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Editorial Introduction: Media, War & Conflict's 15 Year Anniversary Special Issue

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This special issue began life as a pre-conference at the International Communication Association (ICA) annual conference in Toronto, Canada, in May 2023, entitled 'Reimagining the field of Media, War and Conflict in the age of information disorder', supported by the ICA Visual Communication division. The pre-conference celebrated the 15-year anniversary of *Media, War & Conflict*, and aimed to build on the thriving community the journal established with our 5-year anniversary conference in London, and tenth anniversary conference in Florence. Before summarizing the selected articles for this anniversary special issue, I present a section looking back at how the scholarship we've published over 15 years has responded to shifts in media technologies, disruptions to the professional context for journalists, and employed various conceptual frameworks to understand how media intervene in a variety of war and conflict situations. With an interest in the authorship patterns as well as the content, I provide data on the countries where our authors are based institutionally, and note a gradual shift toward internationalization, a trend we hope to encourage further.

As editors of the journal *Media, War & Conflict,* we wanted to reflect on how new actors, technologies, and global power struggles have challenged the relationship between media and conflict in the 15 years since our first issue was published in April 2008. Geopolitical and technological shifts have shaped patterns of media visibility for conflicts around the world, as political leaders, militaries and civilians share information about wars via a diversifying range of media platforms. This diversification can be celebrated for its democratizing of informational power, but it also has a destabilizing effect, generating anxieties about how such media platforms are used to display violence, falsify material, and amplify extremist views, where the distinctions between trusted and untrusted sources become ever murkier. The proponents of information disorder feed on the delegitimation of credible sources and

mounting intolerance of opposing views. Wartime disinformation and propaganda strategies have become part of mainstream political communication practices, and the consequences of this kind of weaponization of popular media and communication channels can be especially destructive in the context of war and conflict.

A major focus of our journal over the past 15 years (18 years at the time of writing) has been on how journalistic organizations have reported on and 'framed' global events, often aligned with the political perspectives and patriotic ideologies of their owners or national governments. Such research routinely critiques the biases of news media, viewed traditionally as conservative influences when it comes to considering alternatives to military action, and responsible for dehumanizing coverage of war victims and refugees. In addition to the journal's substantial output focused on the coverage of war, we also publish many articles about journalistic professional routines, with motivations, ethics and the mythological status of war reporting coming under scrutiny. Whether examining the finished artefacts or the production processes of journalism, the dividing line for when healthy scepticism becomes an unhealthy distrust is hard to draw. The status of journalistic institutions as authorities for truth and witnessing, and as the leading interpreters of unfolding events, has been weakened, while reporters on-the-ground are threatened, jailed or murdered with apparent impunity (RSF, 2024; Allan, 2025). At the time of writing this introduction, the Committee to Protect Journalists (2025) reported that more journalists were killed in 2024 than in any other year since they started collecting their data, with two thirds of the 124 media workers killed globally being Palestinians killed by Israeli forces (an unprecedented 85 journalists). Co-ordinated efforts to discredit, threaten or kill journalists have a chilling effect on those who expose war crimes, with broader implications for democratic health and press freedom.

In a pluralized and fragmented digital media environment, citizen witnesses and online activists offer alternative narratives to the professional journalist who might be denied direct access, or have their status reduced to being one voice among many contested opinions. Notions of 'participative war' (Merrin, 2018) and 'radical war' (Ford and Hoskins, 2022) proffer new characterizations of the current era, understanding digital connectivity as intertwined with the conduct of war, alongside broader geopolitical insecurities. The array of images and videos captured on ever-present smart devices can serve as 'weapons' in the legitimation of military and political actions, whilst also transforming the aesthetic and moral understandings of war for citizen spectators (Della Ratta, 2018). The very first editorial in the journal noted the 'weaponization' of media and how a 'media-war nexus' had become 'a

significant driver of a shift in the very character or nature of warfare' (Hoskins et al., 2008: 5).

