

Mass Violence and the Media in America: Why the Media Incentivizes Mass Violence and What the Public Can Do to Stop It

By Julie Shedd, S-CAR Associate Dean, jshedd@gmu.edu

I was watching, and occasionally engaging in the social media conversation the weekend following the Boston Marathon bombings and was struck by the extent to which we as a collective were seeking clarity on the meaning of the events, and needed to know the motive in order to make sense of the bombings. One particular exchange focused on whether this event was in the category of Columbine or of Oklahoma City. My initial response was that this event was Columbine with explosives, and I received quite impassioned responses that no, this was a terrorist event, and I was conscious that the labeling of the event mattered quite a lot. This shouldn't surprise any of us; the label attached to violence has been part of the struggle throughout the history of terrorism.

One poignant example is the ten IRA prisoners who died in 1982 in a hunger strike protesting Margaret Thatcher's policy change removing political prisoner status from them and labeling them as criminals. As the rash of mass killings continues across the country it raises the question of where we



American media's portrayal of mass violence affords attention to perpetrators. Photo: Flickr user mattermatters.

draw the line. By academic definitions, these acts are not terror attacks because they lack a political motive and appear to be narcissistic demands for attention. But by these standards Boston presents us with a quandary. That these two suspects were born in Chechnya, the largely ignored site of some of this century's most horrific mass violence committed by government and rebel forces alike, leaves us wondering if this is part of an organized terror campaign. By the time this article is published we will likely know much more about their motives, but my gut feeling is that no, this really was Columbine

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COMMENTARY

I Will, I Can, I Am

S-CAR's Scholar-Athlete Speaks at the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky

By Soolmaz Abooali, S-CAR PhD Student, sabooali@masonlive.gmu.edu



Soolmaz Abooali. Photo: Soolmaz Abooali.

Louisville, Kentucky is home to the Muhammad Ali Center, a place that promotes the principles of “confidence, conviction, dedication, giving, respect, and spirituality.” As a scholar-athlete studying Sport Diplomacy, I was excited to have been recently invited to speak at the Center’s forum on “Athletes for Social Change” regarding the role that educational institutions can play in supporting athletes working to create positive social change. The venue stands as a representation of Muhammad Ali’s example that athletes can be athletic, social, and political forces. Other athletes have followed in Ali’s socially inspired path; amongst them is Dikembe Mutombo, who has spent millions to build a hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, treating over 100,000 individuals.

The forum, held on March 29-30, brought together a unique group of academics, non-profit organizations, and private industry to discuss roles and responsibilities in addressing social issues. In my speech, which discussed the effects of athletes as agents of social change, I argued that as athletes learn to excel in a mental (“I will”), physical (“I can”), and spiritual (“I am”) framework, they become proficient at creating internal change. Social change at the core relates to an alteration in the social order of society and includes changes to thought processes—similar to the thought processes that athletes alter in order to position themselves for success. Herein lies a link: athletes have a unique potential to transfer skills from such internal change toward external change. This does not by any means guarantee an athlete’s ability to create sustainable benefits to society or provide social opportunities where there might be none. In most cases, it actually means very little beyond a one-time contribution that produces feel good stories and pictures of happy children around the athlete. Yet countries (including the United States) and IGOs such as the United Nations are increasingly dedicating resources to programs founded on sport such as peacebuilding, development, and diplomacy programs.

Some would argue that athletes should be discouraged

from advocating for social change. The fact remains, however, that athletes possess both an influential attraction to the public and a desire to contribute to society away from the playing field. In most cases they have the time and financial resources to do so. The way forward thus centers on how to best train and equip athletes and to support entities with the knowledge to create real, sustainable change through a balance of theory and praxis, as opposed to praxis over theory where the name of the game is “try and try again.” To this end, educational institutions have the influence to create a ‘Scholar-Athlete for Social Change Association,’ an interdisciplinary umbrella and cross-sectional organization to develop curricula, research, and public-private partnerships. This influence could help partner with policy makers to ensure broader and deeper positive change. ■

Recent S-CAR Articles, Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor, and Media Appearances

There have been 28 articles, op-eds, letters to the editor, and other media appearances by S-CAR professors, students, and alumni since the last S-CAR newsletter has been published.

