THE CONSTRAINTS OF HARMONY NEWS COVERAGE MEDIA REPORTAGE OF KENYA'S 2017 GENERAL DECISIONS

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Abstract:

In 2008, Kenya hovered on the brink of a war arising from the political violence that followed the general elections. In reportage akin to that of the infamous Rwandan genocide of 1994, the Kenyan media pitched the country's different ethno religious groups against each other. The result was a wanton loss of lives and property, as well as a highly volatile socio-political climate. By 2013 when the country was about to conduct another general election, apprehension ran high amongst the populace. However, in what seemed like a sharp deviation from what had happened in 2008, media reportage of the election was more conflict-sensitive. Although there were pockets of irregularities, the 2013 election recorded less violence and the media was lauded as a key reason for that. In the 2017 election, the media was once again at the center of public discourse, this time accused of sacrificing democracy in the cause of peace. Public observers accused the media of downplaying and/ or underreporting irregularities and outright election rigging for fear of a possible outbreak of violence. The argument by many journalists and media practitioners was that the media practiced peace journalism. By analyzing selected articles from Kenya's mainstream media, this article examines peace journalism in its many complexities and contextual dynamics, in order to clarify the thin line between peace journalism and advocacy.

Keywords: elections, framing, media, media framing, peace journalism, election reportage

Background

Kenya has a vibrant media sector which is often regarded as one of Africa's most vociferous (Adebayo 2016). From the early colonial days when the British started newspapers such as the Taveta Chronicle, established in 1895 by Rev. Robert Stegal of the Church Missionary Society, and the founding of the Leader by the British East African Company in 1899, the media has played an active role in setting the agenda for public discourse. The Kenyan media has served varying functions: it has been both a means to maintain the status quo by legitimizing the rights of the colonial government, and in later days a tool for social rebirth, the promotion of human rights, and the provision of forums for public debate (Ojwang 2009). One area where the Kenyan media has been particularly active is in the electoral process. In the last decade the country has had three elections, with the media playing a pivotal role in all, most notably in 2007 when Kenya experienced one of the worst explosions of post-election violence since independence. The conflict that ensued after the election results were announced was due in part to the ethnic, religious and tribal nature of Kenyan politics, as well as to uncontrolled media reportage (Youngblood 2018). Ojwang (2009, p.24) posits that the violence was precipitated by heightened expectations, exaggerated pre-election opinion polls and media reports of alleged rigging. In the run-up to the 2007 general election, the Kenyan public depended heavily on the media for information regarding the electoral process and candidates involved. To the media's credit, it

provided live updates at the national vote-tallying center, and set the tempo of public interest as a national conflict unfolded amid finger-pointing and grandstanding by political party loyalists. According to Stremlau, Blanchard, Gabobe, and Ahmed (2009, p.18), the Kenyan media wittingly or unwittingly incited the public to violence, with attendant and avoidable loss of lives and property. Radio broadcasts shortly after the election contributed in no small measure to fuelling the post-election violence that rocked the country. Stremlau et al. observed that the major culprits were the vernacular radio stations, which broadcast in Luo, Kikuyu, Kalenjin, and other local languages. These stations overtly broadcast hate messages similar to those transmitted during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The mainstream English media in Kenya seemed determined to remain unbiased as its messages were largely objective, while the vernacular stations fuelled the embers of hatred and division (Stremlau et al., 2009). Thus, in the lead-up to the 2013 general elections in Kenya there was considerable public apprehension as many were unsure about whether this election would also be violent. Given that the media was partly blamed for the violence that marred the 2008 elections, many wondered what role the media would play this time. Laker and Wanzala (2012, p.7) aver that training and retraining programmes were conducted for journalists in Kenya in a bid to forestall a recurrence of the violence that had engulfed the country in 2007. For example, the Peace Journalism Foundation (PJF), an East African-based peace media NGO with the aim of creating a peaceful society through the media, conducted training for Kenyan journalists in the runoff to the elections. Similarly, several other organizations such as the International Media Support Group conducted training for Kenyan journalists with the aim of ensuring that they were safe during elections and that they were able to provide balanced and fair reportage by using a conflict-sensitive style of journalism (Laker & Wanzala, 2012). While the 2013 general election in Kenya was in no way perfect, it was a marked improvement on the violent 2007 election. The media played a more responsible role in 2013 by mobilizing and sensitizing the public towards peace and nonviolence. Kenya's next election was in 2017 and like the elections of 2008 and 2013, the media played an active role before, during and after the electoral process. The election was widely considered to be one of the most contentious, not only in Kenya but also across the African continent. Although eight candidates, including three independent aspirants, vied for the presidency, it was clearly a contest between incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta of the Jubilee Party of Kenya and Mr Raila Odinga of the National Super Alliance. The media's role in the election once more highlighted the contestations regarding peace journalism's propensity to unwittingly slide into advocacy. Renowned peace journalist Steven Youngblood describes the inclination of some journalists to (un)wittingly slide into advocacy and misrepresent peace journalism thus: Nowhere in the theories of peace journalism elaborated by its founders, Dr Johan Galtung, Dr Jake Lynch, and Annabel McGoldrick, and nowhere in my new university textbook Peace Journalism Principles and Practices, does anyone say that peace journalists should ignore the unpleasant and potentially volatile news. 'Tension and protests' are newsworthy, and must be covered. Election rigging is news, and cannot be ignored by real journalists. Peace journalism does not question if these stories should be reported but instead asks how journalists should cover this news. Do we report responsibly and in a manner that does not incite violence, or in ways that fuel the fire and exacerbate an already tense situation? (Youngblood 2018, p. 441) according to Youngblood (ibid.), if the media in Kenya or elsewhere ignore or minimize news at the excuse of promoting

