

Wilhelm Kempf

Concepts and conceptions of peace journalism

Kurzfassung: Gegenstand dieses Aufsatzes ist die Klärung der Grundbegriffe und kritische Gegenüberstellung der durchaus verschiedenen Auffassungen des Friedensjournalismus seitens Kempf (1996) und Galtung (1998). Wie gezeigt wird, liegt den Modellen von Galtung und Kempf nicht nur ein unterschiedlicher Friedensbegriff zugrunde, sondern die Autoren unterscheiden sich auch in ihrem Verständnis von Gewalt und Gewaltfreiheit, sowie in der theoretischen Fundierung ihrer Modelle des Friedensjournalismus. Anhand einer Auseinandersetzung mit Lynch & McGoldricks (2005) Rezeption des Friedensjournalismus wird auf Kritik eingegangen, die Loyn (2008) und Hanitzsch (2004, 2008) daran geübt haben und die Vereinbarkeit des für Kempfs Modell zentralen Begriffs der Fehlwahrnehmung mit dem Konzept der sozialen Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit aufgezeigt. Den Abschluss des Aufsatzes bildet eine Skizze der Hauptergebnisse bisheriger und der dringendsten Aufgaben zukünftiger friedensjournalistischer Grundlagenforschung.

Abstract: The aim of this essay is to clarify the basic concepts and critically contrast the quite different conceptions of peace journalism on the side of Kempf (1996) and Galtung (1998). As will be shown, the models of Galtung and Kempf are not only based on different concepts of peace, but rather the authors also differ in their understanding of violence and non-violence, as well as in the theoretical foundations of their models of peace journalism. Based on a discussion of Lynch & McGoldrick's (2005) reception of peace journalism, Loyn's (2008) and Hanitzsch's (2004, 2008) criticism is examined, and the compatibility of Kempf's central concept of misperceptions with the social construction of reality is examined and clarified. The conclusion of the essay is a summary of the main results of previous and the most urgent tasks of future basic research on peace journalism.

1. Basic concepts of peace journalism

By no means does a unified concept underlie what we call peace journalism. The models of peace journalism developed by Johan Galtung (1998) and Wilhelm Kempf (1996) and subsequently further developed by many authors differ not only in regard to their theoretical foundations, but already in their understanding of the basic concepts of peace and violence. This has – not only on the side of critics of peace journalism, but also within the Peace Journalism Community – led to misunderstandings and distortions that can only be overcome through terminological precision.

1.1 Peace

One of the reasons for these misunderstandings is that neither of the two founding manifestos of peace journalism, i.e., neither Galtung's (1998) nor Kempf's (1996), defines what the authors mean by peace. Consequently, it is all too likely that people will reduce the concept of peace to the absence of war, as is often found in everyday language (and some political science literature).

Not only Galtung but also Kempf have simply assumed understandings of peace and violence they had elaborated already decades before (cf. Table 1).

Peace: Thus already Galtung (1969) rejected the understanding of peace as the absence of war and opposed to it a positive concept of peace that conceives peace as not only the absence of *direct* (personal), but rather also of *indirect* violence. Originally understood (only) as *structural* violence, the concept of indirect violence was later expanded by Galtung to include as well *cultural* violence (Galtung 1990).

In contrast, Kempf (1978) understands peace as a specific *way of dealing with conflicts* where each party sets aside its positions and interests until negotiation has led to a consensual conflict resolution, and where each party is willing to take *all* other parties' positions and interests into account when planning its own actions – including the positions and interests of parties who (can)not participate in negotiations (Kempf 1978).

It is obvious that such a constructive way of dealing with conflict presupposes not only renouncing personal violence, but also sensitivity for structural and cultural violence (Kempf 2018). Insofar, the definitions of Galtung and Kempf are not nearly as different as they seem at first glance, and Galtung's (1998) suggestion that peace journalism should understand peace as non-violence plus creativity shows that he also has in sight not only a renunciation of violence, but also the resolution of conflicts.

