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PAUL MART JEYAND J. MATANGCAS

EXPLORING CONFLICT-SENSITIVE JOURNALISM EXPERIENCES IN DAVAO CITY, PHILIPPINES: A HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCES APPROACH

Thesis Adviser:

SERLIE B. JAMIAS, Ph.D.
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies

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SERLIE B. JAMIAS, Ph.D. _____
Chair, Thesis Committee

JEAN A. SALUDADEZ, Ph.D. _____
Member, Thesis Committee

ALEXANDER G. FLOR, Ph.D. _____
Member, Thesis Committee

DIEGO S. MARANAN, Ph.D.
Dean
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies

11 September 2023

Biographical Sketch

Paul Mart Jeyand J. Matangcas (he/him) is a freelance journalist and early-career educator based in Davao Oriental, Philippines. He has produced multi-platform content for various media outlets and is interested in reporting about the environment, labor migration, and indigenous narratives. His research interests revolve around the intersections of marginality and critical journalism and media studies. Paul has been trained in media and communications in Ireland, Kenya, and Austria.

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I extend my gratitude to a handful of people from different aspects of my life who have been the source of inspiration in everything that I do:

To my family, the reason for all of this, I love you always. To my friends, for amplifying my voice while keeping me in check every step of the way. I sleep in bed comfortably at night knowing that I am loved.

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The pandemic took away a huge portion of my life. Making it this far in graduate school is my way of reclaiming it.

Lagi't-lagi para sa bayan!

Dedication

To all journalists, past and present, who continue to hold the line

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of journalists from Davao City, Philippines in practicing Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (CSJ), which emphasizes the important elements of conventional reporting and introduces conflict analysis to equip journalists of their capacity to contribute to conflict resolution without sacrificing the standards of journalistic professionalism. Guided by Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy of influences model, I utilized five levels of analysis—individual, routines, institutional, organizational, and ideological—to understand the journalists' narratives. I described their transition from their academic training to their professional career and their specific practices related to effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding. In-depth interviews elicited three prevalent themes anchored on their experiences: disconnection, competition, and unfamiliarity. There is a disconnect in academic training and professional practice which not only reinforces the theory-practice gap, but also illustrates the glaring reality between the often-idealistic expectations developed in journalism education and the "real world" issues that the press experience on the ground. There is also the prevalence of intrinsic and extrinsic competing ideals in terms of individual embodied practices versus the norms imposed within media organizations that blur the lines of what constitutes conflict sensitive reporting. CSJ is not practiced directly and explicitly but rather imbued within the personal inclinations of the journalists to what constitutes as right for them. Furthermore, in the era of rapid technological advancement and media ubiquity, there is a need to enact sustained efforts to demystify, streamline, and future proof CSJ especially since journalists face precarious conditions such as violence in their line of work.

Keywords: *conflict reporting, peacebuilding, practices, qualitative, hierarchy of influences*

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Journalism is a diverse cultural practice entrenched within a complex social landscape (Carlson, 2015) that plays a key role in combating corruption (Hamada, 2020) and serving as a means of democratic empowerment (Ettema, 2007). According to Norris (2006), the state of a free press in any country is an indicator of good governance and a thriving democratization process. However, reportage done by mass media following the traditional journalistic framework of objectivity is not without criticism. Hampton (2008) posited that objectivity has drawn flak for "reaffirming the existing power arrangements in society (as not all perspectives are represented by an 'authority') and for bearing an uneasy relationship to the 'truth,' since in the real world 'both sides' are not always equally truthful" (p. 477).

Traditional journalism has also been criticized in the way it presents multifaceted and dynamic crises, particularly in its tendency towards oversimplification (Koop, 2018). This issue stemmed from the observation that there are several problems that cannot simply be reported without a thorough analysis of their historical, cultural, and social underpinnings. Socio-cultural issues, involving violence for example, do not only present themselves in physically quantifiable phenomena but are also embedded in the structural fabric of society (Bufacchi, 2005).

This is quite a deplorable state since according to Nishimura (2020), news media

can significantly raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Khairil et al. (2017) posited that mass media play an essential role in attaining the SDGs, especially Goal 16, which focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions. There has also been a growing discussion among communication scholars around the world about the role media should play in conflict resolution as well as the type of journalism that would best address democratic concerns (Lohner et al, 2019).

Hence, Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (hereafter CSJ) “has been developed to respond to the media’s strong and often negative influence on conflict dynamics through its power to shape public opinion and peoples’ decision making.” (Rama et al., 2018, p. 7). CSJ gained prominence in the early 2000s (Howard, 2004), which emerged to reinforce the indispensable role of journalism in reporting conflict (Pragers & Hameleers, 2021) while addressing the limitations of the traditional framework. Although its earlier iterations may have emerged as early as the 1980s as a response to the need for responsible media in Europe (Ward, 2003). According to Doerner (2018, p. 8), “CSJ is a constructive paradigm that creates space for the peaceful transformation of violent conflict instead of contributing to its escalation.”

Moreover, various global, national, and local issues have proven to be more complex than what traditional forms of journalism can handle. CSJ provides an alternative wherein facts are not simplified but rather, the complexities in a language that can be understood by many are explored (Rama et al., 2018).

According to Howard (2015), CSJ emphasizes important elements of conventional reporting and introduces rudimentary conflict analysis to equip journalists of their capacity to contribute to conflict resolution without sacrificing the standards of

journalistic professionalism. In the traditional conventions of Western journalism, the status quo has limited journalists to mere reporters of the bare facts of an issue or to report things as they are (Tandoc, 2016). Some even claim that whatever happens after a story is reported is beyond the role of a journalist. However, CSJ rejects this perspective. So, the question then is, who is a conflict-sensitive journalist?

A conflict-sensitive journalist analyzes the root of conflict and finds ways to resolve it by finding new voices and perspectives on an issue and looking at all sides of the matter. They do not choose sides but are actively engaged in conflict resolution (Kenya, 2014).

CSJ in Mindanao, Philippines

The Philippines holds one of the longest-standing democracies in Asia, but it remains to be one of the least stable in the global South due to the pervasive conflicts that exist between and among the ruling elites and the oppressed (Regilme, 2016). This can also be attributed to gender-based violence, state-sponsored killings, and violent extremism (Herbert, 2019; Schiavo-Campo & Judd, 2005). For Herbert (2019), conflict is driven by a plethora of factors such as poverty, weak governance, displacement from ancestral domains, and an inefficient peace process. Hence, viewing issues from the objective lens of traditional journalism is inefficient especially when the context is systemic, and the information cannot be relegated to the mere 5Ws (what, when, where, why, who) and 1H (how) structure.

Throughout the tumultuous history of journalism in the Philippines, journalists have played an essential role in providing information and contributing to the spark of

many revolutions. Nevertheless, as the years progressed and the notions imbued within Traditional Journalism became insufficient in appropriately reporting conflict and violence, the rise of Peace Journalism became a palatable alternative. However, one of the criticisms drawn from Peace Journalism is its inability to reconcile its advocacy of promoting peace while still maintaining the principle of objectivity in journalism. Hence, the emergence of CSJ.

CSJ as an independent body of knowledge has become more relevant than ever with the alarming rate of extrajudicial killings, human rights abuses, political instability, and violence reported (and experienced) by journalists globally. Although there has been a growing interest on CSJ around the world, there is still a lack of available literature in thoroughly moving towards a holistic framework that led Betz (2011) to pose the question:

> "It would seem that some attention must be paid to how CSJ is used, implemented and shared, not only regarding the context but also how the practice of CSJ may be affected by a variety of factors including technology, citizen reporting, the people factor and safety. How do we take these things into consideration when implementing CSJ activities or is this too ambitious?" (p. 9).

While it has been established that journalists are vital players in conflict resolution and influencing public perception (Prager & Hameleers, 2021), there is still an expansive unexplored terrain on viewing CSJ beyond just a theoretical concept taught in schools or explicated in teaching guides. Much theorizing has been done on CSJ but an approach that focuses on its empirical, practical, and applied perspective is lacking (and very much needed). I argue that with the current political climate of the Philippines,

there is a need to report complex issues from a conflict-sensitive lens, thus emphasizing the need for CSJ.

In 2013, the Forum Civil Peace Service (forumZFD), Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Regional Office XI, Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON), and Media Educators of Mindanao, Inc. (MEM) explored how CSJ can be mainstreamed in academia. This coalition aimed to integrate this framework within several higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Davao region that offer communication programs (e.g Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication). These HEIs include leading institutions in Davao City such as Ateneo de Davao University (AdDU), Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC), and University of Mindanao – Main (UM).

Since then, several workshops, training programs, and a teaching guide have been developed to strengthen the media's capacity to report about conflict and support teachers in capacitating aspiring media practitioners with theory and skills for reliable reporting.

