

Framing Peace Process and Sharia: An Evidence of Peace Journalism during Violent Conflict in District Swat, Pakistan.

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Abstract: *This study contently examines the editorial coverage of the [violent] conflict/ militancy in district Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, in two leading local newspapers, i.e. Daily Chand and Daily Shamal, from a peace journalism perspective. The findings, based on content analysis of overall 145 editorials written on the issue of militancy/conflict, indicate that the local newspapers backed the peace process and implementation of Islamic laws (Sharia) and viewed them as important elements for conflict resolution.*

Key Words: Peace Agreements, Dialogue, Adl Regulations, Islamic Laws, Sharia, Government, Militants

Introduction

Pakistan has suffered a lot of the worst law and order situation after the terror attacks in the United States (US) on September 11, 2001, followed by the US attacks on Pakistan's neighboring Afghanistan in October 2001. The USA and its allies move against Afghanistan sparked large scale protests in different parts of Pakistan, the especially severe reaction came from Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa when the chief of Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariate-Mohammadi [TNSM] Maulana Sufi Muhammad called for support of Afghanistan against US assault and sent [reportedly] thousands of local people to fight against the US intervention (Din & Khan, 2015).

Militancy in district Swat, headquarter of Malakand division, may be linked with two major events; one of them is the constitutional status. Since its merger in Pakistan, the district Swat has been treated as a Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA) under Article 247 of the Constitution of Pakistan, this status of the area restricts the elected members of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and of course, the provincial government [to do legislation for the PATA region] (Aziz & Luras, 2010). Mulana Sufi Muhammad's led TNSM started its movement in 1992, wherein the leadership of TNSM demanded of the government to introduce an Islamic justice system. The *Talibanization* in Swat can be connected to this movement, which was primarily launched for the implementation of Sharia (Islamic Laws) in the entire Malakand division (Din & Khan, 2015).

Secondly, the developing scenario after the 9/11 incident increased anti-Western feelings and, hence, boosted support for demands of Islamic Laws (Sharia) in the the Malakand division, where hatred against the US was [reportedly] higher than other parts of Pakistan. When militant exploited the anti-Western sentiments and tried to enforce their agenda through different tactics and means, including the usage of media, then the situation turned into conflict in the the Malakand division, especially in district Swat. After the the banning of the TNSM in 2001 and the the arrest of Sufi Muhammad, the movement was [then] led by Sufi's son-in-law, Maulana Fazlullah. During a a short span of ti,me, the militants challenged the writ of the government and, hence, took many areas of the district Swat in their control. (Aziz & Luras, 2010)

Peace Agreements

The Awami National Party-led the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government with the support of its ally Pakistan Peoples Party at center inked two different peace agreements with local militants, which were

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aimed at bringing peace in Malakand division in general and the restive district Swat in particular. Peace agreements were used as a policy tool by the government, which were meant to restore peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and (the then) Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which indicates Pakistan's commitment to adopt non-military option for conflict resolution(Tajik, 2011).

Though the government was struggling to bring peace in the restive district Swat and other districts of Malakand division, even after the signing of a first agreement on May 21, 2008, with local militants, the fear factor forced about 400 policemen in district Swat to resign from their services soon after the peace agreement (Tajik, 2011). After the failure of the first peace agreement, the government continued its struggle to resolve the issue of militancy through peaceful means. In this regard, the provincial government signed another peace agreement with the Taliban in district Swat in February 2009. In this agreement, the provincial government's sovereignty over Swat was recognized (Aziz & Luras, 2010). The demand for implementation of Islamic laws was guaranteed in this agreement, and hence, keeping the development and the recommendations of the National Assembly, the then President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari signed "Sharia Nizam-e-Adl Regulations -2009" on April 13, 2009.(Din & Khan, 2015)

Media Approach to Conflict: A Critical Overview

This overview of conflict journalism is evolved in different phases to identify some of the elements, which influence or even determine the media narratives on a given conflict. In fact, conflict, as a source of hard news, gets prominence space and time in media; most often, the media inclined towards war/ conflict-oriented news. Media frame the conflict in a way that contribute to maximizing the conflict; this may happen, particularly when the government lacks political support within a country. The government's incapability to deal with terrorism due to increase dissent in the political circle and lacking control over informational flow prompted the Israeli news media to play a negative role during the Arab-Israeli peace process(W Olfefeld, 1997)

