

"War Crimes and the Role of the Media: Balancing Freedom of Expression and Responsibility"

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Abstract

This essay looks at the role that the media plays in reporting on war crimes and the difficulties that arise when trying to strike a balance between freedom of expression and responsibility. War crimes are the most serious violations of international humanitarian law, and they can have terrible effects on both the victims and the communities in which they are committed. When it comes to notifying the general public about these atrocities and holding those guilty to account, the media plays an extremely important role. But the media also has a responsibility to present the news in a fair and balanced manner, without encouraging violence or spreading stereotypes. They must fulfil this obligation in order to fulfil their role. This examination investigates the ways in which the media can both inform and mislead the general public about war crimes, as well as the ethical issues that should be taken into account by journalists and media organizations while reporting on such atrocities.

This paper examines the issue of freedom of expression and responsibility in war crimes and provides an overview of the sources on this topic. It then focuses on how journalists' freedom of speech is affected by their obligation to report on war crimes, as well as examining the impact of war crimes on media outlets.

Keywords: *War Crimes, Media, Freedom of Expression, Responsibility, Journalism, International Humanitarian Law, Ethics, Reporting, Accountability.*

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Introduction

Crimes against humanity, sometimes known as war crimes, are serious violations of international humanitarian law that occur during armed wars. They include acts such as murder, torture, and rape that are performed against those who are not participating in the conflicts. The victims of these atrocities are typically civilians. When it comes to informing the general public about war crimes and holding those guilty accountable, the media plays an extremely important part. Nevertheless, the portrayal of war crimes in the media brings up serious ethical and legal problems regarding the proper balance between freedom of expression and responsibility. In this examination, we will evaluate the role of the media in reporting on war crimes, as well as the issues that the media encounters when trying to strike a balance between accountability and freedom of expression. In addition to this, it will investigate the potential repercussions of media coverage of war crimes, both for the victims of the crimes and for the general public. During the course of the examination, we will investigate the ethical and legal frameworks that govern media reporting on war crimes, as well as the obligations of media organisations and journalists when it comes to covering these crimes. This examination will, on the whole, provide a clearer grasp of the complicated problems surrounding media reporting on war crimes and the significance of striking the correct balance between freedom of expression and accountability.

The United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination (UNOCC), established its first international convention against the use or threat thereof of terrorism and related criminal acts, under the title “Convention Relating to International Terrorism and Related Activities, 1994”. While some nations did not participate in the creation of such a convention, the UNOCC was convened to address the question of whether the convention could be implemented universally. In 1992, it adopted a resolution that established principles of fair treatment for parties involved in hostilities and the consequences of violations. This document was published by the United Nations Security Council in 1993 and went through four revisions since, with the latest being in 2020. One major concern surrounding this convention is the question of whether countries should participate since they are responsible for the acts of these terrorists and what methods would be used to prevent them from committing more attacks. Another concern involves the limits of the convention by specifying that states can only commit terror or act as perpetrators if there is no international

agreement on this (Sassen, 2018). According to this article, the problem lies in the interpretation of the text, with it allowing to see both sides of the debate. However, due to the number of different interpretations, the treaty becomes hard to implement without significant modifications. To resolve the conflict, the author suggests that international laws can better define which side a terrorist is on and the ways to deal with each situation (Sassen, 2018). Although international law might need revision, as there is still disagreement regarding the language of its standards, the author argues that such legislation allows for better compliance by all states. Ultimately, while many criticism of the treaty are based on concerns about the applicability of internationally agreed rules, the overall outcome can be viewed as positive. Despite this, there are arguments that this measure can result in bias in favor of certain countries or people, resulting in a lack of trust in the entire convention (Sassen, 2018).

