

Revisiting Peace Journalism With a Gender Lens

by Cai Yiping

Peace Journalism (also called conflict solution journalism, conflict sensitive journalism) has been developed from research that indicates that all too often news about conflict has a value bias toward violence. Peace journalism also includes a practical methodology for correcting this bias by producing journalism in both the mainstream and alternative media; and working with journalists and other media professionals, audiences and organisations in conflict.¹

As defined by Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch, peace journalism takes place whenever—editors and reporters make choices—about what stories to report, and how to report them— which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value nonviolent responses to conflict— (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). Peace journalism is a broader, fairer and more accurate way of framing stories, drawing on the insights of conflict analysis and transformation. The basic question a peace journalist would ask before crafting any story would be, “what can I do with my intervention to enhance the prospects for peace?”

The peace journalism approach provides a new road map for tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their reporting— the ethics of journalistic intervention.²An explicit aim of peace journalism is to promote peace initiatives



from whatever quarter, and to allow the reader to distinguish between stated positions and real goals.

Professor Johan Galtung, eminent Peace Studies professor and director of the TRANSCEND network, started using the term, “Peace Journalism” in the 1970s. The peace journalism model was further developed by Conflict and Peace Forums, a think-tank based in UK in a series of international conferences and publications in the late 1990s, e.g. *The Peace Journalism Option* (1998); *What Are Journalists For?* (1999); and *Using Conflict Analysis in Reporting* (2000). In their book “Peace Journalism” (2005)³ Lynch and McGoldrick summarised and elaborated the basic tenets of Galtung’s approach as well as highlighting the misunderstandings and scepticism levelled at peace journalism by discussing dominant misconceptions and emphasising the ways in which it is regarded as unprofessional, biased or partisan.

In 2010, Jake Lynch and Johan Galtung launched their new book, *Reporting Conflict: New Directions in Peace Journalism*.⁴ In it, the two leading authors in this rapidly growing field of research, practice, teaching and training, continue to challenge reporters to tell the real story of conflicts around the world.

Debates and criticisms around peace journalism

Peace journalism has run into a number of debates and criticisms from some scholars and journalists.

“Activist news”/peace advocacy lacking “objectivity”

Some opponents characterise peace journalism as “activist” new writing and peace journalist as peace advocate. It is criticised as either “too critical” or “not critical enough”. This raises the important question of how objective and impartial is peace journalism. From a peace journalism perspective, it is not peace advocacy and it is generally more “objective” than war journalism, with its inclusion of implications for international law, positive developments in both elite peacemaking and capacity building, and non-elite perspectives and peace-building initiatives.

Contextualising/explaining violence equals justifying it

This criticism can be represented by neo-conservative proponent Richard Perle, that one must “decontextualise terror...any attempt to discuss the roots of terrorism is an attempt to justify it. It simply needs to be fought and destroyed.” And this may be a common response to journalism advocating context. Conflict Analysis and Peace Research has shown why an explanation of violence is not the same thing as a justification for it.

By focusing on root causes of conflict such as poverty or prior abuse, and not merely focusing on events associated with violent political encounters, peace journalism could act to “un-embed” seemingly immutable official positions from the greater context of a conflict by exploring the background to a conflict, challenging propaganda, and making visible official and local initiatives for peaceful conflict resolutions.

Journalistic agency versus media structure

Lynch argues that most journalistic work is “governed”, not “determined” by convention and structural factors arising from the economic and political interests of the news industry. Thus, journalists’ own self-awareness and efforts at reform can combine with mobilisations in civil society to challenge and supplement conventions.⁵

Despite misunderstandings and scepticism, the peace journalism model has become a source of practical options for journalists; a lead in to media monitoring for peace activists and offers a firm basis for drawing distinctions in content analysis by academic researchers.

Peace journalism with a gender lens

The Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 report shows that only 24% of the people heard or read about in print, radio and television news are female. In contrast, 76% – more than 3 out of 4 – of the people in the news are male. And news continues to portray a world in which men outnumber women in almost all occupational

categories, the highest disparity being in the professions. Meanwhile, high proportions of stories on peace (64%), development (59%) war (56%), and gender-based violence (56%) reinforce gender stereotypes.⁶ These findings confirm the imperative need to include women and integrate gender perspectives in the news media and journalistic profession, including peace journalism.

The genuine peace journalism model, of course, has an inherent gender perspective, which understands how gender relations play out. It is, therefore, better equipped to uncover the underlying roots of armed conflict and helps find solutions for lasting and sustainable peace from the locality and creativity, whether it be

at the grassroots, mid level or upper level or a combination.

