

Chapter 9

Media in the peace-building process: Ethiopia and Iraq

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The idea that one can consider a governance reform agenda in a post-conflict society assumes that there is “governance” and, in particular, governance that has about it a structure, preferably a rational one. Our study could be said to be about outliers: states or contexts in, after, or before conflict, where the governance agenda is merely a hope. The optimist views the democratic role of the news media, in as many contexts as possible, as that of a watch-dog, agenda-setter and gate-keeper. We point to variables that influence how realistic the optimistic agenda may be, principally patterns of evolution in political structure.

There is little that is static about the peace-building process. The post-conflict period can extend for many years, particularly if fundamental issues have yet to be resolved. The complex state and nation-building processes cannot be seen simply as short transitional periods but may continue for decades. Even if the post-conflict period could be bounded, opportunities during this stage are, to a great extent, shaped by media approaches both before and during the conflict. Here we focus on two cases—Ethiopia and Iraq—that represent very different instances and stages of peace-building.

Both countries have experienced significant violent conflict and have liberalized their media systems to some degree. Ethiopia and Iraq are, however, at different points in the nation and state-building process. In Ethiopia, after a decades-long civil war that ended in the early 1990s, pockets of conflict continue. Fifteen years later, there are fundamental disagreements, particularly among elites, about the constitution and the nature of the state. There has been no effective process of reconciliation and the media has been deeply polarized, reflecting some of the divisions. In Iraq, the government’s project to bring peace has been similarly complex. Despite recent progress, Iraq is still largely a country in conflict where the central government struggles to set the national agenda and maintain peace.

We do not set out to directly *compare* Ethiopia and Iraq, but rather to ask similar questions in the two contexts, in an effort to draw out some issues as to why a liberalized press after violent conflict might not contribute to the governance agenda. Our bias is empirical. We need to ask what role the media should play normatively in these societies, and how the media-political relationship is actually shaped in practice. On the political side, the question could be how the state and other actors have sought to shape the media space, with what discourse or methods. More broadly, how has the process

of reconciliation progressed? How has the government incorporated (or failed to incorporate) different perspectives, how has it sought to engage with those that represent different viewpoints, and what is the government's approach to dialogue?

Because the media in such environments often do not necessarily perform the watch-dog, gate-keeper or agenda-setter functions specifically assigned in the ideal, there is a need for a diagnostic mode of thinking of these contexts. We posit four questions: 1) Do the media facilitate a process of dialogue between government and insurgents or between opposition groups or political parties, or a process of power-sharing? 2) Do the media help define the question “what is the nation”? 3) Does their functioning contribute to a viable state capable of governing? And (reflected in the above three) 4) At a minimum, are the media restrained from encouraging violent outcomes?

If *power sharing* and *dialogue* are keys to conflict resolution—as they seem to be in some, though not all, contexts—then one question might be what media arrangements make dialogue more effective, including dialogue leading to power sharing. And what media arrangements then maintain the power sharing agreement that was put in place (by agreement or by imposition)?

In terms of *framing the state, or nation*, Nancy Fraser has recently discussed some of these issues.¹ Originally, Fraser considered that it was important to look at the shift in thinking about justice from redistribution to representation. But she has recently revised this to think about what she calls the “who” factor, namely the frame in which issues of redistribution and representation are contained. In thinking about conflict zones and structure of the media, this issue of the frame—in this instance the nature of the entity which is to emerge or about which an architecture should be decided—is obviously both the understood objective and the overriding complexity. In many (though not all) conflict zones, the very definition of the frame is key to determining the approach to understanding the nature of the media. The frame influences what would be considered pluralist and what remedy there is for intense partisanship. The media are about the negotiation of the frame itself. The media have a central role in providing this space and negotiating and articulating divergent perspectives—for example, by reflecting reconciliation and building consensus on historical events—but the involvement of the state in negotiation and dialogue is key.

In terms of media *enabling government to govern*, in 2006, the Crisis States Programme at LSE issued a report called “Why Templates for Media Development Do Not Work in Crisis States.” This was a somewhat controversial report, partly because it sought to part from orthodox approaches to the functioning of the media (both press and broadcast) in conflict zones. Almost by definition, the situation

of “governance” in a fragile state is itself in the balance. The process of elite coalition formation is central to obtaining a context where there is an entity that can and does govern, and the role of the media in this project is an important, often overlooked role. In a recent paper, James Putzel, one of the authors of the LSE report, argues that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Standard templates of “good governance” involving the devolution of power and the promotion of private and non-governmental agents of development may be, not only inadequate to the challenge of state-building, but positively counter-productive if not accompanied by singular efforts to support elite coalition formation and significantly increase capacity at the level of the central state.”²

This process of elite coalition formation is closely linked to the idea of power-sharing. Florian Bieber, who has studied post-conflict states in the former Yugoslavia, locates the systematic failures of power-sharing in “the lack of consensus among the political elites from the different communities over the state and the institutional set-up.” Bieber seeks to determine “the broader significance for our understanding of accommodating diversity in post-conflict societies.” Power-sharing can be imposed externally or reached by compromise (or a combination of various methods), with different results.

As to *avoiding violence and preventing civil war*, Donald Ellis³ and Robin Williams⁴ provide detailed studies of how ethnic divisions in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were mobilized through the use of media to activate ethnic identities for the gains of political elites, though they give only a partial insight into the factors that motivate ‘conflict media. An International Media Support (IMS) Report outlines several factors that encouraged the emergence of a conflict media in Rwanda: a strong ideology; control over a mass medium/media; psychological preparation to hate; and a call to violence.⁵ A strong ideology is propagated by prominent academics, journalists or politicians who develop theories of their ethnic or sectarian group. Such theories in the media portray their group as a ‘stronger race’ and ‘a race with a glorious past,’ or as ‘victims’ who have to unite in order to deal with a threat posed by other groups so that they will not be ‘eliminated’ from the political process or annihilated from within the state altogether. In the final case, violence conducted by one community against the other is portrayed as a matter of self-defense. Without sufficiently considering the political and historical context, or the role of the state, these frameworks risk characterizing conflicts as ‘tribal’ and the expression of deep-seated hatreds—a simplistic presentation often employed by the media. Nevertheless, these factors are useful in beginning to identify the emergence of conflict media.

