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Launching a PJ guide in Afghanistan

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30 What is Peace Journalism?
Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters make choices that improve the prospects for peace. These choices, including how to frame stories and carefully choosing which words are used, create an atmosphere conducive to peace and supportive of peace initiatives and peacemakers, without compromising the basic principles of good journalism.

A number of valuable peace journalism resources, including curriculum packets, online links, as well as back issues of Peace Journalism, can be found at www.park.edu/peacecenter.

Center for Global Peace Journalism

The Center for Global Peace Journalism works with journalists, academics, and students worldwide to improve reporting about conflicts, societal unrest, reconciliation, solutions, and peace. Through its courses, workshops, lectures, this magazine, blog, and other resources, the Center encourages media to reject sensational and inflammatory reporting, and produce counter-narratives that offer a more nuanced view of those who are marginalized—ethnic/racial/religious minorities, women, youth, and migrants.

Contributors

Cilene Victor (Humanitarian, page 4) is a full professor in the Social Communication Program at Metodista University of São Paulo (UMESP), Brazil, where she is one of the leaders of workgroup Humanitarian Journalism and Media Interventions, and professor at FAPCOM.

Gloria Laker (Uganda, page 6) is a Ugandan award winning journalist and a peace journalism trainer. Gloria runs the Uganda Refugees and Migration Media Network.

Salibir Musa is young and passionate peace journalist based in Arua City.

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Steven Youngblood (Media Lit/PJ, page 10) is director of the Center for Global Peace Journalism at Park University, and editor of The Peace Journalist.

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Laney Lexon (Slow journalism, page 14) is a PhD candidate at University’s School of Applied Policy and Social Sciences research the role of archives documenting incarceration in societies affected by conflict. Her work falls broadly into critical theory with an anthropological approach to fieldwork and focuses on viewing linear time as a social construct.

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Lewis W. Duruid (Media and Covid, page 20) is an author, freelance writer and lecturer.

Masoud Memin (Afghanistan, page 22) is a freelance media trainer. He worked with Media Assistance Afghanistan and NAI Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan. He has conducted many trainings for Afghan journalists.

the PEACE JOURNALIST

The first time I put out a call for submissions to this magazine, almost 10 years ago, I half expected to get one or two articles, leaving me to figure out how to fill an entire magazine by myself.

Instead, I continue to be amazed and thrilled not only by the quality and volume of submissions about peace journalism, but also with the contributors’ willingness to share their stories for nothing but my thanks.

This is all doubly true during the Covid 19 pandemic. I had expected peace journalism research and project work to ground to a halt after last March. I was, once again, mistaken.

A quick glance at the table of contents reveals a wealth of stories about ongoing PJ project work in places as diverse as Uganda and Afghanistan, where peace journalism events and trainings have even been held in person. A number of other Zoom peace journalism workshops and seminars are underway, including a fascinating one involving Indian and Pakistani journalists.

Peace journalism researchers and thinkers are also busy considering a feminist approach to PJ, social media negativity and PJ, and how PJ can benefit from the techniques of slow journalism.

I hope in reading this edition of The Peace Journalist that you, like me, will be inspired and energized by the drive and commitment of peace journalism’s advocates and practitioners around the world.

If our colleagues can continue carrying PJ’s torch in war-torn Afghanistan and Yemen during a pandemic, the rest of us don’t have much excuse for not redoubling our own efforts.

—Steven Youngblood

Editor’s Notebook

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pg 3
Is human suffering Invisible?
How media under-report humanitarian crises

Imagine a world where disasters, climate change, civil wars, and armed conflicts happened simultaneously, impacting dozens of countries, and making the first three decades of the 21st century a portrait of the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of the Second World War.

That was our world before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which, for over a year now, has increased the suffering of millions of people and exacerbated the weaknesses of political and social institutions in facing the problem.

In 2021, the first World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul, in 2016, celebrates its fifth anniversary, although it seems that its alerts and appeals, in essence, materialized in the Agenda for Humanity, have not been heard. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), it is estimated that in 2021 there will be around 239 million people in need in 57 countries.

Before moving on to the discussion, I would like to go back in time a little. Even though the Rwandan genocide was one of the most brutal conflicts of the 20th century’s last decade, it was also one of the most invisible events in the Western mainstream media. This lack of coverage in turn was used as an excuse internationally for not knowing what was happening in the African country.

As journalists, we must improve our coverage to help society achieve peace and justice, and especially to reduce people’s suffering across the world. This includes victims of civil wars, armed conflicts, climate change, natural disasters, economic and political instabilities, and the pandemic. This coverage must include minorities’ struggle for dignity, justice, and peace, made even more difficult by these challenges.

It is crucial to discuss how the media has reported humanitarian crises and avoided hate speech. For that, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the information production process, which I have called the lifespan of journalistic information. This process starts in our hands.

It means that, as journalists, we must be aware of how the narrative, perspectives, and approaches can impact the perception of the audiences on national and international realities. Our role is to eliminate the invisibility of the people in need and at the same time to rescue our moral and ethical commitment to humanity. For that, it is necessary to set a humanitarian agenda in the public spheres as a crucial condition to follow the lifespan of the struggle for justice which starts when we publish the first news about the issue.

These concepts underlie peace journalism. The first lesson we have learned from Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick in their foundational work “Peace Journalism” is that “peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and how to report them – which create opportunities for society to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict.”

Given that, we can identify a considerable connection between peace journalism and humanitarian journalism. This is represented by the research of Martin Scott, Mel Bunce, and Kate Wright, who have examined media coverage of crises. In the most complete study on the theme, “The state of humanitarian journalism,” the authors offer possible ways to guide a humanitarian media agenda.

More than removing people’s suffering of invisibility and opacity, the main role of humanitarian journalism is to provide coverage guided by humanitarian ethics—coverage that respects the dignity of minority groups.

As journalists we have to observe and cover the root causes of injustice, thus helping society avoid new social tragedies while laying a foundation for positive peace.

The research conducted in the workgroup Humanitarian Journalism and Media Intervention of the Communication Program at Metodista University of São Paulo, Brazil examines the connection between peace journalism and humanitarian journalism, and the need to avoid the invisibility of human suffering. The researchers want to contribute to highlight the root causes of wars, disasters, climate change and conflicts, putting journalism at the center of the worldwide struggle for human dignity.

–Cilene Victor
Election violence menaces Ugandan journalists

PJ, safety trainings provide some assistance

Before Uganda’s recent election, several media development organizations played a leading role in training local journalists to prepare them for a balanced, professional, and peaceful coverage of the January, 2021 general election.

One such media developer is DW Akademie, Germany’s leading media development organization. They tailored their election project by training journalists in five of its partner radio stations across the country in key areas including democracy, peace, and electoral reporting and media law in Uganda.

