

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: City, University of London (City)		
Unit of Assessment: D34, Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Improving International Crisis Reporting		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Mel Bunce Dr Zahera Harb Dr Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar	Bunce: Reader Harb: Senior Lecturer Tasiu Abubakar: Senior Lecturer	Bunce: 2012 to present Harb: 2011 to present Tasiu Abubakar: 2013 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) City, University of London's Research Cluster on international crisis reporting has had deep reach in international news organisations and UK regulatory and diplomatic bodies, changing journalistic and professional practice and editorial policy to the benefit of practitioners, media managers, NGOs, funders, audiences, and ultimately those in need of humanitarian support. The research presented here has: 1) supported editorial policy changes at The New Humanitarian, the world's oldest specialist humanitarian news outlet, resulting in a transformation of the content available to the humanitarian sector globally; 2) shaped Ofcom regulatory decisions in the UK and improved journalistic practice globally to reduce hate speech and harmful stereotypes, and 3) changed understanding of strategic communications for Defence Attachés, military experts attached to British embassies, furthering the UK's National Security Objectives.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) City, University of London's (City) International Journalism Research Cluster has created new knowledge and practice relating to the production, content, and influence of international crisis reporting (ICR). The group of nine scholars, all experienced journalists, use interviews, content analysis, newsroom ethnography, audience surveys, and discourse analysis in their research. Here we report the work of three scholars in the cluster.</p> <p>2.1 Foundation funded reporting Dr Mel Bunce researches the production and content of ICR, often with her long-standing collaborators Drs Scott (UEA) and Wright (Edinburgh); equal co-authors, they take turns as lead authors. International news coverage plays a key role in raising awareness of humanitarian crises yet, due to the high costs involved, few outlets regularly produce original coverage. In a major AHRC-funded study [3.8] of English language reporting on humanitarian issues, Bunce and co-authors analysed the outputs of more than 20,000 news outlets and found that only 12 organisations routinely produced original reports on humanitarian issues – almost all of them relying on support from states or private foundations to explain the complex causes of such crises. [3.1, p. 1] The report presented a close textual analysis of reporting undertaken by news outlets (including The New Humanitarian) on specific humanitarian issues/events in Nepal, Yemen, and South Sudan. This showed that there was generally very limited reporting on the environment, gender, and health and that most outlets relied heavily on western sources, rather than affected citizens and local experts. [3.1] The research findings led to changes in editorial policy at The New Humanitarian which resulted in better quality content for the humanitarian sector. A wider study involving 32 organisations (foundations, intermediaries, non-profit news outlets) found that foundations are changing the role and contribution of journalism. While foundations did not try directly to influence content, they incentivised journalists to focus on topics aligned with their priorities. [3.2] Recent unpublished</p>		

research investigates how democratic governments' allocations of humanitarian aid are influenced by ICR and finds that sudden-onset, national news coverage can increase levels of emergency humanitarian aid. [5.4]

2.2 Reporting the Middle East

Dr Zahera Harb's 11 years as a reporter in Lebanon informs her research on the reporting of Middle Eastern crises by international and local media. She shows how Western media representations of countries in crisis often reinforce stereotypes of the country and its people. In 2015 she reviewed British media stories of women's lives in Lebanon with high-profile Lebanese female journalists. Participants found the coverage was simplistic and applied the 'oppressed Muslim woman' stereotype. Harb argues that the tendency towards generalisation and applying preconceived perceptions, especially in gender reporting, amounts to a form of Orientalist (after Said) news practice. [3.3] Harb was an adviser for the Ethical Journalism Network's '5-point Test for Hate Speech' (see 4.2) which she used in her investigation of Arab media reporting of regional conflicts to analyse TV news on Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, the most prominent 24-hour news channels in the region. She identified how the channels operate in line with their sectarian political affiliations, with the language, tone, and framing of news content perpetuating divisions between religious, ethnic, and political groups. [3.4] These findings influenced Ofcom decisions in the UK and changed journalistic practice globally reducing hate speech and harmful stereotypes.

