guidelines of peace journalism, journalists need to understand and recognise the difference between normal conflict and protracted social conflict. To report on a conflict that is deeply rooted in needs deprivation without the
appropriate contextualisation would be to misrepresent what is actually taking place.

### 2.2.4 Peace journalism and the multiplicity of news sources

Proponents of peace journalism suggest that the decisions journalists make concerning the sources they draw on in constructing the news has important implications for conflict coverage. They propose, further, that journalists should consider two concerns when making decisions about their sources. The first is that they should be wary of creating an overly simplistic portrayal of a conflict by suggesting, through their selection of a limited range of sources, that the conflict only involves two parties in contest over the same goals (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 28). Such dichotomous representations of conflict, they argue, creates an impression that contending parties comprise monolithic entities where everyone shares the same views of conflict and how it should be pursued. Hyde-Clarke (2011:47) suggests that in such circumstances there is value in disaggregating parties involved in the conflict and showing that there are often divergent opinions regarding acceptable methods of pursuing conflicts and the goals that might be regarded as acceptable.

By showing that there are alternative views, journalists make it possible for people to see and explore alternative approaches to conflict that do not necessarily involve the power politics so often presented as the only options by elites. This can also mean deliberately seeking out the ‘peacemakers’ in communities and allowing their voices to be heard (Lynch, 2008: 64). Peace journalism also argues that journalists should be aware of the different stakeholders involved in conflict and they should be sure to provide platforms for all of these parties.

The second concern regarding sources is integrally related to the first. Here peace journalism’s proponents argue that journalists should not limit themselves to the views of elite sources when reporting on conflict (Irvan, 2006: 34). Richards and King (2000: 492) warn against an overreliance on official sources because they will often have highly vested interests in a situation of conflict. An over-emphasis
on such sources can have the effect of further polarising conflict situations. By restricting themselves to contributions from elite sources, journalists will often serve the propaganda interests of elites (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005).

Peace journalism thus also involves journalists in seeking out the stories of people at grassroots level in communities affected by conflict and encouraging these people to tell their stories, explain their concerns and to propose solutions they believe might have a long-term impact on the conflict. It also means seeking out the views of people who may not be directly involved in the conflict, but who have contributions to make that can help people understand what is taking place and how they might address tensions.

The next section explores peace journalism’s claim that journalists should contextualise conflict by locating events and processes both temporally and geographically.

2.2.5 Peace journalism’s role in enhancing understanding

Advocates of peace journalism identify a number of analytical tools borrowed from the field of peace and conflict studies that may be of value to journalists. A key concept that they refer to, in this context, is the extent to which attitudes and context come to impact on conflict behaviours a conflict that is clearly explicated by both Galtung (1996) and Mitchell (1981) in their depictions of the triangle of conflict.

For peace journalism’s proponents, consideration of the concept of the conflict triangle leads to a range of critical insights that can help journalists to better analyse why parties are engaging in particular behaviours. It can also allow journalists to explore additional options for engaging with narratives that go beyond a focus on the directly observable behaviours of the parties. Such reporting strategies may enable journalists to tell stories that raise awareness about the complexity of the conflict, and which possibly point to possibilities for the resolution of conflict that may not have been considered. In Galtung’s (1996)
terminology, consciousness of the concept of a triangle of conflict allows journalists to go beyond the manifest indicators of the conflict to consider the non-manifest causes which may be latent. For Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 8) the model demonstrates that conflicts do not occur along a single axis where gains by one side must result in losses by the other. Instead it illustrates that there is a significantly broader range of opportunity available to participants that does not necessarily have to be driven by a zero-sum conception of the outcome. For the peace journalist this understanding can inspire a range of questions that ask parties to think creatively about the options available to them.

From a peace journalism perspective this model highlights the importance of journalists finding a balance between ‘episodic’ and ‘thematic’ ways of framing news stories. Tiegreen and Newman (2008: np) explain these concepts, suggesting that:

Episodic frames focus on the immediate event or incident and give little or no context about the underlying issues or context, while thematic frames focus on the big picture … and help the public view the event in a broader context.

When coverage is restricted to the ‘what happened’ – descriptions of parties’ behaviours – then it does little to promote understanding of the underlying causes of a conflict. Episodic frames address the traditional who, where, what, when and how of conventional news coverage, but they do not address the critical question of why something happened. Peace journalism suggests that to address the why question, journalists must also provide thematic frames for stories; they must seek to uncover the trends and contextual facts that help people to understand conflict and the history that has informed parties’ attitudes to each other. It is only by focusing on these issues that a journalist will be able to uncover the structural and cultural violence that may underpin conflict behaviour (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 60-62).

A related concern identified by proponents of peace journalism is that journalists tend to limit their coverage of conflict to particular temporal moments and geographic spaces. It is argued that to describe a conflict at one moment in time without reference to past conflicts that could have shaped attitudes and
behaviours is to distort the representation of the conflict. The proposal is that it is important for journalists to show, instead, that conflicts are historically situated and that they have not simply erupted without reason. Furthermore, according to guidelines for peace journalism, it can be dangerous to focus on what is happening in a particular geographical location without considering how events in other places may be impacting on the conflict (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2005: 28). As Galtung’s (1996) medical metaphor suggests, (see Section 1.3) an overly simplistic and situationally-restricted diagnosis of a conflict can result in parties responding inappropriately and in ways that fail to address real needs.

The final section of this chapter explores how peace journalism’s proponents see journalists as contributing to the formation of mediative spaces in which members of rival groups can find each other.

2.2.6 Peace journalism’s mediatory potential

Peace journalism’s proponents share a common understanding that the media has the potential to play a mediatory role during times of conflict. From this perspective, it is assumed that the journalist can either, as Kempf (2003: 83) suggests, take sides with one party against another or “play the role of a moderating third party in order to improve the communication between them and contribute to constructive conflict transformation”. This view finds support in Peleg (2006: 1) who agrees with the notion of the media as a third party to conflict inasmuch as “the third party is the facilitator of communication, the mediator or the arbitrator between the two rivalling sides”.

Bothas (nd: 3) suggests that journalists are frequently involved in processes that "adhere to the first principle of mediation", which, he explains, is to give all parties involved an opportunity to present their views. He argues that in the process of giving each side a hearing, several important steps toward conflict resolution can occur. The parties may, in particular, be educated about each other's point of view; stereotypes are challenged; and initial perceptions can be re-evaluated and clarified. In this regard Galtung (1998: np) suggests that there are a range of
critical questions journalists should be asking of parties in conflict if they are to contribute to understanding of the issues and relationships involved.

These questions include:

- What is the conflict about? Who are the parties and what are their real goals, including the parties beyond the immediate arena of violence?
- What are the deeper structural and cultural roots of the conflict?
- What visions exist about outcomes other than one party imposing itself on the other – what creative new ideas? Can such ideas be sufficiently powerful to prevent violence?
- If violence occurs, what about invisible effects such as trauma and hatred, and the desires for revenge?
- Who is working to prevent violence, what are their visions of conflict outcomes, their methods and how can they be supported?
- Who is initiating genuine reconstruction, reconciliation and resolution, and who is only reaping benefits like reconstruction contracts? (Galtung, 1998: np.).

Ross (2006) agrees with the importance of such guidelines, arguing that good reporting and news analysis should look beyond the stated positions of those involved, towards the parties’ interests and needs. She argues that reporting of this kind can assist both disputants and those involved in conflict resolution processes to get to the root of problems causing conflict. She proposes, furthermore, that it is of particular importance to situate conflict within its historical and social setting. Journalists can also point out the danger of escalation and draw people’s attention to issues they may not have considered regarding the causes of the conflict or why contending parties hold such negative views of each other (Ros, 2006).

Du Toit (1994, 2010) and Howard (2008) make a range of overlapping proposals about how journalists can contribute positively towards the mitigation of conflict. All of these points appear to have direct value for journalists covering conflict. They resonate, furthermore, with peace journalism’s contention that journalists
should adopt specific positions when it comes to thinking about their roles in reporting on conflict:

- Educating parties about conflict processes: journalists can play a significant role in helping parties to understand conflict and explain why parties may feel compelled to behave in the ways they do. This is particularly important when it comes to the coverage of ethnic conflict, because of the complexity of the issues and the fact that groups are often likely to feel that they are locked into situations that are not of their making. If groups can begin to grasp the dynamics of conflict, and to see themselves in relation to the theories developed to explain them, then there is an enhanced prospect of these groups being able to take steps to resolve conflicts. Journalists can also help parties to see how similar conflicts have been successfully managed and resolved in other contexts thereby enabling them to adapt these lessons to their own contexts.

- Confidence-building: journalists can present news that shows how groups involved in conflict have managed to find solutions. If journalists can provide examples of how seemingly intractable ethnic conflicts in one situation have been resolved in another, this can help to build confidence in the prospects of resolving conflict.

- Clarifying misperceptions and making them human: by exploring how different sides to a conflict feel about each other and the beliefs and misperceptions they may hold, journalists can contribute towards enabling parties to develop more realistic pictures of each other. By allowing people to understand that their opponents have fears and concerns that are often the same as their own, journalists can create the possibility for greater understanding.

- Identifying underlying interests: by spending time with parties and interacting with people on the ground, journalists can often develop a comprehensive picture of what some of the real needs and concerns are
that are held by the different parties. In doing so they will be going well beyond simply reporting the stated positions of leaders. They can also show that groups are not monolithic and that within their ranks there can often be significant differences.

- The framing of conflicts: media frequently describe ethnic conflicts in a way that suggests that ethnicity is the cause of such conflict. If journalists are able to provide alternative frames that show conflicts can have their origins in needs, relative deprivation and communication failures this can serve to widen the search for possible solutions. Journalists also frequently frame conflicts in a way that suggests violence is inevitable, while this is not the case. By making it clear that violence is always a choice, journalists can, at least to a limited degree, play a role in holding people accountable for their actions and for upholding their commitments.

- Broadening the search for solutions: journalists can help to increase the range of possible solutions on the table by paying attention to all proposals that might be put forward. They can put these options out in the public domain and they can also challenge leaders within parties to consider particular options.

- Empowering weaker parties: journalists can play a very important role in helping to encourage a balance of power by giving a voice to marginalised groups. If coverage is balanced and journalists treat weaker groups in the same way as powerful groups, they can help to place both groups on the same level and this can be empowering for weaker parties. It is common for dominant parties to dismiss their opponents by refusing to acknowledge them at all. By recognising these parties, journalists can ensure that the positions of marginalized groups are placed on the agenda.

