

Peace Journalism: An Introduction to Peace Journalism, the Center for Global Peace Journalism, and the *Peace Journalist Magazine*

Steven Youngblood*

ABSTRACT

Most people are reflexively skeptical when they hear the term peace journalism yet are usually receptive to the principles of peace journalism like accuracy; balance; objectivity; discussing solutions; avoiding inflammatory, demonizing, stereotyping language; and rejecting “us vs. them” narratives. Perhaps this is because the term peace is itself ironically inflammatory. A good starting point, therefore, could be to examine the concept of peace, and how it relates to the practice of journalism.

Keywords: Peace Journalism, Johan Galtung, War Reporting, Traditional Journalism, Peace Journalism in Turkey

Article Type: Opinion Article

Submitted: 15.04.2024

Accepted: 27.04.2024



* Assoc. Prof., Fulbright Scholarship, steven.youngblood@fulbrightmail.org, 0009-0008-8954-5694

Barış Gazeteciliği: Barış Gazeteciliğine Giriş, Küresel Barış Gazeteciliği Merkezi ve *Peace Journalist Dergisi*

Steven Youngblood*

ÖZ

Çoğu insan barış gazeteciliği terimini duyduğunda refleks olarak şüpheli yaklaşır, ancak genellikle doğruluk, denge, nesnellik, çözümleri tartışma, kışkırtıcı, şeytanlaştırıcı, klişeleştirici dilden kaçınma ve "biz ve onlar" anlatılarını reddetme gibi barış gazeteciliği ilkelerine açıktır. Belki de bunun nedeni barış teriminin kendisinin ironik bir şekilde kışkırtıcı olmasıdır. Bu nedenle, barış kavramını ve bunun gazetecilik pratiğiyle ilişkisini incelemek iyi bir başlangıç noktası olabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Barış Gazeteciliği, Johan Galtung, Savaş Haberciliği, Geleneksel Gazetecilik, Türkiye’de Barış Gazeteciliği

Makale Türü: Görüş Makalesi

Başvuru Tarihi: 15.04.2024

Kabul Tarihi: 27.04.2024



* Doç. Dr., Fulbright Bursiyeri, steven.youngblood@fulbrightmail.org, 0009-0008-8954-5694

Introduction

Most people are reflexively skeptical when they hear the term peace journalism yet are usually receptive to the principles of peace journalism like accuracy; balance; objectivity; discussing solutions; avoiding inflammatory, demonizing, stereotyping language; and rejecting “us vs. them” narratives. Perhaps this is because the term peace is itself ironically inflammatory. A good starting point, therefore, could be to examine the concept of peace, and how it relates to the practice of journalism.

Definitions

Peace has traditionally been defined as a lack of conflict or violence. However, one of the fathers of peace studies (and the originator of the concept peace journalism), Norwegian academic Dr. Johan Galtung, created a construct that outlines positive and negative peace. Negative peace is simply the absence of conflict, whereas positive peace is the presence of the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies (Youngblood, 2016) The pillars (elements) of positive peace include well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, free flow of information, good relations with neighbors, high levels of human capital, acceptance of the rights of others, low levels of corruption, and a sound business environment (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2017, n.p.).

For the purposes of peace journalism, Galtung’s notion of positive peace is especially salient, since peace journalists report about and analyze these elements of positive peace while leading substantive societal discussions about issues that pertain to justice and equity, both of which are prerequisites to sustainable positive peace. With the foundation of positive peace established, we can look to definitions of peace journalism itself.

In *Peace Journalism*, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) define the genre as, “when editors and reporters make choices - of what to report, and how to report it - that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict” (p. 5).

The Center for Global Peace Journalism adapts and expands on the Lynch/McGoldrick definition. The center says that PJ is a practice in which “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. Peace Journalism gives peacemakers a voice while making peace initiatives and non-violent solutions more visible and viable” (Youngblood, 2018, p. 2). Like the Lynch/McGoldrick definition, this again emphasizes PJ’s place within traditional journalistic practice.

Just as important is a consideration of what peace journalism is not. None of PJ’s foundational literature states that peace journalism means open advocacy for peace, or that peace journalism ignores unpleasant, potentially inflammatory stories. News is news, and it must be reported. Thus, peace journalism asks how the news should be reported, how it should be framed, what words should be used, and how the event can be reported in a way that doesn’t exacerbate already dire situations, fuel violence, and make angry people angrier (Youngblood, 2016).