We turn first to Ethiopia and then to Iraq as part of an ongoing study of how the media structure relates to the factors we have set out, and how media development reflects or influences power

structures. In both cases we have questions about who is participating in the nation-building project, whose definitions and historical visions are being reconciled, and who is competing for power. The media are not only active participants but also reflect these processes.

In Ethiopia, we focus on the printed press, and in the case of Iraq, we focus on broadcasting. Radio stations have strongly impacted the media landscape across much of Africa in interesting and important ways, but Ethiopia has been excluded from this trend. Newspapers, however, set the media agenda in the early 1990s when many African governments were changing and have retained their importance across much of the continent. In Iraq, on the other hand, there has been a burgeoning of both broadcasting and press in the post-war period with radio and television having a strong impact.

Ethiopia

After seizing power in 1991, the Tigreyan People's Liberation Front's (TPLF) guerrilla commander Meles Zenawi sought to differentiate himself from his predecessors and generate domestic and international support for the new regime. One way he did this was through some liberalization of the media space. A free press was compatible with the TPLF's political ideology, Revolutionary Democracy, and was also a response to domestic and international pressures calling for expanded political space. Tolerating media freedoms helped the image of Meles as one of Africa's New Leaders presiding over a democratically-inclined developmental state. There was a widespread hope that he, along with others in the region, including Yoweri Museveni from Uganda, Isais Afeworki from Eritrea and Paul Kagame from Rwanda, would bring about a broader African Renaissance. None of these leaders, however, has relinquished control, and each still presides over a highly centralized autocratic regime.

Until the aftermath of contentious elections in 2005, Ethiopia's press was vibrant but deeply polarized. It served as a principal forum for expressing perspectives that diverged from the ruling party on issues that have been dividing Ethiopian society for decades such as the rights of ethnicities, land ownership and a federalist constitution. The post-election period exposed critical failings in the nation and state-building project. In widespread violence, more than 100 people were killed, mostly by government forces, and tens of thousands arrested. Dozens of journalists were jailed, as was a substantial part of the leadership of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party. The private press has largely been silenced and is no longer able to serve as the forum for alternative visions of nation-building it once did. In an effort to understand the role of the media in post-war Ethiopia, we will visit each of the four questions we have proposed for the media in post-conflict environments,

reflecting upon the critical decisions that were made in the early 1990s as well as the factors that led up to the 2005 elections where the media space suffered a dramatic reversal.

Do the media facilitate a process of dialogue?

Despite the attempts by some in the media to negotiate different visions of Ethiopia, the government, a crucial partner in any post-war dialogue, has refused to participate in dialogue. The TPLF saw little need to directly engage those whom it defeated, particularly those that were aligned with the communist Derg regime that the TPLF overthrew.

Because the TPLF's power base was located in Tigray, a region in northern Ethiopia with less than 10 percent of the country's population, the group had little choice but to form a multi-ethnic coalition. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was formed by the TPLF several years before it successfully defeated the Derg regime and came to Addis. In theory, the EPRDF was to be an umbrella organization holding together different political parties representative of the complex Ethiopian landscape. But not all opposition groups were eager to join the EPRDF and many groups that did join became disenchanted quickly during the transitional period. Despite repeated calls from those in the previous government, and others who felt excluded from the transitional government, the TPLF pursued its own agenda with little compromise. The TPLF also believed that tangible development rather than persuasion or dialogue would convince the rest of the country of the merit of its policies and leadership. This strategy emerged from the Front's experience of convincing the peasantry to join the struggle during the war.

The unilateral process of constitution-making has polarized the press and continues to be a deeply divisive and unresolved issue. Central to the TPLF's struggle was the idea that Ethiopia's ethnic diversity would be best served by a federal arrangement that would have at its core the right of secession. The TPLF also made it clear that it planned to continue to control the executive committee and entrenched its power ethnically within the military as at least 50 percent of the fighters were drawn from Tigray. One of the first (and most contested) actions the EPRDF took when it first came to power was to allow Eritrea to secede.⁶ The move angered many and was seen as a unilateral and inadequately consultative decision. Many of the early press commentaries called for a dialogue and national discussion on federalism which to some Ethiopians was seen as destroying the Ethiopian nation-state. For example, in the early 1990s, in an effort to draw attention to their desire to participate in the political discussions, as well as express concern, if not outrage, at the federalist arrangement, many political groups came together for the Conference on Peace and Reconciliation. The government

refused to engage, claiming there was no need for a “peace” conference in a country that was already at peace, and labeling the participants as “anti-peace.” Many of the newspapers were behind this conference and actively supporting it. But the government was not willing to recognize the conference or the recommendations and dismissed it as a demand by a “limited number of intellectuals.” Since these early days the press continued calling for reconciliation, power-sharing and more dialogue. In some cases journalists represented the agenda of political parties that were critical of the EPRDF and in others their motives were more personal and ethnically based.

Rather than negotiating or co-opting opponents, the EPRDF simply ignored them or in some cases tried to isolate them. This strategy further exacerbated an already tense period. Girma Beshah, Mengistu’s former interpreter, spent several years in jail after the EPRDF came to power until he was considered to no longer be a substantial threat. As he describes:

When the TPLF first came they didn’t know who was who. They locked us all up. A new order was unfolding. It was not a new government but a new order, a new era. Everything of the other regime was gotten rid of.... Sensitive places were taken over... [they] didn’t want any interference or to coexist with anyone. That was the aspiration of communism and Lenin’s [theory of] political cleansing - getting rid of the Tsarists. The EPRDF wanted to get rid of these people so they couldn’t have any feelings of the past....Many of them lost their jobs in the state media. The government sent others to retirement. So people thought it’s not a new government, but a new ethnic group.⁷

Many of the journalists who lost their jobs went on to start private publications that were deeply critical of the government.