Climate Denial Has Led to Paralysis in Leadership

Dennis J.D. Sandole, S-CAR Professor
The Financial Times, 5/19/13

School Suspensions: A Better Way

Allyson Mitchell, S-CAR MS Alumna
The Christian Science Monitor, 5/13/13

Authorization for Use of Military Force: A Blank Check for War Without End

Michael Shank, S-CAR Adjunct Professor and PhD Alumnus
The Guardian, 5/5/13

BHU Holds Seminar on Peacebuilding

Jeremy Rinker, S-CAR PhD Alumnus
The Times of India, 4/2/13

Education in Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Richard Rubenstein, S-CAR Professor
Unrest Magazine, 4/2013

These are only 5 selections of the 28 most recent media pieces. For a complete list, please go to: <http://scar.gmu.edu/media>

The Discourse of Storytelling: S-CAR's Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution

By Sneha Upadhyay, S-CAR MS Student, supadhya@masonlive.gmu.edu

The Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution (CNCR) focuses on the establishment of relational dynamics through the discourse of storytelling. Conflicts stem from the search for validity and justice. The practice of exchanging narratives allows individuals to disclose struggle and emotion experienced from shared histories while gaining a counter-perspective of the Other. CNCR's mission is to anchor research in narrative processes in conflict dynamics within and across the faculty and students at S-CAR, thereby advancing narrative theory and practice. Dr. Sara Cobb, the director of CNCR, is currently teaching CONF 695: Narrative Practice in Conflict Resolution, a course designed to provide students with the analytic tools necessary to conduct their own research using a narrative perspective.

CNCR has been and will be very active in presenting the S-CAR community with events supporting the narrative perspective. In September, Michal Alberstein presented the "Law of Alternatives: In Search of Identity in Dispute Resolution." Alberstein, the head of the conflict management and negotiation program at Bar Ilan University Israel, discussed alternative practices to dispute resolution. Rob Ricigliano visited CNCR in October, hosting a workshop entitled "Systemic Approaches to Conflict Mapping." The workshop introduced students and community members to the basic methodology behind mapping out a conflict situation through a team-driven exercise. In November, CNCR welcomed Dr. Maria Pia Lara, a professor and researcher from the Metropolitan University of Mexico, who presented her work entitled "Revisiting the Theory of Reflective Judgment."

This spring, CNCR hosted a variety of events aimed at providing students with narrative insight. On February 26th, NYU Professor Allen Feldman presented his lecture "Apophatic Sovereignty Before the Law at Guantanamo," which included a discussion of Feldman's involvement with Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRT).

CNCR continues to host lunchtime Narrative Research Roundtables, which affords students the opportunity to present their research-in-progress for feedback and scholarly exchange. The semester's first roundtable took place on March 26th, where S-CAR PhD student Sarah Federman held an exercise on reflective practice entitled "State, Story, and Strategy." Students were asked to consider what stories and particular roles they each play surrounding a given conflict, to reflect on their own states of mind when entering a new engagement, and to identify a strategy from S-CAR that can be used as a resolution for the conflict at hand.

PhD student Roi Ben-Yehuda presented his research at the second roundtable on April 16th. Ben-Yehuda discussed the qualitative changes introduced by the activity of the popular Israeli band Orphaned Land into social interactions within the Israel-Palestine conflict.