| | Everyday language usage | Galtung | Kempf |
|---|---|--|---|
| Peace | Peace = absence of war | Galtung (1969): Peace= absence of both direct and indirect violence. Galtung (1998): Peace = non-violence + creativity | Kempf (1978): Peace = a specific (constructive) form of dealing with conflicts. |
| Conflict, value conflict, conflict formation and conflict constellation | Distinction between conflict and violence often neglected | Galtung (1998), Kempf (1996): Conflict = open for win-win or win-lose | |
| | | Galtung (1975): Incompatibility between goals or values of actors. | Kempf (1978): Conflict = mutual obstruction or hindrance of actions or goals of two or more conflict parties. Here defined as: Value conflict = incompatibility of values. |
| | | Galtung (1998): Conflict-formation = x Parties, y goals and z objects | Kempf (1996): Conflict constellation = totality of the conflict- and/or resolution-relevant rights, goals and actions of each of two parties. |
| Violence | | Galtung (1969): Violence is present when people are so influenced that their actual somatic and psychic realization is less than their potential realization. | Kempf (2000): Violence = violation of people's physical or mental integrity. |
| Direct violence | | Galtung (1969), Kempf (1995): Direct violence = personal violence (i.e., exerted by concrete persons or actors). | |
| Indirect violence | | Galtung (1969, 1990), Kempf (1995): Indirect violence = structural and/or cultural violence. | |
| Structural violence | | Galtung (1969), Kempf (1995): Structural violence = not committed by concrete persons or actors, but rather is built into the system. | |
| Cultural violence | | Galtung (1990): Cultural violence = every aspect of culture that can serve to justify direct or structural violence. | |
| Violence against objects | | | Here defined as: Violence against objects = damaging or destroying assets. |
| Economic violence | | | Here defined as: Damaging or destroying the economic capacity of a person, group or society. |
| Non-violence | Non-violence = Renunciation of direct physical or psychic violence. | By analogy: Avoidance of every form of direct or indirect violence, including violence against objects and/or economic violence insofar as they can be regarded as a form of psychic violence. | Here defined as: Non-violence = Renunciation of direct violence, not only against people but also against objects, but not however rejecting economic violence. |

Table 1: Basic concepts of peace journalism

While Galtung's concept of "creativity" leaves open how conflicts should be resolved, Kempf's definition of peace refers very concretely to a resolution strategy which in the theory and practice of conflict management (Fisher & Ury 1984, Creighton 1991, Glasl 1992, Besemer 1993) has in the meantime become generally recognized and tested: The strategy to understand own positions as means to achieve underlying interests, and to keep them disposable until common (or at least reconcilable) interests are found, starting from which one seeks compatible courses of action that enable conflict parties to support their justifiable interests.

For Kempf it is thereby not just a matter of negotiation, but rather of consultation (Beratung) based on the principle of reason and morals in the sense of Lorenzen & Schwemmer (1975), whereby the *principle of reason* (somewhat simplified) requires for one thing to avoid "creative vagueness" sensu Henry Kissinger, and for another to renounce double standards:

- It is unacceptable for conflict parties to agree on one thing but thereby mean quite different things, and

- it is unacceptable to demand from others anything one is unwilling to do oneself.

The *moral principle* states that one should not be satisfied with only *de facto* conflict resolution (which reconciles only the particular interests of conflict parties, and possibly does so at the expense of third parties). One should rather strive for a *just* conflict resolution that only approves those interests that can be justified by universal norms.

This has significant consequences for how the two authors conceive their models of peace journalism. While Galtung encourages peace journalism to search for peace initiatives and make their creative ideas public, Kempf assumes that conflicts can only be resolved by the affected parties themselves and conceives of peace journalism in the role of a mediator that helps to break down communication barriers between conflict parties and pave the way to dealing with conflict constructively.

1.2 Conflict, violence and non-violence

Conflict and Violence: Common to both authors is the (in everyday language often neglected) distinction between conflict and violence, as well as Deutsch's (1973) conception that conflicts are basically open to being dealt with either cooperatively with common benefits (win-win model) or competitively, whereby only one side can win (win-lose model).

As *conflict* Galtung (1975) understands the incompatibility between goals or values of actors, while Kempf (1978) defines conflict as the mutual incompatibility of actions or goals of two or more conflict parties¹. Since *value conflicts* – i.e. the incompatibility of values – are much harder to deal with, they should be introduced as a category of their own.