peace, then they are not practicing peace journalism or any real journalism for that matter. This article argues that although there were dissensions raised regarding the Kenyan media's reportage of the 2017 elections (some of them very valid), this reportage consisted mainly of peace journalism in intention and principle. This study concurs with Youngblood and contends that, if in a bid to promote peace we foster injustice, we have actually done more disservice to society. The study further draws lessons that accrue from the Kenyan experience for other African countries planning to hold elections in the near future.

THE PEACE JOURNALISM MODEL

In the 1970s renowned Austrian scholar Johan Galtung first coined the term 'peace journalism' (PJ). According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, p.5), peace journalism is the deliberate selection and reportage of stories in ways that create opportunities for society to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict. Peace journalism uses the insights of conflict analysis and transformation to update concepts of balance, fairness, and accuracy in reporting; and provides a new route map tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their journalism. In the process PJ builds an awareness of nonviolence and creativity in the practical job of everyday reporting and editing. Hyde-Clarke (2011, p. 43) contends that one main feature of peace journalism is its ability to frame stories in ways that provide society with enough information with which to respond non-violently to conflict or conflict situations. She also affirms that peace journalism is not only relevant in conflict situations; it can also find relevance in attempts at maintaining peace in society by providing varied viewpoints that will help a large section of the citizenry make informed decisions about issues that concern them. This places enormous responsibilities on the media as society's watchdogs (Hyde-Clarke 2011, p.43). Bratic, Ross, and Kang-Graham (2008, p.13) aver that peace journalism was born out of the need to correct the negative consequences associated with traditional (standard) journalism. They posit that the practice of traditional journalism is more likely to foster violent conflict than encourage peace because it does not present society with alternatives that encourage peace. This follows from the fact that news media have often been used to promote wars and conflicts. For example, the news media was accused of both helping the Allies further their goals in World War II, and (in Germany) overtly persuading the German masses into believing that Jews were a lesser race (Stout 2011, p.9). In addition, Nazi Germany employed undisguised propaganda to maintain the loyalty of Germans. In much the same way as the horrific genocide perpetrated by the Third Reich was encouraged by this prejudice, the media played a significant role in the ethnic conflicts that engulfed Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia by demonizing the 'other' – Jew, Tutsis or Bosnian Muslims. Journalists played crucial roles in the promotion of violence in these countries (Thompson 2007). The media can also play an important role in positively shaping society. Hachten (2005, p.24) states that the persistent reporting by the international media about pariah states such as South Africa under apartheid helped facilitate political change. Such reporting formed world opinions, which in turn led to actions by concerned nations. Persistent American and European press reports of the civil war in Bosnia and the growing evidence of genocide by Bosnian Serbs undoubtedly pushed the Clinton administration and NATO to intervene and impose a military truce, which ultimately led to peace in that troubled nation. Hackett (2010, p.118) argues that

