Use of Collective Memories in Conflicts: A Peace Journalism Perspective in Representation of Therik e Taliban Talks with Pakistani Government

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Abstract

Collective memories are shared past events that are communicated to people who may not have been present at the time. It is up to the media to decide how and when to transmit shared memories, as they play a crucial part in this process. When a peaceful resolution is taking place, memory as a reminder of the prior dispute or the use of conflicting memory during conflict are both determined to be significant factors. Memory and conflict are said to go hand in hand, so when the media links violence and conflict with previous events of the same kind, it attempts to resurrect the bitter experiences that individuals may or may not have had in the past. Bringing previous experiences to the forefront makes it difficult for people to think favourably or positively about a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This study investigates the use of conflicting collective memories in mainstream media representations of TTP talks with the Pakistani government. As a supplement, PJ was used in conjunction with CDA. The findings show that during the chosen time period, agonizing memories of the past were used as a context for new or recent events.

Keyword: *Collective Memory, Therik E Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Talks, Peace Journalism (PJ), Peace Memories, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).*

Introduction

Scholars believe that collective memories play important role in societies. Collective memories are reciprocal recollections of earlier social experiences that may or may not have been

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experienced individually but are generated collectively through communicative social functions. (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Media most of the time contributes to sharing such recollections. Scholars argue that collective memories play important role in social and individual lives e.g., provide a sense of belonging, provide direction, an introduction to the past and so forth (Bellelli, et al. 2000; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Researchers believe that the use of memories of disturbing social events can cause an escalation in the existing conflicts. As Wagoner & Bresco have mentioned, "Conflicts and memory are often the two sides of the same coin" (2016). Conflicts leave a lasting impression on both individuals and groups' memories, making future peace less likely. In contrast, memory is the root of many disputes since some ways of recalling dramatic events involve bringing the past into the present together with its associated scars, complaints, resentments, hatreds, and a sense of vengeance. Therefore, considering memory can aid in our understanding of how specific uses of the past may reignite, continue, or create tensions (ibid). Overall, memory research is crucial because the past becomes an instrument for making "change or stability", as well as fostering or preventing disputes (Wagoner, 2014).

Mutual memories are used and refreshed at different times in media. Media being the carrier can play a significant role in the de-escalation of conflicts. According to Becker (2014), "The media neither initiate wars nor can they end them" (p.1) but they hold immense powers to influence the process of peace or war so they can be either facilitators of peace or instigators of war. Past social events and conflicts are communicated through media as

has been observed that representations of previous wars as a social tragedy can help to overcome prolonged conflicts (Paez & Liu, 2011). In Pakistan Independence Day is celebrated as a national day with examples of martyrs as heroes of the nation. Media during that day telecast special programs which rejuvenate the youth. Likewise, there are examples when media play a part in reinforcing the past conflict which ultimately results in the acceleration of violence. In the representation of conflicts media often create a binary of ingroup and outgroup polarization (Paez & Liu, 2011). Like in the representation of Therike e Taliban Pakistan media created a binary of "they are bad" "we are good", "they are violent" and "we are peaceful" (Shaheen & Tarique, 2022). In the case of the representation of Muslims in Indian cinema, the same binary of good and bad, peaceful and violent has been observed (Tarique & Shaheen, 2021). The outgroup is often represented negatively and such negative representation justifies violence (Fisher & Kelman, 2010). Media holds a strong place in today's world, it shapes, reshapes and distorts the existing beliefs in society as "Media forms realities and beliefs and at the same time shape them by shattering some previous popular beliefs" (ibid). Representation of the good past is institutionally mediated and is frequently appropriated to meet the demands and needs of the present (Paez & Lu, 2010).

Literature Review

Remembering cannot be regarded as an autonomous ability operating in a social vacuum in search of an exact replication of the past. Through these case studies, we demonstrated how

different tales offered by a specific sociocultural milieu affect recall (Bresco, 2016).

