

## Chapter 6

### Oligarchy reloaded and pirate media: the state of peace journalism in Guatemala<sup>1</sup>

*Lioba Suchenwirth and Richard Lance Keeble*

This chapter presents a case study of the state of peace journalism (PJ) in Guatemala, based on the critical assumption that analysts need to broaden the definition of PJ to encompass current local level and alternative media initiatives. It investigates current PJ in Guatemala through interviews with those who analyse the media (media experts), produce the media (journalists and volunteers), and those whose representation in the media is essential for the Guatemalan peace process (indigenous groups). While profound racism and a violent environment hamper peace journalistic work for both mainstream and alternative outlets, the chapter argues that the opening for media for the people and by the people in Guatemala is to be found within alternative channels rather than commercial outlets.

#### What is PJ?

Peace journalism is a normative journalistic school critiquing mainstreaming 'war journalism' as introduced by Johan Galtung in 1965 (see Lynch & McGoldrick 2005, p6). By using conflict analysis techniques in reporting, its main purpose lies in both mapping out and actively supporting peaceful solutions to conflict. Rather than modelling its reports on sports journalism with its zero-sum games and focus on who is winning or losing, Galtung suggests that the PJ approach should be modelled on health journalism, which does not focus merely on

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, 8(1): 44–52.

disease, but also on possible ways to overcome it (Galtung 2002, p259). The core of the theory is formed by an awareness of conflict dynamics and an understanding that no information can be neutral.

According to PJ theory, every time a report goes public, it has an impact on the particular conflict. By reporting in a manner that gives undue attention to violence, journalists' reports may actually spawn a new chain of violent behaviour in a perpetuating feedback loop (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005). Consequently, PJ will be 'intended outcome programming' used as a tool for transforming attitudes, promoting reconciliation, putting the conflict sides together for resolution, maintaining 'a duty for journalists to use their potential for mediation between conflict parties' (see also Spurk 2002, p16), thus emphasising the responsibilities of journalistic actors to respond in ways that are supposed to maximise the chances for peace (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005).

While the definition of PJ provided by Lynch and McGoldrick (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005, p5) remains vague, making it very hard to measure PJ outcomes, they provide a clear list of practical/professional activities for peace journalists, comprising four major elements (based on Galtung 2002, p6). Reporting is:

- *peace/conflict-orientated*, making conflicts transparent, and, as such, is exploring conflict formation, proactive in the prevention of violence and empathetically humanising of all sides
- *truth-orientated*, exposing cover-ups on all sides
- *people-orientated*, focusing on giving voice to the voiceless and people peacemakers
- *solution-orientated*, highlighting peace initiatives, focusing on structure, culture, the peaceful society as well as resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation.

In contrast, core elements of war journalism are seen to be:

- *war/violence-orientated*, focusing on the conflict arena and a zero-sum orientation, 'us-them' journalism, dehumanisation, making

## Expanding peace journalism

wars opaque and reactively waiting for violent incidents before reporting

- *propaganda-orientated*, exposing 'their untruths' and helping 'our' cover-ups
- *elite-orientated*, focusing on able-bodied elite males, and on elite peacemakers
- *victory-orientated*, with coverage focusing on treaties, institutions and the controlled society (Galtung 2002).

### *Critiquing the elite tradition in PJ theory*

Despite critiquing elite-orientated journalism, a dominant characteristic of peace journalism theory focuses on the possibilities for transforming professional routines. Dov Shinar and Wilhelm Kempf, in their seminal work *Peace journalism: the state of the art* (2007) draw together some of the leading theorists in the field – virtually all of whom concentrate on professional issues, only occasionally acknowledging any 'alternative' outlet. Susan Dente Ross, for instance (in Shinar & Kempf 2007, pp53–74) ends an extraordinarily detailed and exhaustive review of the PJ literature with a passing reference to 'independent, self-critical media' (such as [www.IndyMedia.org](http://www.IndyMedia.org)) and an emphasis on the 'norms of professional ethics and objectivity'. She calls for a 'journalism of symbolic rapprochement' involving a transformation of 'the images of the self and the others' to end intractable, essentialist, cultural conflicts. But no 'revolutionary' changes are needed. She concludes that 'peace journalism does not involve any radical departure from contemporary journalism practice. Rather peace journalism requires numerous subtle and cumulative shifts in seeing, thinking, sourcing, narrating and financing the news'.

In the final chapter, Dov Shinar (2007, pp199–210) outlines the conclusions of a two-year project by the peace journalism group of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research. His priorities, too, are largely in the professional journalistic realm. Listing 'four promises of peace journalism', his first is 'professional improvement'. Peace journalism, he says, 'might change the seemingly inherent contradiction between the nature of peace stories and the professional demands

of journalists' (Shinar 2007, p201). His fourth promise is to widen 'scholarly and professional media horizons' away from 'functionalism, hard core Marxism and technological determinism'.