CNCR also launched the center's first e-journal, Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice. Editors of the journal are Dr. Cobb and John Winslade, who is a professor at California State University, San Bernardino. The first issue consisted of articles from within the S-CAR community as well as outside scholars, and was published April 15th, 2013. ■

S-CAR in April: Reasons to Celebrate The School's 30 Year Celebration and Senator George Mitchell

By Mark Hardee, S-CAR MS Alumnus and Newsletter Editor, mhardee2@masonlive.gmu.edu

On April 20, 2013, S-CAR community members came together to celebrate the Thirty Year Anniversary of the School, a milestone in the institution's "journey from the modest trailer in Fairfax in which it began to the junction of knowledge and policy," as Dean Bartoli would say. Thirty years after George Mason University supported the inception of an innovative postgraduate degree, a Master of Science in Conflict Resolution, S-CAR finds itself expanding its sphere of influence and impact with a full range of degrees in addition to the MS, boasting graduates of the BS, BA, PhD, and graduate certificate programs. Alumni, professors, and current students alike find themselves embedded in the full spectrum of institutions rooted in conflict analysis and resolution.

With so much to celebrate, the event spanned

the entire Saturday and began with a keynote address by the President of the Alliance for Peacebuilding, Melanie Greenberg, and was followed by panels that explored the historical, contemporary, and future endeavors of S-CAR. The message gleaned from these panels asserted that the roots of the School have spread far and wide, creating a community dedicated to the resolution of conflict.

In fact, S-CAR hosted a prominent member of this community three days prior to the Thirty Year Anniversary event. Senator George Mitchell, architect of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and Special Envoy to the Middle East, spoke of the importance of place in peacebuilding and honored the history and vision of a new 'Point of View' as S-CAR anticipates its next thirty years of service to the world. ■

initiatives

events

Experiential Learning at S-CAR: The School Presents Many Opportunities to Find Knowledge in the Field

By Tyler Branscome, S-CAR MS Student, tbranscoi@masonlive.gmu.edu

On December 5, 2012, the Undergraduate Experiential Learning Project (UELP) in collaboration with the Applied Practice and Theory (APT) course on Experiential Learning hosted a workshop and discussion on topics surrounding experiential learning in the classroom. The workshop began with an activity designed to get practitioners talking about themselves and their experiences with experiential learning activities in their classrooms. After breaking the ice, the participants gathered for an informational presentation on the goals, achievements, and future of the project, led by S-CAR professors Dr. Susan Hirsch and Dr. Agnieszka Paczynska. Graduate Research Assistants who are working on the project also provided their insight and offered their assistance as points of contact for specific experiential learning activities (ELAs) that are being used in the classroom. After the introduction, the workshop continued forward into a focus group activity led by Dr. Andria Wisler, Executive Director at the Center for Social Justice

fer students), Pace University in Brooklyn, and Salisbury University in Maryland. The Salisbury program, directed by Dr. Brian Polkinghorn (an S-CAR graduate), and their team members were able to meet with us to discuss experiential learning and how the two programs might collaborate in the future. There are plans in the fall to continue working with other universities around the country, especially community colleges, to conduct ELAs with students in a variety of programs.

On February 15, 2013, the UELP in collaboration with the APT hosted a workshop and discussion on field-based experiential learning. The workshop was held on the Fairfax campus of George Mason University and was attended by practitioners and educators from both S-CAR and other local institutions that are leading similar courses. The overarching theme of the workshop was to explore how and if theory informs practice, as well as how and if practice informs theory in field-based experiential learning initiatives.

The workshop began with an introduction to the S-CAR model of field-based experiential learning, known as the Service Learning Intensives (SLI), explained by S-CAR faculty member Dr. Patricia Maulden. Specific themes of discussion included dialogue on pedagogical theories, frameworks, challenges, power dynamics and relationships within partnerships in the field, preparing for and coping



Experiential learning workshop and discussion. Photo: Tyler Branscome.