The role of media in shaping memory is not much explored, there is scarce literature on this topic as Mayers (2007) observed that "Memory creation occurs across the media, and one of the primary study directions should investigate the influence of the type of the media source in affecting the memory that is built" (p.15). Lang & Lang suggested, Journalists cite history for four main reasons, "as a yardstick, for analogies, for the quick explanations and lessons it can deliver" (1989, p. 127).

Memory is a transmission of the past into the present where media serve as a vehicle to carry on a mass scale and in all dimensions. There is a relationship between media and memory (Allen & Seaton, 1999). Presentation of events and personalities by media helps people to understand the present while thinking past (Zelizer, 1992). To this extent, Meyers work establishes that media work as an agent of memory revival and the "role of journalists as active memory agents is now well understood" (Neiger, et al. 2011, p. 57). According to Edy (1999), "Reporter stories may influence whether we consider ourselves as one community or multiple groups, whether we think critically about our past or simply accept it as it was, and if and how we regard the past as important to the present and future" (p. 73). "Social representations of collective memories can be crucial in discussions of protracted conflict because they can act as barriers to change" (Nicholson, 2017). Garagozov argues that "collective memory can contribute to both instigating and reducing interethnic conflict" studying the Karabkh conflict he found that

painful memories can yield strong emotions among people (2016, p. 28).

Media give an influential depiction of the past being the main source of information (Edy, 2006) and reinforces what is already happened "since the media is an important medium for conveying memories to a broader audience in general" (Neiger, et al. 2011), and its dependents upon the gatekeepers to which part of the memory they considered to be highlighted. Media refreshes the past with formal or informal remarks, pictures and other content and when the memory is about violence it revives the conflict as Allen & Seaton observed, "representation of war memory in media is sometimes misleading" (1999, p. 7). Media play a crucial role in using memory as a context hence Neiger et al. 2011 argue that the media used the reference to the Watts riots of 1965 when unrest erupted in Los Angeles in 1992 which made the worst kind of riots. Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2011) surveyed the "influence of the media on collective memory"; by using the theory of agenda-setting, they examined the coverage of Israel's Independence Day in media and its influence and relationship with opinions of the past incidents and found that media coverage affects the people's opinion of the past incidents.

Theoretical Framework

Literature provides the media's greater influence on conflict escalations than peace resolution (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Media play a variety of roles in our society, some are good some are bad, some are positive some are negative and some are constructive and some are destructive so the need is to understand how best we can use media as a peacebuilder, conflict

resolver and promoter of peace (Tarique, 2017). Peace can be brought to the restive community by the transmission of past events representation through peace journalism. As events that happened in the past have come through the lines of memory and media, one of the neglected topics so far, the paper endeavours to locate the events in the sense of PJ.

In his study, Peleg (2006) discovered that in any conflict, media acts as a third party as "the facilitator, mediator, or arbiter of communication between two opposing groups", but peace journalism should operate as a third party to aid as a reconciliatory force. He stated, "peace journalism as a viable and practical method must be grounded in theoretical premises to be more pragmatic and programmatic in the face of structural, psychological, and professional impediments" (ibid, p. 15).

The development of the Peace journalism theory has made it easier for conflict resolution academics to examine the media portrayal of a conflict. It assembled a massive archive of study literature on a wide range of conflicts, including hot and cold conflicts, race conflicts, and situations in which there are no wars but only violence. Peace journalism idea has been successfully implemented to overcome and avoid impending conflicts (Lynch & Galtung 2010; Lynch & Mc Goldrich 2005 in Tarique, 2017). Peace journalism, as a technique of disaster newsgathering, provides special consideration to peace initiatives and reports on post-war/post-conflict achievements due to its goal of providing solutions to conflicts (Hanitzsch 2004, p. 485 in Tarique, 2017). It intends to investigate the origins of the conflict,

with the ultimate goal of making confrontations more transparent to the public (ibid., p. 484).

Methodology

Keeping in mind the media's power and the importance of responsible journalism the theory of peace journalism has been applied. The main objective was to see how and when media represents memories of the past at times of peace and war. For analysing these questions, newspapers' representation of the Taliban conflict and the coverage of TTP talks with the government of Pakistan was taken as a case study. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques have been used to address the following questions.