Media role during conflict is not limited to conflict reporting, but sometimes patterns of media reports show that media is taking a side in the conflict. Using sensational frames and military jargon, the media don't remain as a partial or impartial observer and/or arbiter; rather, they [media]are in the battlespace. (McLaughlin, 2001)

Obviously, media organizations will be facing pressure from each side of the conflict, which determines and/or change the media frames; hence this [potential] state of media may guide the public to imaginary solutions of conflict. The government and military put pressure, in many cases, on media to build a narrative that can be used to manipulate and construct a social reality that may serve their [government and military] interests. (Lynch, 2007)

However, it is also argued that media, even when it is choosing news frames during the conflict, gives priority to their commercial interests. To attain their financial gains, the media focuses more on conflict and war-oriented news stories so that to increase its audiences' circle, which is essential for obtaining its commercial goals. Hence, it can be argued that Media institutions, most often, use conflict and war-related news because of their commercial anxiety. (Kasbari, 2006)

The medium of media organizations and their audiences have also influence, to some extent, media framing at the time of conflict. In the Pakistani context, a study found that the elite English press didn't only gave more coverage to the conflict than the Urdu press, but it also framed more news stories from a war journalism perspective. (Siraj & Hussain, 2012). It can be concluded that media organizations are more inclined to war journalism frames due to influencing factors that vary from conflict to conflict. Some of the influencing factors, drew from the above discussion, are;

- Government and military pressure
- Commercial interests
- Audience-centred approach: - to care of audiences 'choices in conflict-related news
- Sensationalizing the event [conflict] by using military jargons.

Apart from these mentioned factors, the uncertain situation in the government circle and strong political opposition to conflict is also an important contributing factor that provides media with a pressure-free environment, and hence the media, most probably, frames the conflict negatively to generate hard news of its choice.

Framing Swat Conflict in Peace Journalism Perspective

Peace journalism has been an area of interest for so many communications scholars since its emergence

in the mid of 1990 decade. Associated with the seminal work of John Galtung, peace journalism insists that journalists should focus on causes of conflict instead of merely reporting violent events during conflict. (Lynch, 2008)

Indeed, peace journalism is an approach that focuses on conflict resolution while suggesting a number of [alternative] ways that peace journalism might be adopted. (Galtung, 2003)

Though peace journalism emerged as a new field with the broader discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies, it has the potential to guide [properly] the working journalists, who are covering conflict/ war, as it guides scholars to critically evaluate war reporting on one side and provides practical plans and options to journalists [to bring changes in their approach towards war reporting] on other side. (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007) Peace journalism is related to editors and reporters' choices that guide journalists to highlights nonviolent responses to conflict (Lynch, 2015)

It is obvious that journalism has the potential to contribute to the peace process, initiating for peaceful settlement of conflicts, but its [potential]role, in this regard, is limited. (Hanitzsch, 2004). Indeed, peace journalism as an alternative perspective to traditional war reporting is not yet deeply rooted in the practical field of journalism. Many elements such as language, story type, conflict's length and its nature influence and shape the framing patterns of war/peace journalism. Hence, some of the available scholarship on the subject suggest that evolving peace journalism into a viable, mainstream approach to news coverage of war and conflict, it is necessary to bring some structural changes t (Lee, 2010).

In spite of different scholarly opinions on peace journalism, this type of journalism has been practising, but in different shapes and pattern, during conflicts. Earlier, it was argued that the media cover conflicts in a way that cause hatreds and promote violence. In this connection, scholars put into consideration the early studies of the role of the radio in Nazi propaganda campaigns to some of the recent conflicts, including Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia conflicts. (Allen & Stremmlau, 2005)

However, journalism has also been playing its vital role in peacebuilding, and, in most cases, it offers alternative means for conflict resolution. In this context, this study is conducted, whereas the researchers have taken the last two salient indicators from Lee & Maslog (2005) study, who suggested that peace journalism has three major indicators, i.e. avoidance of demonizing language, a nonpartisan approach and a multiparty orientation. (Lee & Maslog, 2005).

Research Hypothesis

- RH1:** There is a significant relation between peace journalism and media organizations' approach towards violent conflict.
- RH2:** Local Press was more inclined towards peace-oriented reporting during the conflict in district Swat
- RH3:** Local Press framed the implementation of Islamic Laws (Sharia) as a vital means for conflict resolution.