As a local peace journalism trainer on this project, the trainings were timely, as many of the radio journalists were not aware of how to cover the election in a more professional way.

PJ/Election Trainings

During the trainings, it became clearer that peace journalism and electoral reporting was much needed given the tense political atmosphere which began in October with election violence witnessed during the elections of the ruling National Resistance Movement. These elections were associated with violence and human rights abuses. Security restrictions on journalists resulted to beating of many journalists covering opposition politician Robert Kyagulanyi, known popularly as Bobi Wine, while he delivered a petition to a United Nations office in Kololo, a neighborhood of the capital Kampala, according to nine of those journalists, who spoke to CPJ, media reports, and statements by local press rights groups.

Journalists became targets of security personnel. Many reporters faced arrests and were beaten by security forces. A month before the presidential election, the Uganda Media Council (UUM) issued statement to regulate journalists by requiring them to register. According to the statement, “The Media Council has been registering reporters to ensure the industry is well-monitored and sanitized from quacks.”

The decision to register journalists was protested by media practitioners who challenged the legality of registration. Following the outrage, the regulation was later withdrawn. However, in the weeks leading up to the election cycle and on voting day, journalists in the West Nile region were targets of intimidation and arrest.

In central Uganda, news of the shooting of journalist Moses Bawo on 5th November sent rays of fear to many journalists. Another reporter, Ashraf Kasirye, was reportedly injured while covering election campaigns in Masaaka district.

Moving to West Nile, Vision Group’s journalist in Nebbi, Emmanuel Ojok, was arrested by the army and later detained at Nebbi Central Police station prior to the election. At the time of his arrest, Ojok was covering a raid carried out by army forces at the home of an opposition candidate, Robert Onega, who was standing for a municipality in the district. Onega, who was standing for a municipality in the district. Ojok was arrested at a graduation ceremony for newly trained police constables who were to provide security during the election. According to the Oguza, he was accused of accessing the venue without permission.

In another incident, NTV journalist Iceta Sovin says he was forced to delete photos captured and recordings during Presidential and Parliamentary election in Obongi District.

Oguza Alua Ronald, a seasoned news reporter with Arua One FM, was also briefly detained by police in Vurra Sub County. Oguza was arrested at a graduation ceremony for newly trained police constables who were to provide security during the election. According to the Oguza, he was accused of accessing the venue without permission.

Internet shutdown

Away from violence against journalists, the media also face numerous challenges submitting their stories following a decision by the Ugandan communication authorities ((https://acme-ug.org)) to shut down internet and social media.

Despite these challenges, there were no reports of media induced violence during and after the election for Uganda’s president and members of parliament. Before polling day, different stakeholders called for peaceful, free, fair and credible elections. To ensure that this was achieved, members of the media play a vital role through election reporting and informing the public.

Journalist Alex Pithua of Choice FM radio in Gulu said when the Ugandan government shut down internet, their radio station did not broadcast news for three days. “Usually we submit our stories via email to the editor and this became hard for us as reporters and even for our editor who could not access international news or search. So everything was a mess for journalists because of the shutdown,” he said.

Gloria Laker and Sabir Musa

Reporting Beyond the Problem

From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism

be accountable and transparent—while implementing productive, socially-responsible reporting approaches that inform the public with the understanding that our democracy cannot prosper without an informed populace.

We believe that caring about the world does not make journalists activists. Embracing our shared goal of making the world a better place through reporting that seeks meaningful impact—with an appropriate level of context, complexity and journalistic rigor—may just be an effective way to reach people.

This edited volume is the first academic book published on these forms of reporting in the United States and is scheduled to become available later this Spring.

--Karen McIntyre & Nichole Dahmen, book editors

Vol 10, No. 1

Irene Abalo Atto is among the eight journalists recently beaten by security forces after the January presidential election.

In Arua, trainer Gloria Laker discusses peace journalism and responsible electoral reporting.

Continued on next page

www.park.edu/peacecenter

April 2021
During the Rwandan Genocide, radio was one of the key enablers in orchestrating the genocide — pointing out localities where the Tutsis were so Hutu militia could find and kill them. In doing so, the media exacerbated tensions and channelled hatred, contributing to genocide.

In Serbia, television was deployed to convey propaganda that would stir ethnic tensions in the run up to the civil war. In the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, nationalist mythology was propagated by the media, and deployed to exacerbate the already simmering tensions over boundary disputes. Years later, even if the media hadn’t been so proactively involved in facilitating conflict on a genocide, a subtle undertone that borrows from these instances continues.

War journalism

War journalism keeps war alive. It is the frontrunner element that campaigns for the prolonged business of war. For the uninformed, as the name suggests, War Journalism refers to journalism that is focused on war, and encourages a presentation that [1] is heavily-oriented towards violence and projects the conflict arena in a two-party and one-goal deal. It confines itself to closed spaces and symptoms of the cause and effect only in the arena. It typically concerns itself only with the visible or tangible effects of violence, making the conflict opaque. The focus is on an ‘us-and-them’ rhetoric while seeing the enemy ‘them’ as the problem and dehumanising them. War journalism is heavily reactive in that it waits for violence to start before it does or says anything, and is heavily propaganda-oriented, seeking only to expose ‘their’ untruths while helping to cover up ‘our’ own flaws.

It tends towards the elite, by focusing on ‘their’ violence and ‘our’ suffering, calling ‘them’ evildoers and focusing only on the elite segments of society — spokespersons and peacemakers. In sum, what War Journalism does is create a hype that gets everyone to say “Never Again” and employs powerful sounding hashtags — but it stops with that. Once the conflict is resolved or becomes old news, there is a massive decline regarding concern over the issue, yet without ever understanding the root of the problem in the first place. This leaves a sense of relief and victor’s guilt on the sore, with- out any concern for preventing the conflict from recurring.

Take any conflict in the world today. There are a range of different narratives, conflicting ones no less. Each passes off a version as the truth, some building on propaganda and a political agenda that they are either paid for, or were founded for, in the first place. This makes getting an accurate idea of the events around the country or the issue virtually impossible.

Assessing the role of the media globally, it is no guess that reporting on most conflict zones presents a torrid dilemma. With the many actors involved in any conflict, there are scores of outlets that offer partisan accounts of the news. Ethics continue to be routed with tampered videos being passed off as news, media houses imposing value judgments and aligning themselves by taking sides. That a biased report or one constructed on untruths can culminate in distrust, disillusionment and cynicism about the media is given. In an already polarised society that is divided, or on the brink of conflict, a section of the community can end-up feeling disadvantaged. Their voices being silenced renders the essence of a democracy redundant.