RQ1. Did the media use collective memory in a more war-oriented tone than in peace-oriented tone in the representation of peace talks with TTP.

RQ2. How media used collective memories in the representation of peace talks with the TTP.

For addressing the first question one year's coverage of four English and Urdu language newspapers were taken. The sample N was 1229. News stories about peace talks and military operations published on the front pages of the selected newspapers were taken. Content analysis has been used to collect data from four national newspapers i.e., English newspapers Dawn & The Nation and Urdu, Jang & Daily Express. The period was from January 1, 2014- to Dec 30, 2014. Systematic sampling was applied and front-page coverage of each newspaper was taken manually and online versions of the newspapers because in some cases online copies of the newspapers were not available.

Only hard news were taken. The stories were analysed in a peace-war journalism tone. If the story represents collective memory in war-oriented journalism tone or refreshes past violence, conflict or negative aspect then it was considered war-oriented and if it represented positive aspects, peaceful events, and good memories of the past that it was considered peace-oriented news. The unit of analysis was the news story.

For addressing the second research question CDA approach has been applied, the period and the newspapers were the same as in content analysis.

Table1: *Sample of news stories taken from each newspaper*

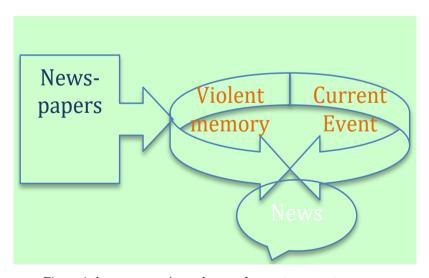| English	No of stories	Urdu	No of stories	Total
Dawn	251	*Jang*	180	431
The Nation	328	Daily Express	470	798

Figure1: *how memory is used as a reference to current news*

Table 2: examples of collective memory from newspapers

War oriented	News stories	Peace oriented	News stories
Conflicting memories. (When media refreshes the violent memories)	1."Those who termed Quaid-e-Azam as Kaafir-e-Azam are being negotiated with today" (*Nation*, April 5, 2014). 2. "2009 main nakalmakani karnay walon ka khial nahin rakha gia tha (*Jang,* June 15, 2014)	Peace journalism / when collective memory is represented in a positive tone or present is preferred more than past	1."mazakraat ki kamyabi kay liay dono taraf say seezfire zarori ha" (*Express,* January 1st, 2014). 2.Shuhda daasal hero hain (*Express*, May 1st 2014)

Analysis

There is a dearth of literature on this area, although literature supports the role of media in an escalation of conflicts with the presentation of previous memories. But in the case of the Taliban, this variable has been worth exploring, when media are in the practice of using the memory of conflicts as a reference.

RQ. Does media use collective memory in a more war-oriented tone than in peace-oriented

The tone in the representation of TTP

Table 3: *Frequency of Memory in conflict*

	War journalism	**Peace journalism**
	410 (33.3)	178 (14.4)
Total	1229	1229 (100%)

Table 4: *Frequency distribution of war and peace* orientation *on news stories among newspapers.*

Newspapers	War Journalism	Peace Journalism
Dawn	109	56
The Nation	78	35
Jang	122	78
Express	101	9
Total	410	178

There is a significant association between war indicators and conflicting memories $X2 = 56.372$ $p < 0.001$; Cramer's V = .214, $p < 0.001$. Media use violent memory as a reference to recent events, usually, media take the previous violent events and try to relate the new events with them, in the effort of doing so media sometimes predict, and sometimes make assumptions which lead to war-oriented journalism.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Q2. How and when media used collective memories in the representation of peace talks with the TTP.

1. "The idea of holding peace talks with the Taliban is controversial in Pakistan because the deals made in the past have largely fallen apart" (The Nation, January 1st, 2014).

This extract is very poor in context, as it does not represent the references of the previous treaties, or talks. The writer has used negative appraisal terms e.g., controversial, and fallen apart, in fact, a different newspaper may present the "same" incident differently, with a different perspective, and in a different discourse. Hence the representation by the journalist has a great impact on the reader and also on the events. By using the term

"controversial in Pakistan" the writer is trying to persuade the readers that homogenization is there and that all the deals and treaties which previously have been made were unsuccessful. At the same time, the negative mental model of the journalist presupposes that like the previous deals, the ongoing peace talks with the TTP will be also unsuccessful.

