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New platform provided voice to the voiceless in Uganda
Refugee media network launches in Uganda

By Judith Atim and Cindy Kalita

In this special report, Judith Atim and Cindy Ayebare Kalita look into the journey, trials, hope and goals that led to the establishment of Uganda Refugee and Migration Media Network-Refugee Online News (RM-RON), a network for refugee journalists living in Uganda.

Uganda is home to thousands of refugees from countries like South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea and Somalia.

By virtue of Uganda’s favorable refugee policy and the generally acclaimed hospitality, a number of refugees are running successful businesses and some are even employing Ugandans.

Despite their immeasurable contribution to the economy, there are still skills among refugees which are yet to be tapped.

Refugee journalists for example have lived in Uganda for many years without finding media outlets to practice their profession. “We were forced out of our home because of wars and violence, it is disheartening to realize that you cannot easily practice your profession in another country,” Dicken Ojo, a South Sudanese journalist, said.

Refugee journalists attribute economic hardships for their inability to acquire reporting gadgets or get further training. With no media organization to support them, it has been hard for refugee journalists to carry on with their media profession.

Exiled and Jobless

“We have spent between 5 to 15 years in Uganda but have not been able to get any jobs here as refugee journalists,” says Moses Mbulula from DR Congo.

“For many years of living in Uganda, no media house can either hire or give us jobs,” Zabel Bridget who fled from North Sudan to Uganda shares her plight of joblessness as a journalist. She is corroborated by Muhammad Ali from Somalia who concurs that there’s no platform to articulate the refugee voice or highlight their plight as refugee journalists.

From their own testimonies, it became evident that the passion of refugee journalists in Uganda to practice their trade is largely constricted by lack of a platform.

Political Persecution and Exiling of Journalists

Due to reporting that is construed as politically subversive, a number of refugee journalists were forced into exile because of their passion to give coverage of human rights abuse and champion the cause for justice for citizens who were being ill-treated by state agencies turned them into ‘state enemies.’

Having been labeled political dissidents and state adversaries, many journalists sought refuge in Uganda.

On the other hand, other refugee journalists fled their native countries in the face of chronic violence-just like other refugees-while a few of them had to run for safety for being implicated in involvement with rebel commanders or opposition leaders.

Prior to the establishment of RM-RON no one brought out the predicament of these ‘exiled souls.’ The amazing skills and talents of these ‘colleagues in the profession’ were not being catered in involvement with rebel commanders or opposition leaders.

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Uganda

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insightful coverage of the refugee situation and bring out the much-needed reforms.

Modeling a Platform on the Concept of Peace Journalism

According to Gloria Laker, the Uganda Refugee and Migration Media Network (RM-RON) is conceived on a model of peace journalism that envisions creating a peaceful society through the media.

This multimedia Community-Based Organization (CBO) is registered in Uganda as a non-profit and non-partisan entity that focuses on highlighting the plight of refugees, migrants, and other vulnerable groups in Uganda using peace journalism. RM-RON's style of reporting incorporates development, innovation, solutions journalism approaches, and capacity building of both refugees and host journalists.

The establishment of RM-RON was an outcome of the brain work of award-winning journalist Gloria Laker. She launched its first project—the Refugee Online News (RON) as a platform for news about refugees, by refugees and for refugees in Uganda. This network could cover issues regarding refugees, asylum seekers, migration, and other vulnerable groups in the broader Great Lakes region in a fashion that is counter-narrative to the traditionally negative and skewed reporting usually seen.

With its mission of "promoting fair, equitable and balanced media coverage of refugees and migrants in Uganda from East Africa and the Great Lakes region by employing the principles of peace journalism in an innovative way," RM-RON established itself as a one-stop center on refugee issues.

Not withstanding the absence of funding, the volunteers and freelance reporters recently launched a news website which is attracting local and international readers alike.

For more information, see—https://refugeeandmigrationmedia.org/

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www.park.edu/peacecenter

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Gloria Laker

explains the founding of the network in Uganda.

LRA war, it became clear that bringing refugees and native journalists together would contribute to laying a foundation for peace, reconciliation and unity among refugees here in Uganda. Besides, it would go a long way in the pursuit of peace back in their countries of origin," concludes Gloria Laker.

Initial Mentorship of Refugee Journalists

A year before the establishment of the refugee media body, Laker had met a group of Somali reporters who approached her for training in peace reporting. “Together with top broadcast journalists David Rupiny and Judith Atim, we met the first group but not much could be done in terms of training due to lack of funding until 2018 when the organization was officially established,” Laker said.

Through a Congolese refugee, salonist Adeline Kakulu, Laker got to know Moise Mbulula, a refugee in Uganda who was a powerful broadcast journalist in Congo. Thereafter the two begun hunting for fellow refugees willing to join the newsroom which also begun as a refuge and protection, Adior was exposed to stress coupled with harsh episodes of trauma and depression, after fleeing from the south Sudan war across to Uganda and got resettled in a refugee camp in Uganda. Without parental love and protection, Adior was exposed to stress coupled with severe depression and does not remember ever being safe as she kept replaying in her mind how her parents were killed during the LRA war.

Refugee children hold on to hope

By Ruth Atim

“Trauma in children is horrible especially if you were like me who witnessed her parents being hacked to death and had to run into the bush with my 4 year old brother, but am happy that I have overcome it and moved on,” commented Abdoir Choul.

