

## Discourse, Media, and Conflict

Bringing together contributions from a team of international scholars, this pioneering book applies theories and approaches from linguistics, such as discourse analysis and pragmatics, to analyze the media and online political discourses of both conflict and peace processes. By analyzing case studies as globally diverse as Germany, the USA, Nigeria, Iraq, Korea, and Libya, and across a range of genres such as TV news channels, online reporting, and traditional newspapers, the chapters collectively show how news discourse can be powerful in mobilizing public support for war or violence, or for conflict resolution, through the linguistic representation of certain groups. It explores the consequences of this “framing” effect, and shows how peace journalism can be achieved through a non-violent approach to reporting conflict. It will therefore serve as an essential resource for students, scholars, and experts in media and communication studies, conflict and peace studies, international relations, linguistics, and political science.

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# Discourse, Media, and Conflict

*Examining War and Resolution in the News*

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*Edited by*  
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Cambridge University Press  
978-1-316-51340-8 — Discourse, Media, and Conflict  
Edited by Innocent Chiluwa  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781316513408](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316513408)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781009064057

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First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-316-51340-8 Hardback

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## Contents

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<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>About the Authors</i>	x
<i>Foreword</i>	xv
OLIVER RAMSBOTHAM	
Introduction: Media, Conflict, and Peace-Building	1
INNOCENT CHILUWA	
<b>Part I Conflict Discourse in Newspaper Reporting</b>	<b>17</b>
1 Elián González in the <i>New York Times</i> : Media Roles in the Trajectories of International Conflict	19
MARK FINNEY AND SARAH FISHER	
2 The Construction of Threat of “Islamist Terrorism” in German Newspapers	47
ENIS BICER, LINA BRINK, AND ALEJANDRA NIEVES CAMACHO	
3 “Herdsmen Are Terrorists”: Analyzing News Headlines on the Herder–Farmer Conflict in the Nigerian Press	69
INNOCENT CHILUWA, ISIOMA M. CHILUWA, AND ANGIE O. IGBINOBA	
4 Covering the War on Iraq: The Pragmatics of Framing and Visual Rhetoric	93
AHMED SAHLANE	
<b>Part II Electronic Media and Online Discourses of Conflict</b>	<b>117</b>
5 Making a Case for War: CNN and the Representations of Humanitarianism, Gadhafi, and NATO in the 2011 Bombing of Libya	119
ADA PETER AND INNOCENT CHILUWA	
	v

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
6	“The Situation on the Korean Peninsula”: <i>Voice of America</i> and <i>China Radio International</i> on China and the USA about the North Korean Conflict VALERIE A. COOPER	140
7	Against a Hard-Earned Peace: (De)legitimation Discourses of Political Violence in Online Press Statements of Dissident Republicans in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland STEPHEN GOULDING	162
8	Ideological Exclusion: Defining the (Dis)believer in Extremist Muslim Periodicals – <i>Dabiq</i> and <i>Inspire</i> TROY E. SPIER	194
9	Violence for Social Change: An Analysis of the #FeesMustFall Movement in South Africa FIONA CHAWANA AND UFUOMA AKPOJIVI	213
	<b>Part III Media Discourse and Conflict Resolution</b>	233
10	The Language of Peace in Conflict Transformation: A Critical Analysis of the <i>New York Times</i> ’ Coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Agreement and Its Role in the Discursive Context of the Oslo Negotiations GIULIANA TIRIPELLI	235
11	The Historical Context in Media Narratives in Search of Peaceful Resolution to the Israel–Palestine Conflict: A Comparative Study of BBC and Al Jazeera JELENA TIMOTIJEVIC	257
12	From Peace Talks to Military Operation: Pakistani Newspapers’ Representation of the TTP Conflict LUBNA SHAHEEN AND MUHAMMAD TARIQUE	278
13	From Collision to Diplomatic Compromise: “We are very sorry” – One Official Utterance, Different Interpretations in the Chinese and US Mainstream News Coverage of the 2001 Mid-Air Collision LUTGARD LAMS	300