Tobiya, one of the first newspapers that appeared after the EPRDF seized power, became one of the most dynamic, experienced and influential publications in the immediate post-conflict period. The paper began in 1992 with 15 former journalists who had previously worked for the Ministry of Information during the Derg as well as some who were outside the Ministry. The founders included Mulugeta Lule, former editor of the Derg party’s⁸ magazine, and Goshu Mogus, who ran the censorship office for the Derg. Mairegu Bezibeh, another journalist for *Tobiya*, spent a year and a half in jail on charges of genocide for having executed 300+ people under the Derg but the EPRDF government could not prove the case.⁹

The background of many of these journalists is key to understanding the role a substantial portion of the press has played in Ethiopia, why the government has been reluctant to engage and why

the press has been so polarized. First, the conflict between some journalists and EPRDF leaders dates back decades to the student movement in the early 1970s. During this period contentious debates over Marxist-Leninist ideology were had and rifts between student groups (which included precursors to the TPLF and the Derg) over issues such as the role of ethnic identities were evident. Second, after a long guerrilla struggle, the EPRDF, when it came to power, felt little need to negotiate or include those that it defeated or those that were also fighting the Derg at the same time since the TPLF “carried the others on its shoulders.”¹⁰ Because the EPRDF did not consider it necessary to explain its actions or policies domestically, Meles would seldom speak with or even acknowledge private journalists. Not only were journalists of private papers unable to write balanced reports but the exclusion also contributed to a deep level of frustration. By failing to engage with the private press, or the arguments themselves, the government has done little create a political mainstream or facilitate a dialogue.

Do the media help to define the question of ‘what is a nation’?

In Ethiopia, a consensus on “what is the nation” has yet to be entirely established, partly because the above-mentioned dialogue between elite constituencies—including the press and those in power—failed to occur.

The government press has been strongly propagandistic and has not even acknowledged alternative positions on key policies. But since its establishment in the early 1990s the independent press, including *Tobiya*, has been presenting contrasting visions of the Ethiopian state. This segment of the press has come to reflect the political divisions of the disenfranchised ethnic groups, particularly the Amhara, who dominate the intellectual class and were the major force in Ethiopian politics for generations. For the many private journalists who see national identity as a single Ethiopia of “one people” that was built by the imperial regimes, the EPRDF’s deconstruction of this idea has been deeply disturbing and something that they continue to address.

The editorial policy of *Tobiya* on this issue was clear. According to Derbew Temesgen, a founding journalist, “the editorial policy was against ethnic politics and against the separation of Eritrea. Ethnic politics is not good for the unity of the country.”¹¹ The papers and magazines consistently argued against the right to secession and often accused the Ethiopian government of allowing Eritreans to intervene in, if not overtly control, local affairs.¹² The paper would also argue for reconciliation or a new spirit of forgiveness,¹³ as well as suggest that the current government should be held as accountable for current violations of human rights as it was aspiring to do for former leaders of the Derg.¹⁴ Indeed, early

editorials and articles emphasize this line. The following example illustrates the arguments that were common in the early months of publication:

The attempt by the fascist Italians to divide the people and the country was not successful, but now it is getting rooted thanks to the current regime. The people of the country are being divided along ethnic lines... The 1991 Charter follows and adheres to the secessionist ideology of a few Eritreans....The attempt to view unity as a marriage is very simplistic and incorrect. The people of Ethiopia are connected by history, nature, culture and psychological make-up.... We also think that no group should be allowed to disintegrate the country. In the new Ethiopia, the unique and terrifying term is “unity.” The charter is not in favor of unity.... The regime supports the division and disintegration of the country and we think this is the first national government to do such a thing in the world.¹⁵

While private press has been effective in discussing issues of national identity, the system as a whole has been too polarized to set or define a national agenda. Much of the failure lies with the government for refusing to engage in these serious discussions or to respond to the arguments presented in the private press. Until the 2005 elections, the government thought such criticism was relatively restricted to the literate elites in Addis Ababa. After the elections the government has felt so threatened by these competing ideas that any possibility for such discussion is severely limited. Existing papers are allowed to be critical of the government but only on the implementation of policies, not the fundamentals of policies such as ethnic federalism. This is related to the third point of this analysis, which looks at the contribution of the media in state-building where we emphasize the role of the government.

Do the media help to contribute to establishing a viable state capable of governing?

The private press has not been able to contribute to the goal that there is a viable state capable of governing for two reasons. First, the government’s unwillingness to include the press in a national project or engage in any sort of dialogue has limited the press’s potential role in state-building. Second, government press and propaganda efforts have failed to encourage trust and reconciliation, instead increasing tensions and polarization. Successive Ethiopian governments have regularly modeled their development strategies on the experiences of other countries.¹⁶ Ethiopia’s present vision of a developmental state draws on the experiences of countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, where

criticism and opposition parties are tolerated so long as they do not present a serious distraction to the ruling party's leadership, and, particularly, the state's economic development.

Meles's arguments on defining 'fundamental policies' clearly establish a precedent that debates within the media are to center around issues of development, rather than political questions such as the constitution or issues of secession, federalism, or land. In the School of Journalism,¹⁷ lecturers argue that journalists should follow the developmental role of the media in China. Similarly, journalists and the editors at the government media outlets emphasize their role in the economic development of the country.

The EPRDF's overall strategy for managing information flows is controlling the message from the center to the periphery. ICTs, for example, have become a major tool for centralizing EPRDF control and ensuring that cadres across the country are on message. This communication, though employing an interactive mechanism, is largely one-way. Meles or another party leader disseminates a message through video conferencing or through local officials who are 'trained' in party ideology. Since 2005, there have been some efforts to use ICT, through a project called WoredaNet, as a way to facilitate two-way communication with local officials offering reports to regional heads about the situation within their area but this has not been the government's focus.

Overall, the EPRDF's basic information strategy targets the peasantry. This has received a greater push in the aftermath of the 2005 elections. There are parallels between the current strategy as well as the pre-2005 strategy and the strategy used during the guerrilla war. The EPRDF is currently focusing on "the advanced elements of the rural community" or those farmers that are more receptive to party ideals. These people are then organized into small groups that receive training and serve as a source of information but, most importantly, as conduits for developmental messages. At the grassroots level, information is not theoretical; the "advanced elements of the rural community" are encouraged to get rich and then help others to get rich. In this context, radio is used for disseminating "best practices" of development—particularly agriculture.

The focus on the peasantry has, however, come at the expense of some groups including intellectuals and members of the previous government. With little desire or strategy to engage such critics, the failure of negotiation of power and voice has exposed dangerous rifts in the state-building process, as most recently demonstrated after the 2005 elections.