A community of people who subscribe to such forms of media reporting, where violence continues to remain the key theme, will be more inclined to sponsor or create conflict. The saying that history is written by the hands of the victors rings true in the context of the media. Accordingly, the foundations of hatred will continue to be built upon, and a future citizenry swearing by hatred and anger will be built on the founts of false or incorrect or unverified information.

Peace journalism

In contrast, Peace journalism doesn’t concern itself with the winning-macho rhetoric, but rather zooms right into the root of the very issue. It portrays conflicts in realistic terms and encourages the exploration of backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation. It presents the causes and options of every side involved, without introducing the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ perspective.

It effectively serves the purpose by [2] being transparent in the representation of the causes, background and issues concerning a conflict; giving a voice to the rival parties involved and their views; exposing lies, cover-ups and attempts to cover-up as well as culprits on all sides unequivocally. It is built on an understanding that conflict is not only with those that are directly involved, but with those that have been marginalized, excluded, oppressed, and talked over. It is cautious about who holds the pen while telling a story, and builds in a committed, and dedicated approach to stay away from sensationalism.

The media as a platform is meant to crystallise public opinion as one only part of its duty. Its primary responsibility is pivoted around being a conduit between the incident and those who should be informed of it. Deploying feminist peace journalism would not only have a duty to collect facts, ascertain and verify the truth behind them, and put them out before the masses in black and white. It is not for the media to misinform, to decide, or to pass value judgment on any subject it explores: but to deliver the truth as it is, by centering those whose truth it is only if they exercise their agency freely and fully in deciding whether to tell their story or not, and accordingly, if they decide to tell their story, then how.

The role of the media

The duty of the media begins and ends with the sole duty of dispensing impartial information for public awareness. In the course of doing so, it has a duty to be blind to prejudice, and to exercise value judgments that are grounded in committed verification. The role of the media in containing tension by reporting pure fact cannot be emphasised enough. As a voice that offers information, the media is perhaps among the earliest to know about a conflict, yet it is the last to know about the country’s fragile areas. Instead of exacerbating conflict by playing up on these divisive aspects, the media should function from a place of commitment to truth-telling.

Refraining from alarmist or over sensationalised reporting will go a long way towards keeping the media within its line of duty. What the media needs to be providing is wholesome information and a statement in clear terms that what it does not know, it does not know. Bridging the objective with purported statements covered with the subjective are counterproductive at best, and only go to create space for baseless propaganda to thrive.

--Kirthi Jayakumar

References

1. See Lynch, J. & Galtung, J. (2010). Reporting Conflict: The Low Road and High Road


Feminist PJ seeks to center the voices of those who have been marginalised, excluded, oppressed, and talked over.
Media literacy projects launched
Leveraging links between PJ and media literacy

With this in mind, the Center for Global Peace Journalism recently concluded two media literacy projects—one in the Kansas City area, and the other in Yemen.

**Kansas City media literacy project**
As American wound down the road toward the November election, it became abundantly clear, if it wasn’t already, that social and traditional media were being weaponized by political operatives and malevolent foreign actors against the American people.

How can we fight back? I think one of the best ways is through media literacy. Media literacy is the thrust behind a project I spearheaded last year. Sponsored by a Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund Rapid Response award from the U.S. Department of State, the project was titled, “Media Literacy for Students: Lessons from Covid-19.”

It kicked off in September with a Zoom conference for Center Middle and Center High School students from Kansas City, and students from Johnson County Community College (Overland Park, KS) and Park University (Parkville, MO).

Co-presenters Lewis Diuguid (journalist/multicultural education trainer), Allan Leonard (Fact Check Northern Ireland), and I presented the attendees with an introduction to, and overview of, media literacy. We discussed the importance of the peace journalism approach (and the dire consequences of traditional journalism) as well as peace journalism literacy. According to Cortland.edu, has five key principles:

- Balanced, neutral news
- Bridge building, peacebuilding stories between “us” and “them”
- Voice of the voiceless stories on all sides
- Solutions oriented stories
- Analyzing/discussing journalism responsibility (peace?), ethics, and objectivity

We have gained new skills. This training was thorough.”

**Yemen media literacy project**
On March 18, Steven Youngblood, director of the Center for Global Peace Journalism, conducted a media literacy workshop for Yemeni journalists sponsored by the US Embassy in Yemen and US State Department.

The students did an excellent job coming up with coding lists designed to discern differences, in reports about hydroxychloroquine (a Covid “cure” promoted by Donald Trump) on Fox News vs. CNN.

Central Middle School Principal Dr. Jarius Jones was thrilled by his students’ engagement in the project. He said, “…the Center Middle School and Center High School scholars have been afforded the opportunity to apply critical thinking skills to real-world issues. Knowing that relevant topics and current events are being examined during the study, is exactly the experience we want for every student.”

**KC literacy project concludes with summit, magazine**
The project culminated in December with a Media Literacy Summit on Zoom wherein students presented their research about media literacy and its importance. The presentations were excellent, and indicated an abundance of critical thinking that will be necessary if the students are to become sophisticated consumers.

As part of the project, the students submitted articles that were compiled into a magazine, *The Misreport-A Study of Media Literacy* (https://issuu.com/peacejournalism/docs/the_misreport_digital-web). The students also produced a podcast (https://soundcloud.com/user-961236233/media-literary-podcast). Both of these products were professionally executed.

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**Above-From the media and literacy seminar for KC students. Below-Flyer for media literacy for journalists program in Yemen.**

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Projects builds bridges across boundaries

Pakistan, India

An Indian Perspective

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”
—Albert Einstein

There is a higher court than courts of justice, and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts.”—Mahatma Gandhi

“Journalism is in fact history on the run.”—Thomas Griffith

An Indian perspective

“Lucknow (India) is cold now… I believe Karachi is comfortable,” said Biswajeet Banerjee while we chatted online while discussing a story we were working on.

“Yes, we have mild winters compared to elsewhere,” I wrote. “My father used to live in Lucknow when he was a child. He loved that city.”

Indian-Pakistani Reporters: How we use peace journalism

“India-Pakistan border practice to debunk misinformation

Q: How have you used peace journalism in your work over the last four months (after the September workshop)?

A: I’ve used it for my college academic writings. It was helpful to look at security studies through the lens of peace journalism.

I’ve stopped writing words like Hindus and Muslims during conflicts, instead say two groups of different religious denominations.

I write about climate change often and I’m much more mindful now of reiterating how both the issues and solutions have to involve multiple countries.

Working on cross border water conflict but avoiding term “Indian Water Aggression”

Pakistani, Indian journalists unite

The East-West Center, a State Dept. grantee, launched a project titled “Reporting on Cross-Border Issues of Mutual Concern” for 80 Indian and Pakistani journalists last year. The project has included subject matter seminars (economy, environment, agriculture, and health) as well as more generalized seminars on multimedia production and peace journalism.