We argue that this dominant strand of PJ theory focuses too closely on the notion of journalism as a privileged, professional activity and fails to take into account the critical intellectual tradition which locates professions historically and politically, seeing them as essentially occupational groupings with a legal monopoly of social and economic opportunities in the marketplace, underwritten by the state. Parkin (1979) and Collins (1990) explore the notion of social closure, according to which occupations seek to regulate market conditions in their favour by restricting access to a limited group of eligible professionals. Such a notion of closure can also help to explain the ideologies of professionalism and 'objectivity', which largely exclude alternative, campaigning, social media from the definition of 'journalism' (Illich 1973).

*Need for a radical redefinition of PJ theory*

Contrary to Dente Ross (see above), we argue that PJ theory does, in fact, need to embrace a radical political analysis of the media and society. This will incorporate an awareness of the possibilities of journalistic activities both within and outside the corporate media and as part of a broader political project to democratise the media and society in general (Hackett & Carroll 2006). The strategy will also ultimately involve a radical broadening of the definition of journalism to include intellectuals, campaigners and citizens – each articulating their ideas within the dominant, and alternative, global public spheres.

While alternative media can consist of very diverse groups and organisations, they can be explicitly partisan, characterised by efforts to disclose issues of exclusion, elite-bias and gaps in information left by the mainstream by providing room for alternative views and a voice to those who are not otherwise heard (Atton & Hamilton 2008, pp79, 86; Harcup 2007, p85). They are seen to 'challenge accepted news values and ethical frameworks of mainstream media' (Harcup 2007, p127), thus creating important counter-public spheres (Fraser 1993 cited in Keeble 2009, p197). Alternative media are often linked to identity and community building, according to Atton and Hamilton (2008, p122):

## Expanding peace journalism

the strength of alternative media lie not only in their counter-information role but also in the provision of opportunities for ordinary people to tell their own stories, and to reconstruct their culture and identity using their own symbols, signs and language. In this way, they challenge social codes, validate identities and empower themselves and their communities.

Thus PJ can learn from development journalism, which has long argued for a transformation from imposition to collaboration. In her theory of citizens' media, Clemencia Rodriguez writes: 'Only when citizens take their destiny in their own hands and shape it using their own cultures and strengths will peace and social change be viable. In both cases power has diffused from being concentrated in a few experts into the everyday lives and cultures of civil society' (Rodriguez 2000, p150). It is the citizens' media, not the news media, which, in her opinion, can 'give voice to the voiceless', foster empowerment, connect isolated communities, foster conscientisation and serve as alternative sources of information (Rodriguez 2000, p151). She is convinced that peace media can learn from citizens' media – and address a gap which peace journalism has so far not addressed appropriately.

## Historic role of alternative peace media

When talking about peacebuilding within a society, it is, then, the local media which are of special importance, because they are concerned most directly with the communication between the different military antagonists and civil groups (see, for example, Blondel 2004). Historically, alternative peace media have played crucial roles in progressive struggles across the globe.

Following are several examples of the role of media in such struggles. Informal underground communication networks and the role of newspapers such as the *Sowetan* were crucial in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s (Downing 2005, pp150–53). Jonathan Neale (2001, pp122–30), in his seminal study of the Vietnam War, identified around 300 anti-war newspapers in the armed services during the course of the conflict. From 1963

to 1983, the Bolivian miners' radio stations highlighted the rights of workers. In Poland during the 1980s, alternative publications of the Polish Roman Catholic Church and the *samizdat* publications of the solidarity movement played crucial roles in the movement against the Soviet-backed government of the day (Atton 2009, p269). In Nicaragua during the 1980s and 1990s, the Movement of Popular Correspondents produced reports by non-professional, voluntary reporters from poor rural areas that were published in regional and national newspapers – and they helped inspire revolutionary education and political activities. In the 1990s, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan bravely reported on the abuse and execution of women under the Taliban by producing audio cassettes, videos, a website and a magazine (Atton 2009, p269). This century we have seen much use made of websites by reformist movements in Burma and more recently (with Twitter, Flickr, Facebook and YouTube) in Iran (Kirkpatrick 2009; Garton Ash 2009). Similarly, in Peru in 2009, indigenous activists used Twitter and YouTube to highlight human rights abuses as more than 50 000 Amazonians demonstrated and went on strike in protest over US–Peru trade laws that threatened to open up ancestral territories to exploitation by multinational companies (Schnieter 2009).

#### *Crucial political impact of peace media*

A sustainable peace can only be built when implicated local groups are willing to contribute. It is in the local settings that the soft power<sup>2</sup> of the media can completely fulfil its potential. This is because peacebuilding efforts must have as an overarching goal 'to enhance the indigenous capacity of a society to manage conflict without violence' (Schnieter 2009). This necessitates that 'external support for peace building is an adjunct to local peace building efforts and not a substitute for them' (Howard et al. 2003, p24). Wolfsfeld (2004, pp11–14) proposes four major types of political impact by local media on peace processes. Media:

- define the political atmosphere;
- influence the nature of debates;

---

2 Soft power is a phrase coined by Joseph Nye to describe a power that is not physical, but works on the basis of persuasion (2004).

