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**War correspondents reporting
from conflict-ridden parts of the
world**

This article analyses the concept of objectivity is central to all forms of journalism, although its role in traditional war reporting has been a subject of complex and continuous debate. A significant criticism to fundamental journalistic standards is associated with ambiguous levels of neutrality in the coverage of conflicts. War correspondents reporting from conflict-ridden parts of the world tend to draw a moral equivalence between the event's main victims and culprits, which lead to an abandonment of objectivity and impartiality. Consequently, a professional war reporter confronts a serious dilemma in order to portray a fair, balanced and impartial picture of war.

Key words: objectivity, impartiality, 'journalism of attachment', War correspondents.

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**Әскери тілшілердің әлемдегі
қарулы қақтығыс
орындарынан беретін
репортажы**

Шынайы ақпарат тарату түсінігі журналистиканың негізгі формасы болып табылады және оның қарулы қақтығыстар жайлы ақпараттарды таратуда рөлі ерекше. Қарулы қақтығыс оқиғасын жазуда бейтараптылықты сақтауға байланысты журналистік негізгі стандарттарға қатысты айтылар сындар көп. Көп жағдайда әскери тілшілердің қарулы қақтығыс орындарынан беретін репортаждарында соғыс құрбандары мен кінәлілер арасындағы моральдық теңдікті айқындауда шынайылық пен бейтараптылықты сақтау толығымен жүзеге аспайды. Осыған орай кәсіби әскери журналист үшін соғыс туралы шынайы, бейтарап ақпарат беру маңызды.

Түйін сөздер: шынайылық, бейтараптылық, «журналистикаға мойынсұну», әскери тілшілер.

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**Репортаж военных
корреспондентов из
конфликтных регионов мира**

Понятие объективности является центральным для всех форм журналистики, в традиционной отчетности войны объективность также выступает предметом комплексного и непрерывного обсуждения. Значительная критика основных журналистских стандартов связана с неоднозначными уровнями нейтралитета журналистов в освещении конфликтов. Репортажи военных корреспондентов из конфликтных регионов мира, как правило, могут привести к моральной эквивалентности между основными жертвами и виновниками данного конфликта, что приводит к отказу от объективности и беспристрастности. Следовательно, профессиональный военный журналист решает серьезную проблему: как предоставить читателю справедливое, сбалансированное и одновременно беспристрастное представление о войне.

Ключевые слова: объективность, беспристрастность, «журналистика привязанности», военные корреспонденты.

**WAR CORRESPONDENTS
REPORTING FROM
CONFLICT-RIDDEN
PARTS OF THE WORLD**

The concept of objectivity is central to all forms of journalism, although its role in traditional war reporting has been a subject of complex and continuous debate. A significant criticism to fundamental journalistic standards is associated with ambiguous levels of neutrality in the coverage of conflicts. War correspondents reporting from conflict-ridden parts of the world tend to draw a moral equivalence between the event's main victims and culprits, which lead to an abandonment of objectivity and impartiality. Consequently, a professional war reporter confronts a serious dilemma in order to portray a fair, balanced and impartial picture of war. In this respect, a decisive strike against the ideology of objective reporting comes from the phenomenon of «journalism of attachment». This approach was coined by the former BBC correspondent Martin Bell, who proposed that «reporters are participants in the conflicts they report and, as a consequence, take part in the public debate about the conflict» (Ruigrok, 2008).

In fact, war correspondents who practice journalism of attachment actively participate in public debates, distinguish “right» and “wrong» according to their personal opinions, suggest optimal solutions as well as take sides with whom they regard the main victims of the conflict (ibid). The movement since it originated during the civil war in Bosnia, in the early 1900s, has received a large number of proponents including academics and practitioners. Their supportive assumptions are primarily based on moral obligations and ethical principles of journalism towards the public.

Generally, the subculture of war correspondents experienced a cultural shift after the events of 9/11, which significantly affected the notion of objectivity in professional news reporting.

Journalists developed alternative methods of “attached reporting» which pose another serious challenge to the ideological frameworks of journalism. This essay aims to discuss the phenomenon of journalism of attachment and offer persuasive evidence which will demonstrate that the concept of objectivity and impartiality can sometimes be replaced.

Journalism of attachment and the concept of objectivity

Journalistic objectivity and impartiality establish the basic guiding principles for professional news reporting. Editors and journalists expend considerable effort in order to cover a news event in

an objective manner. But the highest standards of objective and impartial news coverage seem hard to reach due to the changing nature of journalism. When journalists claim to be impartial, the extent to which it is desirable or achievable is often doubtful (Franklin et al., 2005, p.177).