shifting and expanding the sphere of conflict reportage beyond the immediate conflict environment to larger venues, and thereby providing insight into possible causes, instigators and solutions, is one of the notable achievements of peace journalism. However, this model is not without its criticisms; even its name evokes contention. For example, Loyn (2007, p.2) contends that the biggest problem with peace journalism is where it puts the reporter. He asserts that the primary duty of a reporter is to be an observer and not a participant in a conflict situation, or indeed, any issue of social relevance. According to Loyn, the reporter is not there to make peace or to take sides in a dispute, but to address and explain the complexity of a messy world and construct a narrative. Similarly, Hanitzsch (2007, p.5) argues that the idea behind peace journalism is often based on an individualistic and voluntarist illusion which suggests that journalists only need to change their attitudes and behaviour in order to produce coverage that will embrace the tenets of peace journalism. He further contends that there are many structural constraints such as inadequate personnel, availability of sources, access to the scene and information in general, which shape and limit the work of journalists. Therefore, he affirms, it would be imprudent to suggest that the conduct of peace journalism is solely a matter of individual scope. In defense of this model, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) maintain that peace journalism is often misunderstood as 'advocating for peace'. Rather, they aver, it is a journalism model concerned with giving peace a chance in the national and international debate, by ensuring that nonviolent responses to conflict get a fair hearing. Similarly, Peleg (2007, p.3) faults Lyon's position that reporters should maintain objectivity by acting as detached observers and not players in the social sphere. He remarks that it is callous, inconceivable and insensitive for journalists to remain aloof and disconnected in the face of social injustice and tyranny. He is of the opinion that it is near-impossible to report on disasters such as the Rwandan genocide, the war in the DRC, and the ravaging scourge of HIV/AIDS without empathy and a distinct emotional slant. Peleg also disagrees with Hanitzsch's (2007, p.5) position that peace journalism overemphasises' voluntarism and individualism, ignoring the sustaining background, organizational logic and economic pressures that accompany day-to-day journalistic duties. Individual reporters, according to Hanitzsch, work alongside a group of other peace-minded people or groups to ensure peace, as they cannot possibly work alone or in a vacuum. According to Peleg (2007, p.4), peace journalism aims at individuals as agents of change and not as the solo crusaders proposed by Hanitzsch. The aim is to create a critical mass of individuals with innovative mindsets working towards the adoption of journalism, thereby rendering the tenets of peace journalism commonplace and not simply a passing fad. A major criticism of peace journalism is that it inhibits journalists from practicing fair and objective reporting. Fairness and objectivity are the universally accepted tenets of the journalism profession (Lee, 2010). Without objectivity, journalism loses respect. However, objectivity without sensitive reportage can often be the bane of journalism. As Lee (2010, p. 363) points out, objectivity is possibly one of the biggest obstacles to journalists playing a more responsible and beneficial role in public life. Objectivity, by emphasizing facts and manifest events, devalues ideas, fragments experience and makes complex social phenomena more difficult to understand. Hackett (2010, p.180) notes that there are certain positive connotations associated with the term objectivity, such as fairness and the pursuit of truth without favour. He argues, however, that objectivity is not fixed but is relative, because whether or not objectivity is a desirable and achievable goal for reporting in a

democratic society is debatable. While objectivity should be entrenched as a fundamental aspect of journalism, it is vital nonetheless to note that news said to be objective can, in fact, fuel violence. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, p. 209) identify the following ways in which news said to be objective fuels violence:

• News that overtly favour official sources

• News that is obviously biased in favour of events over the process

• News that favour dualism in reporting conflicts.

