

25th Edition!

the PEACE JOURNALIST

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- Social media fuels conflict in Ethiopia
- Survey: War journalists in Gaza
- Dispatches from the Philippines, South Africa, Pakistan, and elsewhere



Peace Bridge, Derry, Northern Ireland



"The Bridge" in Mitrovica, Kosovo



Bloody Sunday memorial, Derry, Northern Ireland

Making
PeaceVisible 
PEACE & CONFLICT IN THE MEDIA

N. Ireland, Kosovo journalists come together to share notes on

Reporting The Past

Cover

Top-Northern Ireland, Kosovo journalists at the Peace Bridge in Derry. Bottom left-Association of Journalists of Kosovo director Xhejaml Rexha and the journalists visit the vehicle barrier that divides Mitrovica, Kosovo along ethnic lines. Bottom right-Journalists study the plaque commemorating Bloody Sunday in Derry. (Top, bottom right photos by Allan Leonard/Shared Future News).

About

This edition of Peace Journalist magazine is published by Making Peace Visible. The Peace Journalist magazine is dedicated to disseminating news and information for teachers, students, and practitioners of PJ.

Submissions: We are seeking shorter submissions (600 words) detailing peace journalism projects, classes, proposals, etc. We also welcome longer submissions (1200-1500 words) about peace or conflict sensitive journalism projects or programs, as well as academic works from the field.

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What is Peace Journalism?

Peace Journalism is when 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. (Adapted from Lynch/McGoldrick, Peace Journalism). Peace Journalism gives peacemakers a voice while making peace initiatives and non-violent solutions more visible and viable.

A number of valuable peace journalism resources, including curriculum packets, online links, as well as back issues of The Peace Journalist can be found at <https://peacejourncenter.blogspot.com>.

Making Peace Visible

Making Peace Visible (<https://www.makingpeacevisible.org/>) is a bridge-building organization that facilitates powerful conversations globally about how the media covers peace and conflict. MPV's mission is to help expand global coverage of peace and reconciliation efforts in the media, to inspire a wider range of approaches to conflict reporting, and to improve the overall public narrative about peace. Towards that end, MPV produces a podcast, also called Making Peace Visible, a magazine, Nuance, and sponsors educational initiatives.

It's been a delight working on the Northern Ireland-Kosovo 'reporting a troubled past' project (detailed on pages 4-9 of this edition).

It was gratifying to see how the project grew from an idea I had a few years ago into the initiative that recently brought together 20 journalists, half from each region. I was especially moved by the way the journalists came together, both professionally and personally. Project co-director Allan Leonard (Shared Future News, Northern Ireland) even said in his closing remarks in Belfast that the journalists, trainers, and project staff had come together to form a family. This is especially remarkable given the journalists' different religion, backgrounds, and generations.

Contributors

Allan Leonard (pg. 4) Allan Leonard is co-founder and editor of Shared Future News, which reports on peacebuilding in Northern



Ireland. He has served in senior management positions in several charities.

Xhemajl Rexha (pg. 7) Xhemajl Rexha is a freelance journalist with 20 years of TV experience in Kosovo. He is the Chairperson of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo.



Adam Weiss (pg. 10) is a high school social studies teacher in Winchester, MA and volunteers with Making Peace Visible.



Carolyn Arguillas (pg. 12) is the founding director of Mindanews in the Phil-



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ippines, and a 2023 Luxembourg Peace Prize recipient for outstanding peace journalism.



Shahira S. Fahmy (pg. 14) holds a PhD from the University of Missouri, and is a journalism professor at the American University in Cairo. She is an International Communication Association (ICA) Fellow and Fulbright scholar. **Mohamed Salama** holds an MA from The American University in Cairo and is pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Maryland. **Mona Raafat Alsaba** holds an MA from The American University in Cairo and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in journalism at Cairo University in Egypt. She works as a teaching assistant at The American University in Cairo.



Editor's Notebook

Their newly formed connections will be put to use as the journalists produce stories during October in teams of two (one journalist from Kosovo, and one from Northern Ireland). They've selected thoughtful, riveting story topics including refugee songs and their power to integrate or segregate; challenges facing ethnic minorities and women in both Northern Ireland and Kosovo; how food brings people together; missing women; expectations of young generations (especially women) regarding reconciliation; etc. I'm proud of what we accomplished during our trips to Belfast/Derry and Pristina/Mitrovica. I'm looking forward to seeing the stories produced by the teams of journalists.

--Steven Youngblood

several Journal articles and book chapters.



Mohammed Ibrahim (pg. 16) is a multimedia freelance journalist in Kaduna State, Nigeria. In 2016 Mohammed received the Courage in Journalism



Award for his investigative reporting, from the Africa Media Development Foundation.

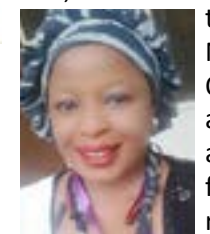
Saddia Mazhar (pg. 22) is an investigative journalist and feature writer in Pakistan, writing for different national and international news organizations. She tweets at @saddiamazhar.



Danmore Chuma (pg. 18) is a radical educator, journalist and researcher in South Africa. He writes on education for liberation, human rights and democracy.



Rosaline Obah (page 24) is a peacebuilding, peace journalism, and community development specialist. She is a trainer of peace journalism, conflict transformation, and Do No Harm.



Temesgen Beyan (pg. 20) is a senior researcher at Research and Documentation Center (RDC), Asmara, Eritrea. He's published

Journalists explore reporting troubled pasts

Project unites journalists from Kosovo, Northern Ireland

Other than being on the front lines during combat, journalists face no tougher challenge than reporting from and about places that are recovering from violent conflict.

With this in mind, a recent project brought together journalists from two regions that have seen their share of violence-- Kosovo and Northern Ireland. The goal of the project was to learn about conflict in both places, to compare challenges in reporting a troubled past, including contested narratives, and to discuss how peace journalism can be useful for reporting about anniversaries, memorialization, marches, sectarian histories, and so on.

As the cornerstone of the project, 10 journalists from

Northern Ireland traveled to Kosovo during the first week of August 2024, and 10 journalists from Kosovo visited Northern Ireland the last week of August.

The project was organized by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, Shared Future News in Northern Ireland, and Steven Youngblood, director of education for Making Peace Visible and founder of the Center for Global Peace Journalism. The project was generously funded by the British Embassy in Kosovo.

In the stories that follow, local project directors Xhejmi Rexha (Kosovo) and Allan Leonard (Northern Ireland) discuss what the journalists did and learned during their visits to each region.--Ed

the ladder of peacebuilding.

I continued by saying that I was curious to see how much has changed, for better or worse, since my last visit.

I described a practical outcome of the 2010 summit — a subsequent study visit to Northern Ireland of Kosovo Police Service officers, who met counterparts from the Police Service of Northern Ireland. This consisted of a 50/50 mix of officers of a Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbian community background. How feasible would such a project be now?

I quickly learned the answer — not much. In November 2022, there were mass resignations of Kosovo Serbs from the Kosovo Police, as part of a wider protest against alleged breaches of EU agreements made between Serbia and Kosovo.

On the second day of our visit, we travelled by bus to Mitrovica. I got more excited as we entered the city, physically divided by a river much like Derry/Londonderry is. “Look!

Restaurant Charlie is still there!” I exclaimed, forgetting that no one else would care. In my multiple previous visits to Mitrovica, many locals and “internationals” (those from foreign agencies and NGOs) would frequent this establishment. (I still say it serves the best macchiatos in the land.)



Mitrovica Bridge, Kosovo

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In Kosovo, reporters reminded of crucial role of civic conversations

On the desk of my hotel room in Pristina was a postcard inscribed, “Dear Allan, Welcome back to Kosovo! As a returning visitor we’re sure you’ll enjoy your time here!” It was signed “AJK Team,” from the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, the lead partner organisation of an exchange of journalists between Kosovo and Northern Ireland. After a long day’s journey, our cohort from Belfast and beyond arrived for our four-day session of a peace journalism project, Reporting on a Troubled Past, facilitated by Professor Steven Youngblood.