2. "But Shahidullah said the group is ready for meaningful negotiations despite facing huge leadership losses if the government proves its authority and sincerity" by halting drone attacks and withdrawing troops from tribal areas". "Taliban insurgents have led a bloody campaign against the Pakistani state since 2007, staging hundreds of attacks on security forces and government targets" (Dawn, January 14th 2014).

The above discourse provides a two-sided picture of the same event. In the first lines, the TTP leadership is trying to convince the opposite party of their willingness towards a peaceful solution to the issue and that follows the negative mental model of the journalist to bring the memory of the previous bad acts of the other party. This is how memory is used in presenting the negative image of "them". Metaphors like staging have been used with a negative meaning which is applied to malign the image of "them". The presupposition that the ongoing talks will also be unsuccessful like the previous one is another representation of negative thinking towards others.

3. The TTP who's who "Mullah Fazlullah, Umar Khalid Khorasani, Qari Shakeel Ahmed Haqqani, Shahidullah

> Shahid, Khan Saeed, Maulvi Abu Bakr Hafiz Saeed, Adnan Rasheed" (Dawn, 21st Feb 2014)

This news from Dawn newspaper explains the bad deeds and the history of the TTP leaders. The purpose is to elaborate the ideology of the TTP and to convince the readers that somehow all the members of the TTP who are initiating the talks are bad people with strong connections with other terrorist groups and presuppose the image that talks would not be a solution in this situation. Together, it's possible to interpret this news as conveying a populist worldview that includes viewpoints that could affect the government's decision to pursue a peaceful solution to terrorism. The use of a populist ideology here specifically controls a mental model featuring a negative opinion about TTP - as all readers will understand it in their mental models. It is known that the Dawn does not exactly favour the government's decision for all issues, but does so for the issues related to people. As Dijk (2013) said, "discourses are like icebergs", with considerable suggested information existing in the participants' underlying mental models but not on the "surface" of discourse. Readers will be able to identify this unfavourable viewpoint as being congruent with conservative attitudes and views.

4. "The report says that during the election campaign in April and May, at least 130 people were killed and over 500 were injured allegedly by the TTP and its affiliates, who had declared elections un-Islamic and warned voters to stay away from the rallies of the formerly ruling coalition parties. Numerous government installations

and law enforcement personnel have been targeted by the Taliban". "At least 22 polio vaccination workers were killed, and 14 wounded in 2012 and 2013 in attacks for which the Taliban claimed responsibility, says the HRW". (Dawn, 22 January 2014).

This extract is very rich in context, the journalist gave all the details published by the HRW report. Referring to the report the journalist tried to illustrate the violent history of the organization. The newspaper said that the militants had already carried out 25 significant terrorist acts in the first 20 days of 2014 at the time the HRW report was released, as the extremists accelerated their attacks across the nation. According to the report, the TTP and its affiliates, who had called the elections "un-Islamic" and warned voters to stay away from the rallies of the formerly ruling coalition parties, are responsible for at least 130 deaths and over 500 injuries that occurred during the election campaign in April and May. The Taliban have struck many government buildings and law enforcement officers. In strikes for which the Taliban claimed responsibility in 2012 and 2013, the Taliban claimed responsibility for at least 22 deaths and 14 injuries among polio workers attacks (Dawn, 22 January 2014). The time for publishing this report was very crucial as the talks were in a planning mode such kind of discourse can harm the mental model of the readers. Volume Adds more weight to the discourse like the number of deaths, or terrorist attacks attracting more attention from the readers. According to van Dijk (2013), Storytelling in news is describing events as personal experiences. And in the above extract, the journalist is reporting the events in the same manner.

5. "Speculation had been rife in recent days in the media and political circles that the government was about to order a military operation in North Waziristan, the main Taliban bastion, like the one successfully carried out in Malakand Pakhtunkhwa under the previous PPP-led government". (Dawn, 22 January 2014).