Methodology

This research is the combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of editorials published in selected newspapers, i.e. *Daily Chand* and *Daily Shamal*, on violent conflict in district Swat during 2008-09. All those editorials were thoroughly selected and examined, which were written on the issue of regional [violent] conflict/ militancy in district Swat and other districts of the Malakand division. These editorials were examined and analyzed in the broader perspective of peace journalism to evaluate the local press priorities during the conflict. Scholarship on peace journalism indicates that this type of journalism would be in practice when editors and reporters have the choice to decide what to report and how to report conflict-related issues that generate the value of nonviolent responses to conflict in society. (Lynch, 2015). The selected newspapers have their influence in the conflict-hit region, and they were, of course, made their choices - how to frame the issue of militancy/ conflict in their editorials that were published during the time frame of this study- from June 2008 to May 2009. The researchers have applied the Chi Square test to evaluate the relation between the media's approach towards violent conflict and the concept of peace journalism. Hence, this statistical tool is adopted while applying a quantitative content analysis method to test the first hypothesis of this study. For the rest of the two hypotheses, the researchers used the qualitative content analysis method, as it has been using by researchers who are more interested in the meanings associated with [texts] messages than the quantity or number of the written texts/ messages. (Li, 2008).

Since the medium of the selected newspapers in Urdu, therefore, the researchers analyzed their editorials, published on the issue of militancy/violent conflict, through their appropriate translation into English.

Results and Discussion

Peace journalism had been given prominence frames by the local newspapers during the time of violent conflict in district Swat, Pakistan, as the findings suggest that both the selected newspapers, i.e. *Daily Chand* and *Daily Shamal*, were focused more on the restoration of peace in their editorial's coverage of the conflict in district Swat, which is an evidence of the practice of peace journalism. The Chi-Square test of data shows below the significant relation between peace journalism and media organizations' approach towards the violent conflict in district Swat, which indicates that peace journalism, to some extent, has been exercising by journalists and media organizations when they are covering conflicts, especially violent conflicts at home.

Table 1. Observed Values/ Frames of the Selected Newspapers' Editorials

Newspapers	Frames of Newspapers' Editorials			Total Editorial
	Advocate Peace Process	An advocate of Islamic Laws (Sharia)	Other	
<i>Daily Chand</i>	55	12	17	84
<i>Daily Shamal</i>	28	20	13	61

Table 2. Expected Values of the Selected Newspapers' Editorials

Newspapers	Frames of Newspapers' Editorials		
	Advocate Peace Process	An advocate of Islamic Laws (Sharia)	Other
<i>Daily Chand</i>	548.08	18.54	17.38
<i>Daily Shamal</i>	36.18	13.46	12.62

Table 3. Calculated values χ^2

Observed Values (O)	Expected Values (E)	(O-E)	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² / E
55	48.08	6.92	47.88	0.99
12	18.56	-6.54	42.77	2.30
17	17.38	-0.38	0.14	0.01
28	36.18	-8.18	66.91	1.85
20	13.46	6.54	42.77	3.18
13	12.62	0.38	0.14	0.01
Total Calculated values χ^2				8.34

Calculated values $\chi^2 = \sum (O-E)^2 / E = 8.34$

Significance level (X) = 0.05

Degree of difference df = (Column of table of observed values-1) (Rows of table of observed values-1)

df = (3-1) (2-1) = 2x1=1

Tabular Values $\chi^2 = 5.99$

In the Chi-Square test, when calculated values are greater than tabular values, then the results indicate that there is a significant relationship between the given variables. Hence, the findings of the above-mentioned tables support the first hypothesis of this study, which states that there is a significant relation between peace journalism and media organizations' approach towards violent conflict.

Table 4. Peace journalism frame in editorials of selected newspapers

Framing Peace Journalism	<i>Daily Chand</i>	<i>Daily Shamal</i>	Total
	55	28	83

Table 4. shows the number of editorials being published, collectively, in the selected newspapers on the issue of militancy/ [violent] conflict, whereas their qualitative content analysis explains, below, the local press inclination towards peace during the conflict.