Contents	vii
14 Constructing Identities in Crisis Situations: A Study of the “Volunteer” in the Spanish and English Press MARÍA DEL MAR SÁNCHEZ RAMOS	324
Conclusion INNOCENT CHILUWA	339
<i>Index</i>	344

## Figures

---

1.1	Favorability towards Castro's control of Cuban politics	<i>page</i> 30
1.2	Favorability towards Castro's control of the Cuban people	30
1.3	Favorability towards Castro's control of the Cuban economy	31
1.4	Favorability towards Castro's control of Cuban culture	31
1.5	Favorability towards Cuba's economic system	32
1.6	Favorability towards Cuba's political system	32
1.7	Favorability towards Cuba's rights	33
1.8	Favorability towards military intervention	34
1.9	Favorability towards economic intervention	34
1.10	Favorability towards diplomatic intervention	35
1.11	Favorability towards keeping González in the US	35
1.12	Favorability towards sending González back to Cuba	36
3.1	Concordance of "Fulani herdsmen" in the headlines corpus	79
3.2	Concordance of "farmers" in the headlines corpus	82
5.1	Libya 2011: The semantics of CNN headlines on the civil war	126
5.2	CNN news frequency of key narratives	131
5.3	Categorization of key pragmatic actors and analysis	134
7.1a	(Anti-)state actors and (alleged) operational links	168
7.1b	Timeline of events and statements	169
7.2	Matrices of legitimation (adapted from Van Leeuwen 2008)	177



## Tables

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1.1	Cooperation	page 29
2.1	Distribution of topic assignments to articles	54
3.1	Newspapers and the number of words in the headlines	75
3.2	Wordlist from the corpus of headlines showing the most frequent lexical words	77
3.3	Killings and attacks attributed to the Fulani herdsmen by the <i>Daily Post</i> newspaper	81
3.4	Distribution of actions attributed to the actors in the conflict in the headlines	84
4.1	Iraq War media frames	109
5.1	Monitoring the trends and mentions of key actors	126
5.2	Pragmatic acts	133
5.3	The rate at which each actor performed each act	134
6.1a	Country mentions in CRI	148
6.1b	Country mentions in VOA	148
7.1	Discourse historical approach strategies (adapted from Reisigl and Wodak 2016)	178
7.2	Legitimation strategies	178
7.3	Discourse topic coding results	179
7.4	Statement AS2 legitimation diagram	181
8.1	Derived lexemes of $\sqrt{\text{SLM}}$	197
8.2	Corpora of <i>Da'esh</i> and <i>al-Qaida</i> extremist periodicals	200
8.3	Derived lexemes and statistics	201
13.1	Units of analysis	302
14.1	VOLUNTEER-COR: A comparable corpus of volunteering in crisis situations	331
14.2	Most frequent collocates for the lemma “volunteer” (The Guardian_EN)	333
14.3	Most frequent collocates for the lemma “volunteer” (ElPais_ES)	334

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## Foreword

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*Oliver Ramsbotham, University of Bradford*

This book addresses a critical issue in the contemporary world. How does the communications revolution affect conflict and conflict resolution? And what is the role of the mass media in this? What needs to happen for “media and online political discourses” to contribute to peacemaking, peace-building and reconciliation rather than to the opposite? The chapters that follow apply discourse analytic approaches in order to explore these questions.

The extraordinary rapidity and scale of the spread of information and communications technology (ICT) in recent years, together with all the attendant forms of digital connectivity (Internet, social media, cell phones), have profoundly affected both the manifestation of conflict at all levels, and the way it is analysed/reported/framed and responded to worldwide. This has had a major impact on the way conflicts are instigated and conducted, on how conflict is understood (data, interpretation), and on efforts to prevent, mitigate, end and ensure a non-recurrence of its worst aspects. In all of this the media play a crucial role.

