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## PEACE JOURNALISM – A PRESSING NEED IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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**Abstract:** The changing and increasingly volatile nature of conflict from inter to intra-state has resulted in the requirement of all key players to intensify their roles and confirm their commitment towards peace building. A study of reporting of conflicts has shown that a majority of media content fall in what can be categorised as war journalism, which feeds into the frenzy of the time instead of reporting in a responsible way. It is argued that current journalism or mainstream news values are conflict oriented.

Journalism being the fourth pillar of the society has a larger role to play in peace building and its contribution in shaping the opinions of the people cannot be ignored. If media play a negative role in terms of increasing the tensions between and among the sides of the conflict, they can also play a positive role by promoting peace. Peace Journalism that has emerged as a recent discipline believes in this premise. However, as with any new discipline, peace journalism has to undergo extreme scrutiny and critique before it is accepted and established as a serious field of study. This paper is an attempt to do so.

The paper will talk about the emergence of peace journalism as a separate discipline. It will critically evaluate the requirements for such a discipline outside of the conventional journalism and the differences between good journalism and peace journalism. It will also attempt to document some important peace journalism experiments conducted worldwide so that the impact of Peace Journalism can be assessed.

**Keywords:** Media, Journalism, Peace Journalism, Conflict

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**Introduction:** ‘Peace Journalism’, a term coined in the 1970s by Johan Galtung, is increasingly being used to describe what *ought to be* done by journalists rather than what is currently being done. As with any such term, there are various definitions that encompass the whole nature and proposed structure of what Peace Journalism (PJ) means and should encompass. This paper will analyse the concept of Peace Journalism and trace its history, study its contemporary relevance and analyse its critiques and limitations.

**Methodology:** Advancements in Information Technology have created a revolution in the area of social science research. Enormous amounts of data have been gathered that is now easily available for secondary research. This has created a requirement to utilize the existing data for research so that the information gathered and compiled is not emaciated. So, there is a greater need to conduct secondary data analysis to properly utilize, analyse and organize the existing literary resources.

At a time where the large amounts of data being collected, compiled, and archived by researchers all over the world are now more easily accessible, the time has definitely come for secondary data analysis as a viable method (Johnston, 2014). The current paper has adopted secondary data analysis as the main method for research. The researches, debates, discussions and reports on the subject have been thoroughly analyzed, verified and scrutinized to reach the final conclusion.

**Peace Journalism – a brief history:** Two of the major proponents of Peace Journalism, Lynch and McGoldrick define Peace Journalism as: “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” (Lynch, 2005)

Irvan sees it as “a normative rather than descriptive theory in that it brings obligations to journalists about what to do, how to do and why to do” (Irvan, 2006)

The Centre for Global Peace Journalism (Youngblood, 2016) defines PJ as “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, 2016)

Shinar (2007) defines PJ as “a normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict, that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals, and audiences towards war and peace.” (Shinar, 2007)

Johan Galtung began by segregating what he called ‘War journalism’ from ‘Peace journalism’, the former, according to him being what is practiced and the latter what ought to be practiced. The idea is well explained by the ‘Rashomon effect’, named after the famous film *Rashomon* (1950) by Akira Kurosawa which deals with the nature of truth. Using this idea to understand PJ, we see that there can be different versions of the truth, all depending upon the perceptions of the people reporting it.

The following table shows how the two concepts of War Journalism and Peace Journalism are segregated and how they present the same stories differently.

Peace/Conflict Journalism	War/Violence Journalism
<p><b>1. Peace/Conflict-Oriented</b>                      explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues general "winwin" orientation                      open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture                      making conflicts transparent                      giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding                      see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity                      humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons                      proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs                      focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</p>	<p><b>1. War/Violence-Oriented</b>                      focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war general zero-sum orientation                      closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone                      making wars opaque/secret                      "us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, for "us"                      see "them" as the problem, focus on who prevails in war                      dehumanization of "them"; more so the worse the weapon                      reactive: waiting for violence before reporting                      focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</p>
<p><b>2. Truth-Oriented</b>                      expose untruths on all sides                      uncover all cover-ups</p>	<p><b>2. Propaganda-Oriented</b>                      expose "their" untruths                      help "our" cover-ups/lies</p>
<p><b>3. People-Oriented</b>                      focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children, giving voice to the voiceless                      give name to all evil-doers                      focus on people peace-makers</p>	<p><b>3. Elite-Oriented</b>                      focus on "our" suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece                      give name of their evil-doer                      focus on elite peace-makers</p>
<p><b>4. Solution-Oriented</b>                      Peace = non-violence + creativity                      highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war                      focus on structure, culture the peaceful society                      aftermath: resolution, re- construction, reconciliation</p>	<p><b>4. Victory-Oriented</b>                      peace = victory + cease-fire                      conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand                      focus on treaty, institution the controlled society                      leaving for another war, return if the old flares up</p>

**Fig.1:** Table from: Galtung, J. (2006). Peace journalism as an ethical challenge. Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition, 1(2), 1-5.

Fig. 1 gives a comprehensive analysis of the differences between War Journalism and Peace Journalism. The focus of Peace Journalism is to avoid a zero-sum scenario while focusing on the causes and prevention of conflict. A more proactive and inventive approach could be a gateway to the kind of solution-oriented journalism that PJ envisages.

Galtung recognises the importance and naturalization that has taken place in the media whereby the rationale for continuing war journalism is the excuse

that it is simply the continuation of things done thus far.

Galtung (2006) also recognises that “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.” (Galtung, 2006). Thus the

change from WJ to PJ engenders a structural change in the existing media systems.

