

Expanding Peace Journalism: Comparative and Critical Approaches

Edited by Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, Jake Lynch, and Robert A. Hackett

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A Book Review by

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Criticisms of the media's coverage of conflicts—that it is disproportionately violent, lacks context and diversity of views, and portrays a win/lose binary—have been well-documented. This type of coverage, war journalism, is endemic to increasingly consumerist and profit-driven media, and seriously calls into question the long-standing ethos of objectivity in journalism. Peace journalism, in response, offers a new approach which seeks out diverse accounts and perspectives in order to challenge elite discourse and journalistic conventions for the promotion of peace as a primary value. *Expanding Peace Journalism: Comparative and Critical Approaches*, edited by Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, Jake Lynch, and Robert A. Hackett (2011), explores this burgeoning, multi-faceted, and transdisciplinary field of research from the perspectives of a diverse range of international writers. Chapter authors present case studies, empirical research, and theoretical arguments to investigate the boundaries, applications, and limits of peace journalism in their respective fields. Challenging the epistemological foundations of traditional journalism, this book explains the emergence of peace journalism and its value as a counter-hegemonic paradigm. A running theme in this book is the need for a reconceptualization of the role of journalists from detached outsiders, to peace advocates, who are embedded in society.

Expanding Peace Journalism is divided into three sections. The first section conceptualizes peace journalism, contrasting it to war journalism, and examining the possibilities for peace journalism to transcend the traditional paradigm. The authors in this section explore the potential for cross-fertilization with other “challenger paradigms” (Hackett, in Shaw, Lynch & Hackett, 2011: 36), such as human rights journalism, communication rights movements, community media, and alternative media. For example, Ibrahim Seaga Shaw suggests, somewhat ambitiously, a new framework for peace journalism which extends it to include human rights. While promoting peace and human rights at the same time may seem contradictory—for example, during news coverage of humanitarian intervention—Shaw argues that peace journalism can benefit from human rights journalism's global reporting, favouring of vulnerable voices, proactive rather than reactive reporting, and compassion for victims. Additionally, human rights violations, if they even make the news, are typically explained as individual events and are not contextualized within the broader social and political structures that have produced conflict. Peace journalism addresses this need for contextualization, diverse views, and a focus on issues

which receive marginal attention in the news. Shaw's chapter, as with others in this section, emphasizes the shortfalls of the positivist and realist approach to journalism in the mainstream media—what is referred to as the “objectivity regime” (Hackett, in Shaw, Lynch & Hackett, 2011: 39) of modern journalism. Such a regime, Robert A. Hackett argues in his chapter, is at the core of war journalism, because it favours a detached, outsider role for journalists, which distances journalists from the consequences of their actions (or words). In this view, there are no self-evident facts which are simply reported on by neutral outsiders; rather, it is the journalist's role, embedded within communities and social processes, to ferret out different perspectives which enable public debate. The embeddedness of the journalist is particularly significant, because from it derives an ethic of responsibility—a running theme throughout this book and an idea central to peace journalism.

The following section presents lessons learned from case studies of the media's coverage of various conflicts, comparing news reportage with war and peace journalism, and suggesting new avenues for research and potential areas for re-examination and alteration of peace journalism's framework. Authors in this section suggest a number of ways that peace journalism's value can be heightened further, such as: expanding the scope of peace journalism to include photojournalism; refocusing peace journalism on alternative and local-level media instead of mainstream media; encompassing Pierre Bordieu's doxa—the media's blind spots, or what is not stated in conflict reporting—in peace journalism; focusing on all stages of a conflict, rather than reporting once violence has started; extending the peace journalism model methodologically by incorporating critical discourse analysis; ensuring that peace journalism covers not only marginal views, but marginal conflicts; and viewing and reporting on peace as a process, rather than a deal. Chapters in this section promote scientific rigour and thorough analysis within peace journalism through the various methods they employed, including case studies, critical discourse analysis, and quantitative content analysis.

The final section highlights promising areas for change in journalism, and provides compelling support for the role of peace journalism in the fight against consumerist and government-driven media alike. For example, Jake Lynch assesses the possibility for peace journalism to bring together diverse social movements, which coalesce around media activism as a common goal. Using the controversial Australian public broadcasting system's approach to coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict as an example, Lynch describes a setting in which Muslim communities and media activists had common ground to push for media reforms. Providing a much-needed bridge between peace journalism and gender studies, Elissa J. Tivona's chapter calls attention to the gendered assumptions typical of mainstream news discourse, and stresses the need for peace journalism to expand coverage of the peace building efforts of women, whose agency is often overlooked and historically marginalized. She argues that compassion, humanness, and empathy in reporting which all underlie peace journalism are exemplified in the peace efforts of women, and must be emphasized in order to break free of historically and politically constituted masculine structures of journalism which tend to foster the production of war journalism.

Given the transdisciplinary and multi-faceted nature of peace journalism, *Expanding Peace Journalism* appropriately offers diverse writings, conceptualizing peace journalism in relation to varying fields, such as peace and conflict studies, human rights scholarship, social movements, alternative media, pedagogy, gender studies, development journalism, and even psychotherapy. While providing a thorough account of peace journalism research is certainly beyond the scope or ability of any single text, there are some noticeable omissions. While in the

introduction, the editors suggest that peace journalism has emerged largely out of the rise in digital journalism and the use of ICT's (fuelling social movements and largely involved in the Arab Spring), there is significantly little discussion of how digital journalism and social media may promote, hinder, or interact with peace journalism's goals. Much of the focus is on mainstream and alternative media, but primarily radio stations, newspapers, and television news, rather than on interactive platforms such as Web 2.0. Additionally, it is difficult to credit the book with being global in perspective, given the relatively little discussion on peace journalism in the Middle East, and the prominence of conflict and potential avenues for alternative media there, as noted in the book, such as Al-Jazeera or social media, to effect changes in journalism. Lastly, while the ethic of responsibility is discussed explicitly in many chapters, as well as implied in others, as central to peace journalism, a chapter devoted to the links between various ethical theories and peace journalism, would have been helpful to include in this book. However, given how vast the field is, *Expanding Peace Journalism* certainly offers an excellent account of peace journalism, providing much-needed empirical and critical research, and is particularly valuable for students and scholars wanting to understand the state of the art and the seemingly limitless possibilities for future studies in peace journalism.

About the Reviewer

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