

Peace Journalism in the 2023 Bitung Ethno-Religious Clashes

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Abstract

A notable incident occurred on November 25, 2023, in Bitung, North Sulawesi, when a clash between the Muslim Solidarity Front (supporting Palestine) and the Menguni Troops (supporting Israel) resulted in one death and two injuries. This phenomenon highlights the volatile nature of intergroup tensions. However, local media played a commendable role by actively engaging in conflict reconciliation efforts, instead of exacerbating the situation, and demonstrating a proactive approach to mitigating ethno-religious conflict tensions. This research aims to elucidate the practice of peace journalism as employed by local journalists in North Sulawesi, specifically in their role in reducing the ethno-religious conflict in Bitung. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and case study methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews. The study involved five local journalists from Bitung as research subjects, focusing on their application of peace journalism techniques in the aftermath of the conflict. The findings indicated that these journalists have a heightened awareness of the necessity for a peaceful resolution following the riots. They actively adopt and implement principles of peace journalism to quell unrest, thereby contributing to a swift resolution of conflicts. This emphasizes the critical role of journalism in fostering peace and preventing the escalation of intergroup conflicts in Indonesia. This study recommends the importance of understanding the concept of peace journalism and its application in presenting the news, especially when dealing with complex contemporary conflicts such as ethnic and religious conflicts, which are further complicated by external factors, such as the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Keywords: clashes; ethno-religious; journalism; peace; ethnic and religious conflicts

Abstrak

Sebuah insiden terjadi pada 25 November 2023 di Bitung, Sulawesi Utara, yakni bentrokan antara Front Solidaritas Muslim (mendukung Palestina) dan Pasukan Menguni (mendukung Israel) yang menewaskan satu orang dan melukai dua orang lainnya. Bentrokan ini menunjukkan betapa rentan ketegangan antarkelompok. Namun, peran media lokal patut diapresiasi karena tidak memperkeruh suasana, sebaliknya aktif dalam upaya rekonsiliasi dan menunjukkan pendekatan proaktif untuk meredam ketegangan konflik etno-religius. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap praktik jurnalisme damai yang diterapkan oleh jurnalis lokal di Sulawesi Utara, khususnya dalam peran mereka dalam meredakan konflik SARA yang terjadi di Bitung. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi dan telaah dokumentasi. Penelitian ini melibatkan lima jurnalis lokal Bitung sebagai subjek penelitian, dengan objek penelitian pada penerapan jurnalisme damai pada konflik SARA di Bitung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para jurnalis memiliki kesadaran tinggi akan pentingnya penyelesaian konflik secara damai saat kerusuhan terjadi. Mereka secara aktif mengadopsi dan menerapkan prinsip-prinsip jurnalisme damai untuk meredakan ketegangan. Mereka berkontribusi pada penyelesaian konflik yang lebih cepat. Temuan ini menyimpulkan peran krusial jurnalisme dalam membangun perdamaian dan mencegah eskalasi konflik antarkelompok di Indonesia. Studi ini merekomendasikan pentingnya pemahaman konsep jurnalisme damai serta kemampuan untuk mengaplikasikannya dalam peliputan, terutama dalam menghadapi konflik yang kompleks seperti benturan etnis dan agama di Bitung.

Kata kunci: bentrok; damai; etno-religi; jurnalisme; konflik etnik dan agama

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INTRODUCTION

Social conflicts based on ethnic and religious issues continue to occur in Indonesia. Despite ongoing efforts to promote harmonious coexistence and tolerance through the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), the potential for conflict remains significant. One example is the clash between communities in Bitung, North Sulawesi Province, on November 25, 2023, rooted in ethnic and religious tensions. The clash involved two community organizations: *Barisan Solidaritas Muslim* (the Muslim Solidarity Front), a pro-Palestinian group, and *Pasukan Menguni* (Menguni Troops), a pro-Israel group. The conflict erupted when both organizations held events simultaneously in nearby locations in Bitung. The violence resulted in one fatality and two injuries. Fortunately, security forces acted swiftly to quell the conflict, and local religious leaders in Bitung promptly mediated between the two organizations, preventing the escalation of violence (Mappiwali, 2023).

The clashes between community organizations in Bitung have attracted the attention of social observers for the unusual underlying causes. This local conflict was triggered by a global issue—the Israel-Palestine conflict. The primary driver was religious sentiment, which was misinterpreted to suggest that Christians supported Israel while Muslims supported Palestine. This labeling fueled a sense of “solidarity” among both sides, ultimately leading to violence (CNN Indonesia, 2023).

