Expert Report Syndicate 3: Practicing peace journalism in the current political climate

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Galtung (1986, 1998) introduced peace journalism as a competing frame to war journalism that dominates news coverage of wars, taking conflict as a central value. War journalism emphasizes violence, presents the war as a zero-sum game with winners and losers, focuses on the here-and-now, highlights casualties and visible effects of the war, blames one side for the conflict, and favors elite voices (Galtung et al., 2013). In contrast, peace journalism is the "high road" reporters can take, focusing on areas of agreement between sides, promoting conflict resolution and reconciliation, employing thematic coverage that goes beyond the present, revealing causes and consequences, and giving voice to the people (Galtung & Fischer, 2013, p. 96). At its core, peace journalism is solution and people oriented (Lynch, 2013) and aims at enabling the public to "value non-violent responses to conflict" (Lynch, 2008, p. 3).

Practicing peace journalism, however, is neither straightforward nor easy to implement. Atanesyan (2020) argues that war journalism remains favorable in much of news coverage because it "serves official security strategies and securitization moves," as per his examination of media coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (p. 546). Although war journalism is prominent in the news, instances exist where peace journalism has taken the forefront. One such example is the recent Israel-Gaza war where both the Associated Press and the Qatar News Agency shifted their coverage to lean more toward peace journalism after the first truce was announced (Kozman & Cozma, 2024). Another instance comes from elite American newspapers' thematic coverage of the chemical weapons' attack in Syria thanks in part to lack of access to ground operations with underlying tones of peace journalism, exemplified in the prominence of diplomacy frames, even when conflict frames were prominent (Cozma & Kozman, 2015). These and other examples reveal the possibility of practicing peace journalism in highly contested wars

when the conditions are "right," reflecting the difficulties journalists face when they try to adopt a peace journalism approach in their stories.

Therefore, how can individual journalists from democratic and non-democratic countries incorporate elements of peace journalism in their reporting? As importantly, how can journalism education shift its focus to advocate for peace journalism, especially in courses about reporting wars? One of the biggest barriers war reporters on the ground have to overcome is that of time. The need to churn out stories around the clock has become more pressing in the age of the internet, especially during wars, where live coverage tilts towards the sensational going with the famous phrase of "if it bleeds, it leads." While it is difficult for journalists to challenge newsroom policies about war coverage, they can spend additional time collecting information on the background of the story and the context of the conflict, where possible. Promoting empathy and understanding, two tenets of peace journalism, can be achieved without taking sides. Giving voice to the voiceless, as per Kovach and Rosenstiel's (2021) advice, is arguably most important during wars when human loss is at its height and people's voices are sacrificed to give room to the elites as authoritative sources. Here, journalists could ensure that their depiction of human suffering is fair and real by focusing on the details instead of relying on "brief facts and shocking statistics," as Zhang and Luther (2020) found in their study of American, Qatari, and Russian media's framing of human suffering in the Syrian Civil War (p. 399). As importantly, journalists covering conflicts should protect their own mental health and understand that the traumatic experiences they cover affect them deeply (Feinstein et al., 2002). Perhaps realizing that although their reporting "can contribute to the peaceful settlement of conflicts," the task of active engagement in peace settlement does not fall on their shoulders (Hanitzsch, 2004).

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