Beyond a news media focus, our journal is also interested in documentaries and creative projects that bring activists, filmmakers and scholars together to raise awareness and generate solidarity for those facing insecurity and violence. Commonly devised with a mission to counter official narratives, human rights organizations and open-source investigation teams employ forensic techniques using a diverse range of imaging and computational technologies to expose war crimes and advocate for those seeking justice (Ristovska, 2021; Smith and Watson, 2023). But within this abundance of communicative activity, whose voices are being mobilized, why and how? As a scholarly journal, we hope to encourage critical questions about the inequalities of the mediated warscape, including the gendered nature of war, and the limitations for expressions of voice and visibility enabled by notionally democratizing communication technologies.

Before turning to the articles included in this special issue, I briefly outline the key areas of research published in the first 15 years of *Media, War & Conflict*, drawing upon journal data about the patterns of authorship, themes and conceptual frameworks.

Mapping the published research in the first 50 issues of Media, War & Conflict

This section reports on an analysis of the articles' lead authors and abstracts published between April 2008 and December 2022, across 50 issues. In the analysis below, I outline the conflicts, concepts and methods which have dominated the journal's output over 15 years. Only data from research articles are included, which means that editorials or book reviews are not part of this short overview. I use the analysis as a jumping off point to discuss how key conceptual frameworks have changed or endured, the conflicts and media types covered, and how we might critically reflect on media, war and conflict as a field. Fifteen years (2008-2022) is split into 3 five-year periods (310 articles in total). The journal moved from publishing 3 issues per year, to 4 issues in 2018, hence the increase in published articles in the final five-year period (Table 1).

Years of publication	No. of articles
2008-2012	84
2013-2017	98
2018-2022	128
Total	**310**

Table 1: Number of published articles for *Media, War & Conflict* over 15 years (2008-2022)

Article lead authors by country of institutional affiliation

Data provided by Sage enables us to chart the country of institutional affiliation for the corresponding author of each article. We do not have access to data on nationality or gender, and so this only tells us where the (first) author is affiliated. What it does demonstrate is a shift from a United States and United Kingdom dominance to a wider spread of countries.