In reality, Bitung is a city characterized by a balanced religious diversity between Christian and Muslim populations, who have coexisted peacefully with minimum conflict. The Ministry of Religious Affairs Indonesia ranks North Sulawesi third in the national Religious Harmony Index (RHI) with a score of 78.35 (Maarif, 2022). Meanwhile, the capital city of North Sulawesi, Manado, is among the top ten cities in the Tolerant City Index (TCI) 2022, as ranked by the Setara Institute. With a score of 5.767, Manado ranks as the eighth most tolerant city (Prasetyadi, 2024). Given this context, an ethnic and religious conflict in Bitung has raised many questions.

Despite the need for further investigation into the causes of the conflict, the role of the mass media in mitigating the violence in Bitung deserves commendation. Rather than exacerbating the situation, the media actively contributed to peace efforts. It is undeniable that the media plays a crucial role in preventing ethnic and religious conflicts (Doll et al., 2023, p. 2001). It can be a peacemaker in social conflicts (Arregui et al., 2020, p. 1384) and reduce or amplify tensions (Alam, 2020, p. 122).

The media’s primary function is to provide the public with the necessary information (Nuraryo, 2020, p. 24). One critical aspect is the media’s role in resolving conflicts through peace journalism when covering and presenting such events. Journalists must deliver swift, accurate, and fact-based information (Doll et al., 2023, p. 1801). They must maintain objectivity in their duties (Nasionalita & Nugroho, 2020, p. 62). The challenge for journalists arises when their ideals are tested in conflicts between professional obligations and business interests, where they must choose events that attract attention and hold commercial potential while simultaneously responding to personal moral imperatives to contribute to peace (Blacksin, 2022, p. 422; Shah et al., 2021, p. 710).

Conflict is an appealing news value for the audience (Harcup, 2023, p. 904). It embodies tension, competition, confrontation, and emotion, captivating followers. Conflict, crises, and confrontations often dominate media agendas, attracting public attention. In 2023, audience interest in conflict coverage emerged as a top priority in 67 countries worldwide (Vartanova & Dunas, 2023, p. 726). Melnyk et al. (2023, p. 245) assert that journalists have long regarded conflict as a key news value, aligning with the notion that “bad news is good news”. However,

careful attention must be paid to how journalists frame conflict coverage within its social context. Conflict holds value when presented in a peaceful public sphere. Conversely, in times of conflict, reporting that emphasizes facts conveying messages of peace becomes increasingly significant (Yoedtadi, 2023, p. 9; Auwal & Ersoy, 2020, p. 7).

The researcher aims to investigate the application of peace journalism by journalists in North Sulawesi, particularly in mitigating ethnoreligious conflicts in Bitung. This analysis is framed through Max Weber's theory of social action, a foundational concept in sociology that voices the necessity of interpreting human actions from a subjective standpoint. Weber characterizes social action as actions undertaken by individuals who are aware of and oriented toward the behaviors of others (Segre, 2024, p. 652). Essentially, social action is understood within the context of social interactions, where its meaning is derived from the participants' perspectives.

Numerous studies on peace journalism have been conducted. Alam (2020) examined the peace journalism framing in *Tribunnews.com* and *Detik.com* regarding news coverage of racism against Papuan students in East Java. Yoedtadi et al. (2020) explored journalists' views on the challenges of maintaining peace and applying peace journalism in Ambon. Permana and Setiawan (2021) conducted a qualitative study using a literature review from various sources, such as books, journals, and official websites, to highlight the importance of peace education among journalists. Also, Pakpahan et al. (2022) analyzes the implementation of peace journalism in the Mata Najwa episode titled "Silang Versi FPI – Polisi," which discussed the shooting incident involving six FPI members. This study was conducted qualitatively through a narrative text analysis of the structure, plot, characters, function, and values. Furthermore, Arifina et al. (2023) investigated the application of peace journalism in Indonesian online media, specifically *detik.com*, during the coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak in June 2021.