## Expanding peace journalism

influence the strategies and behaviour of the antagonists; and  
raise or lower the public standing of antagonists.

### PJ initiatives in Guatemala: historical context

Fifteen years after the end of Guatemala's infamously brutal civil war, armed groups and clandestine security networks have merged with criminal organisations deeply entrenched in state institutions. Murders and death threats to civil society activists undermine democracy, and homicide rates have almost doubled since 2000. The UN development report comments: 'To put it bluntly: Central America is the most violent region of the World, with the exception of those regions where some countries are at war or are experiencing severe political violence' (United Nations Development Programme 2010, p14).

Meanwhile, international actors such as the World Bank, Organization of American States, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, religious organisations as well as numerous NGOs and state development agencies have been heavily involved in the country's affairs, though the effects of their efforts remain dubious. Poverty rates remain at 51 percent, with 34 percent living in extreme poverty. Twenty-three percent of children are malnourished. At least 26 percent of the population is illiterate (World Bank 2010). Indigenous people, mainly Mayan groups, are affected the most, because although they make up the demographic majority, they are excluded politically, socially, economically and culturally.<sup>3</sup> In short, the civil war is over, but violence and the underlying causes of the conflict continue to exist.

The signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords in December 1996 marked the official end of a 36-year conflict between army and guerrilla groups. A CIA-sponsored coup had overthrown the democratically

---

3 Statistics concerning Guatemala are considered to be extremely unreliable for a variety of reasons, yet Mayans are believed to number about six million people, meaning that by all accounts they comprise one half or more of the total population (Handy 2002). In addition, there are around 2000 Xinca (a different indigenous group) and 4000 Garifuna, whose ancestors were African slaves settling on the Caribbean coast at the end of the 19th century.

elected government in 1954, justifying the intervention in the light of a US Cold War interventionist strategy to contain the 'communist menace'. Land reforms seeking to redistribute unused land from large holdings to landless peasants were immediately reversed. Reformist dissidents were gradually eliminated as civil society was destroyed through targeted repression by the subsequent military dictatorship. Receiving extensive military and economic assistance from the US, Guatemala became a security state *par excellence*.

The consequent civil war took a tremendously heavy toll: a minimum of 200 000 deaths, in addition to 40 000 people who 'disappeared' after being arrested. More than 400 villages were destroyed; 200 000 people were forced to flee to neighbouring Mexico, and, of Guatemala's 10 million inhabitants, about one million were displaced internally (Handy 2002; Carey 2004, p70). Around 93 percent of the killings were inflicted by the army, according to the Guatemalan truth commission. As over 83 percent of the dead were Mayans, the army had committed 'acts of genocide' since they 'contemplated the total or partial extermination of the group' (Handy 2003, p279). Although the conflict had its origins in Cold War ideological differences, it soon took on distinct ethnic dimensions.

Clearly, the rift between the population of European descent (and those who could adopt a European identity), so-called Ladinos, and the majority indigenous population did not appear overnight. Shortly after the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in 1524, Spanish distinctiveness was sharply separated from 'Indian' identity through the provision of different rights. During centuries to come, racism was rife, while political indigenous identification was discouraged at best and brutally suppressed at worst (Colop 1996; Watanabe 2000). 'To be indigenous was to be treated as the dangerous "Other" who had to be kept under control – if necessary by all means' (Warren 2003, p108).

*Elite-focus in the Guatemala mainstream media scene: it's a family thing*

Media ownership in Guatemala is marked (and marred) by monopoly, which both perpetuates the oligarchic system and prevents democratic change (Monzon 2010; Rockwell & Janus 2001). Monzon speaks of an



‘ideological embrace’ between media and company interests (2010, p60) and concludes: ‘They are [primarily] companies, not communication media’ (Monzon 2010, p59).

All of Guatemala’s national newspapers<sup>4</sup> are owned by two competing news groups, both of which are affiliated with the famous 20: elite Guatemalan families who control the country’s major sources of income and wield considerable political influence (Casaus Arzu 2002). In addition, there is a ‘monopoly of gate-keeping’ within the media (Silvio Gramajo, personal interview, 2010). One example is the family Marroquin, who own the smaller publishing group. In addition, both the editor of *Prensa Libre*, the biggest broadsheet in the country, and the editor of another broadsheet, *El Periodico*, are Marroquin relatives. ‘They are not [a] very powerful family as such, but it looks as if they might soon have the entire print output under control’ (Silvio Gramajo, personal interview, 2010). While the Guatemalan readership is low, due to the country’s high illiteracy rates, newspaper influence among the elites is deemed to be considerable (Silvio Gramajo, personal interview, 2010). This underlines a clear *elite-focus* as described in Lynch and McGoldrick’s critique of war journalism (2005, p6) – that news is written by elites for elites, and reflects elite standpoints.

