Peace Journalism, War *and* Conflict Resolution

EDITED BY
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PETER LANG
New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Peace journalism, war and conflict resolution /
edited by Richard Lance Keeble, John Tulloch, Florian Zollmann.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. War—Press coverage. 2. Social conflict—Press coverage.
3. Peace—Press coverage. 4. Journalism—Political aspects.
5. Journalistic ethics. 6. Mass media and peace.
I. Keeble, Richard. II. Tulloch, John. III. Zollman, Florian.
PN4784.W37P45 070.44'930366--dc22 2009045810
ISBN 978-1-4331-0725-2 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-1-4331-0726-9 (paperback)

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.**
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the "Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data is available
on the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de/.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council of Library Resources.

29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

Printed in the United States of America

Foreword

JOHN PILGER

War and mayhem happen; peace is utopian. Many journalists believe such an assumption immutable. I did. But the more I investigated causes, the clearer it became that so-called mainstream journalism was committed almost exclusively to the interests of power, not people. There is no conspiracy; since the demise of the great crusading editors, such as John Delane, Edward Smith Hall and Hugh Cudlipp, and the rise of corporate "professional journalism", the media has become the managerial arm of the established order, no matter its preferred disguise as a "fourth estate" and honourable exceptions. Turn the pages of any major newspaper, watch or listen to the evening broadcast news, and be assured that news and opinion come from the top, however circuitous, almost never from the bottom.

In his chapter in the following collection, "Normalising the unthinkable: The media's role in mass killing", David Edwards relates one of his now famous exchanges on medialens.org with Helen Boaden, the BBC's director of news. "To deal first with your suggestion that it is factually incorrect to say that an aim of the British and American coalition [in Iraq] was to bring democracy and human rights," she wrote, "this was, indeed, one of the stated aims before and at the start of the Iraq war and I attach a number of quotes at the bottom of this reply."

Whereupon Boaden supplied, as Edwards describes, "no less than 2,700 words filling six pages of A4 paper of quotations from George Bush and Tony Blair".

I can think of no other admission as demonstrable of a war propaganda role. To Boaden, the proven lies of Bush and Blair, to borrow from Harold Pinter, did not happen even when they were happening; they did not matter; they were of no concern. That her rationale was apparently unconscious merely confirmed rapacious power's grip on media orthodoxy. The war journalism she defended is, in principle, pretty much that of the *Sun*; only the presentation is different.

This happens at a time when British parliamentary democracy has been appropriated by reinvigorated militarism: witness the refusal of MPs to vote on the invasion of Iraq and the standing ovation they gave the warlord Blair when he departed the House of Commons. This is an historic shift, with the main parties now pursuing almost identical foreign as well as domestic policies. The media's role is to present the fiction of difference and democracy and the bloody invasion of countries as "humanitarian" enterprises, acts of altruism whose victims are "us". Mark the manipulative TV images of the flag-wrapped coffins of 18-year-old soldiers being borne through a Wiltshire high street, accompanied by commentary about "Britain's resolve to see this through". In fact, the majority of Britons oppose the current wars, just as a majority regarded Blair as a liar. The journalism of people speaks for this disenfranchised majority.

Looking back, this "peace journalism" has a remarkable if unacknowledged record. During the twentieth century's longest war, in Vietnam, the mainstream media promoted, at best, the myth of America's aggression as an honourable "blunder" that became a "quagmire". This allowed Ronald Reagan to renew the same "noble cause", as he called it, in Central America. The target, once again, was an impoverished nation without resources, Nicaragua, whose threat, like Vietnam, was in trying to establish a model of development different from that of the corrupt colonial dictatorships backed by Washington.

I reported Reagan's wars from Nicaragua, El Salvador and the United States. War journalism so framed the mainstream coverage in the US that liberal newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, actually debated whether or not the Sandinistas by their proximity somewhere south of the border represented a "threat". Truthful or peace journalism countered this by exposing the "secret" and bloody campaign by the CIA to subvert the government in Managua and to make war on the populations of El Salvador and Guatemala via armed and bribed proxies.