Daily Chand

Referring to tab 4. the local newspaper *Daily Chand* was more inclined to the restoration of peace as it had written 55 editorials, where the paper supported both the peace agreements signed on May 21, 2008 and February 16, 2009, with local militants. The paper, while mostly chosen the positive aspect of agreements and urged both the provincial government and local militants' leadership to honor the agreements, which the paper claimed as a prerequisite for the restoration of peace in district Swat.

The *Daily Chand* in its editorial on June 19, 2008, which was written in the context of the first peace agreement that was signed on May 21, 2008, stated;

-----Flexibility on both sides is the need of the hour after the peace agreement so that the goals of sustainable peace in the province can be achieved.

In another editorial on July 29, 2008, the paper, while stressed on timely implementation of decisions being taken by the government and local militants in the May 2008 peace agreement, stated;

-----Parties involved in a peace agreement should avoid emotional steps, which may negatively affect the peace process.

Claiming that use of power may cause damages rather than to resolve the issue/ conflict, the paper in its editorial published on November 09, 2008, viewed;

-----To prevent the loses of security forces and civilians, both the government of the side and the Taliban should use peaceful means. The government needs to review its policies, stop operation and initiate dialogue, while the Taliban should also show flexibility and announce a ceasefire in the best interest of people [who were suffering from conflict/ militancy].

The second peace agreement was inked between the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [the then NWFP] and local militants of Swat on February 16, 2009. Like the previous peace agreement, the *Daily Chand* supported the second agreement too and lauded the sacrifices of ANP led provincial government for the restoration of peace. The paper, in its editorial published on February 17, 2009, termed the second peace agreement, is the result of ANP led the provincial government's commitment to peace. The paper stated;

-----Provincial government remained on militants' target, but even after killing of some of Awami National Party (ANP) members and leaders, the provincial government continued its struggle for the restoration of peace in district Swat, and at last its struggle is bearing fruits now. Similarly, the paper in its editorial published on February 19, 2009, stated;

-----The positive sign of peace agreement is that the bloodshed causing by the use of power has now been ended, but still there are some elements [of terrorism] exist, for their elimination, it is necessary to implement all the decision being taken by both sides in the [peace] agreement.

When the situation in district Swat became deteriorated more after the second peace agreement, and the media, even the local people, felt worries and uncertainty about the peace process. The *Daily Chand* strongly supported the peace agreement and urged both parties to maintain the peace process. In its editorial published on April 05, 2009, the paper stated;

-----If Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariate-Mohammadi and the provincial government avoid propaganda at this crucial stage and act according to the peace agreement, then peace can be restored in Swat. Continued its voice for peace, the paper on April 11, 2009, also stated in its editorial that;

-----Struggle is needed to keep the agreement, which is signed between provincial government and Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariate-Mohammadi, unbroken. If unfortunately, this historical agreement breaks, then violence would, again, be started in Swat.

Daily Shamal

Referring to the above-given tab 4. another selected newspaper *Daily Shamal* also advocated the peace process, and it had written 28 editorials in support of peace agreements that were signed between the KP government and local militants of district Swat.

Like *Daily Chand*, the *Daily Shamal* also wrote editorials in support of the peace process, but its frames, in this regard, are recorded more vibrant than *Daily Chand's* frames. The paper, in its editorial published on June 16, 2008, supported the May 2008 peace agreement and stated that;

-----It is the responsibility of local administration and military leadership to make strengthen the recently signed peace agreement and give severe punishment to those involved in spoiling the situation

in the area. Similarly, the paper supported the peace process in its another editorial published on June 18, 2008

-----The whole nation, particularly the people of Swat, are quite happy over the peace agreement, which is signed between the provincial government and [Swati Taliban] local militants, but some elements are still busy to make the agreement fail. Hence the implementation of decisions has been delayed.

Framing the second peace agreement, which is known as the February 2009 peace agreement, the paper termed it as a positive step toward the restoration of peace in the restive district Swat;

-----After the announcement of the [second] peace agreement, the residents of Swat seem quite happy over this development, and they are now waiting for the restoration of peace in their area.

When uncertainty and mistrust surfaced soon after the second peace agreement, there was fear of full-fledged military operation in the region. In that prevailing scenario, the *Daily Shamal* continued to support the peace process in its editorials, and one of the editorials that were published on March 02, 2009, the paper stated;

-----Government should fulfil its promises regarding the implementation of the Islamic system in the Malakand division, particularly in district Swat, and take steps for releasing Taliban [local militants]. On the other side, the Taliban should also release the government officials as without taking such steps, peace cannot be possible in Swat and other areas [of Malakand division].