Abdoir Choul is a 15 year old girl who has gone through harsh episodes of trauma and depression, after fleeing from the south Sudan war across to Uganda and got resettled in a refugee camp in Uganda. Without parental love and protection, Adior was exposed to stress coupled with severe depression and does not remember ever being safe as she kept replaying in her mind how her parents were killed during the LRA war.

Children at play in the Bibi Bidi resettlement camp in north-western Uganda.

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Refugee children

hacked to death as she watched helplessly in her hideout with her sibling. As far as she remembers, she never experienced a childhood. Never sleeping a full night, and deeply depressed with severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and forcing her to attempt to kill herself several times.

This is one among the many stories that refugee children experience, left alone trekking for days on an empty stomach to reach their destination unaccompanied by any adult. Adior was lucky to be matched up with a foster family that took her in and now lives a normal life with her new found family.

To date Adior doesn’t know why she had to leave her home. “I still don’t understand why they had to make us children suffer because of their disagreements, one of my friends fell sick and disappeared in the bush while we were escaping. I don’t know if she is alive or not, I may never see her again,” Adior recalls with tears in her eyes.

Dralero Joseline, a community services officer working in the office of the Prime Minister for Adjumani refugee operations, says trauma in refugee children has affected many keep compar sleeplessness, regressive behavior, social withdrawal and operations, says trauma in refugee children has affected.

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Yemen journalists absorb 3-day online session

By Steven Youngblood

Imagine a highly polarized media environment where media focus exclusively on the alleged misdeeds and even atrocities committed by the other side. Media stoke hatred by dehumanizing the other side. In this environment, there is no middle ground, only biased reporting and propaganda, leaving the public with a distorted picture of the situation.

No, this is not the United States. This is the media environment in Yemen, as described in an article by The Atlantic Council (https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-yemen-war-media-and-propaganda/).

Yemen is saddled not only with this toxic media culture, but with an especially brutal war that has, according to Human Rights Watch, sparked a “world’s largest humanitarian crisis,” with 14 million people at risk of starvation and repeated outbreaks of deadly diseases like cholera.

Against this backdrop, I conducted a peace journalism seminar July 23-24 for 13 journalists from Mukaalla, Southern Yemen, an area which has not been spared the ravages of war. According to one of the seminar’s organizers, in Mukaalla, “a half million people live in extreme poverty, and in the city streets beggars are searching for food in garbage, while sewage has floated in open drains, causing environmental pollution and spreading many diseases.”

In a normal year, due to the ongoing war, the seminar would have been conducted in person in a neighboring country like Oman. But we know 2020 is anything but normal, and thus, the seminar was held via Zoom.

I presented information about the fundamentals of peace journalism. The principles of giving voice to the voiceless and rejecting ‘us vs. them’ narratives were especially salient for the participants. We discussed if peace journalism is widely practiced in Yemen. According to the journalist participants, it is not. We also reviewed the Atlantic Council’s assessment of Yemeni media, and they agreed with the journalist who told the Atlantic Council that “polarization in Yemeni media has never been this high. The problem is that there is no room for a middle ground. On one hand, Houthis (one of the warring parties) allow press only if it is biased in favor of them, as does the Yemeni exiled-government. All that you have in Yemen now is propaganda and each side can support you, only if you abide by their propaganda.”

Asked to present tips on how Yemeni media could practice peace journalism, the participants shared ideas like listening to all parties; double checking sources; including discussions of peace; interviewing “everyone”; concentrating on truth and not rumors; and developing more training in peace journalism techniques. The participants also agreed that they have a vital role to play when it comes to curating social media for their audiences—to “check sources, look for the truth, and listen to all parties,” in the words of one participant.

The seminar closed with a break-out session conversations about “Implementing Women’s Rights in the Local Media” with 33 women leaders and workers in the field of humanitarian relief for the displaced and refugees were honored and the Peace Journalism Platform continually strives to establish the voice of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Also, it has also given the displaced people and refugees in the camps special coverage based on its goals to convey the aspirations and concerns of people.

The first peace press conference was held in May 2019 in Mukaalla. This session is titled, “Empowering Women: Where is the Place for Women in Peace Journalism?”

Steven Youngblood, a 2020 Luxembourgh Peace Prize laureate, is editor of The Peace Journalist magazine and director of the Center for Global Peace Journalism at Park University, Parkville, MO USA.

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When the world slowly seemed to freeze over at the beginning of 2020, with COVID-19 paralysing one nation after another, governments all over the globe shifted their gaze forwards, at their own economies and their own populations. While a global crisis like climate change undoubtedly struggles to get the response it requires, a pandemic managed to instantly shift priorities worldwide, and not necessarily for the better.

This crisis highlighted that, once again, the world’s most vulnerable and marginalised people were left struggling in fragile and conflict-affected settings, would be hardest the last thing that needed to happen was for their voices to drown out and for this pandemic to spark new violence and fuel existing conflict, while the rest of the world tended to their own needs first. Because of our experience in dealing with a similar crisis, the 2014-2016 Ebola crisis in West Africa, the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS) rapidly recognised the immediate and urgent need for action.

During the Ebola outbreak, CSPPS witnessed first-hand the importance of community engagement and locally led solutions in combatting the health crisis. However, the Platform also learned that these approaches instilled a sense of ownership among societal groups, in turn leading to recognising the immediate and urgent need for the response measures to this crisis.