The plural formulations in Kempf's definition (actions, goals, values, two or more conflict parties) point to the fact that usually *conflict formations* (Galtung 1998) contain several conflict constellations (Kempf 1996). Namely, competitive conflicts have a tendency to expand and to affect the rights, goals and actions of not just two, but rather a multiplicity of conflict parties, and even cooperative resolution proposals can disadvantage third parties and thereby create new conflict constellations.

Defined as a totality of the conflict- and/or resolution-relevant rights, goals and actions of respectively two parties, a *conflict constellation* comprehends not only the current objects of conflict (= current incompatibilities between rights, goals and actions of the two conflict parties), but rather

- also such rights, goals and actions that to be sure are not currently conflict objects, but would have to be considered in cooperative conflict management, in order to avoid shifting the conflict from one conflict object to another,
- and as well, common rights and goals and cooperative actions for joint benefits that can serve as starting points for cooperative conflict management.

While Kempf (2000) understands *violence* as the violation of people's physical or mental integrity, Galtung's (1969) concept of violence goes beyond this: He believes that violence is always present when people are so influenced that their current somatic and mental fulfillment is less than their potential fulfillment.

Common to both of these definitions is (a) their anthropocentric formulation – violence means violence against people – as well as that they include (b) not only physical but also psychic violence, (c) not only intended but also unintended violence and (d) not only direct (personal) but also indirect (structural and cultural) violence.

In regard to the concept of non-violence it is, however, advisable to define two additional concepts:

- Violence against objects = damage or destruction of tangible assets.
- Economic violence = damage or destruction of the economic capacity of a person, group or society.

Galtung (1969) argues that the destruction of objects can be understood as a form of *psychic* violence in at least two regards:²

- "as announcement or threat of a possible destruction of persons," and

¹ Drawing on Mitchel (1981), Kempf (in ASPR 2003) distinguishes between objective conflicts (= the actual incompatibility of actions and/or goals of conflict parties) and their subjective representation, and correspondingly between *real* conflicts (= actual incompatibilities of which the parties are aware), *latent* conflicts (= actual incompatibilities of which the parties are unaware) and pseudo or *false* conflicts (= incompatibilities believed by the parties to be real, although they actually do not exist).

Although this distinction is essential for conflict management, Lynch & McGoldrick (2005: 34), who define conflict as "a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have, or think they have, incompatible goals, needs and interests", do not differentiate between real, latent and false conflict, however.

² Analogously one can also apply this argument to damaging tangible assets.

- “as destruction of something that for persons who are referred to as consumers or *owners* [emphasis in original] is very valuable.”

In this sense one would also have to treat economic violence as a form of psychic violence, e.g., if the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which is intended as non-violent resistance against Israeli occupation of Palestine, is experienced by many Jews, for whom the state of Israel represents an important value, as an attempt to destroy Israel.

Such considerations go too far, however, and ultimately result in such broad concepts of violence that they cannot be worked with anymore – except to de-legitimize and criminalize non-violent actions, a view the then German Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann, in 1983, summed up in the formula: “Non-violent resistance is violence.”³

Non-violence: If we accept Galtung’s extremely broad concept of violence, then non-violence goes far beyond what it means in ordinary language. Non-violence is then no longer limited to renouncing direct use of physical violence, but rather means avoiding any form of direct or indirect violence, including violence against objects and/or economic violence, insofar as they can be viewed as a form of psychic violence.

Both Kempf (2016) and Lynch (2018) characterize BDS as a form of non-violent resistance against Israeli Occupation⁴ and clearly support a narrower concept of non-violence which does not exclude the use of economic violence but only rejects direct violence – not only against people but also against objects.

However, one should not overlook in the whole violence discussion that violence against objects and/or economic violence represent to be sure no direct violence against people, but can lead to indirect (structural) *physical* violence against people, and indeed:

- if in this way people’s life conditions are so harmed that their somatic fulfillment remains behind their potential fulfillment (Galtung),
- and respectively their physical integrity can no longer be assured (Kempf).

For example, if destruction of production facilities or economic boycott of a country leads to bottlenecks in medical care for the population or causes food shortages, etc.

Conclusion: We should only speak of violence if it actually comes to this. If one uses an overly broad concept of violence and literally declares everything to be “violence,” it is no longer possible to defend one’s rights with “non-violent” measures.