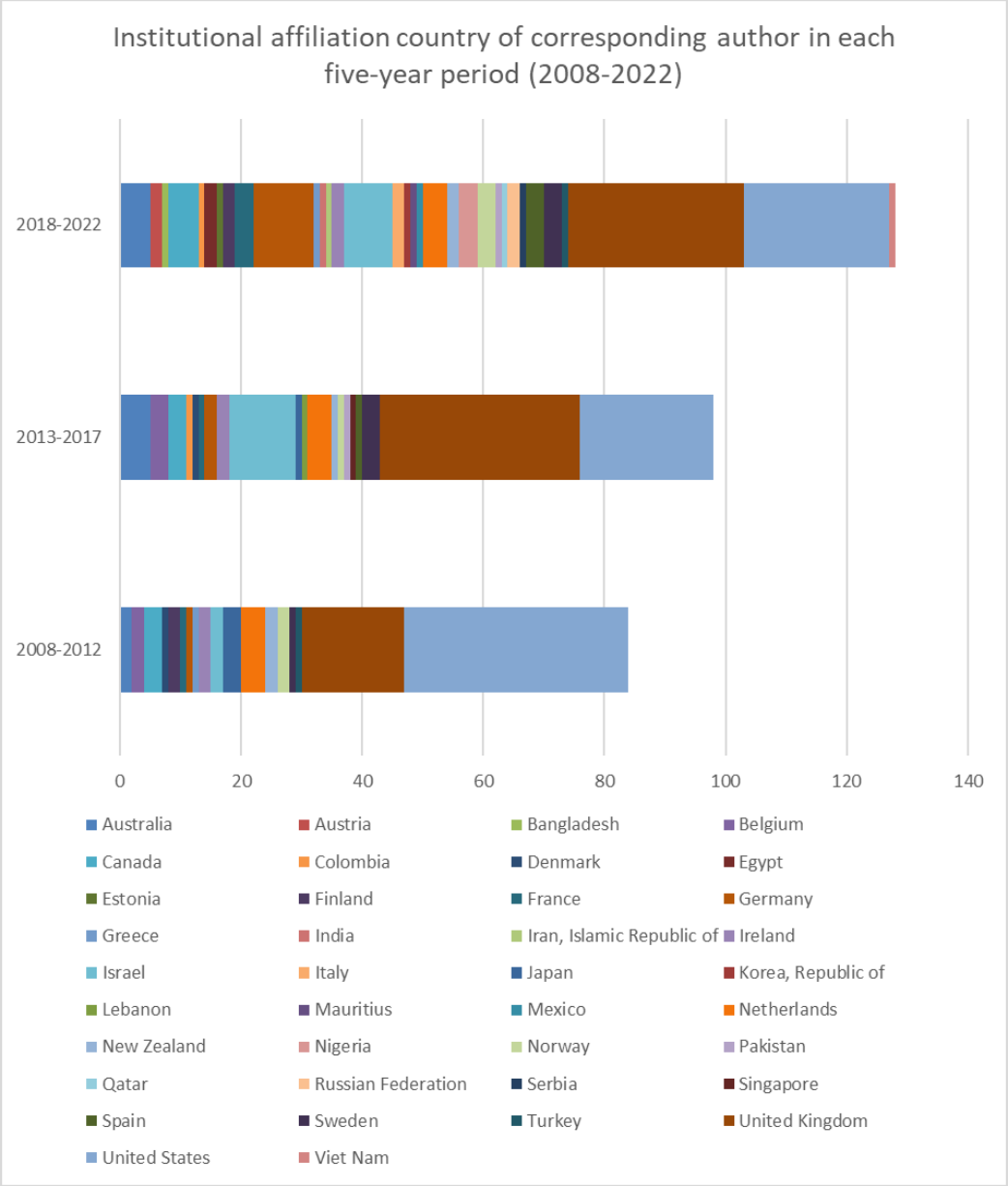

Figure 1: Institutional affiliation country of corresponding author in each five-year period (2008-2012; 2013-2017; 2018-2022)

Figure 1 presents the number of articles (rather than percentages) to reflect the overall increase in published articles, as we moved from 3 to 4 issues per year in 2018. Corresponding authors for the 84 articles published between 2008-2012 were working in 18 different countries. This rose slightly to 20 countries in the next period (2013-2017: 98 articles); and finally, to 33 countries represented in final period (across 128 articles, 2018-2022). The prominence of the US and UK as the countries of institutional affiliation for the corresponding author illustrates their dominance overall. The first five years saw articles from authors in the US with the highest share (44%), but this drops to 22% in 2013-2017, and 19% in the final five years. We can observe the UK share going up from 20% to 34% across the

first ten years, and then dropping again to 23% for the final period, but remaining as the country with the largest individual share. Another way to express this is that the combined UK and US share of the 'pie' falls from 64% between them, to 56%, and then 41%.

It might not be possible to match each country to its colour in the chart (Figure 1), but what is visible is the increased variation of different colours, reflecting a small but noticeable increase in the proportion of articles from varied countries. The data for Figure 1 is available in supplementary materials [**online link to supplementary file for Figure 1**]. Israel, Germany, Australia, Canada, Netherlands and Nigeria tend to be well represented, but in the context of a relatively small number of articles, many countries appear only once or twice in each five-year period. An article from Nigerian scholars has become one of our most read and cited articles over a longer period (rather than the 6 months' period available on our website). Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2022) examine local and international coverage of the conflict between nomadic herders and sedentary agrarian communities in Nigeria, with drought in the north among the reasons for increased pressures and violence between the farmers and herders. The authors find western media follow norms of impartiality in their coverage but are largely indifferent to a conflict they consider a domestic matter.

It is encouraging to see greater diversity but it is still on a modest scale. Of course, this doesn't reflect nationality or ethnicity of authors, but only where they are affiliated. Studies into the structures of power embedded in the broader field of communication through analysis of journal article authorship find a continuation of colonial legacies and marginalization of women and non-White scholars: 'Publication and citation practices produce a hierarchy of visibility and value' (Chakravartty et al., 2018: 257; see also, Freelon et al., 2023). As a communication sub-field, war and media scholarship also reflects these inequities, not only in authorship but, as we will see below, in the unequal attention paid to certain conflicts and in the analytical lenses employed.