Infamously, the Mexican Angel Gonzalez (nicknamed ‘the Angel of Democracy’), brother-in-law of the former minister of communication, owns all four commercial TV licences, as well as the main radio news channel, Radio Sonora, and a large portion of the commercial radio stations. When journalist and social scientist Gustavo Berganza wrote of favours exchanged between Gonzalez and certain politicians, he was made ‘the target of a relentless attack of the news programs of the “national” TV channels owned by this Mexican’ (*Guatemala Times* 2008). In a personal interview, Berganza (2010) said: ‘[Angel

---

4 Cooperacion de Noticias owns the broadsheet *Siglo Veintiuno* as well as the tabloid *Al Dia*. They are in fierce competition with the other, larger group, a news conglomerate controlling the biggest-selling broadsheet *Prensa Libre* and which also holds the most successful tabloid *Nuestro Diario*, as well as *El Periodico*, another broadsheet. In addition, the Prensa Libre group owns *El Quetzalteco*, Quetzaltenango’s bi-weekly regional paper – the biggest regional in the country.

Gonzalez] doesn't distort reality as such, making up news that [is] pure government propaganda, but he omits information that could harm [the government]', clearly indicating that the Gonzalez's news coverage is both *elite-orientated* and *propaganda-orientated* (see Lynch & McGoldrick 2005, p6).

Radio ownership is similarly concentrated among a few major groups which mainly repeat the news broadcast by Radio Sonora, or printed in newspapers with allegiance to the Catholic and evangelical churches and the state. Due to the high illiteracy rate, radio is of particular importance, and more than 90 percent of the population of Central America is exposed to radio on a daily basis (Rockwell & Janus, cited in Salzman & Salzman 2010, p8).

Regional journalists often work parttime in public relations for local authorities, and parttime as correspondents for media in the capital, since the media organisations do not pay them sufficiently (Gramajo, personal interview, 2010). Hence journalists do not appear to stay in the profession for very long, as they receive low wages and have few career opportunities (Berganza, personal interview, 2010). A recent government drive saw the recruitment of large number of former mainstream journalists to government media outlets to increase the quality of their output (Berganza, personal interview, 2010). Consequently, the newspaper *Diario de Centro América* and various radio stations have had a strong rise in popularity. Silvio Gramajo elaborates:

[At present] the government is putting [in place structures] for the formation of government media: they are calling them public media, but I doubt that. I think they are government media, yet with a different vision. In this country government media were imminently pro-government; propaganda. But now they also report from a different view. To put [it] simply, there is journalistic work now, when before it was propaganda work. Is it not the best [journalism possible]? Probably. But it exists. That is a step forward. (Personal interview, 2010)

## Expanding peace journalism

A positive side-effect of the media's increased popularity and wider reach is that the government is less dependent on placing advertisements with commercial media to distribute official information, thus making them less vulnerable to corruption and favouritism (Berganza, personal interview, 2010). In PJ terminology, Guatemala's mainstream media consequently focus on elite orientation and propaganda orientation. Their coverage is both war/violence-orientated and victory-orientated in the sense that they focus on treaties, institutions and the elite of society.

### *Proactive peace reporting in the alternative media: pirates, priests and communists*

One distinguishing feature of peace/conflict-orientated reporting is its proactive approach, and its giving of a voice to all parties. Although the right to indigenous and participatory media is actually part of the Guatemala Peace Accords signed in 1996, community radio stations are illegal, if they have not competed for their frequency in regular commercial auctions, which they can hardly ever afford. Yet there are more than 800 self-declared community radio stations in the country. Some promote mainly missionary content rather than news, such as the evangelical stations in association with Radio Cultural (Sywulka, personal interview, 2010). Others are essentially commercial pirate radio stations with local reach. Yet according to Martina Richards, country director of the German national development agency DED, community radio is at present the best media outlet for Guatemala, because 'it's where its audience is' (personal interview, 2010).

During the conflict, community radio was used both by guerrilla groups to keep in touch with their fighters and supporters as well as a nonviolent means of opposition (Viscidi 2004; Randall 1993, p633). Former broadcaster with legendary guerrilla radio station La Voz Popular, Tino Recinos is now coordinating Mujb'ab'l yol, a network of 205 community radio stations. Programs focus on human, indigenous and children's rights, freedom of speech, and other social and political themes and are conducted in indigenous languages as well as Spanish (personal interview, 2010). Mujb'ab'l yol sees its role clearly as proactive community-building. Its website states:

From our point of view a means of communication shouldn't just be about distributing and sharing information but rather it should be orientated around getting close to the community it serves. In this way it can supply the conditions needed to benefit society as a whole in terms of increased community awareness and cohesion. Establishing members of radio stations and other people as pillars of the community, who can promote progressive change, means leaving behind the image of just being distributors of information to being progressive activists who promote development within the community. (2010)

The network is peace/conflict-orientated in that it aims to open spaces for all, especially marginalised groups, exploring conflict formation, the prevention of violence, and the humanisation of stories. It is solution-orientated since much of its coverage highlights peace initiatives, focusing on culture, and in particular on peaceful society initiatives such as resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation (these fit with the elements suggested by Lynch & McGoldrick 2005, p6).