2. Conceptions of peace journalism

An essential difference between the conceptions of Galtung and Kempf is that Galtung supports a static concept of peace which finds expression in an antagonistic juxtaposition of peace and respectively conflict journalism on the one side and war or respectively violence journalism on the other (Galtung 1998), while Kempf (1996, 2017, in ASPR 2003) conceives peace journalism as a process of gradually de-escalating conflict perceptions (cf. Table 2).

This difference is grounded as well in the divergent theoretical foundations of the two models of peace journalism, i.e. in what the two authors see as the chief cause of the (often noted) indistinguishability of war reportage and propaganda.

2.1 Galtung’s model of peace journalism

Tracing back to works by Galtung & Ruge (1965), Galtung’s model of peace journalism has its theoretical foundation in media-scientific news value theory (cf. Kunczik 1990, Eilders 2016), which holds that international news are selected according to the same criteria as national or respectively local news. Negative events (e.g., catastrophes, riots or coups) are regarded as particularly newsworthy. Elite countries (e.g., great powers or geographic or respectively culturally closer countries) enjoy more media attention than countries on the periphery. News concerning persons is more interesting than news about structures or institutions, and it is all the more interesting if the persons involved belong to elites.

As Galtung (1998) shows, already these news factors – negativism, personalization and eliteorientation – create a frame that divides the world into rich and poor and at the same time into good and evil. Since non-elite countries only become newsworthy if there is something negative to report about them, while persons belonging to the

³ Cf. https://de.wikiquote.org/wiki/Friedrich_Zimmermann.

⁴ Defined as “discrimination between populations on the basis of ethnic origin as a result of a lasting occupation that denies political and economic rights of the occupied population” (Bar-Tal 2015).

elites of elite countries already appear in headlines if they do anything positive, a stereotypical image of conflicts arises. According to it everything bad (war, terror, dictatorships, etc.) occurs at the periphery, while everything good (peace) is brought to non-elites through the patient and costly intervention of elite members from rich countries.

| | Galtung | Lynch & Mc Goldrick | Kempf |
|--|--|--|--|
| Conception of peace journalism | Static juxtaposition of war vs. peace journalism. | | Process of gradual de-escalation of conflict perception. |
| Theoretical foundation of peace journalism | Media scientific news value theory | | Social psychological conflict theory |
| Strategy of peace journalism | Galtung (1998): To liberate oneself from the dictates of news factors in favor of a peace-oriented, truth-oriented, people-oriented and resolution-oriented reportage. | | Kempf (in ASPR 2003): Based on a firm stance in logic of constructive conflict management, to develop distrust of the plausible and to pose the right questions (see below). |
| Definition of peace journalism | | Lynch & McGoldrick (2005): "Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and how to report them – which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict." | Kempf (2012) "Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters are aware of their contribution to the construction of reality and of their responsibility to give peace a chance." |
| Journalistic goal-setting | Galtung (1998): To research conflict formation through serious, professional reportage and to give all sides a voice | McGoldrick (2006): Rejection of journalistic objectivity. | Kempf (2008): To secure the quality norms of truthful, objective and neutral reportage even in times of conflicts and crises. |
| Relation to peace work, propaganda and PR | Galtung (1998): Agitation for peace is better practiced by peace workers (rather than by peace journalism) | Lynch & McGoldrick (2005): Peace journalism does not mean that journalists should advocate specific solutions or initiatives. McGoldrick (2015), Lynch (2018): Justification of non-violent action through reduction of conflicts to an antagonism between "good" and "evil." | Kempf (1996): Peace journalism must not mean accepting oppositional propaganda or making peace propaganda. |

Table 2: Models of peace journalism

With great regularity, the result is what Galtung calls *war* or respectively *violence journalism*, which starts when violence breaks out, and after the end of war moves on to the next trouble spot, only to return if the old conflict flares up again.

- Reportage that portrays conflict as a zero-sum game between two parties and is only interested in physical consequences of violence (dead, wounded and material damage).
- Reportage that views the "others" as a problem and – by dehumanizing them – constructs an antagonism between "us" and "them," focuses on "our" suffering and attacks "their" wrongdoing, exposes "their" duplicity, and supports "our" cover-up attempts.
- Reportage that seeks reasons and solutions on the battlefield ("Who cast the first stone?"), focuses on who gains the upper hand in war, and reduces peace to victory + armistice.
- Reportage that serves as the mouthpiece of elites, emphasizes that only elites can conclude peace and does not report peace initiatives until it is certain who the winner is.