Statement of the Problem

In the years after CSJ or conflict-sensitive reporting (Howard, 2015) was streamlined and introduced in Davao City in Mindanao, Philippines, a multitude of developments in media, journalism, and societal contexts have emerged, yet research on the discipline remains relatively unexplored. Moreover, there have been no studies done on the experiences of students who have been equipped with the foundational tenets of CSJ in their transition from academia to professional practice. Extracted from data based on the extant qualitative methodological literature and in consonance with

Howard's (2014) description that CSJ is "beyond convention but short of advocacy," I contend that CSJ is grounded on two objectives: (1) effective conflict reporting and (2) peacebuilding. But does this translate on the ground and beyond the confines of the classroom? And if yes, how?

Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the experiences of journalists in practicing CSJ in Davao City, Philippines. This is the major question of this study. I expand the discourse by interrogating, based on their personal perspectives, how (or if) CSJ is related to effective conflict reporting and to peacebuilding. These journalists anchored their discursive constructions on their personal experiences on reporting issues in Mindanao and on their formal educational training on CSJ.

Specifically, I sought to address the following research questions:

1. What are the narratives of journalists in their transition from their academic training on CSJ to their professional practice?
2. How do they feel about practicing CSJ in relation to effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding?

Significance of the Study

As Philippine journalists grapple with the challenges and developments in their profession, it is necessary to explore the narratives of those who operate within the Mindanao setting. Hence, this study aims to fill in the dearth of available knowledge when it comes to situating CSJ in the Philippines. This study addressed this gap by providing insights necessary for further research, which would be relevant to researchers in various allied fields such as conflict and peace studies, development

communication, and media studies. Empirically, the qualitative data obtained from the interviews contribute to the existing literature on the growing field of journalism studies and serve as a starting point for aspiring (and current) practitioners in navigating their own journalistic roles especially at a time where democracies are threatened, and disinformation is prevalent (Rajan, 2020). From a practical perspective, the findings of the study may be utilized by CSJ practitioners and academics to recalibrate their strategies in effectively advocating for CSJ in academia and the profession. It can also be used to improve or develop existing curricula or academic materials.

Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to the lack of empirical scholarship on CSJ by exploring the narratives of journalists in Davao City, Philippines. However, it also has limitations which should be considered. As this is a preliminary exploration into the subject matter, I focused on describing journalistic experiences within the status quo instead of providing an evaluation or assessment of the effectiveness of CSJ. This also means that this study is not meant to be representative of practicing journalists in the Philippines. Furthermore, due to the issues in scouting for individuals who were willing to participate, the selected sample all graduated from one higher education institution.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Power of Media

Media incorporate essential channels and platforms such as newspapers, television, radio, and digital media as an imperative to further the journalism profession. In journalism, different types of information are disseminated (Rama et al., 2018). Empirical evidence foregrounded on the power of media to generate and mold public opinion has been extensively studied by many scholars as reinforced by Eide (2007) who claimed that the power of journalism is influential in the exercise of power and democracy in the modern world. A study by Pulido et al. (2021) revealed that in the context of gender-based violence, excellent journalistic practice has the capacity to contribute to social impact. Meanwhile, Simons et al. (2017) argued that the issue of the role of journalism is becoming increasingly urgent because of the rapid changes engulfing the news media caused by technological advances and other factors.

For Rama et al. (2018, p. 11), the goal of media is to “facilitate peoples’ understanding of issues relevant to their lives so they can participate in their community and the country as a whole.” The massive power of media and journalism as a force of liberation and people power is evident in many democracies around the world.

The Philippines is an interesting case study on this matter:

Rosario-Braid & Tuazon (1999) extensively detailed how the Spanish (1521-1898), American (1898-1946), and Japanese (1941-1945) colonial eras suppressed the freedom of Filipinos from expressing their dissent and condemnation on the widespread

injustices prevalent during those times. However, the massive censorship during the succession of the colonial eras did not stop many revolutionaries from finding alternative forms of media such as underground papers, literature, music, and plays to express their disdain on the oppressive measures subjected to them by foreign rule despite the risk of persecution (de Jesus, 2007). Additionally, at the onset of the declaration of the 1972 Martial Law, the state of journalism in the country faced unprecedented setbacks (Astorga, 2021).

As a response to the government's propaganda and erasure of injustices during Martial Law, several journalists in the 1970s produced critical content and xerox reprints from the international press, but since the government predominantly controlled mass media, these forms of "alternative media" did little to no impact (de Jesus, 2007). During the 1980s, the era of the alternative press reemerged. The rise of several publications signaled the renewed strength of journalism in the country and the weakening, and eventual downfall, of the stronghold of the Marcoses, which the EDSA Revolution further exacerbated (Rosario-Braid & Tuazon, 1999).

However, Rosario-Braid and Tuazon (1999, p. 291) noted that decades after Martial Law, the revolutionary and politically oriented mass media would instead choose to merely become "a chronicler of events, a government watchdog, and an entertainment channel."

Conflict, Violence, and Traditional Reporting

Conflict and violence are prominent terms commonly used in journalism and communication studies. Although they are often used interchangeably, they are not

synonymous with one another. Conflict is a process where two parties undermine each other due to their incompatible goals (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2006). For Howard (2004, p. 6), it is a phenomenon "where two or more individuals or groups try to pursue goals or ambitions which they believe they cannot share." He also asserts that,

> "Not all conflict is violent. Conflict is normal when there is change. Some people want change, but others disagree. If their disagreement or their conflict is managed peacefully, it can be a positive process. But when conflict is not managed properly, it becomes violent. In violent conflict, people fear for their safety and survival. When we say conflict, we are usually referring to violent conflict" (p. 6).

On the other hand, violence is a strategy that uses force to resolve a conflict. Hence, it is the product of a conscious choice. Galtung (1969) identified three forms of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. Direct violence refers to the physical manifestation of hurting another entity; this is the violence that journalists typically report. Structural violence pertains to how social structures such as unequal power relations harm marginalized communities. Meanwhile, cultural violence refers to the parts of culture "that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1990, p. 291).

In the traditional journalistic practice, the reportage of conflict and violence is grounded on the principle of objectivity. Many journalistic institutions abide by a code of ethics which adheres to news values grounded on the principles of impartiality and social responsibility (Maras, 2013). Bednarek and Caple (2007) underscored that news values define newsworthiness. These news values are timeliness, proximity, prominence, oddity, impact, and conflict (George Mason University, n.d).

According to Ward (2019), objectivity rests on the notion that journalists should tread in neutrality and become mere chroniclers of facts without formulating opinions or interpretations. Subsequently, objectivity can be attained through purity and passivity (Meyer, 1991). According to Kim (2017, p. 3), passivity in journalism "refers to the idea that it must only serve to deliver news and not create it" and purity is "the idea that journalists must not interfere with the truth and social events, and only observe the world without any opinion."

Moreover, framing plays a key role in conflict reportage. Framing refers to the presentation of issues or events which constructs reality in a meaningful but selective way (von Sikorski & Matthes, 2020). In traditional journalism, the framing of conflict is almost always from the perspective of two opposing entities: the victim and the perpetrator. It does not offer contextualization on the historical, systemic, or cultural structures that may have caused the conflict in the first place. Many scholars have noted that when political topics are presented in the news, dualistic terms that highlight drama and conflict are often used (Jameson & Entman, 2004) which leads me to my argument that traditional journalism fails to effectively report conflict. This is further supported by existing scholarship which have noted the various limitations of traditional journalism, most especially on the concepts of neutrality, impartiality, and bias. For Hanitzsch (2019, p. 214), approaching the concept of journalism "without any sort of ethnocentric bias is an epistemological impossibility." Subsequently, Lohner et al. (2019) pointed out that even though objectivity in journalism and the watchdog role has widespread patronage among many journalists, there are tensions between these

norms. Arao (2020) underscores that journalism is inherently critical, and that neutrality is a myth. He explains,

> "Stories cannot be approached neutrally as doing so reduces a journalist to a mere fence-sitter. There is no such thing as neutral observation as it results in a false sense of balance and pluralism. Journalism by its very nature takes a stand against any wrongdoing." (para 6)

The link between the power of media and the limitations of the traditional journalistic framework led many scholars to find an alternative way of reporting societal issues. It is grounded on the intention that "the choices journalists make while covering conflicts tend inescapably either to expand or contract the space available for society at large to imagine and work towards peaceful outcomes to conflicts" (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2006, p.21).

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding, as defined by Lambourne (2000), are strategies created to promote secure and lasting peace where basic human needs are achieved, and violent conflicts do not occur. If we contextualize this from a journalistic perspective, we arrive at the concept of Peace Journalism.

Johan Galtung pioneered Peace Journalism "to criticize the preference given by mainstream journalism around the world to war, violence and propaganda, to causes promoted by elites and establishments and to facile and polarized victory/defeat reality constructions" (Shinar, 2009, p. 451). Moreover, Galtung named two opposing frames for reporting news on war and conflict: peace and war journalism. War journalists report

conflict in a way that perpetuates opposition and violence, while peace journalists present the root of an issue and actively find solutions to them (Gouse, 2019).