Shifts in thematic and conceptual focus in the articles published over 15 years

The last two decades have seen a number of prolonged conflicts, either directly named as part of the US-led 'Global War on Terror' rubric, or in some cases as a consequence of those wars. At the same time, digital media technologies have intensified and diversified the coverage of such conflicts. Using tools to capture frequency of certain words, this section

traces the shifts in focus for named media organizations, and the concepts applied in studying them. The Ngrams tool in Gale's Digital Scholar Lab was used to determine the frequency of single words in the article titles, and the occurrence of two words used commonly together (e.g. social media, foreign policy, content analysis). The single word frequencies can be visualized as a word cloud using the same tool, and Figure 2 is an example from the final period (2018-2022).

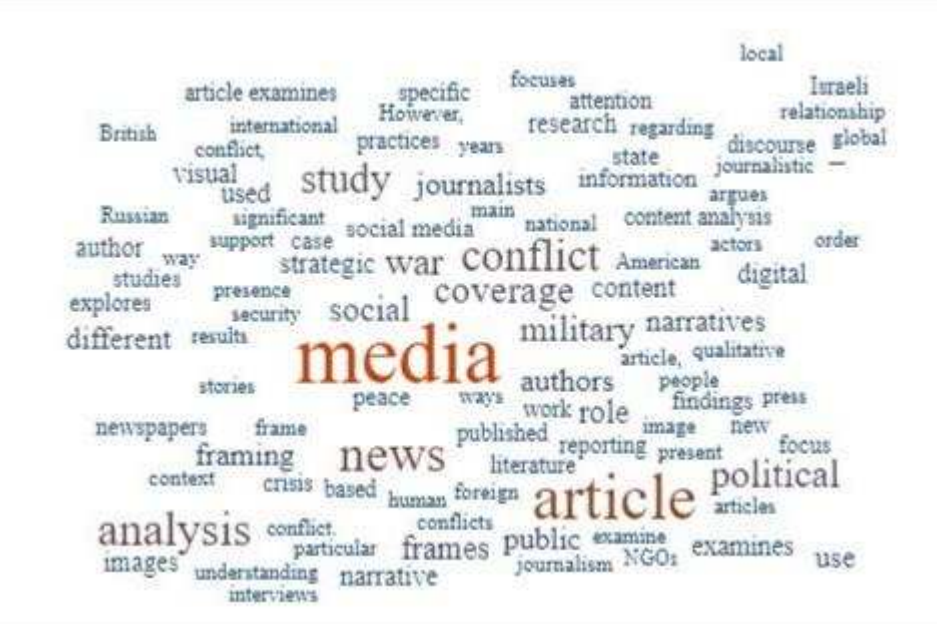

Figure 2: Word cloud generated in the Gale Digital Scholar Lab from article abstracts, 2018-2022.

Not surprisingly, the word cloud is dominated by the words we might expect: 'media' 'article' 'news' 'war' 'conflict' and 'analysis'. This word cloud is from the final period, but the three periods all looked very similar due to dominance of certain key words. Once the data is cleaned further, the prevalence of certain topics could be determined. With the removal of the most common words, and the merging of similar words (e.g. with capitals or slight differences), more fruitful patterns emerge. Many terms are of little interest – 'author', 'findings', 'examine', etc. which form the 'background noise' of academic writing.

The frequency of certain words speaks to the predominance of favoured theories, methodological approaches, and objects of study, but I was also interested in those words which were less frequent than we might expect (women, peace, etc.). The initial impressions from the Ngrams word clouds were confirmed by conducting a 'Named Entities search' of the article abstracts in the Gale Digital Scholar Lab, which allows for quick identification of pre-