Two key elements of peace journalism are framing and word choice. One definition of framing in journalism is the way journalists organize and present news. This includes which aspects of stories to emphasize, which to minimize, and which to ignore. In producing frames, media establish the meaning of an event, and help the public understand and categorize its importance. Peace Journalism Principles and Practices (2016) states, “Framing theory is significant for all journalists, but especially so for peace journalists, who often speak of narratives, which can be defined as the interpretation and presentation of a story. This (demonstrates) the power of media to create meaning and, thus, structure societal discourses” (p. 9). The idea that media create frames is integral to understanding how news media and peace journalism in particular operate within society. Another key to peace journalism is the importance of words and word choices. Peace journalists must be careful to avoid demonizing, victimizing, and inflammatory language because carelessly selected words can be anger-inducing, misleading, or divisive.

There are many words that journalists regularly and carelessly use that add only negative emotion, but no substance, to a story. For example, how many people have to die for an event to become a massacre? Or how about the words “brutal,” “callous,” “slaughter,” “grim,” “monstrous”? What exactly constitutes a tragedy? And who is a martyr? This list includes demonizing language like “criminal,” “thug,” “liar,” and “evil.” “Terrorist” is also frequently tossed around carelessly. After all, what’s the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter? The fact is that all of these words and their synonyms are subjective and imprecise. If a journalist (or peace journalist) is to adhere to the principles of

objectivity and impartiality, and if these emotive words are inherently subjective, this alone should be sufficient reason to omit such language. Peace journalism teaches that if 100 people were killed, that we simply write that 100 people were killed. Peace journalists report the facts, and let the reader or listener make their own subjective decisions as to whether the event is a tragedy or a massacre.

What words would a peace journalist use instead? A peace journalist can report in a matter-of-fact manner. For example, write “John was arrested for stealing \$100” or “John has been arrested 16 times” instead of “John, a known thief, liar, and thug, was caught red-handed ripping off \$100.” A peace journalist, when writing about victims, could state matter-of-factly what happened without sensational labels designed to make the victims look even more helpless or tragic. For example, “Sara was unarmed and holding her baby when attacked” instead of, “Sara, who was holding her defenseless, ill baby, was helpless when heartless thugs jumped her.” Peace journalists can avoid sensationalism by sticking to the facts. For example, write “23 people were killed” instead of “23 people were slaughtered in a bloody massacre,” or “200 rebels were ambushed by the government” instead of “200 heroes were martyred by brutal enemy soldiers.”

Other Important Principles

In *Peace Journalism*, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) lay out a number of principles of peace journalism. This includes a 17-point checklist comparing peace journalism to war/violence journalism, or what can more broadly be termed traditional journalism.

In the checklist, war/violence journalism is reporting characterized by “us vs. them” narratives that demonize “them,” the spreading of propaganda, reporting that is victory-oriented, reactive, elite-oriented, and only focuses on the visible effects of violence. Peace journalism is the opposite. It is reporting that is proactive, humanizes “them,” gives voice to everyday people, and discusses solutions.

Other key points in the checklist include avoiding reporting about conflict as if it is a zero-sum game (one winner, one loser); reporting about common ground shared by parties involved in the conflict; avoiding reporting only the violent acts and “the horror”; and not reporting claims as facts (p. 6).

The Center for Global Peace Journalism, using Lynch and McGoldrick 17 points as a foundation, devised a 10-point list outlining the elements of peace journalism.

Peace Journalism Elements

1. PJ is proactive, examining the causes of conflict, and leading discussions about solutions.
2. PJ looks to unite parties, rather than divide them, and eschews oversimplified “us vs. them” and “good guy vs. bad guy” reporting. Peace journalism builds bridges.
3. Peace reporters reject official propaganda, and instead seek facts from all sources.
4. PJ is balanced, covering issues/suffering/peace proposals from all sides of a conflict.
5. PJ gives voice to the voiceless, instead of just reporting for and about elites and those in power.
6. Peace journalists provide depth and context, rather than just superficial and sensational blow by blow accounts of violence and conflict.
7. Peace journalists consider the consequences of their reporting.
8. Peace journalists carefully choose and analyze the words they use, understanding that carelessly selected words are often inflammatory.
9. Peace journalists thoughtfully select the images they use, understanding that they can misrepresent an event, exacerbate an already dire situation, and re-victimize those who have suffered.
10. Peace Journalists offer counter-narratives that debunk media created or perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions. (Youngblood, 2016, p. 6)

Peace Journalism: Beyond War Reporting

When the concept of peace journalism was developed, it was created as an antidote to irresponsible reporting about wars and violent conflict. During the last dozen years or so, research and project work done especially by the Center for Global Peace Journalism has demonstrated PJ’s utility in improving reporting in a number of domains—elections and politics; reconciliation; crime; race; migrants, and so on. In each of these areas, traditional journalism has been found wanting; and in each area, peace journalism offers valuable guidance as to how to report more responsibly.