CSPPS is a global network of civil society organisations which operates in two distinct ways, while functioning as a bridge between all parties involved. Firstly, the Platform supports local civil society organisations in their peacebuilding efforts on the ground, for example by assisting them in the roll-out of workshops and training, or by increasing collaboration between relevant state and non-state stakeholders. Secondly, CSPPS elevates civil society’s predicament to the international level through concerted lobbying, advocacy and advocacy efforts, pushing for policy changes and global support for the achievement of sustainable peace and development worldwide. We follow frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda (with a particular focus on SDG16+) and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, while serving as the civil society arm within the tripartite structure of the international dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding.

But raising the voices of those in need when the entire world is in lockdown had to take on an entirely new dimension. During this pandemic, CSPPS is in constant contact with its member organisations in the 29 countries that the Platform is active in. The Platform had many conversations and meetings that were aimed at defining the needs of the members, resulting in the publication of a series of articles that zoomed in on the effects of the pandemic in countries such as Yemen, Libya, Cameroon, Liberia, Somalia and Sierra Leone. CSPPS also published several (joint) statements, calling the global community to action. Eventually, all these contributions culminated in a more elaborate report which highlighted the wider implications of COVID-19 on FCAS.

Sultan also called for the Riyadh Agreement – last year’s peace agreement between the government of Libya and the southern separatists – to be enforced, and for the international community to put further pressure on all the warring parties. Unfortunately, in the months following this interview, the southern separatist movement was reported by the United Arab Emirates – the Southern Transitional Council – seized control of Aden, and declared self-rule in April, de facto breaking the Riyadh Agreement. Yemen’s precarious situation has since surged and is in dire need of action, collaboration, and support. For the CSPPS article on Libya, Zorgi Madi from the Tamazight Women’s Movement, a CSPPS member organisation, was interviewed. Libya has been plagued by war since the 2011 overthrow of Gaddafi’s 42-year-long dictatorship and the Libyan population is largely polarised. However, Zorgi described how Libya’s civil society organisations are persisting in supporting the transition of their nation towards a unified and resilient society.

Madi said, “Seeing how other nations with functioning health systems, such as Italy and Tunisia, were flooded by COVID-19, sparked a lot of fear amongst our people. They started to take preventative measures themselves, attempting to wash their hands more, socially distancing themselves and trying to remain at home. But when there is shelling going on and staying at home is often not the safest option (thus) self-imposing a lockdown becomes increasingly difficult.” Despite the opposing parties’ attempts at taking on the governing lead of the country, a coalition of Libyan civil society organisations – including Madi’s organisation - pursued their mission by contributing to the first Voluntary National Review of the 2030 Agenda (with a particular focus SDG16, is at the very core of this effort, and that these efforts are needed especially when two governments, fighting over power, see civil society as a threat to their own legitimacy.

Both Libya and Yemen, as well as many other countries in the world, struggle with economic, political, social and environmental fragility. The added threat of COVID-19 only destabilises these situations in fragile and conflict-affected settings. CSPPS sees it as a part of its mission to make the voices of people on the frontlines heard, so the international community does not forget that our interlinked way of existence is indeed the reason why COVID-19 could so easily spread, but also why we cannot turn our focus inwards alone. The coverage of local perspectives and voices is needed for, as CSPPS platform firmly believes that working towards more peaceful, just and inclusive societies, the provision of access to justice for all and the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, as stipulated by SDG16, is at the very core of this effort, and that these efforts are needed especially when two governments, fighting over power, see civil society as a threat to their own legitimacy.

The raising of voices of those in need when the entire world is in lockdown had to take on an entirely new dimension.
S. Sudanese youth battle Covid misinfo, hate speech

By Gale Julius Dada

Despite the world’s current focus on healthcare workers battling the COVID-19 pandemic, South Sudan’s youth are fighting a different battle — one against misinformation and online hate speech sparked by the virus.

South Sudan’s Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of COVID-19 on April 5, identifying a United Nations (UN) aid worker who arrived to the country on February 28. The announcement was followed by social media attacks against foreigners and aid workers, sparking xenophobic messages allegating that the UN imported the virus into the country.

Now, in a bid to counter the growing hate speech, youth advocacy groups have formed a consortium called Access to Information and Rumor Verification in South Sudan (AIRSS) to raise awareness and dispel fake news about COVID-19. In a nation where six out of ten COVID-19 rumors are untrue, according to UNICEF, the stakes are high.

The collaboration initiated an online peace campaign after seeing overwhelming cases of hate speech and xenophobic messages shared on social media.

“Spreading hatred and inciting against a group based on belonging will only frustrate our efforts in the fight against the deadly virus,” Malual said.

“The fight towards ensuring our community is COVID-19 free needs a lot of efforts from all corners and as of now a lot of hate speech misinformation and fake news have taken over, but our fight is hate-free South Sudan,” Lobijo (pictured above in red) said.

The youth group are also using bicycles fitted with megaphones to convey messages about COVID-19 throughout their communities.

“Fellow South Sudanese, Coronavirus is a global pandemic, it does not discriminate whether you are a man or woman, white or black, Christian or Muslim, young or old,” Chol said. “It is threatening our health and peace. We therefore, must come together to protect ourselves, families, our communities and the peace that we have just secured by forming the revitalized government of national unity.”

During his April 9 national address, President Salva Kiir urged the people of South Sudan to exercise restraint and shun hate speech and xenophobic utterances against the humanitarian community in South Sudan.

“I call upon you to exercise restraint and avoid hate speeches and xenophobic utterances against our guests and those who have come to provide services to us from different countries and organizations,” he added.