To this, Galtung opposes his model of *peace* and respectively *conflict journalism*, which is not only preventive (for the purpose of preventing violence and war) but also reports on the post-war phase (conflict resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation). It comprehends:

- Reportage that researches conflict formations from a general win-win orientation and draws attention (as well) to immaterial consequences of violence (trauma and fame, structural and cultural injury).
- Reportage that views not the "others" but rather the conflict or respectively war as a problem and by means of empathy and understanding humanizes all sides, focuses on all suffering and names all injustices, exposes falsehoods on all sides and exposes all attempts to conceal facts.
- Reportage that clarifies causes and solutions as well in history and culture, focuses on (possible) conflict resolution and understands peace as non-violence + creativity.
- Reportage that gives a voice to the voiceless, emphasizes peaceful tendencies in the population and calls attention to peace initiatives (as well in order to prevent the spread of war).

2.2 Definitions of peace journalism

Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), who translated Galtung's model into concrete instructions for how (peace) journalists should report on conflicts, summarized their understanding of peace journalism in an often cited formula which, however, does justice to neither Galtung's nor Kempf's model.

Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report, and how to report them – which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005: 5).

Whereas Galtung (1998) wants to free journalism from the dictates of news factors in order to facilitate peace-oriented, truth-oriented, people-oriented and solution-oriented reportage, Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) suggest that "editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report, and how to report them."

Whereas Galtung (1998) calls for serious professional reportage on conflicts, and Kempf (2008) strives to secure the often violated quality norms of journalism – truthfulness, objectivity and neutrality – as well in times of conflict and crises, McGoldrick (2006) makes a frontal assault on the call for journalistic objectivity.

Whereas Galtung (1998) is concerned to research the conflict formation and give all sides a voice, and Kempf (1996) advocates self-critical, undistorted representation of the therein contained conflict constellations, Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) pursue the pedagogical intention to "create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict."

Whereas Galtung (1998) concentrates on "non-violence + creativity," Lynch & McGoldrick's definition has only non-violence in view, which they also do not understand in the same comprehensive manner as Galtung (see above).

Whereas Galtung (1998) points out that campaigning for peace is better left to peace workers, and Kempf (1996) raises the call that peace journalism should not slide into peace propaganda, Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) merely affirm that peace journalism does not mean advocating specific solutions or initiatives.

Whereas Galtung (1998) calls for researching conflict formation, humanizing all sides and giving a voice to the voiceless, McGoldrick (2015) and Lynch (2018) reduce the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an "abusive domestic partnership, in which Israel is the abuser, and the Palestinians are the abused." They thereby ignore that in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the dividing line between those who want to live in peace and those who place their bets ideologically and emotionally on violence runs across the dividing line between Jews and Arabs (Grossmann 2014), reduce the conflict to two parties (Israel against Palestinian civil society), side with the voiceless (Palestinian civil society) and construct a simple antagonism between "good" and "evil."

This may be functional to mobilize non-violent resistance (against Israeli occupation policy). In relation to peace journalism, however, it is no more than regression into exactly that mindset that according to Galtung (1998) characterizes war journalism.

The combination of moral outrage, partisanship for the weaker side and a conscious decision about what stories to tell and how to tell them turns peace journalism literally upside down. In the end this can lead to extremes, as for example, when Hackett (2017, 110 f.) recommends that Climate Crisis Journalism (CCJ) should apply Peace Journalism (PJ) *sensu* Lynch & McGoldrick for "escalating conflict in order to challenge business as usual." Although "the valorization of the warrior doesn't seem to be part of Peace Journalism's normative framework, ... the contrast between PJ and CCJ should not be exaggerated."