Are the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq different? Yes, but there are haunting similarities. Read again Helen Boaden's response to David Edwards and you have

an echo of Reagan's "noble cause" of "bringing democracy to others less fortunate". And yet Reagan was responsible not only for the killing of countless thousands throughout Latin America but also for the creation of a force of mujihadeen, who drove the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan and whose drug lords were as far from democracy's embrace as it was possible to be. War journalism made them into heroes. Truthful or peace journalism traced Reagan's war to an inevitable "blowback", which happened on 11 September 2001.

Today, liberal war journalism promotes the myth of Barack Obama, whose siren call of "change" ensures the status quo and muffles the opponents of war. "From Europe to the Pacific," said Obama in May 2009, "we've been the nation that has shut down torture cha---mbers and replaced tyranny with the rule of law." As William Blum has documented, since 1945, the United States has overthrown fifty governments, including democracies, and crushed some 30 liberation movements, and set up torture chambers from Egypt to Guatemala. War journalism reports what power says it does; peace journalism reports what it does.

This anthology of essays from those who study peace journalism in the international academy is a landmark work. Led by the pioneers of Lincoln University, it challenges war journalism's right to occupy the mainstream, suggesting that those who propagate the profanities of war, no matter their euphemisms, ought to occupy the craft's and humanity's margins until they are finally made redundant.

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Introduction: Why peace journalism matters

RICHARD LANCE KEEBLE, JOHN TULLOCH AND FLORIAN ZOLLMANN

According to the most recent authoritative source, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's annual report for 2008, world military spending by 2007 had reached $1.2 trillion.[1] This represented a 6 per cent increase in real terms over the previous year and a 45 per cent increase over the ten-year period since 1998. The United States, responsible for around 80 per cent of the increase in 2005, accounts for some 45 per cent of the world total, distantly followed by the United Kingdom, China, France and Japan each with 4 to 5 per cent of the world share.

American military spending for 2009 was expected to account for 44.4 per cent of federal budget funds ($1,066 billion), with the annual intelligence budget amounting to around $30 billion (Woodward 2004). At the same time, just $284 billion (11.8 per cent) was being directed at projects to eliminate poverty and $52 billion (just 2.2 per cent) to education and jobs.

In the UK, almost 13 million people live in poverty: that's one in five of the population, according to the charity Oxfam.[2] Yet the latest Ministry of Defence figures show around £32 billion is spent annually on the military. Planned expenditure on military equipment alone over the next 30 years stands at £235 billion – with £2.5 billion wasted every year on outdated projects (Norton-Taylor 2009).[3] As the environmental activist and journalist George Monbiot commented, the Department for International Development could be funded twice over just from the MoD's budget for capital charges and depreciation (£9.6 billion) (Monbiot 2009). Globally almost 1 billion people are estimated to be living in poverty (Rizvi 2008).

The United Nations defines "major wars" as military conflicts involving at least 1,000 battlefield casualties each year. In mid-2009, there were at least eight major wars under way, with as many as two dozen "lesser" conflicts ongoing.[4] At the same time, millions of people around the world are confronting abuses of human rights, environmental degradation, violence and repression with courage, imagination and non-violent resistance (see Carter, Clark and Randle 2006).

These are bald, impersonal statistics – but they highlight the wider, political and social context in which this book appears. Indeed, in a world where the priorities of governments appear so misguided in the face of such glaring disparities of wealth (both material and cultural) and privilege and potential environmental catastrophe, are there any more pressing issues than those that surround war and peace – and the media coverage of them?

The emergence of the notion of peace journalism

And yet, while the study of wars and the media coverage of conflict – which we might term war journalism – has been well advanced within the academy for many years, the study of peace journalism has emerged only recently. During the 1970s, peace researchers, activists and academics began to develop the premises underlying the notion of peace journalism (Shinar and Kempf 2007: 9). But the seminal theoretical study was conducted by Johan Galtung (see Lynch 1998: 44), one of the founders of the academic subject of Peace Studies, who essentially contrasted the elements of what he described as "peace/conflict journalism" with those of "war/violence journalism" (in other words, the dominant mode of covering conflict in the mainstream media).

Thus peace journalism "gave a voice to all parties", focused on the invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to social structures), aimed to "expose untruths on all sides", was "people-oriented", gave "a voice to the voiceless" and was solution-oriented. On the other hand, war journalism dehumanised the enemy, focused on only the visible effects of the violence, was propaganda-oriented, elite-focused and victory-oriented, and tended to concentrate on institutions (the "controlled society").