Are the media restrained from encouraging violence?

In the worst case the difficulties that the Ethiopian government has had in both making its own propaganda successful and in managing non-governmental flows of information effectively leads to violent outcomes. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, the media were so deeply polarized that both the private and the government media exacerbated an already delicate situation and had a strong role in provoking the violence as well.

While the private press was not overtly calling for violence the choice of words and discourse on both sides amplified the tensions. The government propaganda is primarily aimed at people in the rural areas whom it views as its real constituencies. But in the post-election period, the government was overwhelmed by the success of the opposition's electoral gains and fearful of what the future held for the ruling EPRDF. Thus, because the government lacked an effective communication strategy and since it felt exceptionally insecure it turned to blatant pro-government propaganda. This quickly became counter-productive, particularly among the private press and the opposition supporters whose messages it was trying to counter.¹⁸ The Cambridge-based scholar Christopher Clapham accurately summed this up in his "Comments on the Aftermath of the Ethiopian Crisis" when he noted:

It is difficult to exaggerate the enormous amount of damage that has been done to the EPRDF government by Bereket Simon, the former Minister of Information and now information adviser to the Prime Minister, who has become the principal spokesman for the government. His neurotic and consistently inflammatory pronouncements, extending even to threats of an equivalent to the Rwanda genocide,¹⁹ have conveyed a very clear impression, both to the opposition and to the outside world, that the EPRDF is entirely unwilling to engage in any normal or reasonable political process.²⁰

The issue of polarization and ethnic divisiveness in the press during the elections has been complex. While it is true that many of the private papers referred to the EPRDF as a minority-led regime and expressed grievances with its ethnic basis, the government also sought to manipulate the ethnicity issue just.²¹ In many respects it appears, as Clapham suggests, that it has been the government itself that has been exploiting and driving this issue. While ethnic violence could be a potential problem, it is far from the government-sponsored genocide in Rwanda. As *Lisane Hezeb* noted, in the debates "EPRDF's labeling of CUD as the Interhamwe of Rwanda is irresponsible."²²

Similarly, a journalist at the government's Ethiopian News Agency corroborated this when he recognized that:

At the ENA we have been compiling our reports from the election. The reporting is biased and you can visibly see the difference between pre- and post-election reporting.... The adjectives for the CUD [Coalition for Unity and Democracy - the opposition party] came after polling day. For the city riots there was an established phrase 'the street violence that was instigated by the CUD'- everything started with this phrase. It has not yet been investigated yet we accuse them....²³

Over the last year or so, the government has begun to recognize that it must communicate more effectively if it wishes to remain in power but also reduce the possibility of political violence. This strategy is part of its developmental agenda (and the renewed emphasis on communicating development projects rather than politics) but is also evident in the continued closure of political space. In 2008 the government has proposed new civil society legislation that will close many of the local NGOs, and virtually all of the international ones, that work in the human rights and governance fields. In addition, the government continues to restrict the flow of competing ideas, whether in the newspapers, on the radios or in blogs. With this continued censorship the propensity for violence in the short-term may be hindered but in the long-term the situation that provoked the violence in 2005 remains unresolved. As the Ethiopian nation and state-building project remains precarious it is likely that in the future the media may re-emerge as a force that will lead to even greater violence.

Iraq

Iraq presents an enormous contrast to Ethiopia. Among the many political variables that appear, Iraq is an instance of "occupation" as compared to radical domestic change in Ethiopia; large scale shifts in technology of media delivery in Iraq compared to milder technological change in Ethiopia; and perhaps most important, the capacity of the powers in Ethiopia to seek to impose information hegemony, even while harboring some pluralism, as opposed to the absence of authoritarian control over media in post-conflict Iraq. Iraq became a theater for competition among many influences (using satellites, for example,) while in Ethiopia the media players were fewer though intense.

The availability of media in Iraq changed drastically with the 2003 war. Prior to 2003, media options were limited: newspapers, and radio and TV stations, were owned by the state, and satellite TV and internet could only be accessed by Ba'ath Party elites. Following the war, more than a hundred newspapers emerged, reflecting political parties espousing everything from communist to Kurdish nationalist to Islamist ideologies. Iraqi citizens can now access the internet, freely own satellite dishes,

and access hundreds of terrestrial and satellite radio and TV stations broadcasting from within Iraq and from the region.

In Iraq, the idea of a balanced and pluralistic media was established as a goal, first in the Athens Conference that was held shortly after the U.S. invasion, but more important, in the key Coalition Provisional Authority Orders 65 and 66, issued March 20, 2004, which articulated the generally-accepted objectives for an idealized post-conflict media. Order 65 created a National Communications and Media Commission (NCMC), designed, in part, to “encourage pluralism and diverse political debate”; Order 66 established the equivalent of a public service broadcaster (from the shell of state television). In 2004, the NCMC issued an Interim Broadcasting Programme Code of Practice that provided standards to avoid violence. For example, the Code provided that “Programmes shall meet with generally accepted standards of civility and respect for ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of Iraq.”²⁴ Despite the efforts to establish an “ideal” media system, the post-war development of Iraq’s media indicates the difficulties encountered in implementation in the context of a continuing conflict, in particular with relation to issues of dialogue, the framing of the state, governance and the promotion of violence.

As Iraq pursued democratization after 2003, the post-war chaos led to fractured identities based on ethnic, sectarian and tribal divisions. The nation’s Shi’a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmens, and Christians found themselves in a security vacuum within a fragile political system dominated by exile and opposition organizations, for the most part formed along ethno-sectarian lines. Facing weak state institutions, Islamist parties in the government, as well as the opposition, augmented their power with calls to nationalism. Political elites, opposition leaders and non-state actors, employing methods of patronage-based politics that have characterized the Iraqi state since its formation in the 1920s, mobilized ethno-sectarian communities, enshrining the insecurity and warlordism based on primordial identities.

The embattled government has been unable to effectively enforce media legislation or regulate media outlets and media content, and unlicensed radio and TV stations have proliferated. When the NCMC was established, and when its licensing mandate was implemented, little attention was paid to the relationship between license applicants and power distribution within the society. The model for issuing licenses was basically first-come, first served, as long as applicants met prescribed standards. Groups not meeting these standards also obtained media outlets to assist their cause through various mechanisms, including self-help, operating in an unlicensed manner, and satellite broadcasting without a license.