One of the biggest problems community radio is facing in Guatemala is that there exists no clear definition of what a community radio station is. The stations are too divided among themselves, which will make it hard for them to get legislation passed. This is why most community stations remain illegal to this day, according to Gramajo (personal interview, 2010). In terms of alternative television, the former military channel was given to the Academy of Mayan languages as part of the Peace Accords, and is now known as TV Maya. Expectations and demand were high, yet TV Maya is currently being kept in an economic limbo, as – being a public channel – it is not allowed to sell advertising space, yet it receives little public funding and cannot broadcast beyond its neighbourhood.

A rather more successful venture is the independent periodical *EntreMundos*, a free magazine aiming to publish 'news and commentary on human rights and development in Guatemala'. Originating as a society magazine in Quetzaltenango, its current focus vastly increased its popularity and readers can now be found all over Guatemala. Theme-specific issue subjects include mining (May and June 2010), education (July and August 2010), and gender (March and April 2010), and its

## Expanding peace journalism

2000 copies are distributed in cafes, universities and libraries, as well as through the internet. Valeria Ayerdi, editor of *EntreMundos*, elaborates on the magazine's agenda:

[I want] to give a voice to news you normally wouldn't see or wouldn't notice ... You see I read the newspapers every day, and I take important news that I know the normal media won't cover and we publish it ... and sometimes small news become big articles for us ... In the mainstream, you see indigenous people just being used, or see them as patronising postcards, but they don't really tell about the story of those [people]. And we are focused; whenever we talk about a project or something from indigenous people or rural areas, we try to show the human side of them. (personal interview, 2010)

According to Ayerdi, *EntreMundos* is actively encouraging its readership to contribute articles. Yet talking about terms such as freedom or civil liberties is difficult, as they are often associated with communism. 'I want to be critical about both sides, both left and right, so that they can see that the fact that you are criticising and that you are talking about human rights doesn't mean that you are a communist' (Valeria Ayerdi, personal interview, 2010).

Again, clear links to PJ elements are apparent. *EntreMundos*' proactive approach, focuses on giving voice to all parties, and humanising of all sides shows a peace/conflict-oriented reporting, while the wish to expose untruths on all sides shows a truth-orientation. The magazine's focus is people-oriented in that it is giving voice to those 'rarely seen in the news', and it has a clear solution-orientation in its choice of topics.

Unsurprisingly, funding is a major point of concern for alternative media outlets. The axiom that 'community media lack power, because they lack economic power' (Evelyn Blanck, personal interview, 2010) was expressed commonly in interviews conducted for this chapter, especially by those who work in and with alternative media. Lucia Escobar, for example, laments that while her project, Radio Ati, is trying to change Guatemalan society as a whole, she often does not even have the fare to send a journalist to report from the next village

(personal interview, 2010). A lack of funding for alternative media means that their employees need to have second and third jobs. These might affect their journalistic output, or vice versa. Valeria Ayerdi tells of the repercussions of her journalistic work for her second job, teaching English. After publishing an *EntreMundos* edition on mining, a particularly sensitive subject in Guatemala, she was called into the principal's office. Parents were apparently concerned about what she was teaching their children. She was given an official warning and told to stick 'only to teaching English' (personal interview, 2010).

However, besides these findings, interviewees also recounted some positive side-effects of economic pressure. Indeed, the tight financial situation appears to increase collaboration between activists. Julia Cajas, coordinator for AMOIXQUIC, an NGO for indigenous women's rights, explained how she turned to a community radio station to broadcast AMOIXQUIC's women's rights program, since AMOIXQUIC had no money to pay for space in a commercial station. Community radio makers taught the women how to produce a program and distributed the results using their wide network of community stations. Since the organisation had no funds to produce professional material, the women had to produce the shows themselves. 'It was problematic because I too didn't know how to do many of these things, but still we managed and that has more value than anything else because we learned it by doing it and between the women there were a lot of skills and originality'. Women did not only acquire more skills, but also gained self-esteem, Cajas said (personal interview, 2010). This precarious economic situation also has the potential to foster an increased sense of ownership and community for those involved, according to volunteer coordinator Ruben Dominguez. When the community radio station *Doble Via* had to raise 4000 Quetzales for equipment, the bill was footed by its 37 volunteers. This increased the sense, within the community, that the station belonged to them (Ruben Dominguez, personal interview, 2010).

*'Us' versus 'them' journalism: racism and indigenous inclusion in the Guatemalan media*

Racism in the media was rampant during and before the civil war. While certain expressions are no longer used after the Peace Accords of 1996, there was little inclusion of indigenous identity in the written mainstream press ten years later (Suchenwirth 2006). This is even more evident in the case of indigenous women (Tubin Sotz 2007). Even in political advertisements aimed at Mayans, indigenous people play subordinate roles (Conolly-Ahern & Castells i Talens 2010). Amilcar Davila, the director of a comprehensive study of the Guatemalan media over the last three years, conducted by Rafael Landivar University, has concluded:

The racism has transformed a lot. But it does not disappear, it adapts, it camouflages. Very few people would now say strong insults in public... but is this progress? ... You can see it very well when there is a crisis of sort[s], let's say a demonstration. Nobody is a racist until there is a crisis ... and [then] everything comes out: [They say that the indigenous people] are behind the times, they don't want progress, they don't think about the future etc ... For me the biggest topic, more than the insults and stereotypes, which do still happen, is the exclusion of indigenous people. They are not covered. Not [even] important topics, not their points of view. They don't even think about them. The discourse goes in a different way ... The news is not aimed at them. (Amilcar Davila, personal interview, 2010)

According to a content analysis of Guatemalan media conducted by the university, an average of only six percent of all newspaper articles mention indigenous people or issues, and those mentions mostly have negative connotations such as that indigenous people are implicated in local conflicts, human rights issues and racism problems (Tubin et al. 2010). It was difficult for professional journalists to accept the outcome of the university's study.

One reason mainstream journalists give is that the country is racist, so therefore the media will be racist, and that if sources are racist,

that translates to the article. But this, they claim, is not the journalists' fault. (Amilcar Davila, personal interview, 2010)

Davila's statement describes the classic perpetuating feedback loop examined by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005). However, interviewees for this chapter agreed that there had been improvements in employment policy, with more journalistic openings for indigenous people, even though they may not always campaign on indigenous causes. As Mayan professor of anthropology, Lina Barrios, comments:

We have had some success in the promotion of indigenous identity [in the last five years]; for example, now there are TV programs which talk about the meaning of the Mayan calendar. This is some progress, but there is no significant progress. (Lina Barrios, personal interview, 2010)

### Constraints to freedom of speech: security

PJ critique is firmly based within a human rights approach to news coverage, making freedom of speech an integral part of the theory. Closed spaces and opaque wars are core elements of war/violence-orientated reporting. Legally, freedom of speech is part of the Guatemalan constitution, though Salzman and Salzman conclude, 'Media freedom is protected only in law. Even the application of that legal protection is not guaranteed' (2010, p10). Guatemala is regularly featured among the most dangerous countries to work as a journalist. In particular, threats related to drug trafficking and organised crime are having a serious impact on freedom of speech, as self-censorship is pervasive. Three journalists were killed in 2009 (CERIGUA 2010). Media outlets in the interior are particularly targeted. One common explanation is the increased visibility of the journalist. Cesar Perez Mendez, chief editor of *El Quetzalteco* (the largest regional newspaper in Guatemala) recounts:

Here in the region, they have killed journalists. There is one well-known case of Jorge Merida whom they killed when he was at home writing a news article [in 2008]. We have had complicated issues regarding the topic of safety here at the *Quetzalteco*. We have received death threats. Last month one of our editors quit her job, because she



## Expanding peace journalism

felt threatened, and it was true, they were threatening her, and also the director of the newspaper, with death threats. So she said: 'I'd rather go home and be alive and [not] expose myself'. These are things which one can't see, but the journalism in the regions suffers. (Cesar Perez Mendez, personal interview, 2010)

There is a consensus among those interviewed for this chapter that solely politically motivated threats seem to have given way to those stemming from a general sense of insecurity in the country (such as organised crime). Valeria Ayerdi states that for publishing *EntreMundos*, 'ten years ago, I would have been killed'. She described relations with the police now as passive aggressive (Valeria Ayerdi, personal interview, 2010). Yet, it is this same violent climate and the associated widespread impunity that makes threats based on political differences even easier to extend. For example, feminist journalist Lucia Escobar reveals she has received a public death threat from a member of the Catholic Church after writing a column about women's reproductive rights (personal interview, 2010). Evelyn Blanck, director of NGO Centro Civitas, tells of an office burglary, despite the office being in a compound guarded constantly by security guards, as well as having its own security guard. The only things stolen were the NGO's computer hard drives and a USB-stick, with everything else left behind (personal interview, 2010).

Conversely, Gramajo warns that many of the journalists working in the media now were around during or directly after the war, in which politically motivated violence against journalists was common. He speaks of the myth of the 'hero journalist', and is not sure of how many threats are bona fide. In addition, he thinks journalists may actively seek danger. 'Some might even say: "I want to die in service" and they go for whatever there is ... There can be a lack of consciousness' (personal interview, 2010).

Violence is not only directed *at* journalists, but can also stem *from* the media. Tino Recinos recounts how a visitor from a commercial radio station threatened to shut down the community station Doble Via, since they were a pirate station. Doble Via broadcast this threat – and asked for support from the population. When the visitor from the

commercial station returned, there were about three hundred people waiting for him, armed with machetes and stones, ready to kill him. Recinos called the police and warned that the situation could get out of hand, while trying to calm the irate listeners. 'He realised what was going on and tried to escape, but they caught him. He was scared. In the end, he signed a paper that the commercial station would leave us in peace, and we have not heard from them since' (Tino Recinos, personal interview, 2010).

*PJ in Guatemala: it ain't what it says on the box*

Peace journalism in Guatemala has been examined in this chapter as seen through the eyes of those who analyse the media (media experts), produce the media (journalists and volunteers), and those whose representation in the media is essential for the peace process (indigenous groups). We have attempted to test our assumption that analysts need to broaden the definition of PJ to encompass current local-level media initiatives, and two main points of critique have been highlighted.