Under Peace Journalism, Galtung challenged journalists to be active advocates for peace because he observed that media significantly contribute to the escalation of the conflict by how journalists report or lean toward war journalism. His observations were further supported by a content analysis by Shinar (2009) which revealed that journalists demonstrated an expected tendency to lean towards War Journalism.

Many scholars heavily regarded the dualism between Peace and War Journalism as an influential framework. There is abundant literature utilizing Galtung's Peace and War Journalism framework in the conduct of critical discourse and content analyses in news publications globally. In the study titled “Peace or War Journalism: Case Study of the Balochistan Conflict in Pakistan", the Balochistan/Pakistan conflict was situated under the premise of peace journalism. It examined the extent of Peace Journalism in traditional and social media using a content analysis of 100 articles drawn from four Pakistani newspapers and 1,000 tweets from various Twitter users. The study utilized the models derived from Galtung and built upon by Lynch and McGoldrick, reflecting the prominent display of Peace Journalism in the working timeframe from various sources (Prakash, 2013).

Another study titled “War or Peace Journalism? Asian Newspaper Coverage of Conflicts” examined the extent to which four Asian regional conflicts in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines are framed as War Journalism or Peace Journalism based on Johan Galtung's classification. It analyzed the content of 1,338

stories from 10 newspapers and revealed that the news coverage of these conflicts is dominated by a War Journalism frame (Lee & Maslog, 2005).

In the exploratory study “Peace Journalism in the Pacific: New Zealand news coverage of the conflict in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and West Papua", a content analysis was conducted on the media coverage of Radio New Zealand's Morning Report (MR) and the New Zealand Herald (NZH). The study utilized the peace journalism framework and sought to identify how information about the conflict is presented to the New Zealand population. The results revealed that War Journalism was the predominant frame found in the news coverage of conflict (Wilson, 2014).

Due to the abundance of research on peace journalism, a study by Gouse et al. (2019) looked at papers published in peer-reviewed journals that investigate the attributes of peace and war as they are conceptualized by scholars analyzing news content within the peace journalism context. The results suggest that most peace journalism studies examine media surrounding direct violence as it is occurring and assess it most often by using the war/peace indicator of elite-oriented versus people-oriented. According to Prager and Hameleers (2021), Peace Journalism is considered a suitable method of handling conflict but can often become impracticable.

The critique against Peace Journalism stemmed from its failure to consider the dynamics of news production, and it supports an “unwelcome departure from objectivity and towards a journalism of attachment” (Hackett, 2006, p. 2 as cited in Barajas, 2016). Moreover, Peace Journalism drew criticism from many practicing journalists because for them, their role was to be objective and to simply report facts without promoting any agenda and that “the problem with covering conflict is that journalists were simply not

covering them responsibly, in large part because they did not understand conflict" (Betz, 2011, p.3). This led to the development of Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (CSJ).

The Emergence of Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

Jake Lynch picked up the work done on Peace Journalism by Galtung and explored how journalists could use conflict analysis to investigate conflicts while still retaining the basic concept of reporting proposed by Galtung (Koop, 2018). CSJ has been loosely used in Peace Journalism studies, with many people often interchanging the terms until it was turned into a prominent journalism concept by Ross Howard.

CSJ builds on the techniques of Galtung and Lynch but underscores the role of journalism as a contributing factor for peace. He highlights the role of journalists and the media both as catalysts of communication and a provider of a broad platform (Koop, 2018). According to Howard (2004), a practitioner of CSJ "applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved" (p.15). Peace Journalism and CSJ are grounded on similar concepts and techniques. However, Rama et al. (2018) argue that,

> "The intention of CSJ is not the resolution of the conflicts its practitioners cover…Neither is it a form of journalism that advocate intentions such as Justice, Peace, Human Rights, and Integrity of Creations. Its aim is to facilitate understanding, engagement, and action among society's real problem-solvers: the people and its many segments" (p. 9).

In 2003, Ross Howard wrote the CSJ Handbook published by International Media Support (IMS) and Institute for Media, Policy, and Civil Society (IMPACS) to enable

journalists to apply conflict resolution tools in their work. The handbook presented a theoretical and practical guide in efficiently dealing with and reporting conflict (Betz, 2011). Years later, IMS published a Special Edition of this handbook for Kenya (2014), which was built upon the previous work of Howard as well as adapted from the scholarly contributions of McGoldrick & Lynch (2006). I have extracted relevant parts of the handbook for this study to provide a concise elucidation of the fundamentals of CSJ, especially for those who are not well-versed on the topic. I created Table 1 showing examples provided in the handbook (Kenya, 2014) between traditional or conventional Western reporting and CSJ, as well as Table 2 showing the difference between the two news reports.

Table 1

Comparison between traditional and conflict-sensitive reporting

Traditional Reporting	Conflict-Sensitive Reporting
Local Government minister, Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, is said to be reluctant to let go of his docket. Sources told the Standard that at least three Cabinet colleagues tried in vain to convince him at the weekend to take another ministry. The ministry is one of those PNU was expected to relinquish to ODM. Uhuru has also been mentioned as one of the leaders eyeing the Deputy Prime Minister's slot. A source said: "Prof Saitoti, Ms Martha Karua and Mr. Kiraitu Murungi met Uhuru to convince him to accept the changes as agreed on by the two principals. But he	Local Government minister, Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, has denied that he is unwilling to give up his portfolio, which is one of those ministries PNU was expected to relinquish to ODM. "I serve at the pleasure of the President. How can I refuse to give up my post?", he said in an interview. "The president can remove me at any time." Mr. Kenyatta was reacting to reports that three Cabinet colleagues had tried in vain to convince him at the weekend to take another ministry. He has also been mentioned as one of the leaders eyeing the Deputy Prime Minister's slot. Mr. Toboa Jana, a PNU

was reluctant and threatened to lead his party out of the coalition." The sources said Uhuru, who is also the Gatundu South MP, won- dered why he was being pushed. On Sunday, he was among Cabinet ministers at Harambee House, where talks between President Kibaki and Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Raila Odinga, again failed to break the deadlock over the new Cabinet line up....	insider, told "The Standard" that Prof George Saitoti, Ms Martha Karua and Mr. Kiraitu Murungi had met Mr. Kenyatta to convince him to accept the changes as agreed on by the two principals. "But he was reluctant and threatened to lead his party out of the coalition," Mr. Jana said. He said Mr. Kenyatta, who is also the Gatundu South MP, won- dered why he was being pushed. On Sunday, Mr. Kenyatta was among the Cabinet ministers at Harambee House, where talks between President Kibaki and Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Raila Odinga, again failed to break the dead-lock over the new Cabinet line up....

Note: Adapted from the Kenya Handbook (2004)

Table 2

Difference between traditional and conflict-sensitive reporting

Traditional Reporting	Conflict-Sensitive Reporting
The news is full of blame and accusations, without giving the other side of the story.	The news begins with a denial rather than the charge because the charge is weak as it is sourced from a third party. It gives Mr. Kenyatta an opportunity to speak his mind on the issue.
It uses unnamed sources in a story that is controversial, without giving reasons why the sources sought anonymity.	It seeks to name the sources. If the sources cannot be named a plausible reason must be given.
It does not give Mr. Kenyatta an opportunity to respond to the accusations. It paints him as a hardliner.	Using anonymous sources is only justified when there is no other way of getting an important story and when the reporter is satisfied that the unnamed source is credible or genuine and has legitimate fears for not wanting to disclose his identity.

Note: Adapted from the Kenya Handbook (2004)

Furthermore, according to the Kenya (2014) handbook,

> "If we only report the bare facts about violent conflict, citizens will only understand the conflict in those terms. But if we search for news beyond the bare facts, and present more information to citizens, including possible solutions, they may see the conflict in different terms." (p. 26).

In the study by Lohner et. al. (2019), 100 local journalists from Egypt, Kenya, Serbia, and South Africa were interviewed to refine and contextualize the normative concept of CSJ with respect to the coverage of democratization conflicts. Findings reveal that CSJ is not only a theoretical and normative model but a principle guiding the practices of the interviewed journalists. While the respondents showed an inclination to Western or conventional forms of journalism, these roles are commonly perceived to be inadequate in the context of conflict resolution. Moreover, the interviews revealed that these journalists have shown a commitment to balanced and conflict-sensitive reporting which can be achieved through impartiality and responsible word choice, among others.

Years after the CSJ handbook was published, several countries worldwide have adapted the framework with context-specific content that coincides with the needs of each locality, including the "Conflict-Sensitive Journalism Teaching Guide: Philosophy and Practice" (2018) in the Philippines.

Analytical Framework of the Study

This study is guided by the hierarchy of influences model developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), which highlights "the multiple forces that simultaneously impinge on the media and suggest how influence at one level may interact with that at another" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 1). It is a "theoretical framework for analyzing

media based on levels of analysis, which help classify influences operating both separately and in conjunction with each other." (Reese, 2001, p. 178).