2.3 Reporting terrorism

Dr Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar's research investigates the ways that terror organisations such as Boko Haram (BH) deploy strategic communications to advance their political goals. Based on rare and extensive access to journalists who liaise with BH, analysis of media outputs, and his personal reflections as a journalist working in the region, he finds that BH's dextrous handling of the media is a key component of their communications campaign. His review of the evolution of BH's 'Public Awareness Department', which handled matters ranging from propaganda to recruitment of members, reveals how BH adapted to government counter-insurgency activities and technological developments, moving from a 'guerrilla' media strategy involving secret sources to direct uploads of material to YouTube and Twitter. [3.5] In a further study Tasiu Abubakar found that BH's attacks and atrocities were often staged to generate news interest and succeeded in securing substantial attention from Western media to the extent that BH, the organisation, could hardly be distinguished from BH, the media phenomenon. Tasiu Abubakar considers how nation states, despite success against BH on the battlefield, have often failed to advance competing credible narratives to local audiences, as trust in their messages is undermined by misinformation and use of disinformation. [3.6] These findings led to changes in training for Defence Attachés, military experts attached to British embassies worldwide. Tasiu Abubakar's work led to further research on the challenges and ethical dilemmas of reporting violent extremism in Africa. [3.10]

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Scott, M., Wright, K. & Bunce, M. (2018) *The State of Humanitarian Journalism*. University of East Anglia. Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/20780>

3.2 Scott, Martin, Bunce, Mel. and Wright, Kate (2019) Foundation Funding and the Boundaries of Journalism, *Journalism Studies*, 20:14, 2034-2052, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2018.1556321

3.3 Harb, Z. (2017). Reporting Lebanon: Orientalism as News Practice. In Harb, Z. (Ed.) *Reporting the Middle East: The Practice of News in the Twenty-First Century*. (pp. 69–86). London: Bloomsbury. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350987791.ch-004>

3.4 Harb, Z. (2019) Covering Regional Conflicts in Arab News: Political Loyalties and Hate Speech. In Kelly, M., Footitt, H. and Salama-Carr, M. (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Languages and Conflict* Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. ISBN 978-3-030-04824-2. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04825-9_13

3.5 Tasiu Abubakar, A. (2016) 'Communicating violence: The media strategies of Boko Haram'. In: M. Bunce, S. Franks & C. Paterson (Eds.), *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century: From the "Heart of Darkness" to "Africa Rising"* (pp. 200-210). UK: Routledge. ISBN 9781138962323. Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/14942>

3.6 Tasiu Abubakar, A. (2017). 'Strategic Communications, Boko Haram and Counter-insurgency'. Refereed journal article, *Defence Strategic Communications*, 2017: 139-169 Available at: <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/18576/>

Grants / awards

3.7 Bunce and co-authors received the International Communication Association (2020) Wolfgang Donsbach Outstanding Journal Article of the Year Award for [3.2], which was also discussed in the Columbia Journalism Review.

3.8 Bunce, Mel. "What is humanitarian news? A multi-sited study of how journalists define, debate and reproduce the boundaries of humanitarianism", AHRC Early Career Research Grant, 2016- 2018, £70,505.00.

3.9 Harb, Zahera. "Reporting Refugees and Hate Speech", Media Diversity Institute, October 2019, £6,000.

3.10 Tasiu Abubakar, A. "The Challenges of Reporting Violent Extremism in Africa". British Academy. 1 Apr 2019 - 31 Mar 2022. £10,000.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The International Journalism Cluster has improved international crisis reporting (ICR) by changing editorial policy, increasing news audience satisfaction, improving journalistic and professional practice, and shaping regulatory decision-making which benefits journalists, media managers, funders, NGOs, readers, and ultimately those in need of humanitarian aid. The cluster's research is curated and amplified by the Humanitarian News Research Network.

[5.1] Founded by Bunce in 2016 and hosted at City, University of London, it has grown to a membership of over 250 journalists, NGO staff, policy makers, and researchers beyond City who aim to improve ICR. The website features original articles and a quarterly newsletter (247 subscribers), while the Twitter account has over 2,500 followers. The cluster also promotes its research through appointments to regulatory and industry bodies; consultancy; partnerships with news organisations, international organisations, policy makers, and NGOs; and speaking at industry and public events.