In many respects, the roles that are ascribed to journalists within these guidelines are based on those normally ascribed to mediators working with parties in conflict. However, Du Toit and Howard are not suggesting that journalists intervene
directly between parties. Rather they suggest that journalists can play a role in creating, what Lederach (2002) describes as mediative spaces in which different civil society organisations contribute towards the creation of modalities of nonviolent interaction.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how journalists can contribute to the development of mediative spaces and enhanced understanding in communities experiencing protracted social conflict. In particular it has examined the claims that a normatively-driven approach to conflict reporting, more widely known as peace journalism, make about the news media’s potential to ameliorate harm and contribute to resolution processes by, among other things:

- channeling communication between rival parties.
- framing conflicts in ways that enhance understanding.
- challenging stereotypes, enhance communication.
- broadening the search for solutions.
- educating parties about peaceful approaches to ending conflict.
- building confidence between parties.
- avoiding the use of sensational and emotive language.

Based on the review of literature presented in the first part of this treatise, it is suggested that journalists have the potential to contribute towards facilitating conditions under which protracted social conflict can be managed and resolved. In the remaining chapters, the treatise asks whether journalists recognise this potential and whether they believe that they have a responsibility to contribute towards the mitigation of conflict through their reporting.

The following chapter provides a detailed overview of the research methodology that has been employed in exploring these questions.
Chapter Three

Research methodology

Introduction

This chapter sets out the overall objectives and goals of the research before providing an overview of the way in which particular ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations have impacted on the study. It illustrates how the particular methods that were employed relate back to these considerations and describes how the research was conducted. It also discusses the limitations of the study in terms of its generalisability and the ethical questions that were considered in planning and conducting the study.

3.1 Research objectives

This study seeks to explore the role journalists perceive they can play in reporting on social conflict and the degree to which these roles are compatible with the principles underpinning the practice of peace journalism. In doing so it aims to provide insights into the degree to which South African journalists might benefit from training in peace and conflict sensitive reporting and the extent to which they may be open to such training.

In seeking to achieve these primary objectives the study explores a number of related themes which encompass the following sub-questions:

1. What roles do journalists believe the news media can play in reporting on conflict?
2. What roles do journalists believe the news media should play in reporting on conflict?
3. What specific opportunities do journalists recognise that can enable them to contribute constructively to the peaceful management and transformation of conflict through their reportage?
4. In what ways are these perceptions compatible with principles underpinning the practice of peace journalism?
3.2 Aims to be achieved

This study had the following primary aims, namely:

1. to explore and describe the perceptions of journalists with regard to the roles they believe they can play in reporting on conflict.
2. to explore the degree to which the journalists’ perceptions of their roles are consistent with the primary principles of peace journalism.

3.3 Ontology and epistemology

Cresswell (1994: 1) suggests that in the human and social sciences paradigms provide frameworks that help us understand phenomena under study. They “…advance assumptions about the social world, how science should be conducted, and what constitutes legitimate problems, solutions, and criteria of ‘proof’”. This view is supported by Guba and Lincoln (1994: 107 -108) who argue that:

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs … that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts … The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 245) and Guba & Lincoln (1994: 108) make the important point that paradigms do not exist in their own right, but are human constructions; constructions which enable social scientists to collectively define for themselves what falls within and outside the limits of what they consider to be legitimate science.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that different paradigms that inform research practice can be captured in the responses to three key questions:

1. The ontological question which addresses the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it.
2. The epistemological question which addresses the basic beliefs about knowledge and what can be known.

3. The methodological question which addresses how the researcher may go about finding out whatever s/he believes can be known.

Of importance to Guba and Lincoln (1994) is that questions relating to ontology and epistemology – the more philosophical questions – must always take prominence over questions of methodology and method. Furthermore these questions are so interconnected that however the inquirer responds to one question, will constrain how she or he may respond to the other two. Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 245) also include the question of axiology (ethics) which addresses how the researcher acts as a moral being in the world.

Babbie and Mouton (1998) suggest that social science research continues to be dominated by three primary paradigms, namely: positivism, interpretivism or phenomenology and critical theory. Guba and Lincoln (1994, 2000) propose a similar set of competing paradigms that include positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. They argue that while post-positivism or critical realism has shrugged off some of the naiveté of pure positivism the paradigm remains subject to most of the same critiques and, for the purpose of this discussion, can be taken together with positivism. Similarly, constructivism and interpretivism are taken to have sufficient attributes in common to be considered part of the same paradigm.

Furthermore, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) have argued, each of these paradigms has its methodological counterpart, with positivism and the quantitative paradigm being linked, while interpretivism and constructivism are tied to the qualitative paradigm. Critical theory is associated with participatory action research (Babbie & Mouton, 1998: 48). In this regard the distinction Babbie and Mouton (1998: 49) make between methods (the wide variety of techniques available to scientists in gathering and interpreting data) and methodology (the selection of techniques in accordance with principles and assumptions underlying their use) is significant.
As should already be evident from the research objectives detailed above, this study falls firmly within the qualitative paradigm and is underscored by a constructivist ontology and epistemology in which:

...realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions ... [that are] socially and experientially based [and] local and specific in nature (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 110).

It is also informed by an epistemology in which the relationship between the investigator and the object of investigation “are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 110). In fact the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology can be seen to disappear as reality is constructed in the interaction between the researcher and the subject. Connole (1993: 13) argues that this approach involves an “empathetic identification with the ‘other’” with the goal of “grasping their subjective experience”, and which Green (1994: 536) suggests is premised on the view that “in the world of human experience, there is only interpretation”.

3.4 Research methods

Having discussed the overall methodology that informs this study, the focus of this chapter shifts to the specific methods to be employed in gathering and analysing the data.

3.4.1 Participant selection

The principle method chosen for the study was one that involved a series of in-depth interviews with experienced South African journalists aimed at exploring with them their understanding of the media’s role in reporting on social conflict.

The process of selecting the participants was consistent with the principles of purposive sampling, described by Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003: 97) as the approach in which members of a sample are chosen with “a purpose to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion”. This approach, they suggest, has
the following two principle aims: firstly, “to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered” (Ritchie, et al., 2003: 97) and, secondly, “to ensure that within each of the key criteria, some diversity is included so that the impact of the characteristics concerned can be explored” (Ibid.).

The objective was to identify a number of key informants who have specific knowledge and experience with regard to reporting in the South African context and who could provide insights into their own views and how others in the profession might respond to the core research questions. O’Leary (2005: 84) suggests that key informants can be selected according to a number of different characteristics, including their expert knowledge of the subject, the fact that they have an insider track that enables them to shed light on the culture and beliefs of a community and their own “rich depth experience” (Ibid.) in relation to the issues being explored. In this instance the researcher was interested in both the key informants’ individual experiences and beliefs and their ability to discuss more generally how South African journalists, including editors and reporters, understand their roles. He was also interested in gaining broad insights into the experiences of a range of professionals which meant including people with a diverse range of experience and backgrounds.

Ritchie, et al. (2003: 79) argue that while the sampling process in qualitative research is seldom designed to generate data that might be considered statistically generalisable, it is nonetheless of great benefit to develop the selection criteria that will guide the choice of individuals to participate in the study. “[Participants] are chosen because they typify a circumstance or hold a characteristic that is expected or known to have salience to the subject matter under study” (Ritchie, et al. 2003: 79). Arthur and Nazoo (2003: 102) concur and argue that:

... the reason for selecting a purposive sample is to achieve symbolic representation and diversity. It is therefore all about controlling sample composition in these terms. It is not about trying to produce a cell that is sufficiently large to sustain independent commentary, as would be the case in statistical research.
For this study the criteria for the selection of participants were as follows:

- Participants should have been active in the field of journalism for at least two years with the majority of that time having been spent as reporters in the field.
- Participants should have first-hand experience of reporting on social conflicts in their respective news beats.
- Participants should be well enough connected within their own fields to be able to shed some light on how other journalists understand their roles in reporting on conflict.
- Participants should ideally be widely representative of the general demographics existent in South African newsrooms.
- Participants should all be South African.
- Participants should produce journalism for independent newspapers that do not have explicit political agendas.

The study deliberately excluded reporters who have worked exclusively as sports journalists or those whose focus has been limited to arts and entertainment as neither of these groups are likely to have sufficient experience of covering social conflict. In identifying interview subjects the researcher specifically sought to ensure that participants include a cross section of people from South Africa’s traditional racial categories and that equitable numbers of journalists from both genders were represented. Furthermore the researcher sought to ensure that participants included reporters responsible for covering different news beats, such as the environment, political, local government, education and crime. While all of the reporters have been involved in covering conflicts of different forms, not all of them had been exposed to violent situations in their reporting of social and political conflicts.

Babbie and Mouton (2001: 168) suggest researchers want to “select informants who are somewhat typical of the groups [they] are studying”. Morse (1994: 228) suggests that:

4 The decision to work with newspaper journalists has been taken because these journalists tend to be the people who provide more in-depth reporting on conflict, who set the agenda that other media will follow and who are generally the primary originators of news.
A good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study.

In making the selections the researcher used an adaptation of the snowballing sampling approach (Ritchie, et al., 2003: 94; O'Leary, 2005: 94) where the researcher identifies journalists who have been involved in covering conflict by scanning newspapers.

The journalists themselves were approached in their private capacities as media professionals, not as representatives of particular media houses. In the end the group involved 12 journalists from mainstream newspapers in the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape and Gauteng. Ten of the journalists work for daily newspapers and two of them report for weekly publications. Of the 12, two had less than five years’ experience in the field while the remainder could all be regarded as seasoned journalists. The group was evenly divided along gender lines, and, while this was not a requirement, each of the journalists had completed an undergraduate qualification.

3.4.2 Data collection

The data collection process involved a series of in-depth discussions in which the researcher posed initial questions and steered the discussion, but allowed for the participants to raise their own issues and concerns.

Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003: 142-143) argue that in-depth interviewing as a form of data generation includes four key features, namely:

- It is intended to combine structure with flexibility. This ensures that while the interviewer is able to cover particular issues, there is also sufficient scope for topics to be covered in ways that suit the interviewee and for relevant issues to be raised spontaneously by both the interviewer and the interviewee. This was certainly the case in these interviews which were largely free-ranging and open-ended.
• The interviews are interactive in nature. The material is “generated by the interaction between researcher and interviewee” (Ibid.). The objective behind each of the interviews was to create a free flowing space in which the researcher and the journalists could jointly work on constructing new knowledge.