For example, traditional media coverage of migrants, including immigrants and refugees, is often one-dimensional, negative, and distorted. The worst reporting about refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and IDP's is often racist and/or xenophobic. Worldwide examples of such reporting abound, and include misinformation, scapegoating, and xenophobic coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkish media, where refugees are often portrayed as criminals, disease-carriers, and a burden. The same negative narrative can be found in U.S. media stories about Syrian refugees, who are often portrayed as flooding into the country, stealing Americans' jobs, and infiltrating the U.S. to hatch terrorist schemes (Youngblood, 2016, pp. 154-157).

As noted in *Peace Journalism Principles and Practices*, peace journalism can be employed to offer more responsible coverage of refugees and migrants. Guidelines about migrant reporting articulated in the book include not using language or images that rely on or reinforce stereotypes, racism, sexism, or xenophobia; proactively investigating and reporting refugee stories that offer counter-narratives that debunk stereotypes and challenge exclusively negative narratives; and humanizing individuals and their stories, especially those that illustrate larger statistics or trends (p. 166-168).

Comparison: Peace Journalism and Traditional Journalism

One can see the difference between peace journalism and traditional journalism reflected in these two versions of the same story, taken from *Peace Journalism* (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

Traditional "war" reporting

Skopje, UPI – Peace talks aimed at ending the conflict in Macedonia lay in ruins last night after the massacre of eight policemen by Albanian rebels who mutilated the bodies. The atrocity took place at the mountain village of Vecje, where a police patrol was attacked with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, said a spokesman. Six other men were wounded, and three vehicles destroyed.

The bodies were cut with knives after they died, he said, and one man's head had been smashed in. The attack was believed to be the work of the National Liberal Army terrorists from the hills near Tetevo. Ali Ahmeti, a political leader of the NLA, said that his men may have fired "in self-defense" ... (p. 58)

This is a traditional report in every way. Notice first how the writer begins with the inflammatory comment that peace talks are “in ruins.” If indeed peace talks are in ruins, this is a determination that readers should make themselves. A peace journalist would ask: what is the consequence of this kind of reporting? Does this make peace more or less possible? If peace is not possible, then one might logically conclude that violence and war is the only viable solution. This story is also unbalanced and is largely based on the claims (propaganda?) made by one government source. Notice also the emotive language that may incite and inflame. Here is the same story, framed differently.

Peace Journalism story

Skopje, UPI — There was condemnation across the political spectrum in Macedonia after a police patrol suffered the loss of eight men. Both the main parties representing the country’s minority Albanians distanced themselves from the killings, believed to be the work of the self-styled National Liberation Army. Ali Ahmeti, a political leader of the NLA, denied that his men had attacked the patrol, saying they may have fired “in self-defense.” But the Macedonian government said it had done nothing to provoke the machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades which destroyed three trucks. A spokesman added that the bodies appeared to have been cut with knives and one man’s skull caved in ... (p. 58).

This story is much better. Notice first how instead of hopelessness, the writer highlights an area of agreement—condemnation of violence. While the violent acts aren’t ignored, they aren’t sensationalized, either. The imprecise, emotive language is gone. The story is better balanced and doesn’t present as gospel truth claims by the government spokesman.

Peace Journalism in Turkey

A project titled “Reporting Syrian Refugees: Building Communities of Understanding in Turkey” was conducted in 2014 and 2015. It was a collaborative project between Center for Global Peace Journalism and Istanbul University Faculty of Communication, Istanbul, Turkey. The project was funded by the US State Department and US Embassy in Ankara, Turkey. Starting in August 2014, the project partners, Prof. Dr. Nilüfer Pembecioğlu and Center for Global Peace Journalism’s Director Prof. Steven Youngblood, collaborated to address key concepts that included improving the living conditions of refugees by giving their concerns deeper and greater media attention; encouraging and nurturing a

more stable peace between host communities and refugees; and empowering local journalists to employ peace journalism tools that foster reconciliation, and discouraging division and violence.