Again, the writer is presupposing the idea that the government is going to launch an operation and it will be successful as the previous one. Here journalist is trying to revive the memory of the previous operation to assure the readers that the if the government would go for military operation the chances of its success are positive. The style of the writer is very argumentative giving the example of a political party's success. These lines also express mental model about the action of the previous government in a very positive way.

6. "The TTP, with Baitullah Mehsud as its head, came into being in Dec 2007 – five months after the Lal Masjid operation. The organisation was banned on Aug 25, 2008" (Dawn 2nd February 2014).

Multimodal mental models are often used to describe the negative aspect of the others in different ways. The reason behind this is that they create a kind of fear in readers minds and may influence the decisions of the government (Dijk, 2016). Negative other representation is yet another aspect of this sentence. Again, the mental model of the journalist is trying to relate the organizations activities with the previous violent memory to refresh the bad incidents in the minds of the readers. At the same

time, he also refreshing the memory that the said organisation was banned by the government.

7. "The government's plan to hold talks with the Taliban was tantamount to strengthening and encouraging the terrorists who had been killing innocent people and attacking mosques, Imam bargahs, schools and hospitals". (Dawn 3rd February 201).

The ideological polarization explicitly describes the negative policies and acts of the others. And the mental model is trying to refresh the memory of the past violent incidents and terrorism done by the TTP. This kind of discourse work in two ways e.g., it reminds the readers not to forget the bad side of the "others" and at the same time, it puts pressure on the government to rethink their strategies and policies regarding the said organization.

8. "Taliban killed 114 soliders in last five months; Army" (Express 20th February 2014).

Transitivity as Richardson (2007) illustrated that it is a crucial aspect of language used in a communicative event. In the above extract number of soldiers killed by the Taliban show that the writer wants to highlight the negative other. He also tries to collect the memory of the previous five months in a negative way which could remind them that they are bad people.

9. "Lahore main phir dehshat gardi" (Jang, February 4, 2014)

The journalist's mental model aims to make readers more afraid and in danger while also exerting pressure on the government to take action against TTP. Fairclough (1992)

explained that the use of such Conjunctions increases the weightage of the discourse.

> 10. "Maazi main twaja na danay say mulk to tukray hua ab ghalti ki gujaysh nahin" (Jang, March 23rd 2014).

A historical comparison that all the previous decisions were wrong and there isn't any place for reconciliation with the terrorist group. This is another type of reminder for the readers to understand the seriousness of the issue.

> 11. "Jang main ittehadi banana kay baad say ab tak 60000 kay lag bhag fojeonion or bashindon key janano ka nuksaan utha chukay hain. Guzasta tera saalon main 103 million ka nuqsaan ho chuka hay" (Jang February 27, 2014).

Collective memory in media is used in different ways, in the above extract the writer is giving statistical figures to increase the pressure and to enhance the impact of his statement. These all discourses are taken from the period when talks were in process. And the media tried to influence the minds of the readers as well as the government to change their decision of a peaceful solution.

Conclusion

When the media attempts to associate violence and conflict with earlier instances of the same kind, it may be doing so in an effort to rekindle the unpleasant memories of people's past experiences. Making past experiences prominent encourages people to resist optimistic thinking and gradual viewpoint changes. The CDA has of the selected news show that how the journalist's mental model utilised memory when negotiations for peace with a violent activity-instigating organisation were in progress. Additionally, a mental model of the government's peace talks strategy that was

based on sociocultural circumstances and political choices affected both the general public's perception and the government's overall decision-making process. Memory was mostly employed during this time while the TTP was carrying out terrorist acts or when the government was making decisions. The majority of the time, a key memory aid was the statistical portrayal of terrorist acts and the number of people killed.

This study contributes to our understanding of the intricate relationship between unpleasant memories of the past and how those experiences are portrayed in the media when similar fresh situations are occurring. Further research is needed in the field of memories, media representation and individual emotions. Which will help to articulate new strategies of conflict resolution and peace building.

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