• The researcher is able to probe the answers received and to ask follow-up questions to obtain a “deeper and fuller understanding of the participant’s meaning” (Ibid.). This was a particularly valuable aspect of the process and the researcher was able to ask probing questions and to follow-up on statements that were made.

• The interviews are generative in the sense that “new knowledge or thoughts are likely”. The “participant will at some point direct themselves, or be directed by the researcher, down avenues of thought they have not explored before” (Ibid.). While the goal was to be open-ended, the researcher did facilitate the discussion by posing questions that encourage participants to consider particular aspects of their work.

These are all features of the method that were valued by the researcher and which contributed to the decision to rely on this form of data generation for this project.

The researcher made use of a minimally scripted interview guide that addressed broad themes that needed to be covered rather than specific questions that should be posed. The actual questions used to steer the interview were all kept deliberately open-ended to encourage interviewees to talk widely about their understandings of journalism and its role in conflict reporting. In all instances participants were encouraged to play a leading role in the interviews, highlighting points that were of particular interest to them.
A notable feature of the interviews was that at least three of the participants spontaneously admitted to having given the subject little or no consideration in the past. These journalists said the interviews had provided them with a chance to consider aspects of their work they had not previously contemplated. Most of the participants indicated that they had found the interviews refreshing and that they had enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss these issues.

The researcher’s objective in conducting the interviews was to facilitate a free-flowing conversation that ensured the interviewees were comfortable in raising issues that they considered to be important. Of interest to the researcher was the range of unique insights interviewees brought to the subject. This dialogical approach was consistent with the constructivist epistemology underpinning this research which assumes that because of the “variable and personal nature of the social constructions” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 111) individual meanings can only be “elicited and refined” through the interaction “between [the] investigator and respondents”.

Half of the interviews were conducted in face-to-face situations at locations selected by the interviewees, while the remaining six were conducted telephonically. The face-to-face interviews were generally of longer duration and the conversations were somewhat more relaxed, but both sets of interviews were characterised by free-flowing discussion and engaged participation from both the researcher and the interviewees. Burke and Miller (2002: np) recommend that telephone interviews need to be conducted at a time that is convenient for the interviewee. However, this was challenging for the researcher because journalists are seldom able to schedule large blocks of time and it was necessary to reschedule discussion on several occasions. The telephone interviews were also a little more rushed, because some of the journalists appeared to be facing deadlines. In developing this study further the researcher will aim to ensure that all interviews take place in a face-to-face context. Several of the journalists remarked that they found the process of being the subjects of an interview, rather than the people asking the questions, a little disconcerting at first. They admitted
that it had taken them a few moments to get comfortable with being on the other side of the microphone.

All the interviews were digitally audio-recorded with the interviewees’ consent and then transcribed for analysis. Hand-written notes were also taken during these interviews to enable the interviewer to note key points that were made during the discussion. The interviews varied in duration from approximately 40 minutes to one hour.

The interview method described above was also appropriate for the study, because it dovetailed neatly with the study’s constructivist underpinnings which sees the interviewer as traveling alongside the interviewee in a journey during which knowledge is created between the interviewer and the interviewee (Legard, et al., 2003: 139). Of value in this instance was the fact that the researcher has worked as a professional journalist in the newspaper context in South Africa for many years. This enabled the researcher to build a rapport with the interviewees and meant he was familiar with both the professional contexts within which they work and the challenges they face on the ground. He was also familiar with the jargon that the journalists used in describing aspects of their jobs.

It was also significant that the interviewer has been involved in the teaching and training of journalists for more than ten years, running short courses that fall squarely within Howard’s (2002) transitional journalism development type discussed in the introduction to this treatise. These courses focus specifically on providing journalists with a deeper understanding of conflict theory so that they can engage more deeply with the stories they are reporting on. This prior conceptualisation of the journalist’s roles and responsibilities in reporting on conflict required the researcher to remain focused on hearing the interviewees’ perspectives and remaining acutely conscious of the danger of asking leading questions.
3.4.3 Analysis and interpretation of the data

The analysis of the data has been approached using the tools of qualitative content analysis, following a process outlined by Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004: 104-108). This approach to analysis begins with a process of data immersion, followed by a systematic process of open coding. Once the open coding has been completed the researcher then seeks to develop particular categories of meaning for further analysis in terms of the themes that are foregrounded, the relationships between categories and how these categories can contribute to an “understanding of the whole” (Van Rensburg & Smith, 2004: 106).

During this stage of the process it is recommended that the researcher ‘brackets out’ his or her own thinking in order to ensure that the participants’ voices are able to emerge. It is also important that the researcher allows the categories of content to emerge naturally rather than forcing these into predetermined analytical boxes. This requires the researcher to operate at a highly reflexive level, constantly reflecting on how prior conceptions might be influencing decisions about themes, categories and relationships.

The above blueprint provides an accurate description of the process that was followed in analysing the empirical data collected during the series of interviews. The process of data immersion began with the researcher conducting the transcripts himself and continued as he read through each of these transcripts repeatedly. During this phase of immersion the researcher deliberately sought to bracket out his prior understandings of peace journalism to avoid applying a pre-existing framework to the analysis of the participants’ perspectives.

Having developed the categories and identified the themes that emerged from the interviews the researcher brought these into dialogue with the theories of peace journalism in drawing conclusions about journalists’ responses to the normative principles advanced by this approach. The use of these different techniques in sequence is evident in the treatise layout where Chapter Four describes the
overall themes and categories, while Chapter Five brings these findings into dialogue with the theories and principles of peace journalism.

### 3.4.4 Generalisability

This study does not adhere to the position in science, including social science, that asserts that the ultimate aim of research is prediction and control based on universal, context independent generalisations and the discovery and validation of law-like generalisations within the objective positivist tradition (Donmoyer, 2000: 47; Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 27). Instead it aims to provide insights into the way that a select group of journalists who are frequently involved in reporting on different forms of conflict in South Africa think about the normative roles that journalists can and should play. However, this is not to say that the outcomes of the project will have limited value beyond the insights developed into the beliefs of a few individuals. Instead the project should be seen as the first phase in an ongoing cycle of research that will further explore how journalists construct their roles.

Lincoln and Guba (2000: 27) suggest that researchers are not limited to ‘either/or’ propositions when it comes to considering overall generalisability of research and suggest instead that it is not necessary to choose between nomic generalisations, i.e. those that are universal and context-free, and particularised knowledge. Rather, it is possible to consider degrees of generalisation. Three of these degrees of generalisation are discussed below to suggest how this study might have a broader impact.

Writing about case study reports, Stake (1995), Lincoln and Guba (2000) and Gromm, et al. (2000: 100) all refer to the idea of ‘naturalistic generalisation’. This is understood to be a form of generalisation which involves readers in the process of determining for themselves whether findings that are applicable in one case are applicable in another. While this research project is not specifically intended as a case study, similar principles are applicable. Given a sufficiently rich description of what participants had to say in relation to particular issues, readers will be able to
determine for themselves the degree to which the findings appear to be valid and transferable to other contexts.

Giddens (1984 in Flyvbjerg, 2006: 224) argues that while small-scale research projects may not in themselves be generalisable, they can “easily become so if carried out in some numbers, so that judgments of their typicality can justifiably be made”. It is hoped that this study will provide one of the first steps in the construction of a web of evidence that indicates how, or indeed whether, journalists are able and willing to play a role in contributing to peace. This study can also be viewed as a pilot project that will inform further research conducted by the researcher who intends to examine these issues further as part of his doctoral research.

Finally the study draws on Bassey’s (1999: 52-54) concept of “fuzzy generalisations” which offers a vehicle for extending the findings of a study beyond the particular. Bassey (1999: 54) suggests that:

…in the use of the adjective ‘fuzzy’ the likelihood of their being exceptions is clearly recognised and this seems an appropriate concept for research in areas like education where human complexity is paramount.

The concept of fuzzy generalisations creates the possibility for researchers to make tentative propositions based on their findings without being able to make specific claims about the generalisability of their research. The degree of fuzziness can gradually be reduced as similar studies are replicated in ways that allow for saturation to eventually occur with the given population.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Durrheim and Wassenar (1999: 66) suggest that researchers working in the social sciences should pay special attention to three essential ethical principles, namely: autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence. These ethical principles were given due consideration both in the planning and conduct of this research process and will be discussed in turn below in relation to this study.
3.5.1 Autonomy

In terms of this principle, researchers are “required to respect the autonomy of all persons participating in the research work” (Durrheim and Wassenar, 1999: 66). This suggests that participants cannot be compelled to participate in the study, even if the institutions that employ them demand that they cooperate. It also implies informed consent. Participants must understand the purpose behind the study, whether there are risks for them in participating, and how the information they provide will be used. They must be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and of the fact that they have the right to anonymity in any publication that might follow the research (Durrheim & Wassenar, 1999: 66).

It’s notable for this study that the participants were all seasoned journalists whose professional conduct is governed by a similar, but not identical set of ethical prescriptions. It was thus important to ensure that they were familiar with all of the rights detailed above. These rights were explained to the journalists in detail prior to the start of the interviews and they were also provided with informed consent forms to complete which spelt out the research process in some detail.

The participants were all approached in their individual capacities which helped to eliminate fears that they might feel compelled to participate in the study. This is in keeping with Scheyvens, Nowark and Scheyvens’ (2003: 142) view that “an essential aspect of ethical research is ensuring participant felt free to decline the invitation to participate if they wanted to”. All participants were fully cognisant of this option. The journalists interviewed for this study have been allocated codes ranging from J1 – J12 in the transcripts to ensure their identities remain confidential.

3.5.2 Nonmaleficence

The principles of nonmaleficence implies that the researcher should “consider potential risks that the research may inflict physical, emotional, social or other forms of harm on any person … involved in the study” (Durrheim and Wassenar, 1999: 66; Scheyvens, et al., 2003: 143). The researcher has considered this
question in some depth and is confident that no harm will come to any of the participants following their participation in the study. Participants are treated anonymously in this treatise and care has been taken to ensure that their identity is protected. Because of the nature of this study it was not anticipated that participants would be exposed to any direct risks. However, in one instance a participant did make some remarks that could have been considered very critical of his employer. This participant has been protected from any potential repercussions by the decision to keep everyone anonymous and the decision not to mention the names of the publications that the different participants are employed by.