Compared to previous studies, the proposed research by the author offers novelty in several aspects. First, in terms of the research object, this study explores the perspectives of journalists in Bitung, North Sulawesi, on the role of peace journalism during the 2023 ethnoreligious clashes. Previous studies have examined the views of journalists on peace journalism in post-conflict regions such as Ambon and Aceh (Yoedtadi et al., 2020). However, this study explores new issues in journalists' perspectives in regions with different conflict dynamics, such as clashes in Bitung, which are influenced by global conflicts – the Palestine-Israel issue. Second, previous studies have frequently employed content analysis, framing analysis, narrative text analysis, and literature reviews to examine peace journalism practices in news content (Alam, 2020; Permana & Setiawan, 2021; Pakpahan et al., 2022; Arifina et al., 2023). In contrast, this study uses a case study method with in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation as data collection techniques involving journalists in Bitung, North Sulawesi, as informants. Third, the author analyzes the research findings using social action theory to examine how the choices made by local journalists in Bitung reflect the implementation of peace journalism. Fourth, this study explores how local media journalists implement peace journalism. This study has the potential to uncover the perspectives of journalists working in smaller media outlets, who may have greater editorial freedom, thus offering a different approach to conflict reporting. Building on the background, this study examines the peace journalism practiced by local journalists in Bitung, North Sulawesi, in response to the 2023 ethno-religious clashes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. The qualitative approach is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken

words from individuals and observable behavior (Aurini et al., 2021, p. 9). This research explains how local journalists in Bitung, North Sulawesi, implemented peace journalism to mitigate the ethnoreligious conflict in Bitung on November 25, 2023.

The research method used is a case study. According to Wahyuni (2024, p. 239), case study examines various characteristics of a limited number of cases. These cases include individuals, groups, organizations, movements, events, or geographical units. This definition agrees with the objectives of this study, which is to examine individuals, especially local journalists in Bitung, North Sulawesi. This research was conducted in June-July 2024 in Bitung, North Sulawesi.

The research subjects or informants are individuals asked to provide information about facts or opinions (Wahyuni, 2024, p. 33). As the research subjects explain, researchers target those who reveal field-based facts. The subjects of this research are local journalists in Bitung, North Sulawesi. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria of senior journalists who have worked for more than ten years and were involved in covering the mass clashes in Bitung. The research informants were five local journalists in Bitung. Consisting of three key informants, one expert informant, and one supporting informant.

The object of the research refers to the problem being studied to find a solution. According to Brennen (2025, p. 33), a research object is an attribute, characteristic, or value about individuals, objects, or activities that demonstrates particular variations. The researcher examines these variations to conclude. This study focuses on the implementation of peace journalism by local journalists in North Sulawesi to mitigate the ethno-religious conflict in Bitung.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five local journalists based in Bitung who were active during the conflict. The researcher also observed the locations of the clashes in Bitung. The documentation review was conducted by examining the reporting results on the Bitung clash in local news media. In this study, the data analysis technique was carried out using a qualitative coding approach consisting of three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and thematic coding. This approach allows researchers to organize data systematically and explore deep meanings from narratives collected through interviews, observations, and documentation (Brennen, 2025, p. 33).

A triangulation strategy is necessary to ensure the case study research process is valid and reliable. Validity in case study research is crucial to avoid questionable reliability or excessive researcher subjectivity (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2024, p. 226). Triangulation combines various methods used to examine interconnected phenomena from different perspectives. Triangulation can be divided into four types: method triangulation, investigator triangulation (if more than one researcher conducts the research), data source triangulation, and theory triangulation (Farquhar

Table 1. Data Informant

No	Name	Media	Experience	Informant
1.	MTB	Sulutnews.com	11 Year	Key Informant
2.	PM	Indonews.id	15 Year	Key Informant
3.	AA	TVRI Bitung	16 Year	Key Informant
4.	GEP	Editorial Sulut News	15 Year	Supporting Informant
5.	AK	Metro TV	20 Year	Expert Informant

Source: Research Result, 2024

et al., 2020, p. 164). Based on these types, this study employed data source triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Bitung is a city in the northeastern part of North Sulawesi Province in Indonesia. It encompasses the mainland at the foot of Mount Dua Saudara and Lembeh Island, covering a total area of 313.5 km². The city is divided into eight districts and 69 villages (BPS Kota Bitung, 2024, p. 3). By the end of 2023, the population of Bitung had reached 219,063 inhabitants. Most of the population is of Minahasa and Sangir ethnicity, while there is also a significant Chinese community. Migrants from Java, Halmahera, and Buton are commonly found in Bitung, mainly working as traders (Wismaningsih et al., 2024, p. 140).