Based on collaboration on the project “Women Making Airwaves for Peace” in 2007, two Philippine based women organisations – Isis International and Mindanao Women Writers, Inc. (Min-WoW) – developed “Engendered Peace Journalism: Keeping Community Whole – A Guide on Gender-Sensitive Peace and Conflict Reportage”.⁷ The following matrix is excerpted from this guide. The matrix is adapted from Professor Johan Galtung’s model, which re-frames Peace Journalism from widely practiced War/Violence Journalism in the 20th and 21st centuries.

War/Violence Journalism	Engendered Peace/Conflict Journalism
I. War/Violence-Orientated	I. Peace/Conflict Orientated
Focuses on conflict arena: 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war, general zero-sum orientation	Explores conflict formation x parties, y goals, z issues, general win-win orientation
Focuses on mostly male resource persons – military, head of state, governments, police as source of information	Explores how women and men of all parties are affected and included in win-win orientation
Closed space, closed time, causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone	Open space, open time, causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history and culture
Making wars opaque/secret	Making conflicts transparent
“Us-them” journalism, propaganda, voice for “us”	Giving voice to all parties, empathy, understanding
Sees “them” as the problem, focuses on who prevails in war	Sees conflict/war as problem, focuses on creativity
Reactive: waiting for violence	Pro-active: before any violence occurs, focuses on initiatives including those coming from the women
Focuses only on the visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)	Focuses on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture, marginalization of women and children)
Portrays women and children as helpless victims (see what “they” did to “our” women and children)	Portrays women as active contributors in conflict transformation and peace building
Dehumanizes “them”	Humanizes all side

War/Violence Journalism	Engendered Peace/Conflict Journalism
II. Propaganda-Orientated	II. Truth-Orientated
Exposes "their" untruths	Exposes untruths on all sides
Helps "our" cover-ups/lies	Uncovers all cover-ups
III. Elite-Orientated	III. People-Orientated
Focuses on "our" suffering; on able-bodied elite males being their mouthpiece	Focuses on suffering all over— on women, aged and children; giving voice to the voiceless
Gives name of their evil-doers	Gives names to all evildoers
Focuses on elite peacemakers, mostly men	Focuses on people peacemakers, heroes of nonviolence, including women
IV. Victory-Orientated	IV. Solution-Orientated
Peace = victory + ceasefire	Peace = non-violence + creativity
Conceals peace initiatives, before victory is on hand	Highlights peace initiatives, also to prevent more war
Focuses on treaty, institution, the controlled society	Focuses on structure, culture, the peaceful society
Aftermath: leaving for another war, return if the old flares up again	Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation (includes women's needs and participation), peacebuilding

Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick had outlined 17 tips for a peace journalist on what to do.⁸ In order to (re)frame stories with a gender lens, a journalist may consider the following questions when writing a story:

- Where are the women/girls in the story?
- How can gender information strengthen the story?
- What are the roles of the male and female subjects and how do these factors inform the issues and story?
- What are the power relationships between men and women, in the leadership of the conflict parties, in the negotiation panels, community structures, family structures?
- How do these roles and power relations further explain the issue?

- How are the impacts of events and processes written about in a specific story, different for women and for men?
- Where are the points of collaboration between genders? What are the common grounds and shared interests and needs?

Another useful tool to engender peace journalism is United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 unanimously adopted on October 31 2000, which marks the first time the Security Council addressed the impact of armed conflict on women, recognised the under-valued and under-utilised contributions of women to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace-building, and stressed the importance of their equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security. UNSCR1820 passed in June 2008, establishes a strong link between sexual violence and sustainable peace

and security. UNSCR1888 (30 September 2009) provides concrete building blocks to advance its implementation.

UNSCR1889 (5 October 2009) builds on the historic UNSCR 1325. It pays particular attention to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the immediate post-conflict peace-building period. These UN resolutions are binding on all UN member states. The media can play a role in monitoring the implementation of these resolutions as well as broaden and deepen the reportage:

- Ask for interviews with all parties to the conflict on the implementation of UNSCR1325 and other resolutions.
- Consult local women's organisations about their UNSCR 1325 monitoring processes and related demands.
- In peace or ceasefire negotiations, ask for the women's representation on negotiation panels. In case no women are represented on the negotiation panels of the different parties, ask what they intend to do about this.
- If national or international armed forces and/or peacekeeping forces are being deployed to a conflict area, ask them if they received any gender training on women's rights and UNSCRs.
- Ask the authorities of refugee camps and relocation sites how they address women's needs and rights as guaranteed by UNSCRs.
- If a peace agreement has been reached, ask how UNSCR 1325 is reflected in the agreement and how much money is allotted to its implementation.
- In post-conflict reconstruction, ask local government, peacekeeping forces and national and international relief organisations, if they trained their personnel in respect to women's rights and UNSCRs. And how they will meet women's needs and guarantee their full participation in post-conflict reconstruction as called by UNSCR 1325 and 1889.