Pristina, Kosovo: Newborn

My previous job brought me to Kosovo a few times, first in 2010 as co-secretariat of an international network, the Forum for Cities in Transi-

tion, where I had responsibility for coordinating a global summit in Mitrovica. My most recent visit was 10 years ago, exploring shared learning and practical knowledge exchanges between Kosovo and Northern Ireland.

Addressing the 20 participants of this current project, I explained the premise of the forum’s work, as outlined by its creator, Professor Pádraig O’Malley at the University of Massachusetts Boston — those societies that have or are experiencing deep conflict or divisions are in the best position to assist other societies that have or are experiencing the same. This takes into account that each conflict is unique to its history and circumstances, as well as the fact that each society will be on different rungs of



(Left) Journalists learn about the Adem Jashari family at a museum in Prekaz, Kosovo. (Right) Journalists brainstorm peace journalism story ideas. (Photos by Allan Leonard, Shared Future News)

Kosovo-NI from pg 4

KFOR (the UN peacekeeping force) and Carabinieri cars were parked on the iconic Mitrovica Bridge, which was open to pedestrian traffic on both sides, but one-meter-high concrete barriers on the northern, Kosovar Serbian-populated side prevented vehicular traffic; one could consider this a visible improvement from the previous mounds of dumped earth.

We got to witness “normalisation” in action, as Xhelal Svecla (Kosovo Minister of Internal Affairs and Public Administration) and Elbert Krasniqi (Kosovo Minister of Local Government Administration) made a public walk across to the northern side, to take a refreshment from a café. Such

actions displease the US and EU governments, as being out of accordance with their own normalisation plans vis-à-vis Serbia.

Later, I was asked what I thought about this particular event. Publicity stunt? Electioneering? Impatience with the internationals? My reply was that while I can understand the Kosovo government’s exercise of authority, any constructive way forward requires dialogue and relationship building. Using the example of the peace process in Northern Ireland, I argued that the relentless work of civil society organisations provided the space for politicians to take risks for peacemaking. Politicians want to take their community (of voters) with them, and CSOs can serve as a barometer of where the people are on various issues.

Well, I was told that much of this civil society work in Vol 13, No. 1

northern Mitrovica has been “captured” by Serbian government interests. I wasn’t able to interrogate this, but I do remember how challenging this bi-communal work was, even in the more conducive working environment a decade ago.

From Mitrovica we travelled to the Adem Jashari Memorial Complex, where family members are buried in stylised tombs. My first impression was of Arlington Cemetery, the resting place of those who served their country. In fact, one can argue this is a primary intention, with the memorial serving as part of an ethno-national narrative of a post-war nation- and state-building exercise. Also, the memorial has become part of historical memory and is included in history textbooks with organised school visits. I observed parents directing their children to stand next to the guarding sentinels for photographs.

A museum curator was pleased to provide our group, and others, with a narration of the Adem Jashari story. I observed the younger listeners, teenagers and children, wondering how they’ll deal with narratives that conflict with this state memorialisation programme.

For example, Kushtrim Koliqi at the Barabar Centre explained how their radio programme of interviews with families of missing persons from the Balkan War started well. However, there was outcry with the third episode, which featured a Kosovar Serbian. The programme was pulled off the air.

All this made me appreciate all the more an exhibit that we visited earlier in the week, at the Documentation Center Kosova, Biblioteka “Hivzi Sylejmani.” “Once Upon a Time and Never Again” is a multifaceted display of names,

Continued on next page

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objects, and stories of those who disappeared or were killed during the war. The artefacts and written annotations tell a heartbreaking story.

But its provocation is its inclusivity. The names of all those killed or disappeared are there to be seen and read.

This exhibit was organised by the Humanitarian Law Centre. Intrigued, I reached out to its managing director, Bekim Blakaj. A colleague and I met up with him to learn more about the organisation's work. He described their meticulous documentation of every single killed and disappeared person's case. Blakaj confirmed that their Memory Book project — a publication of the names and biographies of all these people — was based on a Northern Ireland publication of biographies of all those killed during the Troubles, called Lost Lives.

Blakaj generously presented another of their published books, Memorialization: Its Role and Importance in Dealing with the Past. The book examines how important the memorialisation process is and how well (or not) this is being practised in Kosovo. It also includes 12 creatively illustrated cases of sites where serious violations of human rights occurred and how they are marked.

One case, for example, is that of Lluzhan's Bridge, when a NATO plane fired and hit a bus, killing 44 people: 31 Albanian civilians and 13 Serbs, of which 7 were civilians and 6 were members of the Serbian forces. The names of the 31 Albanian victims are written on the memorial plaque, but then there is an ordinal number "32" with three dots and no further names. The book chapter concludes: "All memorial services in honor of the victims should involve all victims, regardless of their gender, race or ethnicity, in order to empower inclusive narratives."

Indeed, for me this is the primary challenge for us participants in this peace journalism project — can we employ principles of responsible journalism so that we can challenge authority and uphold the humanitarian ethos of inclusivity?

--Allan Leonard



(Top, Left)-Journalists visited "Once Upon a Time and Never Again," an exhibit about the 1,133 children killed during the war between Serbia and Kosovo. (Above)-North Mitrovica resident Jelana Rasic explains about the complications of life in a divided city. (Photo left by Allan Leonard)

Expectations were high for our visit to Northern Ireland, after hosting 11 of our colleagues from Belfast and Derry/Londonderry in Kosovo, in early August.

As little kids when peace reached Northern Ireland, our NI guests visit here gave us just a little glimpse of what to see and feel there. As you would have two sides in a conflict, not much was given to us on where everyone stands from the group. I understood that as a sign of a co-existence and backgrounds not being an issue, after almost three decades of the Good Friday Agreement.

I was in for a shock.

Belfast at first sight looks like any other part of the UK, some of which I had visited very often in the last decade. I haven't been to Ireland to say how much it looks like it, in my eyes.

Spending hours in city centre you get the idea of a regular European city, but when you move to west and the walls appear everything changes.

Paintings of Palestinian solidarity adorn the first walls

we see. They are called Peace Walls, and they have messages of Irish nationalism. A concrete big gate stands between these and a new set of walls where Israeli flags are painted and messages of solidarity are addressed towards Tel Aviv.

We are told the gate is closed every night for traffic and pedestrians, and it basically keeps Catholics and Protestants apart from each other. Gates locking came as a shock to all the Kosovo journalists. Our divide point is a bridge in Mitrovica, Kosovo. People can walk freely from the southern Albanian side, to the northern Serbian side, but no car can cross it. NATO troops, mainly Italian Carabinieri stand there 24 hours a day.

We were not aware the divide was that deep it needed

A Kosovan perspective: My visit to Derry and Belfast



(Top)-During a bike tour taken by the program participants, radio journalist Collin O'Carroll discusses Belfast's Peace Walls which separate ethnic/religious regions in the city.

(Bottom)-Palestinian-sympathetic murals are ubiquitous in both Belfast and Derry.

big walls and gates, but we were told it is mainly psychological. No one locally seems to have an issue with the walls, which are in turn a tourist attraction. But, seeing more barriers built inside yards of houses as to protect from stones being thrown, to a foreigner, again, comes as a shock.

During the day, people of both backgrounds in Belfast who were on the opposing sides of the conflict, practically live and work together.

That is not necessarily the case in Kosovo. In capital Pristina, practically there are no Serbs living in the city. Some thousands live in 3 nearby villages, with one of them Gracanica turned into a town as part of giving more autonomy to the biggest minority.

In Belfast, the City Hall is a must see with a museum inside that takes visitors to the incredibly rich history of Northern Ireland. While on our way out, we meet by chance the Lord Mayor, Mick Murray. He was kind enough to take us on an hour tour to where the sessions are held, and explain the work through portraits

of former Mayors. They are an amazing piece of art reflecting the values and interests each of them brought to the office.

The most anticipating part of the trip would, of course be Derry. Or, Londonderry as it is known to the British. Our trip from Belfast did not go as planned. The train stopped 20 minutes into the route, as a lorry had hit a bridge. After waiting for some 30 minutes, the train went back to Belfast, so we could get a bus to pass the bridge and take a new train to our destination. Luckily, we were still able to enjoy the breathtaking views on the route to the city.