PJ seminars for journalists and students were held in Malatya, Adana, and Istanbul. The project recommended that the press, employing peace journalism, could help bridge this gap, and open essential dialogues, and aid refugees. (<https://www.scribd.com/document/681933409/Peace-Journalist-Apr2015-Web>).

A more recent project was an effort to combat the spread of racist and xenophobic narratives against migrant communities within the media in Turkey was spearheaded by the U.S. NGO HasNa, which partnered with Kırkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doğa Derneği in Gaziantep, Turkey and the Center for Global Peace Journalism. Their capacity building project in 2022 was titled “Media in Tandem: Social Cohesion through Storytelling.”

Targeting young journalists from migrant and host communities in Gaziantep, the project’s goals were:

1. Promote social cohesion between migrant and host community journalists by encouraging them to collaborate and learn with one another
2. Enhance the professional capacities of journalists through targeted skills trainings thereby better preparing them for the labor force
3. Raise awareness of the issues of xenophobia and hate speech relating to refugees in Turkey, fostering empathy with forcibly displaced communities.

The first phase of the project comprised a series of 12 training sessions on various aspects of peace journalism. Cross-cultural collaboration is a core value of HasNa, which is why the project was designed to facilitate collaboration not only among Turkish and migrant journalists, but also among Turkish and American experts who came together to share knowledge and best practices on a variety of topics. The 12-week training curriculum included weekly sessions under such headings as New Media and Social Transformation, Rights-Based Journalism, Visual Media Ethics, Citizen Journalism, Communication Law, Gender Equality in the Media, and Representation of Refugees in the Media.

During the second phase of the project trainees were divided into four multicultural groups, each receiving a small stipend to produce an audio-visual digital story on the overarching theme “migrants.” Seeing that project

participants were already professional or student journalists, no additional training was provided on videography or documentary filmmaking. The digital stories that emerged from the project serve as important testaments to the lives, struggles, and most importantly, humanity of immigrant communities living in Turkey (<https://www.scribd.com/document/681759767/The-PJ-April-2022-Web>).

The Center for Global Peace Journalism, The Peace Journalist Magazine, Peace Journalism Insights Blog

A semi-annual magazine, *The Peace Journalist*, was launched in 2012 by the Center for Global Peace Journalism. *The Peace Journalist* magazine is dedicated to disseminating news and information for teachers, students, and practitioners of PJ. It is the only publication of its kind devoted exclusively to PJ. Current and back copies can be found at: <https://peacejournalcenter.blogspot.com/>.

The Center for Global Peace Journalism (<https://peacejournalcenter.blogspot.com/>) 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.

The award-winning *Peace Journalism Insights* blog (<http://stevenyoungblood.blogspot.com>) regularly chronicles the activities and projects of the Center for Global Peace Journalism as well as providing critiques of media practices as seen through a peace journalism lens.

Conclusion

As we have seen, peace journalism, “when reporters and editors make choices that can create an atmosphere conducive to peace” (Youngblood, 2016), offers journalists an opportunity to professionalize their reporting across a number of domains, including reporting about war, civil unrest, reconciliation, race, and migrants. It is grounded in tested journalistic theory, including agenda setting and selective exposure theories, and its principles are embraced and practiced (at least intermittently) worldwide.

Despite the strides made by PJ, the concept still faces an uphill struggle. In the conclusion of the textbook *Peace Journalism Principles and Practices*, I write,

“It would be fantasy to believe that in our world of exaggerated sensational coverage, of red-faced pundits, of polarizing political media, and of unchecked and irresponsible social media messages, that anything approaching widespread adoption of peace journalism will occur anytime soon. That said, I am still optimistic that our journalism can get better and can adopt at least some of the principles of peace journalism, despite the obstacles...While the goal of news media practicing peace journalism is admirable, perhaps a more realistic goal would be the integration of peace journalism into the journalism curricula at universities in the U.S. and worldwide.”

Peace journalism, like the time-honored journalistic tradition of objectivity, is an ideal. Any progress toward this ideal, towards better, more responsible reporting, will make the journey worthwhile.

Unquestionably, progress toward this ideal is well underway. As Dr. Galtung observed, “We are on the way from nothing to something...Looking forward, [there will be] ever more media space for peace” (Galtung, 2015, n.p.).

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