METHOD

For this study, the researcher analyzed selected election-related news stories in two leading Kenyan newspapers, as per the 2015 GeoPoll data on newspaper and magazine readership in Kenya. According to the report, Daily Nation and Standard are the top newspapers by audience size and share, beating their competitors by a large margin. The report shows that Daily Nation had an average readership of approximately 4 379 400 per day, and Standard had an average of 2 223 500 per day. This means that nationwide, Daily Nation has a 40% share while Standard has a 20% share. Lower down, Taifa Leo has a 10% share, and People Daily has an 8% share (Elliott 2015). Suffice to add that the focus of the researcher's analysis was online newspapers; broadcast media outfits (radio and television) were not analyzed. The reason for the choice of newspapers over broadcast media is due to the continued influence that traditional newspapers have in setting agenda for members of the public. As can be observed from Table 1 above, while the prevalence of social media and blogs have surged as sources of news, traditional newspapers still have a prominent place in news dissemination. In fact, studies by Jo (2005) and Anderson (2007) have shown that newspapers are generally perceived as more credible sources of news than online sources (social media). As Just et al. (1996, p. 31) aver, 'If a citizen wanted information about the substance of policies, newspapers were clearly the medium of choice'.

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TIME FRAME

Kenya's general elections to elect the president, members of Parliament and devolved governments took place on 8 August 2017. Thus, the researcher focused the analysis on the period between January and August 2017, and also shortly after the election, from September to December 2017.

FINDINGS

What Peace Journalism is not: Lessons from the 2017 Kenyan Elections Since contestations about what peace journalism is have not reconciled divergent and sometimes antagonistic opinions, a discussion of what peace journalism is not may provide a better understanding of the model. Nowhere in recent times have the tenets of peace journalism been questioned as much as in the 2017 Kenyan elections. Through analysis of selected newspaper stories that emanated

from the country before, during and after the elections, this study aims to illustrate the limits of peace journalism.

Peace Journalism is not a Conscious Disparaging of Journalistic Objectivity

A major criticism of peace journalism is that it inhibits journalists from practising fair and objective reporting (Hanitzsch 2007; Loyn 2007). Critics argue that fairness and objectivity are the universally accepted tenets of professional journalism and many believe that without objectivity journalism loses its respect. However, objectivity without sensitive reportage can also be the bane of journalism. As Lee (2010) points out, objectivity is possibly one of the major obstacles to journalists playing a more responsible and beneficial role in public life. By emphasizing facts and overt events, objectivity may devalue ideas, fragment experience and make complex social phenomena more difficult to understand. There are certain positive connotations associated with the term objectivity, such as fairness and the pursuit of truth without favour. However, objectivity is not a fixed position; it is relative because whether or not objectivity is a desirable and attainable goal for reporting in a democratic society remains debatable (Lee 2010). In the wake of the prolonged and highly contested 2017 presidential election in Kenya, there have been intense debates within the media and sociopolitical circles about the role(s) the media played in the elections (Gathara 2017; Youngblood 2017). These debates have revolved around whether the media lived up to public expectations by reporting the entire election process accurately in an in-depth and fair manner that offered adequate space to the contesting parties, especially the fierce competition between the two major political formations, Raila Odinga's National Super Alliance (NASA) and the Jubilee Party led by Uhuru Kenyatta. The debate is whether the media served the broader national good, identifying and prioritizing key national issues and presenting, analyzing and projecting them in a manner that helps in the country's democratic transformation and in conflict resolution. Shortly after the results of the 2017 general elections in Kenya were released, Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition party NASA, rejected and challenged the results. This led to a boycott of the repeat elections of October 2017 ordered by Kenya's courts. Mr Odinga cited several irregularities as reasons for his and his party's positions, including media bias, which was evident in deliberate misinformation, downplaying violent attacks on his supporters, and underreportage of his party's activities. He subsequently threatened to establish a 'people's assembly' to carry out protests and boycotts, while seeking changes to the Constitution. In a column in the Washington Post on 11 August 2017, renowned Kenyan journalist, activist and cartoonist Patrick Gathara recalled that in the run-up to the election, there was great public resistance to 'preaching peace' as a means of pre-empting violence in the event that the election was disrupted (Gathara 2017). Gathara claimed that the media's bid to preach peace had the obverse effect and created the fear of possible anarchy in the minds of Kenyans. Wittingly or unwittingly they (the media) had made a deal with the government to report in ways that framed the election as free and fair (Gathara 2017). While not discounting Gathara's views, given that media messages often hold varying meanings to different audiences depending on how the messages are framed, it is nonetheless important to point out that the media's watchdog role also includes providing early warnings for possible conflict situations. The sampled newspapers did just that. For example, The Daily Nation of 10 June 2017 had the following heading for its leading story: 'Insulating the 2017