4.1 Changing editorial policy and increasing the range of ICR available to audiences

Bunce's consultancy work with The New Humanitarian (TNH, formerly IRIN), the oldest specialist humanitarian news outlet in the world, supported changes in editorial policy which increased the range of TNH content for audiences. TNH has 375,000 unique website visitors a month and 57,000 newsletter subscribers in 190 countries. **[5.2]** After TNH became independent from the UN in 2015, TNH reviewed how to position themselves in the news market and how their reporting could best serve those affected by humanitarian crises. Bunce and co-authors advised the outlet on editorial strategy based on their analysis of TNH's news outputs, which showed a lack of health and climate change reporting and few local experts appearing in reports. **[3.1]** As a result, TNH's new editorial strategy took on board the research findings, the Director said "Since seeing the results of their research, we have made a considered effort to increase the coverage of health and climate change, and to increase the percentage of local sources consulted as analysts and experts – not just as survivors or beneficiaries. Finally, it was a helpful confirmation of our plans to put attention and resources into investigative reporting about the humanitarian sector". **[5.2]**

The research's impact on TNH's editorial strategy was evidenced by a follow-up content analysis of TNH reporting: "Between 2015 and 2017, our coverage of 'Weather and Climate', increased from 2% of reports to 10%. The number of TNH stories classified as 'investigative' or 'campaigning' journalism increased from 6% to 17%. And the proportion of 'local experts' cited in TNH's coverage doubled from 2% to 4%". **[5.2]** The Director confirmed that these changes were welcomed by global audiences: "In our 2018 audience survey, 40% of respondents said that TNH had recently improved its investigative reporting. In addition, a significant proportion said the outlet's coverage of health (39%) and climate change (44%) was one of the 'most useful' topics for their work". **[5.2]**

The change in TNH's reporting, for example doubling the use of local experts, is significant because it is a key information source benefitting decision-makers in the global humanitarian sector. TNH's 2020 audience survey found that 80% of readers had decision-making responsibilities in international / national NGOs and government organisations. Evidencing the influence of TNH's news, 69% of respondents said that TNH stimulated further research

and/or advocacy and 24% said that TNH informed organisational and operational priorities, including the deployment of resources. [5.2] For example, following TNH's health reporting (September 2019) on the potential spread of Ebola from Congo to South Sudan, the Ministry of Health contacted the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention to discuss how to further strengthen South Sudan's overall preparedness. [5.3, p. 15]

In February 2020, Bunce and co-authors presented their findings on how ICR influences aid budgets to the UN's Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week in Geneva. [5.4a] The UN Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs' closing remarks said of the research, "These findings are not only interesting – they are instrumental to inform how we approach the media moving forward. And I think we can all agree that by better understanding the role of the media, we can help make humanitarian funding more principled, efficient, effective and transparent". [5.4b] Bunce is also an adviser to Médecins Sans Frontières and an expert witness at the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes in ongoing proceedings between Al Jazeera and the Egyptian Government (Case No. ARB/16/1) relating to alleged losses of USD 150 million of Al Jazeera's investment due to the enforced closure of its business in Cairo and the arrest of its journalists.

4.2 Reducing hate speech and harmful stereotypes in ICR

Harb's research on Middle Eastern crisis reporting has influenced how journalism is regulated in the UK and improved journalistic practice globally. Harb was a member of the Office of Communications (Ofcom) Content Board (2015-2018), which oversees the regulation of media in the UK. The then Chair of the board said Harb "made an invaluable contribution to its work, both in providing review and oversight of Ofcom's Content and Standards procedures and in offering wider advice and expert guidance to Ofcom as a whole... her knowledge of Middle East politics and media made her a particularly valuable member of the Ofcom team".

[5.5] Harb sat on ten special committees assessing more than 250 broadcast complaints and a fellow board member confirmed Harb's research influenced their decision-making, for example, in cases of hate speech or as background on who owned or controlled Middle Eastern TV channels operating in the UK. [5.6] Harb also advised Ofcom on projects relating to diversity and religious matters.

Since 2014, Harb has been a Trustee and Board member of the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), a global coalition of 70 groups of journalists, editors, press owners, and media support groups. Harb advised on the development of professional tools to improve reporting on sensitive and inflammatory issues, such as the '[5-point Test for Hate Speech](#)' (2014). [3.4] She co-produced guidelines for reporting terrorism and countering hate speech [5.7], an action plan on hate speech and coverage of violence for media practitioners, managers, and owners in the Caribbean [5.8a], and [guidelines for covering a pandemic](#) (2020).

