

**“Peace Journalism: Creating the journalist’s network within
grassroots organizations”**

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Introduction

Peace journalism is an alternative style of reporting and networking within the realm of the profession.

Instead of conforming to mainstream and contemporary styles, peace journalism returns to the traditional roots of reporting, which focus on gathering information from a variety of sources, avoiding the bias towards one side of the story, and victimizing one group over another.

A peace journalist strives to network with contacts from all possible angles, so the information can be compared and equally presented. The goal of peace journalism is to find the connections between various groups, so they ultimately realize that there are points of similar interests between them. So much so, that they would be inspired to work together on an issue instead of immediately resorting to war.

Peace journalistic work provides a discourse between societies to have opportunities to resolve conflict or discuss tensions. Not only does this alternative journalism utilize several views of one issue, it spotlights how the various acts affect a community over a long period of time instead of only highlighting immediate consequences.

Though peace journalists strive to reduce or solve conflicts, they don't do so through bias and victimization type stories. Instead, they remain impartial, present facts from all sides, and aim to make connection points between the oppositions.

Critics accuse peace journalism of contradicting the detached reporter angle. However, peace journalism is impartial, but the peace journalist is someone who dives into a conflict area with hopes of unearthing stories that can bring peace to the area by raising awareness and opening up societal discourse.

Like most alternative mediums, peace journalism is not a well-established platform for information exchange to the public, because few people know the genre exists, much less seek out channels to receive it. The dominant consumer-driven media companies run like businesses, so they are more concerned with their investors, their finances, and the size of their audience. Yes, contemporary media outlets such as Fox, CNN, and ABC, act as the fourth estate to the government, players in the checks and balance, but they are just as much influenced by officials and business leaders. There is no longer diversity of styles or stories between them.

Peace journalism defies that. If more readers invested their time in independent writers or sources, they would see and learn the difference between a mainstream story and a locally produced one. This genre needs to be highlighted, studied, and nurtured, so the mainstream media can be challenged to return to the roots of journalism. It needs to be showcased so it can develop. With citizen journalism

becoming more accessible and accepted as a reliable source, the globalizing world is an ideal environment for peace journalism to thrive.

As a journalism student, I am taught to adapt to citizen journalism, which includes being active on my own blog site or through social media such as Twitter, so I can be just as effective as an information gatherer and sharer even though I don't have the official pass of a funded media company. I have never been taught about peace or any alternative journalism style, however.

If the next generation of professional journalists can escape the grasps of governing media conglomerates, it must start with researching and practicing independent forms of journalism.

This was my lead to expand my own knowledge of peace journalism. After three years of being educated for the journalism career field, I doubted if it was where my efforts should be dedicated. I questioned the business side that has taken over the work and the bias that was discretely infiltrating the writing. Hence, this proposal is based on what I have gathered.

To be an affective peace journalist, one must tap into the right network, which would have to be a local one webbed together from a variety of groups and people.

How does one go about building this network? These types of journalists must digest an understanding of conflict-induced situations, the culture of the area in which they are reporting, then most importantly and the point of this research, they must turn to local and grassroots organizations for sources.

These community groups can harbor a journalist as they collect their evidence and find sources in the area to build relations with. The local groups also have a firm understanding of the current issues at hand within their society, so they can help guide the journalist in a newsworthy direction.

Also, in conflict stricken areas, grassroots are the relied upon organizations to help those displaced from the tensions. This allows the journalist to stay in close touch with what people are experiencing in their lives.

The purpose of this research project is to see how supportive and realistic it is for a journalist to use the grassroots level to make connections among societal groups. It also raises the point of how more readers should seek out independent peace journalists, because they are not under the media conglomerate umbrella that has taken over in the past few decades.

With purposeful and passionate observations, a peace journalist can deliver an informative story that balances both sides, yet they don't have to hide the reason they wrote the story from a particular angle, because there is no hierarchy of business telling them what to do or where to pull from. Overall, an engaged peace

journalist will deliver the more energized and thorough story, one that could spark a necessary reaction.

Literature Review

Though many understand how much influence the media holds over any situation, most readers do not analyze the approach or focus the writers are using to bring the issues to life.

Peace journalists learn the complexities and history of the many people involved in the situation. This more involved understanding allows peace journalists to avoid sabotaging the building blocks of peace, which could easily be dissolved by mainstream writers, by equally representing both sides of the conflict.

To begin, I will define war journalism to present the contrast style that peace journalism is up against and trying to reform.

War journalism potentially increases tensions between countries or groups, which provides more incentives to attack each other, by writing objectively and victimizing one of the only two sides portrayed. This escalates stereotypes and ideas preconceived between the oppositions. War journalists' work is driven by their access to hierarchical sources such as military leaders, policy makers, and government officials. This network sets the appearance of legitimate or quality sources, even though, these higher-ups could twist any information the way they need, because they know the journalist will come to them and trust them first (Ross, Tehranian, 2009).

Though war journalists do not intentionally fuel tensions with their work, they do not help the situation by feeding what their mainstream editors are asking for. As mentioned in the introduction, I do not blame the writers for their style as much as I do the training that has molded them to find and report information they do.