If peace journalism is not to degenerate into a one-sided partisan Journalism of Attachment (Bell 1997), it does not suffice to claim that "PJ draws upon the insights of conflict analysis" (Hackett 2017: 106). One must also

understand its insights and the escalation dynamic of conflict. Otherwise one will all too quickly take the path of Marcus Tullius Cicero, who in his famous speech in 43 BC spoke first as an advocate of peace, but then concluded that peace with Mark Anthony was first shameful, second dangerous and third impossible: "*si vis pacem, para bellum*" (If you want peace prepare for war).

Criticisms such as made by BBC journalist David Loyn and media scientist Thomas Hanitzsch against peace journalism are then literally pre-programmed: throwing overboard journalistic quality norms (Loyn 2008), harming the integrity and neutrality of journalists (Hanitzsch 2008), leading to role confusion between journalism and activism (Loyn 2008) and the transgression of limits between journalism and public relations (Hanitzsch 2008).

Even if Lynch (2008, 2018) insists he did not mean most of this the way it sounds, Kempf (2012) has as a result proposed abandoning Lynch & McGoldrick's (2005) definition and replacing it with a formulation that heeds the peace obligation of media established in a variety of international treaties and documents of the United Nations (Becker 2004), secures the quality norms of truthful, objective and neutral reportage even in times of conflict and crises, and keeps open (at least) the option of constructive conflict management (Kempf 1978) through making available the information necessary for this in an unbiased manner:

Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters are aware of their contribution to the social construction of reality and of their responsibility to give peace a chance (Kempf 2012: 2).

2.3 Kempf's model of peace journalism

The prohibition of warmongering, glorification of violence and hate speech, etc. does not suffice to fulfill the media's peace obligation, and similar to Galtung, Kempf (in ASPR 2003) regards an orientation to news factors as problematic. Unlike Galtung, he sees the main reason for the often asserted indistinguishability of war reportage and propaganda, however, not in news factors, but rather in the cognitive-emotional dynamic of conflict escalation (Kempf, 1996, 2003, ASPR 2003).

The openness of conflicts for a cooperative approach is extremely fragile. Since own actions are interpreted from the thereby pursued intentions, and the opponent's intentions are experienced, to the contrary, in terms of their effects, there arises a divergence of perspectives between conflict parties. This narrows the angle of vision to own rights and intentions and threats to them by the opponent's (actual or intended) actions and suggests perceiving conflict as a competitive situation. To give peace a chance therefore means first of all: transforming conflict into a cooperative process.

Competitively pursued conflicts take on a life of their own and become autonomous processes (Kempf 1993) that favor the use of more and more drastic and violent means to impose own goals. This goes together with competitive misperceptions that heat up conflict and become quasi motors of conflict escalation.

With increasing escalation of conflict these misperceptions intensify and destroy the readiness and ability of conflict parties to engage in cooperative conflict management. To facilitate the transformation of conflict into a cooperative process means accordingly: to contribute to reducing misperceptions.

For Kempf, the task of peace journalism is not the de-escalation or resolution of conflicts (only conflict parties themselves can do this), but rather de-escalation of conflict perception and reduction of communication barriers between conflict parties.

Contrary to Lynch & McGoldrick's (2005) understanding, this definitely does *not* mean that peace journalists should make decisions "of what stories to report, and how to report them." *Deliberate* decisions about what parts of reality they report on, which they ignore (news selection) and how they represent them (framing) are not a matter of journalism, but belong in the domains of propaganda and public relations. Even the most honorable goal – for example: to "create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict" (Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) – cannot change anything about this.

Most journalists simply want to report the truth (Loyn 2008) – or what they hold to be true. But journalists are themselves members of society and often share misperceptions with the rest of society. To contribute to de-escalating conflict perceptions and reducing communication barriers, they must distance themselves and develop a healthy mistrust of the plausible. For this they need a firm anchoring in the logic of constructive conflict management and must approach conflict with the right questions: Not "Who is the evil-doer?" and "How can we stop him?", but rather "Where is the problem?" and "How can we solve this in the common interest?" (ASPR 2003). Already this makes a difference in what stories seem worthy of reporting, and what sorts of "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993) seem appropriate. What stories they report and how they report them change quasi spontaneously (Kempf 2017).

To contribute to de-escalating conflict perceptions and breaking down communication barriers, it does not suffice to be aware *that* journalism makes a contribution to the social construction of reality, one must also be aware that it is just *one* contribution.