Derry is beautiful. Its walls to me represented the rich cul-



(Right)-Paul Gallagher of the WAVE Trauma Center in Northern Ireland discusses victimhood, trauma, and the media. (Photo by Allan Leonard/Shared Future News)

Kosovo-NI from pg 7

ture more than the divide. But, watching from above there stood a sign reading “West Bank Loyalists still under siege. No surrender,” accompanied by “Peace if possible, truth at all costs.” The most famous sign though reads: “Welcome to Free Derry,” and when we visited the face of famous Gaza journalists, Motaz Azaiza stands there, having visited for a pro-Palestine rally just two days ago. The Bloody Sunday memorial is just across the street, as a reminder of the innocent lives lost, that would sparkle years of conflict. The Peace Bridge we crossed looks fairly similar to Mitrovica. But, here it was built with the purpose of promoting peace and reconciliation between the communities.



Richard Moore, speaking to journalists in Derry, Northern Ireland.

In Derry, we met the most inspiring of speakers. Richard Moore, left blind at the age of 10 by a rubber bullet fired from a British soldier, stands tall in a room full of rapt listeners. He walks us through his journey of forgiveness and befriending the soldier who ruined the life as he knew it as little child. But, he used his

tragedy as a force of good, by engaging in Africa and elsewhere helping the most vulnerable, and working tirelessly to promote peace, healing and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. He recalled visiting Kosovo right after the war, and engaging in a rather bizarre episode where a visit to the northern Serbian run side of Mitrovica, was interpreted by an Albanian taxi driver as kidnapping. Moore said, “We noticed a helicopter in the sky and we were told afterwards it was looking for us!”

Reflecting on his life story, we cannot think of a case, in which a victim in Kosovo would be ready and able to forgive a soldier or policeman behind a similar act.

Back in Belfast, we met a group of brave women journalists, reporting on most of the pressing issues, very often reflecting the scars of The Troubles. In times of online abuse rife against women, we witnessed their determination to go far in reporting the truth, and giving voice and spotlight to more women, often with a personal price to pay.

Angelina Fusco’s presentation gave an important input to Kosovan journalists on the principles to follow when reporting about conflict, riots, all related to trauma. Paul Gallagher of WAVE Trauma Centre, explained on how the

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(Far Left)-Mary Kelly (L) and Ardita Zeqiri discuss their collaborative story topic. (Left)-Xhemajl Rexha reflects on the project’s Kosovo component. (Photo by Allan Leonard). (Below)-During a bike tour taken by the program participants, radio journalist Collin O’Carroll discusses the murals that adorn Belfast’s Peace Walls which separate ethnic/religious regions in the city.



Kosovo-NI from pg 8

centre helps people deal with the trauma of the conflict, even if they come forward with their story half a century later. We know that to be the case in Kosovo, as the number of some 20.000 women and men raped during the war to come forward to claim pensions, remains very low.

The bond between journalists from Northern Ireland and Kosovo at the end of the trips seems the most natural.

They are paired in 10 groups, and topics such are: symbolism through flags and insignia, women’s representation and recognition in the peace process, the police work and cross-community inclusion or the segregated education system in both countries, will be explored in depth. I will surely go back to Belfast and Derry to explore more.

--Xhemajl Rexha

Podcast explores media and negotiations

Journalists should ask: 'How do two peoples live in the same land?'

William Ury has been one of the world's most influential peacebuilders and experts on negotiation for nearly fifty years. He played a significant role in conflict negotiations in Colombia, the Middle East, de-escalating nuclear tensions between the U.S. and North Korea, among many other contexts. In 1981, Ury and his co-author, Roger Fisher, wrote the foundational book on negotiation "Getting to Yes" and he co-founded the groundbreaking Program on Negotiation at Harvard University in 1983. Ury also founded The Abraham Path Initiative, an NGO that builds walking trails connecting communities in the Middle East. His latest book, "Possible: How We Survive (and Thrive) in an Age of Conflict" offers tools for conflict resolution learned from his decades of work.

Ury spoke with the Making Peace Visible podcast, hosted by Jamil Simon, offering many insights on the important role of journalists in covering conflict negotiations. This summary is edited for length.

Jamil Simon: I'd like to ask you some questions about peace building in the media. Our project is all about this kind of work, how it can be better represented in the media, and more visible, so let me ask your advice. For journalists covering conflict, are there people involved in conflict situations who you think journalists tend to ignore? Are there people involved who we should hear more about?

Bill Ury: A long time ago, I remember talking to an old labor negotiator who said there's always three tables in any negotiation, at least three tables. We always focus on the one table. And the one table is, it's the leaders on both sides. Union-management or Arabs and Israelis are all sitting around the table, right? And that's where the focus tends to go. That's where the

media puts the focus. That's where everyone puts their focus. What people forget is that there are at least two other tables there.

There's the internal table. Inside the union, who's sitting at that internal table inside the domestic constituency? Who's sitting for the other side around management? Oftentimes the real stickiness is not at just at the external table where all the attention goes. The real problem is in the two internal tables. It's the internal negotiations that are more difficult with the people who are on the same side. It's within the family or within the business, within the organization. And so in negotiation, when you cover



negotiations as a journalist, don't just cover the main table, cover the two internal tables, because that's where the real difficulty is.

Right now for example, take the Middle East and people are focusing on Israelis and Palestinians. What about the politics within Israel? What about the politics among the Palestinians? You'll find out that in fact, that's where the real blocks are and that's maybe where the real opportunities are to allow the external negotiation to succeed.

JS: Right. It's those opportunities that people aren't seeing. I think, they're seeing the problems and the obstacles and maybe in part because they're not looking for the opportuni-

ties.

BU: I find that's true, Jamil. I find that it all depends on the questions that you ask, and journalists are good askers of questions. Think about the power of the right question. If the power of the question is who's winning, who's losing. If I ask you who's winning your marriage, if you're asking that question, you're asking the wrong question, because those are relationships and most negotiations, most conflicts are relationships.

Even among the Israelis and Palestinians, that's like a bad marriage, right? They're living in the same house, right? The same narrow piece of land. I've been there many times and they're figuring out how do we share it? Is the question "who's winning?" Because we know the dynamics of war here, which is that no one wins. And the key power that a journalist has is the power to reframe the question instead of "who's winning?" ask the question "How do two peoples who live in the same land, live side by side in security?" Now that's the interest in dignity and in peace. That's a constructive question, because that starts to move things forward. That looks for possibility.

JS: Another challenge for journalism is finding the drama in peacebuilding stories. The drama is in what's not happening. Nevertheless, there's certainly plenty of compelling drama in your book. For most news outlets, it's much easier to cover violent conflict with all the visuals it provides. Do you have any advice for journalists looking to tell the kind of dramatic stories that audiences are naturally attracted to about peace efforts?

BU: I put herself in the shoes of

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Podcast *from pg 10*

a journalist of what can I cover? Where's the drama? These situations are seemingly impossible. How do you possibly do it? So the question is, how can we make the impossible possible? If that's the question, then you've got drama in there, right? Because the odds are against it. And then if you can actually pepper it with examples from other places where the impossible became possible. You have got to find a way to dramatize the story. Take Colombia for example.

You're not gonna cover the secret phase of the talks. So the secret phase of the talks was about six months. They were taking place secretly in Havana. And there were so many stories that would come out later, but those can be covered later. Six or seven months later when you actually have an agreement, go back and cover it a little bit. Because it was dramatic the efforts that people had to make, people going in canoes down rivers blindfolded to, to a guerrilla camp or trying to take a guerrilla leader by helicopter, because you couldn't take a military helicopter. You had to rent a private helicopter and this guy shows up in the middle of the jungle and why would he get on this private



William Ury, author of "Getting to

helicopter to be taken somewhere to get him to Cuba? How does he trust that? And all his fellow guerillas are saying, "Don't get on this. This is a trap." All the high drama of that.