In the project, one journalist from each country is working together as a team on a cross-border media story to be published or broadcast within the country and on the project’s website (https://www.journalistsforchange.org/). Two peace journalism workshops have been held thus far, one in September last year and one in January this year.

The two pieces below were written by a Pakistani and an Indian participant in the project, which will culminate with a face to face workshop later in 2021 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

An Indian perspective

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”
—Albert Einstein

There is a higher court than courts of justice, and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts.”—Mahatma Gandhi

“Journalism is in fact history on the run.”—Thomas Griffith

Three these quotes sum up the meaning of journalism, how it should work and why it should aim at building peace and work for inclusive growth.

In the month of January 2020, I came to know about the first-ever India-Pakistan cross-border journalism project by the East West Center platform. I was really excited to get an opportunity to join the group of journalists from both the neighbouring countries to discuss and work on cross-border issues of mutual concern.

A series of workshops was scheduled in Kathmandu in the mid of 2019, but COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown forced the EWC to postpone the physical gathering by one year. In its place were two seminars featuring much-needed interaction started on Zoom.

The cross border journalism project features interactions within subject matter areas (agriculture, economy, health), as well as to cross-border issues of mutual concern.

I got immediate support and required quotes in the series of fact-checked articles from colleagues across the border. 

I became a part of a separate group with Usman Hanif, Safina Nabi, and Shahzada Irfan. We are all working collectively on a few topics assigned to us.

The regular online interaction and training sessions helped all of us to understand the issues and most importantly look for solutions through carefully created articles covering all the cross-border identical topics. Personally, I am very much excited to finish the story assignments quickly, meet everyone in Kathmandu later this year, and take forward the collaboration to a new level where all become the change agents to establish peace in the South Asia region.

—Pratyush Ranjan

A Pakistani perspective

“Lucknow (India) is cold now… I believe Karachi is comfortable,” said Biswajeet Banerjee while we chatted online while discussing a story we were working on.

“Yes, we have mild winters compared to elsewhere,” I wrote. “My father used to live in Lucknow when he was a child. He loved that city.”

Since I am a certified fact-checker associated with Google News Initiative India Training Network as well, I used this opportunity to connect with fellow journalists and debunk fake claims about Pakistan which are viral on social media platforms in India.

I quickly collected and gathered fact-checked articles from colleagues across the border.

In the very first interactions with organizers Susan Kriefels and Carolyn Egwu from EWC and presenters Stephen Franklin, Steven Youngblood, Randall Smith, and Steve Rice, and discussions with selected fellow journalists from both India and Pakistan, I realised that this project was going to be one of the best collaborations I have ever done in my entire professional career.

For me, it was the first interaction with anyone from Pakistan, and the continuous discussion with them on cross-border issues and their solutions made me think that people from both countries have been facing almost the same issues for ages.

The EWC team which initiated the project brought together 80 selected journalists on a single platform to brainstorm, ideate, and work on cross-border topics directly related to the people living on both sides of the border.

One primary focus of the project was peace journalism, taught by Steven Youngblood. Who knew the project was also an opportunity to make friends?

Susan Kreifels, Media Programs Manager of EWC, smiled as she encouraged journalists from both countries to brainstorm and produce interesting stories.

Participating in this project has made me realize making peace is tough and is an ongoing process. Peace journalism is a tough job but someone has to do it.

And that is exactly what Kreifels has done.
**SLOW**

Slow journalism can be valuable peace tool.

This is not to suggest that truth is malleable but rather to say that the most objective, or at least complete, truths are those that are co-produced and create room for discussion and various perspectives. Access to information, without the ability to also participate in contributing to that information, as a pillar of democratic practice maintains status quo and exclusionary systems of knowledge construction.

This perspective on knowledge dissemination has a long history. Consider the founding of the public library system in the United Kingdom—in 1850, a parliamentary act was passed making libraries open to the public. This was done out of a desire to give working class people access to information and ‘culture’. However, this still maintained a hierarchical class system. The working class was invited to participate in a construction of culture of which they were not allowed a say.

Contextualizing this understanding of knowledge-building in the democratic theory of Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe offers a framework for understanding the revolutionary nature of a ‘slow’ journalism for peace. Rancière understands democracy as working against the privatization of society. Rather than thinking of the state in terms of influence in society, he sees this as more opportunity for individual citizen involvement in the State. In his seminal text Hatred of Democracy, he describes this as a process of “enlarging the public sphere.” An essential part of this process, according to Mouffe, is the institutionalization of lifelong friendships.

The EWC’s cross border journalism project has not only helped to improve the way journalism is done for cross border stories, but (the peace journalism instruction) also made us aware of how we report local stories.

We are interested in seeing how the stories are otherwise hidden below the rhetoric.

And as soon as South Asians usually do, we had a What’sApp Group which began buzzing from the time it was created.

The second friend I made was Pra-tyush Ranjan, a fellow fact checker and journalist, had shared a story he had fact checked about Pakistan and I volunteered. This was an interesting experience. As well as Vijay who has some great stories we are collaborating on.

Pakistan, India from Pg 13

We also met some amazing Indian women journalists who helped me with the story—Zeba Wani and Shreya Pareek.

The EWC’s cross border journalism project has not only helped to improve the way journalism is done for cross border stories, but (the peace journalism instruction) also made us aware of how we report local stories that are sensitive. With delicate relations between our two countries, peace journalism is helping us to tackle sensitive stories more carefully, reporting facts without provocation.

During the initial days of the project, the Indian farmers’ protest was going on. Pakistan had a temple attack. And there were some incidents across the Line of Control (LoC). This was a test for journalists from both sides participating in this project. And it was heartening to see mature approach from both sides. In fact, it was nice to see how many participants highlighted some stories from each side which they thought did not adhere to the rules of Fj and could have been done in a better way.

It is evident that despite being patriotic, they want to work towards peace and build bridges.

Peace journalism is an important tool to help try to mend relationships. Journalists have a duty to continue to speak about the din of hate in the region.

The EWC, Susan Kreifels, and the whole team should be commended for efforts to bring peace in the region and we hope this project continues for years to come to help build peace and lifelong friendships.

—Lubna Jerar

**Slow from Pg 14**

Slow journalism is an effort to develop a form of truth-telling with room for nuance and complexity, also incorporating ideas of co-production and participation. This counteracts the normative ethos of modern-day journalism, which is intent on ‘breaking’ news to disseminate information quickly. This rapid and widespread dissemination of information is often seen as a pillar of democracy through creating a more informed citizenry. However, this assumes that understanding is based on information that is objective and concrete. This view is particularly difficult when considering reporting on peacebuilding efforts and from societies affected by conflict, which often are consumed by differing and contentious understandings of societal realities.