Yet the notion of objectivity is the professional lodestar of journalism and «giving equal weight to differing accounts, provided that their probable reliability or otherwise is adequately reflected» (Rodgers, 2012). It is clear that impartiality and objectivity in covering news events have been widely criticised on theoretical and practical grounds in general, since within a particular subculture of journalism neutral and impartial coverage of a story tends to produce appreciable effects (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003, p.216). In this regard, traditional war reporting is likely to be influenced and considerably altered. For this reason, the ideal of objectivity in portraying conflict has apparently become even more unclear and ambiguous. With regard to reporters on the battlefield they at times may be accused of going beyond professional requirements of objectivity and impartiality. It could be argued, that this can result in generating a new journalistic practice which accepts more «human face» in war reporting, and prioritizes moral principles. The phenomenon of journalism of attachment certainly posed a significant challenge to journalistic objectivity. It also could be argued, that news coverage of war in relation to objectivity is likely to be interpreted differently by journalists who are in the newsroom than those who are in the conflict zone. In this case, war reporters face a difficult choice about whether or not to get emotionally involved, take sides or emphasise the main victims and culprits and by doing so cross the line of objectivity and impartiality. However, Bell has offered a professional canon of the notion. Thus, Bell (1995, 1997, 1998) advocates journalism that, *“cares as well as knows; which is not a neutral and mechanical undertaking, but in some sense a moral enterprise; which is aware of its responsibilities, that will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor”*.

This prompted sharp criticism towards ideological frameworks of journalism. An important point comes from determining whether war regimes with catastrophic consequences are worthy of being portrayed objectively. In this respect, the advocates of journalism of attachment argue that «reporters cannot remain detached or neutral in the face of modern evils like genocide in Bosnia or Rwanda, but must side with the victims and demand that something-must-be-done» (Hume, 1997, p.4 cited in Franklin

et al., 2005, p.125). Likewise, Christiane Amanpour, foreign correspondent from CNN, also supports this view stating by “there are regimes in war that do not deserve neutrality» (ibid). It therefore can be assumed that one-sided news coverage and subjectivity as necessary and essential elements of journalism of attachment are possible when reporting conflicts, but only in certain circumstances. The second key aspect in favour of «attached reporting» finds an adequate explanation from Bell’s original point. Bell claimed that «journalists should record the human and emotional costs of war rather than acting as «transmission vehicles» for governmental or military sources» (Bell, 1996, cited in Franklin et al., 2005, p.125). The implication of this is fairly profound as «objective» coverage of a story has been accused of consisting of having a dispassionate stance, political inactiveness, and moral disengagement. From such a perspective, Bell’s arguments seem to some extent fair and sensible. The nature of conflict journalism is associated with trauma, fear and death which may lead to an emotional attachment in news coverage.

However, the underlying support and foundation for the phenomenon of journalism of attachment are based on moral principles (ibid). According to Bell (1996) «attached reporting» is strongly driven by a sense of moral responsibility and an increasing awareness that war reporters can influence conflict. There are a certain number of journalism academics who state that notions of objectivity and accuracy are still «sacred» for practitioners of «attached reporting» (Vulliamy, 1999 cited in Ruigrok, 2008). This means that some war correspondents seek ways to be neutral and even-handed in presenting different sides of warfare. Considering the important points of «attached reporting» it is possible to say that objectivity and journalism of attachment share a common boundary with regard to neutrality. This is because war reporters tends to draw a moral equivalence and decide whether to give a fair hearing to opposite sites which eventually results in a rejection of neutrality. On balance, the rejection of journalistic neutrality is justified as a consequence of a moral imperative to stand up to wickedness, which its proponents see as an indispensable aspect of good journalism (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003, cited in Franklin et al., 2005, 126). Arguably, these cases of journalistic practice illustrate some potential shortcomings of war reporting and generate the strongest argument to the concepts of objectivity and impartiality in wartime journalism.