with stress and emotion during field-based experiential learning trips, and ethical consideration and dilemmas encountered in practice. The remainder of the workshop was split into three sections of discussion groups: pedagogical theories, partnerships in the field, and ethics and stress in the field. The workshop concluded with a group discussion on the future of field-based learning, facilitated by S-CAR faculty member Dr. Arthur Romano. Afterwards, the APT team created a deliverable for participants several weeks after the conclusion of the workshop in the form of a concise blueprint summary of the insights and questions from the workshop and a 'call for action' based on the input. ■

at Georgetown University and the project's external evaluator. The final section of the workshop attempted to synthesize our experiences through a roundtable discussion on the integration of experiential learning in the classroom. In addition to this workshop, members of the APT and the UELP teams have been conducting ELAs in classrooms at GMU and other universities. So far, ELAs have been conducted with Lutheran College Washington Semester, a program for visiting students from Lutheran colleges, Northern Virginia Community College (the second largest community college system in the country and a source of many GMU trans-

with stress and emotion during field-based experiential learning trips, and ethical consideration and dilemmas encountered in practice. The remainder of the workshop was split into three sections of discussion groups: pedagogical theories, partnerships in the field, and ethics and stress in the field. The workshop concluded with a group discussion on the future of field-based learning, facilitated by S-CAR faculty member Dr. Arthur Romano. Afterwards, the APT team created a deliverable for participants several weeks after the conclusion of the workshop in the form of a concise blueprint summary of the insights and questions from the workshop and a 'call for action' based on the input. ■

A New Yearlong Course: The Political Economy of Civil War and Peacebuilding

By Thomas Flores, S-CAR Professor, tflores2@gmu.edu



CONF 751 students and Professor Terrence Lyons. Photo: Professor Thomas Flores.

One challenge of graduate school is building long-lasting relationships with faculty members. In the hustle and bustle of the typical semester, it can be difficult to build the kind of mentorship that many graduate students—and faculty members—desire. This year, Professor Terrence Lyons and I built a new solution to this dilemma by offering an innovative, year-long, and team-taught course focusing on the political economy of civil war and peacebuilding. MS students Lindsay Burr, Barre Hussien, Dilafuz Khonikboyeva, Beth Rivard, Van Schmidt, David Younes, and Alvaro Zarco teamed up with PhD students Charles Martin-Shields and Ellyn Yakowenko to take the course, meeting weekly from late August to early May.

CONF 751 offered students a deeper look into the political economy of conflict. Each week, students read a book or set of articles focusing on different aspects of civil war and peacebuilding. Rather than relying on many of the “old favorites,” we pushed our students to read newer, cutting-edge work; the oldest book for the class was written in 2000. Our students read work by Jeremy Weinstein, Stathis Kalyvas, and Page Fortna, among others. Together, we worked our way through a series of topics on the origins, dynamics, and termination of civil war in the fall. In the spring, we turned to the political economy of peacebuilding. The areas we discussed include the economic origins of civil war, insurgent organizations and collective action, genocide, security sector reform, post-war democratization, and post-conflict justice. Rather than lectures, we focused class time on a free-flowing discussion, in which students debated the theoretical, methodological, and normative implications of the readings.

The course also encouraged a close working relationship between students and faculty particularly by me and Terrence mentoring students as they developed

their research interests. Our students took the entire academic year to write a long paper that included original research on a topic of their choice under the direction of one of us. In the fall semester, students defined the literature they wished to address and wrote an abstract and research proposal that they presented to their classmates. In the spring semester, students completed their proposed research and wrote a finished product for presentation in the last week of class. This year’s projects took on a wide variety of topics, including the economic impact of UN Peacekeeping Operations; the relationship between food insecurity and both riots and civil war; competing narratives on civil conflict in Tajikistan as seen through social media; and the importance of capital cities as a political symbol during civil war. Our students have used the project as a springboard for their MS theses or doctoral dissertations and some will be submitted to journals and professional conferences.

As evidence of the strong esprit de corps built over 28 weeks together, students and faculty headed to O’Sullivan’s Irish Pub after our last class meeting, eager to spend one last hour together before officially ending the academic year.

CONF 751 will be offered again in 2013-2014 with three key improvements. First, students will register for 4 credits per semester, for 8 credits overall. Second, we will add several innovative experiential learning modules to the course, especially trips to meet with peacebuilders in the Washington, DC area. Third, we will organize a series of public lectures by scholars engaged in research on the political economy of civil war and peacebuilding that will supplement the classroom discussions.