This story originally appeared at peace2news.com.

Gale Julius Dada

Gale is multimedia journalist from South Sudan. Since 2014, Gale has worked as a reporter, radio producer, and photojournalist. He is currently the producer and presenter of Peace Forum program on Bakhita Radio 91.0 FM in Juba.

Wilfred named South Sudan’s top peace journalist

By Siyabulela Mandela

South Sudan Background

After decades of prolonged civil war between the North and the South in Sudan, constant political struggle by the South with the central government in Khartoum, and the transition period between 2005 and 2010, the government of South Sudan (GODSS) declared independence from the North. In July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan was declared as an independent country under the leadership of President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Vice President Riek Machar Teny.

However, in 2013, hardly two years after its independence, South Sudan was engulfed in the civil war following the disbandment of the cabinet under President Kiir on the accusation of a planned coup against his government by his deputy Riek Machar. The deputy president led a rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) which waged a violent struggle against the government forces SPLM, and the civil war lasted for five years killing almost 2.2 million South Sudanese and displacing millions. In August 2018, in an attempt to end the violent conflict, President Kiir signed a power-sharing agreement with rebel leader Machar and other opposition groups.

Journalist profile: Rosemary Wilfred

Siyabulela Mandela is the Team Leader for Journalists for Human Rights in South Sudan and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in International Relations and Conflict Studies at Nelson Mandela University, South Africa.

This story originally appeared at peace2news.com.

In Juba, bicyclists spread Covid info using a megaphone. (Photo by Gale Dada)
Since the emergence of digital media, many scholars and journalists have written about the impacts of this new medium on journalism. Besides setting the agenda of mainstream media and digital media platforms also empowered people in a way that, with their thumbs, they became capable of bringing down authoritarian regimes (i.e. Arab Spring) and legitimising hate speech through successive sharings. Information became the main weapon in networked societies, but, interestingly, this weapon has the power to hurt and heal. It is important, then, to question ourselves: how am I using digital media to hurt or to heal?

This question came to my mind in 2017 when I realized how extremist groups were using digital media to radicalize young people from all over the world. They were using formats recognized as legitimate vehicles of truth (pieces of newscasts, online magazine, documentary’s language) merged with videogame techniques to affect individuals who were looking for a cause to dedicate their lives.

October 2020

Words Heal: The World

Beatriz Buarque

The PEACE JOURNALIST

Words Heal to have become capable of producing information as truth (a place that used to be occupied solely by journalists) and if information has been used to incite hate – especially among youngsters, then young people must be empowered to use information to promote peace. The logic behind Words Heal seems easy to understand but young people rarely are the opportunity to take the front seat in peacebuilding strategies – especially in underdeveloped countries.

This fact has driven me to start working with Brazilian undergraduate students enrolled at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Drawing upon the work of the American philosopher John Dewey, who stated that students communicate what they experience, Words Heal employs the methodology Educ-(-a)ction. This cultivates multidisciplinary critical thinking and it also provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to take action, to implement their own ideas, and to challenge hate speech in digital spaces. Since 2017, over 110 Brazilian students have transformed academic articles into written pieces accessible to everyone, developed social media campaigns, produced videos, organised events, and launched the groundbreaking report The Hate Map Of Brazil.

The work expanded to the UK and Argentina, and students from different nationalities started producing content in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, reaching an online community of more than 6,280 people in different platforms. Even though students are expected to volunteer at Words Heal for one year, the experience of producing content to challenge hate speech is so enriching that some of them decide to stay longer. This was the case of Camelia Abdelmid from the University of Westminster (UK). After directing the movie “Who you fear, you should hear,” she realized she could do more to challenge hate speech, and hence, she became Words Heal’s social media coordinator. She said, “Being part of the short documentary was a pleasant experience as I got to hear what different students from diverse nationalities had to say. When I first saw them blindfolded and how easily they would talk to each other, I started to think more about how people judge each other based solely on their appearance, gestures and how they react when someone is talking.”

Laura Rocha produced a powerful video for the campaign against femicide and decided to stay longer than one year to coordinate the project Hype News (a project launched during the COVID19 pandemic to promote news that give a sense of hope to the public during a moment in which the world seems to have bowed down) and eventually, she said that Words Heal is special because it brings together young people from different nationalities and backgrounds with the common goal of challenging hate. Rocha said, “It makes me believe that I have this power. The power to reach whatever I desire and also help people around me. We work as a team but we are bonded as a family.”

Overall, the work developed by Words Heal The World has brought positive impacts to students, universities, and civil society organizations. Students from different backgrounds learn how to use digital media to promote peace and share this knowledge within their communities. Universities have a partner that gives students the opportunity to use their skills to promote peace, contributing to a diverse and equal environment. Civil society organizations that work with Words Heal have their work promoted by students, filling the gap of lack of media professionals faced by many NGOs.

Learning about digital media and hate speech has made hundreds of young people aware of their power in a society ruled by information. They are producing words to heal our world and also inspiring people to take action to shape a peaceful society. They became so powerful that, in three years of existence, Words Heal has already won two international prizes: the Transcendence Award granted by Michigan State University (US), and the Luxembourg Peace Prize. Peacebuilding is no longer solely on the hands of big organizations. Each of us has responsibility in shaping a peaceful society and every message we share on digital media counts.