From these beginnings, a considerable body of work examining the actual or potential role of the media in promoting conflict resolution rather than war and violence has emerged (see Ross 2007). Amongst these, one of the most important was Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick's *Peace journalism* (2005). Significantly

many of the contributors to this text refer to it. Lynch and McGoldrick suggest peace journalism is when:

> ...editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and about how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict. Moreover it:
>
> - uses the insights of conflict analysis and transformation to update the concepts of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting;
> - provides a new route map tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their journalism – the ethics of journalistic intervention;
> - builds an awareness of non-violence and creativity into the practical job of everyday editing and reporting (ibid: 5).

In addition, they offer a 17-point plan for practising peace journalism (ibid: 28–31) which includes:

- Avoid concentrating always on what divides parties, on the differences between what each say they want. Instead, try asking questions which may reveal areas of common ground.
- Avoid focusing exclusively on the suffering, fears and grievances of only one party... Instead, treat as equally newsworthy the suffering, fears and grievances of all parties.
- Avoid "victimising" language like "devastated", "defenceless", "pathetic", "tragedy" which only tells us what has been done to and could be done for a group of people by others. This is disempowering and limits the options for change. Instead, report on what has been done and could be done by the people.
- Avoid focusing exclusively on the human rights abuses, misdemeanours and wrongdoings of only one side. Instead, try to name all wrong-doers and treat allegations made by all parties in a conflict equally seriously.

Dov Shinar and Wilhelm Kempf's *Peace journalism: The state of the art* (2007) is important for drawing together some of the major writings on the field. In a concluding chapter, Dov Shinar (ibid: 199–210) suggests that peace journalism does not necessarily mean "good news"; rather it is conceived as "a fairer way to cover conflict, relative to the usual coverage and suggests possibilities to improve professional attitudes and performance; strengthen human, moral and ethical values in the media; widen scholarly and professional media horizons and provide better public service by the media" (ibid: 200).

Shifting the focus

Peace journalism, war and conflict resolution now builds on the theoretical and methodological foundations within these seminal texts but expands the focus to new and significant fields. The first section of the book features an eclectic and contrasting range of approaches, often marginalised in both the mainstream and alternative media debates.

Clifford G. Christians is considered the world's leading authority on communication ethics and in his opening chapter draws on the insights of philosophical anthropology with its stress on the "relational self" (as opposed the liberal "individualistic self") and of social philosophy with its stress on dialogic communication (rather than monologic transmission between discrete individuals) to promote a notion of peace communication. Christians' emphasis on spirituality also highlights an essential role of communication as uncovering the significance in life. "It recognises that our important threat is not physical survival but the uncanny. The ultimate menace occurs when lingual systems start disintegrating."

Debating Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model

One of the major inspirations for peace movement media activists worldwide has been the writings of the American maverick intellectual Noam Chomsky – and in particular those he drew up with his colleague Edward Herman on the propaganda model (PM) (see Herman and Chomsky 1988). Accordingly, the mainstream media are seen as operating primarily as propaganda instruments of dominant economic, political, social, cultural and military interests. Chris Atton (2003: 27), in exploring the ethics of the alternative media, suggests that the works of Chomsky (and Edward Said) are constantly cited in alternative media as the seminal demystifiers of corporate media notions of "objectivity".

Here Oliver Boyd Barrett acknowledges that the PM is useful for showing how the corporate media produce a supply of news and views that fits comfortably within the limits acceptable to power elites. At the same Boyd Barrett joins with Robert A Hackett (2007: 75–96) in criticising the PM for saying little about the mechanisms of propaganda in the text itself. But he is more concerned here to critique the PM for prioritising a *systemic* explanation of media performance, thus downgrading the question of *agency*. In particular, Boyd-Barrett, argues that it is impossible to ignore the links between corporate journalists and the intelligence services and other arms of the "secret state" when analysing the coverage of war

and peace. Focusing on three case studies – of William Laurence, Judith Miller and Michael Gordon – he concludes:

> Unless the significance of these operations are factored centrally into peace journalism theory and media theory more generally, Western scholars may be doomed to a pluralist "deficit" model of the press, one that assumes that if only there was some tinkering here and there then the press could at last fully serve its purported roles of watchdog, fourth estate and public sphere.