There are so many human stories. I'll give you just one from Colombia. There was a woman whose name was Pastora Mina. She lived in a little village in Colombia and one day a wounded fighter came to her door and she took him in and she nursed

him. She put him in her son's bed, she nursed him back to health. It took her several months. When he is coming out he's finally leaving, he's in their living room, their parlor room. And he looks and sees a photo of her with a young man. He says, "Don't tell me that's your son?" And she says, "Why? Yes, of course that's her son." And then he says, he falls to his knees and says, "Forgive me, forgive me. I was the one who tortured and killed your son." He happened to be on the other side. And Pastora Mina said, "Please get to your feet. Please get to your feet. I forgive you." He says, "How could you forgive me?" She says, "Well, because you are liberating me from having to bear the burden of hating you for the rest of her life."

JS: I love that story. I mean, what a poignant story.

BU: It's the human stories. We think of conflicts as all high politics and everything like that and sure enough, there's high politics and power and resources and all this stuff, but in the end, it boils down to human beings. That human connection that turns out to be central because all these leaders are human beings.

--Adam Weiss

Making Peace Visible

[Making Peace Visible](https://www.makingpeacevisible.org/) (<https://www.makingpeacevisible.org/>) is a bridge-building organization that facilitates powerful conversations globally about how the media covers peace and conflict. MPV's mission is to help expand global coverage of peace and reconciliation efforts in the media, to inspire a wider range of approaches to conflict reporting, and to improve the overall public narrative about peace.

Podcast

[The Making Peace Visible Podcast](#) speaks with journalists and peacebuilders who help us understand the human side of conflicts and peace efforts around the world. From international negotiations in Colombia to gang violence disruptors in Chicago, to women advocating for their rights in the midst of the Syrian civil war, these are

the storytellers who are changing the narrative.

Education

MPV also sponsors [educational initiatives](#) like a 2018 symposium in New York. MPV is planning a second symposium in 2025 in Washington, DC.

Journal

MPV also publishes a journal, [NUANCE](#), that features essays, interviews, and photojournalism projects. NUANCE publishes thought-provoking pieces about both the challenges and creative solutions to elevate peace efforts in the mainstream media.

Peace Docs

[Peace Docs](#) is a curated film archive designed to create a living archive of the highest quality documentary films about peace and reconciliation in the world today.

MindaNews promotes responsible coverage

Philippines news service focuses on contents, characters, consequences of storytelling

MindaNews is the news service arm of the Mindanao Institute of Journalism in the Philippines. We started as a media cooperative in May 2001.

We are a product of the government's "all-out war" in 2000 against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. It was this war that eventually made us decide to organize a Mindanao-based, Mindanao-focused, Mindanao-owned news service. Mindanao is in the southern Philippines.

Let me transport you back to 30 years ago, the early 1990s, back to a world without Facebook. Our world then was a world where the news agenda was crafted by people outside our own worlds. International news agencies dictated what was and what was not news for the rest of the world. National newspapers also did the same for the rest of the nation -- Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

Where I come from, Mindanao, is the farthest from the national capital.

Mindanao at that time was dubbed the country's "war zone" and "kidnap-for-ransom capital." It was the most troubled part of the Philippines. The mere mention of the word "Mindanao"

then evoked images of war, bombings, kidnappings, terrorism, mass evacuations, massacres, etc...

I headed a team of reporters in the Mindanao Bureau of a national newspaper from 1991 to 2001, all of us too eager to report to a national audience what was happening in our communities.

Please remember, there was no Facebook then. For us in the provinces, it was important that the issues that mattered most to us would be amplified through the national newspapers we were writing for so that whatever appropriate action was needed would be attended to immediately.

Before we found ourselves in the Mindanao Bureau, we had known each other from the mid-1980s. We were working for different national newspapers, trying our very best to tell the rest of the country that there are armed conflicts in Mindanao because of historical injustices that have not been addressed and that there is so much more about Mindanao than the violence it has been associated with.

All those years working for national newspapers were years of struggle for us from the provinces who had to fight for space in the limited pages

allotted for provincial news.

Mindanao did make it to the front pages or the headlines of TV and radio news and that was because of the stories on violence. Bad news, sadly, lands on Page One. And even in the provincial pages.

For a long time, it was "Mindanao equals Violence."

That was the national narrative.

It is not as if we should not be covering these violent incidents. They occur, they recur, they're a reality so we should really cover them. But are we covering them responsibly? And are these the only issues about Mindanao that are worth reporting?

For a long time, too, there were only three instances when Mindanao would land on page one of the national newspaper we were writing for and the other national newspapers as well: First, violence such as bombings, massacres, wars. Second, disasters; and third, celestial phenomenon like a total solar eclipse.

Aside from fighting for space, we also had to fight with the Central Desk in Manila (where all the main offices of the national media are). We would repeatedly remind them of the misuse of the word "Muslim" to describe kidnappers or terrorists. Sometimes

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there would be a period when you would not see these words misused. But the problem would recur. And recur. And we would also repeatedly remind. And remind.

Journalism school taught us the basics of newswriting: 5Ws and 1 H. Who, what, when, where, why and how. But we need to add more, especially in conflict zones -- the 3Cs as suggested by Teresita Quintos Deles back in the late 1990s, when she headed a peace NGO. She later became Presidential Peace Adviser in two administrations.

The 3Cs are Context, Characters and Consequences. What is the context of what you are writing about? What are the roots, the history of the conflict? A firm grasp of history is important in reporting Mindanao or any other conflict for that matter. Peace journalism trainings can teach journalists skills but without knowing and understanding the history of the conflict, the context of the story is sacrificed.

On the second "C": who are the characters in the story? Emphasis on the "S" -- characters -- so that we do not limit ourselves to elite sources or the warring forces only but ensure we include the civilians particularly women and children who suffer the other "C" -- consequences -- of the conflict.

And this is why it is important that we are also well versed on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. And the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

As journalists, we have a huge responsibility to report as accurately as possible to ensure we do not exacerbate the conflict.

Disinformation, misinformation and malinformation especially in conflict zones are as dangerous as bullets or bombs.

Peace is a process and not a mere event. In reporting peace and conflict, knowing history and upholding human rights and justice are a must.

The all-out war that our government waged against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2000 was, for most of us in the Mindanao bureau and our contemporaries then, the first major war that we covered. Nearly a million Mindanawons were displaced by that war. We would file our reports on what we witnessed on the ground, on the voices we listened to on the ground, but in several instances, only a few paragraphs would be used, if at all, in the national newspapers, as this would be merged with reports from the Defense and Presidential beats in faraway Metro Manila.

So what picture of that war would the readers get? I would receive an average of 90,000 worth of characters from the reports sent to me by reporters and from herself as well, which I had to reduce to only 5,000 characters because that was the space allocation for us. But that space would still be reduced further as it will still be shared by related reports from the Defense and Presidential beats. As a result, a peace rally at the end of a peace caravan from Davao to Cotabato merited only a sentence or two in the final story that came out.

Sick and tired of the many frustrations we experienced, we left the paper and set up MindaNews in May 2001. We were lucky the internet connection in Mindanao had already improved by then, at least in key areas, because we did not have money to begin with. We pooled our meager financial resources that actually lasted only for a few months. We thought we could offer the national newspapers their own version of a Mindanao Bureau with a subscription offer of only 10,000 pesos a month but we were told "we already have a Defense Beat." Because that was how Mindanao was viewed then. As Defense Beat. As a security issue.

Despite the many challenges we faced in the last 23 years of our existence, we have continued to do what we set out to do back in 2001: tell the story of Mindanao from the lenses of



Mindanao, from the perspective of Mindanao; report on the many faces and facets of Mindanao beyond what the national newspapers, national radio and television networks report about Mindanao; report on the issues in Mindanao as comprehensive as we can.

We have been confronted with several challenges in the past two decades, among them financial constraints and major leaps in technology. Social media has changed the landscape, and this includes the quick spread of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. Add to that the problems brought about by the pandemic. And now AI.

We in MindaNews continue to navigate our way through these technological advancements so we can reach out to more people.

But I believe what has helped us survive is really our commitment as journalists and our commitment to peace. Oh, we were called "crazy dreamers" because, well, we were. We dared defy the usual. We set up something unprecedented. We were short on cash, definitely short on cash, but definitely long on vision. And we were and are fully aware that we are not just reporters based in Mindanao, we are peace stakeholders ourselves.