Today, much more than in the last decades, young people can play a crucial role in peacebuilding but to use words to heal, they must be trained. They must learn the characteristics of networked societies to use regimes of popularity in favor of messages that promote peace. They must learn how to use silence and words in an effective way. This knowledge combined with the freshness of young people can become our main weapon against polarization and extremist acts. After all, if people learned to hate, they can learn to love and respect. It is a matter of education.
Israeli PJ course shifts to Zoom during pandemic

By Ruth Ebenstein

Peace journalism is now being taught in Israel in the virtual classroom.

Since early July 2020, some seventy people—Jewish and Arab Israelis, women and men from across the country, ranging in age from 20-something to 70-something—have gathered on Zoom to learn the principles and practices of Peace Journalism. It’s an engaging assembly, with chitchat in Hebrew and Arabic before the lectures begin, and a flurry of conversation in the chat boxes throughout, swapping opinions and sharing perspectives.

With many participants dialing in from home, one is privy to the little touches of abode: a colorful collection of magnets covering every corner of a family-size refrigerator, a dainty collection of tea cups tucked behind a glass china cabinet, and the accidental shout of a family member when the mute button slips off, or a cat blinking by.

Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, participants studied Peace Journalism by going away for the weekend. This very same course was taught over three intensive face-to-face weekends at hotels and guest houses where participants congregated to study, socialize, debate and connect. They also participated in study groups, welcomed the 70 Jew and Arab participants on Zoom.

But shifting the course to Zoom has been surprisingly smooth and successful. It’s involved quite a bit of learning as well as its own kind of magic.

Complex is the program’s official name: “Media Impacting Conflict Transformation: From Local Action to Cross-border and Global Outreach.” It is the brainchild of The Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace, an educational NGO that promotes peace, human/civil rights, tolerance and coexistence across religious, ethnic and national groups in Israel and the region. The Adam Institute has partnered with Israel Social Television, an independent media NGO promoting social change via video content, dissemination and media training for social activists. Support for this program comes from the European Union.

It draws an admixture of participants, including journalists from mainstream and independent media, social activists, communication students, spokespeople, artists, and other media-related professions.

The curriculum comprises lectures as well as theoretical and practical workshops. The larger group is divided into three smaller groups, with each section learning under the guidance of two facilitators: one Jewish, one Arab. In the smaller workshops, Jewish and Arab participants can process the lectures, voice their perspective, deepen their knowledge and engage in group discussion. Group facilitators use the unique, award-winning “Betzavta” – Adam Institute’s group facilitation method, which transforms conflicts into dilemmas. (Betzavta means “Together” in Hebrew). This method allows for greater depth to the discussion.

The course kicked off on July 1 with a lecture by Etta Prince-Gibson, former Editor-in-Chief of The Jerusalem Report and Deputy Bureau Chief for The Washington Post, presenting on the topic, “What is Peace Journalism?” The award-winning journalist and editor introduced participants to Johan Galtung, the Norwegian sociologist who founded the discipline of peace and conflict studies and peace journalism. Prince-Gibson also explained its connection to Solutions Journalism, which is rigorous reporting about journalistic story, how to edit. I know this because I took this very course in 2019, and got to partake in that no-longer-safe physical togetherness that we took for granted in the Pre-Corona Era when it was as plentiful as oxygen.

In mid-September the topic centered on the exclusion of women from the peace discourse, with compelling presentations by Dr. Sarai Aharoni of Ben-Gurion University, who specializes in feminist security studies, women and peace processes. Also presenting on the role of women in peacemaking was Nabila Espanioly, a psychologist, politician and activist.

On the roster of upcoming topics: Mizrahi Jews and their role in promot- ing peace in the past and present; the double exclusion of Bedouins and Palestinian citizens of Israel from the peace process; ultra-Orthodox and their stance on the peace process; and citizens from the Former Soviet Union, their narrative on the peace process and stance on possible solutions.

The lectures are slated to wrap up in November. Corona-permitting, the course will culminate with a three-day workshop that will allow for consid- erable hands-on learning, meeting of professional journalists, discussion of ethics, and getting-to-know-you.

During these trying times, when people are locked down at home and physically going out less, it is affirming to know that there are programs exploring ways to use technology to reach across the divide. To continue to create artistic work together, to dismantle stereotypes.

Some serious questions arise in the group discussions. Can Peace Journal- ism ever match the ratings of War Journalism? If not, what can we do about it? What is the significance of granting legitimacy to these voices that are left out of the conversation, and how can we change that? Also compelling is the array of definitions given to Peace Journalism, what it means and what it can do.

There seems to be consensus around this: war journalism reports on differ- ences rather than similarities whereas peace journalism layers the “us” and “them” with additional elements. Rather than focusing on what we have, peace journalism focuses on what we need to have, what ought to be. This new online course in Peace Journalism is a much-needed step as Israelis and Palestinians, and all people all over, must find a way forward together.
Harvard event explores bias, BLM reporting

Godha Bapuji

Bias, as defined by the Oxford English dictionary is “a strong feeling in favour of or against one group of people, or one side in an argument, often not based on fair judgement.” As humans, we have to empathise with the fact that our cognitive abilities determine how we act or react to a particular sociocultural situation when faced with one.

An evolutionary psychological perspective predicts that the mind is equipped with function-specific mechanisms adapted for special purposes—mechanisms with special design for solving problems such as malnutrition, safety avoidance, and social exchange. How we act or react to a particular sociocultural fabric.