Most of Bitung's residents are Christians, comprising 63.46% of the population, with 60.08% identifying as Protestants and 3.38% as Catholics. Christianity is generally practiced by indigenous groups such as the Sangir, Minahasa, and Talaud. Meanwhile, residents from the Mongondow, Javanese, Bugis, and Gorontalo ethnic groups predominantly practice Islam, which accounts for 36.25% of the population. Buddhism is practiced by 0.15%, Confucianism by 0.02%, mainly among the Chinese, and Hinduism by 0.11%, primarily among the Balinese. Other religions are followed by 0.01% of the population (Wismaningsih et al., 2024, p. 140).

Despite their ethnic, religious, and belief diversity, the community in North Sulawesi Province, especially in Bitung, has remained relatively free from sectarian conflict. While religious and ethnic conflicts erupted in other cities in Indonesia, such as Ambon and Poso, the security in North Sulawesi remained stable. The province has shown strong immunity to such conflicts (Yusuf & Hasan, 2020, p. 14).

Journalists interviewed in this study highlighted the importance of continuously maintaining a peaceful atmosphere in Bitung. This perspective reflects a collective awareness among the city's journalists, shaped by past experiences where peace fostered a conducive environment for enhancing the welfare of Bitung's residents. They affirm that a tranquil environment is essential because Bitung serves as a key industrial hub and a vital maritime gateway for North Sulawesi Province.

Reflections on past conflicts in various regions of Indonesia, such as Ambon and Poso, where prolonged unrest caused suffering for all communities involved, inform this commitment to sustaining peace. Based on this understanding, the informants, many of whom have lived in Bitung for an extended period, are dedicated to preserving peace in the region. "Perhaps it is due to experience, hearing many accounts of the experiences of our brothers and sisters

Table 2: Bitung Religion and Ethnic Statistics

Religion	Percentage (%)	Predominantly Practiced By
Protestant	60,08	Sangir, Minahasa, Talaud
Catholic	3,38	Sangir, Minahasa, Talaud
Islam	36,25	Mongondow, Javanese, Bugis, Gorontalo
Buddhism	0,15	Chinese
Confucianism	0,02	Chinese
Hinduism	0,11	Balinese
Other Religions	0,01	Various small groups

Source: Wismaningsih et al. (2024)

in Ambon and Poso. As a result of the conflict, their lives were filled with constant fear and unrest” (Informant 2, Interview, June 25, 2024).

The informants expressed their concerns that if the conflict were to persist, it would disrupt the peace and stability that have long been established in Bitung. As residents living with their families, they recognize the crucial need for a safe and conducive environment.

We live in Bitung, and our children and grandchildren will likely also live here. When conflict arises, who suffers mentally, socially, and materially? If the conflict persists, who stands to lose? We can see this from the conflicts in Ambon and Ternate (Informant 3, Interview, June 25, 2024).

They firmly believe that prolonged conflict would negatively impact the city’s economic stability. Since Bitung is widely known as an economic hub, hosting numerous industries, any disruption could have severe consequences. Moreover, as the main port of North Sulawesi Province, Bitung plays a vital role in regional trade and commerce. An economic downturn caused by conflict would inevitably bring hardship to the entire community. From the experience in Ambon after the conflict, the economy had not recovered even three years later.

Considering that Bitung is one of the gateways to North Sulawesi province due to the presence of the port, all essential supplies and other materials enter through Bitung Port. When unrest occurs, the economy will inevitably collapse. This is the economic impact; many people suffer wherever unrest and conflict arise. This includes innocent people who suddenly find themselves victims (Informant 4, Interview, June 25, 2024).

They recognize that the ethnic and religious diversity in Bitung is both a wealth and a challenge in maintaining a peaceful atmosphere. One informant even acknowledged that the diverse backgrounds of the community present a potential for conflict. Despite acknowledging the differences that could lead to conflict, journalists highlighted the resources available to maintain harmony and peace among the people of Bitung. One key factor is the shared awareness that everyone residing in Bitung is considered family, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. The well-known slogan they embrace is *Torang samua bersaudara*, which means ‘We are all brothers and sisters.

At first, I was also shocked that unrest could occur in Bitung, but from that moment, I tried to calm the situation as quickly as possible, concerned about the direction things could take. However, I returned to the principle that we have the slogan ‘*Torang Samua Basudara*’, and with that slogan, I tried to ensure that people did not overthink the unrest happening (Informant 1, Interview, June 24, 2024).