3.5.3 Beneficence

This principle suggests that the research should go beyond being research for its own sake and that it should have some benefit to “other researchers and society at large” (Durrheim & Wassenar, 1999: 66). There must be benefits that accrue from the involvement of the research participants that go beyond the researcher’s personal interests. The researcher is convinced that this study will contribute to the field of peace journalism and to on-going deliberations concerning the contributions journalists can make in reporting on conflict.

In addition to this overall objective for the treatise it was evident from many of the participant’s responses that they found value for themselves in participating in the process. Many remarked that they had found it refreshing to be able to reflect on their professional activities and that the interviews had provided them with a rare opportunity to reflect on their roles in reporting on conflict.

The final treatise will be made available to all of the participants who, it is hoped, will gain additional insights into their profession and into the way other journalists understand their roles in reporting on conflict.
Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the methodological considerations that have underpinned this study and which have formed the foundation upon which decisions about methods have been based. It has also provided a description of the research process, detailing particular issues that might have impacted on the study.

The goal in providing this level of detail has been to provide the reader with a relatively thick description of the process, thereby enabling him or her to share the journey with the researcher and to allow for an understanding of the analytical decisions that have been made.

The following chapter, which covers the empirical component of this research, explores the perceptions of the 12 journalists who participated in the study regarding the roles journalists can play in reporting on social conflict.
Chapter Four

Findings: Journalists’ understandings of their roles

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of how the 12 journalists who participated in this study responded to questions regarding their perceptions of the journalist's roles in reporting on social conflict.

The evidence presented below emerged after a process of data emersion during which the researcher studied the transcripts and developed an initial set of codes which reflected emerging themes. These codes were refined as the process of data analysis continued. In presenting these findings it should be stated that each of the codes developed below were supported by several of the journalists, but were not necessarily unanimously advanced. In some instances it is also clear that the journalists did not share the same views about issues and in some instances they held diametrically opposite views.

In presenting the core findings of the empirical component of this treatise the researcher has aimed to provide a space that allows for the authentic voices of the journalists to come through. Thus, while the chapter naturally seeks to analyse and interpret the journalists’ different perspectives on the issues, the approach has been to allow the journalists to ‘speak for themselves’ through the text. This is in keeping with the constructivist nature of the epistemology underpinning this study. To facilitate the ease of reading all quotes that draw specifically on the interviews have been presented in italics whether indented for long quotes, or not.

It is important to note that in many of the interviews participants admitted to having given little time to reflecting specifically on the impact of their work on conflict. In fact, several of them indicated that they had given scant if any attention to the issue until this interview. They also noted that these concerns were seldom discussed within their news organisations. As a consequence, in many instances,
this study is dealing with relatively unformed thoughts as the participants begin to reflect on the issues under investigation. It's also important to note that all of the participants' responses were deeply influenced by their location as newspaper reporters working within the South African context. Their understanding of conflict was clearly shaped by the social issues that are making headlines in contemporary South Africa and which were addressed in Chapter One. These included: service delivery protests, internal conflict within political parties, ideological disputes, outbreaks of xenophobia and conflict over official corruption.

4.1 How journalists understand conflict

While there would be no reason to expect that the journalists participating in this study would necessarily have been exposed to conflict theory, it was notable that the group of interviewees could be divided into two camps when it came to questions relating to their understanding of conflict. The majority of them could be said to have a relatively sophisticated understanding of conflict, but there were also journalists who struggled to make a distinction between conflict and violence. The positions taken by these journalists will be discussed under the following headings:

- Conflict as violence
- Conflict as a social process

4.1.1 Conflict as violence

Some of the journalists made no distinction between conflict and violence during the interviews, arguing, as was evident in J4’s response that: “conflict would be like, a sort of dangerous situation, where there are crowds of people and where things turn violent, that would be my understanding”. J11 expressed a similar view arguing that conflict could be

... any situation... that's actually quite fiery and where people's lives could be in danger or property even. I think it depends on many different levels. It could be a war for instance or it could be crime over a certain period, [that takes place] over and over again. I suppose it's just making people get to a breaking point whether they become victims
or they are the ones doing the intimidation or you taking a gun to someone’s heads.

The focus on violence as an essential part of conflict was also evident in J9’s references to conflict when she says:

Conflict on the level that I would cover it would include protest marches that get violent for whatever reason … we get to cover conflict in meetings where people start fighting and it can range from verbal exchanges to throwing bottles and chairs or even getting violent with each other and assaulting each other. And then conflict obviously can also be war…

Common to these views was the journalists’ descriptions of conflicts as events or sequences of events rather than as social processes that need to be analysed and understood. They also expressed a view that conflict needed to involve direct confrontations between parties and actual, or at least threatened, physical violence. This was markedly different to the views put forward by the second group.

4.1.2 Conflict as social process

Journalists whose descriptions of conflict fell into this category demonstrated a much wider understanding of conflict. This group argued that in general conflict permeated most aspects of news coverage. J5, a local government reporter, argues that conflict is something she encounters on a day-to-day basis in her reportage. She argues that she continually encounters conflict in council meetings where rival political parties are frequently at odds. She also finds conflict in the relationships between municipalities and rate-payers who are dissatisfied with services and between councils and residents of informal settlements who have grown weary of waiting for basic services.

J7 shares this perspective, arguing that in political reporting “you would not expect to see a lot of violence associated with conflict, but you [would] see a lot more ideological battles and class struggles”. “The violent side only happens,” he says, “when politics fails.” This view finds further support from J10, an education reporter, who argues that her work in reporting on education sees her continually
reporting on conflicts between the teachers unions and the provincial and national education department, between principles and school governing bodies, between parents and teachers, and between pupils and teachers. J10 suggests that most of these conflicts become manifest when “one party is not happy with the way another party is using resources”. These conflicts seldom involve violence, but they do involve a great deal of politics and manipulative and often coercive attempts by different groups to use legal and procedural processes to achieve their objectives. The issues are also often representative of long-standing issues relating to structural problems and inequalities in South African society. “There is always conflict [in education],” J10 says, “that’s why it goes in the paper”. J3 augmented these points, suggesting that conflict does not need to occur at an intergroup level, but that it can also take place within groups and that such conflicts can be particularly contentious. Here he cited an on-going leadership struggle between rival factions within the Eastern Cape structures of the ANC as an ideal example.

While the first group of journalists take a very event-driven approach to conflict and rely largely on outbreaks of violence to signal these events, the second group recognises that all spheres of social and political activities can be drawn into conflict. This is significant because conflict is regarded as one of the enduring news values and if parties only see conflict when there is violence then they are likely to find that certain important stories are rendered invisible by the media.

4.2 The journalist’s responsibility in reporting on conflict

In most of the interviews, a significant amount of attention was dedicated to discussions concerning the degree to which journalists should seek to play a role in reporting on social conflict. Several of the journalists had fixed positions in relation to this issue, but others found themselves vacillating between different positions, sometimes changing their minds as the conversation continued. Three different positions could be distinguished from the different responses, namely:

- A rigorous commitment to professional distance
- An impartial yet concerned positioning
- A conflict sensitive approach to reporting.
Each of these positions will be discussed below drawing deeply on the journalists’ own responses.
4.2.1 Rigorously committed to professional distance

Journalists who positioned themselves in this way were strongly committed to the idea of professional impartiality and objectivity. They argued that their roles as journalists should be to simply report the facts fairly and accurately and that they could not, and should not, be expected to take responsibility for the outcomes of their reporting. These participants held the general view that enabling parties to resolve conflict fell outside of the scope of professional journalism and that this was not an outcome they should be concerned about. Expressing her views on the subject J9 argued that a journalist should not set out to play a role on conflict mitigation. She suggested that:

You would not think about, oh, gosh, let's help these people with their conflict, they are not speaking to each other. I don't think that you can consciously think about that. You think about it more from a news value point of view, but then that would be the unintended consequence that you actually help facilitate talk and a resolution … once you start getting involved in the story and you become part of the story then it becomes more difficult to report on it. So I don't think it is something I would be comfortable in going out and deliberately doing.

However, she suggested that if the journalism about conflict had positive, but unintended consequences, then such a result would be entirely acceptable. J4 agreed with this position suggesting that the journalist’s role should be restricted to observation. “You don’t want to get more involved,” he said.

4.2.2 Impartial yet concerned

Several of the journalists were uncomfortable with the rigorous commitment to pure observation and suggested that journalists should take some responsibility for the impact of their writing. However, they stopped short of suggesting that journalists should actively seek to make a difference through their coverage. J2 felt that journalists needed to consider the impact of their reporting, but argued that reporters were seldom reflexive enough to mitigate against the harmful effects of their coverage. He felt that reporters should be more cognisant of “… the effects of their reporting” and argued that it was common for journalists to
become deadened to the “serious effects of what reporting could cause”. He felt that failing to ask questions about the impact of conflict in news coverage could be “dangerous” and that journalists needed to ask:

What effect is this going to have on whoever reads this?
What potential does this have to inflame or to cause further conflict?

4.2.3 Conflict conscious reporting

The final position to emerge on this matter was based on the idea that if journalists were able, through their reportage, to make a constructive contribution towards resolving conflict then they should attempt to do so. J3 summed up this position by arguing that:

I think it’s each and everyone’s responsibility to say: Look I’m contributing something positive and building a non-racial society and a peaceful society around us.

J7 agreed, and in responding to the position that journalists should not take responsibility for the impact of their coverage of conflict, he suggested that this was an extreme form of impartiality that would suggest the journalist did not care about the society he or she was reporting on.

Ultimately it’s [journalism] a service. It’s [claiming impartiality] almost at a point of saying we don’t really care, we are churning out copy and what happens after that is not my concern. We live in these communities and in a way it should also affect us. You see your job as making a contribution. To say impartiality yes, but that [the position of rigorous impartiality] sounds like saying: ‘Hey man, whatever.’

He took the argument further suggesting that journalists can “play a very central role” in helping to resolve conflict and that they should keep “that sort of mind set” when doing their jobs. However, he was also concerned that this way of thinking about the journalist’s responsibilities could contradict professional norms.

It’s sort of difficult to speak about it without almost contradicting yourself at times, you do need to have that impartiality, but at the same time, why are you reporting on the conflict? We obviously have an interest in seeing change
managed in a non-destructive way and ... whatever that outcome is you want to be able to say that it was managed in a proper way.