We know that the impact of communications technology on conflict in general is not as new as is sometimes made out. On the widest historical scale, we can think of the advent of writing itself at the time of the first states and empires; printing by moveable type at the time of the reformation and the wars of religion in Europe; the creation of the mass media and the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century; the invention of the telephone, radio, film and TV in relation to the world wars and subsequent cold war and decolonisation wars of the twentieth century. In the worst genocide of the late twentieth century in Rwanda in April–July 1994, the most potent media role in instigating the massacre was played by a private radio station, Radio Television Mille Collines (RTMC), broadcasting to a largely illiterate audience between 8 July 1993 and 31 July 1994. And the main weapons used in the massacre were machetes. Nevertheless, it seems hard to overestimate the significance of the onset of the digital age – young though it still is – so far in the twenty-first century.

For one thing, the field of conflict analysis and conflict resolution has been radically affected by the impact of ICT in such a way that traditional

distinctions between international, national and local levels of human conflict are being eroded. And – in line with what I understand to be the theme and hopes of this book – perhaps the basis for a future global partnership for peace is being constructed.

But the analysis in these chapters emphasises the deep ambivalence of the role of the media and online political discourse in all this. On the one hand, in relation to the cyberworld, both Norbert Wiener (creator of cybernetics) and Tim Berners-Lee (creator of the World Wide Web) in their different ways hoped that the new capacity would be a powerful instrument for peace – in Berners-Lee’s words “to empower humanity by launching transformative programs that build local capacity to leverage the Web as a medium for positive change”. This accords with the aspiration of the *World Summit on the Information Society* in 2003 in its “Tunis Commitment” that the new technology would be used to promote “a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society” premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN, international law, multilateralism, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These hopes and aspirations remain vibrant and inspire many of the younger generation all over the world. But we hardly need to be reminded of the close relationship that has existed historically between technology and militarism, or the manifest danger of the opposite happening as underlying and mounting global problems impact on young, urbanised and increasingly informed populations outside the former monopolists of power, as well as on those “left behind” within them. A new digitalised worldwide field of contestation is opened up where mass media are co-opted and exploited by unscrupulous populist commercial and political forces, including the leaderships of the most powerful countries currently engaged in geopolitical struggles in what has recently become a multi-polar world.

Mass communications and the role of the media have always been a two-edged sword. They can inform, educate, empower, emancipate, and enable forms of cooperation. But they can also manipulate, polarise, escalate, exacerbate division, and enhance hegemonic control. The militarisation of new technology is an old story – in recent years connected to the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). The Internet itself was born as the ARPANET funded through a US Department of Defense project in 1969. And we still hear more about cyber war, cyber warriors, cyber-attacks etc. than about the possibilities for cyber peace. Something comparable occurs in relation to commercialisation. The jury is out on whether the new digitalised mass media overall increases democratisation or its Orwellian opposite; whether it opens communication or results in the creation of isolated “information bubbles”; whether it promotes more mutual understanding through mutual exposure (the contact hypothesis) or leads to a break-up of the mass media itself into ghettoised “echo



chambers” where those inside only hear what they want to hear and divergent messages from outside are dismissed as “fake news”.

These are portentous issues in which the role of the media is central. Behind them lies the question: how can standards of “ethical or accountable journalism” or “responsible reporting” be redefined in the digital age? Attempts have been made in recent years to set out applicable criteria (Lynch and Galtung 2010; Hoffmann and Hawkins 2015; Lynch 2015) as also to warn against an overly “top down” imposition of interpretation (Sutherlin 2013). There has been advocacy for a concerted international effort at the “pacification of cyberspace” (Woodhouse 2014), and an attempt to grapple with the very idea of “neutral”, “impartial” or “disinterested” reporting in areas of intense linguistic intractability and “radical disagreement” (Ramsbotham 2010, 2017).

These are some of the larger themes explored in this book. The authors’ contributions offer analysis of this complex field across different sectors, in relation to different topics, at different levels, and with reference to case studies from many different parts of the world. Discourse analysis techniques are applied. The result is a study that contributes valuable information about the interplay between mass media/online political discourse and human conflict, and thereby casts light on what needs to happen if future development is to be in the direction that the authors hope to see.

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Cambridge University Press  
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