We did not stop at news reporting only. To assert "This is OUR Mindanao," we organized media summits and media trainings, photo exhibits, video documentaries, published several books and a newsmagazine, organized book festivals, did roundtable discussions on pressing issues such as the peace processes in Mindanao, conducted grassroots documentation and reporting trainings, a summer institute of Journalism for journalists,

Continued on next page



From the Philippines, MindaNews, and MindaNews fact check.

Survey quizzes Palestinian journalists in Gaza

Study looks at dangers, motivations, challenges of reporting during war

CAUTION: This article contains graphic, disturbing descriptions of violence and its aftermath. --Ed

"I captured numerous photos of blood, deceased bodies, martyrs, and skulls... I recorded a video of a body in Khan Younis being devoured by dogs, birds, and even cats," recounts Abdullah Obead, a Gaza-based Palestinian journalist who has immersed himself in the most dangerous and ongoing conflict in the MENA region over the past ten months. Against the backdrop of incessant shelling, suffocating dust, and pervasive mortality, these journalists have transcended their roles as mere reporters - they have become witnesses, historians, and often the final voices for those who have none.

Since the Israel-Gaza conflict reignited in October 2023, 108 out of 113 Palestinian journalists have lost their lives, according to reports from the Committee to Protect Journalists

(CPJ) as of August 20. This staggering toll has transformed the practice of journalism into a perilous undertaking. For those who persevere, each story they cover becomes a confrontation with mortality, and every photograph they capture becomes a poignant testament to their unwavering commitment. This feature delves into the lives of these resilient war journalists, drawing insights from our most recent study published in the *Online Media and Global Communication* journal, through interviews with 18 local journalists that reveal the profound motivations, immense challenges, and enduring resilience of Palestinian journalists reporting from the heart of Gaza.

The Duty of Reporting: A Personal Calling

Our qualitative survey of 18 local journalists reveals that for many Palestinian reporters, their work is not solely professional but profoundly symbolic. It transcends being merely a job; it is a duty linked to their identity and the history of their homeland. Our study illustrates how they infuse their experiences into their reporting, viewing

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journalism students and anyone interested in journalism and at one point in the early years of our existence, had a summer youth training program in the subdivision where our office is located, teaching kids basic photography, basic news writing, and yes, even dance.

In the first Mindanao Media Summit that we organized in May 2002 – on our second year of existence – we convened Mindanao’s community newspaper editors, radio and television managers – to discuss the many challenges we face as journalists.

But we also asked representatives from the Moro, Indigenous Peoples and Settlers – the Mindanao mixed population – to give us a critique on media’s reportage of Mindanao. We even had a reverse press conference. Representatives of our readers, viewers and listeners asked us questions about our reportage.

From there we acknowledged our sins and made plans on how to improve our reporting and came up with a Covenant we simply titled “This is OUR pg 14

Mindanao.”

We said: “We are disseminators and interpreters of news. But we are also major stockholders in the quest for peace in Mindanao.”

“We want to re-shape and re-direct the themes on Mindanao currently dominated by terrorism, war, criminality, and other forces of violence, to one that presents a realistic, balanced and truthful reporting of the lives, initiatives, relationships, issues, pains, dreams and triumphs of our people.”

“We believe that ethnic and religious biases; the elitist framework of reportage that consistently gives voice to the powerful; the focus on events rather than on processes deter us from achieving our goal.”

“We welcome the assistance of academe and other expert groups to increase our knowledge and skills.”

“We will give equal time and space to the powerless, the marginalized, the victims of the many political, socio-economic conflicts who deserve to

have their voices heard.’

“As Mindanawon journalists, we play a crucial role in helping chart the future of Mindanao.”

As journalists, we often hear about Peace and Development. But we must always ask ourselves: “Peace for whom? Development for whom” or “Whose peace?” and “Whose development?” Because we are aware that we could be helping breed a cycle of conflict in Mindanao if we do not know the answers to these very basic questions.

Peace for whom? Development for whom? Whose peace and whose development?

We are still navigating our way through these major leaps in technological advancements. We have major constraints, especially given our very limited resources, but we try our very best to provide the readers a better understanding of what is happening in Mindanao.

--Carolyn O. Arguillas

<https://www.makingpeacevisible.org>

A screenshot shows Amir Al-Maghary, a freelance photojournalist in Gaza, standing amid the damage left by an airstrike (taken on June 13 from his Instagram account)



Gaza from pg 14

journalism as a lifelong commitment rather than a mere occupation.

As expressed by Youmna El Sayed, “For us as journalists from the Gaza Strip, it’s more of a duty because this is a war on every single Palestinian civilian in Gaza. So, you’re reporting or you’re defending your people and your land. It’s more of that mindset that we have.” This vested interest, shaped by their personal background and professional responsibilities, attests to their commitment to presenting narratives that may otherwise go unnoticed. The stories of the interviewed journalists demonstrate that these journalists are not merely narrating a story – they are fighting for its survival.

Navigating Ethical Challenges with Faith

The ethical dilemma of covering the war in Gaza was noted to center mainly on the necessity for journalists to photograph bodies, particularly those of children. For many journalists, this responsibility was not just a professional obligation but also an internal struggle. The recurring question persisted: was documenting these scenes essential for bearing witness to the harsh realities of conflict, or did it risk crossing into insensitivity? The social and psychological conditions of enduring with steady bloodletting and savagery become the reality of the people, as one journalist explained.

In the midst of all this, the most prominent aspect observed among the journalists was the presence of faith, which served as a significant coping mechanism and moral guide. In this context, Abdullah Obead, a Palestinian jour-

nalist from Gaza, encapsulated this reliance with a straightforward statement, “God is the only shield... and that is all.” Faith was not merely a remedy for despair; it also served as a compass to navigate the complexities of moral ambiguity and the psychological strain of bearing witness.

Battling Physical and Digital Threats: The Dual Frontlines

The study also highlights that Palestinian journalists face two distinct forms of risk: physical risk and the risk posed by digital technology. Engaging in their work places them in a perilous environment where the mere act of being journalists puts them in a line of fire. Haneen Harara, a Gaza-based Palestinian journalist, underscores this by stating, “There was a clear intention to target the journalists in specific body parts, such as the hand, to prevent them from holding the microphone.”

The study also sheds light on the significant risks faced by these journalists on social media, particularly concerning algorithmic suppression. A key challenge they encounter is the persistent digital censorship that severely hampers their ability to communicate with the world. Journalists recounted instances where they faced bans on platforms like Facebook after posting conflict-related videos, leading them to exit Instagram for similar reasons. “The limitations placed on us constrain our audience reach; if I use such tags as ‘occupation,’ ‘deaths,’ ‘killed,’ or ‘massacre,’ her videos are watched less,” one journalist noted. Consequently, to disseminate their message effectively, journalists resorted to employing various tactics to circumvent censorship mechanisms. For example, they used the Arabizi technique,

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Peace journalists re-write narratives in Nigeria

“For us journalists, it’s imperative that we seek peace”

Nigeria, a country of over 200 million people with more than 250 tribes and ethnic groups, has consistently made headlines due to various crises. In Northern Nigeria, religious or tribal conflicts have resulted in the loss of countless lives and properties. Some blame the media for fueling societal divisions through biased and sectarian reporting.

In response to this, journalists with the Network of Peace Journalists (NPJ), with the assistance of non-governmental organizations including the Interfaith Mediation Center, Mercy Corps, and Kaduna State Peace Commission, have undergone train-

ing in peace journalism. They aim to use their training to foster peace and reconciliation rather than hate and division within society.

Ibrahima Yakubu, the team leader of the NPJ in Northern Nigeria, emphasized the impact of peace-building training in mitigating conflicts and combating the spread of “fake news” on social media, while aiming to promote positive narratives. “We have been experiencing conflict reportage that destabilizes communities. It’s time to change the narrative by encouraging journalists to promote peace journalism,” he said.

According to Yakubu, journalists in Nigeria have directly experienced the negative side of instability. As such, their role is to ensure that they promote peace through their newspapers, broadcast radio stations, and online news platforms. Yakubu also advocates for journalists to write personal blogs, which he believes can strengthen the push towards assisting every citizen in promoting the ideas of peace journalism.

Andrew Mshelia, a Kaduna-based broadcast journalist and member of NPJ, highlighted the pivotal role of journalists in promoting peace in regions prone to religious and political

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incorporated English words to describe content in Arabic, or even used emojis to evade Meta’s blocking mechanisms and ensure their content reached a wider audience, as highlighted by one journalist.