This tension was evident in many of the journalists’ responses to questions relating to their roles and responsibilities when it came to reporting on conflict. For J2, whose other remarks fell within the previous category, the question had to do with the tension he felt existed between his professional identity as a reporter and his individual moral standing. This tension is evident in the following remark:

... it comes down to how one sees oneself as a journalist and to what degree are you a journalist and to what degree are you, you know, human. Um, I would agree that in a strict definition journalism ... report on issues and I guess that whole fourth estate thing being a mirror on society should technically be relevant, but I believe that morally we have an obligation to the society or the community we live in that as far as possible, what we report on should be to the betterment of that community.

What was also common to all of the journalists was their belief that, beyond reporting on the conflict, the journalist should not seek to change the course of a conflict in anyway. None of journalists felt that reporters should seek to take on the mantel of active peacemakers, nor should they deliberately attempt to bring parties together into negotiations and to try and facilitate conflict resolution processes. This, they said, would be ‘crossing the line’ and would interfere with their ability to actually cover conflict stories.

One aspect that was common to all the groups was the belief that journalists should not seek to change or distort a story simply because it could potentially exacerbate conflict. This view was evident in J10’s remark that: “Obviously you can’t change a story ... I mean if it’s a bad news, you can’t hide it and put flowers over it.” J9 agreed, saying:

You kind of have to consider the impact of your reporting, but if you know that it is going to inflame people and cause further conflict you shouldn't necessarily self-censor, so there are two sides to that. Yes, you must help find resolution, but no, you should not self-censor either because it might cause further conflict.
It’s noteworthy that reporters from at least three institutions were able to describe specific actions their companies had embarked on in order to promote dialogue in their communities. The activities involved public meetings designed to either promote understanding between people from different racial and ethnic communities or between civic bodies and government institutions that were failing to deliver vital services. However, all three of these journalists made a firm distinction between the large scale interventions of these media houses and their own work as reporters having to interact with communities.

Despite their differences in opinions the participants were also broadly in agreement that journalists should not be involved in promoting any particular solution. However, several were also emphatic that this did not prevent them from helping to expose parties to fresh perspectives that could shed light on alternative solutions to a conflict.

4.3 The challenge of neutrality

While the journalists clearly had different views on what their respective responsibilities were in reporting on conflict, it was evident that they shared a common perspective about where they should stand in relation to events and processes. There was general agreement that, unless journalists were seen to be fair and impartial in their coverage, their potential to make a constructive contribution towards conflict mitigation would be greatly diminished or entirely compromised. The following remarks are broadly representative of the journalists’ positions on this issue:

J1: I believe that as journalist we are supposed to be objective. If we feel the stories that we are doing will sort of influence a conflict in the community we need to look at both sides of the story.

J3: To stay neutral I think in a conflict, let’s say there is a conflict between the ANC and the DA and these guys are at war with each other and accusing each other of corruption and all of that, now, we can’t take sides … you can’t say in our reporting that the DA are hooligans or the ANC are hooligans.
J7: Look you are always taught in ethics class and journ 101 [first year journalism courses] that you take a very impartial view and that you report on what is happening on both sides. I think that is the correct way to go …especially in this sort of environment where … there is always an agenda behind.

However, the journalists also stressed that striving to be neutral does not necessarily guarantee acceptance by parties in conflict. They noted that, in many instances, journalists have been accused of siding with particular groups and of side-lining others. Such accusations occur regardless of whether the journalists believe this is true or not and regardless of measures that they have taken to ensure inclusivity in their coverage.

The journalists also noted that the task of seeking to be fair and neutral means going beyond paying lip-service to a professional convention. In this regard J5 described how journalists can often be tempted to side with an oppressed community against a local authority and to accept at face value the claims made by this community. When this happens, he says, journalists need to check themselves to ensure they are fair. “Sometimes”, he says, “stories that we do write tend to have an angle that does come across as us taking sides. I don’t think it’s something that we do consciously, but it is, unfortunately something that happens.” J4 agreed with this remark saying that:

In some cases you can read our stories and actually see which side the reporter actually followed, but that’s wrong, it should not be like that. Just because you sided with one, you should still give the other person the respect and the time...

This view was shared by many of the journalists who were adamant that reporters should strive to be fair, but that this was exceptionally difficult, particularly during times of conflict.

Several of the journalists also spoke of a relatively recent occurrence that is severely impacting on their role as neutral observers in reporting on conflict. They noted how, when communities were planning to hold protests over issues such as service delivery they would contact the newspaper and tell them about a demonstration. However, the demonstration, with its associated acts of violence
and destruction, would not actually start until the journalists arrived. Describing the predicament J4 said:

... they won't do anything until the reporters come or the camera's come, then they actually get physically violent. We might be playing into their hands. We can't ignore the story, but we also don't want to be a perpetrator in these actions … people would calmly sit there until they saw us arrive and then they would jump up and start stoning the police.

The journalists note that they have found that these actions place them in an exceptionally difficult predicament as they grapple with the question of whether or not to respond to calls to report on demonstrations. The journalists expressed concern about being dragged into the conflict and forced to become active players against their wills.

It's like they turned to us and said, ‘Well what level of violence you like us to create that would actually put us on the front page’ (J4).

The journalists also expressed concern that if they failed to respond to calls to report on demonstrations, there was a reasonable prospect that communities would resort to more violent approaches to protest to ensure that their voices were heard in the media.

### 4.4 The media's mediatory potential

Whilst the journalists were collectively emphatic about the fact that there was a significant difference between their roles as reporters of conflict and the roles played by mediators, most felt that similarities could be identified. Some felt that these similarities did mean that journalists could make a meaningful contribution to the management of conflict through their reporting, while others felt that even thinking about their roles in this way could detract from their core duties as impartial story tellers.

J10 felt strongly that journalist should not try to actively play a role in resolving conflicts between parties.

…I don't think that's our role. I really don't. I mean, obviously things are going to happen as a result of what you do [but] …
imagine if I now were to play mediator for every single story that I do, which is every single day. I don't think it will be healthy, I don't think it will be maintainable, but I just don't think ... I think it would take away from my duty as a journalist.

This view was supported by J3 who said:

Our role is not to be mediators, so we are not going to make harmony between [political parties], if they have squabbles then let them iron out their differences and come back to us saying that 'we have come up with a solution' ... So really, it is up to them, but as journalists we can always report and then it's up to them too ... you can take a cow to the river, but you cannot make it drink.

While most of the journalists shared this view it was clear from many of their descriptions of their own reporting practice that the overlaps, at least on a surface level, between reporting and mediation are quite evident. This similarity in function between a journalist and a mediator was evident in J6's description – quoted at some length - of how a journalist might report on a conflict. Describing a process in which a journalist is covering a conflict between residents and municipal officials, she said the story would start when the reporter became aware of the “drama and the unhappiness” that is causing the conflict. He or she would then:

... get the different viewpoints in and explain where the one person is coming from ... like go back to the residents and say this is what residents have been saying is happening, here's a copy of the correspondence that they sent to your office and they've actually heard nothing. And then getting back from them [the municipality] and going back to the residents and saying well this is what the city says they came with and it was signed by a representative ... and in that kind of sifting through what's happening and just basically putting both sides of the story on the table ... I think that happens when there is a breakdown in communication or when different sides aren't really listening to the other. When they just say this is my view, this is what's happening and not really taking in what the other side is saying. I go into the situation and listen to both sides openly and don't have a certain kind of bias. When you come in from that point of view and you write it like that, when you're asking your questions from that point of view and you approach it like that, that's where the carrying of messages comes through ... I wouldn't necessarily say it was that hands on in
that it was actual mediation – more just saying this is what’s happening.

This process of moving to and fro between parties, updating them on what the other is saying and explaining the different parties’ stand-points on issues is not at all unlike the traditional role played by many mediators. However, as the journalists were quick to mention, this is not the motivating force behind their actions. Instead their goal is to construct a narrative that enables others to develop an understanding of what is happening. Contributing to the resolution of conflict the journalists argue is often a by-product of their actions, it is not the objective. Other journalists also related how they had contributed to enabling parties to resolve small scale issues in the process of their reporting duties, sometimes without even writing stories about their involvement.

4.5 Channeling communication between parties

Several of the journalists observed that during times of conflict it could be possible for journalists to enable people from rival groups to communicate with each other through the pages of the newspaper or across the airwaves. This was evident in J3’s observation that:

... as a journalist you can always provide a platform whereby parties in conflict can reach a common ground and iron out differences that they have.

J6 was in full agreement with this statement, suggesting that journalists can make a significant contribution when communication between parties has collapsed. She said:

I think that happens when there is a breakdown in communication or when different sides aren’t really listening to the other. When they just say this is my view, this is what’s happening and not really taking in what the other side is saying. I go into the situation and listen to both sides openly and don’t have a certain kind of bias. When you come in from that point of view and you write it like that, when you’re asking your questions from that point of view and you approach it like that, that’s where the carrying of messages comes through.
J11 observed that in some instances it might be better for parties to communicate through the media rather than face-to-face because the lack of physical distance might lead to “fist-fights and emotions getting out of hand”. However, she stressed that this form of communication would only be effective if the media were to treat members from different parties equally and fairly. This view was supported by J9 who argued that there were also times when parties “don’t want to talk to each other through the media”. She observed that in such circumstances journalists could encourage them to talk by “[giving] them both platforms and [asking] opinions from both sides”. The challenge for the journalist is to come up with ways of allowing parties to get their views across. “Do you give them space in the opinion pages, do you reflect it in a news story?”

For J8 the media’s ability to allow parties to communicate during conflicts placed journalists in positions where they can help to facilitate communication.

... what we can do is, if we can be accurate in expressing the views of these different parties and use our different forms of media to allow them to communicate, I think that is an important way for these warring factions to understand each other through us. Let them know if one party is talking to us, then we will also give them the right to reply.

Reiterating the importance of journalist being fair on all parties in facilitating the exchange of communications, J11 argued that it was possible that a publication that was supportive of a particular cause might deliberately act to represent what an opponent has to say in a poor light.

The journalists also suggested that they could help to channel communication between parties by reporting on events, not just on what people had to say. Referring to service delivery protests in townships across South Africa, J7 observed that these might be “misguided”, but in reality the demonstrations are attempts by communities to draw attention to their living conditions and to the degree of frustration and anger they are experiencing. J7 notes, furthermore, that when people talk about their actions during demonstrations, they will often explain themselves by saying:
Why didn’t these people [authorities] sit down and talk to us before we did this. We have tried to speak to you so many times, but you have not listened to us.

