

## Peace Journalism as an Ethical Challenge

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The reader will find, below, a table with two columns: *peace/conflict journalism* to the left and *war/violence journalism* to the right. The hypothesis is, of course, that the latter is today the mainstream, dominant style, protected by a massive cover of rationalizations, and the former is hardly ever found, not even as a countertrend. And yet these are two different ways of thinking about, looking at, describing and ultimately writing up the same set of events; two angles, two discourses, maybe political messages, left and right. Both are based on reporting facts, and are based on underlying cognitive and emotional assumptions rather than one being idealistic and normative and the other realistic and descriptive.

Which one to choose is *essentially an ethical question*. But that choice has already been made for thousands of journalists and other media workers all over the world, and the choice is in favor of war/violence journalism as the dominant style because it is the tradition: "that is the way we do it" as so many editors tend to say. Consequently, the argument in this article is essentially in favor of changing that style, moving it from war/violence journalism toward peace/conflict journalism through an exploration of some compromise or eclectic in-between positions.

This will not be an easy task, given that major media – written, audio or visual – like major universities, are products of the modern state-system, reflecting the perspective of the dominant powers that house them. Post-modern, globalized – not just Westernized/Americanized – media do not exist yet.

<b>PEACE/CONFLICT JOURNALISM</b>	<b>WAR/VIOLENCE JOURNALISM</b>
<p><b>I. PEACE/CONFLICT-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>explore conflict <u>formation</u>, x parties, y goals, z issues general "win-win" orientation</p> <p>open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture</p> <p>making conflicts transparent</p> <p>giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding</p> <p>see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity</p> <p>humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons</p> <p><u>proactive</u>: prevention before any violence/war occurs</p> <p>focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</p>	<p><b>I. WAR/VIOLENCE-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>focus on conflict <u>arena</u>, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war general zero-sum orientation</p> <p>closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone</p> <p>making wars opaque/secret</p> <p>"us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, for "us"</p> <p>see "them" as the problem, focus on who prevails in war</p> <p>dehumanization of "them"; more so the worse the weapon</p> <p><u>reactive</u>: waiting for violence before reporting</p> <p>focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</p>
<p><b>II. TRUTH-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>expose untruths on all sides</p> <p>uncover all cover-ups</p>	<p><b>II. PROPAGANDA-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>expose "their" untruths</p> <p>help "our" cover-ups/lies</p>
<p><b>III. PEOPLE-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children, giving voice to the voiceless</p> <p>give name to all evil-doers</p> <p>focus on people peace-makers</p>	<p><b>III. ELITE-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>focus on "our" suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece</p> <p>give name of their evil-doer</p> <p>focus on elite peace-makers</p>
<p><b>IV. SOLUTION-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>Peace = non-violence + creativity</p> <p>highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war</p> <p>focus on structure, culture the peaceful society</p> <p>aftermath: resolution, re- construction, reconciliation</p>	<p><b>IV. VICTORY-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>peace = victory + cease-fire</p> <p>conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand</p> <p>focus on treaty, institution the controlled society</p> <p>leaving for another war, return if the old flares up</p>

What does the above chart mean in concrete terms? Here are some essentials from the *Manual of Ten Pointers to Peace Journalism*:

1. The focal point of peace journalism is not advocacy, but the expansion of the conflict discourse to include peaceful outcomes and processes, making peace perspectives visible.
2. To do this a critical/constructive attitude that understands the following is needed:
  - Facts are always *selected*: hence, also select peace issues!
  - Facts are often *distorted* from event to print, be watchful!
  - Facts are often *repressed*: to be avoided also when those facts run counter to peaceful outcomes and processes!
  - Consider the *potential facts* that might have happened: "Mr. President, could you imagine meeting your opponent?"
3. To do this a critical/constructive attitude toward texts is necessary:
  - The texts/narratives of conflict parties like governments must be reported together with the *counter-texts* of other parties;
  - There are usually *subtexts* where other intentions are hidden, embedded: try to get at them through investigative journalism;
  - The open text may be a *pretext* or only a (very) partial truth;
  - There is always a *context*, the broader conflict formation of parties and goals and issues: try to identify all of them!
  - There are *deeper texts*, in the collective subconscious/deep cultures of the parties: study gender, class, national myths!
4. When reporting acts of violence much of the focus should be on victims and suffering. Is the act seen only as the work of one "evil" actor, not also as a product of structure, culture and context? Fight DMA traps (Dualism, Manichaeism, Armageddon): where *there are only two parties* and the context does not matter:
  - *One is good, one is evil*, and (the latter's) texts are only pretexts)
  - *War is unavoidable anyhow*, better support the good side.
5. Care with language: quote parties correctly; do not use "claims" for one party and "explanations" for the other.
6. Care with the term "peace"; it is much deeper than "cease-fire". Acid test: are the parties treated symmetrically?
7. Care with the term "terrorist": drop it, or balance it with "state terrorist". Use the names the parties use for themselves.
8. Look out for and report peace proposals, there are more of them around than may be expected.
9. Do not fall for the idea that peace has to come from governments; governments matter but their decisions are empty unless backed by public sentiments and civil society.
10. Use questions to invite people to propose, suggest; peace belongs to everybody, not only to the political class.

Let us take an example that is now a little dated but no less pertinent: How did mainstream reporting in the NATO/Serbia war stand up relative to this peace journalism mini-manual?

- There was a focus on *peaceful outcome through war* as the only approach, but *not peace through a peaceful process*, like
  - increasing the Kosovo Verification Mission, e.g. by 10
  - weeding out people with other motives like identifying targets
  - closing border between Albania and Kosovo, tried but sabotaged
  - cooperation Beograd-Tirana, tried but sabotaged
  - return of all refugees, to Kosovo, and also to Croatia and BiH

- Kosovo as a republic in Yugoslavia, not only an autonomy
- a Helsinki type conference for the region as a whole
- all of this under UN auspices/Chapter 6, like for Cambodia

Alternative measures were never explored by the media. The stakes were high: the alternative to a peaceful process, the NATO war, in fact nullified the United Nations and its charter, and marginalized Russia-China, with dire future consequences.

- The selection included *repression of peace initiatives* like the above (like the silenced UN/Pérez de Cuéllar initiative, December 1991) and inattention to potential facts by asking whether such alternatives are being pursued. There was little space for peaceful relations, even between Serbs and Albanians.
- There were counter-texts in the sense that the Beograd position was often mentioned. However, that text was usually commented upon and interpreted in search for subtexts in a way that the official texts were not, although there was also talk about NATO needing a war to stay alive (and take on extended tasks) as there was talk about Milosevic needing a war to stay in power or to leave power against an overwhelming adversary. Ulterior US motives (a base in Kosovo, Pipeline 8 Caspian-Adria, get hold of the Trepcia mines) and German motives (Hinterland in the Balkans) were never explored in mainstream media. Much space was devoted to "Operation Horseshoe", a Serbian plan to cleanse Kosovo of Albanians, revealed as plot by the Bulgarian-German secret services, and the Racak lie, like the famous photo of alleged concentration camps with the barbed wire around the camera, not around people. Are media people *gullible, used, or "patriotic"*?
- There still seem to be only a few people who are aware of Serbia's basic goal throughout the whole decade: not to be governed by the people who killed them during the Second World War, in Croatia, BiH and Kosovo. Three times they were delivered to them by the West; but unknown, due to the powerful effect of the DMA factor.
- There was always a language switch for the Milosevic party.
- For Kosovo there is now much news reporting that makes this distinction, relating it to democracy and human rights which is one discourse for deeper, positive peace. But during the war the focus was on "winning = ceasefire/capitulation = peace".
- The Serbs used the term "terrorists" for KLA and the term "state terrorists" for NATO/USA, the world used "terrorist" for the Serbs. Could be used for both to refer to attacks on civilians by surprise.

TRANSCEND, for instance, can report demands for peace proposals, but after the war started (and failed), not before. In short: a dismal record.