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This perspective on knowledge dissemination has a long history. Consider the founding of the public library system in the United Kingdom—in 1850, a parliamentary act was passed making libraries open to the public. This was done out of a desire to give working class people access to information and ‘culture.’ However, this still maintained a hierarchical class system. The working class was invited to participate in a construction of culture of which they were not allowed a say.

Contextualizing this understanding of knowledge-building in the democratic theory of Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe offers a framework for understanding the revolutionary nature of a ‘slow’ journalism for peace. Rancière understands democracy as working against the privatization of society. Rather than thinking of the state in terms of influence in society, he sees this as more opportunity for individual citizen involvement in the State. In his seminal text Hatred of Democracy, he describes this as a process of “enlarging the public sphere.” An essential part of this process, according to Mouffe, is the institutionalization of lifelong friendships.

This is a system of understanding I attempt in my own doctoral work. Before the coronavirus pandemic, I was conducting anthropological fieldwork in Germany. My PhD thesis aims to understand how peacebuilding efforts can be more participatory and democratic. My fieldwork consisted primarily of conducting qualitative ethnographic interviews with former political prisoners incarcerated within the Cold War-era East Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The interviews conducted were done based on structured dialogue, rather than a more traditional semi-structured or structured interview format. In this style, interview length is dictated by the participant and multiple interviews are conducted with a single participant. Although I focused each interview around similar themes, the conversation’s direction was heavily dictated by the interviewee and what they thought was important for me to know and understand in my research.

This is an act of collaborative knowledge production and a movement away from hierarchical preferences of knowledge from certain sources over others. It is an acknowledgement that the job of the anthropologist is not to act as a singular voice producing ostensibly objective knowledge but to reflexively engage in the knowledge building process while being critical of one’s own preconceived assumptions. Using this style places importance on the individual narrative as an integral part of building pluralistic and nuanced societal understanding, particularly in places with a contentious history and divided past. This follows a trend in contemporary anthropology towards viewing the work of the ethnographer as a collaborative project in understanding humanity with the participants. This collaborative approach problematizes the observer: subject binary endemic of traditional colonial ethnographic practice.

Johan Galtung argues that to reach a state of ‘positive’ peace, it is necessary to examine every day dominant structures that perpetuate structural violence and to introduce new ideas of challenging or dismantling these structures. In Galtung’s understanding, structural violence is, at its very core, exclusion from participation. It is a limiting of potential. To slow down from the pace in which these normative structures operate is to create the space to change them.

As an act of speaking peace into existence through telling the stories of peacebuilding and considering how peace might be maintained, the act of developing a slow journalism of peace is a radical step towards the more peaceful world that can be. Speaking slowly helps us to resist our own radical choice to remove understanding from traditional linear temporality and traditional notions of progress. This removal allows for transformation.

Discussions of the potential of this transformative space are beginning in the peacebuilding field. Critiques of ‘fast’ journalism addressed by the slow journalism movement mirror critiques of top-down peacebuilding efforts. From Transitional to Transformative Justice, a recent collection of papers edited by Paul Gready and Simon Robins, addresses a critique that transitional justice efforts lack opportunity for participation. This creates a problematic space in peacebuilding efforts that, in the interest of transitioning a society out of a violent and difficult past, often disenfranchises average citizens by limiting room for individualized perspectives.

Creating journalistic efforts for the purpose of sharing stories and reaching conclusions quickly leaves little space to consider alternative narratives. Conducting a more narrative and co-produced style of journalism creates space for conversation and for the development of new ideas that Galtung argues are necessary for sustained peace. The COVID 19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns and other restrictions have colloquially been called ‘The Great Pause.’ This temporal framing of our collective global reality is echoed in calls to ‘restart’ economies. It’s as if normal as we know it were simply put on pause and we’re all lumped back into the ways to proceed again. Understanding the pandemic as a ‘pause’ removes a sense of urgency from problems that should feel urgent—racism, climate change, etc. Considering this period an opportunity for slowness, rather than a pause in normal, offers space for us to reconsider if we want to press play again on our old lives. By framing our worldviews in linear temporality, we limit the potential for transformation. Developing a slow journalism to report on and discuss peacebuilding efforts is a step towards this transformative framework.

—Laney Lenox

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Anti-refugee narratives thrive in Turkey
Fostering a more positive, truthful discussion

Just before the local elections in March 2019, İlay Aksoy, a founder of the nationalist İyı Party and mayoral candidate for Istanbul’s Fatih Municipality, displayed campaign banners reading, “We will not concede Fatih to the Syrians” throughout the busiest points of the district. Her subsequent campaign speeches, rallies, and social media posts came to employ the same tenor of xenophobic language, blaming the Syrian refugee community for Turkey’s economic and societal woes. 

While official complaints were filed against her for inciting public hatred, enmity, and discrimination, many media outlets opted instead to amplify her divisive message that “actually, it is the Syrians who pose the existential threat.” Just in March 2019, İlay Aksoy, a founder of the nationalist İyi Party and mayoral candidate for Istanbul’s Fatih Municipality, displayed campaign banners reading, “We will not concede Fatih to the Syrians” throughout the busiest points of the district. 

In his posts, Özdağ claimed that 1 million Syrian refugees had entered Turkey since the advent of the Covid pandemic, exacerbated by the advent of the Covid pandemic, and labeled as a “threat” against Turkey’s demographic balances. Similarly, the nationalist and anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee politics of the center-right opposition İyi Party. In his posts, Özdağ claimed that 1 million Syrian refugees had entered Turkey since the advent of the Covid pandemic, exacerbated by the advent of the Covid pandemic, and labeled as a “threat” against Turkey’s demographic balances. Similarly, the nationalist and anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee politics of the center-right opposition İyi Party. In his posts, Özdağ claimed that 1 million Syrian refugees had entered Turkey since the advent of the Covid pandemic, exacerbated by the advent of the Covid pandemic, and labeled as a “threat” against Turkey’s demographic balances. 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"Initially, I was just trying to keep our lives, trying to stand on our own feet." Riva is among the lucky few who have received a platform to tell their stories from their own perspectives. In what other ways can Turkish media practice peace journalism when building narratives around refugee issues? Johan Galtung and Jake Lynch came up with a few basic principles that can serve as guidance for those building narratives and molding public opinion. To foster more compassion and give voice to the voiceless, peace journalists should: ● Explore the formation of conflicts: who are the parties involved; what are their goals; what is the socio-political and cultural context of the conflict; what are the visible and invisible manifestations of violence; ● Avoid the dehumanization of the parties involved and expose their interests; ● Offer nonviolent responses to conflict and alternatives to militarized/violent solutions. ● Report nonviolent initiatives that take place at the grassroots level and follow the resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation phases.