election against violent extremism' (Kagwanja 2017). The article, which examined a report in 2017 by the International Crisis Group (ICG) called for vigilance from all Kenyans, and especially the security forces. The paper further remarked: …What is patently clear, however, is that a necessary pathway to peace and to defeating the forces of extremism is to anchor democracy on a professionally robust, adequately financed and well-coordinated and equipped security sector…This is the most decisive lesson Kenya learnt from the 1991-2014 decades when protracted democratic transitions greatly weakened the coordination, control and mechanisms of its security forces… The government should invest in training and equipping the police in non-violent methods that de-escalate crises and counter extremism without violating human rights. (Daily Nation, 10 June 2017) When newspapers provide early warnings and calls for peace, it would be unfair to regard these as preaching peace. A crucial example of the importance of the media's early warning responsibility is the Rwandan genocide. In the lead up to what is today regarded as one of the most gruesome events of the 20th century, Dowden (2007) remarks that the media failed to report on the festering relationships and brewing animosity between Rwanda's ethnic groups. Rwanda simply was not important enough. To British editors, it was a small country far away in a continent that rarely hit the headlines. The words Hutu and Tutsi sounded funny, hardly names that an ambitious news editor or desk officer would want to draw to the attention of a busy boss and claim that they were of immediate and vital importance. Within a few days of the plane crash, [which marked the start of the genocide] the Times ran several articles about what it obviously considered an angle to interest its readers: the fate of the Rwandan gorillas. (Dowden 2007, p. 251) While peace journalism seeks to promote public knowledge and understanding of alternatives to violence as means of resolving differences, it nonetheless does not mean that the public should not be made aware of the whole story in news items. Withholding or hiding stories lest these instigate public violence is in itself a form of violence. Deliberate misinformation or concealment of information is violent because ignorance can breed deadlier forms of violence. In similar vein, shortly after the election the Standard newspaper presented a balanced analysis of some of the factors that led to the annulment of the 2017 Kenyan election. On 20 September 2017, the newspaper published a story titled: 'Reasons why presidential election was declared invalid, court gives full verdict'. Although the story was largely a summary of the Supreme Court's verdict on the disputed election, the newspaper provided a detailed analysis of this verdict. The claims by both the incumbent, President Uhuru Kenyatta, and his main opponent, Mr Raila Odinga were presented. The newspaper also highlighted the shortcomings of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), stating that the body failed to act on the violation of law and misuse of public resources by Uhuru Kenyatta during campaigns. The newspaper gave voices to the major actors, and apportioned blame where necessary. This balanced presentation of varying viewpoints with adequate context and background to social issues represents the ideal of what peace journalism should be.

Peace Journalism is not 'Good News' Journalism

There is a general belief that news is not news until it is bad. When the then BBC newsreader Martin Lewis suggested in 1993 that television news coverage should move away from bad news and 'its remorseless emphasis on disaster, conflict and failure' (Independent 26 April 1993) to