Hence, the above discussion on the framing of the peace process during conflict supports the second hypothesis of this study, which states that 'Local Press was more inclined towards peace-oriented reporting during the conflict in district Swat'. As editorials reflect the policy of newspapers, therefore, the overall discussion on the framing of the peace process indicates that the selected newspapers deliberately designed their editorial contents with the prior aim to contribute to the process of peace restoration.

Table 5. Framing Sharia (Islamic laws) in Editorials of Selected Newspapers

Framing Sharia	<i>Daily Chand</i>	<i>Daily Shamal</i>	Total
	12	20	32

Table 5. shows the total number of Sharia (Islamic Laws) frame of editorials, which were published on the issue of violent conflict in district Swat, whereas the selected newspapers viewed the implementation of Sharia (Islamic Laws) as a vital source for peace restoration in the restive district Swat, and other districts of Malakand division.

Daily Chand

When [targeted] military operation was launched in Malakand division after the failure of the May 2008 Peace Agreement, the paper opposed the operation and advocated the demand for Islamic laws. It started in an editorial published on December 20, 2008;

-----The implementation of Islamic laws is the demand of people; therefore, the elected representatives should take solid steps in this regard without further wastage of time and put pressure on the federal government to end military operation and implement the real Islamic system in the area. In another editorial, which was published on January 03, 2009, the paper viewed;

-----If the government announced the ending of the military operation and implemented a real Islamic system in the Malakand division, then Taliban [local militants] would disarm themselves.

The paper lauded the second peace agreement, which was signed on February 16, 2009, and termed it as a historical move; however, it suggested that the early implementation of Islamic laws is vital for peace. The paper criticized the delay in the implementation process while using mild language in its editorial published on March 30, 2009;

-----After signing a peace agreement, a period of one month has been now passed, but the Sharia Nizam-e-Adl Regulations are not yet implemented practically in the Malakand division; however, Qazi has been appointed in six tehsils [sub divisions] of Swat, but they have no powers.

Daily Shamal

The *Daily Shamal* also supported peace agreements and stressed the need that both the parties should act according to the peace agreements. The paper, while advocating the implementation of Islamic laws, stated in its editorial published on June 03, 2008;

-----[Local] people are demanding the implementation of the Islamic justice system to get speedy justice, earlier so many laws including PATA and Riwayat regulations and regular laws have been exercised, but no avail.

The *Daily Shamal* urged the government to implement Islamic laws in district Swat and other districts of the Malakand division. The paper, in its editorial published on January 14, 2009, stated;

----- The justice system based on Islamic laws is the demand of local people for a long, and now, owing to the prevailing situation, if the government resolves the issue according to the wishes of the public, it would be a better move in regard to peace restoration and attaining of speedy justice.

The paper, in its editorial published on March 21, 2009, viewed the development after a second peace agreement is a positive sign that brought improvement in law and order situation, the paper stated;

-----Due to prolonged law and order situation, the demand for an Islamic justice system arose; subsequently, after dialogue and continues peace process, the government announced the implementation of Islamic laws, which is helpful in improving the law and order situation.

Similarly, in its editorial published on April 23, 2009, the paper also expressed its view on the deteriorated situation, arose after the second peace agreement, in these words;

-----Nizam-e-Adl [regulations] should be implemented in the entire Malakand division, including Swat district so that peace agreement should be protected in the best interest of the region and its public.

The above discussion, based on qualitative content analysis, support the third hypothesis of this study, which states that 'Local Press framed the implementation of Islamic Laws (Sharia) as a vital means for conflict resolution'.

Recommendations

Scholars may conduct future studies relating to the practice of peace journalism during the conflict, in so many ways. Some of them are suggested below;

- Comparing the peace journalism's frames of media organizations, which are reporting from conflict zone with frames of those media outlets that are covering the same conflict but from a safe zone.
- To evaluate the fear factor that shapes and/or influence the selection process of media's contents relating to the conflict.
- To evaluate the cultural values of the conflict-hit area[s] and their [potential] influence on the procedures of contents' selection.
- Exploratory studies can also be conducted to examine the role of peace journalism in peace restoration.

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