The Emotional Toll: Bearing Witness to Human Suffering

The study unequivocally establishes that reporting from a war zone exacts an immense emotional toll on individuals, as evidenced in the firsthand accounts of journalists in Gaza. The duty of observation extends beyond a professional obligation—journalists experience, live, and internalize the events they witness, paying a personal price for their commitment. Descriptions from our interviews underscore the profound emotional impact of witnessing pain and death.

Ibrahim Qanan, a Gaza-based Palestinian journalist, shares a chilling account. He described a gruesome, horrifying scene he saw where a pregnant woman was killed by a bomb dropped from an airplane. Such haunting experiences leave an indelible mark on journalists’ psyches, constituting a significant portion of their emotional burden. Another journalist reflects, “I had reached a stage of psychological and physical exhaustion, as if I were over 100



years old,” illustrating the internal struggles accompanying the act of bearing witness to the human toll of conflict.

The Implications for Peace Journalism

The study emphasizes how war journalists can find themselves in unprecedented situations, particularly in Gaza, which has been a hotspot for almost a year or ten months so far. The research reveals that local journalists in Gaza encounter challenges that exceed human endurance, jeopardizing their very existence, particularly when it comes to making editorial decisions, particularly concerning ethical issues. Additionally, ongoing censorship, especially online, continues to marginalize them, leaving them to fight on multiple fronts.

The study underscores that these journalists have developed a unique voice, sharing stories from the war zones since October 7th, positioning themselves at the heart of communication in the conflict. Consequently, the study suggests that by amplifying the voices of those directly impacted by conflict and prioritizing narratives that foster dialogue and reconciliation, peace journalism can serve as a powerful tool for healing and transformation in conflict-affected regions like Gaza.

Through a commitment to ethical reporting, nuanced storytelling, and an unwavering dedication to peace advocacy, journalists can transcend the challenges of conflict and pave the way for a more empathetic and inclusive narrative of the realities of war.

--Shahira Fahmy, Mohamed Salama, Mona Alsaba

<https://www.makingpeacevisible.org>

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tensions like Kaduna. He said, “People believe us journalists, and they take our words seriously. It’s not just about holding the government accountable but also holding ourselves accountable.”

Mshelia highlights the importance of media agenda setting, in which the media can highlight not just what to think, but also what to think about. He emphasized the need to focus on stories that unite rather than divide, recognizing that peace is essential for societal stability and progress.

Mayen Etim, the Deputy Team Leader of the group, echoed the sentiment, emphasizing that peace is paramount for societal advancement. She stressed the need for journalists to promote peace, as their words can either foster harmony or ignite conflict.

“So for us journalists, it is imperative that we seek peace. If we set any ethnic group against the other and the country is set ablaze, we will be running helter-skelter.... We should remember to write to live because if you write and you set the nation ablaze, you will also be affected,” she said.

She added that the local people are tired of hearing bad news in the media which is why they are working hard to train more journalists to embrace peace journalism, to preach peace, speak peace, talk peace, and work for peace.

Samson Auta, a Development Practitioner and Early Warning Early Response Specialist (EWER), said the media is key to engaging the community and the government on how to address issues that can lead to crisis or conflict in society. The EWER system is a way to identify threats at an early stage in communities and initiate a rapid response to mitigate conflicts.



(Top)-Ibrahima Yakubu, the Team Leader of NPJ, makes a point during a meeting. (Bottom)-Members of the Network of Peace Journalists in Nigeria. (Photos by Mohammed Ibrahim)

Auta believes that journalists should be supporters of peace because they are also members of the community, and would themselves benefit from building peace in every community. “We noted that in the past most violence that happened, we discovered that the journalists contributed to it directly or indirectly due to their reportage.” Referring to the activities of the NPJ team, he said, “We could see their work so far, they have become part of the peace professionals by avoiding headlines that will escalate

violence or tensions.”.

The group is actively seeking partnerships with organizations, aiming to expand peace journalism training beyond Kaduna to other parts of Nigeria. As journalists, they understand the power of their pens and the responsibility that comes with it. By promoting peace, they aim to not only shape the present but also pave the way for a brighter and more unified future for Nigeria.

--Mohammed Ibrahim



The demonisation of refugees and immigrants has become a common feature of the South African mainstream media. Towards the end of last year and the beginning of this year, there was a sustained increase in hate speech against foreign

nationals of African origin by South African politicians and extremist right wing groups. And the mainline media, particularly the *Daily Sun* newspaper, has not been immune.

When monitoring media coverage of international migration news by the *Daily Sun's* online edition, from November 2023 to February 2024, we discovered that the paper's characterisation and representation of international migration news was largely negative. Stories were mostly one-sided, not analytic, inaccurate, incomplete and misleading, describing immigrants as criminals, illegal, undocumented, undesirable, border jumpers, and exaggerating immigration population.

Of the 20 stories published by the paper on cross border migration during this period, only three stories were slightly positive.

Lumping immigrants with crime

By lumping immigrants with crime, we noticed a deliberate attempt by the paper to portray immigrants as criminals. For example, in an article written on the 4th of January, Ntebatse Masipa, said, "8 illegal immigrants were bust, 3 suspects were arrested for drugs ranging from mandrax, nyaope, and crystal meth."

The only human beings mentioned in a sentence that speaks to crime and drugs are immigrants. Yet though the article gives an impression that immigrants are drug dealers, they are not the perpetrators of the said crime. This reckless reporting could flare anti-immigrant violence and at times leading to loss of life and destruction of property.

In April 2022, Elvis Nyathi a Zimbabwean immigrant was killed and burnt for allegedly committing crime and not

South Africa Media incite anti-immigrant violence

Western Cape dismissed the dominant narrative that indiscriminately label all Nigerians in South Africa criminals.

" We write to state that it is untruthful, and damaging to promote narratives that tend to suggest that all Nigerians in South Africa conspire to import crime into the country. The dominant narrative in the South African print media paints pictures of a group of people who are on a mission to import crime into the country." (Nigerian Community of the Western Cape Press Statement, 6 October 2019).

Whilst there is no mention of Nigerians as criminals during the studied period, the narrative given by crime journalists covering international migration is that of immigrants hell bent on committing crime in the republic.

“ Stories were mostly one-sided, not analytic, inaccurate, incomplete, and misleading.

To refer to immigrants without South African documents as illegal is unethical, malicious, and irresponsible.

Previously, the media have published stories of South African adults and children with no identity documents and birth certificates.

If a local South African without documents can not be said to be an illegal local, why should a person on the move without these documents be called an illegal immigrant. If calling an immigrant without documents illegal and not a South African without the same documents is not xenophobic then what should it be called?

Exaggerating immigration population

The paper made countless efforts to exaggerate immigration population with no evidence of research.

We refer to an article written by Kgomotso Medupe, published on the 22 November 2023 referring to a statement

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<https://www.makingpeacevisible.org>

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by Gayton McKenzie, Patriotic Alliance leader known for his anti-foreigner sentiments. He said, "We can rather have a half stadium of patriotic South Africans than a full stadium full of undocumented immigrants. We are being recolonized here by illegal foreigners."

It is clear that McKenzie was electioneering, and there was no basis for his assertion, but the writer reproduced these stereotypes, instead of challenging them.

On the 14th of November last year, in an article written by Joseph Mokoaledi, the caption reads, "Hospital beds full of foreigners." This statement intends to exaggerate immigration population.

On the 4th of December last year, Keletso wrote, "Ramaphosa said the increased number of undocumented immigrants has worsened the country's socio-economic situation."

The writer lost a golden opportunity to interrogate the president on the reliability of his statement.

"Flocking" and "increased" are very problematic terms in transnational migration which seek to exaggerate the population of immigrants in the country, and incite anti-immigrant violence.

On the 4th of December 2023, Keletso Mkhwanazi wrote, "In a more shocking story, the Border Management Authority intercepted a bus carrying illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe."