Service to the public

Reporting from conflict zones is strongly differ-

entiated from other forms of journalism as war correspondents take serious risks. In this respect, war correspondents as witnesses are clearly aware of the decisive social value of their occupation. The role of journalists during wartime is essential because the public is often perceived as being inactive regarding world affairs (Thussu and Freedman, 2003, p.221). As a consequence, war reporters try to attract the attention of their audiences in order to make them informed of the world's brutal reality. Ruigrok (2008) stated that from this perspective journalism of attachment can be considered a hyperbole of public journalism which aims to improve public life as well as having the responsibility to promote the participation of citizens with regards societal problems. According to the significant principle of «public journalism» reporters must initiate public debate (Voakes, 1999, cited in Ruigrok, 2008). In fact, journalists provoke discussions among citizens with the purpose of performing their public duty. A similar view has been made by Grasper (1992) who claims that «objectivity has denied journalists their citizenship; as disinterested observers, as impartial observers, journalists are expected to be disengaged and politically inactive» (p.81 cited in Hanitzsch, 2004). Such an assumption has the possibility of two profound implications: First, giving an analytical account of a conflict which is based on a journalist's personal judgments is worthy of debate. This can result in a stereotypical and obscure picture of the conflict which occurred in the case of the civil war in Bosnia as, noted by McLaughlin (2002, p.167), where, «journalists in general adopted a sustained anti-Serb narrative in coverage of the conflict». Another prime example is the Rwandan genocide where the media's misunderstanding resulted in the withdrawal of UN troops, supposing that the conflict was over. However, the Western media's inaccuracy and wrong representation contributed to international indifference and inaction, and hence to the crime itself' (ibid). Thus, war correspondents that adhere to this kind of reporting apparently fail in their main mission, thus relying on their own prejudices and views. It should be noted, however that journalists' role as judge and jury appears to have nothing to do with taking sides in war coverage and efforts to sustain public debate. This is probably a matter of professionalism rather than being an illustration of attachment in portraying conflict. Another important point to make from Grasper's assumption is closely linked with the advantage of «attached reporting». The advocates of «journalism of attachment» maintain that war correspondents can be politically active and morally engaged towards notions of «good and

evil', «innocent and the forces of darkness», «victim and aggressor». However, this is only valid if war reporters are able to limit their activities to their role of citizens (Hanitzsch, 2004). In this respect, journalists, as professionals, can remain objective and impartial. War coverage as a consequence will be in a line with the fundamental principles of journalistic duty towards the public.

Summarising the results, it is possible to say that the social value of war reporting is extremely significant. By getting close to the epicenter of the conflict correspondents attempt to deliberately implement a functional role of journalistic practice, and service to the public. Thus, news coverage of warfare provides photos, written accounts and film footage in order to make the audience aware of atrocities that take place around the world. Several demanding questions have arisen with regard to journalistic objectivity and impartiality, which seem to be answered by central principles of public journalism. It should be noted that public journalism and the phenomenon of «journalism of attachment» share certain common perspectives: both tend to create public debates and engage citizens with societal problems. War correspondents however are not expected to make analytical and explanatory reporting, thus in this respect achieving objectivity and impartiality appears to be unlikely. Nevertheless, it is possible if the moral and ethical duties of the journalist towards the public can be prioritised and their judgments and actions can be realised as citizens.

Cultural shift after 9/11

The next section provides a general discussion of the important aspect of «journalism of attachment» that originated after the events 9/11. It will put forward a logical explanation that the notions of objectivity and impartiality can be occasionally replaced by «attached reporting». The key point is associated with terrorist attacks and how the news coverage thereafter led to the rejection of neutrality generating a new version of journalism of attachment. Firstly, «journalism of attachment», since its origin during the Bosnian War has progressively become a theoretical and practical basis of journalism. A possible reason for this is the dramatic transformation in the ways in which global events are portrayed by news media. In this respect, the events of 9/11 seemed to have a substantial impact on journalism practices particularly on cultural forms of war reporting. A series of terrorist attacks were reported by war correspondents as well as other journalists who may have had less experience in reporting catastrophic events. As a result, news coverage of the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon appar-

ently contained elements of fear, anxiety and trauma. In addition, the concept of the War on Terror had a strong association with the notion «friends and enemies». With regard to the debate of objectivity and impartiality in reporting it has intensified, which can be illustrated in a similar manner with the portrayal of war, Humber and Prentoulis (2003, p.226) state that, «the boundaries between two journalism communities have become less clearly defined.» This has been described as «a paradigmatic shift» in mainstream journalism with journalist shifting «from detachment to involvement, from verification to assertion, from objectivity to subjectivity» (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003, p.228).

Thus, traditional standards of professional news reporting perhaps suffered; however this was not due to the abandonment of neutrality and emotional responses of journalists. Arguably, there is nothing incorrect with the call for having a «human face» in reporting. Occasionally journalistic norms seem powerless and the occurrence of attached reporting in news coverage is inevitable.

Overall, it appears that the categories of objectivity, detachment and impartiality periodically change across cultures and journalistic models. Obviously, such a paradigmatic shift after 9/11 has been a subject of vigorous debate among academics and journalists. For instance, Ruigrok (2008) assessed that as «the new framework of war reporting which accelerated a trend among reporters towards increased attachment.» The implication of this is broad: the events of 9/11 clearly showed that journalistic standards tend to experience dramatic shifts and that the significance of «attached reporting» can emerge into having a leading position.