The social construction of reality is a complex process in which a multiplicity of actors participate. Media consumers are furthermore not passive "recipients," but rather form their own opinions by interpreting what they read, hear or see in the media. *How* they interpret it depends on a great variety of factors, especially: their (previous) knowledge and the interpretation frame with which they structure their knowledge and (already previously) have positioned themselves one way or another to conflict; on their sensitivity for the ambivalence of their interpretation frame; on political attitudes like pacifism or human rights engagement; on their social proximity to conflict and/or conflict parties, but also on prejudices toward conflict parties; and not least: (their estimation) of the credibility of the medium and of journalists.

If peace journalism wants to give peace a chance, it must be clear about whom it addresses and how it can address them.

3. The concept of misperception

Hanitzsch's (2004) criticism that peace journalism depends on a naively realist epistemology is thereby not yet refuted. If it is true that *every* representation of reality is necessarily selective and therefore offers only a distorted image of reality, so that *no* representation of reality can stand out against others (Schudson 2003), then the concept of competitive misperception, which is central to Kempf's model, can as well no longer be upheld.

To answer this criticism, Kempf (2006, 2009) distinguishes between different forms of reality and their relation to the statements in which they are represented: Statements can only be true or false if we have established how we can argue for or against them. While *objective reality* comprehends exclusively those facts that are represented in trans-subjectively grounded (Kamlah & Lorenzen 1967) true statements, *social reality* also contains, first, merely possible issues that to be sure are represented in statements capable of being true or false, but whose truth or falsity is however (still) undecided, as well as, second, fake issues ("alternative facts") that are represented in false statements, and third, issues that are merely simulated in the sense that they are represented by statements for which it is not yet established how to argue for or against their validity.

That the various forms of reality are not of equal status – and therefore not every construction of reality can make the same claim to validity – is insofar obvious. At least "alternative facts" are identifiable as such, and the demand for truthful reportage cannot be sidestepped.

When Hanitzsch speaks of the selectivity of socially constructed reality, it is more than just a question of the truth or falsity of asserted facts. It concerns the *meaning* of the asserted facts, which results from their context and the perspective from which we view them.

The ascription of meanings is an interpretive process that, among other things, rests on current interests, biographical and historical experiences, social and cultural rules, etc. Since different people, groups and societies have different interests and experiences, and since various different groups, societies and cultures interpret the same facts on the basis of various different rules, the world of meanings lacks a trans-subjective basis, and it is thus impossible to judge meanings *per se* as true or false. The predicates true and false are simply inapplicable to statements about the meaning of an issue.

Although statements about "the meaning" of an issue are thereby neither true nor false, there are nevertheless statements *about* meanings which are accessible to verification or falsification,⁵ and to be sure, if the discourse on meanings can be no discourse on whether they are true or false, attributions of meaning can nevertheless be judged in regard to their adequacy.

As well this predicate does not befit assignments of meaning *per se*. Adequacy is a double-digit predicator that places assigned meanings in relation to something that itself lies outside the meanings: the orientation function that assignments of meaning have for human action.

In the case of conflict related misperceptions, this means that the rules which conflict perception follows cannot be criticized as true or false, but they can, however, be judged as escalation or de-escalation prone, and depending on what we want to achieve – conflict escalation or conflict management – they can be found to be

⁵ These are not statements about "the meaning" of an issue *per se*, but rather (1) statements that describe the meaning an issue has for a given person, group, society or culture, (2) statements that represent the perspectives and experiences and/or social and cultural rule systems on the basis of which this meaning is constructed, as well as (3) statements that describe how these constructions of reality interact with each other.

suitable or unsuitable (adequate or inadequate).⁶ And if we take into account that conflicts are basically open to cooperative management, we can actually talk of competitive misperceptions as soon as the parties' conflict perception and/or the (media) representations of conflict undermine or exclude this option.

To be precise, however, we should not say that the respective conflict perception *is* a competitive misperception, but rather that examined in the light of conflict theory, it *means* a competitive misperception. The conception according to which *all possible* representations of reality are equal in value, however, proves for its part to be naive.

4. Basic research on peace journalism

Clarifying its basic concepts still does not establish peace journalism on a solid foundation. Necessary is also an examination of the production conditions and implementation chances of peace journalism (Bläsi 2006), as well as the development and empirical/experimental examination of more precise strategic conceptions of *how* escalation prone misperceptions can be reduced.