Journalists are trained to gather information, create a network of authority sources, and craft the information in a report that is one sided but claimed to be objective. Due to the lack of awareness of and education in alternative journalism, there is no funneling of writers to the field of peace journalism, because they simply don't know about it.

Due to this lack of research, those who are interested in recording and labeling particular aspects of peace journalism must tackle obstacles in their own findings to extend knowledge of this platform. When collecting examples of this genre, they face vague guidelines for classification and analysis, because the only information published is outlines made by the pioneers of peace journalism. It is an adaptable and merging form of reporting, so placing it in a distinct frame is difficult.

There are five stages the media progresses through in attempt to play an active role in intervention of a conflict situation (Romano, 2010). First, the use of conventional journalism plays out in the way reporters practice objectivity and deny any biases.

Second, the reporter must strive to deter hinting or using any stereotypes or generalizations of the people involved.

Stage three, the journalist must seek stories that capture the layers of the tension and provides one block to add to establishing peace within the situation. Stage four is when conventional journalism can no longer handle the responsibility of being a means of intervention. At this stage, the reporter is now a facilitator between the various perspectives, with no ties to political influence or corporate attachment.

The last stage, in its own way, transcends our idea of journalism all together. Stage five is utilizing any means of story telling from plays to books to videos to spread the message and teach others about what is going on and how conflicts can be resolved. This series of stages reflects the alternative nature of peace journalism.

This distinct style is a way to pluck readers out of our mainstream Western thinking and drop them into a situation that must be understood and respected for all aspects. It must avoid labeling an "other."

A case study of the civil war in Sri Lanka raises the question of who can be a peace journalist (Keeble, Tulloch, Zollmann, 2010). Does it have to be an official correspondent or a reporter?

Shortly after the turn of the 21st century, government-run camps in Sri Lanka denied media access and threatened to kill those who talked to reporters. An intense and pro-longed conflict was continuing to fester in the country, yet nothing could be done about it from the outside. There was no one to get the message out.

That is, until locals began to use the Internet to raise a voice from the war within.

These local civilian efforts are what turned the international light on their issues in a cry for help. This reveals that peace journalism is not a label of a profession, it is a movement carried by anyone who is willing to take the steps to peace be it activists, scholars, civilians, or human rights campaigners.

Citizen journalism is on the rise due to technology and the world of blogs that has emerged as a primary modern day salon for writers. The accessibility for more people to travel on their own and report their findings via the Internet increased the amount of people who take on their own journalistic responsibility.

The case study in Sri Lanka reveals acts of civilian journalism. In 2008, the government already banned most reporters during the ongoing conflict between the government and the Tamil Tigers. With the war coming to a close, there was an

obvious reporting voice still stirring. Around 200,00 civilians were trapped between the opposing forces, so they, more than anyone, experienced first hand what this conflict was causing their country's physical and psychological health (Keeble, Tulloch, Zollmann,2010).

Due to the lack of coverage by media outlets, however, few outside of Sri Lanka were aware of the extensive destruction. Canadian politician Michael Ignatieff said it was a "war without witness."

One Tamil site, Tamilnet.com, survived the media slaughter, however. Its editor, Dharmaratnam Sivaram, trained various teachers, government workers and correspondents in reporting techniques and how to use technology to gather information to be published. These reporters networked internationally with other editors and news groups to launch their stories out of Sri Lanka.

Once the government recognized these efforts, they countered it with their own media push. This sparked a media movement, where first-hand witnesses, civilians, adapted skills to do similar publishing. Though their blogs and videos did not attack politics directly, they shed light on the inhumane environment in which Sri Lankans were trying to live.

This particular case shows that citizen journalism bears witness to events not seen by anyone else. They essentially call out actions or violence that is quickly swept under the rug and goes unseen. Citizen journalism unearths a voice for the voiceless. Even if their messages were not published through official media platforms, the rise of voice expresses what the locals of a war-stricken area believe would be the most effective. Who knows what is best for the recovery of a place than those who call it home? These unofficial reporters' skills can eventually graduate to professional level if needed, but a peace journalist could also tap into local networks to understand their concerns.

One journalist who embodied this type of change was Dahr Jamail, a now profound international journalist who began as a blog and travel writer who entered Iraq for personal reasons then planted a new seed of journalism for the war zone.

Jamail said he "wanted to report on where the silence was" (Keeble, Tulloch, Zollmann,2010). His journalism consisted of themes that other journalists used, such as civilian deaths, US military and political policies, living standards in the country, and torture, but his style stood out for many reasons.

His writings gave voice to the local people and unveiled their perspective of daily struggles. Jamail also interweaved civilian and public sources, and he strived to dig deeper into what the US military and government was trying to cover up.

A key code to Jamail's reporting is his network of sources does not consist of government officials but ordinary people on the streets. He walked through the city

and spoke with Iraqi people who voiced their own opinion through him. He would contextualize this information in a way that contradicts mainstream journalism style and was also told from his stance. His dedication to credible facts is unshakable.