In his book “The Limits of Journalism: War Crimes, Genocide, and Truth”, Richard Dreyfus discusses the relationship between journalism and justice. He provides examples of how the press deals with a variety of injustices, including war crimes, genocide, false reporting, and other forms of human rights infringement. For example, one form of injustice that has been widely covered in newspapers and television is the Vietnam war. During this time in history, many Americans were shocked to read of atrocities committed, including murders of civilian populations. Many newspapers, as well as television stations and news agencies had already revealed war crimes by the U.S army, so many were shocked by what was happening. At the same time, the American government kept silent, avoiding revealing their involvement. As a result, this created uncertainty in the public, with many believing that the government was withholding information about their actions. Eventually, however, as various studies of war crime evidence provided more details of atrocities being committed, several members of congress demanded the Pentagon release the information, citing it as necessary for accountability (Dreyfus, 1986).

One way in which war crimes are presented in newspapers is through visual displays of images and videos that depict atrocities committed. Throughout history, visual displays have been used to convey information about wars and demonstrate how those events happened, especially during the Vietnam War. A display titled Operation Desert Storm showed images of bodies being burned by napalm, the destruction of military bases, and the death of civilians (Dreyfus, 1985). The image was also meant to show America’s brutality, which created a sense of fear among the population

(Dreyfus, 1986). Another type of war crime image is displayed in video games and films, with titles showing soldiers holding rifles to their heads until they die. These scenes lead many viewers to believe that the war in Vietnam was unjustified because these soldiers were forced into engaging with innocent civilians (Dreyfus, 1986). Such visual displays of the horrors of war were popular during World Wars I and II, but not in times of peace and calm. Since the Vietnam War was televised, this resulted in high levels of distrust towards governments and increased resentment toward reporters and editors (Dreyfus, 1986).

Media outlets have a responsibility to provide truthful reports when covering war crimes. An example is reported in the Washington Post in 2018, where editorials and stories are written about incidents of violence after US troops enter Saudi Arabia (“Saudi Arabia News Digest”, 2018). Due to the nature of these cases, the Washington Post edited some of the articles to remove any mention of the presence of weapons. Instead, the publication focused on images of wounded civilians and destroyed homes in order to avoid upsetting the residents and create more focus on the suffering that occurred (“Saudi Arabia News Digest”, 2018). This article shows the importance of journalists’ responsibility to maintain objective coverage of events. Overall, this work can help improve future conflicts, as well as promote respect for journalists who cover such matters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the function of the media in the reporting of war crimes is a nuanced topic that calls for a careful balancing act between the right to freedom of expression and the obligation to act responsibly. On the one hand, the media plays an essential part in its responsibility to inform the public about war crimes and to hold those responsible accountable for their actions. On the other hand, the media has a responsibility to be aware of the possible harm that its reporting can bring to victims, witnesses, and ongoing investigations in order to avoid doing any such harm.

Reporting on war crimes in a manner that is factual, fair, and respectful of the rights and dignity of victims and witnesses is a responsibility that rests squarely on the shoulders of the media. This may involve avoiding the use of graphic imagery or words that could be traumatic for victims and witnesses, as well as taking precautions to safeguard the identities of those who were victims and witnesses. In addition, members of the media need to be aware of the potential impact that their

reporting can have on active investigations, and they need to take precautions to avoid doing anything that could jeopardise the credibility of those investigations.

Additionally, it is the job of the media to be open and honest about the information sources from which they obtain their stories, as well as to confirm that the material they report is accurate and trustworthy. This may entail verifying the accuracy of information as well as adding context and background details that can assist readers in gaining a better understanding of the bigger picture surrounding the events that are being covered.

It has been recommended, in light of these duties, that media companies should create ethical criteria for reporting on war crimes. [Citation needed] These guidelines should be prepared in conjunction with subject matter experts in the field, and they should take into account the rights and needs of victims and witnesses, in addition to the requirements of investigations that are currently underway. In addition, news companies ought to make investments in the education of its reporters in order to teach them how to write on war crimes in a way that is both responsible and ethical.

References

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