

28 War and peace journalism

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“Covering a war means going to places torn by chaos, destruction and death, and trying to bear witness. It means trying to find the truth in a sandstorm of propaganda when armies, tribes or terrorists clash... Our mission is to report these horrors of war with accuracy and without prejudice.”

Marie Colvin, veteran war correspondent
killed covering the Syrian protests

The last few decades have witnessed an “explosion” of conflicts across the world (Bercovitch & DeRouen 2004:147), with hundreds of cases of militarised violence in places as diverse as Angola, Myanmar, Sudan, Iraq, Russia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Bosnia, and India. The latest in this series, the Arab Spring protests that swept across North Africa and the Middle East, has recorded an exceptionally heavy death toll in Libya and Syria, and is still continuing at the time of writing. Such events invariably attract much media attention. Regional, national and international news organisations invest significant resources to their coverage of the violence, and by and large the army of war correspondents that march to conflict zones attempt to report on what they witness as objectively as possible, in the best traditions of their profession.

But the journalism that emerge out of war zones is hardly objective (Carruthers 2000, Tumber & Palmer 2004). To record the truth, to track it down amidst the claims and counterclaims of places “torn by chaos, destruction and death” and report it “with accuracy and without prejudice” (Colvin 2012) is not an easy task. Issues such as patriotism, national interest, censorship and propaganda severely undermine a war correspondent’s effort to remain detached and provide the even-handed

reporting prescribed by the conventions of journalism. Often the desire to stay neutral and objective can skew news by reproducing views of the dominant parties in the conflict and passing those on as ‘balanced’¹ (Pedelty 1995). The result mostly is a narrative that is state-led, as much partial as partisan, which has the potential to exacerbate the conflict by projecting the ‘other’ as the ‘evildoer’ perpetrating violence on ‘innocent us’ (Wolfsfeld 2004).

There is a growing acceptance, hence, that conventional war reporting, with its stress on patriotic objectivity, needs a rethink, and that a more creative and conflict-sensitive approach is needed. This chapter focuses on the constraints that conflict zones place on war correspondents. The first section provides a historical context to war journalism, tracing its origin to the Crimean War. The significance of such reportage in the contemporary media landscape is then discussed, paying particular attention to the potential influences the media have on its audiences. It is argued that the conventional approach, often coloured by ethnocentric values and clouded by the fog of war, are counterproductive when reporting conflicts. Peace journalism, originally put forward by Johan Galtung and developed further by Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), is offered as an alternative. Though critiqued for being founded on ‘naive realism’ (Hanitzsch 2004), and fraught with operational difficulties, it is suggested that peace journalism can support a richer and more complete understanding of conflict situations by presenting overlooked, non-elite discourses, bringing to light untruths on all sides, and focussing on people caught in the conflict rather than the policymakers.

Going to the ‘hostilities’

The emergence of war correspondence as a specialist profession can be traced to the 1853–56 Crimean War, when major European powers fought over a declining Ottoman Empire. Among those who assembled in that theatre of activity by the Black Sea to witness the British-French efforts against Russia were two Irishmen: William Howard Russell of *The Times* from London, “the miserable parent² of a luckless tribe”ⁱⁱⁱ as he was to describe himself later (McLaughlin 2002:6), and Edwin Lawrence Godkin of the *London Daily News*, who had been per-

sueded “to go to Turkey for the hostilities” (Knightley 1989:7).

In their individualistic ways, both produced remarkable journalism. Russell, riding up and down behind the action and interviewing every soldier he could stop, concentrated on an overview of how a battle was won or lost. This is his description of a French attack:

At five minutes before twelve o’ clock the French, like a swarm of bees, issued forth from their trenches close to the doomed Malakoff, scrambled up its faces and were through the embrasures in the twinkling of an eye. They crossed the seven metres of ground which separated them from the enemy in a few bounds, and in a minute or two after the head of their column issued from the ditch, the Tri-colour was floating over Korniloff Bastion. (Knightley 1989: 10)

Godkin, on the other hand, focussed on the ‘micro’ picture, the human element. Here he reports from the same battlefield, as a French soldier — “beardless, slender, hardly able to trot under his musket, fitter to be by his mother’s side than amidst the horrors of a heady fight” — is stopped by a general from panicked flight:

The general rushed towards him, tore one of his cotton epaulettes off his shoulder and shouted in his ear, “Comment? Vous n’etes pas Francais, donc!” The reproach stung the poor boy to the quick: all his fiery, chivalrous French blood rose up to him to repel it; his face flushed up, and constantly repeating, “Je ne suis pas Francais,” he ran back, mounted the top parapet, whirled his musket about his head in a fury of excitement, and at last fell into the ditch, riddled with balls. (Knightley 1989: 10)

Despite the differences in approach, these accounts have a commonality. Both can be interpreted as partisan. Russell makes it clear which side he is on through his description of the effortless way the Russians were defeated. In the latter writing, the journalist’s sympathy for the ‘boy soldier’ is evident, and in the way he chronicles his death, Godkin’s own anti-war stance — his “hatred for war” (Knightley 1989:10) — comes through. Both stories also display a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Elliot 1986). In Russell’s piece this is overt in the way he defines the Russians as the “enemy”. In Godkin’s this is rather covert, and is mainly a product of his point of view — his positioning with the French, the British ally — and his choices of focus and language, and is an example of the ‘we-ness’ influencing journal-

istic output from “the primary stage of selection, encoding and transmission” (Sonwalkar 2005:267).

Since the days of Russell and Godkin, war reporting has received significant scholarly attention. The sizeable body of literature on overt and covert conflicts that has arisen out of this sustained interest clearly acknowledges the partisanship that plagues most war reporting (Jamieson & Waldman 2003, Tumber & Palmer 2004). Carruthers (2000:17) summarises this most efficiently when she writes war coverage is not a reflection of the world as it is, “as the journalists are wont to claim”, but “a map of the broad preoccupations, interests and values of their particular society (or at least of its dominant groups)”.

Simply put, in war situations journalists need to negotiate a plethora of hurdles – patriotism, national interest, anger, censorship and propaganda, among others – that actively “conspire to prevent objective, factual even-handed reporting” (Maslog, Lee & Kim 2006:22). In war correspondent Kate Adie’s words, “The principles of reporting are put to a severe test when your nation goes to war ... the very nature of war confuses the role of the journalist, that objective, independent, detached person of theory and media study courses” (cited in Allan & Zelizer 2004:3). Kalb (1994:3), speaking in the US context, put it more brazenly: “When America goes to war, so too does the press, wrapped in the flag no less proudly than the troops themselves.” News, in other words, is fundamentally ethnocentric and this ethnocentrism becomes especially blatant in times of crisis. Wolfsfeld (2004) writes:

“[T]he news media are easily mobilized for the vilification of the enemy. News stories provide graphic descriptions of the other side’s brutality and our people’s sufferings ... Claims about our own acts of aggression and the other’s suffering are either ignored, underplayed, or discounted. We are always the victims, they are always the aggressors.” (Wolfsfeld 2004:23)

And therein lies the challenge for journalism. While newsroom conventions call for reporting wars in an objective fashion to achieve a fair representation of the facts as they were, the reportage of such situations can hardly be objective or fair. Journalists are part of a citizenry, members of a nation. As such, they operate from a political and cultural base that defines

their beliefs, attitudes, values and prejudices (Bar-Tal & Tiechman 2005, Schudson 1996). This, in turn, influences the way they report a conflict. Given the public are primarily reliant on the media for news from conflict zones, the version of events presented to them – what is reported, as also how it is reported – is incredibly important in shaping their perceptions about the violence.

Why war coverage matters

The idea that ‘the masses’ would decide political action by expressing their opinion (Lippmann 1922), and the media provides a ‘public sphere’ – an arena where the public can exchange thoughts and opinions, engage in debates to battle political power, and thus help constitute civil societies – for such an expression is well established (Habermas 1989; see also Allan 2010 for a discussion). The media’s ability to influence its audiences has been widely debated. While most theorists have now moved away from ‘direct media effect’ stance (the belief that media content, by itself, can modify the behavior of the public), there is a consensus that the media do influence its audiences. This influence is indirect; exposure to news will, over time, have a cumulative effect on the audience perception of the world (Gerbner & Gross 1976, Weimann 2000). The effects are gradual and long-term, but significant; and they are on the attitudes of the viewer rather than on their behaviour. Thus, while the media content might not lead to direct behavioral changes, heavy exposure could cultivate attitudes more consistent with what is presented in the news.

Douglas Kellner (1995) places this in the context of what he calls the ‘media culture’. The media are an integral part of modern existence, the driving force behind a culture. Kellner (1995:1) holds the media “produces the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, sharing political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities”. He sees news messages as providing an “environment” in which people construct their view of the world. Media messages are not consumed in isolation, or in originality, but are interpreted by the receiver on the basis of own values, commitments, sense of belonging, etc. And as such, scholars have argued (Bar-Tal 1998, Bar-Tal & Tiechman

2005), audience immersion in this environment could result in an internalisation of the ‘reality’ – the version of events – presented over and over.