But, given the location of almost all media deep inside a nation-state, at the national or local levels, reflecting the reflections on what happens within that horizon and in a region of allies, media perspectives become narrow. We would expect servility – or investigation! – on this side of the horizon; massive selection, distortion, suppression and dehumanization beyond, for the other side. Typically the focus will be on how "our side" reacts, not on "their side". And even less on all sides in an interlocking, *global*, human reality. In short: anything but peace journalism.

Let us take another example: Western reporting on anything with Arab/Muslim/Islam in it (I know too little about the reverse side of the issue). Like the Serbian example one would expect deep culture all over, with enmities from the eleventh century (the Schism in the Orthodox case, the Crusades in the Muslim case) to play a major, but largely subconscious, role. Being key issues in Western history we would expect DMA syndrome activation: us or them, they are evil, war/violence in the air. "Judeo" is hyphenated with "Christian" to the exclusion of the third Abrahamic track, Islam. "Jihad" is always misunderstood. Complex feelings of guilt, self-righteousness through atonement relative to Israel are invoked. More significant is the total lack of understanding of what the Christian world looks like from that Other side, exposed to Christianity by the Crusades, as party to the 1258 massacre of Baghdad, as colonialism from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century to the US/UK in Iraq today.

But there is also the Other's Other: Muslim expansion into Spain and into India and beyond - not to be forgotten. A little history is indispensable, and goes a long way in reporting.

*What are the ethical implications of these two styles of journalism?* Let us start by clarifying what kind of ethics we are talking about: the ethics of consequence rather than intent, and the ethics of action rather than conviction. The concern is with what the media in fact do, and the impact on people, both empirically accessible. What media report and what people do are related to the Other, and hypotheses may be tested empirically.

The consequences are enormous and easily seen. If "their" action is seen not only as violent, but as motivated by nothing but evil character, with no rational goals, only doing evil and expanding their evil empire, there can be only two reactions:

1. *For the victims on our side:* immediate and justified revenge, by producing victims on their side!
2. *For third parties of all kinds:* incapacitate the evil-doers, if possible bring them to justice!

On the other hand, if "their" action is seen as motivated by goals that have at least some subjective justification, by structural exigencies and cultural myths, and if their goals are at least partly legitimate while at the same time peaceful ways of solving the conflict without given short thrift to legitimate goals, then there can only be one reaction:

1. *For the victims on both sides:* stop the violence immediately!
2. *For third parties of all kinds:* work for peace by peaceful means! - and then critical media follow-up of that work!

The way the media present conflict and violence will be a major factor in determining the reaction: war, or peace. One assumption is readiness to identify the legitimate goals of the Other. Most parties are carriers of mixed bags of goals, so the task is to provide an umbrella for all legitimate goals. *Sufficient prominence of such possible outcomes in the media is a basic necessary, if not sufficient, condition.*

In other words, the media carry a heavy responsibility. They prepare, consciously or unconsciously, the premises for a dramatic choice. The key word is "legitimate". There is no assumption that there are not also conflicts in the world, such as between slave-owners and slaves, colonial countries and colonies, where the DMA model may be adequate. In that case, however, there is also the possibility of nonviolent resistance against evil as opposed to conventional violence. But the media are by and large not cognizant of this option - as seen in the reporting on the struggle in the DDR - so crucial in putting an end to the Cold War - summer and fall 1989, particularly the heroic struggles in Leipzig associated with such words as "Montagsdemonstrationen" and "Nikolaikirche". Of course the demonstrations were reported. But, whereas military action is reported not as random action at the spur of the moment the deeper strategy behind nonviolent action is not seen for lack of knowledge, in spite of the many references to Mahatma Gandhi and to Martin Luther King Jr. Better do some reading on nonviolence!

Let us now confront what has been said with two terms of good standing in the ethics of journalism: *objectivity* and *balance*. The words are honor words like the proverbial motherhood. There will certainly be no effort to argue against them, only to understand them.

*Objectivity* refers to the factual basis of reporting; in favor of truth, against untruth. Facts should not be selected, distorted and/or repressed. The sum of these three untruths is also known as propaganda. *Who did What To/For/Against Whom* is as good a formula for good reporting as any, complete with subject, predicate, object and compliment, SPOC.