defined categories such as prominent cultural groups, named people, geo-political areas or organizations. The tool extracts this data using natural language processing. It is a quick but blunt way to extract the information from unstructured text, which I combined with manual identification based on knowledge of the field. By applying manual analysis, I was able to identify certain key terms in one five-year period, and then check against the other periods, to find patterns of increased or decreased occurrence. Observable shifts related to media technologies and popular channels of communication: CNN was the most named media outlet in the first period, partly due to a special issue revisiting the CNN Effect; with YouTube and WhatsApp starting to appear alongside news channels such as Al Jazeera and BBC in the second period; and then Twitter overtaking YouTube as the most named platform in the final period. Interestingly, the abstracts suggest little research on Facebook (unless labelled as 'social media' in general). Social media platforms certainly become prominent in the final period, with Twitter the platform of choice for researchers. The renaming of Twitter to X under its new ownership has also been accompanied by diminishing access rights for researchers. But with the 'X-odus' of users, including major media and political actors, its research value is also diminished. It will be interesting to see how this decline is observed in the abstracts for the next five-year period (2022-2026), alongside the growing research interest in TikTok and Telegram.

Figure 3: Predominant objects of study, conflicts and methodological approaches of articles in *Media, War & Conflict* for each five-year period.

Figure 3 offers a simplified summary of the principal objects of study, conflicts and methodological approaches in the journal. Not evident in the diagram, the Israel-Palestine conflict is prominent throughout the 15 years, with 'Israeli' the most common cultural group mentioned across all three periods according to the Named Entities search. Various terms

associated with Islamist terrorism and the war on terror also appear in varied forms (Al Qaeda, ISIS, ISIL). The 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas and the war in Gaza are not included in this period under discussion, but we have seen scholarly attention shift markedly once again to this ongoing conflict in recent submissions. Another notable shift was the reference to Samuel Huntington's (1996) 'clash of civilisation' theory, no doubt connected to the latter stages of the Global War on Terror era and George W. Bush's 'with us or with the terrorists' rhetoric, which disappears after the first five-year period.

Undoubtedly, certain conflicts become much-researched during periods of intense fighting and media attention, with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 prompting many submissions to the journal, building on those that had studied the Euromaiden protests and 2014 Russo-Ukrainian war. But we also routinely receive historical work and research on the conflicts around the world that receive less attention in western media, such as Korea, Vietnam (historical case studies), and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Burundi, Nigeria, Mexico, Bangladesh and Pakistan, to mention more recent cases. Funding patterns can also generate an increase in submissions – for example, the 100-year anniversary of the First World War, the '14-18 NOW' commemorations in the UK also brought funding opportunities for research. Many scholars in our field are interested in the selectivity of the media spotlight, but this is echoed in the roving spotlight of academic research and how this shapes the submissions we receive.

We can also trace conceptual and methodological trends and refinements. This review confirmed that framing analysis continues to dominate as a theoretical/ methodological approach, often combined with content analysis. Its continuing appeal for researchers was discussed in a special issue guest edited by Sumaya Al Nahed and Philip Hammond in 2018, initiating 'a fresh discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of framing as a method for analysing contemporary war coverage, of how and why the method has been refined and modified over the years, and of how it might be developed further' (2018: 365). The guest editors noted the ongoing concerns about framing as a 'fractured paradigm' (Entman, 1993), but the articles in the issue demonstrate the adaptability of the approach to social media, visual media and even surveys. In a respondents' article, Curd Knüpfer and Robert Entman (2018) outline how digital platforms and transnational information flows bring new factors and logics that are 'crucial for understanding the connections between frame competition and political conflicts' in this era (p. 476).

The continuing appeal of framing or frame analysis is also evident in the modified version that places images as a primary focus in 'visual framing', which we see gaining traction in the latter two periods, alongside a general visual turn in the field. But this visually focused adaptation has also been matched with growing attention to strategic narratives. One of the most read and cited articles in the journal, 'Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power' (2014) by Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin, argued for the importance of studying narratives for understanding and analysing power and influence, especially in a more chaotic and connected world:

> '[W]ar and conflict will be affected by the more extensive and intensive connectivity that is a feature of the new media ecology; more extensive as more people around the world are able to upload, communicate, dissent across distances and in virtual spaces; more intensive because connections become more instantaneous, with a greater number of potential participants and audiences, producing an acceleration of the conduct of war and deliberations around it.' (Roselle et al. 2014: 80)

Despite this call for conceptual development being published in 2014, it is only in the final five-year period (2018-2022) that strategic narratives have become a prominent concept in the journal's articles.