In such a scenario, the effect of war news on audiences is believed to be extremely significant – even more so, as we live in an era of “mediatized conflicts”, an era wherein governments seek to “control the media in order to win the ‘battle for hearts and minds’” (Cottle, 2006:74). This ‘propaganda war’, though it attracts less attention than the overt violence, is arguably a more crucial part of any conflict. It is a contest for winning public opinion for the cause of war and is common to all conflicts (Tumber 2004). The military and governments deploy “a combination of mechanisms ... to manage the flow of information in times of war” (Cottle 2006:74-75). This includes what can be termed as ‘hard’ censorship such as prohibition of journalists from war fronts (as it happened in World War I, when journalists were accommodated in castles, as ‘chateaux warriors’, and thus kept away from the Western front; and more recently in the 1999 India-Pakistan Kargil war, when reporters were contained to base camps) and the requirement all stories be approved by military ‘minders’ before being ‘filed’ (as it happened in the 1991 Gulf War); and ‘soft’ censorship, wherein the media are fed government-issue information at regulated press briefings, and absorbed as ‘embeds’ into fighting forces.

Such ‘media management’, as mentioned before, is the state’s attempt to legitimise its claims, demonise the enemy, marginalise counterviews, and generally create a public mood that supports war. In this, states are mostly successful, particularly in the case of ‘external’ wars (as opposed to internal strife). An impressive number of scholars point to this in their writings on the 1991 Gulf War (among others, MacArthur 1993, Philo & MacLaughlin 1995). McNair’s study of the British television coverage of Soviet news in the 1980s, which showed how the USSR was portrayed as “a threat, or an enemy” (McNair 1988, p47) is another instance when media reports were consistent with the government line. There is literature on this elsewhere as well: Northern Ireland (Miller 1994), Kosovo (Hammond & Herman 2000), the Israeli-Palestine conflict (Bar-Tal 1998; Wolfsfeld 2001), Falklands War (Morrison & Tumber 1988), the India-Pakistan Kargil (Thussu 2002) and Kashmir (Hickman & Barlett 2007) conflicts, and the post-September 11 wars on ‘ter-

ror' (Allan & Zelizer 2004, Stromback 2005, Spencer 2005).

The influence of such coverage on the conflict itself cannot be underestimated. The way the public perceives the situation – not only whether 'we' are in the right, but also about the cost of the conflict, its consequences, and outlook of a win – can potentially influence how a conflict is pursued, whether it is exacerbated or not. As Wolfsfeld (2004:11-12) argues, one crucial way the news media could significantly impact a conflict depends on how it defines the existing political atmosphere, and the conduct of the antagonists involved in the violence. Is the situation conducive for peace, or to embark on a peace process? Or should the violence continue till the enemy is vanquished? Does the overall level of violence appear to be rising or declining? Is the 'other side' keeping its side of the agreements? Are 'we' in the right? Is the 'enemy' vile, perpetrator of evil? Answers to such questions help determine whether the public supports the policymakers in the way they pursue the conflict.

Journalists, hence, shoulder a great responsibility in times of war. But, as more than one scholarly inquiry has evidenced, the conventional approach to war reporting has been largely counterproductive, fostering conditions conducive to the continuance of the conflict, rather than its cessation. As Wolfsfeld puts it, "All other things being equal, the news media generally play a negative role in attempts to bring peace" (Wolfsfeld 2004:220). If that is so, are there other ways that can be explored to report war?

An alternate model

Peace journalism has emerged as an attractive alternative to the conventional approach to reporting war, sparking some productive – at times bitter – debates, not just in the academia, but among journalists as well. In recent years, a small but growing number of scholars and journalism practitioners around the world have argued a case for it – among them, Blaise (2004), Hackett (2006), Keeble, Tulloch & Zollman (2010), Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), Ross & Tehranian (2009), and Shinar (2007).