Interested students can e-mail Terrence Lyons (tlyons1@gmu.edu) or Thomas Flores (tflores2@gmu.edu) with any questions about the course. ■

initiatives

Nino Kukhianidze, S-CAR Masters Student

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, Ph.D. Student and Knowledge Management Associate, kdegraff@gmu.edu

Nino Kukhianidze, a final year MS student at S-CAR, is currently working to develop an initiative to promote post-conflict development through the arts. While there have been other similar initiatives such as the Dance for Peace or the Theatre for Peace projects, Nino is looking to add “smart peacebuilding” elements to her design.

Nino asserts that smart peacebuilding is “developing a comprehensive program that would prove to be both sustainable and durable for the community that it is targeting.” This would involve identifying a part of the arts that the targeted communities largely engage in, including all the relevant stakeholders in the development of any program ideas, and finally securing the initial capital and “safe place” to kick-start the enterprise. To put this within the context an “Arts for Peace” project, Nino plans to tap into the new initiative of many corporations that are championing their social responsibility component, and having them fund projects that would be beneficial to the targeted population as well as to the corporations themselves. For example, Nino’s pilot project looks to bring clothes designers from the Caucasus



Nino Kukhianidze. Photo: S-CAR.

region—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—to develop a joint fashion line that would be under the brand name of WalMart, Kohls, or even Armani, among others. The aim of such a project would be to show that cooperation could exist between communities that perceive themselves as adversaries outside of the political scope while at the same time providing exposure and a steady income for the designers. For a clothing company, this initiative would enable them to tap into more clothing innovations while at the same time positioning themselves to

positively affect the strained relationships within or between these countries. From the Caucasus, Nino hopes to expand this initiative to other parts of the world.

“This would fall within the realm of peace economics or social entrepreneurship within the field of conflict analysis and resolution,” Nino said. Although she acknowledges that her initiative would not resolve conflicts overnight, “it would at least provide the framework or building blocks for repairing strained relationships, which would lead towards positive and therefore sustainable peace.” ■

Innocent Rugaragu, S-CAR PhD Student

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, Ph.D. Student and Knowledge Management Associate, kdegraff@gmu.edu

Innocent Rugaragu is a PhD student at S-CAR. He is also an ordained Jesuit Catholic Priest. Originally from Rwanda, Innocent said, “I watched in horror as the genocide was taking place and that was when I decided that I must devote my life to fight for social change, peace, and justice.” Still reeling from the memory of the genocide, he feels that the priesthood provided him with the emotional and spiritual strength to pursue a path that called for “understanding, promoting, respecting human life, human dignity and human values rather than objectifying them.”

Innocent’s journey to the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution was encouraged by the Order of Jesuits, as it formed a significant part of his Jesuit journey. The promotion of higher education as a common greater good for justice and peace is also one of the Jesuits’ main tenets not only for



Innocent Rugaragu. Photo: Innocent Rugaragu.

their members but also for humanity as a whole. For Innocent, the programs that S-CAR offer are an ideal complement to his faith and his vision of himself as a Jesuit priest for peace and social change.

Currently, Innocent intends to focus his studies on leadership for peace and reconciliation. This interest stems from Africa’s very checkered past of leaders who promote their own selfish agendas at the expense of peace, justice, and reconciliation in their respective countries. As such, Innocent wants to challenge these leadership styles.

After his education, Innocent has three plans: 1) to set up a center that will promote peace and reconciliation leadership; 2) teach, research and do community organizing as a preferential option for the poor and those in need; and 3) continue his Jesuit spiritual and ministerial work in the priesthood. ■

Mass Violence and the Media in America

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with explosives, yet another domestically brewed tragedy.