A small group of Harvard students and alumnae tried to do exactly that earlier this year in June, after the horrific murders of individuals from our black communities in the U.S. more specifically a homocide to George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, through their student-run volunteer organisation and consequently our oblique access to the news media outlets in the US.

Our idea was to create space for the community to heal from the trauma of the murders but also to critically reflect on the news and media coverage of the protests that ensued in the midst of a global pandemic. Our esteemed panel included guests from multi-disciplinary fields such as Rachel Bowen-Pittman, the Executive Director of UNA-USA, Vincent Bish, Michael Patrick Macdonald, and Center for Global Peace Journalism’s director, Steven Youngblood. He started off by emphasizing the varying characteristics of media depiction of the George Floyd murders by media outlets and how partisanship is reflected in those hearings. He shared his observations about violence framing and word choice. Youngblood stated “Words matter. They carry meanings beyond their dictionary definitions and helps news consumers to contextualise the news.”

Youngblood rightly asks, “What can be done to improve the coverage?” He believes that peace journalism can be used to improve the partisan coverage that exist where stories are framed, who we are talking to and how we are telling the stories matters and that Peace journalism is very cognizant of word choice therefore very firmly rejecting the Us vs them narratives commonly seen in news media outlets in the US.

He further clarifies that peace journalism is not just good news reporting. But there is a simple demand and supply mechanism that perpetuates bias and FUD that further leads to the spread of disinformation and misinformation. As he concludes Steven hopes that “someday, someone, media consumers will demand more from their media outlets, including abandoning those reflexively partisan narratives of everything from Covid-19 to Civil rights protests. ‘...when this happens, media outlets consider the suggestions from peace journalism that can improve their recording and their service to the public.’

How does our discussion of bias and FUD tie into all of this? In line with Steven’s remark that “words matter” as noted in the earlier paragraphs, the bias we see in the news media today reflects our mental equipment to deal with unfamiliar or unknown situations. Fear, uncertainty, and doubt plays a dominant role in explaining why certain groups are predisposed to get deflected away from a certain angle of thought or action.

By playing on the genuine cognitive limitations of our mind, certain groups tend to find a survival mechanism that enhances their agenda and “truth.” But by understanding the principles of peace journalism and as Steven hopes, news and media outlets will be better equipped to assess all sides of the narrative to become more objective in their reporting to the public.

Furthermore using the same principles of peace journalism, as consumers can better empathise with the groups that want to tell us their version of “truth,” thereby nudging ourselves to critically reflect on what we hear and see and consequently demand better from our public services as journalism. There are a few tools available today to help us ascertain media outlet bias although it is important to note that everything we do is inherently laced with bias and there are several such bias that we are not aware of.

The Cognitive Bias Codex is one such great tool to help us become aware of cognitive biases and fallacies. At the same time, other bias marking tools such as Ad Fontes Media’s Bias Chart or media bias or fact check websites provide efficient means to verify information that we consume.

The bottom line is that humans are inherently biased, it is our natural survival mechanism based on several biological and sociocultural factors that have shaped our thinking and cognitive faculties. By being aware of these limitations and by applying the principles of peace journalism we can prevent the negative feedback loop of disinformation and misinformation that further shape our mindset and consequently our actions towards less understood or less known people, places, cultures, and situations.

References


The first day of the seminar featured an introduction to peace journalism. I led a discussion about what responsible journalism should do, and should look like, in Sudan. Several participants discussed the importance of freedom of the press as a prerequisite to improving journalism, and hoped that the 2019 revolution will pave the way for expanded press freedoms. There is still substantial improvement needed in this area, however. Human Rights Watch and others have reported on recent efforts by the army to threaten and muzzle critical journalists using the same anti-freedom laws wielded by the previous autocratic regime. Those who spoke agreed, noting that the State acted “with a fist of iron.” Those who spoke agreed that social media was best suited for the revolution were guiding the revolution, but was persuaded to allow the journalists to participate in the workshops. Working with contacts in the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to convince them to collaborate on the project. Universities throughout Sudan have an excellent fiber optic network, that had been jealously guarded by the MoHESR, but was persuaded to allow the Ministry of Culture and Information to invite journalists to the universities to participate in the workshops.

The result was fifteen Sudanese universities, mostly in conflict areas, hosted 255 journalists. The event was held with a minimum of technical issues and a maximum of interaction.

By Keith Hughes, Public Affairs Officer, US Embassy-Khartoum

How the Sudan PJ seminar became reality
The existence of centers, courses, as well as conferences, as well as journals, manuals, and other publications dedicated to peace journalism would have been greatly welcomed by Alfred Hermann Fried (1864-1921). He would certainly have recognized the urgent need for this kind of journalism today. The Austrian was the first journalist to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (1911). Today, many journalists have been persecuted for their pursuit of peace, truth, and justice.

Born in Vienna, Fried started out as a bookseller and publisher in Berlin before he became an active and leading member of the organized international peace movement that emerged following the publication of Bertha von Suttner’s bestselling anti-war novel, *Lay Down Your Arms!* (1889). During the last decade of the 19th century, Fried published a small but important peace monthly that von Suttner edited. In 1899 it was replaced by *Die Friedens-Warte* (The Peace Watch) which Fried edited until his death. The chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee called it ‘the best journal in the peace movement, with excellent leading articles and news of topical international problems.’ Among its many distinguished contributors were academics from a wide range of disciplines (especially scholars of international law), activists, and politicians.