Traceable to the peace research of Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung in the 1970s, peace journalism is offered as an antidote to the ailments of conventional conflict coverage. Hanitzsch (2004: 484) sees it as a "special mode of socially responsible jour-

nalism”, a “programme or frame of journalistic news coverage which contributes to the process of making and keeping peace”. For Dov Shinar, it is “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 2007:2). In sum, peace journalism gives a voice to the voiceless, focusses on the invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to social structures), aims to expose untruths on all sides, and attempts to arrive at a solution to the conflict (Keeble et al 2010: 2). Galtung explains it further:

“Peace Journalism stands for truth as opposed to propaganda and lies, ‘truthful journalism’ being, as mentioned, one aspect in peace journalism. It is not ‘investigative journalism’ in the sense of only uncovering lies on ‘our’ side. The truth aspect in peace journalism holds for all sides, just like exploration of the conflict formation and giving voice (glasnost) to all.” (Galtung 2002:5)

The peace journalist, Galtung continues, tries to depolarise the conflict by showing the black and white of all sides, and to de-escalate by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence. He likens conventional war journalism to sports journalism and peace journalism to health journalism. Sports journalism, Galtung argues, is a zero-sum game. Winning is everything. In health journalism, however, the plight of the patient would be described – but so too would be the possible causes. Further, the factors that contributed to the diseases, the possible remedies, and preventive measures would be presented.

Galtung sees war coverage as falling into two categories – ‘war journalism’ and ‘peace journalism’. This is based on four broad practice and linguistic orientations (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005). War journalism would focus on the conflict (visible effects of the conflict is reported), be propaganda-orientated (expose ‘their’ untruths, conceal ‘ours’), present elite voices, and portray victory over the enemy as the end goal. Peace journalism, for its part, would be peace-orientated (explore conflict formation, aim to prevent conflict), be truth-orientated (expose untruths on all sides), people-orientated (focus on suffering all over, focus on peacemakers as people), and solution-orientated (highlight peace initiatives,

present solutions rather than ways to victory).

Apart from the content of reportage, Galtung's classification considers an assessment of the language used. Words that demonise, victimise or are emotive, accordingly, are against the grain of peace journalism. Galtung's other prescriptions for covering conflicts include "taking a preventive advocacy stance" by writing editorials and columns "urging reconciliation and focussing on common ground rather than on vengeance, retaliation, and differences, and emphasizing the invisible effects of violence" (Maslog, Lee & Kim 2006: 23).

Building on Galtung's work, and drawing on conflict analysis and transformation literature, former journalists Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick present peace journalism as a broader, fairer, and more accurate way of covering conflicts. Their view "is premised on the importance of journalists understanding conflict and violence, because what they report will contribute to the momentum towards war or peace" (Maslog et al 2006:26). Peace journalism, in Lynch & McGoldrick's (2005:5) words, occurs "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". They see it as a set of tools, "both conceptual and practical intended to equip journalists to offer a better public service" (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005:5). It is remedial, "a deliberate creative strategy to seek out and bring to our attention those portions of 'the facts' routinely under-represented; the significant views and perspectives habitually unheard" (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005:224).

Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) expanded Galtung's classification of war journalism and peace journalism into 17 good practices, which include (a) focussing on presenting solutions (b) reporting on long-term effects (c) orientating the news on people and the grassroots (d) searching for common ground (e) reporting on and naming wrong-doers on all sides (f) disaggregating the 'us' and 'them' into smaller groups, (h) avoiding victimising language such as 'devastated', 'defenceless' and 'pathetic', (i) avoiding imprecise use of emotive words such as 'tragedy', 'massacre' etc (j) avoiding demonising adjectives and labels such as 'brutal', 'barbaric', 'terrorist' and 'fanatic', and (k) avoid making an opinion or claim seen as an established fact.

The literature on peace journalism, as we can see, is mostly

prescriptive – and, compared to the literature on conventional war reportage, very limited. Besides Galtung, McGoldrick & Lynch, other contributors to the peace journalism include Maslog (1990), who offers a manual based on the conflict in Philippines. Another notable scholar of this school is Robert Karl Manoff (1998, 2000), who, based on conflict transformation theory, identifies 12 roles for the media in reporting violence constructively. Quite similar to Lynch & McGoldrick’s version, these are: (1) channelling communication between parties (2) educating (3) building (4) counteracting misperceptions (5) analysing conflict (6) de-objectifying the protagonists for each other (7) identifying the interests underlying the issues (8) providing an emotional outlet (9) encouraging a balance of power (10) framing and defining the conflict (11) face-saving and consensus building and (12) solution building.