Our collective search for the information we need to create meaning and develop labels, and the systems that have developed to communicate that meaning, have profound consequences. Standard journalistic practice and norms following an event like the Boston bombings leave the public inundated with pictures and stories about the suspects, and the public has begun pushing back. A Facebook message that same weekend went viral bemoaning media practices. In part, Cam Siciliano says, "I don't want to know his name. I don't want to see his face... I don't want to know what 'cause,' if any, he was fighting for... I don't want to know. Because that's what he really wants. I'll be damned if I'm going to give him what he wants." And he's right: whether this was media seeking disaffected young men, or a terrorist campaign, the media spotlight is what perpetrators want. Modern terrorism (and increasingly modern mass violence) is about communication; it is about hijacking public discourse and demanding attention. It is about using destruction and innocent victims to send a message that can't be as effectively sent by nonviolent means. This is not to lay the blame for acts of terror at the media's feet; we as media consumers demand to know the back-story, demand to know the cause, and financially reward media outlets that give it to us. We are at a point in the struggle against mass violence and terrorism that we need to take seriously the incentive structure our public communication processes have created.

Access to the public discourse is not equal; it is

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Recently Published Books by S-CAR Professors and Affiliates

Neoliberalism, Interrupted: Social Change and Contested Governance in Contemporary Latin American

Mark Goodale and Nancy Postero

May 29, 2013

Attracted to Conflict: Dynamic Foundations of Destructive Social Relations

Andrea Bartoli, Robin Vallacher, Andrzej Nowak, Peter Coleman,

Lan Bui-Wrzosinska, Larry Liebowitch, Katharian Kugler

April 30, 2013

Conflict Resolution and Human Needs

Kevin Avruch and Christopher Mitchell

April 2, 2013

From Conflict Resolution to Social Justice: The Work and Legacy of Wallace Warfield

Alicia Pfund

March 28, 2013

The Eclipse of Equality: Arguing America on Meet the Press

Solon Simmons

March 5, 2013

For more information on these books, please go to <http://scar.gmu.edu/books-roster>

Congratulations 2013 S-CAR Graduates!



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Mass Violence and the Media in America

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dominated by governments and elites representing mainstream society, people who look and believe like us. While social media allows more access for marginalized groups, it still doesn't open up a line into mainstream discussion. We know from decades of media studies that violence sells newspapers (and airtime). Violence exponentially increases the chances of a marginalized group being covered in mainstream media. However, my research on media coverage of terrorism seems to indicate that violence actually decreases the amount of coverage that focuses on a group's grievance or message. When a marginalized group can get media attention for something nonviolent, their chances are higher of having their history, and grievance presented than when they have acted violently. Nonviolent action, when it is covered, is a better tool for communicating than violence. But there is the paradox; nonviolence doesn't often make media headlines. We are incentivizing violence by rewarding it with access to public discourse and then demanding information to make meaning.

What then do we do? Do we ask journalists to not cover violence, and request some kind of self-censorship? Probably not. But, we could ask them to change how they cover violence, and as a public, reward those who change with ratings and subscription dollars. During the manhunt for the Boston suspects there was utility in having their pictures splashed

across T.V. stations and newspapers as a tool to find them. But why, when the manhunt was over, couldn't the pictures featured be those of the victims and heroes of that tragic event? Echoing Cam Siciliano, can we imagine a public communication process that results in our knowing the names of the victims and not the perpetrators, the heroes and not the villains? Can we imagine a process that would allow access to the public discourse to nonviolent groups, minimizing the voice of those that use violence, a process that actively disincentivizes violent action? Let's take seriously the need to cover nonviolence with depth and thoughtfulness, and do more of it.

The word is out; it is easier to get your 15 minutes of fame committing mass violence than by suffering through a season of a reality show or achieving something meaningful. If we, the collective, want to decrease the frequency and intensity of such violence we need to take responsibility for our part in it, recognize our role in the voyeurism of tragedy, and take action. We need to lobby media outlets, journalists, and talk show hosts to de-emphasize the perpetrators and to tell the story of victims instead. This won't be easy; our demand for information in order to make meaning must be balanced against incentivizing violence. To stop the killing requires that we try. ■



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