Peter van den Dungen was a lecturer/visiting lecturer in peace studies at the University of Bradford, UK (1976-2015). A peace historian, he is honorary general coordinator of the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP).

always reported and analysed the political issues of the day in a way that focused on the needs of peace for calming inflated sentiments and preventing violent conflict (as did von Suttner, the first female political journalist in the German language). They consistently and practically promoted an enlightened, cooperative and constructive approach.

Fried was a great gifted and prolific author who was equally active as a journalist, editor, and author of books, both popular and scholarly, on such related subjects as the peace movement, international organization, and international law. His proficiency as a journalist is shown by a volume that he published in 1908 with details of 1,000 of his newspaper articles on the peace movement. He clearly set himself apart from the mainstream journalists of his day – with its notorious stoking of fear, hatred, and suspicion among countries – by referring to himself as a peace journalist. ‘Under the White Flag’, a book that he published in Berlin in 1901, consisted of a selection of his articles and essays and was sub-titled ‘From the files of a peace journalist’ (Friedensjournalist).

In an introductory essay on the press and the peace movement, he criticized how the latter were neglected or ridiculed. But its steady growth and influence, including the gradual adoption of the movement’s agenda (notably the use of arbitration) by states to settle their conflicts, made him believe that a major change in public opinion was imminent. Other factors contributing to this historic shift were the growing realization of the burden and dangers of an armed peace, and the costly and devastating wars in Cuba, South Africa and China. Fried correctly argued that wars were made possible, indeed inevitable, because of the anarchy that characterized international relations. His motto – ‘Organize the World!’ – was a precondition before disarmament (as expressed in Bertha von Suttner’s ‘Lay Down Your Arms!’) would become a realistic possibility.

Although he devoted much time and energy editing several peace movement journals, Fried realized that they reached only a relatively small audience and that ‘preaching to the converted’ was ineffective. The real campaign had to be waged in and through the mainstream press.

The need for peace journalism is greater than ever, also because the consequences of violent conflict and war are so much more catastrophic than a century ago. The organization and institutionalization of peace journalism at the start of the 21st century is therefore greatly to be welcomed. Fried had attempted something similar at the start of the 20th century when he took the initiative for the creation of an International Union of the Peace Press. Despite his best efforts, it remained embryonic and when peace journalism was revived in the aftermath of two world wars, his pioneering efforts had largely been forgotten.

Even in his native Austria, the Nobel Peace Laureate had been ‘suppressed and forgotten’ – the title of the first biography of Fried, published in 2006.

by Rosaline Akah Obah

The coronavirus that has now taken the entire world hostage has changed daily routines and has made normal things now look unusual. While it continues to spread with many getting hospitalized, the death toll rising by the day, Cameroon journalism core’s has been hit hard by the virus. Reports are rife about the virus and at the same time keeping safe from the virus has become a daily dilemma for many journalists in Cameroon. Cameroon’s journalists now battle credibility checks and deal with drying up of news sources and ICT use at work.

Peace journalists especially within the Cameroon Community Media Network (CCMN) have complained that the rapid spread of Covid 19 in Cameroon has affected their daily work of building peace in the country. The pandemic that comes at the heart of the Anglophone crisis has made things worse at the time their work as peace journalists is needed most.

Cameroonians, especially English speaking Cameroonians, have lost trust in the government in the close to four years crisis. The government’s response to the pandemic has been met with mistrust, and efforts by peace journalists in helping to educate the public on the pandemic come with a gamut of challenges. Lockdowns, social distancing, restrictions on movements, and the self fear of exposure have made work difficult for peace journalists. Ndefra Melanie, peace journalist in Bamenda, observed, “My work entails me giving a voice to the community as well as societal actividades is done via interviews and panel discussions. Covid 19 has come with lots of myths and conflicts. Many people in Bamenda still believe that the government is telling lies about Covid 19. Some say its not real working. As a peace journalist, one needs to talk to or invite medical doctors, government officials and the local people via pop to talk to the people on the radio. Because of the fear of exposure and the need for physical distancing, I’m helpless. It’s difficult to get resource persons,” she said.

Moma Sandrine, another peace journalist in Yaounde, is torn between staying safe and doing her work as a peace journalist. “It has not been easy as movements are restricted. Boarding a taxi from one locality to another is so risky because you can get exposed to the virus. To get information or statistics, I can only do phone calls which are not reliable. When you try at times to get to government offices, you are denied access because the number of person accepted per day has exceeded. In such a situation, balancing stories and getting right information is difficult,” she intimated.

The measures enacted to combat Covid 19 are a hindrance to journalism work. According to Fongoh Primus Ayeh, Vol, 9 No, 2

by Peter van den Dungen

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Seeking better Covid coverage in N. Macedonia

by Marina Tuneva

Reporting on COVID-19 has created great challenges for journalists in North Macedonia. Journalists faced the complex task of reporting the truth, while avoiding to provoke unnecessary anxiety and concern among the public. Nonetheless, some of them have become a “vehicle” for spreading distorted truths, half-truths, lies and misinformation. As the virus spread, various misinformation and lies began to spread as well. “Bio-threats from China,” “secret labs,” “Government scenarios” “spread by those who ate bat soup,” “the vaccine already exists,” were among the phrases media coined.

Uncertainty leaves room for false claims, which in the wake of the pandemic could lead to behavior that accelerates the transmission of the virus. Epidemiologist Adam Kucharski wrote for the Guardian. “When our natural inclination to seek information that underpins our pre-existing beliefs and fears, the likelihood of becoming infected with the “virus of lies” becomes even greater. Excessive exposure to coronavirus information increases anxiety and panic.