Richard Lance Keeble similarly critiques peace journalism theory that emphasises professional responses arguing that journalism is best seen as *political* practice. According to Keeble "a dominant strand in PJ theory focuses too closely on the notion of journalism as a privileged, professional activity and fails to take into account the critical intellectual tradition which locates professions historically and politically, seeing them as essentially occupational groupings with a legal monopoly of social and economic opportunities in the marketplace, underwritten by the state".

He joins John Hartley (2008) in calling for a radical transformation of journalism theory. We need to move away from the concept of the audience as a passive consumer of a professional product to seeing the audience as producers of their own (written or visual) media. This leads Keeble to highlight the peace journalism of the alternative media both historically and globally and to extend the definition of "journalist" beyond the ranks of the professionals to radical media activists, intellectuals and human rights campaigners.

In his chapter, Jake Lynch synthesises critically a range of propaganda theories (e.g Ellul 1965; Luostarinen 1994; Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2000), focusing in particular on the reporting of the Nato attacks on Kosovo of 1999 and the US/UK invasion of Iraq in 2003. He draws, in particular, on Marianne Perez's exploration (2006) of George Lakoff's theory (2004) that two competing frames govern the conduct of US politics: the "nurturant parent" and the "strict father". Lynch concludes that the logic of peace journalism is "to adumbrate a strategy covering both structure and agency to increase the plenitude of cues and clues for readers and audiences to form their own negotiated or oppositional readings of appeals to support collective violence of one kind or another".

Peace journalism theory and practice in an international context

The second section examines peace journalism theory and practice in an international context. Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick propose a strikingly original

transnational research exercise to identify psychological responses, firstly to examples of war journalism – and then to these same reports adjusted to peace journalism framings. The aim, they say, would be to identify thresholds at which war journalism can be confidently pronounced harmful to its consumers, and peace journalism, psychologically beneficial, thereby directly informing the global standard.

Agneta Söderberg Jacobson draws on her experience in the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation in lobbying rank and file journalists and editors in Sweden to adopt the principles of peace journalism. In addition, the foundation works with women's groups in many conflict-ridden countries – such as in the Balkans, South Caucasus and the Middle East. The promotion of women – both as journalists and subjects of journalism – has to be at the heart of peace journalism, she argues. Even the dominant peace journalism model fails to incorporate adequately a gender perspective. Jacobson thus proposes the addition of the opposing factors of gender blindness and gender awareness to Lynch and McGoldrick's model of the contrasting aspects of war journalism and peace journalism (2005: 6). Making the gender analysis more explicit "would surely make the model more attractive to women journalists and to feminists in general (including men)".

Valerie Alia, in her chapter, explores the ways in which Indigenous peoples around the globe are engaged in a collaborative project that is forging new ways of communicating, and new ways of preventing, mediating and resolving conflicts. In particular, she examines developments in Australia, Greenland, Canada, the United States and Japan. Alia writes of the "guerrilla" or "outlaw" roots of much of Indigenous journalism and she notes, optimistically, that the media guerrillas and outlaws are increasingly coming aboveground and publicising their views and work to an ever-growing global audience.

In contrast to Alia's focus on Indigenous peoples, Florian Zollmann next spotlights the journalism of the American independent journalist Dahr Jamail. Initially reporting from Iraq as a blogger and travel writer, Jamail's distinctive journalism was rapidly recognised and published by various independent and mainstream news organisations. Concentrating on the US attacks on Fallujah, Iraq, in November 2004, Zollmann compares Jamail's reporting with the corporate media's coverage. And through a close textual analysis, he argues that Jamail encapsulates the principles of peace journalism as outlined by Lynch and McGoldrick in their seminal text (op cit). For instance, Jamail focuses on causes, outcomes and the aftermath of the conflict and reveals the effects of violence as well as the suffering of ordinary people. The experiences and views of ordinary Iraqis caught up in the appalling violence of the occupation lie at the heart of Jamail's reporting. Statements by government officials and the military are weighed against these

personal testimonies and, contrary to mainstream media practices, do not make up the major frameworks for journalistic understanding. Moreover, unlike embedded reporters, Jamail does not concentrate on the strategic progress of what is labeled as "warfare". Instead, he documents the progressive destructiveness of what could rather be described as "high-tech barbarism".