To do this, the model uses factors at five levels of analysis that shape media content. Reese and Shoemaker (2016) categorize these levels as individual characteristics of specific news workers (*individual*), their routines of work (*routine*), organizational-level concerns (*organizational*), institutional issues (*institutional/extramedia*), and larger social systems (*ideological/sociocultural*).

Media content, in this context, pertains to the journalistic work produced by journalists and the practices that they perform in order to produce them. In the succeeding pages, I exemplify media content from the perspective of media sociology.

The journalist as subject

In the field of journalism studies, using the journalist as a research subject has grown throughout the years since they are key actors in finding insights into the profession and they play a crucial role in the state of the world's press (Reese, 2001). Not only is this phenomenon important for the scholarly field but also shows that the number of individuals who have been academically trained in journalism has increased due to the prominence of journalism and communication education around the world. According to Reese (2001), the hierarchy of influences model may be utilized to facilitate the growing research interest in the field of journalism by locating the individual journalist within a web of organizational and ideological levels. He further adds:

> "Understanding journalism through these levels of analysis helps untangle many of the critiques of press performance, identify their implicit normative

> and theoretical assumptions, and suggest appropriate kinds of evidence. Ultimately, press practices must be viewed against normative standards. A multi-perspectival approach helps us sort out how different press professionals, practices, and systems work to advance these basic social goals" (p. 174).

Media content

Reese (2001), coined the term "media sociology" to pertain to how media powers function within a larger social context, and thus, underscores the need to "tackle the structural context of journalism, moving beyond the more narrow attempt to psychologize the media through the attitudes and values of individual practitioners." (p.174). According to Reese and Shoemaker (2016):

> "Journalism professionals have historically adhered to a philosophically realist view of the world in which news of external events is "out there" waiting to be gathered and disseminated. But this process is a social construction determined by a number of larger forces, making the search for these forces and understanding how they interact a logical focus of theoretical development" (p. 396).

Succinctly put, there are multiple forces that shape or influence media messages and content. Adapted from the work of Reese (2011), content, therefore is: (1) influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes, (2) influenced by media organizations and routines, (3) influenced by other social institutions and forces, and (4) a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo.

The levels of influence

Reese and Shoemaker (2016, p. 396) posit that through each of the levels of influence, "one can identify the main factors that shape the symbolic reality—revealed

through content, constituted and produced by media work—and show how these factors interact across levels and compare across different contexts (e.g., national, technological).” For Reese (2001, p. 174), this model “locates the individual journalist within a web of organizational and ideological constraints” and enables a thorough understanding of how media content is produced.

1. *The Individual.* This level focuses on the personal traits of news workers, news values they adhere to, professional roles they take on, and other demographic features. Subsequently, this level underscores the relative autonomy of individuals, how they are shaped by their surrounding organizations.
2. *The Routine.* The routine level is concerned with patterns of behavior that form the immediate structures of media work. Routines are the ways of working that constitute that practice, including those unstated rules and ritualized enactments that are not always made explicit. News routines serve the needs of journalists and the organization, but they also have come to embody considerations about the audience, what it will find acceptable and interesting in the form of news values.
3. *The Institutional/Extramedia.* At the institutional level, the influences originating primarily from outside the media organization are highlighted. This perspective considers that the power to shape content does not solely lie in the media but is shared with a variety of external institutions in society.
4. *The Organizational.* At the organizational level, the goals and policies of a larger social structure and how power is exercised within it is given much consideration.

Editorial policy allows the organization to shape what stories are considered newsworthy, how they are prioritized, and how they are framed.

5. *The Ideological.* This level is concerned with how media content is linked to larger social interests and how meaning is created. This leads us to consider how each of the previous levels function to come up with a coherent ideological result. In this sense, the hiring of journalists, their values, the routines they follow, their organizations' norms, and those organizations' positions in the larger social structure work to support the status quo.

Hierarchy of influences in CSJ

Scholars study journalists and their profession to identify insights which ultimately shape their work (Reese, 2001). Through the five levels of analysis (Figure 1), I sought to address the overarching aim of my study, which is to identify and describe the CSJ experiences grounded on the journalists' educational training and professional practice. Consequently, I aspired to locate CSJ's practice in the attainment of effective conflict reporting and fostering peacebuilding based on the professional work that these journalists do particularly in Mindanao. It is therefore within the interest of this study to understand the journalist from multiple levels, both intrinsic and external, within which they operate.

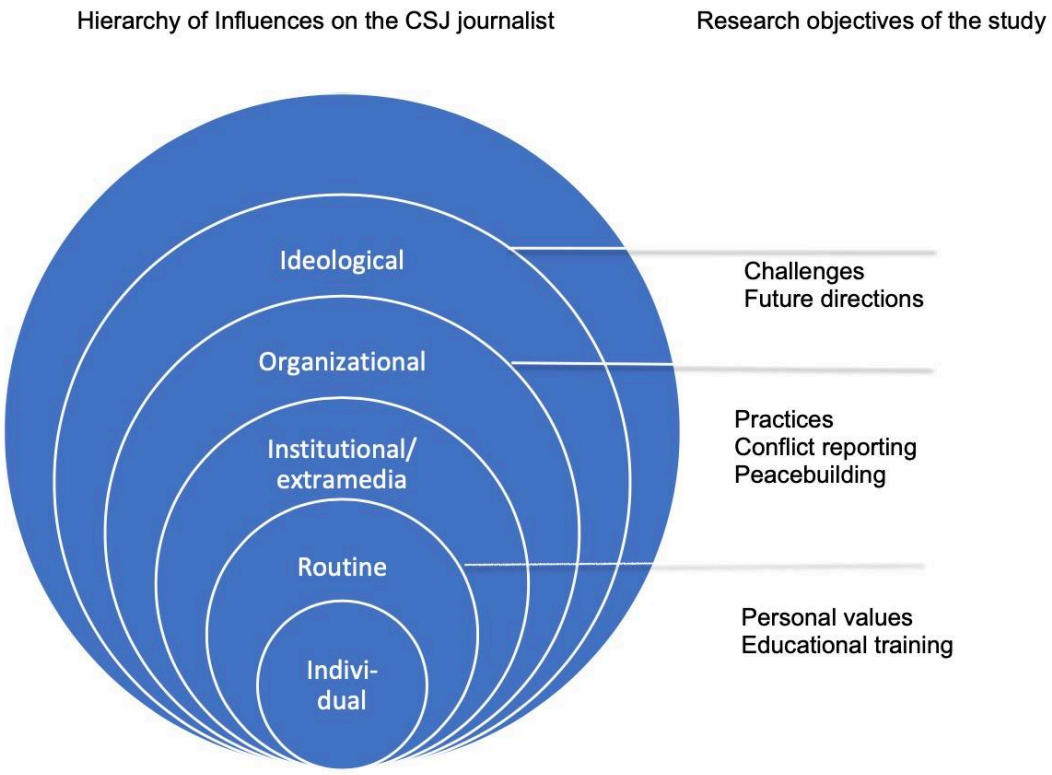
In analyzing my data, I made use of the levels of hierarchy of influences wherein I interrogated the *individual, routines* (personal values, CSJ educational training), *institutional, organizational* (practices, conflict reporting, and peacebuilding), and *ideological* (challenges and future directions of CSJ) levels to come up with a nuanced

understanding of what ultimately led to the production of their media content (e.g., news reports) as embodied in their journalistic practices.

Furthermore, I aligned this framework within Reese and Shoemaker's (2016, p. 396) approach to journalism which is "to tie social structures to symbolic formations (media content), understand how social reality takes shape, and bring to the foreground normative concerns of how well journalism is working."

Figure 1

Analytical framework of the study



Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is an exploratory qualitative study. According to Swaraj (2019), exploratory research is a preliminary study of a relatively unexplored topic employed to develop initial insights and provide direction for further research or investigation. An exploratory research design does not aim to provide the conclusive answers to the research questions but “investigates the full nature of the phenomenon, the manner in which it is manifested, and the other factors to which it is related” (Polit & Beck, 2008, p. 20).

On the other hand, qualitative research aims to understand a social problem from multiple lenses and involves a process of building a dynamic picture of the topic of interest (Flick, 2011; Cresswell, 1994).