The result has been the positive, though accidental, emergence of a pluralized media sector. As in other contexts in the wake of conflict and relatively new to independent media, ideal internal media pluralism is hardly present.²⁵ Most of the stations in Iraq are now independently owned, but they operate as extensions of ethno-sectarian political institutions. The dominant Arab media are owned by Islamist parties, and various political factions, deeming it necessary to have a TV channel to convey political propaganda and to inspire their constituents, have media outlets at their disposal. The largest Shi'a, Arab Sunni, and Kurdish parties own satellite channels, *Al-Furat TV*, *Al-Baghdad TV* and *Kurdsat*, respectively, that are viewed in Iraq and abroad.

During times of political stability among the factions, Iraq's polarized plural media ownership reflects that stability. During times of discord and disintegration, however, media polarization further undermines the capacity of the weak state to govern, and the political parties have the capability of reinforcing the country's sectarian divisions. In late 2007, Iraqi Sunni Islamist factions and tribes began to oppose the strict religious para-state created by Al-Qa'ida, eventually realigning themselves against the terrorists. The tribes coalesced into the Reawakening Councils known as '*Al-Sahwa*' and managed to bring relative stability to their areas, forcing Al-Qa'ida elements to disperse and seek refuge in other parts of Iraq. Once this conflict de-escalated, so did the "war of the airwaves." As of 2008, no Iraqi channels have directly incited one party to violence, but nevertheless there are a multitude of channels that form an ethno-sectarian media landscape, reflecting the political structure that emerged in Iraq as of 2003.

Studies conducted by the United States Institute of Peace on media in conflict states warn of the capability of media becoming tools of warlords as a result of rushed and hastily-conceived media plans.²⁶ Izabella Karlowicz, in her work on media development in post-conflict Balkans, warns that "unregulated media may be dangerous and can encourage, rather than calm, nationalistic tendencies." Karlowicz highlights "the dangers of poorly planned assistance to the development of the Fourth Estate in post-conflict areas, which may cause an outburst of ethnic conflict rather than fostering peaceful cohabitation."²⁷ Just such an "outburst of ethnic conflict," or, in the Iraqi case, "ethno-sectarian conflict," has become a reality.

The literature on ethnic conflict stresses that ethnic cleavages in deeply-divided societies are not precursors in and of themselves for intra-state violence. Rather it is the mobilization techniques used by political elites that engage communal groups and gear them up for an identity conflict.²⁸ Jenkins and Gottlieb define identity conflict as "any rivalry between two or more groups that define themselves in

mutually exclusive terms that use a collective 'we/they' definition."²⁹ Political Islamist elites scapegoat other communities as a strategy to legitimize their rule. In the Middle East, elites often blame the "others" for problems, diverting attention from their own shortcomings. Such elites, it is argued, "present themselves as loyal protectors of group heritage. By propagating ethnic ideologies that dehumanize or devalue other groups, these ethnic entrepreneurs incite hatred and mobilize attacks."³⁰ This theoretical approach is valuable when it is born in mind that numerous ethnic groups in deeply-divided societies do not engage in organized political actions based on a collective identity basis. Williams argues that a first requirement for a group to take part in a conflict is some sort of mobilization based on a real or imagined grievance shared among the identity based group: "Without some sense of grievance, people do not mobilize."³¹ In fact, over centuries, Iraq's Shi'a have followed a tradition of political quietism, enduring or acquiescing to their lack of power during the Ottoman era and the formation of the Republic of Iraq. It was only after 2003, when the Shi'a became full participants in the political process, with access to political parties and the agencies of the state, that Shi'a political elites emerged to move this group to action.

We turn now to the questions posed about the role of the media in post-conflict environments to understand how mobilization and patronage have affected media developments in Iraq.

Do the media facilitate a process of dialogue?

Iraq's ethno-sectarian media were established to represent positions to strong and polarized sectors, not necessarily as instruments of dialogue, yet the pluralistic media environment that emerged in the chaos of the post-war period has allowed more dialogue to occur than would otherwise.

The political movements that took part in the January and December 2005 elections mobilized as Kurdish, Shi'a and Sunni Islamist parties that maintained their own militias. These parties, as in most nearly every conflict in a deeply-divided society, were the first to organize and did well in post-conflict elections. The ethno-sectarian factions, some radical in their nature, rallied support among the populace on a platform of promising to protect each community's identity-based interests. One could characterize the dynamic as "mediated patronage." The parties demonstrated that they could provide security for their own media, highlighting the successes of their security forces against the insurgents. In this fray of mediated patronage, political parties and movements based on non-sectarian platforms did not have time to develop before the elections were held and thus could not provide this protection for their constituencies; voters thus chose parties along the ethno-sectarian divide.

Thus, rather than seeking to promote or foster dialogue, the party and militia that owned each channel promised protection from the inimical other and dominance in the political process. The parties sought to employ agenda-setting tactics to further their view on the role of Islam in the state, the nature of federalism and how to maintain security, all of which are intimately related with issues of power-sharing. Federalism would augment the Kurds and Shi'a parties' power, at the expense of Sunni and Turkmen parties, while an Islamist state would augment the power of the Shi'a Islamist parties and threaten the power of secular Kurdish parties. Thus, dialogue on these channels was hardly encouraged, and contradicting viewpoints were neglected. The channels owned by political factions also failed to foster dialogue by excluding guests from other communities on their political, social, or religious programs. For example, religious programming on Sunni channels tended to host only Arab Sunni clerics, and a political talk show on a Shi'a channel would primarily feature Arab Shi'a politicians.

Pluralism also allowed for an Iraqi media with no political affiliation and agenda to emerge; these media are trying to provide an alternative to the Islamist media owned by ethnic Kurdish and Turkmen or sectarian Shi'a and Sunni political parties. The *Al-Baghdadiyya* TV channel has ensured that guests on its program include Arab Shi'a and Sunni, Kurds, and Christians.

Do the media help to define the question of 'what is a nation'?