Opposite page, top: Vote to care about Refugees – Refugee Action protest 27 July 2013 Melbourne by John Englart (Takver) is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Above: The direct translation of the banner is, “We will not concede Fatih (a city in Turkey) to the Syrians.” This phrase was used by İlay Aksoy, a mayoral candidate from Turkey’s İyı Party, during her election campaign.
Social media is a form of electronic communication tool, through which human beings can create and share content that will enable for social networking. In doing this, people use dedicated websites to interact with other users, and find people with similar interests. This assertion is gradually eroding young people in Nigeria, as it seems like they are deviating from the social networking attribute, which is the most important in social media usage, to using social media to attack, abusing, and invading the privacy of others.

It is so popular to witness on social media platforms of some Nigerians, who, when asked a simple question, respond with comments that denote curses, abuses, and things that are not connected to the question asked. Reacting to this ugly thread, Godswill Agbagwa wrote on his Facebook timeline that “many Nigerians can’t engage in logical arguments without digressing or using ad hominem.”

Prior to 2015 elections in Nigeria, the opposition party was prone to using comments that demonise the ruling party, as far as they were concerned, there was absolutely nothing good about the then ruling party, and the social media was the main platform through which the demonisation was fostered. Since 2015, the opposition has been in power and nothing seems to have changed. The adverse effect of preferring demonising to constructive criticism is that, it increases the bitterness within, unconsciously blinding us from seeing concessions to hold unto and examine issues properly, so as to proffer a lasting solution. It also distorts our sense of understanding and compromise, such that we begin to see and feel that the world and those in it, should operate in a particular way and anything contrary to that must be annulled.

Maybe the error is that many social media users are yet to understand the difference between demonising and criticising constructively. The two are different from each other. In demonising, there is the use of abuse, hate, threat, conspiracies and personal attacks to shut the door of dialogue and conversation. It also uses unconnected ideas to divert the conversation under review, as well as fostering the presence of words that crave to make people and views that are different appear inferior. In constructive criticism, there is the use of facts, debunking of myths, under review and it abhors use of abusive, hateful, threatening views or words to prove a point. It is devoid of personal attack and makes effort to understand and respect different views. Finally, it does not shut the door of dialogue and conversation.

The alarming rate of abuses on social media platforms in Nigeria should give concern to the call for adherence to ethical standards in its usage by all users, especially those without journalistic training. The fact that one uses the social media to transmit information to a social audience (homogenous or heterogeneous), qualifies the user as a media practitioner. In the media world, there are two categories, the professionals and practitioners. A media user can be a professional (as a result of the training) or a practitioner (as a result of the practice, even without a formal training). But the double title of a professional and practitioner can as well falls on those who as a result of their training, are involved in the practice, mostly journalists. In other words, the demands of adhering to ethics in the use of social media while sharing of information, does not exclude practitioners (which is a category most social media users fall into).

Some social media users have argued that emphasising ethical standards will be about holding back the truth and trampling on their right to freedom of speech. These are common relational standards that are already obtainable in the society. They include: truthfulness and accuracy (confirming and giving all the relevant facts), fairness and impartiality (presenting all sides to the story), humanity (doing no harm to the lives of people with words and images), and accountability (correcting errors and expressing of regret when at fault). The above standards are meant for media users who involve themselves in the sphere of information transmission.

Inasmuch as the social media is a very handy platform for use to freely air views, there is a responsibility attached to the freedom it offers, which in this regard concerns not using it to propagate contents that are capable of causing harm. Although there is a right to freedom of speech, at the same time, it does not allow for irresponsibility and recklessness. Even when apologies are offered to mitigate the harm, they usually do not go as far as the harm already done. This is why the ethics of media usage emphasis on its responsible usage.

Adhering to ethical standards are not in any way stopping constructive criticisms, neither do they censor users in their freedom to express themselves, rather they look at maintaining stability and equity, which are key to individual and collective development. Observing ethical provisions or principles while using the social media, demand that in transmitting of information, users should be critical, always consider the facts, and check to see that published contents are from reputable persons and outlets. Thanks to the constant evolution of information communication technology, which has brought forth free fact-checking platforms that are very effective for use in authenticating pieces of information.

A friend of mine in the university once saw his photo which he shared on Facebook informing his friends about an accident he survived. But famous Nigerian journalist, without his consent, used that picture of his, and framed a different narrative around it saying he got the wound where he was caught with another man’s wife, and for a long while people associated him with this wrong frame. It had to take some of us who knew what happened, to go to the various platforms, where the ridiculous frame up was published and debunked the lies. Indeed, he was strong enough to have survived it, because he had colleagues who assisted him in countering the incorrect narrative about his photo.

The same could not be said about a young Nigerian man, whose name and photo was added on the tweet of a popular blogger, who had called on people to add names of those who they feel are rapists. The young man was later reported to have committed suicide because he could not bear the unwarranted condemnations, hate and threat targeted at him on the social media as a result of the accusation.

There was also the case of a social media user in Nigeria who on Facebook publicly stated that he had hacked the social media account of a certain pastor, invaded his private messages, and published the private chats and photos the pastor shared with some supposed married female members of his congregation. It was so disgusting to see how social media users in Nigeria, were sharing and making despairing comments to demonise the pastor, the members and surprisingly, congratulating the hacker for invading the privacy of other people. It was troubling to see the number of young Nigerians who did not see the action of the hacker to be wrong. There were many occasions where people who were alleged to have committed an offence, had their pictures and names published on social media and going through the community sections, the level of ignorance, bigotry, hate, blame, and judgment are so disturbing. Meanwhile, those were only allegations, no competent court had proven them guilty of the alleged offences.

The above three instances are clear cases of individuals who were falsely accused, and without consent, their private data were collected and used online. This is wrong. Inordinate actions like the above give credit to the call for data protection. It is noted that there is need to protect individual and private data that do not clash with the public interest. Although the constitution of Nigeria lays emphasis on the right to privacy and private property, the above instances seem to contravene the constitution. But because Nigerians are yet to embrace fully the culture of litigation, individuals seem to allow those who unjustly trample on these constitutional rights of theirs to evade justice.