This signifies that every Bitung resident is part of the same family regardless of ethnicity or religion. In addition to the brotherhood slogan, explained by informant 2, journalists also uphold another motto coined by North Sulawesi’s prominent figure, Dr. Sam Ratulangi: *Sitou Timou Tumou Tou*, meaning that every person lives to support the lives of others. “So, we hold on to that. Just like the slogan of Dr. Sam Ratulangi, ‘*Sitou Timou Tumou Tou*,’ which means a person lives to sustain others.’ This also means we all need each other, whether Religion A or B” (Informant 2, Interview, June 25, 2024).

The informants also demonstrated their commitment to maintaining a peaceful atmosphere by refusing to serve as sources for mass media outlets based in Jakarta. Following the conflict, several Jakarta-based media outlets, such as CNN Indonesia and BBC Indonesia, contacted the informants, requesting interviews. However, they declined the interview requests, citing that a peace declaration had already been made and the situation in Bitung had returned to normal. The informants were concerned that continued coverage of the conflict could perpetuate animosity between the two warring mass organizations. One informant even took proactive steps by contacting online media outlets reporting on the Bitung conflict. He requested they

stop publishing content related to the unrest and clarified that the situation in Bitung had already stabilized.

The informants stated that they did not fully understand the concept of Peace Journalism. One informant admitted having read about Peace Journalism but did not understand it deeply. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the journalists were motivated to actively reconcile the religious conflict in Bitung on November 25, 2023, through their reporting.

The informants expressed that during the incident, their priority was to help establish a conducive atmosphere rather than to produce news that might further fuel the dispute. They agreed not to report the conflict between the two mass organizations, fearing that media coverage could exacerbate the unrest. Informant 1, who currently serves as the Chairman of the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI) in Bitung, North Sulawesi, shared that when the conflict erupted, all PWI members in Bitung gathered at the Bitung Police Headquarters. There, they agreed to assist in de-escalating the conflict as quickly as possible. There was a shared awareness among the PWI members to help swiftly bring the conflict to an end.

The online media outlets, where the informants work simultaneously, adopted a policy of restraint by not reporting on the clashes between mass organizations on November 25, 2024. They only reported on the event once a peace agreement was reached between the conflicting organizations. For instance, in Figure 1, *Sulutnews.com*, where Informant 1 works, published a report on the peace agreement between the two mass organizations on November 26, 2024, at 2:42 AM.

Informant 5 similarly refrained from disseminating news, opting not to send reports to the television station with which he was affiliated, despite his obligations as a contributor to cover and submit news to the outlet. Rather than reporting on the clash, she actively utilized



Figure 1. The Peace Agreement News in *Sulutnews.com*

Source: *Sulutnews.com*, 2023

social media to advocate against media coverage of the confrontation between the two mass organizations in Bitung, aiming to prevent further escalation and restore safety to the area. She expressed concern that the unrest in Bitung could extend to other regions, potentially inciting solidarity actions among religious groups elsewhere.

The journalists intentionally chose not to interview sources from either of the conflicting parties, fearing that if the news featured statements from those involved in the conflict, it could further inflame the situation. Additionally, they refrained from reporting the religious affiliations of the groups in conflict to prevent any further public sympathy toward either side. For the same reason, they avoided publishing images of the conflict, such as acts of violence, the resulting damage, or the victims. The journalists indicated that their news sources primarily originated from security forces and government officials, with coverage emphasizing how the situation was managed and how law enforcement addressed the perpetrators. They deliberately avoided referencing religion in their reports, opting instead to refer to traditional mass organizations and Muslim-based mass organizations without explicitly labeling them as Muslim or Christian, as such identifications were believed to exacerbate tensions potentially. They also noted the absence of religious leaders in the conflict. They emphasized that any mention of religion would have made the underlying divisions, such as north versus south or black versus white, more pronounced and volatile.

Actions taken by journalists in Bitung to de-escalate the unrest and foster a peaceful environment were not limited to reporting; they also involved monitoring social media content that continued to disseminate information about the violent clashes between mass organizations, including video recordings of the events. One informant reported actively reaching out to the owners of these social media accounts, requesting the removal of posts related to the clashes among mass organizations in Bitung. The informants acknowledged that social media is a medium that is difficult to control during conflict situations. They recognized that citizens' freedom on social media is often not accompanied by a greater sense of responsibility in promoting harmony.