This post-2003 Iraq conflict emerged as an identity-based struggle that failed to form a cohesive Iraqi nation. The notion of an Iraqi nation is contested and still in flux. Arab Sunni parties tend to favor the status quo, declaring loyalty to a centralized Iraqi nation that is part of the greater Arab world and opposing plans for a future federated Iraq as a "foreign scheme" to divide the nation and leave them in a landlocked rump state. The Shi'a and Kurdish parties tend to favor a bi-national federation that distances itself from the political conflicts in the region; the Kurdish parties' vision seeks a Kurdish Regional Government administering the multi-ethnic, oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

The state-owned Iraqi Media Network constructed by the CPA under Order 66 had the aim of reinforcing a national identity, but the ability to accomplish that goal was mired in banal contracting and confused goals during the critical period of the channel's formation. The IMN, and its flagship station *Al-Iraqiyya*, stands, though weakly, for a unified country, but its alliance with the ruling party has called into question its ability to broker among candidates and parties. According to its critics, the station, reflecting its relationship with the current government (dominated by an alliance of Shi'a Islamist groups, known as the United Iraqi Alliance, and an

alliance of ethnic Kurdish groups known as the Kurdish Coalition), has an inherent Shi'a-Kurdish bias. However, the station has tried to encourage dialogue by allowing more of its content to be devoted to Arab Sunni and Turkmen guests, who use the channel to express their grievances, if not criticize the government directly. Furthermore the station has attempted to minimize the differences between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a by broadcasting live coverage of Friday sermons where religious leaders from both communities preach against the nation's sectarian divide and stress "Iraqi unity." It also holds televised meetings between Shi'a and Sunni leaders as a means of inter-sectarian dialogue.

The capacity to maintain an information hegemony with respect to defining the state was strongly affected by the existence of the abundant private media. In post-war Iraq, some private media seek to stress the unity of Islam in Iraq, and forge a concept of a unified Iraqi nation. While the Shi'a *Al-Furat* channel has a distinct Shi'a leaning, it does not focus on issues of ethnicity. Songs in between programs support peace and unity among Iraq's various ethnic and sectarian communities, and the station avoids direct references to the Shi'a as a distinct religious group, emphasizing Iraqi unity based on an inclusive Iraqi Muslim identity. The news program rarely refers to Iraq as part of the "Arab world" as do other Arab Sunni or independent Iraqi satellite channels. The *Al-Sumariyya* channel produces its own announcements that call for peace among Iraq's communities. The station also features on-the-street interviews with the Iraqi public, and interviews with program guests, who stress unity among Sunni and Shi'a. *Al-Baghdadiyya* stresses that it seeks to promote Iraqi culture and to urge Iraqis "to unite" through various advertisements and music clips.

Alongside these calls for unity, private Iraq media with ownership in the hands of competing political Islamist and ethnic factions reflect these conflicting ethno-sectarian agendas. While no party seeks to break up the Iraqi nation, each party argues that it is best suited at the helms of power, and knows what is best for Iraq. Paradoxically, while each party stresses its commitment to Iraqi unity, the ethno-sectarian media have exhibited the potential to further the gap between Iraq's communities and weaken any kind of national belonging. While none of Iraq's ethno-sectarian parties sought the state's partition during the most intense periods of the sectarian conflict, their media ultimately served the goal of enhancing the power of the parties that owned them. The result that emerged was not a national media sphere, but ethno-sectarian media 'spheres' further developing identities along sectarian lines and setting the country on a course of partition in terms of identity. Iraqis who watch only Shi'a,

Sunni or Kurdish channels may have communal loyalties to begin with, or these channels can further the formation of communal identities. Regardless, these channels do provide the visual imagery and rhetoric to make more concrete sub-national identities.

Do the media help to contribute to establishing a viable state capable of governing?

As a public service broadcaster *Al-Iraqiyya* is inclined to portray the vision that there a viable state capable of governing. As a result, the channel's programming features mostly pro-government programs that stress "optimism" in the progress being made in "reconstruction" and "security." In its depictions of violence, the station's pro-government line is represented with features on the operations of the Iraqi security forces give viewers the impression that they are taking an active role in quelling insurgent and sectarian violence. The channel also seeks to frame state violence as legitimate by featuring public service announcements calling upon the Iraqi public to volunteer information on the "terrorists."

At the same time, the channel provides a space for Iraq's citizens to interact and communicate with politicians and the government, providing an alternative for the acts of violence that are in themselves protests against the Iraqi state. Shows include live call-in segments where viewers can direct questions about political affairs to government officials and political leaders. Programs also allow representatives of the state to discuss elections, military operations and the agendas of various Iraqi political parties, with studio audience participation.

Private channels not affiliated with political parties also offer the Iraqi citizen a civic forum to address constructive criticisms to the Iraqi government through studio interviews or on-the-street interviews or viewer call-ins. For example, *Al-Sumariyya's* "Who is Responsible?" interviews Iraqi citizens on the hardships they face, and then allow the invited guest on the show, usually a government official, to discuss how they are dealing with these problems.

Because the Shi'a party that owns the *Furat* channel is dominant in the government, *Furat's* programs tends to frame violence in Iraq with a pro-government stance, just as *Al-Iraqiyya* does. Programs on the Kurdish-owned stations stress the progress of the Kurdish north, the ability of the parties to provide security, and support for Kurdish members of the government.

On the far end of the spectrum, the case of the *Al-Zawra* satellite channel, owned by Mishan Al-Jaburi, a renegade member of the Iraqi government, illustrates how unregulated, free media can pose a danger to a post-conflict state. Following Mish'an's expulsion from the National Assembly, the channel

evolved into a platform for insurgents, airing insurgent-produced videos with footage of attacks against multinational forces. When former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's death sentence was announced on November 5, 2006, *Al-Zawra* featured videos and songs supportive of the outlawed Ba'ath party, as well as exhortations for Iraqis to join groups fighting the U.S. "occupation forces" and the Iraqi government and its "sectarian gangs."

Are the media restrained from encouraging violence?

After 2003, most Iraqi Islamist parties used their media to stress unity among Iraq's communities. From 2004 – 2007, and particularly following the February 2006 bombing of the revered Shi'a Al-'Askariyya shrine in the city of Samarra, however, when inter-communal violence between Shi'a and Sunni was at its highest, the various sectarian and ethnic factions used their media outlets to legitimize the violence and portray their respective groups as victims, encouraging both Shi'a and Sunni to defend themselves in the ensuing sectarian conflict.