Social media have become an extension of our lives and people and organisations no longer rely on the content of character alone to judge their associates, they now judge by the contents they see their associates exhibit online. Users need to see the social media as a platform for enriching human interaction and connection, and thus, avoid using it to demonise others or glorifying hate and contents that are capable of causing direct or indirect harm, especially those that put people down. Most times I wonder if these Nigerians in all honesty can say these horrible rantings I see on social media to the same person(s) if it were to be in a face-to-face situation. Making judgments and demonising people even without hearing their own side of the story is unbecoming of a responsible person. No doubt, these inordinate views may have the intention of correcting a perceived error, but the words and styles been adopted end up tearing apart those people and organisations no longer rely on the content of character alone to judge their associates, they now judge by the contents they see their associates exhibit online. Users need to see the social media as a platform for enriching human interaction and connection, and thus, avoid using it to demonise others or glorifying hate and contents that are capable of causing direct or indirect harm, especially those that put people down. Most times I wonder if these Nigerians in all honesty can say these horrible rantings I see on social media to the same person(s) if it were to be in a face-to-face situation. Making judgments and demonising people even without hearing their own side of the story is unbecoming of a responsible person. No doubt, these inordinate views may have the intention of correcting a perceived error, but the words and styles been adopted end up tearing apart those people and organisations no longer rely on the content of character alone to judge their associates, they now judge by the contents they see their associates exhibit online. Users need to see the social media as a platform for enriching human interaction and connection, and thus, avoid using it to demonise others or glorifying hate and contents that are capable of causing direct or indirect harm, especially those that put people down. Most times I wonder if these Nigerians in all honesty can say these horrible rantings I see on social media to the same person(s) if it were to be in a face-to-face situation.

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---Innocent Umuzurike Iroagahanci
News media fail to humanize Covid-19 deaths
Coverage leads to lack of empathy

Later this year, millions will gather near downtown to commemorate the 114 lives lost and more than 200 injured when two skyscrapers collapsed on July 17, 1981, at what then was the Hyatt Regency Kansas City Hotel.

It was supposed to have been a festive, Friday night tea dance in the atrium lobby filled, pandicking across the expansive lobby failed, pandicking onto each other, and then the lobby floor crushing people to death.

The lack of information has kept people from fully empathizing with (victims).

I had the day off because it was my 26th birthday. But I went into work at The Kansas City Times-Star immediately after seeing the bulletin on TV news. As a reporter/photographer only three years out of the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism, I didn’t cut a lot of slack and then the next morning helping to cover the tragedy. The next day, I led a team of reporters assigned to do news stories on each person who died in what was supposed to have been a fun night out. The stories were more than obituaries, which ran separately, because the individuals who perished had their lives to live, and then what turned out to be the deadliest, non-deliberate structural collapse in U.S. history. The ongoing and investigative reporting by the two newspapers earned them a Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting in 1982.

That journalistic duty of telling the public about the wholesome lives cut tragically short is what the nation and world have needed the last year as the global coronavirus pandemic has killed more than half-a-million people in the United States and millions people throughout the planet. More than 28 million people in the U.S. have tested positive for COVID-19, and more than 110.9 million people worldwide.

Yet except for a few profiles of individuals’ deaths to the pandemic, the news media have failed horribly to give the public a complete and in-depth sense of this loss. We have not read in newspapers, magazines or on the Web, heard on radio or podcasts, or seen on television or the Web details about the many hundreds of thousands of individuals whose lives have been cut short by COVID-19. That lack of information has kept people from fully empathizing with the individuals who have died and the mourning survivors they have left behind.

U.S. Baby Boomers — born between 1946 and 1964 — can relate to this. A Vietnam War-era fact because of the exhaustive news media coverage of the bloody conflict was that individuals who were alive at the time knew at least one person from their high school or community who served in Vietnam as well as individuals who died during the war allegedly to stop the “domino effect” of Communism’s spread. That’s because the local, regional and national press reported the deaths of more than 58,300 Americans killed in Vietnam.

The press reported that from August 1964 to May 1975, more than 2.7 million Americans, or 9.7 percent of that generation of young adults, served in Vietnam. The names of those killed appear on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. They are the ones individuals look up first when we visit the memorial, opened in 1982. We knew them; we could identify with them; they were our neighbors, our classmates, our coworkers, our family.

There is not that same sense of connection now in this coronavirus era of social distancing, staying away from public places and masking.

The United States was just as divided then as now and the news media, protests that enveloped many cities and college campuses. The nation was undeniably split into doves, protesting for peace, and hawks, insisting that the bloodshed was justified to maintain democracy and free markets worldwide. But each side had in mind the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers.

The news media, in the last year as the COVID-19 death toll has climbed, have readily pointed out the connection between the United States’ various war casualties and the mounting number of those killed by the pandemic. It was in April 2020 that the number of people killed in the United States from the coronavirus surpassed the number of Americans who died in Vietnam. U.S. losses in World War II; the coronavirus death toll of 116,567 topped that by mid-June 2020. More than 405,390 U.S. service personnel died in World War II; the coronavirus death toll topped that in January 2021, claiming 405,400 people.

The difference between now and the Vietnam War era was the news media did their job of humanizing the losses so that everyone could empathize more closely with the tragedy. The combat losses were senseless, but so are the losses from the virus because the U.S. response was mishandled.

Part of the blame lies with then-President Donald Trump, who from the start tried to minimize, politicize and cover up the mounting U.S. numbers.

Trump and his followers even politicized wearing a facial mask for self-protection and the protection of others. To them, not wearing a mask was an assertion of their freedom.

The inaction and division served to put the U.S. out from among nations in the world for having the most cases of the coronavirus and the most deaths. Other nations do not want to follow that lead any more than they would want their political leaders — as Trump did on Jan. 6, 2021, — to provoke a mob of thousands to surge onto their capitals in a riot to disrupt the certification of a presidential election. A peaceful transition of power has to rule all nations as well as a unified effort to control Covid-19.

Until Joe Biden became U.S. president on Jan. 20, 2021, the U.S. had no cohesive plan to get the coronavirus under control and no news media stories chronicling the depth of the loss.

In news conferences, Trump explicitly and repeatedly labeled COVID-19 “the China virus.” It is believed to have originated in Wuhan, China, but it is a global health problem not attributed to any one country or group of people. Trump knew how deadly the virus was in February 2020 but chose to play it down, saying he didn’t “want to create a panic.”

What is clear is a frustration over the global pandemic doing more damage to the world and U.S. economies since the Great Depression, slamming shut doors of hotels, restaurants and travel industries. The pandemic also exposed the grotesque income, wealth, health, housing, education and high tech disparities in the United States.

COVID-19 has hit African American, Latinx and Native American communities hardest with the virus having been both positive for the virus becoming the sickest and more likely to die from it, leaving behind survivors to pick up pieces. Black, Latinx and Native Americans also traditionally have been the least likely to receive coverage from the mainstream press. The Kansas City Star’s own historic Dec. 20, 2020, front-page apology and series about its 140 years of deplorable coverage of the Black community explains that.

The coast-to-coast news media failure has fed the national life-threatening pandemic. It was in April 2020 that the disparity the virus exposed and a peace-driven sense of empathy for all others.

The virus doesn’t discriminate, and neither should people in this nation or the world. The vaccines have to be distributed equitably and not go mostly to the wealthiest, whitest neighborhoods in the U.S. and wealthiest Western nations of the world.