Locale

The study was conducted in Davao City, Davao del Sur, Philippines. Davao City is the center of many leading media entities in print, radio, and television in Mindanao. Moreover, it is the regional center for southeastern Mindanao and houses most of the coalition of academic institutions that have integrated CSJ in the curriculum of their communication programs.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998). This procedure involves choosing a population with the ability to provide information on a particular topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Tongco (2007), this type of sampling involves a non-random deliberate selection of a person for the qualities that they possess and does not need underlying theories or a fixed number of people. The respondents are observant members of the community of interest who are knowledgeable about the topic and can participate in information sharing (Bernard, 2002; Campbell, 1955; Seidler, 1974; Tremblay, 1957 as cited in Tongco, 2007). In addition, they also fit the additional criteria for selection that I created:

1. Currently based in Davao City, Davao del Sur, Philippines
2. Have experience working in the print, radio, television, or digital media industry
3. Possess an undergraduate degree in communications from any of the universities that are part of the consortium of schools in Davao City that integrated CSJ in their academic curriculum

I initially did not determine a specific number of journalists to serve as my respondents. However, throughout the course of data collection, I reached data saturation after five interviews with my respondents (Table 4). Data saturation occurs when there is sufficient data, when the capacity to acquire additional information has been accomplished, and when further coding is no longer practicable (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Table 3

Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Respondent	Gender	Educational Level	Industry	Years of Experience
Journalist A	Male (he/him)	Graduate student	Radio	2+
Journalist B	Female (she/her)	Graduate student	Television	4+
Journalist C	Male (he/him)	Graduate student	Digital	3+
Journalist D	Female (she/her)	Graduate student	Digital	2+
Journalist E	Male (he/him)	College graduate	Television	1+

Research Instrument and Data Collection

The unit of analysis used in this study are the narratives derived from the in-depth interviews of CSJ-trained journalists. Narratives are texts or discourses expressed in lived and told stories (Creswell, 2007).

To gather these narratives, I created an interview guide (Gorden, 1992) to facilitate the discussion. To ensure a comprehensive scope in the interviews, I formulated dynamic questions that would wield sufficient information for analysis, encapsulate the core of my research question and objectives, and serve as a starting point for the interviewees to share relevant and personal answers through in-depth interviews.

According to Minichiello et al. (2008, p. 170), in-depth interviews are “purposeful interactions in which an investigator attempts to learn what another person knows about

a topic, to discover, and record what the person has experienced, what he/she thinks about, and what significance or meaning it might have." Through this method, the research participants were given enough time to openly express their thoughts and not be constricted within the bounds of the prepared questions, thus, allowing a more substantive discussion to take place. This process also enabled me to probe additional questions based on their initial responses (David & Sutton, 2011).

However, due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were done through a hybrid format of both in-person and online modalities. The data collection process started in July 2023 and ended in August 2023.

Data Analysis

To highlight how journalists deploy professional discourses, lived experiences, shared cultural, social, ideological, ethical narratives within the context of CSJ, I assert that their insights, and the themes that would emerge, should be given primary importance. Therefore, I made use of thematic analysis to make sense of the data collected. Thematic analysis is a method used to analyze qualitative data where recurring ideas, or themes, are located in a data set (Alhojailan, 2012).

To analyze the results of the interviews, I followed, and slightly modified, the step-by-step guide of Maguire and Delahunt (2017) based on the earlier work of Braun and Clarke (2006).

1. *Familiarizing data*. I performed a manual transcription of the interviews to ensure that the interviews were recorded accurately, especially when a mix of English

and *Binisaya*, which may be wrongly interpreted by transcription software, is spoken throughout the interviews.

2. *Generating codes.* I systematically organized my data into more accessible “chunks" by coding each segment that was relevant in addressing my research questions.
3. *Searching for themes.* A “theme” is a pattern that encapsulates a significant or interesting dimension about the research question. While there are no concrete rules about what makes a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006) I examined the codes and ultimately found narratives which clearly address my research objectives.
4. *Reviewing themes.* After broadly conceiving themes based on my codes, I further reviewed, modified, and developed these to attain clarity and remove irrelevant insights.
5. *Defining themes.* The final step involves the refinement of the themes and explicating what each theme is about and how this relates to the various concepts in the study.

Positionality

As a qualitative researcher, I subscribe to the notion that multiple realities exist in any given situation—my reality, that of the journalists through their narratives, and that of the readers who will read the results. This is my ontological stand. Thus, I listened closely to the five journalists who have prior academic training in CSJ as well as recalled my own experiences as having studied in a school with a CSJ course.

Throughout my interaction with the journalists, I myself became an instrument in meaning making of their experiences. This is my epistemological stand. I am not distant to those being researched as we have affinity in backgrounds and experiences. Thus, my background and own identity as a journalist affected my interpretation of their narratives and the meanings we co-created together in the process of the study.

Lastly, my axiological stand is that research is not value-free. By interrogating my own discipline and profession, I also lay my values on the line, and my beliefs on what CSJ should be and how it should be ideally practiced.

Data Ethics

The norms of anonymity, confidentiality, and written informed consent (Richard & Schwartz, 2002) were strictly followed subject to RA 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Furthermore, as the sole and principal researcher, I declare no source of funding from any institution or any conflict of interest.

Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study answered the research question: ***What are the experiences of journalists in practicing CSJ?*** Specifically, I sought to address the following research questions: (1) What are the narratives of journalists in their transition from their academic training on CSJ to their professional practice? and (2) How do they feel about practicing CSJ in relation to effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding?

Based on the findings, three prevalent themes emerged. These are (1) disconnection, (2) competition, and (3) unfamiliarity. To further exemplify these themes, I answered my research questions through two major clustered subheadings, namely: (1) Transition of CSJ Professionals from Academic Training to Practice and (2) Practice of CSJ for Conflict Reporting and Peacebuilding. I concluded this chapter, represented through a diagram, by synthesizing the prevalent themes that emerged and placed them against the backdrop of the realities experienced by journalists in the Philippines.

Transition of CSJ Professionals from Academic Training to Practice

I first interrogated the discourses of conflict-sensitive journalists in their transition from being students to practicing professionals. One prevalent theme emerged, which is **disconnection** from the academe to the workplace.

To further elucidate why journalists described this transition phase as such, I utilized the *individual* and *routine* levels in the hierarchy of influences model. In the *individual* level, the demographics, personal traits, and factors that shape a person are

given focus to understand how media content is created. In this case, I highlighted the education or formal academic training of the interviewees on CSJ, which ultimately helped shape their values, identity, and personality. According to Idris et al. (2012), education does not only provide knowledge and skills but also contributes to the formation of the youth's national identity.

Hailikari et al. (2008) posited that a common problem faced by instructors in higher education is that students lack important prior knowledge and skills needed when they enter the more advanced courses in their curriculum. However, all the interviewees made it clear that prior to entering higher education, they already had existing knowledge on the intricacies of journalism and the media, mainly because of their experience watching television at a young age and joining journalism competitions in high school.

a. Disconnection from highschool to college

The interviewees consider themselves critical consumers of media who are aware of the pitfalls of journalism and its tendency to lean into tabloidization techniques (Talde, 2022) for engagement and profit. These experiences, among other factors, compelled them to pursue a degree in the field of communication. But the feeling of disconnection started upon entering college where their existing knowledge, especially within the context of journalism, was challenged with new concepts. Journalist D recalled,

> *"In high school, I learned that journalists report issues based on facts. We followed the 5Ws IH structure. But when I was in college, I was taught all*

these new concepts such as the mitigating capacity of journalism. Does this not negate the tenets of objectivity in the type of journalism I was accustomed to? Not necessarily, but I had to deconstruct what I knew, which opened my mind to new questions. Is CSJ the same as peace journalism? Who gets to decide which is which? It was confusing at first but then again, the purpose of going to school is to relearn, learn, and unlearn."

This experience of disconnection from the transition between highschool to college is just one aspect in the multifaceted world of academia. On top of academic adjustments, students are also exposed to circumstances that expose them to risk factors of mental health issues and which may subsequently exacerbate pre-existing problems (Cleary et. al., 2012)

b. Disconnection from college to the workplace

The second bout of disconnection continued after finishing their undergraduate degrees and obtained job opportunities in the media. They admitted that there was a gap from their theoretical knowledge to the actual application of their learnings in the field or the so-called theory-practice gap. While the concept of theory-practice gap (Greenway et al., 2019; Rafferty et al., 1996; Hewison & Wildman, 1996) has been identified in literature, the interviewees contend that there is no comparing the reality check that fresh graduates experience when immersed into the "real world" especially in the field of journalism. As Journalist A put it:

"I know that what they teach you in school is not fully reflected in the workforce. But it is a different feeling when you experience the gap in theory versus praxis firsthand. College gave me an idea of what to expect in the journalism world but academic training or education can only do so much. I felt like I started from scratch but at least I had a semblance of what to expect and I developed discipline and proper work ethics."

When asked about the suitability of their educational training to the routines that they perform in their practice, the interviewees contend that what they teach you in school is not necessarily applicable in their working environment.

For Reese and Shoemaker (2016, p. 399), routines are “the ways of working that constitute that practice, including those unstated rules and ritualized enactments that are not always made explicit.” In this level, we look at the structured rules, norms, and procedures that are embedded in media work. These norms are often guided by a code of ethics that a journalist follows.