At the heart of the inquiries pursued in the journal are concerns for how wars are legitimized and memorialized, not just in news coverage and social media, but across film and popular culture, cartoons, comedy, games, military recruitment, artwork, monuments, graffiti, terrorist publications, to name a few. Beyond framing, content analysis and strategic narratives, the diversity of approaches is also notable – rhetorical, discursive, iconological, and film analysis, for instance, but also (digital) ethnographic research, surveys and interviews.

As mentioned earlier, looking for frequencies can also alert us to the omissions or marginalized topics. The Ngrams analysis suggests that the words 'female', 'gender' and 'women' only appear in the final five-year period of abstracts, indicating that gender is an under-explored perspective in the journal until the last five years. However, a cross-check with the original abstracts revealed that we did publish a single article in first period with 'female' in the title or abstract:

'What's love got to do with it? Framing 'JihadJane' in the US press', by Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney (2012).

The second period had three articles: ‘Victims and bystanders: Women in the Japanese war-retro film’ by Jennifer Coates (2013); ‘Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq’ by Mercy Ette (2013); and ‘Women, wars and militarism in Svetlana Alexievich’s documentary prose’ by Aliaksandr Novikau (2017).

And the third period had five: ‘Framing the 'White Widow': Using intersectionality to uncover complex representations of female terrorism in news media’ by Meagan Auer, John Sutcliffe and Martha Lee (2018); ‘Online news coverage of female perpetrators during the October 2015 wave of violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’ by Amit Lavie-Dinur, Moran Yarchi and Yuval Karniel (2019); ‘Telling NATO’s story of Afghanistan: gender and the alliance’s digital diplomacy’ by Katharine Wright (2019); ‘Women, body and war: Kurdish female fighters through *Commander Arian* and *Girls’ War*’ by Aina Fernàndez Aragonès (2020); and ‘Army recruitment video advertisements in the US and the UK since 2002: Challenging ideals of hegemonic military masculinity?’ by Natalie Jester (2021).

It is worth displaying the articles’ titles here as it also reveals the wide range of media forms within this small sample (literature, press, film, online news, documentary and social media (digital diplomacy), video recruitment campaigns). This offers just one example of delving further into the data, and it demonstrates that the computational methods are not perfect, but can give a clue to patterns over attention over time. Interestingly in terms of agency and focus, it is mostly women as fighters or perpetrators studied here. Lastly, it is notable that all but one of the lead authors are also women. A similar search for possible omissions across the three periods showed that veterans and refugees are other groups that have received surprisingly little attention as the primary identified actors in the journal’s published research.

Finally, I extracted articles from the database that included ‘journalis*’ in the abstracts to look more closely at this particular area of research. I acknowledge again it is a blunt instrument for sampling articles, but gives us an insight into those articles which at least foreground journalism as a profession, or discuss journalistic practice and coverage. Despite a turn towards studying participatory warfare and digital diplomacy on social media in recent years, journalistic practice continues to be a significant and consistent focus across the 15 years (71 articles in total, evenly distributed).

A focus of attention in the first period was the embedding programme during the 2003 Iraq invasion, with the subsequent use of this term (sometimes retrospectively) discussed in relation to notions of objectivity and press freedom. The concept of peace journalism is

another staple, examined through competing frames of war and peace, and often guided by a clear normative position that concerns itself with finding ways to improve journalism during conflict, especially in relation to the diversity of sources and resisting the stoking of adversarial perspectives. The 'emotional turn' across the fields of politics and media is also reflected in the sub-sample. Journalists' PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) is examined through surveys in our first period, with a shift to a broader set of emotions considered through interviews and ethnographic studies in our later sample of abstracts. Similarly, threats to journalists, killings, exile and (self) censorship are recurring themes, especially in articles drawing upon interview data, and from a wide range of countries (for example, Nigeria, Burundi, Cyprus, Colombia).

The pressures and constraints on journalism as an industry were also emphasized, via the financial pressures on foreign correspondents, citizen journalism and news agencies replacing journalist expertise and their traditional gate-keeping role, or issues of access to conflict areas. The ideal of journalistic freedom is certainly advanced and challenged in the journal. Whether cast as patriotic dupes echoing official sources, or under threat from the state or commercial imperatives, the most prominent normative underpinnings tend to perceive journalists as important witnesses and recorders of conflicts, coping with the dangers of tactical targeting and restricted access, which in turn negatively impacts the quality of journalism from war zones.