The word "shocking" intends to exaggerate immigration population and draw interest in the story. Even if the story was true, it easily loses credibility because of using wrong, emotional and exaggerating terminology. In the same article, Keletso Mkhwanazi wrote, "The Border Management Authority dealing with an increase in undocumented immigrants." The writer went on to say, "There are over 1 million Zimbabweans in South Africa."

Instead of questioning how this figure was arrived at, the media is seen as a propaganda mouthpiece, reproducing these popular xenophobic statistics, and oiled to spread misinformation and fake news.

We refer to a media statement by Stats SA (2021) on "Erroneous reporting of undocumented immigrants in South Africa," following exaggerated media reports on the number of undocumented immigrants in the country. "The population census enumerates all persons within the borders of South Africa, irrespective of their citizenship or migration status. The census migration model asks the province/country of birth, date moved to South Africa,

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and the country of citizenship and not the documentation status of an individual. It is not the mandate of Stats SA to determine the documented or undocumented status of persons born outside South Africa." (Stats SA, 2021).

Now where the journalists got the influx, increasing, and many undocumented immigrants is difficult to tell. If this is not an attempt to set the stage and incite xenophobic violence, by propagating fake news, and unverified statistics, then what is it?

Conclusion

We discovered that of the twenty articles on this topic, published by the paper during the period under review, the majority were negative, misleading, inflammatory and sensational and used as a weapon to unleash terror against immigrants. It is our submission that the pen should be used to promote peace and not conflict.

Responsible, ethical and solutions based coverage of international migration can help to curb xenophobic violence and help to promote peace at a time South Africa is heading to its watershed elections, and in the post election period.

--Danmore Chuma



Opposite page, top left--A presentation on the role of the curricula and pedagogy to promote an inclusive and peaceful society is given by the *Chronicles of Refugees and Immigrants (ChRI) Curriculum Development Workshop* at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Opposite page, top right--Leaders from the Nigerian Community in the Western Cape province make a press statement challenging media mischaracterization of international migration.

Above--A presentation on media misrepresentation of cross border migration is given by the *Chronicles of Refugees and Immigrants (ChRI)* to visiting students from the University of North Carolina Wilmington (US) at the University of the Western Cape.

Social media helps to fuel Ethiopian conflict

Could social media instead become a platform for peace?

Ethiopia experienced a devastating conflict in Tigray between 2020 and 2022. Despite the difficulty in ascertaining the exact impact of the war on individual lives and overall socio-economic fabric of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in general, conservative estimates put the casualty in numbers to be at least six hundred thousand dead. Considering the relatively short duration of hostilities, the conflict might be the most devastating one in the region in the 21st century. The Tigray war was executed on two fronts, the physical and virtual, thereby setting new precedences, in comparison to previous inter and intra state conflicts in the region.

The virtual front of the conflict is characterized by activists supporting the cause of the different military disputants through linguistic and visual effects. Activists demonized the forces of their opponents linguistically and associated them with horrendous actions visually.

While the armed forces were fighting on the ground, political activists continued the fighting on digital platforms. A key example is how the Tigrayan online activists or sympathizers launched an organized campaign of propaganda through the Digital Woyane program.

When TPLF-associated activists made their presence felt in the field, this automatically reactivated counter groups associated to the Amhara, Federal and Eritrean forces. (The TPLF is the rebel group from the north of the country fighting government and Eritrean forces). Largely relying on unreliable sources, the social media activists of all sides assumed new agency in influencing the dynamics of public view towards the conflict. Such condition then leads one to poses a question: What were the manifestations of the conflict in the digital front? Could this platform be a space for peace? By answering these questions, the article sheds light on the dynamics of the social media activism during conflicts and peace.

The Internet in general, and social media in particular, have democratized information and allowed ordinary citizens to access a platform previously preserved for authorities and specific classes or groups of people. However, the democratization of media has proven to be a two-edged sword. It serves both good and bad intentions by individuals, corporations, and states. However, internet through social media enhanced the political power of the people, now

governments are using the digital platform for everything from cyber espionage to social services. Despite these utilities, social media has become full of all kinds of useless and dangerous ideas. Nevertheless, social media has three distinct applications, social networking, propaganda and espionage, and news and information sharing both by state and non-state actors.

In the recent conflict, the TPLF promoted a social media movement through Digital Woyane. Right after TPLF's removal from the pinnacle of political power, Digital Woyane activists hyped up the anti-federal government narrative. Slowly, TPLF-aligned social media channels challenged traditional media sources as social media bestowed them the power of dissemination from many-to-many in the absence of central authority. Fluid and unreliable, much of the information promoted hatred and fueled violence. Yet, because of its sensational nature, social media gained more audiences among urban young generation because of youth's ability to accessing and mastering technology so quickly.

“ The democratization of media has proven to be a two edged sword. It serves both good and bad intentions.

As the war began in 2020, social media had already obtained publicity as a way of quickly sharing and receiving information about what was happening on the ground. Along with traditional TV and radio channels, social media became competitive by giving alternative views and voices.

Having realized the relevance of social media during the prewar period, the TPLF force increased its reliance on social media as traditional media channels regularly failed to reach the public as the war escalated. Fed by people on the ground, activists on both sides largely living abroad, mainly in the US and UK, became the voice of the TPLF forces. Sitting in front of digital screens, political activists took it upon themselves to make big claims regarding the direction the war was going, and what could be done to benefit their side. One important case is the 'genocide' narrative which galvanized the social media activists either to advance it or to disqualify it.

Once it was trending, the 'genocide' narrative obtained a political currency on the international stage despite what actually occurred on the ground. This was basically because when activists received information from the ground, they disseminated it immediately without much verification of the information. Once tweeted by a prominent academic, people passed genocide messages through

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different channels. In the process, content was either distorted, reduced, or exaggerated far more than it was previously.

For many, the accuracy of the information seemed not to matter, so long as they believed it supported their side. When one side posted a win or defeat, the other side must refute it and come with a new counter-narrative. Oftentimes, YouTubers and Twitter/X users were not active participants in the fighting and often lived far away from the war theater. This distance therefore afforded them the chance to disseminate information without verifications so long as it fits to the agenda of their side. The distance, however, also deprived them of the ability of grasping the impact of their messaging on the ground, not to mention that this distance made them immune from being accountable for their messages.

In this situation, the activists were tools of the propaganda machines of the protagonists in the war while at the same time, as social actors, they set trends and shaped public opinion. They were tools of each side's propaganda efforts as they willingly supported the agenda of political and military actors. However, as there was continuous shift in the agenda in the war zone, the social media activists suffered from inconsistency and overlapping information which led to public confusion and mass illusion. At the same time, these social media actors increased opportunities for the public to receive multiple sources of information, and deprived the state of a communications monopolization. Yet, this came with increased risk of public vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation, which resulted in increased polarization and support for the escalation of violence.

So, in one way or another, social media served as a catalyst for the war. In the course of the peace initiatives, activists worked to own the process by weakening the military position of their opponents. The presentation was simply to persuade the public that it was the victory of their side that pushed their opponent to come into the table, not the willingness for peace. This was been a common narrative by both sides whenever peace negotiations commenced.

If social media can actually exhibit this much effect in influencing a war, it can be applied to sustain peace as well. It is now more important to encourage pro peace activists in order to help the people recover from the aftermath of the war.

When this is synchronized with the changing demography, social media occupies a central role in shaping the dynamics of war or peace. The task in peace time is to turn this



ability to advance an agenda of regional peace by turning the platform from violence to discussion, and from hate-speech to reconciliation-speech.

During the conflict pro-peace, activists were working separately and individually. This disabled them to counter the strong pro-war activists. One way of organizing the pro-peace activists is to establish a united front by making associations. Pro-peace transnational social media activists can form an association which could organize regular virtual and physical meetings to frame peace and reconciliation narratives.

Creating a pro-peace social media association could achieve three objectives. One, the pro-war social media activists negatively affected the popularity of social media among the ordinary people. Social media has been perceived as hostile to peace by the public, for its popularity was related with conflict. Second, such associations can create a platform that could be used to organize conversations among the pro-war activists themselves to sort out their differences. Three, as future conflicts will definitely continue to use social media in running war propaganda, the formation of pro-peace association would not only provide an alternative perspective but also deprive them of platform to promote conflict.

--**Temesgen T. Beyan**

Pakistani officials hope to empower the public through the Right to Information law.