Discussion

Journalists in Bitung continually highlight the significance of nurturing peace within their community. Insights from interviews indicate a common recognition among these journalists of their duty to foster calmness in the city. Past experiences and observations of the detrimental impacts of extended conflicts in other areas, such as Ambon and Poso, have shaped this understanding. The participants emphasize that maintaining peace in Bitung is vital for the community's welfare, especially given that Bitung is a key industrial center and the maritime entry point for North Sulawesi. Though the ethnic and religious diversity in Bitung is often seen as enriching, it poses challenges. As a result, journalists feel compelled to exercise a careful and accountable approach in their reporting, recognizing that the news they convey should alleviate tensions. This perspective aligns with the principles of peace journalism, which advocates for reporting that fosters conflict resolution and reconciliation (Riaz et al., 2023, p. 5).

In a broader context, the professional awareness among journalists could effectively shape public opinion and serve as an important source of information about current (Arandas et al., 2022, p. 2). Informants acknowledge that, in conflict situations, mass media are instrumental in alleviating tensions. This understanding aligns with findings in the literature Sehl et al. (2023, p. 19) that mass media can be a tool for conflict resolution by providing information that helps minimize conflict tensions. Media outlets must exercise caution when reporting clashes

between communities, particularly those involving religious differences (Mokodenseho et al., 2024, p. 25).

The informants indicated that they intentionally avoided presenting the events chronologically once covering the clash between two mass organizations in Bitung on November 25, 2023. They prioritized peace statements and calls for de-escalation. According to Galtung, peace journalism should be oriented toward peace and conflict resolution (Khan et al., 2020, p. 556; García-Perdomo et al., 2022, p. 993). In practice, peace journalism must detach itself from the standards of mainstream journalism that prioritize mere fact presentation, as peace journalism aims to provide peaceful solutions to ongoing conflicts (Arandas et al., 2022, p. 2). The decision to engage in conflict resolution may introduce biases in reporting (Wang, 2022, p. 1066). Nonetheless, the researcher maintains that this approach is justified when considering the goal of effectively and promptly addressing conflict in Bitung.

The informants recognized that if their reporting focused excessively on bare facts from the field, the conflict would not subside. Conversely, such reporting could exacerbate the situation on the ground. This peace-oriented approach in news production aligns with Galtung's assertion that peace journalism offers peaceful solutions and is concerned with de-escalating conflict situations (Selvarajah, 2021, p. 137; Hussain, 2019, p. 3).

The researcher views the journalists' decision not to report disturbances between mass organizations in Bitung as prudent. While some individuals may criticize journalists for not producing news as unprofessional behavior, this decision reflects the journalists' professionalism from a social responsibility perspective, prioritizing public interest by seeking to mediate conflicts (Rafeeq, 2023, p. 2). As Siregar said, journalists may report openly in social unrest situations as long as they maintain the legal order. However, in areas where social conditions have not yet achieved an ideal state of legal order, careful evaluation of the relevance and importance of such news publications is necessary (Yoedtadi, 2023, p. 9).

Journalists acknowledge that social media presents a challenging medium to control when mitigating ethnic and religious conflicts in Bitung. This poses a significant challenge for journalists advocating for a peaceful environment. As noted in the study conducted by Doll et al. (2023, p. 1999), social media plays a complex role in peacebuilding efforts and is often a double-edged sword in conflict situations. On the one hand, it can facilitate dialogue and support the creation of peace; on the other hand, it can exacerbate conflicts and undermine peace initiatives. The community frequently utilizes social media as citizen journalism, serving as the first reporting medium for an event. However, it is unfortunate that the content shared often inflames the situation and intensifies conflict escalation (Hassan et al., 2023, p. 37).

The actions of journalists in Bitung in maintaining peace can be analyzed through the framework of social action theory. According to Weber, social actions refer to those influencing other individuals within a social framework. They are characterized by their subjective meanings, implying that these actions are not arbitrarily performed (Pratama, 2022, 124). Thus, these actions have been recognized from the outset as purposeful and imbued with specific significance; for instance, when we engage in an action, it serves as a reaction to the actions of others (Sumintak & Sumirat, 2022, p. 29).