In conducting a case study of the state of PJ in present day Guatemala, we looked at the political economy of the mainstream media in Guatemala and different alternative media outlets, and then explored two features that are distinctive of the Guatemalan situation: racism and security. Mainstream media appear far too involved with the Guatemalan oligarchy and too absorbed by economic goals to reflect alternative viewpoints, thus failing to give a voice to disenfranchised groups such as Guatemala's indigenous people. While there are examples of good journalism and voices of dissent, mainstream media output can hardly count as PJ, and is, in fact, mostly counterproductive to peace building in post-conflict Guatemala.

Alternative media are aiming to fill this gap. Community radio stations such as the Mujb'ab'l yol network are actively promoting human rights and social change while giving voice to those least heard. Situated within small communities, the stations have ideal access to local knowledge and cultural codes. However, community radio efforts are threatened by their legal situation and lack of definition. Since every station can be a self-declared 'community radio', news value for peace has to be scrutinised carefully in each individual case.

## Expanding peace journalism

Indeed, as described by Recinos and others, on occasion, community stations may even incite violence. TV Maya has so far failed to reach out to its audience. *EntreMundos* appears the most successful project so far, as it is constantly growing, focusing more and more on peace journalistic issues such as proactive reporting, inclusion of minorities, and exposing untruths on all sides. The country's high illiteracy rate, however, means that the magazine is not for all. Profound racism and a violent environment hamper peace journalistic work even further for both mainstream and alternative outlets.

Yet despite these difficulties, the opening for media for the people and by the people in Guatemala is to be found within alternative channels rather than commercial outlets. The success of *EntreMundos* and the ever-increasing number of community radio stations tells of the population's interest. Peace journalism emphasises the moral responsibility of media involved in conflict. It is the people who should be able to recognise themselves in their media – expressing their own voice to determine their fate.

## References

- Atton, Chris & James Hamilton (2008). *Alternative journalism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Blondel, Yvla Isabelle (2004). International media get the most attention, but don't ignore local media in defusing conflict. In Barry James & UNESCO. *Media Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction* (pp27–31). Paris: UNESCO.
- Carey, David (2004). Maya perspectives on the 1999 referendum in Guatemala: ethnic equality rejected? *Latin American Perspectives*, 139(3/6): 69–95.
- Casaus Arzu, Marta (2002). *La metamorfosis del racismo en Guatemala*. 3rd edn. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- CERIGUA. (2010). *Estado de situacion de la libertated de expresion 2009*. CERIGUA: Guatemala. [Online]. Available: [cerigua.info/nuke/especiales/](http://cerigua.info/nuke/especiales/)

informe\_primer\_semestre\_2009\_estado\_situacion\_de\_la\_libertad\_de\_expression\_en\_guatemala.pdf [Accessed 10 November 2010].

Colop, Sam Enrique (1996). The discourse of concealment and 1992. In Edward Fisher & R McKenna Brown (Eds). *Maya cultural activism in Guatemala* (pp146–56). Austin: University of Texas.

Connolly-Ahern, Colleen & Antoni Castells i Talens (2010). The role of indigenous peoples in Guatemalan political advertisements: an ethnographic content analysis. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 3(3): 310–33.

Downing, John (2005). Activist media, civil society and social movements. In Wilma de Jong, Martin Shaw & Neil Stammers (Eds). *Global activism, global media* (pp149–64). London: Pluto Press.

Fraser, Nancy (1993). Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In Bruce Robbins (Ed). *The phantom public sphere* (pp1–32). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Garton Ash, Timothy (2009). Twitter counts more than armouries in this new politics of people power, *Guardian*, 18 June 2009. [Online]. Available: [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jun/17/iran-election-protests-twitter-students](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jun/17/iran-election-protests-twitter-students) [Accessed 26 July 2011].

*Guatemala Times* (2008). In solidarity to Guatemalan journalist Gustavo Berganza, *Guatemala Times*, December 16, 2008. [Online]. Available: [www.guatemala-times.com/news/guatemala/644-in-solidarity-to-guatemalan-journalist-gustavo-berganza.html](http://www.guatemala-times.com/news/guatemala/644-in-solidarity-to-guatemalan-journalist-gustavo-berganza.html) [Accessed 26 July 2011].

Hackett, Robert & William Carroll (2006). *Re-making media: the struggle to democratise public opinion*. London: Routledge.

Handy, Jim (2003). Reimagining Guatemala: reconciliation and the indigenous accords. In Carol Prager & Trudy Govier (Eds). *Dilemmas of reconciliation: cases and concepts* (pp279–306). Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University Press.