Shi'a channels sought to inflame tensions by blaming Sunni Muslims for targeting their communities. (This discourse does not target Iraq's Sunni population per se, but rather attacks the foreign Arab fighters who came to Iraq who subscribe to the Wahhabi or Salafist ideologies, and those Iraqis who cooperate with them). The Shi'a channels provided a visual discourse that stressed notions of a past marred by "victimization," and of a community "oppressed" since the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Iraqi state. Such suffering culminated under Saddam Hussein's rule. Victimization was also expressed after suicide attacks on the Shi'a religious Ashura processions and after attacks on Shi'a shrines. Shi'a channels have called upon the Shi'a to have faith in the security forces (most of whom are Shi'a) to restore stability. Furthermore, the Shi'a media have expressed a sense of abandonment by the predominantly Sunni Arab world. *Al-Furat* TV, owned by the largest Shi'a party, covers inter-sectarian violence against Iraqi Shi'a Muslims, although the station does not advocate revenge but rather patience and obedience to those Shi'a leaders who have called for restraint. Another example is the show "Deported in The Homeland," which profiles internally-displaced families (most of whom are Shi'a, evidenced by the last names of those interviews and the phrases used) who have relocated due to sectarian violence.

On the other side, the Arab Sunni discourse focuses on a notion of "disempowerment" wurse also expresses a sense of "victimization" at the hands of U.S. "occupying forces" and the "militias," a euphemism for Shi'a death squads that operate privately or within the Iraqi security forces. For example, Sunni Islamist channels highlighted, if not glorified, insurgent attacks against U.S. forces (this practice ended after the parties entered into an alliance with the Iraqi government). A dominant frame

on *Al-Baghdad* is “resistance” to the U.S military forces, referred to as “occupation forces.” This view of violence in Iraq mirrors the Arab Sunni Accord Front’s. Unlike *Al-Iraqiyya* or *Al-Furat*, this station refers to insurgents as “armed men” rather than “terrorists.” It did not incite violence, but did legitimize non-state violence.

While channels like *Al-Zawra* directly incited violence, and provided a channel for insurgents to air their broadcasts, channels with no political affiliation have refused to air any material that incites ethnic or sectarian divisions. For example, *Al-Sumariyya*, which claims non-affiliation with any sectarian, ethnic or political party, does not carry live statements or press conferences of any Iraqi politicians, indicating the station’s effort to maintain its neutrality. *Al-Diyar* rarely shows live footage of the aftermath of insurgent attacks; its news programs usually focus on domestic news, with an emphasis on social affairs rather than violence.

Following the violence that ensued after the 2006 bombing of the Al-’Askariyya shrine, the various sectarian and ethnic media outlets eventually called for restraint among Iraq’s communities, and tensions further de-escalated by 2007 with the closure of *Al-Zawra*.

Conclusions

This has been a study in contrasts in terms of control of information, stability, nation-building and maturation of political institutions. What we think is clear, however, is that a reformulated grid of press functions needs to be defined in post-conflict contexts. It is not enough to say that the media should serve the roles established in the ideal of watchdog, agenda-setter and gate-keeper. But in order to understand these adjusted or altered roles, one must examine the players affecting the media market and their goals. Ethiopia and Iraq present two very different, examples of the role the media can have in the nature of post-conflict governance, with the media in each case either reflecting or exacerbating the divisions and coalitions of elites or other groups.

By looking at select examples of these cases through the framework presented in the paper, it becomes evident that capacity to govern, stability, and the nation-building project can be anterior or even superior to the media’s role in promoting democracy or good governance. Understanding the media’s potential for encouraging the development of a stable state is a key part of promoting peace. And while the media reflect the political processes—including that of reconciliation and the development of a government (either coalition or minority led)—they also have a role in these processes. While it can be useful to suggest, as the normative governance agenda does, that journalists should be ‘watchdogs’ of the government, focusing on that role leaves little room for understanding

the complex ways in which journalists see their work. Journalists often have nuanced roles in the nation and state-building exercise which cannot be easily divorced from the political realities.

In both Ethiopia and Iraq, it is evident how quickly after a conflict the media can both reflect and negotiate the process of dialogue and power-sharing. For a 'free media' system to be an effective part of the nation-building project, government involvement is required. The leadership has a responsibility to participate in this 'elite sphere' by responding to criticisms and debates. If it fails to do so, as has been the case in Ethiopia, the media can contribute little to reconciliation and polarization, which both reflects and is part of the political process, has little chance of being mitigated. We do not argue that polarization is necessarily part of the post-conflict period, but circumstances frequently mean that it will be, and any theory of post-conflict environments must accommodate that likelihood.

This paper has dealt with states that deploy language of democratic aspirations, but are not comfortably capsulized as "democratic," nor at peace. Both are engaged in a continued nation-building process. Each is a messy, nonlinear project. If Ethiopia offers any indication, the process of conflict and conflict resolution in Iraq will continue for years; evidence of a "free press" is only a sign, and not necessarily a convincing one, for those wishing it on a "democratic" trajectory. Examples from elsewhere do provide some suggested indications of how to mitigate the chances that a polarized media system exacerbates the potential for instability and violence. In each case the structure of the media must be seen in relationship to the political process—the consolidation of power, reconciliation, power sharing, the relationship between present, future and past regimes and their efforts at state-building and extending power.

All this must be kept in mind in considering what, if any, relationship might exist between the media and a governance agenda. The nature of the crisis and the complexity of the factors at play indicate why polarized media or government control are often the outcome in these contexts, as well as why prevention of violence, the framing of the state and the contribution to dialogue and conflict resolution are so significant in describing the way the media function.

Policies should also recognize this reality and work to understand the polarization in the broader processes of nation-building, what opportunities can be taken from the situation and how best all actors should engage in the circumstances. The emerging state can have a strong role in defining the frame of the nation, but polarization and segmentation may make that problematic. We have emphasized the "blur" that characterizes pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict resolution. One way of increasing the opportunities that may be available to engage with the polarized media is to deepen an understanding

of how the government and parties are approaching the information sphere based on their prior experiences of communication, persuasion and political ideologies. It is usually only the normative governance agenda that assumes a break and fresh start post-conflict; the reality for the actors on the ground is typically more complex and bears the burden of continuity.