J7 also observed that journalists should not simply provide an uncritical and open channel for communication. Instead they could enable parties to exchange views through in-depth interviews that challenge them to go beyond rhetoric and stated positions.

I think if you get down the nitty-gritty of what the issues are. If you get both sides of the story across and you ask those critical questions from both sides of the conflict, I think those would be critical things that one needs to do in terms of covering it in a proper way. If you get those critical questions that will satisfy these people that are taking whatever action that they are taking. It might not always be a positive answer that they are getting, but at least they will know where they stand.

Implicit in this understanding is the recognition that messages communicated may not necessarily be of a reconciliatory nature, but they will enable parties to make informed decisions that takes into account the other’s positions.

4.6 Empowering marginalized parties

Many of the journalists recognised the asymmetrical nature of many conflicts and suggested that they could play a constructive role by helping to empower marginalised parties. They argued that in playing this role they need to concentrate on providing a voice for the voiceless – an expression that came up repeatedly during the interviews.

J3 suggested that journalists can also contribute to the empowerment of individuals who find themselves in conflict with intransigent bureaucracies. He cited the case of an individual ratepayer who had been complaining about the quality of water that was being delivered to his house. After receiving no assistance from the city the man turned to the media. Only then did the municipal officials begin to take his concerns seriously. For J3 this did mean “stepping on their [the municipality’s] toes” but he felt that this was a way of putting pressure on them to ensure that they “get up and serve the community better”. J10 cited a
similar example in which a domestic worker became the victim of identity theft and had her bank account plundered. She tried for four years to get the issues resolved with the bank and to recover her money without success. When she finally turned to J10 for assistance she was able to have the problem resolved within a matter of hours. J10 described the process as follows:

… the lady had a problem for the whole thing for four years and all it took was one phone call from me and at the end of the day the problem was solved that she had been unable to solve for so many years … I was purely doing a story. She gave me the information. I approached the bank and then I said: ‘This is her story, can you explain to me how this thing could have happened?’ And it was resolved.

In both instances journalists were able to ensure that large bureaucracies were willing to respond to the concerns of marginalised individuals who had previously been ignored. The journalists suggested that the media could play similar roles when it came to the needs of communities whose concerns are being ignored. The media’s ability to draw public attention to the concerns of marginalised communities can often place weaker parties in a much better positions to negotiate with more powerful institutions.

J7 observed that part of the journalist’s role in empowering weaker parties meant ensuring that people’s concerns were placed on the public and policy agenda and ensuring that people’s voices were heard. “I think ultimately if you are speaking for the voiceless you also want to make sure that the voiceless did get their voice,” J10 argued. He suggested that this process of ensuring that the marginalised people were heard and understood also has to do with the way in which protest activities are covered in the media. He said it was important for the media to go beyond simply describing demonstrators as “a gang of marauders who break down stop signs”. Journalists should not limit their coverage to the violent actions of parties involved in demonstrations and should also ask critical questions about what it is that led people to behave in this way. He also stressed, however, that in seeking to understand the motives behind people’s actions, journalists should not seek to conceal or downplay the destructive impact of violent protest activities.
The journalists also argued that the media could empower marginalised communities by ensuring that people in positions of power and responsibility are held accountable for their behaviours and the promises they have made. J6 felt this role was “very important” and said that “there needs to be some kind of responsibility for promises that are made or for what people are given a mandate [to deliver on]”. They felt that journalists could help to present conflict by simply holding people in power accountable for their mandates.

4.7 Analysing conflicts

All of the journalists felt that the news media’s primary function in conflict reporting is to explain the conflict to people so that they can understand what is happening and make informed decisions about how to respond to the conflict. However, the process of explaining what is happening was not seen to be simple and involved a number of different aspects which are discussed below.

For J2, one of the journalist’s primary objectives is to try to determine what the underlying causes of a conflict might be. This, he suggests, means determining what the different parties “identify as the root cause of the conflict” because there is a strong possibility that each of the parties will have “a different view to the other” about what is important. The journalist’s job in this context is to “assimilate the information to find out a general trend in the chaos ... to find out what could be the underlying cause overall and relaying that to the reader”. Implicit in this statement is the acknowledgement that attempts to uncover the root causes of a conflict can be complex and that the underlying causes may not be immediately evident.

For J7 this can mean going beyond reporting on what is self-evidently part of the story, such as community demonstrations. It means recognising that: “Conflict (violence) must be seen as a sort of by-product of that the actual problem is.” J5 supported this view, arguing that:

... if there was protest and people are upset about things journalists should inform the public about it because there are many people with the same issues out there and some
of the issues that we report on are representative of what is happening in other areas in the city. If we are able to highlight those issues perhaps the municipality or the government should be able to come forward and assist communities... and that would assist other communities where they find the same problems.

As a strategy for determining what the root causes of a conflict might be, J2 proposed that journalists should identify the parties involved and seek to find out from them what the most contentious issues are. They should then seek to find as many sources as possible to confirm this and to “accumulate these views to get an idea of what is as close to the truth as possible”. This view is shared by J5 who suggests that:

I think you’ve to watch who is telling you what. I’ve seen it so many times that there would be division within the parties, but it’s so easy to get drawn in on someone’s saying that this is the problem and then they tell a whole lot of lies. It’s very important for journalists to try and speak to more people and to try and get more context and just be able to decipher what is fact or lies or distorted information. It’s so easy just to get drawn in, especially with someone you speak to regularly. You always have to bear in mind what is the agenda of this person.

What is clear from these accounts is that the journalists do not believe they can take statements made by their sources at face value when it comes to determining the root causes of a conflict, nor can they assume that there will be a shared understanding of these causes among parties. It is quite possible, as J9 points out, for the journalist to entirely misunderstand a situation and to misrepresent the conflict in the news. This potential to mislead is captured in the example cited by J9 below.

I think people need to understand the reason for conflict. I think to just report on conflict ... so and so had a punch up with so and so ... fine, but I think people need to understand, especially if it’s a political conflict. If we have two councillors in a punch-up and they are both from different camps for instance ... but the punch-up actually involves money, then I think it would be irresponsible for us to not give context, because then you can worsen the conflict if you don't give proper context. It can lead to misunderstanding ... So if you don't understand the context then people from Camp B can get cross with people from Camp A and you can get war,
well not war, but you can worsen that conflict … if you don’t report responsibly, then it can lead to misunderstandings and further conflict.

Both J11 and J8 stressed that explaining conflicts and their causes could also mean focusing on some of the ‘less exciting’ issues and rather interrogating points about people’s actual lives. There was value, for instance in providing information about the frustrations people deal with on a daily basis, or with exploring the difficulties people encounter as they try to raise families in conditions of poverty where basics services are missing. J11 proposed that by focusing on the daily lives of ordinary people journalists can shed light on conflict and on the possibility that these could be resolved.

I think sometimes people need to forget about the big exciting things and look at how people actually live in a place and how do they survive in a place. It can take a lot of strength … to keep going … and maybe some of those things are quite positive. How does this person do it? You know there is always hope in a bleak place. It depends on what you are looking for.

By way of an example J11 cited a story told by a photographer working in Iraq about his work in a village a long way from the “big places where the mobs had gone” in an approach to journalism that was quite atypical. The photojournalist spent time in a:

… relatively peaceful and quiet part of Northern Iraq and where you’ve got this Christian minority and just looking at their daily lives. What do they do, how do they look at life and how do they deal with things? They know that there is war taking place, but their concerns are very different. And they are still going forward. And the Muslims and Christians in that area still get along and when they have community meetings there’s not all these negative stories you hear about how the Shias are killing the Sunnis and that type of thing but they all live together and they realise that together they are better protected than when they are separate from each other.

This story, J11 proposed, provided a fine example that could challenge stereotypes and show the potential for people of different faiths to live together without antagonism. In J8’s example, a group of female journalists drew attention to the way certain classes of women are treated in South Africa. These journalists
pretended to be begging on the streets of Johannesburg and experienced first-hand some of the abuse destitute people are confronted with on a daily basis.

It was clear from the range of different contributions volunteered by the journalists that there are many different ways in which journalists can help people in conflict to understand each other’s needs and interests. It was also evident that none of the principles they referred to fell outside of the scope of what would be regarded as good conventional reportage.

4.8 Educating parties about alternatives

Several of the participants supported a view that journalists can contribute to enabling parties to find non-violent solutions to conflict by educating them about the different options that might be available to them. They suggested that there were a number of different ways in which reporters could educate parties through their reportage, the main categories of which are discussed below.

4.8.1 Introducing expert advice

J1 suggested that one of the most effective ways of educating parties in conflict about alternatives is for the journalist to identify experts who can shed light on the problems that are being faced and to draw on their knowledge in providing alternatives. He stressed that journalists should not themselves make judgments or seek to promote particular positions about how the conflict could be resolved. “You are not a judge … you just report,” he said. However, he was adamant that journalists could still contribute to the process of bringing fresh perspectives to bear by identifying people with expertise with regard to the particular underlying issues that may be promoting the conflict. These people can then be approached to provide their perspectives on the conflict and to make proposals about the range of options that might be available to the parties. “The experts must say what must happen for the conflict to be resolved,” he said, suggesting that in this way journalists continue to retain their independence.
4.8.2 Providing examples for comparison

J4 proposed that journalists often have a broader view of what is happening in society than people who are directly involved in the conflicts and that this can provide them with valuable perspective. This perspective makes it possible for journalists to recognise the similarities between the issues confronting different communities that are experiencing conflict. It also makes it possible for them to observe how the different parties have approached these different but similar conflicts and which approaches have had the best results for everyone concerned. By drawing the attention of parties involved in one conflict to approaches that have led other parties to find solutions, J4 said journalist can help parties to address conflicts peacefully. J4 described the process in this way:

*I suppose if two communities have the same problems and then we write about how one of the communities managed to achieve their goals without violence, you would hope that people would be reading and thinking well it is possible, we don’t have to incite violence as means to an end.*

J5 proposed that journalists can educate people in different communities about peaceful solutions to conflict by simply reporting on the successes of other communities in solving problems. She cited an example of service delivery protests to buttress her argument, saying that when people from one community saw that others were having their problems addressed they would also see the value in bringing attention to their concerns and taking issues up with the authorities.