In recent years, correspondents such as Martin Bell, Tom Geltjen and Michael Nicholson have spoken out against conventional war reporting, advocating a journalism that fits in well with the notion of peace journalism. Several related coinages have emerged, including ‘justice journalism’ (Messman 2001), ‘engaged journalism’ (Lynch 2003), and ‘human rights journalism’ (Shaw 2012). Bell coined³ the phrase ‘journalism of attachment’ for this brand of reporting, summarising it thus:

“In place of the dispassionate practices of the past I now believe in what I call the journalism of attachment. By this I mean a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; and will not stand neutral between good and evil, right and wrong, victim and oppressor.”

(Bell 1997: 8).

While the idea has been much talked about since, and is considered something new, the practice has been in vogue for years. Reports by war correspondents Martha Gellhorn, John Pilger, and Robert Fiske, for instance, do not stand “neutral between good and evil”. Though passionately argued, Bell’s proposal does not find favour with a large section of journalists, as also scholars. Stephen Jukes, former global head of news at Reuters known for his insistence the agency would use the objective term ‘militants’ and not ‘terrorists’ in the wake of the September 11 attacks, touched on the issue in a personal

interview: “I believe journalists can serve their society best by being objective. You can deliver better journalism by asking questions ... by practising standard journalism properly.” John Pilger is certainly of a different view when he writes how the US media has promoted “the myth of Barack Obama” and allowed his siren calls for change to maintain status quo and muffle the opponents of war. “War journalism,” Pilger summarises, “does what power says it does; peace journalism reports what it does” (Pilger 2010:xi).

Peace journalism: issues

Not surprisingly, given that it advocates what is often perceived as a radical path from the conventional approach, peace journalism has met with much resistance. A major criticism levelled against it is by proponents who feel it undermines the journalistic principle of objectivity. There can be no greater betrayal of journalistic standards if reporters stray from this principle (Weaver 1998), as it is objectivity that gives the practice of journalism its undoubted nobility. This group believes the challenge for journalists remains the same as ever: “to report a conflict as objectively and accurately as possible without undue risk to self and without compromise to professional integrity” (MacLaughlin 2002:207). The media should not in any way try to prevent or influence conflicts, because once journalists do, it is a short step to accepting that any means to achieve that end is justified (Weaver 1998). It then becomes possible to use what is ‘good’ and lies become more important than truth. Journalist David Lyon, a passionate advocate of traditional journalistic values, doesn’t mince words in his criticism of the alternate model:

“Now there is ‘peace journalism’ – the most pernicious of the lot, especially since it is so well funded, academically backed and superficially attractive. I want to appeal for more traditional values such as fairness, objectivity and balance – the only guiding lights of good reporting. News is what’s happening and we should report it with imagination and scepticism (where appropriate). Full stop. We do not need to load any other demands on to it. And we certainly do not need to seek out peacemakers unless they are actually successful.”

(Lyon 2003)

A more foundational critique comes from Hanitzsch (2004), who argues peace journalism epistemologically draws from naïve realism. Accordingly, Galtung's position that media distorts the truths about the conflict – it distorts reality – assumes “the observer and the observed are two distinct categories” and that reality “can be perceived and described ‘as it is’” (Hanitzsch 2004:488). Galtung's suggestion that conventional war reporting represents reality in a distorted way – in the way the dominant groups in the society want it to be represented, that is – “misses the point ... In a world full of contingent descriptions of reality, war correspondents can only provide one version of reality that is just as ‘true’ as numerous other versions” (Hanitzsch 2004:488). Cottle makes the same case when he points out that peace journalists appear to “presume that ‘truths’ and ‘untruths’ are self-evident” (2006: 103).

Implicit in the realist stance of peace journalism scholars is also an assumption of powerful, causal, and linear media effects (Hanitzsch 2004), which has attracted severe criticism. While there exists a robust belief in the power of the media in political, economic and military circles, which today is well catered for by expensive media strategies, the theory of powerful media effects has not gained much empirical evidence (Gauntlett 1998, 2005). More acceptable is the theory of selective media effects, which Brosius (2003, cited in Hanitzsch 2004:489) summarises thus: “Some media have, at certain times and under certain circumstances, an effect on some recipients.” Peace journalism, however, overestimates the power of the media (Hanitzsch 2004), assuming a linear relation between how it presents a conflict (whether it is solution-orientated, for instance) and how the presentation is perceived by the public. This, according to Hanitzsch (2004), is an overestimation of the power of the media, and is based on an out-dated conceptualisation from the early 20th century, which, ignoring the impact of interpersonal communication and social structure, propagate the notion of a singular audience, instead of pluralistic audiences, and assumes the media is the sole influencer of public opinion. Hence, peace journalism can have, at best, limited impact. Moreover, peace journalism overlooks the fact that “journalists and their employers do not orient themselves to an anonymous ‘mass audience,’ but they adjust their ‘responsibilities’ to the interests of their specific audiences. Any disregard

of the audiences' preferences could jeopardize the media organizations economic existence" (Hanitzsch 2004:489).