In the Philippines, for example, the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) promotes ethical standards in television and radio through professional codes of conduct that govern broadcast media operations. These standards guide journalists to do their roles with utmost professionalism. Black (2010) underscored that a journalist is characterized by performing journalistic activities ethically. Routines serve the needs of journalists and the organization, but they also have come to embody considerations about the audience, what it will find acceptable and interesting in the form of news values. This entails that journalists do not work alone or use rules they invent themselves (Reese, 2001) which means that in one way or another, there is always that disconnect between the forces that resonate within the individual versus the normative roles that they are expected to do. Journalist C further elaborated on this:

> *“More than the individual struggle of bridging the gap between theory and practice, there is also the matter of negotiating what you perceive to be the ideal way to perform your journalistic responsibilities versus what is required of you from your editors and supervisors. This competing ideal of the self versus the institution poses a big challenge in journalistic freedom,*

especially when you work in media institutions that influence you, albeit not explicitly, on how you should frame or write a story."

When asked about their recollection on what CSJ is, the interviewees were able to come up with an operational definition built upon their previous understanding of the subject matter. According to Journalist B:

"CSJ is an approach to journalism that aims to present news in an impartial manner that ensures all sides are presented to prevent the further escalation of conflict by helping the audience understand what the conflict is all about."

Subsequently, Journalist C shared how he manages to utilize some concepts he remembered about CSJ:

"While not explicitly, I make use of CSJ through the conflict analysis tools that I have learned in college, such as the timeline tool. Through this tool, I chronologically map out key events to understand how a specific issue can be and fill in gaps or analyze which periods certain conflicts escalated."

The disconnect that the journalists experienced is made even more evident with the lack of access or reinforcement to their learning of CSJ. Journalist B mentioned that the last time she encountered CSJ was through her Comm 211 (Journalism Principles and Practices) and BC 414 (Broadcast Media Criticism) courses. Journalist A recalled that since graduating from his university, which was five years ago, no additional mechanisms have been made available in any fora and the few that are offered, which are usually in the form of online training, are not always accessible due to the lack of promotion or the limited number of attendees accepted.

The experience of "disconnection" among journalists within the context of CSJ is further supported by previous scholarship on the evident gap between journalistic orientation and conception versus role performance or enactment (Tandoc et al., 2013;

Tandoc et al., 2019; Dalen, 2014). Furthermore, this “gap” should be consistently questioned and interrogated rather than assumed.

All the interviewees believe that CSJ holds great promise. However, for it to be a sustainable model, there is a need to demystify its definition, conception, and application, especially in today’s time. For one of the interviewees, it is important that advocates of CSJ strengthen partnerships with academic institutions and expand to other schools from different regions and include other allied programs as well. At the same time, it would also be beneficial to maximize the rise of webinars to explain what CSJ is all about and not conflate it with other forms of journalism. For one interviewee:

> *“There is a need to strengthen their efforts because when you ask someone what CSJ is, I don’t think they would be able to answer it easily.”*

Moreover, for the journalists, there is a need to not only connect with students, media practitioners, and educators but to also collaborate with media entities since this is where the disconnect between theory and practice is exacerbated. Many of these institutions mostly operate in the decades-old journalistic conventions they are accustomed to, so relatively new initiatives such as CSJ are usually met with criticism. Furthermore, all these journalists have been exposed to the “Philosophy and Practice” teaching guide which is the primary tool utilized by teachers in teaching CSJ. According to one journalist:

> *“I remember attending the launching of the teaching guide at a hotel last March 2018. I was fortunate to listen to authors themselves who were the brain in simplifying the said teaching guide. But it has been years since that time and many developments have happened. It is necessary to update this material and integrate new case studies and insights in line with the changes in the media landscape.”*

These insights in improving and moving forward with CSJ can address the disconnection being experienced from academia to the field. These are also grounded on the operative word “sustained” since the ubiquity of media in today’s age holds many issues in itself such as disinformation and fake news (Shu et al., 2017). Hence, efforts in mainstreaming CSJ should be consistent to keep up with technological advancement and the needs of contemporary society. Otherwise, CSJ might be reduced to just another buzzword.

Practice of CSJ for Conflict Reporting and Peacebuilding

“Other than the journalists who were introduced to CSJ during their college years, do you think other people or organizations know what it is?” This was one of the central questions that guided the discussion on how CSJ is being practiced while locating its relation to effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding. I utilized the *institutional* and *organizational* levels in the hierarchy of influences model to parse through the narratives of my interviewees and thus addressing my second research question wherein two themes were identified: (1) **competition** and (2) **unfamiliarity**.

1. Practicing CSJ is a “competition”

All the interviewed journalists perceive the journalism profession as an embodied practice. This means that their bodies are utilized to their full extent, often covering stories in the midst of floods, calamities, drug busts, and other precarious situations.

Journalist B described their work as *“kapoy”*(tiring) as is with any job. However, the physical manifestation of the impact of their hard work does not translate into their

paychecks. According to Tait (2011), journalism is enmeshed with the concept of "bearing witness" or the practices of assuming responsibility for contemporary events. However, this runs counter to the interviewees' personal experiences. In their practices, there is that competing mindset whether to do their job to the best of their ability in the name of truth-telling or to simply adhere to what is conventional, that is, to report news as they see it and go home.

Other than their intrinsic competing ideals, there is also the external form of competition in terms of job placement after college. Journalist D lamented the unfortunate state of media work, especially in Davao City, where not all opportunities are available to everyone despite their evident skills. He added:

> *"I know a lot of colleagues who are good, but because of the lack of opportunities in the media and the salary that goes with it, have pushed them to venture into other paths. I see many former classmates dabble in online work. To be honest, seeing them work from home and travel constantly, while I'm up as early as 5 am to cover something, makes me seriously want to switch careers. But again, I'm still constantly debating with myself because I love my job. But it doesn't seem to love me back."*

In the aspect of journalistic practices, many of the journalists admitted to falling into a certain routine, which is to cover the story, wait for the editor's decision, and watch it be published.

In the *organizational* level in the hierarchy of influences, media content does not exist within a vacuum since the norms of a larger (or more superior) social structure is given consideration, such as editorial policy. In journalism, editorial control often lies within bosses who tell what stories are newsworthy and worth covering. They also influence the way in which stories are prioritized, organized, and framed.

According to Journalist E, at the end of the day, media organizations are still businesses with lucrative interests where there are unspoken and implicit norms that control the ways in which stories are told or how angles are framed. Journalist A recalled an experience during his previous job:

> *"Last election, I covered a story on air about a particular politician regarding some questionable activities. After my show, my boss called me to his office and told me not to do that again. At that moment, of course I was confused. I later found out that his team gave a certain amount of money to our station. It's cases like that, which I know have existed for a long time, that really make you sad about the state of the press in the Philippines."*

When asked about the specific CSJ practices that they can recall doing in their line of work, many of the interviewees were unable to locate a particular situation where they explicitly practiced it. For Journalist B:

> *"When I write news, I don't say 'oh this CSJ' or 'this is responsible journalism'. No. I just write to the best that I can drawing from the strict training I learned in college as well as my experiences, then have my editor check it. Whatever happens after is beyond me. Although, I am very particular about the words or terms that I use. As a writer, I know the power of words. One wrong term can lead to a lot of problems."*

All the interviewees posited that their practices, despite being embodied, are not explicitly performed in consonance with what CSJ is. Rather, they view (and perform) their actions in what they know and perceive to be credible. This also necessitates a collaborative effort with outside forces–such as editors–to ensure that their content ultimately gets published and reaches their audience.

2. *Conflict reporting and peacebuilding are unfamiliar territories*

According to Rama et al. (2018, p. 9), “CSJ is not so much the craft of covering violence and war, as it is the craft of effectively covering conflict.” While the criteria to gauge effective conflict reporting in journalism varies among different accounts, I shall align this parameter in accordance with the Society of Professional Journalists’ (2014) four principles of ethical journalism, namely: (1) seeking truth and reporting it, (2) minimizing harm, (3) acting independently, and (4) being accountable and transparent. This also supports Doerner’s (2018) description of good journalistic practice as following the principles of accuracy, balance, and impartiality.

In addition, CSJ does not intend to resolve the conflicts that journalists cover in their work. It also does not seek to directly advocate for peace, human rights, and justice. Instead, it aims "to facilitate understanding, engagement, and action among society’s real problem-solvers: the people and its many segments” (Rama et al., 2018, p. 9). I shall refer to this definition as peacebuilding, which coincides with the description by Schirch (2008), that it is a process of establishing relationships and institutions that support the peaceful transformation of conflict.

Therefore, based on the literature and previous studies done by experts on the field, I extracted and formulated a typology of the goal of CSJ, which is to (1) effectively report conflict and (2) contribute to peacebuilding. This conceptualization is central to the main arguments of this study.

When asked to locate the contribution of their CSJ practices to the two concepts imbued within CSJ which I labeled, much like their vague ability to locate specific instances of CSJ application in their work, they were also not able to identify explicit

contributions. Experiences of unfamiliarity in journalism, however, are not new concepts. In the study by Hooker et al. (2012), the news value of “unfamiliarity” and “uncertainty” were prominent among 16 journalists covering avian influenza and expressed concern about the accuracy and impacts of reporting.