On the potential of web-based activism

Shifting the focus to India, television producer and academic Pratap Rughani reflects on his own photographic representation of atrocity, drawing on Susan Sontag's critique of Holocaust photography as in general "re-victimising the victim". Rughani also highlights the potential of web-based activism in the digital age and how this historical moment can throw up new opportunities for marginalised peoples.

Continuing the theme of web-based witnessing, Donald Matheson and Stuart Allan next assess a range of ways in which war journalism is being rearticulated by social networks such as YouTube and Flickr, personal media such as blogs and Twitter, social sites such as Facebook and virtual worlds such as Second Life, as well as networks enabled over cell phones. Their case studies look at the Mumbai attacks of 26 November 2008, the Greek street protests in December 2008, the Israeli assault on Gaza in the same month and the Sri Lanka government's final push against the Tamil Tiger rebels in late 2008 and early 2009. In the process Matheson and Allan show how individualised media often intersect with professional and mass media in significant ways as the recording of conflict moves to the level of the interpersonal. As a result, the familiar "culture of distance" engendered by Western journalism's mediation of witnessing is thrown into sharp relief, with the stress on the suffering – as well as the aspirations for peace – of many of those caught-up in the atrocity resonating in social media sites.

Two journalists next outline their very different ways of promoting peace journalism. First Jean Lee C. Patindol draws on her experience of building up a peace journalists' network in the Philippines. Because the very notion of "peace" is controversial in her country (often being associated, for instance, with leftist/communist groups) journalists there often find the notion of "peace journalism" confusing – and thus it is abandoned in favour of "conflict-sensitive reporting" (as promoted by Ross Howard, 2003).

In contrast, the author, journalist and political activist Milan Rai directs his spotlight on the London-based *Peace News*, which he jointly edits. After outlining its history and placing it firmly within the tradition of the alternative, radical, dissenting

press of the early part of the 19th century, Rai argues that his journal captures many of the principles of peace journalism (see Lynch and McGoldrick op cit). For instance, it illuminates "issues of structural and cultural violence, as they bear upon the lives of people in a conflict arena, as part of the explanation for violence"; it frames "conflicts as consisting of many parties, pursuing many goals"; makes "peace initiatives and images of solutions more visible, whoever suggests them"; and aims to equip citizens "to distinguish between stated positions, and real goals, when judging whether particular forms of intervention are necessary or desirable" (op cit 28–31). Making the peace initiatives of the Afghan Taliban and of the Iranian government "more visible" were particular priorities in *Peace News* in late 2009.

But Rai also writes that "*Peace News* has functioned in many ways outside the framework of Lynch-McGoldrick-style peace journalism". For instance, *PN* has not always obeyed the injunction to look at "how shared problems and issues are leading to consequences that all the parties say they never intended", rather than assigning blame. In many conflict situations, *Peace News* has found it appropriate, and indeed necessary, to "assign blame", and to identify (and criticise) the hidden objectives that lie behind the rhetoric of "unintended consequences".

Sociologist Sarah Maltby adds a completely new dimension to the debate over peace and conflict journalism, examining the ways in which the military have used local radio in the Balkans and Afghanistan during peace building and conflict resolution operations. She argues that these activities (while they cannot be considered as "peace journalism") are positioned in terms resonant with some of the key principles of peace journalism, namely: a commitment to providing a voice to the voiceless; a promotion of peace through open dialogue and an orientation to solution. Moreover, Maltby argues that the military's self proclaimed orientation to "peace" in radio stations such as Oksigen and Rana FM raises some interesting questions about the use of discourses of peace and empowerment to legitimate military practices which, at times, appear to be culturally naïve.

Critiquing (and transforming) the mainstream

The final section carries a series of case studies which build on the major strand of peace journalism theory and practice – critiquing mainstream news values and myths of "balance" and "objectivity". Susan Dente Ross and Sevda Alankus, in examining the press coverage of the 2008 election of a new president in the (Greek) Republic of Cyprus and the subsequent bilateral initiatives towards settlement of