His process mirrors traditional journalism values of thorough investigation to promote journalism as the government's fourth estate, one that checks and balances political actions. Jamail's reporting falls into the peace journalism category for many aspects: it focuses on the consequences or outcomes of situations, reveals the effects of violence, and most importantly for my specific topic, he builds his source network from the ground up by relying on ordinary, unofficial citizens.

This ground-up network I am referring to was expanded upon in a journalism case study in the Philippines (Keeble, Tulloch, Zollmann, 2010). Though my focus revolves around journalist's network within grassroots and local citizens, journalists do need an umbrella media organization to help train in the craft and also create a forum or meeting place for all the individuals who are peace journalists.

The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON) formed in the Philippines in 2004. It is a growing body of journalists and media educators who strive to flip mainstream news to peace or conflict-sensitive journalism in a free-market world. They help train and build connections of journalists who wish to battle war journalism with their own writings.

I note "help train," specifically, because PECOJON acknowledges that training is not enough to be an effective peace journalist. According to Jean Lee C. Patindol, "it is not enough to just train journalists any more. There have to be more regular and consistent forms of follow-up and support, as well as venues for mutual exchange and building solidarity among journalists and peace journalism practitioners within countries and globally" (Keeble, Tulloch, Zollmann, 2010).

For this genre of journalism to sustain, though, the media world has to transform. Peace journalism is viewed as an alternative form of coverage due to the fact that very few people know it is a media option. Mainstream media not only controls gates of information, they dictate how information is written in certain styles.

Methodology

While traveling to Morocco, Turkey, and Sri Lanka, our cohort will be working with grassroots organizations; I will also be staying in Sri Lanka to work with Sarvodaya's communication group. My main methods during these ventures is to interview managers and workers of the grassroots with questions regarding their use of media and level of interaction with journalists.

Due to the larger amount research on civilian or peace journalism in Sri Lanka, I am interested in learning first hand how this media platform is thriving now, if it has sustained at all.

Sarvodaya's Buddhist agenda for peace intertwines many points of interest, but one that relates particularly to my research is how they organize events and seminars to spread peace education and encourage inner as well as outer peace awakening (Nan, Mampilly & Bartoli, 2011).

This influenced my methods, because I would like to attend these events to observe and ask how these help the cause. Off of that point, could more media attention to this agenda and its way of launching encourage more participation? Could peace journalism aid the process? Also, could it be considered or morphed into a platform of peace journalism?

Since there is a lack of peace journalism research in Morocco and Turkey, I will need to search harder for traits of civilian or independent journalism in these countries. Even in our readings this semester, media and peace promotion was not a prominent theme until we studied Sri Lanka or Sarvodaya. I hope to find leads while in the other two countries that can enhance my fall research of alternative journalism in these particular places.

I would also like to tailor my questions to gain their perspective of how grassroots organizations can aid in conflict resolution. Do they think their network of groups is actually a safe zone for international journalists to work within, and if so, are they supportive of that situation?

I have set up a blog to maintain all of the information I will gather, as well as to have a log of daily observations and events. I will use certain quotes to post mini stories on the blog regarding the topic. This will be a way to store my research while practicing my first attempt of international citizen journalism, which is a key component to being a peace journalist or at least building the network to become one.

A few questions arise when researching an emerging medium that does not have a set of rules or specific outlines of how to classify it. Ultimately, it is an outlet to raise awareness about conflict through angles usually hidden or unknown with one intention, to achieve peace and understanding between the opposing forces. With such a vague description, there are concerns with peace journalism.

A primary aspect of peace journalism that sparks anxiety is the method or style that works for one conflict situation most likely could not be applied to any other due to the uniqueness of each place, community, and tension.

There is no formula that can be followed. Since this is a common theme in this medium, many wonder how it is possible to effectively use it across many national

lines. It also makes it seem impossible to do any type of news comparison or find parallels between the different situations (Ross, Tehranian, 2009).

The responsibility to counter these faults falls upon the journalist's shoulders. It is their duty to be immersed within the local networks of the conflict areas as to be connected with who they need to find what the best resolution approach is. Without background research or personal interaction with the situation, a peace journalist would not know from where to write or what to record.

Critics of peace journalism also question creditability of sources and reliability of the journalist. These are constructs of a mainstream media consumer mind, however. In reference back to war journalists who are networked with higher-up authorities, it is important to question the motives of their authoritative sources.

A peace journalist works within an experimental field, one that takes a reader's attention and tosses it in the middle of a conflict zone with representation of both sides. Though their network may not be with policymakers or leaders, it is tied to honest voices that are in need of listeners. They are seeking change, which could be discussed and eventually attained through the work of an effective peace journalist.

My research, presently, focuses on the people this type of journalist uses as sources, their network on the ground. After gathering information during the study abroad, I will tailor my findings appropriately then immerse in research of how these networks can enhance the work of a peace journalist based on the outlines of this medium according to Jake Lynch.

I will also focus, in the fall, on ways an aspiring peace journalist can begin their work in this field besides flying into a combat zone with the urge to help by writing stories. There are programs crafted to train reporters on effective peace journalism techniques.

I am interested to gauge if this type of training could infiltrate the mainstream schools of journalism, or is it too much of a sub-genre to be highlighted in j-schools and will be confined to independent programs like it is now.

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