However, the respondents were able to negotiate their narratives in consonance with the *institutional* level in the hierarchy of influences model. This level acknowledges the fact that the capacity to produce content is shared with a plethora of outside actors such as the government, advertisers, and other influential stakeholders. In this regard, the interviewees agree that a lot of factors contribute to how they create stories and enact their journalistic practices, but this also applies both ways; the impact of their works also does not solely lie within select individuals. As Journalist E put it:

> *“Well, CSJ, as I remember it, simply seeks to ensure that conflict is not escalated. When an issue is not blown out of proportion, then I think that means I contributed in one way or another to peacebuilding. As for the effective conflict reporting aspect? Well, what is ‘effective’ by the way? That’s such an arbitrary term. Who's to say if we ‘effectively’ report an issue? But I do acknowledge that as someone who works in the media that many of our audiences come from various backgrounds so if I receive a message telling me that I did a good job, then I guess you can consider that effective reporting.”*

Citing the unfamiliarity of CSJ to the masses, the journalists argue for the need to frame CSJ not just in its theoretical underpinnings but also in its real-world applications because it is a concept that has yet to truly remove itself from the confines of the classroom. Journalist C narrated:

> *“CSJ is confusing because more than a concept, how does it translate to practice? How would I know if what I am doing is CSJ? When I look at the definition of CSJ, of course, I agree with what it advocates for. It involves*

responsible word choice, making sure all sides of the story are heard… but then again, is this not just responsible journalism? It's the bare minimum."

For the journalists, there is no one "gatekeeper" of the types of journalism and is immaterial compared to the gravity of socio-economic issues that they tell. "Is the form more important than the substance?" Journalist A asked:

"When indigenous people are displaced from their land, I don't think people would fixate on your style or educational background. They rarely care about the byline. Although yes, the way you frame and present a story has an impact on public perception and whatnot. This has been studied by experts. But then again, many people just want to know what's going on in the world."

Moreover, this also reveals the gaps in journalism education since these journalists, who first learned about CSJ in college, contend that there is still so much to learn in this constantly evolving field. "There is always this feeling of not being able to reconcile what we know and what we ought to know," exclaimed an interviewee.

When asked how they envision the future practice of CSJ, they expressed the challenge they are experiencing of living under the shadow of violence. One of the interviewees attested that the lived experiences of journalists in Mindanao, within this landscape of violence, starkly differs from the experiences of those working in Luzon or Visayas. She further explained:

"The experiences of Mindanao-based journalists are more challenging than those in Luzon or Visayas because many of the areas that we cover are conflict-stricken. In Mindanao, there are still feuds between families especially in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) area."

In the ideological level, media content is created with respect to larger social structures (Reese, 2001) that intersect with experiences of the individual and their routines, as well as the environment within which they operate. Therefore, we cannot

understand how journalists create stories or embody their practices without unpacking the material conditions they are subjected to. When journalists are placed in precarious situations, the roles that they are mandated to perform become immaterial especially when their safety is put in jeopardy. For one journalist, while he acknowledges the reality of the precarity of the state of journalism in the country, his experiences pale in comparison to his colleagues who have been killed. He added:

> *"When I was a student, sure, CSJ seemed like the perfect solution to the challenges in the media and Philippine democracy. But journalists are subjected to harsh conditions not only physically but economically, as well. We are barely paid for work that we do which is why many opt to switch careers. For some of us, we report news as we see it, have our editors check it, and leave. How can we advocate for CSJ, despite its commendable goal, if we are one hospitalization away from abject poverty? Do we really go 'beyond' to contribute to peacebuilding even if it may not be practical?"*

The raison d'être of CSJ lies in its negotiation of the limitations of various forms of journalism such as traditional journalism and peace journalism. However, this goal becomes challenging to achieve considering that journalists are not exempt from the violence that they cover and are confronted with socio-economic challenges as well. In a study by Dorff et al. (2022), as violence against journalists increases, news story specificity decreases. Because of this, journalists develop strategies to ensure that high quality reporting is still produced despite the risk conditions they face in areas of protracted conflicts.

Synthesis

In parsing through the narratives of my respondents, I was able to describe their journalistic experiences from their academic training to their professional practices

which answered my main research question: ***What are the experiences of journalists in practicing CSJ?*** A summary of the themes that emerged from this study, based on the literature and building on the works of previous scholarship, may be seen in the diagram below (Figure 2).

First, at the core, is ***CSJ***. On each of the sides, representing an equally important aspect of CSJ, are academic training, CSJ practices, and I also integrated a contextualization of violence as a phenomenon that is not only reported by journalists but experienced as well to give further nuancing to the ways in which CSJ can further be developed.

Academic Training. I paid particular attention to the transitional discourses of the journalists from their academic training to the workforce since this study is predicated on their CSJ education. These journalists graduated from HEIs that are members of the coalition of schools that aimed to integrate the concepts of CSJ in the curriculum, as well as other learning mechanisms. I tracked down these graduates and unpacked their insights as to how their education helped them in their current professional roles as well as how their CSJ training was manifested in this transitional phase. Results revealed that there is a disconnect between their educational preparation and the roles they performed as professionals.

CSJ Practices. To supplement the themes that were identified in their educational background, I then examined the specific CSJ practices that journalists perform and subsequently, interrogated if at any point, they were able to locate if these practices contributed to the attainment of the goals of CSJ. The prevalent themes indicate that practicing CSJ is rather difficult to identify since there is no specific

parameter to identify what is CSJ and what is not. These journalists embody the journalistic profession in ways that they personally know and feel to be effective and ethical. Moreover, the journalists believe that they are not in a position to say if their works are “effective” and contributing to peacebuilding. Instead, they make use of the discipline and basic concepts that they have learned in college–such as responsible word choice–to ensure that they produce quality work that does not contribute to the escalation of conflict.

Building on the ubiquity of media amid the precarious conditions that journalists face in the Philippines, I highlight the concept of violence both as a professional mandate and a lived experience. I make use of the *ideological* level in the hierarchy of influences model to further give context to their journalistic experiences which is a necessary dimension in shaping the trajectory of how CSJ will be developed, studied, and applied in the future since they are informed by the personal narratives of those who have been at the opposite ends of the dynamic domains of CSJ—theoretical and practical, academic and professional, idealistic and pragmatic.

The Human Rights Watch (2018) placed the country in a state of human rights crisis following the highly criticized war on drugs by former President Rodrigo R. Duterte. In a report done by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, it was revealed that widespread human rights violations and abuses in the Philippines continue to be committed with impunity (Schlein, 2021). In these instances, journalists are often subjected to precarious situations, especially those who cover stories in Mindanao (Høiby, 2020). In 2021, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked the Philippines the seventh country in the Global Impunity Index with the most unsolved

journalist murders. In the ideological level, media content is created with respect to larger social structures (Reese, 2001) that intersect with experiences of the individual and their routines, as well as the environment within which they operate. Therefore, we cannot understand how journalists create stories or embody their practices without unpacking the material conditions they are subjected to. When journalists are placed in precarious situations, the roles that they are mandated to perform becomes immaterial especially when their safety is put in jeopardy. To illustrate this sordid reality, Maria Ressa, journalist and the first Filipina Nobel laureate, continues to face persecution in the Philippines. In 2017, she was arrested for a story published in 2012 even when the law she supposedly violated did not exist at that time (Tomacruz, 2022).