**Contemporary Relevance:** Many events have necessitated the birth of a separate field of Peace Journalism. The field of journalism has been guided by codes of ethics since its inception. Journalists are required to follow these ethics. However, during conflicts, reporting acquires a dangerous dimension due to the fact that the situation being volatile can easily be fuelled by simply the use of a term that may be culturally or otherwise insensitive given the context in which the journalist is reporting. It is here that one of the basic premises of PJ comes into play, which is that reporting needs to be more than a mere statement of facts. It needs to analyse the causes of the conflict as also the invisible effects of violence. (See Fig.1). What, according to Galtung, journalists also need to focus on is the aspect of 'prevention', i.e. be proactive and work towards preventive journalism before any violence occurs (Fig. 1).

According to Kirsten Sparre (2000), war reporting was initially quite simple. With the change in the nature of warfare to intra-state conflicts, "the expectations of journalists are far less clear cut". (Sparre, 2000) (p. 252). Sparre also says that:

International journalists have found themselves to be key players in the public communication processes about this modern variation on the theme of war even if the exact dynamics of the process are currently very poorly understood. For many international journalists covering the intense violence in places like Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo has led to personal soul searching and questioning of the appropriate roles of journalists in such conflicts- particularly as it has become clear how much the protagonists have used local media to build and sustain the very same conflicts. (P. 252)

Sparre further adds that even though journalists may try hard to observe neutrality during reporting, they inadvertently become part of the management of the conflict due to the fact that the public forum they occupy is crucial to helping people to understand the causes of the conflict and potential for its resolution. The insistence by journalists on objectivity and their argument that their role is limited to only the 'reporting of facts' is negated by the fact that historically it has been recognised that journalists can play a role in conflict prevention and resolution (Sparre, 2000). Also, 'facts', as the Rashomon effect explicitly describes, are also subject to perception. Therefore, to say that journalism is removed from the context in which it operates would be a fallacy. The alternative would be, and is, that a revised set of codes and ethics be introduced to regulate the reporting ethics so as to channelize it towards peace-oriented reporting. Again, Peace Journalism recognises that journalism has been functioning under a code of ethic through-

out history and it does not seek to negate that. In fact, what it does do is that it derives from, and enhances the existing norms and builds on them to fit the dynamic nature of conflicts in the contemporary scenario.

Keeping in view the effect of media in informing the socio-political consciousness of peoples, it is imperative that the essence of what PJ implies needs to be understood in order to create a safer space in society. In a society where media is used as a propaganda tool, Peace Journalism is trying to carve a niche which is *relatively* independent (PJ does not assume complete objectivity) of influences and the state or war machinery that feeds into the military-industrial complex. Examples of such propaganda are glaring and much more widespread than before, where media, often heavily influenced by the state and corporate narrative, frame facts and news to shape entire public opinion towards a particular idea. One such example is the fear psychosis that was built up by the media in the buildup to the occupation of Iraq by the US. The US media repeatedly echoed the state narrative and built up a fear that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The counter-narrative found very little space in public discourse and was choked 'in the interest of the nation'. Thus media has been sucked into ultranationalist discourses where they are forced to choose sides and their 'loyalties' are tested.

Peace journalists are not just required to be aware of the conflict they are reporting, but also to be acutely aware of the *consequences* of their reporting. Mary Anderson applied the concept of 'Do No Harm' to delivering humanitarian aid and argued that sometimes, even though the intentions may be good, but aid agencies end up creating or fuelling more conflict than was originally prevalent. War journalists do exactly that! Thus the requirement for the field of Peace Journalism. (Anderson, 1999)

What PJ requires is for war reporting to work according to the principles of PJ in order to work towards peaceful and solution-oriented journalism

While there is still a long way to go, there are indications that journalists recognise that they have a bigger role to play in reporting and managing conflicts than mere regurgitation of 'facts'.

"The radio station Voice of America has introduced a conflict resolution component to their coverage of conflicts in Africa and on the Balkans, and elsewhere journalists have set up radio stations in Kosovo, Rwanda, Liberia, Burundi and the Central African Republic to counter hate speech and prevent further violence". (Sparre, 2000)(p-258)

**Critique:** The introduction of Peace Journalism as a form of journalism has generated multiple debates regarding its merits and demerits. While its advocates promote it as one of the best and comprehensive ac-

counts of conflict situations, its opponents have argued that this form of journalism has nothing good, or different, to offer.

David Loyn (a BBC correspondent) argues that “the reporters’ sole purpose is to be witnesses to the truth and such commitment can only be kept by adhering to objectivity, which is the only sacred goal we have. Such an admirable goal is feasible if and when reporters preserve their position as observers not players”. (Loyn, 2007). Another argument is that ‘Reporting and peacemaking are two different roles; reporters who give undue prominence to passing peace plans, or search for peacemakers, distort their craft and do not serve their audience.’

**Conclusion:** Press is considered the fourth estate of society – the first three being the judiciary, legislature and executive. The role of media could not be limited only to the reporting of the events and issues related to other three estates. The presence of journalists influences the events they cover. Journalists being aware of the two parties of the conflict always try to

detach themselves from either party by presenting the facts. However, the choice of the sources, the angles captured and the opinions gathered by the journalists makes them a partner in the arising situation. As in his paper on *In the defence of Peace Journalism: A rejoinder*, Samuel reported,

The affair of Iraq’s missing weapons of mass destruction raised searching questions in newsrooms on both sides of the Atlantic as it should have. Research findings showing that most of the British television audience believe it is the Palestinian who are occupying the territory, not Israelis, would set alarm bells ringing. (Peleg, 2007)

So, the media has an important role to play under conflict situations and Peace Journalism aims at a more balanced and more comprehensive account of conflict. This objective makes this approach more reasonable under this context. This approach of journalism has the potential of diminishing the wrong stereotypes created by media. It can enhance its role as the fourth pillar of democracy.

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