



Voices from the Field

Reflections on Feminist-Alternative Media, Peace Communication, and Intercultural Dialogue

Nazan Haydari, interviewed by Casey Man Kong Lum

In the following conversation, Dr. Nazan Haydari, a founding member of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Professor of Media at Istanbul Bilgi University, Türkiye, reflects upon the nature and dynamics among feminist-alternative media, peace communication, and intercultural dialogue.

You have been very active in promoting feminist and alternative media, as well as peace communication, among other interests in media, culture, and communication. What have been some of the key driving forces behind your advocacy and activism in this regard?

As a feminist scholar, I believe that academic knowledge production is a political process defined by the conscious attempt to bridge theory with the everyday to make scholarly knowledge accessible, relevant, and meaningful beyond the university. What is studied, whose voices are heard, and how knowledge is communicated all shape the possibilities for pursuing equity and justice. Therefore, I aim first to challenge, (re)define, and expand already established theoretical frameworks. Second, I am in constant search for participatory methodological approaches that foster dialogue across the academic environment, civil society, and policy development. Third, I want my work to create spaces for those whose voices and experiences are too often left unheard to bring their knowledge into conversations. Feminist and “alternative” media, as well as peace communication, are two areas that foster such approaches.

The concept of “alternative media” has been extensively challenged and redefined through such terms as citizens’ participatory, or oppositional media. Acknowledging the significance yet without engaging with these ongoing conceptual debates, I refer to alternative media as communicative practices that challenge dominant structures of ownership, representation, knowledge production, and political power while creating participatory spaces for voices and experiences excluded from mainstream public discourse. For me, these practices are not limited to conventional media platforms but also include artistic and museum spaces, urban tapestries and interventions, streets, and protests. Yet “alternative” communicative practices are not inherently emancipatory. They may

reproduce the gender hierarchies, nationalism, inequalities, and forms of exclusion found in mainstream media. I therefore approach alternative media not as a fixed category, but as a changing and contested set of practices shaped by particular social, political, and historical contexts.

Peace communication refers to communicative practices that seek to understand, prevent, and transform conflict without reducing peace to the absence of visible violence. It tries to understand how language, images, narratives, silences, and patterns of representation may normalize inequality, exclusion, militarism, and hostility. The concept also explores how communication can create possibilities for dialogue, recognition, rights, justice, collaboration and living together. Grounded in a rights-based and feminist epistemology, peace communication for me is a reflexive and participatory practice concerned with transforming both the narratives surrounding conflict and the conditions under which communication takes place.

As a founding member of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, what do you see as the role that peace communication and feminist / alternative media can play in promoting intercultural dialogue and why?

Peace communication and feminist and alternative media challenge the instrumental understanding of intercultural dialogue. Dialogue is not simply a tool for managing cultural differences. It takes place within relations of conflict, inequality, and power. Feminist epistemology makes these relations visible. It also brings advocacy, situated knowledge, and self-reflexivity into the discussion.

From this perspective, intercultural dialogue becomes an ethical and political practice. It requires attention to unequal relationships and to the capabilities needed to transform them. Creative practices can open new ways of relating across differences. Silence also matters. We need to ask who chooses to remain silent, who is silenced, and whose silence is recognized.

Please describe for our readers a project or two that you think can further shed light on the ideas that you share in the above.

One project that reflects these ideas is the [Istanbul Gender Museum](#), of which I am also a part. Established in 2022, the museum develops physical and virtual exhibitions, feminist pedagogy programmes, cultural events, publications and alternative forms of communication. We approach the museum not simply as a place for displaying knowledge, but also as a space for producing and sharing it. The museum brings feminist research into conversation with art, activism, advocacy and everyday experience.

One of the museum's projects is [Advocacy Diaries](#). Young people aged 18–25 identified issues that affected their lives and created their first digital exhibitions. They worked as researchers, curators, storytellers and advocates. Their exhibitions addressed housing rights, feminist history, women's resistance through music, LGBTQI+ rights, environmental justice, and discrimination based on mother tongue. The participants did not simply contribute to a project designed by others. They decided what needed to be discussed and how it should be presented publicly.

The [#DeBêje \[means speak up/tell in Kurdish\] exhibition](#) within Advocacy Diaries offers a concrete example. Curated by Ecenur Alan and Halide Berçem Özçelik, it focuses on the languages spoken in Türkiye and on experiences of discrimination based on mother tongue. The multilingual campaign invites people to share their own stories and to take part in expanding the exhibition. #DeBêje therefore does more than representing linguistic diversity; it creates a participatory space for a collective production. For me, this shows how feminist and alternative cultural spaces can support intercultural dialogue. They can connect personal experience with structural inequality and create the conditions for people to speak in their own languages and on their own terms.