This brief overview has only looked at a single journal which does nevertheless have 'media, war and conflict' as its core remit. I recognize that the field stretches far beyond one small English-language journal, and this can only ever be a snapshot. I have outlined initial observations for some scholarly trends and fashions in terminology, but this exercise also identified significant continuities. Does this mean the field is too stuck or comfortable? Or do certain themes and methods endure because they are effective in showing how certain media intervene in discourses of war? Has the concept of strategic narratives given us more intellectual purchase to explain power and influence in the shifting terrains of media and war?

This is an incomplete picture, limited by a small dataset, and with a recognition that the standard generic conventions of an article abstract possibly disguise where the more subtle differences have taken shape. The limitation of using word frequency methods for this dataset is that the abstracts contain similar overall themes and methodological approaches combined with a large variety of case studies and objects of study which might only appear once or

twice. The particularities of the individual cases are drowned out by the conventional approaches. This exercise certainly confirmed that the military, political leaders and the news media continue to be the prominent actors in our field, but it also raised concerns about the lack of attention paid to the gendered nature of war, of refugee experiences, or post-conflict/veteran issues, which arguably remain under-explored in the research we publish.

In kindly reading over this editorial introduction for me, co-editor Richard Stupart commented that the reflections prompted him to think about how the journal has started to develop a common ethics, in addition to developing the common theoretical approaches outlined above. Journalistic practices and accounts have provided the backbone content for the journal, but this is being complemented with an openness to arts practice and visual media, alongside a critical ethics towards war that's neither an anti-war stance, nor an ethics of the normalization of war. Whatever the emergent ethics of the journal is, we hope it offers a generative space for writers and practitioners from both those worlds (and others).

Introducing the Special Issue articles

This special issue includes six articles, most of which were presented at our 2022 ICA pre-conference along with others that have been developed since then, but all papers include authors who participated in that event. We are delighted that early career researchers, and especially women researchers from a variety of global regions, are well represented in our selection of articles. Not surprisingly given the timing of our event, the Russian war in Ukraine features prominently, with our first four articles providing analysis that covers a range of communicative practices and media platforms, from western news coverage of Zelensky to politicians, activists and influencers on Twitter/X and TikTok. The fifth article continues a focus on TikTok digital activism, but in this case tracing the varying viral success of feminist campaigns in response to the murder of Mahsa Amini in Iran, and the #HandsOffMyHijab movement following the niqab and hijab ban in France. Our final article is attentive to the experiences of exiled Burundian journalists in Rwanda who are required to adapt their practice in the face of myriad challenges, including a lack of funding and issues with verifying reports from across the border.

In the first research article, 'Canonizing online activism: Memetic iconography in the North Atlantic Fella Organization', Kateryna Kasianenko and Olga Boichak argue that 'memes serve as icons that anchor online communities through organizing the rituals and articulating

the values of participant involvement'. Brought together as a transnational online community, the North Atlantic Fella Organization (NAFO) are dedicated to ridiculing Russian disinformation with visually striking memetic activity, primarily on Twitter/X. In a visually-rich essay, the authors demonstrate how visual icons, avatars, national and religious symbols are created and remixed as memes to form publics and serve 'as "glue" bonding an online community together'. Drawing upon interviews with 25 'fellas', Kasianenko and Boichak provide insights into the shared values and sensemaking approaches of those taking part in the 'the collective's ritualistic practices'.

A different kind of political performance is examined in Liz Hallgren's article, 'The symbiotic relationship between Volodymyr Zelensky and Western news: Authenticity and performance in Ukraine's fight against Russia'. Combining close analysis of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's social media content alongside the interpretive work of journalists in 'profile pieces' in the early months following Russia's 2022 invasion, Hallgren argues that both media genres co-construct an authentic persona for Zelensky in a mutually beneficial relationship. By applying a performance studies lens, Hallgren provides a refreshing take on how the genres of self-branding social media and mainstream media profiles work together to transform Zelensky into a masculinized 'man of the people', through which Western audiences can understand and empathize with Ukraine's struggle.