While misperceptions in slightly to moderately escalated conflicts consist of *blind spots*, in highly escalated conflicts these blind spots become saturated with downright *perceptual distortions*. The higher the degree of conflict escalation (more precisely: the societally dominant conflict perception), the more resistance there is to correcting misperceptions (Reimann 2019). Especially if misperceptions in long-lasting conflicts have already hardened into societal beliefs (Bar-Tal 1998), we can expect there to be ruthless fanatics who use every means to torpedo conflict resolution efforts. How peace journalism can deal with this problem has hitherto been just as little researched, however, as have the specific requirements of constructive reportage on peace negotiations.

Previous empirical studies had as their focal point above all the analysis of escalation prone bias in conventional war reportage (Kempf 1994, Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2001, Kempf & Luostarinen 2002), its (tendency to) decrease in post-war reportage (PFK 2005), and its (extensive) overcoming when peace and reconciliation are on the political agenda (Jaeger 2009). Furthermore, the acceptance and effects of de-escalation oriented conflict reportage have also been researched in a wide range of experimental studies (for an overview see Thiel & Kempf 2014).

Major results of these studies are among others: (1) that de-escalation oriented conflict reportage definitely belongs to the journalistic repertoire and is also employed if it is desired, and (2) that journalism disposes of a broad spectrum of means to accompany reconciliation processes in a constructive way. (3) If reconciliation is regarded as already achieved, however, the tone becomes harsher, and from time to time may lead as far as portraying even very normal democratic decision-making processes as embittered power struggles (ASPR 2003). (4) At least in democratic societies news factors are not as irrevocably set as Hanitzsch (2008) suggests, and (5) also there is no realistic danger that violating news factors would squander audience interest and thus rob the media of their economic basis (Hanitzsch 2008). (6) Namely the – for constructive conflict reportage contraindicated – simplification of news possesses no news value of its own, but rather quite to the contrary a more complex reportage can awaken reader interest even in topics that according to other news factors have only low news value. (7) On average, media recipients do not evaluate de-escalation oriented conflict reportage worse, and often rate it even better than conventional reportage: as more understandable and balanced and less distorted and partisan. (8) Not only escalation but also de-escalation oriented reportage has an effect on how recipients understand news. (9) Whether peace journalism produces positive resonance depends, however, on what sort of frame recipients already use to interpret conflict and what side they have thereby taken. (10) The less their individual frame is compatible with offered media frames, the more media frames are rejected, and the less influence media frames have on their conflict perception.

We should have no illusions. The target groups of peace journalism can probably only be the (still) moderate segments of a society. Peace journalism will hardly convert fanatics, but will rather trigger resistance. Accordingly, it appears all the more important to employ peace journalism already in (relatively) peaceful times. The chances that peace journalism will be practiced in wartime are better if reporters and editors, the public and individual recipients have already become accustomed during non-violent conflict phases (Bläsi 2009), and – not least, peace journalism should not repeat the mistake of conventional conflict reportage and ignore conflicts until the outbreak of violence threatens or has already occurred.

Moreover, social media and the nationalistic, religious and/or cultural fanaticism that has proliferated since the turn of the millennium is confronting the peace journalism project with new challenges. Without developing workable concepts for how the loss of democratic values can be effectively countered, peace journalism will remain a "hopelessly twentieth century" project.

⁶ Accordingly Deutsch (1973) also speaks of cooperative misperceptions that to be sure favor cooperative conflict management, but bear the danger that conflict parties will not deal sufficiently with their contradictions and thus will reach no sustainable agreement.

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The author: Wilhelm Kempf is Professor emeritus of Psychological Methodology and Peace Research at the University of Konstanz, Germany. Since 2002 he is the editor of *conflict & communication online* (www.cco.regener-online.de). His fields of research include quantitative and qualitative research methodology, nonviolent conflict resolution, peace journalism and the construction of social reality by the mass media. He currently works on a research project on "Criticizing Israel, coming to terms with German history and differentiating aspects of modern anti-Semitism".
eMail: cco@regener-online.de, Website: <http://www.pfkn.regener-online.de/>