What have been some of the biggest challenges that you and your constituencies have faced thus far and why?

One of the biggest challenges is the shrinking space for critical and independent work in Türkiye. Peace communication, feminist media, and alternative media engage with difficult questions about conflict, gender, identity, inequality, and power. In a polarized environment, it becomes more difficult to discuss these issues openly, find support, build collaborations, and sustain long-term work.

The journalists, alternative media organizations, women, LGBTQI+ communities and conflict-affected groups face related pressures. Limited financial resources and insecure working conditions threaten the continuity of alternative media. Restricted access to information and concerns about legal or political consequences shape not only what can be said, but also where people can meet, create, listen, and imagine different ways of living together.

Another challenge is bringing academic knowledge into everyday practice. Peace communication cannot remain only an academic discussion. It needs to connect with community initiatives, cultural spaces, media practices, advocacy, and daily encounters. Building these connections takes time, trust, and resources. When independent spaces become weaker, our capacity to communicate across differences and act together also becomes more limited.

Yet struggle and hope persist, sustained by solidarity and the willingness to work together. This is what keeps communities going.

Please recall for us some of your recent successes in this regard, the lessons you have learned from them, and why.

I consider *Advocacy Diaries* one of our recent successes because it enabled young people from different cities to turn issues affecting their lives into public exhibitions. They worked on subjects ranging from language-based discrimination and housing rights to feminist history, LGBTQI+ solidarity, and environmental justice. The digital format made this geographical diversity possible. It also gave participants their first experience of researching, curating, and publicly presenting an issue from their own perspective.

An especially valuable part of the process was having the young curators guide visitors through their own exhibitions. Explaining their choices and responding to questions increased their sense of ownership. I came to see guided tours as a pedagogical tool in themselves. They enable participants to revisit their work, articulate their positions, and engage directly with an audience.

The project was mainly online, and sustaining participation over time was difficult. This taught me that digital spaces can bring together people from different geographies, but they cannot always replace in-person meetings. Physical gatherings are important whenever they are possible, as they can build trust, strengthen relationships, and create a sense of continuity.

We also need pedagogical tools that support different forms of participation. Some people remain silent in group settings, and silence should not be immediately interpreted as a lack of interest. It may be related to confidence, power relations within the group, the pace of discussion or discomfort with the format. We therefore need to understand what produces silence and offer different ways of contributing.

I also learned to pay closer attention to generational differences. Different generations may understand feminism, advocacy, participation, and political action in different ways. These differences should not be treated as problems to overcome; rather, they can become part of the learning process. This requires listening, flexibility, and a willingness to question our own assumptions. The project reminded me that participation requires more than creating a space. It also requires paying attention to how people enter that space, who feels able to speak, and who remains at its edges.

Based on the challenges and successes in your experience, what advice would you share with colleagues vested in intercultural dialogue?

I would encourage colleagues to think beyond just creating individual moments of intercultural dialogue. A successful workshop, exhibition, or meeting may open a conversation, but the more difficult question is what remains when it ends. We need to build structures through which relationships, knowledge, and collaboration can continue. Dialogue should have an afterlife.

I would also suggest that we reconsider what constitutes success. Agreement, visibility, or the number of participants tell us very little on their own. A more meaningful question is whether the process changes who can produce knowledge, interpret experience, and address a public. In this sense, creative practices are not simply tools for making dialogue more attractive. They can redistribute authorship and create new ways of knowing and relating.

I believe that intercultural dialogue should leave room for disagreement, uncertainty, and incomplete communication. Its purpose is not to create a smooth encounter or to resolve every difference; sometimes tension, hesitation, or silence reveal more than an immediate exchange does. Our role is not always to fill these gaps, but to create conditions under which they can be explored without reproducing existing inequalities. This requires patience, institutional commitment, and a willingness to let the process change our own understanding of dialogue.

At a broader level, I would also advise resisting treating intercultural dialogue as a policy tool for managing diversity or reducing social tension. Such an approach often asks marginalized groups to adapt, communicate more effectively, or demonstrate social cohesion, while leaving the political sources of conflict untouched. A non-instrumental approach begins elsewhere. It asks how citizenship, borders, language policies, media systems, and/or unequal access to resources determine who can participate in public life.

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