Vulnerability to disinfo grows in Pakistan

Rise of disinfo impacts safety of journalists

In an era where disinformation is a pervasive threat, particularly in Pakistan, the role of journalism in countering false narratives has never been more critical. The spread of disinformation, whether intentional or accidental, has led to increased social tensions and deepening mistrust among communities. This issue is compounded by the sensationalism that often dominates media reporting, prioritizing breaking news and dramatic headlines over accuracy and accountability.

Adnan Rehmat, a senior journalist and media expert, asserts, "Combating disinformation by the media industry requires an institutionalized response. This starts with first acknowledging by industry representative bodies like the All Pakistan Newspaper Society,

Pakistan Broadcasters Association, and Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors that the scourge of disinformation is eroding levels of trust in media as reliable and professionally self-regulated journalism content producers." He further emphasizes that these industry associations need to update their charters and codes of ethics and conduct for the new age, to benchmark definitions, offer tools to counter disinformation, and then monitor and enforce updated standards.

Disinformation, often spread through social media and other digital platforms, poses a significant risk to democratic processes and societal harmony. In Pakistan, where internet usage is rapidly increasing, the vulnerability to disinformation has grown exponentially. A recent report by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) highlighted that as of November 2023, there were 129 million broad-

band internet users in the country, making up 54% of the population. This vast digital landscape has become a breeding ground for false narratives, frequently spread by foreign entities and local actors alike.

The Right to Information (RTI) law offers a solution by providing journalists and citizens the right to access accurate and official information. This access is crucial in verifying facts and debunking false stories that could otherwise lead to widespread misinformation. For instance, journalists have successfully utilized RTI to expose the truth behind misleading reports, leading to investigations that not only halt the spread of disinformation but also address its root causes.

Pakistan has robust federal and provincial RTI laws, recognized as some of the best global regulations

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on the subject. These laws are natural allies of media houses, which should institutionalize their usage by journalists as a means of securing officially certified information from government sources. "Information secured through the use of RTI laws will boost not only trust in media information but also strengthen media professionalism by promoting investigative journalism," Rehmat adds.

One notable example involves a journalist's request for information from the Capital Development Authority (CDA) regarding properties leased to private organizations, including Shifa International Hospital. Despite repeated delays and bureaucratic resistance, the Pakistan Information Commission (PIC) ultimately ruled in favor of transparency, directing the CDA to release the requested information. This case underscores the RTI law's potential to hold authorities accountable and ensure that the public has access to trustworthy information.

The rise of disinformation has also negatively impacted the work and safety of Pakistani journalists, particularly digital reporters. Many journalists have reported being deceived by fake social media posts during news gathering, compromising the integrity of their work. Moreover, women journalists have been disproportionately targeted by gendered disinformation campaigns, leading to physical, psychological, and reputational harm. These challenges highlight the urgent need for stronger fact-checking mechanisms, training programs, and coalition-building efforts within the media industry.

Peace journalism, which focuses on reporting that promotes conflict

resolution and understanding, can be significantly bolstered by the RTI law. By accessing accurate information, journalists can challenge sensational narratives and contribute to a more informed and peaceful society. The combination of RTI and peace journalism creates a powerful framework for reducing tensions and fostering dialogue. This approach not only counters the spread of disinformation but also addresses the underlying issues that fuel conflict.

Rehmat believes that digital media can be a purveyor of public interest journalism by focusing on communities or their pre-identified audiences. He said, "Focusing on audiences allows space for peace-centered approaches to engagement with content and breaks free from sensationalist treatment of content to attract media consumers." Unlike conventional media, digital media can be interactive with its audiences, which can be strategized to disincentivize breaking news and sensationalism cycles as poor substitutes for audience-interest

and public interest journalism. The effectiveness of RTI in promoting peace journalism can be further enhanced through technology and media literacy initiatives. Educating citizens on how to identify reliable information and use RTI effectively empowers them to challenge false narratives and demand accountability from authorities. As more people become aware of the potential of RTI, its role in fostering transparency and peace in Pakistan will continue to grow.

The battle against disinformation in Pakistan is multifaceted, requiring a combination of legal frameworks like the RTI law, responsible journalism, and public education. By leveraging RTI, journalists can play a pivotal role in countering false narratives, promoting transparency, and fostering peace. This approach not only strengthens the democratic process but also creates a more informed and cohesive society.

As Pakistan navigates the challenges of the digital age, the integration of RTI into journalistic practices will be crucial in building a future where truth prevails over misinformation.

--Saddia Mazhar



The Governor of Punjab, Balighur-Rehman, presents the RTI Champion Award to Saddia Mazhar for her exceptional use of RTI laws in addressing critical public interest issues in Pakistan.

**DIARY OF A ROTARY
PEACE FELLOW:**

As a Rotary Peace Fellow at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, I have embarked on a transformative 9-month social change initiative with a clear mission: to champion inclusive narratives that enhance sustainable peace and social cohesion. My goal was to make significant strides in both the global and local arenas, leveraging my expertise in peace journalism to bring marginalised voices to the forefront and foster a more inclusive approach to peacebuilding.

At the heart of my initiative is my collaboration with Global Peace Let's Talk, where I played a pivotal role as a lead facilitator in an online 6-week certificate course on Nonviolent Communication and Servant Leadership. The course, designed for peacebuilding experts worldwide, attracted over 175 participants from diverse backgrounds. The program aimed to equip these participants with critical skills in nonviolent communication—essential for resolving conflicts without violence—and servant leadership, which emphasizes the importance of empathy, inclusivity, and community-centered governance.

The impact of this course has been tangible, with participants applying the principles learned in their respective countries. For example, in Uganda, a participant successfully mediated a land dispute using nonviolent communication techniques, preventing a potentially violent confrontation and setting a new standard for conflict resolution in the community. In Nigeria, another participant launched a radio program dedicated to addressing corruption and governance issues through the lens of servant leadership, providing a platform for marginalized voices and fostering a more inclusive political dialogue. These examples highlight how this initiative has inspired real-world applications that contribute to peace and social cohesion.

My commitment to promoting inclusive narratives extends to my work in my home country of Cameroon, particularly through my partnership with the Cameroon Journalists Trade Union. This collaboration focused on promoting peace journalism and inclusive reporting, with the goal of amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, especially in the context of the ongoing Anglophone crisis. My partners and I initiated a competitive submission call for journalists and media producers across Cameroon, challenging them

Reflections from a Rotary Peace Fellow

to create content that highlights the experiences and perspectives of those excluded from mainstream narratives.

The response was remarkable, with over 50 submissions

received. These productions, which included radio documentaries, written articles, and multimedia pieces, have significantly raised awareness about the importance of inclusive reporting in conflict zones. For instance, one radio documentary provided a deep dive into the lives of internally displaced women in Cameroon's Northwest region, bringing their stories of struggle and resilience to a wider audience. Another article highlighted youth-led peace initiatives in the Southwest region, giving a voice to young people working tirelessly for peace in a volatile environment. These efforts have not only increased public awareness but also underscored the critical role that inclusive media can play in promoting peace and development.

In addition to my collaborative efforts, I have written extensively, contributing over 40 articles to two major newspapers in Cameroon. My columns have consistently focused on amplifying the voices of marginalised communities, particularly those

affected by the Anglophone crisis. Through my writing, my goal is to shed light on the human toll of the conflict, drawing attention to the experiences of women, children, and other vulnerable groups who are often overlooked. I hope that my articles have served as a powerful platform for these voices, advocating for a more inclusive approach to peacebuilding and highlighting the need for policies that consider the perspectives of all community members.

As a Rotary Peace Fellow, my work is guided by my commitment to fostering sustainable peace through the promotion of inclusive narratives. My 9-month fellowship has demonstrated the power of storytelling and media in peacebuilding, showing how giving voice to the marginalised can lead to greater social cohesion and lasting peace. By equipping peacebuilders with the tools they need, promoting inclusive journalism, and tirelessly advocating for the unheard, it's my hope that I have made a profound impact on both local and global scales. It is my wish that my work serves as a testament to the idea that sustainable peace is only possible when all voices are included in the conversation.

--Rosaline Obah



the **PEACE**
JOURNALIST

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