The public in North Macedonia has increasingly started to react to the media coverage of the pandemic. Of the total number of press complaints filed to the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia starting from February through August, 33% of the reactions were related to the coverage of the coronavirus crisis. Most of the complaints referred to the one-sided reporting, sensationalism, and biased reporting in favor of political actors. The Council warned the media that this kind of reporting can further increase anxiety and panic and encourage irrational behavior by citizens.

The Macedonian neurologist Arben Taravari claims that if news and information in the media coverage is accurate, it can help people think rationally and feel safe. They will know how to defend themselves from the unknown enemy and be aware about the risks, he says. The things we need in moments like these is to regain our sense of control over our own fears, without overreacting and risking to contribute to the general panic. In that battle, careful selection, consumption and evaluation of the contents is crucial. Sensationalism and scaremongering in language and images that could heighten anxiety should be entirely avoided, the Ethical Journalism Network recommends.

Audiences exposed to pandemic journalism have been found to demonstrate increased levels of hope and empathy. Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – about what to report, and how to report it. Journalists reporting on crisis are expected to look at the entire context and not just to the visible consequences. Therefore, media need to adopt a new spirit, giving particular emphasis to a more trustworthy information that help audiences understand the problem and behave rationally. Information is vital to encourage people to take the available preventive measures to protect and save lives. Therefore, media outlets are key public health players, shaping knowledge of risk and targeting communities to protect health.

In an effort to help media professionally report about the pandemic and apply the principles of peace journalism in their reporting, the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia produced “Guidelines for Safe and Professional Reporting on Coronavirus” written by Marina Tuneva and Ognen Janeski. (These can be accessed at: https://tinyurl.com/yxg3gmve.) Calming tensions and offering solutions to the citizens is one of the principles included in the Guidelines. In conditions of great concern and anxiety about the spread of the virus and its consequences, the media should help citizens with specific information regarding protection and measures that they should take. Recommendations should be based on relevant and official sources. Acknowledging a fear and uncertainty can help in their overcoming.

Media coverage should reflect public concerns, but also be aimed at providing reliable information on how they can act. Media have a role in the way they report the news and how they report it. In this sense, they are not simple observers but actors because of the responsibility that they carry in their work, not out of engagement, but in the political sense of the word. This is a valuable lesson not just for the media, but also for institutions and foreveryone affected. Otherwise, the price we would pay would be much higher than the threat posed by the virus itself.

Marina Tuneva is an Executive Director of the Council of Media Ethics in North Macedonia and an Assistant Professor at the Institute for Communication Studies. Her areas of expertise include strategic communication, public relations, media and diversity reporting, peace journalism and ethics in communication.

April 10, 2018 was an exciting day for the 400 experienced journalists and peacebuilders who got together to take a deep dive into the issues surrounding the way peace and conflict are covered in the media. It was also the beginning of a series of events designed to bring peacebuilders and journalists from around the world together, meeting to exchange ideas, experiences, stories, and strategies.

The first “War Stories, Peace Stories: Peace Conflict & the Media” symposium was held at the New York Times Center. It featured journalists including Robert Rosenthal, Director of the Center for Investigative Reporting and Jon and Kerri Sawyer from the Pulitzer Center on Reporting, and peacebuilders such as Mike Jobbins from Search for Common Ground and Bridget Moix from Peace Direct.

The event was a wonderful success, provoking serious dialogue and tangible results in the form of many articles about international peace efforts in global media outlets. The creator of the program, Jamil Simon, was awarded the Luxembourg Peace Prize in Peace Journalism for his work.


Focused on increasing global media attention to peacebuilding efforts, Jamil and Peter began organizing a series of WSPS symposia in regional media centers around the world. The second event was planned for Brussels, with support from the International Federation of Journalists, and a third was to be held in Bogota, with former President of Colombia and Nobel Peace Prize winner Juan Carlos Santos supporting the event in order to reach Latin American journalists. The creators’ long-term plans were to follow Brussels and Bogota with events in other major media centers: London, Nairobi, Mumbai, Sydney and Tokyo. Like the rest of the world, they had to press the pause button on their ambitious plans.

Jamil and Peter’s commitment to the power of this idea is unshakable, to bring journalists and peacebuilders together to explore new approaches to writing about peace and conflict. With the help of a small team of writers, designers and web developers, and with experienced journalists and peacebuilders to guide the development of the content and the design of the activities, they’ve currently turned toward rebuilding the War Stories Peace Stories website.

The WSPS web platform (https://www.warstoriestapesstories.org/) will become a dynamic global platform to build community around this idea and to lay the groundwork to support the in-person symposia when it becomes possible to continue them. Changing the way journalists report on peace and conflict is a powerful idea that will resonate on a virtual platform, designed to keep the idea alive and build community among journalists and peacebuilders.

Jamil Simon is a peace activist, an award-winning documentary filmmaker, and a communications strategist. He created a symposium called War Stories Peace Stories: Peace and Conflict and The Media. Last June he was awarded the Luxembourg Peace Prize for his work building global awareness of peaceful solutions to conflict.

In the April Edition:
- Media literacy and PJ
- Uniting India/Pak journos

In the October Edition:
- War Stories Peace Stories looks ahead to Brussels

Alexis Okeowo, Staff writer at The New Yorker, makes a point at "War Stories, Peace Stories" in New York in 2018.