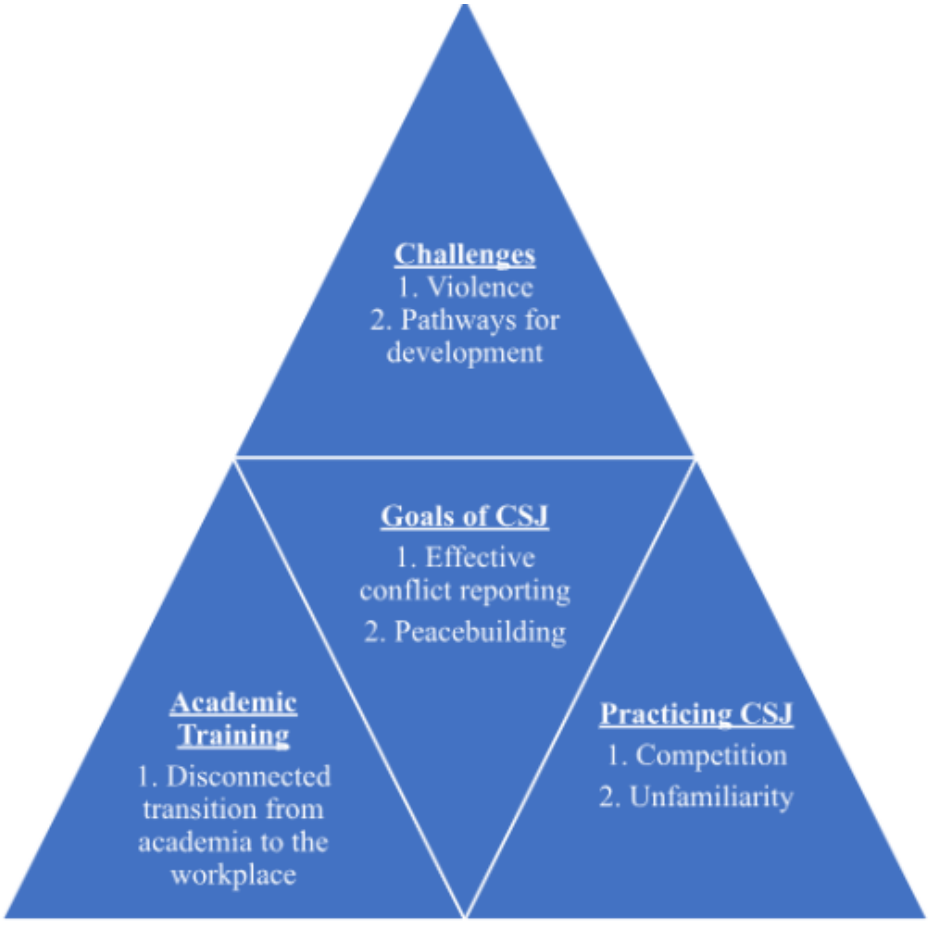
The raison d'être of CSJ lies in its negotiation of the limitations of various forms of journalism such as traditional journalism and peace journalism. However, this goal becomes challenging to achieve considering that journalists are not exempt from the violence that they cover and are confronted with socio-economic challenges as well. In a study by Dorff et al. (2022), as violence against journalists increases, news story specificity decreases. Because of this, journalists develop strategies to ensure that high quality reporting is still produced despite the risk conditions they face in areas of protracted conflicts.

Furthermore, as with any topic in the field of journalism studies, numerous challenges surround the journalistic profession. Notwithstanding the violence that journalists report (and experience), there are also areas that need thorough improvement in moving forward with CSJ as a normative concept. The themes posit a need for collaboration and sustained efforts to demystify and future proof CSJ,

especially within the Philippine context at a time of disinformation and the risks brought by the highly digitized post-pandemic world.

Figure 2

Diagrammatic illustration of themes that emerged



Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This exploratory-qualitative study describes the journalistic experiences from the narratives of five journalists in Davao City, Philippines who are graduates of an institution that has integrated the framework of CSJ in their academic curriculum. It provides a nuanced description of how CSJ is practiced among journalists. I described the transitional discourses of the journalists from their academic training to their professional career and their specific practices related to effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding.

Guided by the hierarchy of influences model developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), I conducted in-depth interviews from July to August 2023 (2 months) with five journalists. Thereafter, I used thematic analysis to make sense of the data obtained through the individual, routines, institutional, organizational, and ideological levels underpinned in my analytical framework.

The highlights of my findings are summarized as follows:

- Results show that there is a disconnect in academic training and professional practice. This not only reinforces the theory-practice gap but also illustrates the glaring reality between the often-idealistic expectations developed in journalism education and the “real world” issues that the press experience on the ground.
- There is also the prevalence of intrinsic and extrinsic competing ideals in terms of individual embodied practices versus the norms imposed within media

organizations that blur the lines of what constitutes conflict sensitive reporting. Based on their experiences, CSJ is not practiced directly and explicitly but rather imbued within the personal inclinations of the journalists to what constitutes as right for them

- Given the era of rapid technological advancement and media ubiquity, there is a need to enact sustained efforts to demystify, streamline, and future proof CSJ. Notably, journalists in the Philippines are subjected to harmful or precarious situations in their line of work so the material conditions in the environment within which they operate should also be given much attention.

Conclusion

The traditional journalistic framework of objectivity has been criticized in its inability to effectively report societal issues and its tendency to contribute to the escalation of conflict. Hence, CSJ emerged to amplify the role of journalists and the media in effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding. Although CSJ has existed for quite some time, it is still a relatively unexplored framework in the Philippines. However, there has been a growing number of initiatives that sought to incorporate CSJ both in the academe and professional practice, especially in Mindanao.

Thematic analysis revealed three themes anchored on journalistic experiences, namely: disconnection, competition, and unfamiliarity. Practicing CSJ involves a disconnect between academic training and professional practice. Subsequently, despite journalism being an embodied practice, the performance of CSJ is not often explicit or defined, but rather implicit and often driven by personal inclinations. Finally, CSJ and

the journalistic profession in general face a plethora of challenges both as a reported and lived experience. Hence, mechanisms to protect journalists and the stories that they cover must be intensified.

Implications and Recommendations

For the Academe

Findings show that there is a disconnect in academic training and professional practice. Despite the admirable goal of CSJ, there is a need to intensify efforts in making people aware of what it is using educational methodologies. While classroom instruction and teaching guides have been established in many HEIs within Mindanao, there is still so much work to be done to ensure the longevity and relevance of CSJ amidst the challenges of the press and journalism in modern-day democracies.

Academics, particularly those working within the coalition of HEIs that have integrated the CSJ framework within their academic curricula, must update themselves of the latest trends in contemporary education and journalism to ensure that the theories and methodologies they teach reflect the realities happening outside the confines of the classroom. Previous teaching guides can be republished with new case studies and issues that reflect the present realities of Philippine media.

Moreover, I draw on the conception of Bor (2014) that to further improve curriculum design on journalism education, an emphasis on technical skills, ethical implications, and potential for career development should be given emphasis. This should also extend to the learning materials that they conceptualize and reproduce for

public consumption, as well as an expansion of CSJ initiatives to other institutions not just in Davao but to other parts of the country through benchmarking activities.

Furthermore, there is also a need to ensure that training programs and webinars are accessible to the masses, especially to those who may not easily have the resources to do so.

For Media Practitioners

Journalists experience intrinsic and extrinsic competing ideals in terms of individual embodied practices versus the norms imposed within media organizations that blur the lines of what constitutes conflict sensitive reporting. Hence, this paper is relevant for journalists, media practitioners, and advocates of CSJ.

The lifeline of CSJ as a model lies in the sustained efforts of not only those in the educational aspect but also those who are professionals in the media industry. This paper exemplifies the necessity to bridge the theory-practice gap. I argue that the study of journalism does not exist in a vacuum, hence, close collaboration among academics, journalists, and other allied sectors, must be strengthened to identify contemporary developments and challenges. This collaboration can take shape in the form of intensifying and outlining the roles of students during internships and work field immersions so that they are not reduced to menial tasks and are given actual responsibilities that would allow them to bridge their theoretical foundations into practice.

CSJ and Development Communication

This study is a confluence of my educational training in CSJ and development communication during my studies at the University of Mindanao and UPOU, respectively. Development Communication (DevCom) highlights the facilitative and transformative impact of communication to improve the material conditions of marginalized communities (Daya, 2019). Daya (2019, p. 153) also propounded that what sets DevCom apart from other forms of communication is it views development "as the context where meaningful and relevant communication happens among community people, and which informs how communication must happen." Similarly, CSJ shares these articulations in the sense that it values how journalism impacts communities and consequently aims to avoid escalating conflict through responsible reportage.

For a study that attempts to show how effective training might or might not contribute to effective conflict reporting and peacebuilding, and highlight the journalists' standing towards media, the journalistic profession, and most importantly towards their audience, I argue that it is necessary to view CSJ from the lens of DevCom and vice-versa. This is especially relevant considering that these two disciplines, despite sharing similarities in structure, are rarely studied together. Hence, much theorizing, through the pursuit of further research and collaboration among institutions (e.g., University of Mindanao and UP Los Baños), is needed to further develop and establish a link between the two fields and contribute to the intellectualization of the nexus between development, communication, and journalism.

Further Research

The findings of this paper have wider implications for future research in journalism education and CSJ development. As such, the following recommendations may be followed:

- Researchers can utilize a variety of methodological approaches such as a comparative content analysis of CSJ teaching guides and handbooks from different countries and identify similarities and differences in contextualizing issues so that a critical analysis of the practice of CSJ can be explored in further detail.
- Meta-analysis or systematic review on the literature could be conducted to map a comprehensive definition of CSJ that does not conflate it with other forms of journalism.
- The narratives of CSJ educators can be studied through qualitative research such as phenomenology, with an emphasis on their constructions of identity that influence their work in academia.
- Historical research of the background and practice as well as future scenarios of CSJ in the Philippines can mark its place in the profession and establish its niche in the field.
- A phenomenological study of a journalist's journey into being a CSJ practitioner and the becoming and (un)becoming of being one will be insightful.

- Empirical research on the curriculum and the teaching materials and how CSJ as a course is being taught and communicated to the younger generation of journalists can improve CSJ's scholarly practice.
- An evaluation study on the effectiveness of the CSJ course in helping Mindanao-based journalists report on conflict and build peace in the communities can serve as input to policy.

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