Another line of thought in assessing the impact of 9/11 on professional news reporting demonstrates the emergence of a crude version of journalism of attachment. Tumber and Prentoulis (2003) suggested that «it appears in news coverage when journalists write about domestic issues.» In other words, nationalistic motives in war reporting lead to patriotic journalism which seems to share common boundaries with the phenomenon of journalism of attachment. Likewise, a journalist who practices patriotic journalism take sides, shows emotional attachment as well as gives up on portraying aspects of neutrality. This movement has received extensive attention among certain news reporters who practice patriotic journalism as a matter of importance in their professional occupation. For example, Mike Hennessy from WFLA Radio positioned himself mainly as a patriot: «I am an American first, a journalist second» (Hanitzsch, 2004). On the one hand, a slight differ-

ence between journalism of attachment and patriotic journalism should be clearly defined. As Bell (1995) noted the former relies on moral grounds while the latter on nationalistic ones. On the other hand, it is basically a consequence of the events of 9/11, which could be taken into account as an essential element of a cultural shift in a line with journalism of attachment. Thus, as stated by Tumber and Prentoulis (2003, p.228) those shattering terroristic attacks in the US contributed to «the attachment and emotion to become gully embraced into the culture of journalism.» Taking everything into account a paradigmatic shift in significant principles of journalism appears to alter traditional war reporting. In this regard, news coverage of the events of 9/11 was a decisive factor and added greater ambiguity to the notions of objectivity and impartiality in reporting conflicts. Moreover, the picture of war and conflicts has a tendency to be covered with regard to the standards and frameworks of attached reporting with the importance of such an approach in news coverage now unavoidable.

Tracing journalism of attachment in news coverage

Reporting from conflict zones prompted war correspondents to seek various ways of covering such events in order to achieve their firm intentions. In recent times, journalists have developed alternative methods of journalism of attachment. Reporting techniques of journalism of attachment appear to convey the main message as offered by the war correspondent. Thus, it is quite difficult to identify the «biased voice» of a reporter. Adopting such methods of reporting allows war reporters to portray certain conflicts «invisibly», thus adding their personal prejudices and judgments. But the most important implication of this is the rejection of aspects of objectivity and impartiality, which may now take place without crossing significant journalistic principles.

There are two major alternative methods of attached reporting which are largely used by war reporters. Kepplinger *et al* (1991) describes the first aspect as «instrumental actualization», which is «up or downplaying certain events or statements of experts in order to support reporter's opinions» (cited in Ruigrok, 2008). Another form of journalism of attachment appearing in news coverage is formed through the use of «opportune witnesses» (Hagen, 1993, cited in Ruigrok, 2008). The opponents of journalism of attachment argue that journalists can directly affect news reports by selection of sources. In fact, they are able to refer to certain expert opinions which support their own political stances and sympathy. They can be any individual,

engaged in war or conflict starting from a combatant to government officials. Ironically, applying both techniques of «attached reporting» tends to influence the “objective reality” of news coverage of warfare. The mark of alternative methods of journalism of attachment can be detected in news coverage in a number of conflicts and war. Certainly, it is a quite sophisticated phenomenon, and probably because of that reason there is limited research and little literature devoted to the subject. However, the impact of such reporting techniques towards journalistic objectivity and impartiality may be more significant than we have imagined. Additionally, it confirms the fact that reporting in an objective manner in wartime can sometimes be easily altered. It should be pointed out that the contemporary practical nature of war reporting is comprehensive, which shows that the replacement of impartiality and neutrality in news coverage is possible, without breaking a professional code of journalism.

In conclusion, journalistic objectivity and impartiality in an ever-changing age of war reporting is a significant area to consider. Journalism of attachment has certainly become a kind of justification in response to a commitment of objectivity and neutrality in news coverage. The former BBC war

reporter, Martin Bell paved the way to a “controversial» approach to war reporting, and its foundation has still not been undermined despite receiving permanent criticism.

An analysis of the news coverage of conflicts starting from the Bosnian War may allow one to assess the relative merits of journalism of attachment. Clearly, cultural shifts in conflict journalism after the events of 9/11, development of alternative methods of «attached reporting» as well as considerable support from leading academics and professional journalists have reinforced Bell’s original ideas and views. It has been determined that there is a variety of factors in war reporting that accept emotional attachment, more «human face», one-sided news coverage and presenting personal judgments and prejudices. Perhaps, such a tendency can be associated with the potential shortcomings of traditional ways of conflict reporting which is now apparently outdated in the face of changing practices and forms of journalism. Thus, it is worth noting that in certain cases the notion of objectivity and impartiality are likely to be replaced by journalism of attachment. As this has been driven by the moral values of the war reporter, there is a set of circumstances that now make this type of journalism possible in war coverage.

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