Special attention must also be paid to the safety of journalists covering conflict situations, both

women and men, who are facing a real danger of physical injury and emotional stress.

Conclusion: peace journalism in new era

Media activism is activism that uses media and communication technologies to strengthen a social movement, and/or tries to change policies and practices relating to media and communication. As Lynch pointed out, "It means that peace journalism is possible, and realistic, here and now, for professional journalists, and it can become the focus of media activism."⁹

This is even more promising with the booming wave of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and rapid growth of community and independent media and civil journalism, which bring the voices and initiatives that are not being reported by mainstream or corporate media in the past. As recent revolutionary movements in Egypt and other Arab countries have so powerfully demonstrated, digital and social media have enabled essential information – via mobile phones, blogs, online social networks, satellite TV, wikis, and user-generated news, photos and videos – to reach people who otherwise would have been disenfranchised.

Meanwhile, collaboration between media and peace advocates, civil society organisations has been recognised as one of the effective strategies and introduced in many training modules on conflict prevention and peace-building, as well as being practiced by media organisations and civil society organisations.

Isis International, a feminist development communication organisation based in the Philippines, has conducted a series of workshops in the Asia-Pacific region for women community radio broadcasters, women community leaders, media professionals, peace advocates, women's human rights advocates and development workers on how to use various media and communication tools, including traditional media like community radio, popular theatre, film and new ICTs such as mobile phones and online social networking, to advocate for lasting peace and climate justice and the elimination of gender-based violence.¹⁰

The community radio station, Radio Purbanchal, in Nepal visited women victims of war and conflict. The visit was coupled with open discussions about the issues facing these women victims and how their rights can be ensured. The discussions initiated by Radio Purbanchal resulted in specific policy recommendations to

the State, including the provision of better and qualitative education to women victims, proper health care and employment opportunities, training and capacity building programmes. Through the initiative of Radio Purbanchal, women also organised to advocate for their rights and welfare.¹¹ ■

Endnotes

1. "Peace Journalism" from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Journalism#cite_note-2)
2. McGoldrick, A. & Lynch, J. (2001). *What is Peace Journalism*". In *"From Headlines to Front Lines: Media and Peacebuilding"*. *Activate: The Quarterly Journal of IMPACS. The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society, Vancouver, Canada.*
3. McGoldrick, A. & Lynch, J. (2005). *Peace Journalism*. London: Hawthorn Press.
4. Lynch, J. & Galtung, J. (2010). *Reporting Conflict: New Directions in Peace Journalism*. Queensland: University of Queensland Press.
5. Lynch, J. (2007). "Peace Journalism and its Discontents". In *Conflict & Communication Online*, Vol. 6, NO. 2. (<http://www.cco.regenerationonline.de>)
6. *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2010.. Published by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)*. <http://www.whomakesthenews.org/>
7. Lina, S. R. & Nicole, R. (2007). "Engendering Peace Journalism Keeping Community Whole – A Guide on Gender Sensitive Peace and Conflict Reportage". Published by Isis International and Mindanaw Women Writers, Inc. (Min-WoW). This Guide can be downloaded from Isis International website: www.isisinternational.org
8. Lynch, J. & McGoldrick, A. (2000). "Peace Journalism – How To Do It". (<http://www.mediachannel.org/originals/warandpeace2.shtml>)
9. Lynch, J. (2007). "Peace Journalism and its Discontents". In *Conflict & Communication Online*, Vol. 6, NO. 2. (<http://www.cco.regenerationonline.de>)
10. See Isis International website: www.isisinternational.org
11. Kadel, K. (2010). "A Radio by Women for Community: Radio Purbanchal in Nepal". In *"Converging Communications: Empowering Women, Transforming Communities"* Women in Action Magazine, 2010, issue. Published by Isis International. Manila, Philippines.

About the Author

Cai Yiping served as the Director of Isis International, from November 2008 to April 2011. Isis International is a non-governmental organization based in Philippines working through media and information and communications technologies (ICTs) towards achieving women's human rights and facilitating networking and information sharing of women's movements in the global South. Prior to joining Isis, Cai was Associate Professor at the Women's Studies Institute of China, and served as the Deputy Director of International News Department, China Women's News, Beijing. She writes extensively on the issue of women's human rights and actively involves in the media advocacy for women's rights in China and internationally. She was the national coordinator for China for WACC's Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 2000 and 2005 and regional coordinator for Southeast and East Asia for the "Global Report on the Status Women in the News Media", research conducted by International Women Media Foundation (IWMF) in 2009-10.