In 'Gender and narrative in digital political communication during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine', Alexandra Pavliuc analyses the political communication preferences of both male and female Ukrainian politicians and international figures on Twitter/X in the year following the 2022 full-scale invasion, challenging the notion that women are likely to be more pacifist in their messaging. While women did discuss narratives of human trauma, war crimes and suffering, they used such narratives to call for more military support in their 'dual roles as *mothers of the nation* and nationalists who will support their country at all costs' (Pavliuc, this issue). As Pavliuc notes, in countries such as Ukraine which face persistent threats of attack, nationalism is prioritized over a pacifist feminism. Twitter/X was a useful diplomatic tool at this time, which enabled Ukrainian politicians to shift from mainly communicating with their constituents, to persuading multiple and targeted audiences with strategic narratives designed to garner international support.

Ukrainian civilian women also became participants of the war through the popularity of their TikTok activity. In our next article, ''So, we have occupied TikTok'. Ukrainian Women in

#ParticipativeWar', Øyvind Kalnes and Nina Bjørge analyse the young civilian women who became war influencers through their TikTok videos, alongside the emotional tone of the comments posted in response. Focusing on five women, the authors identify five potential roles for civilian war influencers: editor, field reporter, commentator, activist, and victim. Each influencer can take on more than one role, but these ideal types show the range of strategies or styles which have informative and potentially mobilizing roles. The personalized mode of address offered by TikTok enabled these young women to share their everyday war experiences in ways which resonated (mostly positively) with those commenting.

Attention to women's agency as political actors in moments of conflict and resistance continues with Rana Arafat and Sahar Khamis' article, 'Unveiling the Online Dynamics Influencing the Success and Virality of TikTok Social Movements: A Case Study on Pro and Anti Hijab Feminist Activism'. The authors examine how two different feminist digital activist campaigns attracted varying success in terms of virality on TikTok. Selecting videos associated with the hashtags, #MahsaAmini and #HandsOffMyHijab, the authors identify a number of themes and purposes, such as defiance against authorities, nostalgia for Iranian women from the past, and resistance against the morality police (#MahsaAmini); and empowering voices through education and advocacy, challenging stereotypes and contesting Islamophobia (#HandsOffMyHijab). The symbolic power of #MahsaAmini, and effective use of TikTok affordances, combined with the specific socio-political context, help to explain the wider visibility and appeal of that campaign among Western feminist audiences and users.

The final article of the issue returns to one of the journal's more established concerns: how journalists cope with reporting on conflict when government and military authorities would prefer to silence them. In ''Journalism in another form': How exile experiences from Burundi renegotiate key elements of journalism', Louisa Esther and Richard Thomas propose the term 'journalism in another form' to capture how Burundian exiled journalists uphold standards of truth, information gathering and verification when the field of conflict is inaccessible to them. Drawing on interviews with Burundian journalists in Rwandan exile, the authors find a range of perspectives on whether they are able to maintain a boundary between their roles as journalists and activists, leading to a renegotiation of their practice guided by their personal conscience. The journalists' commitment to the principles of professional journalism and their desire to be helpful to those in their home country steers them through seeming impossibilities to find 'another form of journalism'.

With journalists facing threats across many regions of the world, and a worrying trend of political authorities failing to protect media freedoms (RSF, 2024), the challenges of reporting on complex conflicts in 'cross-border' journalism or in exile are becoming ever more relevant in journalism studies (Waisbord, 2025). Together, the articles in this special issue show how sensemaking about war and conflict manifests across a variety of media spaces and genres, which therefore require a range of suitable analytical approaches. In the era of 'participative warfare' (Merrin, 2018) and ubiquitous digital technologies, the contestation of narratives or frames becomes a cacophony of voices and images across an unequal digital mediascape; fragmentary, and yet also centring attention even more intensely on certain conflicts, such as Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza. The paradoxical impetuses of concentration and disintegration present challenges to those studying media and war, due to the relevant communicative activities and preferred technologies taking so many forms, and providing only ever a partial understanding.

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