*… if there is a problem with service delivery when we report on it, a lot of the time, we hope that it assists to alleviate the problem. I think a lot of the times the community needs to know about [how the problem was solved]. Perhaps people feel that I can also raise my hand and tell the municipality that this is not just happening in [another area]. I think it is important for us to report on that.*

4.8.3 Educating people about others’ cultures and concerns

J12 proposed that journalists do not always have to turn to experts in order to educate people in conflict about social and political factors that might be
contributing to conflict. Citing the problem of xenophobic violence in South Africa she felt that journalists could educate people from communities involved in these attacks about the needs and concerns of others. She said journalists should be interviewing people on the ground – in this instance illegal aliens, immigrants and refugees – and trying to understand their needs and concerns. By talking to these people and learning about their reasons for coming to South Africa, journalists would be able to educate local communities about conditions people were fleeing from and their reasons for coming to the country. She felt that by relaying these people’s narratives, journalists might be able to promote understanding and sympathy so that people would recognise that:

... it’s not only that they want to come to the country because they want to take our jobs away from us, that’s not the main reason, maybe it’s because of the political influences that arise from their countries, I means political unrest that they find in their countries. J12.

She felt that if people could understand the reasons why people have come to South Africa to escape violence and starvation this could enhance the potential for communities to be more accepting and tolerant.

4.8.4 Educating people about processes

Several of the journalists suggested that the media could play an important role in times of conflict by providing people with information about political and administrative processes that they need to follow to have problems addressed. They suggested that people from marginalized communities often lack basic information about administrative systems. For J6 journalists could address this problem in simple ways, such as providing people with the telephone number of their ward councilor. J6 took this point further arguing that:

*Well, I guess it’s pointing people in the right direction, but not necessarily saying: “This is what you could do, these are your options”. My basic thing most times is about information for people, because most times people don’t know who to contact. They don’t have internet access, they can’t just type someone’s name into Google and get their contact number*
immediately. So I guess I just play a role as someone who can connect the two.

All of these different contributions point to positive contributions journalists can make in times of conflict by helping to educate different stakeholders.

4.9  Exacerbating conflict

All of the journalists agreed that the news media could play a role in exacerbating conflict if they were not careful about the kind of language that they used and the way in which they approached conflict. J3 observed that: “there is just a thin line between reporting and adding fuel to the fire”. For J10 this line is frequently crossed. This view was evident in her remarks that:

… I think we also, as the media, we also can be guilty of perpetuating conflict. Of just making things worse in the way we report, in the way we put the story forwards, in the way we approach the story. You know sometimes, instead of, I mean obviously we are not there to calm things down and play a shrink role, but sometimes I think we are a little bit irresponsible in just handling things in a way that is not very helpful in the broader scheme of things. (J10)

For many of the journalists the problem arises when the media seeks to find ways of making stories more dramatic and appealing to their audiences or when they attempt to manipulate information so that it conforms to the particular narratives expected by their audiences.

J7 argued that the media tends to place excessive focus on protest action and violence, rather than seeking to actually explain what the conflict is about. He argued that it is important for people to see that attendant violence that frequently accompanies conflict is a by-product of underlying problems. He suggested that in general the media finds it “easier” and “much more headline grabbing” to privilege dramatic action over information that provided context. Citing the example of service delivery protests over malfunctioning sewerage systems or the eradication of shacks, he suggested these problems could be prioritised in the story, while the violence accompanying a protest over these issues could be relegated to a less prominent position in the story. He proposed, however, that it might be necessary
to make reference to the violence in the introduction to the story to ensure that it attracts the attention of the audience.

This view, that media frequently sensationalised particular aspects of conflict, found support in J10’s comments when she argued that “essential things are left out purely for sensationalism”. She observed that this often meant providing oversimplified narratives:

... sometimes I think we just get caught up in the hype and we let go of substantial aspects of a story that we would have been of more service to the listeners or the readers ... I think sometimes we focus on the sensationalism at the expense of people getting a better understanding of what the story is about.

J2 agreed that the market-focused nature of many news organisations contributed to conflict. He suggested that the choice of words in headlines could often provoke anger among communities involved in conflict and that these sensationalist terms could often undo all of the good effects of a sensitively written story about conflict. He blamed this problem on a lack of awareness on the part of journalists and editors about the impact of their work on conflict and on the fact that these issues were seldom discussed in editorial meetings. He provided the following description of how an article that might initially have been written with care could be distorted in a way that could enhance conflict.

*It comes down to the editorial process. You will be as conscientious as possible and you will leave for the day [having written a story aimed at ameliorating conflict]. Then the night editor comes on. They are doing their front page headlines and first thing that springs into her head is "mob". It's three letters and you can use it nice and big. Even mob justice, it just sounds good, and then all your preparation for the story, about not inflaming is undone in a single headline, because no one really reads the story once they've read the headline.*

**Conclusion**

This chapter has covered the most important findings of the empirical component of this research process that aimed to determine how journalists perceived their
roles in reporting on conflict. It should be evident that while opinions are by no means unanimous, the group of twelve journalists who participated in this study recognise that the media does have a contribution to make in helping to manage and resolve conflict. In this respect many of the problems people referred to could be classified as general conflict rather than as protracted social conflicts, but many of these issues are also symptomatic of broader underlying concerns.
Chapter Five

Peace journalism and the journalists’ perceptions

Introduction

This chapter explores how the journalists’ expressed perspectives on conflict reporting relate to concepts of peace journalism. It will do so by bringing the findings from Chapter Four together with the theoretical discussion of peace journalism that concluded Chapter Two. The discussion will draw on key themes from the discussion on peace journalism in Chapter Two to explore how journalists participating in the study respond to the core concepts of peace journalism. It will be evident to the reader that there is often a significant degree of overlap between the different points that are made in this section.

5.1 Reporting responsibly on conflict

Peace journalism advocates that journalists should deliberately seek to make a contribution towards the peaceful management and resolution of conflict. In so doing it argues that journalists must recognise that the media does have an impact on conflict and that they can either contribute to exacerbating conflict or helping to mitigate its harmful effects. Of central concern to peace journalism is the idea that journalists must be prepared to take responsibility for their reporting (see 2.2.2)

It was clear from the analysis of the journalists’ perspectives that opinions were divided on this issue. Some of the participants felt that their jobs did not extend beyond fair and accurate reportage and that they could not and should not be expected to consider what might happen as a consequence of their reporting.

Others felt strongly that even though journalists should not deliberately seek to influence a conflict in any way, they had to be aware of how they could exacerbate conflict through their reporting. A third group of journalists recognized
that they had the potential to make a positive contribution in situations of conflict. These journalists appeared comfortable with the idea that journalists can contribute towards creating conditions that allow for parties to manage and resolve conflict, but that they should not promote the interests of particular groups or parties.

5.2 Understanding conflict

One of the key tenets of peace journalism is that reporters need to be equipped with a range of tools for conflict analysis if they are going to be able to report effectively on conflict. These analytical tools must enable them to go beyond simply reporting on events, but also to understand the underlying causes of conflict and to be able to distinguish between interests-based conflicts and needs based protracted social conflicts. These tools also equip journalists to assess how parties’ different approaches to conflict are likely to impact on future relationships and the potential for conflict to be resolved constructively. It seems highly likely that journalists who lack the tools they need for understanding conflict will not be able to provide audiences with sufficiently comprehensive or nuanced descriptions and explanations of the conflicts they are covering.

It was clear from the interviews that none of the participants had been exposed to conflict theory, but it was also evident that some had significantly more sophisticated understandings of conflict than others. Of particular concern was the fact that several of the participants struggled to grasp the idea that conflict can exist without violence and confrontation. It could be argued that these journalists are unlikely to recognise the potential for conflict breaking out in societies until they become manifest.

It’s evident that a journalists understanding of conflict will have a significant impact on how they approach conflict stories. An understanding that concentrates on the violent manifestations rather than on uncovering the root causes is unlikely to promote understanding and may contribute towards fuelling the flames. However, it was clear that the participants with a more sophisticated understanding of
conflict held views that are not dissimilar to those advocated by proponents of peace journalism. It may be that these journalists would benefit from an introduction to conflict theory that would enhance their ability to provide a deeper and more complex explanation of conflict (see 2.2.4).

5.3 Comprehensive conflict analysis

For the proponents of peace journalism it is clear that one of the most important contributions journalists can make in their reporting on conflict is to aid parties involved in conflict, together with other stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes, by providing information they need to make informed decisions. This means providing an analysis of conflict that goes beyond the provision of a simple description of the behaviours of the different parties. It means, furthermore, describing why a conflict is unfolding in a particular way, identifying the needs and interests of the contending parties and pointing out factors that might have contributed towards a conflict becoming manifest at a particular time. It can also mean helping to assess how a conflict might be peacefully managed and resolved, or how the parties can move from a ‘negative’ to a ‘positive’ peace. For peace journalism this means finding a balance between episodic and thematic news frames, with the former concentrating on the here and now, while they latter provides the context needed for understanding the conflict.

There was little doubt that many of the journalists shared these perspectives. They stressed the need for trying to uncover the underlying causes of conflicts and recognising that different people might understand the issues in different ways. They argued that if journalists are to provide a plausible and accurate analysis of conflict then they need to identify all the different stakeholders involved. They also noted that it is important to recognise that people on different sides of the conflict might well hold views very different from each other (see 4.7). These views then need to be explained as part of the journalist’s analysis of the situation on which they are reporting.
5.4 Indirectly mediating between parties

Several of the journalists interviewed recognized that journalists have the potential to play a mediatory role in their reporting of conflict. They acknowledged that in the process of gathering information for stories, journalists would frequently be asking questions of all parties involved in a conflict and that they would be asking parties to respond to statements by rivals. They were able to accept, when prompted, that this process of moving between parties and effectively conveying messages from one side to the other is very similar to that of the mediator. However, they were all equally adamant that this function should be a by-product of good journalism, not its goal.

This position is entirely consistent with the general ideas of peace journalism which do not seek to suggest that journalists should attempt to actively play the role of mediator between rival parties. Peace journalism suggests that reporters can make it possible for parties to communicate with each other through the media and that they can encourage parties to challenge stereotypes and to think more widely about non-violent solutions to conflict.

5.5 Channeling communication between parties

Peace journalism, as represented in this treatise, places a significant amount of emphasis on the potential of the media to enable parties in conflict to communicate with each other. As was noted above, the journalists point out that they are frequently placed in positions where they obtain views from different parties in conflict and relay these statements, opinions and arguments over the air, on the pages of their newspapers and on their websites. Peace journalism stresses that in such instances journalists should not be satisfied with simply relaying rhetoric relating to threats, accusations and positions. Instead journalists should ask probing questions that explore the parties’ real interests and needs and challenge parties on their intentions when making threats or passing blame.