more good news stories, particularly on television but also in newspapers, he was derided by his colleagues and, according to him, was even threatened with dismissal by his employers. Recounting his experience years later, Lewis remarked: …My job was on the line. I thought – 'Here is an organization respected around the world, the bastion of democratic debate and argument and assumes the right – quite properly – to analyze and criticize every other sector in society, but they won't tolerate a public discussion about [how] they operate their own news business and indeed the news business itself. Lewis's experience would be different today as many news organizations have begun to consider tilting their reportage towards 'good' news over 'bad' news. DigiDay, an online trade magazine that creates content, services, and community fostering change in media and communication, reports that Huffington Post's Good News has increased its traffic 85 percent over the last year and gets twice the social referrals of other Huffington Post content (Sahil 2016). Given the growth of social media and its increasing importance as a tool for business growth and development, one can safely state that good news is good business for the Huffington Post. Other publishers of positive news aver that countering traditional media's penchant for bad news is not only good for societal well-being; it also helps to catalyze potential solutions to the problems of society (Sahil 2016). However, it is important to state that good journalism is not peace journalism; and the sampled Kenyan newspapers aptly made this distinction in their reportage. Many critics of the Kenyan media reportage of the 2017 Kenyan general elections, like Gathara, contend that the Kenya media painted a façade of normality by ignoring or under-reporting citizens' protests and frustrations in order not to disturb the peace. Some also argue that most of Kenya's media saw the reportage of peaceful marches and public protests as bad news that might paint the nation in bad light in the international community, and might also initiate violence. According to Ouma (2018), the Kenyan mainstream media blacked out the clashes between state security agencies and sections of opposition supporters who were demonstrating against the disputed presidential results. Ouma further argued that the local mainstream media attempted to paint an image of a country that had moved on from the electoral conflict, and instead they focussed on other trivialities (Ouma, 2018). Claims that the Kenyan media 'blacked out' certain stories which they believed might incite violence are not completely true, judging by the news stories that were analysed. For example, the story by Onyango in the Daily Nation of 9 October 2017 entitled '37 died in post-poll chaos — KNCHR report', gave a detailed report of the violence that ensued shortly after the general elections. The newspaper did not only present numbers, it humanised its story by providing the exact place where the violence and resultant deaths occurred: The deaths were recorded in Kawangware, Mathare, Kibera, Lucky Summer, Baba Dogo and Huruma in Nairobi County; Kondele, Manyatta, Nyamasaria, Nyalenda in Kisumu County; Siaya town and Ugunja in Siaya County; Rangwe in Homa Bay County, Tana River and Elgeyo-Marakwet counties. 27 people were killed in Nairobi, Kisumu (3), Tana River (3), Siaya (2) and one each in Homa Bay and ElgeyoMarakwet counties. (Daily Nation, 9 October 2017) The newspaper also reported the ages of the dead and that seven minors had died, three girls and four boys. The paper went a step further by naming the toddler who lost her life to the violence as Samantha Pendo of Kisumu's Nyenda slum. Not only did the newspaper not blacklist stories of violence, it presented these in a way that humanized those affected. This is an important tenet of the peace journalism model that is of humanizing stories, and giving voice to the voiceless (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005).

Peace Journalism is not Advocacy

At the core of peace journalism's belief is the tenet that any aware member of the society would be able to make informed decisions on the best possible ways to resolve an issue (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005). Such awareness includes the various actors involved in a given conflict or conflict situation, the possible unseen influencers, the people who benefit and those who stand to lose from a conflict, men and women who are working for peaceful resolution of the conflict, as well as creating awareness of the possible nonviolent conflict resolution options available to all parties involved in the conflict. This involves not just reporting good news, or under-reporting bad news; it involves conscious engagement by the journalist in ways that give them the opportunity to understand contexts and backgrounds. These in turn would ultimately help by providing detailed coverage or reportage of events that present society with balanced information of all sides and all angles. However, Loyn (2007), one of peace journalism's fiercest critics, maintains that his discontent with peace journalism stems from where it puts the reporter. He argues that by demanding engagement from the reporter, peace journalism fails to recognize or accept that there is no such thing as a transparent observer; the implied contract with the audience is that the standpoint of the reporter is at least an attempt to be an observer. He remarks that: Reporting news is about addressing the complications of a messy, visceral world and constructing a narrative, telling stories, not 'searching under stones'. This may involve shining a light on some dark places, where the peace/solution-oriented seeker for conflict resolution would want to 'frame' the situation in a different way. But if people are out to kill each other then, as journalists, we are not there to stop them. This study agrees with Loyn's position that in an attempt to practice peace journalism, many practitioners may (UN) wittingly apply a prescriptive set of rules that actually excludes the engagements that peace journalism claims to promote. Journalists in Kenya, like their counterparts in most part of the continent, face daunting tasks when it comes to discharging their duties. Some even argue that credit should be given to any journalist who reports at all, given the dangerous conditions they operate in. For example, a report by Article 19, an organization committed to helping people (including journalists) express themselves freely and engage in public life without fear of discrimination, shows that journalists who covered Kenya's 2017 general elections worked in an exceptionally challenging environment. Many faced direct attacks and arrests, were denied access to certain areas, and received different forms of threats, even more so after the August elections and in the run-up to the October repeat presidential polls. While it is commendable that the media in Kenya took intentional and deliberate steps to consciously report in ways that sought to foster peace and nonviolence during the 2017 elections, it is nonetheless important to note that deliberately avoiding or underreporting news reports or events, as argued by Gathara (2007), negated their efforts. News should be served to the public as a buffet. According to Kempf (2007), if peace journalism is understood in the right way, it is not the opposite of good journalism, but its prerequisite.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was not to defend Kenyan media's reportage of the 2017 elections, neither was it an approval for another peace journalism success story. The study sought to provide