Though a supporter of the philosophy, Keeble (2010) critiques peace journalism for its dependency on the professional values of journalism. The success of the model depends on the professional responses of the reporter, but journalism is more a political than professional practice. Peace journalism theory, thus, fails to take into account the "critical intellectual tradition which locates professions historically and politically", seeing journalism myopically as an occupational grouping with "a legal monopoly of social and economic opportunities in the marketplace, underwritten by the state" (Keeble 2010:5).

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the challenges that journalists face when reporting conflicts. As we have seen, the conventional approach, which insists that the journalist remain objective and impartial, often falls short of producing responsible journalism: mostly the media produce counterproductive coverage that accentuates the differences between the antagonists, thus contributing to the continuance of the conflict. Peace journalism is suggested as an antidote to this situation. Though not without issues, and critiqued by many traditionalists as discussed in the above section, this model arguably is more conflict-sensitive, with the potential to the present a more nuanced and richer version of war events.

It is also possible to discern some common ground between conventional war reporting and the philosophy of peace journalism. Both approaches, in effect, are advocating quality journalism – ethical, even-handed, responsible reporting. Peace journalism and the subjectivity it brings with it means taking a stand, but that need not involve mixing facts and emotions, or suppressing facts – which forms the foundation for the criticism that it compromises journalistic integrity. Similarly, the epistemological issue with peace journalism is something that is applicable to conventional war reporting as well. Truth and untruths are not self-evident in conflict situations, and the media can present only a distorted form of reality. The question, then, is what form this distortion should take – whether the journalists should make a deliberate choice to contextualise

their reporting, provide voices to all parties involved, and explore possible solutions to the conflict so that it provides the audiences a more holistic picture, or whether they should narrow their focus to the violence at hand, reporting the views of those seen traditionally as newsworthy.

While it would be difficult to argue that the news media is all-powerful and the sole influencer of public opinion, it is safe to say that the media is a significant force in any conflict, shaping its pursuance and conduct. Such 'power' brings with it – or should bring with it⁴ – heightened responsibility. It requires journalists to exercise an even more acute sense of ethics and responsibility in war zones. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, this does not always come to bear; in the fog of war it is exceptionally difficult to apply the traditional principles of reporting. One reason for this could be that the canons of journalism were developed for 'normal' news, hence not suitable for an 'abnormal' situation⁵. The many practical, political, economic and ethnocentric forces bearing down on journalists encourage them to 'play up' war and violence at the cost of peace news. Continuous immersion of audience in such news, of violence perpetrated against 'us' by 'them', will shape their version of reality and societal beliefs, contributing to a frame of mind that encourages the continuance – even exacerbation – of war. Peace journalistic coverage, with its solution-orientation, on the other hand, could promote a different climate, one that is conducive to the cessation of war, to the promotion of peace.

Notes

1. American journalist Hunter S Thompson, noted as much for his radical journalism as for his radical lifestyle, seems to underline this point when he speaks about the built-in blind spots of objective journalism. By attempting to be objective, by paying lip service to the ideology, he argues, journalists are falling back on conscious and unconscious prejudices (cited in Hirst & Patching 2007).
2. Though this gives the impression Russell was the first professional war correspondent, that honour goes possibly to G L Gruneisen of the London Morning Post (Knightley 1989).
3. Galtung, the architect of peace journalism, had used the same phrase to describe his idea. However, for him journalism of attachment meant

being attached to “all actual and possible victims of the conflict” (Hainitzsch 2004, p486).

4. Max Weber places extra emphasis on this, comparing journalistic and scholarly responsibilities: “[I]t is almost never acknowledged that the responsibility of every honourable journalist is, on the average, not a bit lower than that of the scholar, but rather, as the war has shown, higher” (cited in Tumber & Prentoulis 2003, p228). See also Clutterbuck (1981, p160).
5. Howard (2002) made a similar point during a keynote address on the role of media in peace-building, terming conflicts as not routine news but “special” cases, requiring “more than a mechanical response in reporting it” (p2).

Challenging Questions

- What are the major challenges faced by journalists when reporting from war zones?
- A journalist's job is journalism, not peacemaking. Discuss.
- Assess the view that peace journalism draws from naïve realism.

Recommended reading

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