Weber posits that the actions of individuals or groups are influenced by their understanding and interpretation of social situations (Mohanty, 2022, p. 58). Journalists in Bitung exhibit a profound understanding of the potential impact of their reporting on social stability. Their past experiences and observations of conflicts in regions like Ambon and Poso have influenced their understanding of the media's vital role in reducing tensions. This perspective aligns with the findings of Loisa et al. (2020, p. 247) that journalists in post-conflict areas have a collective

memory that inspires them to contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

The Ambon and Poso conflicts represent two significant episodes of communal violence in Indonesia that emerged prominently from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, involving disputes between religious and ethnic groups. Socio-economic tensions, historical injustices, and the manipulation of religious identity polarization by local and national political actors fueled both conflicts (Rasidin et al., 2023). The Ambon conflict (1999–2002) began with minor clashes that escalated into widespread violence between Christian and Muslim groups, driven by socio-economic disparities and regional expansion policies that sparked competition among factions (Hanumbhawono et al., 2024). Conversely, the Poso conflict (1998–2001) arose from local political rivalries that fostered segregation between Muslim and Christian communities, exacerbated by dissatisfaction with power distribution following the New Order era, as well as the infiltration of militant groups (Ristanti, 2022).

Weber posits that an individual's action is deemed social if it carries personal meaning and is directed toward the actions of others (Mohanty, 2022, p. 59). This theory provides insights into the behaviors of individuals and groups by acknowledging their diverse motives and objectives (Budiyanti et al., 2020, p. 390; Segre, 2024, p. 653). Weber identifies four types of social action: instrumental rationality, value rationality, affective (emotional), and traditional (habitual) actions. Instrumental rational action involves behaviors aimed at achieving specific objectives through efficient means. Value-oriented rational action, in contrast, is driven by intrinsic values and beliefs, prioritizing principles over outcomes. Traditional action emerges from established customs and habitual practices, while affective action is motivated by emotional responses and feelings (Sumintak & Sumirat, 2022, p. 30; Raza, 2022, p. 99). The actions of journalists in Bitung can be categorized as instrumental rationality and value rationality.

Instrumental rationality pertains to the journalists in Bitung who act with open, rational thought and possess clear objectives, utilizing means to achieve their desired goals (Turnip et al., 2022, p. 53). For them, carefully packaging news is a rational means to uphold community harmony.

Value rationality can be described as follows: journalists in Bitung perceive themselves as part of a profession that bears responsibility for fostering peace in the region. The underlying motive is idealism. This idealism, as a commitment to peacekeeping, forms the basis for social action characterized by value rationality. As Weber articulates, value rationality is an action grounded in awareness. Awareness refers to the actions imbued with specific values directed toward others (Budiyanti et al., 2020, p. 391; Putra & Suryadinata, 2020, p. 3). These values may include religious, compassionate, moral, and divine values (Çamlı et al., 2021, p. 6318). Journalists convey that their cherished value is peace through the motives guiding their actions.

The social actions exhibited by journalists in Bitung, due to their interaction with the community, depict that journalistic awareness regarding local social conditions is vital. This exemplifies one of the journalists' ideals as part of public service (Owolabi, 2023, p. 3). Correctly understanding the social context is essential for journalists to recognize the consequences of their reporting. Every social fact encountered should be understood as an interaction among social actors, necessitating journalists to consider the repercussions of these interactions in the facts they report.

CONCLUSION

Journalists in Bitung have effectively embraced the practices of peace journalism. They purposefully avoid chronological coverage of conflicts among citizens, choosing instead to promote messages of peace. This approach points out their awareness of the media's influence

on public perception and their obligation to wield it wisely for peace and reconciliation. Their motivations stem from social actions, defined by instrumental and value rationality. The journalists recognize the significance of maintaining a peaceful atmosphere in their city, reflecting their commitment as community members and showcasing their social responsibility. In light of the unrest caused by clashes between mass organizations on November 25, 2023, they adopted peace journalism to alleviate tensions. They deliberately opted not to report on the specific details of the conflict to prevent escalation and facilitate a quick resolution. This research suggested that awareness of responsibility for living peacefully and understanding local values that teach harmony in diversity should be socialized among journalists.

This study recommends the importance of understanding the concept of peace journalism and its application in reporting news, especially when dealing with complex contemporary conflicts, such as ethnic and religious clashes in Bitung and the Palestine-Israel conflict. In addition, local media editorial policies and journalist training could help journalists deal constructively with issues that can trigger social conflict.

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