Handy, Jim (2002). Democratizing what? Some reflections on nation,

## Expanding peace journalism

- state, ethnicity, modernity, community, and democracy in Guatemala. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 27(53) 35–71.
- Harcup, Tony (2007). *The ethical journalist*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Howard, Ross, Francis Rolt, Hans van den Veen & Juliette Verhoeven (2003). *The power of the media: a handbook for peacebuilders*. Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention.
- Illich, Ivan (1973). The professions as a form of imperialism. *New Society*, September 13: 633–35
- Keeble, Richard (2009). *Ethics for journalists*. 2nd edn. Oxon: Routledge.
- Kirkpatrick, Marshall (2009). Dear CNN: ‘please check Twitter for news about Iran’, *ReadWriteWeb*, 13 June 13 2009. [Online]. Available: [www.readwriteweb.com/archives/dear\\_cnn\\_please\\_check\\_twitter\\_for\\_news\\_about\\_iran.php](http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/dear_cnn_please_check_twitter_for_news_about_iran.php) [Accessed 26 August 2009].
- Lynch, Jake & Annabel McGoldrick (2005). *Peace journalism*. Stroud: Hawthorn Press.
- Monzon, Marielos (2010). Guatemala: con los mismos anteojos. In Omar Rincon (Ed). *Porque nos odian tanto. Estado y medios de comunicación en América Latina* (pp55-70). Bogota: Centro de Competencia en Comunicación para América Latina, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. [Online]. Available: [www.c3fes.net/docs/porquenosodian.pdf](http://www.c3fes.net/docs/porquenosodian.pdf) [Accessed 25 August 2011].
- Neale, Jonathan (2001). *The American war: Vietnam 1960–75*. London: Bookmarks.
- Nye, Joseph S. Junior (2004). *Soft power*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Parkin, Frank (1979). *Marxism and class theory: a bourgeois critique*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Rockwell, Rick & Noreene Janus (2001). Stifling dissent: the fallout from a Mexican media invasion of Central America. *Journalism Studies*, 2(4): 497–512.
- Rodriguez, Clemencia (2000). Civil society and citizens’ media: peace architects for the new millennium. In Karin Wilkins (Ed). *Redeveloping*

*communication for social change: theory, practice, power* (pp147– 60). Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.

Ross, Susan Dente (2007). (De-)constructing conflict: a focused review of war and peace journalism. In Dov Shinar & Wilhelm Kempf (Eds). *Peace journalism: the state of the art* (pp53–74). Berlin: Verlag Irena Regener.

Salzman, Ryan & Catherine Salzman (2010). Central American media: testing the effects of social context. *Journal of Spanish Language Media*, 3: 5–23.

Shinar, Dov & Wilhelm Kempf (Eds) (2007). *Peace journalism: the state of the art*. Berlin: Verlag Irena Regener.

Spurk, Christoph (2002). *KOFF – media and peacebuilding: concepts, actors and challenges*. Schweizerische Friedensstiftung. [Online]. Available: [www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/KOFF/Reports/medienstudie.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/KOFF/Reports/medienstudie.pdf) [Accessed 1 December 2010].

Suchenwirth, Lioba (2006). Mayans in the news: a study of the formation of post-conflict identities in Guatemala. Master's Thesis, University of Oslo, Norway. [Online]. Available: [www.duo.uio.no/publ/statsvitenskap/2006/42403/42403.pdf](http://www.duo.uio.no/publ/statsvitenskap/2006/42403/42403.pdf) [Accessed 22 November 2010].

Tubin, Victoria (2007). *Mujeres Mayas, racismo y medios de comunicación*. Guatemala: Fundacion para Estudios y Profesionalizacion Maya (FEPMAYA). [Online]. Available: [www.racismoenlosmedios.com/img/articulo\\_2.pdf](http://www.racismoenlosmedios.com/img/articulo_2.pdf) [Accessed 10 October 2010].

Tubin, Victoria, Lucia Verdugo de Lima & Amilcar Davila Estrada (2010). *Racismo en los medios: hacia un espacio incluyente: informe final*. Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landivar.

United Nations Development Programme (2010). *Opening spaces to citizen security and human development: human development report for Central America, HDRCA, 2009–2010*. [Online]. Available: [www.scribd.com/doc/53638310/Human-Development-Report-for-Central-America-PNUD](http://www.scribd.com/doc/53638310/Human-Development-Report-for-Central-America-PNUD) [Accessed 26 July 2010].

Viscidi, Lisa (2004). *The people's voice: community radio in Guatemala*.

Expanding peace journalism

*Americas Program of the Interhemispheric Resource Center*. [Online].

Available: [www.cipamericas.org/archives/1402](http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/1402) [Accessed 27 July 2010].

Warren, Kay (2003). Culture, violence and ethnic nationalism. In R Brian Ferguson (Ed). *The state, identity and violence: political disintegration in the post-cold war era* (pp102–14). London: Routledge.

Watanabe, John (2000). Culturing identities, the state, and national consciousness in late nineteenth century western Guatemala. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 19: 321–40.

Wolfsfeld, Gadi (2004). *Media and the path to peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

World Bank (2010). *Guatemala data*. [Online]. Available: [data.worldbank.org/country/guatemala](http://data.worldbank.org/country/guatemala) [Accessed 27 July 2010].