External goals are to achieve governments that can govern—fairly, and with legitimacy, progress toward democratic values, and an agenda that leads to just outcomes in economic and social progress. The paper hopes to contribute to understanding this process, starting by understanding contexts where the goals, to varying degrees, seem remote.

¹ Nancy Fraser. 2008. 'Shifting Landscapes of Political Claims Making.' Presented at an April 2008 workshop on "1989 and Beyond: the Future of Democracy" at the New School, New York.

² James Putzel and Joost van der Zwan. 2006. Why Templates for Media Development do not Work in Crisis States. LSE: Crisis States Research Centre. [Available at http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/docs/conference_lse05_crisisstates_report.pdf].

³ Donald G. Ellis. 2006. *Transforming Conflict: Communication and Ethnopolitical Conflict*. New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 66-7.

⁴ Robin M. Williams Jr. 2003. *The Wars Within: Peoples and States in Conflict*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 151.

⁵ Monique Alexis & Ines Mpambara, 2003. *IMS Assessment Mission: The Rwanda Media Experience from the Genocide* Int'l Media Support Report.

⁶ The TPLF fought against Mengistu with the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF).

⁷ Interview: Girma Beshah

⁸ The Commission to Organize the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE)

⁹ During Mairegu's time as editor-in-chief of *Tobiya* he was also charged with murder but the charge was downgraded to incitement. This experience encouraged him to take time off from the paper and work as an information officer at the European Union. He later began teaching in the Department of Journalism at Unity College and remained involved with the newspaper, helping to start and write for *Lisane Hezeb*. Interview: Mairegu Bezabih.

¹⁰ Interview: Ahmed Hassan

¹¹ Interview: Derbew Temesgen.

¹² 13 January 1994, Editorial, *Tobiya* (as quoted on 20 January 1994 in *Press Digest*, p.4)

¹³ For example, an article on 21 July 1994 argued "there is a need for a spirit of forgiveness which is a prime requirement for reconciliation and reconstruction. In Ethiopia, the government is actively advancing enmity between the peoples of Ethiopia through the media and has also been living in the past in the last three-and-a-half years. Such dishonest and politically dangerous ways are pursued in order to monopolize power. This country's future rests not on any one dominant group but on every Ethiopian (as quoted on 25 July 1994 in *Seven Days Update*, p. 6)

¹⁴ In an article a reporter from *Tobiya* argued "the crimes of the past are to be exposed soon and the criminals to be sentenced in public. Yet, there is no proof that the very same crimes are not being

repeated today. Human rights organizations repeatedly lament of the growing violation of democratic and human rights indicating that the country is moving from one era of darkness to another (as quoted in *Seven Days Update*, 28 November 1994, p.6)

¹⁵ 24 February 1986 (EC), Editorial, "A serious threat faces the country more than ever," *Tobiya*, p.2

¹⁶ Christopher Clapham. 2006. "Ethiopian Development: the Politics of Emulation." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* (1): 137 – 150.

¹⁷The Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute (EMMTI), which was established in 1996 under the Ministry of Information, has been the central institution for training journalists but has consistently restricted its students to those of the government media.

¹⁸ An editorial on August 13, 2003 in *Lisane Hezeb*, p. 2 noted that "the programmes are actually reinforcing people's hatred towards this media".

¹⁹ Bereket is quoted as saying "The alternative was strife between the different nationalities of Ethiopia which might have made the Rwandan genocide look like child's play." Martin Plaut, 23 June 2005, "High Stakes in Ethiopia Standoff." Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4122350.stm>

²⁰ Christopher Clapham. 2005. Comments on the Political Crisis in Ethiopia." *Ethiomeia.com*, November 14. Available at: http://www.ethiomeia.com/fastpress/clapham_on_ethiopian_crisis.html

²¹ For a general discussion on ethnic federalism in Ethiopia see David Turton (ed). 2006. *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: James Currey.

²² 14 April 2005, Editorial, *Lisane Hezeb*, p.2. Former US President Jimmy Carter also noted in his election trip report that "The EPRDF's likening the opposition to Rwanda's interhamwe is as, or more, regrettable as are some opposition slurs against the Tigrayans in the ruling party". 19 May 2005, "Ethiopia Elections: Jimmy Carter Trip Report Postelection Statement". Available at: <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc2097.html>

²³ Interview: Anonymous.

²⁴ Stanhope Centre, Iraq Media Developments Newsletter, Issue 26, "NCCM Code and Discussion." Available at <http://www.stanhopecentre.org/research/26.shtml#1>. Also see the original CPA documents at http://www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations/20040320_CPAORD65.pdf and http://www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations/20040320_CPAORD66.pdf

²⁵ An important study in this subject in the Balkans is Izabella Karlowicz's "The Difficult Birth of the Fourth Estate: Media Development and Democracy Assistance in Post-Conflict Balkans," in Sukosd,

Miklos and Peter Bajomi-Lazar (eds.). 2003. *Reinventing Media: Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Center for Policy Studies).

²⁶ Mark Frohardt and Jonathan Temin. 2003. *Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies*. Washington DC: United States of Institute of Peace; Yll Bajraktari and Emily Hsu. 2007. *Developing Media in Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*. Washington DC: United States of Institute of Peace.

²⁷ Izabella Karlowicz. 2003. 'The difficult birth of the fourth estate: media development and democracy assistance in post-conflict Balkans.' In Miklos Sukosd and Peter Bajomi-Lazar (eds.) *Reinventing Media: Media Policy Reform In East-Central Europe*, eds. Budapest: Central European University Center for Policy Studies.127.

²⁸ J. Craig Jenkins and Esther E. Gottlieb. 2007. *Identity Conflicts: Can Violence be Regulated?* New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1; James. M. Jasper and Jeff Goodwin. 1999. 'Trouble in paradigms.' *Sociological Forum* 14(1): 107-125, 117; Ellis 2006, 66-7; and Williams. 2003, 151.

²⁹ Jenkins and Gottlieb, 1.

³⁰ Ibid, 11.

³¹ Williams, 149.