We have to care about others so that this tragedy�ers in better health and a lasting peace. We must show that we care about the well-being of ourselves.

The downside of not caring, of not showing empathy is the coronavirus death toll in the U.S. could within a year rise to eclipse the estimated 620,000 who were killed during the Civil War. It was a time of great division in the United States with bloodshed over slavery.

Surely no one wants to repeat such a brutal part of the past. Surely, we are better than that.

—Lewis Diuguid
Mediothek Afghanistan publishes PJ guide

Mediothek Afghanistan with the support of GIZ-Civil Peace Service Program in Afghanistan has published a manual entitled, “Peace and War Journalism.” This manual is written and compiled by Masoud Momin, freelance peace journalism trainer and Mrs. Gulgibi Joya, university lecturer and national advisor for civil society (CPS).

This manual consists of three chapters and it took about two years to write this manual. The first and the second chapters of this book are about the concepts of War and Peace Journalism in the times of peace and war. In these sections, the views and researches of Dr. Johan Galtung, Dr. Jake Lynch, Annabel McGoldrick, and Steven Youngblood as pioneers of peace journalism and conflict studies have been explained. The third chapter of this manual consists of six scholarly articles which have been written by some Afghan writers and journalists.

The titles of these articles are:

--Journalism Ethics and the Promotion of Violence in the Afghan Media- Mr. Mohammad Siddiq Zalig, writer and journalist

--Political Propaganda in the Afghan media- Mrs. Homaira Saqib, writer and journalist

--The Impact of Media on Social Security in Afghanistan- Mr. Mustafa Aqil, writer and journalist

--War and Peace Journalism and the Afghan Media- Mr. Mohammad Ishaq Fayez, writer and journalist

--Rumors and the Afghan Media- Mr. Seyed Noorulain Naween, journalist

--Reporting on War and Violence in the Afghan media- Mr. Mahmoud Mobarez, writer and journalist

This manual provides guidelines and tools for Afghan journalists to look deeper into peace and war issues in Afghanistan and later play a responsible role in promoting the values of peace in Afghan society. It has been published according to the internal needs of the Afghan media. The target audiences of this manual are Afghan journalists, reporters and journalism students. Currently, the contents of this manual are taught for students at the Balkh University, Faculty of Journalism.

In November 2020, Mediothek Afghanistan and the GIZ-Civil Peace Service Program in Afghanistan jointly have conducted a one day conference in Kabul. The event was attended by media activists, civil society activists, journalists and government officials. They have been spoken about the contents of this manual for Afghan journalists.

Mediothek is committed to educate people, work for a democratic and tolerant culture, and strengthen civil society to facilitate peace in Afghanistan. It was founded in 1993 in Germany with the aim of strengthening education, preserving cultural heritage and promoting a peaceful future for the Afghan people.

--Masoud Momin
PJ needed to set tone for peace in Ethiopia

Bias, jingoism seen in traditional reports

It is with great alarm that I viewed the violent conflict unfold in Ethiopia late last year. I spent the spring, 2018 semester as a State Department Senior Subject Specialist at the University of Gondar, near Ethiopia’s Tigray region from where the conflict originated. I traveled throughout the country, including to Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region.

As a peace journalist, I am as always concerned with the news media and their coverage of the conflict. Are they accurately reflecting the situation in Ethiopia? Are they fanning the flames of conflict, or instead are they practicing peace journalism?

I called upon two of my Ethiopian colleagues to help me make sense of the media coverage. I’ve decided not to use their names, out of respect for their privacy.

First, regarding international coverage, both of my colleagues are critical of the news media. My colleague whom I’ll call Abel said, “some of the international reporting has been surprisingly incomplete and partisan. The national defense forces were engaged in respecting rule of law in the defiant Tigray Liberation Front Forces. While this was the fact many news organizations such as Al Jazeera, Foreign Policy Magazine, the BBC and The Guardian represented the event as a brink of civil war. This is totally out of context and incomplete.”

He continued, “The other dishonest news come from Reuters news agency. While the Tigrayan Liberation forces have killed more than 500 ethnic Amhara civilians in border town of May Khadra, the reporter reported as (though) they were ethnic Tigrayans and were killed the national defense force. This is totally a fake information which is aimed at disinforming the international community.”

My second colleague whom I’m calling Kaleb agreed. He said, “Most of international news is biased... This is not civil war. It is a military operation... I also believe that Tigrayan brothers and sisters are ill informed and highly influenced by TPLF’s (the ruling party in Tigray) propaganda and disinformation. TPLF has created a false narrative in the country that Amhara (the region bordering Tigray, which includes Gondar) is chauvinist.”

Media coverage by Ethiopian outlets is also a concern. At the local level during any conflict, peace journalism asks whether local media reports are flag waving, jingoistic propaganda (traditional war reporting), or whether they are more balanced and give local residents a chance to consider non-violent responses to conflict.

A quick perusal of several Ethiopian news sources as the conflict unfolded late in 2020 revealed the prevalence of traditional war reporting. (Keep in mind that there are only a few sources in English, so this analysis is severely limited.) The Ethiopia News Agency for example, uncritically parrots government information in stories titled “Inhabitants of Addis Ababa Express Support for National Defense Force,” “Ethiopians Honor Defense Force,” and “Reports, Footages Claiming Airstrike on City of Mekelle (in Tigray region) False.” Ethiopia Zare does the same in stories like “The Ethiopian government asked the international community to condemn TPLF.” One needn’t look beyond the lead of this story to divine its approach: “The heinous and reprehensible massacre committed against innocent civilians in Mykadra by TPLF is clearly a grave violation of the most basic norms of international law.”

The same jingoism can be found in at least one Tigrayan media outlet, Tigray Online (http://www.tigrayonline.com/) in stories titled “Barbaric-Genocidal Ethnic Cleansing, Extreme Savagery, in Ethiopia,” “(Ethiopian leaders) Abiy Ahmed and Esayas Afewerki Planned and Started a Joint War against the Innocent People of Tigray,” and “Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes, machete killings in Tigray.” This last story includes the quote, “They killed anyone who said they were Tigrayan. They stole our money, our cattle, and our crops from our homes...”

Instead of this traditional reporting, peace journalists would critically analyze propaganda, and instead seek to balance stories with reports from all sides. PJ stories would reject inflammatory language (“barbaric,” “innocent people,” “savagery,” “machete killings”) and instead use more straightforward, less anger-inducing verbiage. PJ would give a voice to everyday people impacted by the conflict, without exploiting them for partisan purposes. Peace journalists would also examine the source of the conflict, and lead societal discussions about potential solutions.

Peace journalism alone won’t end the violence in Ethiopia, but can help erect a foundation upon which peace can someday be built.

--Steven Youngblood