Harb, in collaboration with UNESCO and the Public Media Alliance (the largest global association of public service broadcasters with over 100 members), led workshops and practical training on the EJN guidelines for editors, journalists, and media regulators in the Middle East, Caribbean (August 2018) [5.8a], and South East Asia (March 2019). [5.7] As a result, as evidenced in formal evaluations of the workshops, participants were more aware of hate speech and gained tools to identify and prevent it. A participant from the Press Council of Indonesia said that the training "helps journalists to make ethical decisions when dealing with hate speech, violence and terrorism reporting". [5.7] A senior representative of The Media Institute of the Caribbean, a resource and training facility for journalists and news managers, said: "I would advocate for the use of the action plan developed at the workshop" [5.8b] and the Institute has subsequently created intensive training courses on hate speech reporting.

In 2019 Harb secured funding from the Media Diversity Institute [3.9], an international agency working to encourage accurate reporting and ran well-received workshops on combatting negative stereotypes and disinformation for refugee journalists and journalists who cover refugee issues for British and international news organisations. Harb is also an expert adviser with the Thomson Foundation UK (2007-ongoing) which works to develop the media industry in countries worldwide and, since September 2020, a Director of the Europe Board of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, a project of the Columbia School of Journalism which supports ethical news reporting on conflict and tragedy.

4.3 Changing diplomatic understanding of strategic communications

Tasiu Abubakar's research gives Defence Attachés (DAs) an understanding of the local media landscape and how it can be used to their advantage. DAs are specialist military personnel attached to British embassies, involved in defence engagement activities, such as collecting intelligence and advising on military matters. This advice can form the basis of action with important geo-political consequences.

In December 2016, "because of his research and expertise on how strategic communications can be deployed to advance specific goals" [5.9], Tasiu Abubakar was invited to teach at the UK government's Defence Academy, the post-graduate training centre for military personnel and civilians from 98 countries. The senior officer who oversees the course describes the impact of Tasiu Abubakar's research-based training on DA practice in the field: "[it] provides our DAs with a vital point of reference for their understanding of the information environment in their new countries". [5.9]

The (DA) Foundation Course covers all aspects of strategic communications, examining the relationship between Embassies, DAs, and the media, engagement with the host nation, and how to use communication to advance defence engagement. Tasiu Abubakar's training sets out the role of information campaigns in terrorism and counter-terrorism, a rapidly changing and poorly understood issue. The course is run three times a year for DAs who are about to be deployed around the world, involving over 400 participants since 2017. [5.9] The senior officer confirms "the understanding of the local media landscape and how it can be used to their advantage...is so essential for them ahead of assuming their new roles". [5.9]

Due to the classified nature of the DA role, it is not possible to give specific examples of how the training has influenced defence engagement practice on the ground. However, its vital role in achieving National Security Objectives was confirmed in the UK's International Defence Engagement Strategy (2017) which stated defence engagement was now a funded core 'soft power' task for the Armed Forces, with resources for the global network of DAs (one of the largest in the world), including training, of around £80 million per annum. [5.10, p. 12]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 The Humanitarian News Research Network <http://www.hnrn.co.uk/>

5.2 Testimonial from the Director, The New Humanitarian, 12.2.21

5.3 The New Humanitarian (2019) Annual Report. Available at: https://assets.irinnews.org/s3fs-public/tnh_annual_report_2019_with_audit.pdf

5.4a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020) Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week, Geneva, Event Summary. Available [here](#). (Accessed 3.3.21)

5.4b UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. (2020) Closing Remarks at 'Media's Influence on Humanitarian Donors' event, 4 February. Available [here](#). (Accessed 3.3.21)

5.5 Testimonial from former Chair of Ofcom Content Board, 6.2.18.

5.6 Testimonial from member of Ofcom Content Board, 17.2.21.

5.7 Public Media Alliance (PMA) "Workshop to develop Guidelines for Reporting Terrorism & Countering Hate Speech for the Southeast Asia Region Final Report", 2019. Available at: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/reporting-hate-speech-terrorism-violence-in-south-east-asia/> (Accessed 3.3.21)

5.8a Public Media Alliance (PMA) "Report on Action plan on Hate Speech and media coverage of violence in the Caribbean region Final Report", 2018. Available at: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Action-Plan-Hate-Speech-Caribbean.pdf> (Accessed 3.3.21)

5.8b UNESCO, Ethical Journalism Network, PMA (2018) Report on Action Plan on Hate Speech and media coverage of violence in the Caribbean region. Available on request.

5.9 Testimonial from consultant to the UK Defence Academy, January 2021.

5.10 UK Ministry of Defence (2017) The UK's International Defence Engagement Strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-defence-engagement-strategy-2017>