There was general agreement among the journalists that the media could play this role during times of conflict and that in doing so they should be seeking to provide
a platform for as wide a range of voices as possible. This is an important observation because journalists all too often see conflict as a dualistic confrontation involving two groups rather than a more complex phenomenon involving multiple stakeholders.

The journalists agreed that reporters should avoid being used by parties as simple conveyors of propaganda. Instead they should ask the critical questions that tackled the “nitty-gritty” issues that are underlying or prolonging conflict. They also emphasised the need for journalists to be fair on parties when it came to conveying their messages. They stressed that parties should be given equal opportunities to get their messages across, but, more than that, journalists needed to be meticulous in ensuring that the messages conveyed were the messages that the parties intended to be published. Several of the participants observed that journalists frequently select the dramatic quote rather than seeking to be sure that they have really caught the essence of what people wanted to get across though their communications.

5.6 Educating parties involved in conflict

The discussion of peace journalism, in Chapter Two explored how journalists can contribute to the peaceful management and resolution of conflict by educating parties about the different options available to them for managing and resolving conflict without violence. It was proposed that journalists can draw on knowledge of conflict, conflict management and resolution processes in explaining why parties behave in particular ways and the processes that can enable people to address conflicts (see 2.2.7).

Similar points were highlighted by the journalists who made compelling arguments about different ways in which the media can educate parties in conflict. These included providing explanations of conflict processes. Here, the journalists suggested that the actual information should be obtained by specialists rather than volunteered by the journalists themselves in their news writing. Implicit in this suggestion is that journalists should have an understanding of conflict processes
so that they will know where to turn to for expert advice. It is also evident that by turning to experts, rather than conveying the information themselves, journalists are able to avoid becoming part of the story.

The journalists also agreed that they can make a difference in reporting on conflict by helping parties to see how other parties involved in similar conflicts have been able to address their issues. Implicit in this approach is an acknowledgement of the importance of having journalists provide in-depth coverage of conflicts that have been successfully managed and resolved (see 4.8).

5.7 Empowering parties

The journalists were in general agreement that they could play an important role in ‘giving a voice to the voiceless’ through their reportage. They recognised the asymmetrical nature of many conflicts and the difficulties the sometimes extreme power differentials posed for weaker parties. The journalists contended that they could help to ensure that marginalized people get the recognition they have a right to by exposing their concerns in newspapers. The examples cited during the interviews were of isolated cases involving individuals, but they could also be applied more widely to conflicts that impact on large populations.

These views were consistent with the arguments made by advocates of peace journalism that by giving equitable representation to parties, journalists can help to elevate the concerns of weaker groups. By placing the concerns of marginalized people on the public and policy agenda, journalists can help to make the concerns of these people visible so that people can begin to engage with authorities about how problems can be resolved.

The journalists also suggested that marginalized groups frequently lack the power to hold public officials and others in authority accountable. They suggested that in this respect journalists could make an important contribution by holding officials accountable for both their actions and for the commitments they make.
5.8 Taking care with language

The majority of the journalists recognised that the use of sensational and dramatic language has the potential to contribute towards exacerbating conflict in several ways. They suggested the use of certain terms for dramatic effect were likely to anger parties involved in conflicts and to promote and reinforce negative stereotypes. Some suggested that the unguarded and insensitive use of language could contribute to parties reacting so strongly to stories that they ignore the potential positive benefits that might be derived from a news item (See 4.9).

These views are repeated in the arguments of those advocating for a peace journalism approach to reporting. Peace journalism stresses the importance of journalists being highly conscious of the impact of the language that they use and stresses the importance of looking for terms that could be regarded as neutral by all parties in conflict. Peace journalism also stresses that the use of particular terms frequently locates the journalist ideologically in relation to the different parties involved which can impact on their credibility.

5.9 Relating comprehensive narratives

Several of the journalists were critical of what they described as a common practice of leaving out essential aspect of a story in order to create a more sensational effect. The journalists observed that reporters will, on occasion, ignore certain aspects of a story as they emerge in the interests of preserving a simple and compelling narrative. They observed that explaining complex conflict in simple, easily consumed prose can be extremely challenging and important issues are frequently left out in the interest of promoting a more compelling story. Editorial decisions of this nature, the journalists argued, had the potential to impact negatively on conflict and to distort the overall analysis.

Advocates of peace journalism would certainly share this view and would argue that journalists who have been introduced to the principles of peace journalism would be less inclined to conduct themselves in this way. These practices, though apparently common in many instances, are clearly counter to the professional
norms and standards of good journalism. Peace journalism argues that if journalists are aware of the potentially negative impact of their work on conflict, they will be less likely to continue to distort stories in the interests of convenience and dramatic effect. Peace journalism recognises that individual journalists may not have the agency to affect change of this nature within their organisations. However, it contends that the peace journalism approach does equip journalists with arguments to promote fair, accurate and comprehensive coverage.

**Conclusion**

It should be clear from the above that in many respects the journalists interviewed during this research process hold similar ideas to those advocated by the proponents of peace journalism. This is despite the fact that none of the journalists had any prior understanding of the concept or were even aware of it as an approach to conflict reporting. The implications of this will be discussed in the conclusion of this treatise.
Conclusions and recommendations

The primary objective for this treatise was to explore the perceptions of South African newspaper journalists with regard to their roles in reporting on social conflict. The study also aimed to compare and contrast these perceptions with the principles advocated by the still emerging field of peace journalism as a normative approach to reporting on social conflict.

During this study, special attention was paid to the potential impact of the media on protracted social conflict, because of the persistent nature of this form of conflict, the difficulties associated with its resolution and the potential it has to escalate to the point where parties resort to destructive behaviours. Peace journalism understands that the news media has a particular role to play in their coverage of protracted social conflict and in helping to mitigate the harmful effects of such conflicts. Peace journalism also suggests that journalists can exacerbate conflict through their coverage, but it also suggests that by handling conflict with sensitivity and care journalists can contribute towards the creation of mediative spaces where people, both at elite and at grass roots level, can jointly manage and resolve conflicts.

This conclusion will address the key findings of this research, before discussing some of the limitations of the process and concluding with some recommendations.

i. Key findings

The key findings of this research were addressed in Chapters Four and Five and are summarized briefly below:

- The journalists who participated in this study expressed divergent opinions about their roles in reporting on social conflict. Some argued that journalists generally have no specific responsibilities when it comes to reporting on conflict. Others argued that journalists can make a contribution and that they should be aware of this, but they should not let this understanding
interfere with their primary roles as news gatherers. Many of these journalists felt that constructive conflict reporting could be a by-product of good journalism.

- The question of how the journalists responded to conflict was contingent on their actual understandings of conflict as a concept. The journalists generally agreed that they could contribute to conflict by providing insightful and comprehensive analysis of conflicts and their causes.
- There was agreement amongst the journalists that they could potentially play a mediatory role, but that this should never be the reporter’s actual objective in reporting on a conflict.
- The journalists generally expressed the belief that they can help enhance understanding by enabling parties to communicate with each other through the media. Many also stressed, however, that the media should resist becoming part of a contending party’s propaganda arsenal.
- They agreed that the media could help to educate parties in conflict about different approaches that could be followed, the needs and concerns of opponents and how other parties have approached the management and resolution of conflicts in the past.
- Journalists felt that in ‘giving a voice to the voiceless’ they could contribute to empowering weaker parties during conflicts.
- They stressed their awareness of the potentially negative impact they could have on conflict by using language injudiciously and by distorting stories to fit sensational purposes.

What is evident in these findings is that many of the journalists who participated in this study see themselves as having a constructive role to play in their reporting on social conflict. They are conscious of the media’s potential to do both good and harm and the roles that they ascribe to themselves are consistent with the guidelines put forward by peace journalism. It may be that they could benefit further is from exposure to theories and principles from the fields of peace and conflict studies and that such exposure could equip the journalists to cover conflicts more comprehensively and in greater depth. However, it is also clear that while the journalists who participated in the study may not have given these
issues much consideration, many of them are comfortable with the ideas put forward by peace journalism’s advocates.

ii. Limitations of the study

As a small scale research project, this treatise has a number of limitations which the reader should be aware of in contemplating the findings noted above. These limitations are addressed below:

- The study has focused on the perceptions of individual newspaper journalists about the role they believe journalists can play. In doing so it has not interrogated in any depth the degree to which these journalists have agency within the organisations that work for. They may, for instance, have difficulties with the way in which stories are changed to fit sensational narratives, but it’s unclear to what extent they have the power to challenge the way in which stories are covered.

- While there was a significant degree of overlap between what the journalists had to say, the group could not be said to be representative of all journalists employed in the newspaper industry. Claims that are made in this treatise can clearly not be unquestionably generalized to the wider journalism population. However, this was never the intention of the study. Rather the goal was to explore how a select group of journalists responded to the research question.

- The study was limited to the views of reporters. There would clearly also be value in reporting on the way in which editors think about these issues.

- To fully explore how South African journalists respond to peace journalism it would be necessary to include the views of radio, television and online journalists.

It has already been noted that this researcher sees the writing of this treatise as a pilot study that will inform a much more substantial research project. It is anticipated that these concerns will be addressed in this study.
iii. Recommendations

The researcher has the following preliminary recommendations as a result of this study:

- There would be real value in expanding this study to encompass a wider range of journalists including those employed by the different media. Such a study should also include the views of more senior editorial staff such as editors and executive producers at broadcast institutions.
- There is clearly a need for journalists at all levels to be introduced to some of the theories and principles of peace journalism. In particular training courses should be organized that allow for journalists to make use of the tools of conflict analysis in their reporting.
- Journalists need to be encouraged to explore ways of ensuring that news articles and reports that conform to the principles of peace journalism are also appealing to audiences.

iv. A final note

The researcher has been involved in the provision of peace journalism related courses for many years. This study has once more brought home to him the fact that many journalists already have a sophisticated understanding of conflict and the roles that they can play in helping to mitigate its harmful effects. They may not be following any predetermined guidelines, but these journalists are already practising their own versions of peace journalism. They appear to be willing to engage with new ideas that may enhance their ability to make a constructive impact and they would value opportunities to think more deeply about these issues.
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