balance, through an analysis of examples from Kenya's mainstream media, to the ongoing debate on the role played by the Kenyan media in the 2017 election. Critics argue that the media sacrificed professionally for peace, and that the media 'went to bed' with the government (Gathara, 2017). While the arguments that the media underreported the election may in some respects be true, it is however unfair to generalize this as the story of media reportage of Kenya's 2017 elections. The Kenyan media has played active roles in most elections in the country, and has been either praised or condemned for its role. It is safe to say that the media in Kenya is gradually beginning to develop a peace journalism approach that is unique to the Kenyan sociocultural and sociopolitical milieu. There will inevitably be contentions with the media's approach. Firstly, accusations of media complicity or 'sell out' will depend largely on who is making the allegation, and on his or her political leanings. Due to the propensity of most Kenyans (and indeed in most parts of Africa) to view politicians and/or political parties from an ethno religious perspective, it is often easy to accuse the media of bias when stories do not favour their course. The media in Africa is constantly under pressure from both the populace and the government. This is even more evident today as elections have increased on the continent because, as Cheeseman and Klass (2018) argue, authoritarian leaders have devised new strategies of rigging elections in ways that are harder for members of the public to see, to the extent that even the media wittingly or unwittingly ascribe legitimacy to often flawed electoral systems. Cheeseman and Klass assert that: How is it possible that the flourishing of elections has coincided with a decade of democratic decline? The answer is that dictators, despots, and counterfeit democrats have figured out how to rig elections and get away with it. An increasing number of authoritarian leaders are contesting multiparty elections, but are unwilling to put their fate in the hands of voters; in other words, more elections are being held, but more elections are also being rigged. (Cheeseman and Klass, 2018, p. 3) Unfortunately, many journalists have ended up as pawns in their hands and have aided the fostering of illegality, which has the potential to snowball into direct violence (Adebayo, 2018). Critics of peace journalism like Loyn (2007, p.2) contend that the biggest problem with the model is where it puts the reporter. He asserts that the primary duty of a reporter is to be an observer and not a participant in a conflict situation, or indeed, any issue of social relevance. According to Loyn, the reporter is not there to make peace but to address the complications of a messy world and construct a narrative, not to search for connotations. In other words, Loyn argues that journalists should report social issues such as elections without necessarily meddling in externalities such as peacemaking. In his words: 'It cannot be the function of journalism to mediate between conflict parties, to sit down at a negotiating table with them and moderate their disputes.' Loyn's position resonates with those of Hanitzsch (2007) who avers that the peace journalism movement wittingly or unwittingly assumes that the media is all-powerful and that its effects are always causal and linear. He argues that this overestimates the power of journalism and understates the impact of interpersonal communication. According to Hanitzsch, this view connects readily with an anachronistic conceptualization of the audience as a mass, as an aggregate composed of dispersed individuals whose characteristics are of only modest consequence for the understanding of mass communication. He argues that if such conceptualization of the audience as a mass coincides with the demand for a (socially) responsible journalism, fatal misjudgments are difficult to avoid. Although the researchers do not agree with the views of Loyn and Hanitzsch, they nonetheless

reinforce the need for balance in the practice of peace journalism, and the need to understand its limits. Journalists practicing peace journalism run the risk of unwittingly becoming advocates. As Youngblood (2018) asserts, none of the tenets of peace journalism suggests that news should be ignored or sugarcoated. He argues that considering the consequences of one's reporting does not mean setting aside or downplaying unpleasant or potentially inflammatory news. What it does mean is that peace journalists should take care to frame and word the story in such a way that, at a minimum, it does not exacerbate the situation. Journalists should not hold back certain facts, but they should not sensationalize them either. These facts should be presented alongside voices that offer nonviolent solutions.

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