Obviously, however, a bomb explosion can be reported even when only the identities of the victims and not the perpetrators is known. This also goes for, say, the Iran-Contra scandal: not to report because the identity of those behind it is unknown is to put a premium on skillfully performed covert action.

At this point it should be noted that the sentence "'A' presented a peace plan for the Middle East" has the same form as the sentence "'B' fired a gun in the mosque/discotheque". Both refer to factual events. There are well known procedures for verifying or falsifying the facts. Media people are, of course, right in saying that not all facts can be reported, and not everything reported can pass the remaining filters.

However, in terms of how consequential these facts are all peace proposals - whether originating higher up or lower down - merit some attention. All bombs, whether ordered by people higher up or lower down at the spur of the moment, not necessarily as parts of some grand strategy, also merit some attention. To select the latter at the expense of the former obviously runs against norms of objectivity. Selectivity against peace smells badly.

*Balance* is more problematic. It is easy to show balance when the goals of the parties, to kill as many as possible, are illegitimate. It is also easy to show balance when both are legitimate as in a conventional war over a contested territory with good arguments on both sides. But how do you achieve balance about a war between the occupiers and occupied, as in the Middle East? The situation is structurally imbalanced, and that imbalance should be reflected in reporting that indicates roads to freedom. But not by condoning the killing, unless one subscribes to the idea that the goal justifies the means, or at least explains the violence.

One possible formula for balance runs about as follows.

1. Balance in a conflict means to give attention to all goals of all parties. Without a relatively complete map of the conflict formation, how would it ever be possible to give a balanced presentation of what happens? The tendency to focus on the parties in violent combat is understandable, but a focus on the *conflict arena* instead of the whole conflict formation privileges the parties clever enough to remain unnoticed. And focusing on the goals the parties themselves want to emphasize, in other words their *conflict discourses* (in plural, one side talks about the "struggle against terrorism", the other about the "struggle for independence"), may be equally misleading, leaving out all the other texts. Audiatur et altera pars.
2. Balance means to give attention to people as well as to elites. In a globalizing world we should learn to be as attentive to suffering on the other side of the horizon as in our camp - and in fact there is much balance in the media except when "their" suffering is caused by "us": "worth the price".
3. Balance means to give attention to all phases of a conflict, before, during, after violence. A focus only on the second, from outbreak of violence till ceasefire, is unbalanced. Include what can be done before, and what must be done after!

In short, "balance" as a norm, a signal activates I, III and IV in the Table above, just as "objectivity" refers to II. We could then talk about "balance" at a still higher level, between these four. Objectivity alone, without balance is not helpful; the same holds for balance without objectivity.

In conclusion, how is peace journalism done in practice?

To start with a small point, often forgotten because it is so obvious: *how about reporting peace?* How about once a month or so simply report something that works, not in the sense that there are no conflicts but in the sense that they are resolved peacefully, together with some views about why? As opposed to a simple, usually imposed, cease-fire?

Second, keeping in mind objectivity and balance, the reporter or/and the editor will have to do some self-reflection. What do we want: to stimulate more violence, or more peace? The media have the power to do both, and in the name of objectivity and balance probably have to do both (but more peace, please).

Third, as to the peace end of that spectrum: the table and the ten points give sufficient leads, not to be confused with being a propagandist for peace, a peace activist or anything like that. The criteria of objectivity, such as critical text analysis, are at least as valid for peace as for war journalism. Anyone who thinks they make a contribution to peace will have to be prepared for searching and deep questioning, and have no more right to be offended than a state or foreign minister, unless the journalist is obviously incompetent.

Fourth, balanced empathy with the parties does not imply balanced sympathy. He who tramples on others' basic needs, on their life and their livelihood, their freedom and identity must be understood, but the sympathy is reserved for the victims.

I doubt very much that this type of objective/balanced journalism will sell badly in the market. On the contrary, it can be argued that this is simply good journalism, *tout court*. It can also be argued that good journalism will attract many and good readers, for instance many more women - even if some over-macho men are lost.

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