

The image shows the interior of a building that has been completely destroyed. The walls are crumbling, the ceiling is missing in places, and the floor is covered in a thick layer of rubble, including bricks, wood, and twisted metal. A person is standing in the lower-left foreground, looking towards the destruction. Sunlight streams in from a large opening in the roof, casting long, sharp shadows across the debris.

**Call For Abstracts**

**Challenges to Contemporary Conflict  
Reporting Preconference**

Cape Town, 3 June 2026

# Challenges to Contemporary Conflict Reporting

## ICA 2026 Media, War and Conflict Preconference

3-4 June 2025

The journalism of war and conflict is facing extraordinary threats. Israel's ongoing assault in Gaza has killed a historically unprecedented number of journalists at a time when the norms protecting the press in armed conflict appear to be crumbling. Elsewhere, violence against journalists covering protest and conflict below the level of warfare is on the increase, with state violence and intimidation of the press now an increasingly normal part of the landscape even in countries like the US, that were - at least rhetorically - committed to the rights and freedoms of conflict journalists. In already-authoritarian contexts, the crumbling of international humanitarian law has weakened what outside support journalists in these countries might previously have depended on. Cross-border and exile journalism have grown significantly in the 21st century, reflecting trends in transnational cooperation but also the intimidation that drives journalists out of their own country.

To the extent that the world is entering a new legal and political order as regards acceptable conduct in war and political violence more generally, how will the work of witnessing, archiving and reporting be done?

This preconference invites contributions that offer ways of thinking about the structures of violence facing those engaged in the mediation of armed conflict, the possibilities of continuing these media practices, the ethical dilemmas, and potential future forms of witnessing war. While we welcome contributions from scholars of journalism studies and war - an obvious home for these concerns - we also encourage submissions from those considering practices of mediating conflict beyond the boundaries of professional journalism.

The Media, War and Conflict journal has a thriving community of contributors, many of whom participated in a 5th anniversary conference in London, a 10th anniversary conference in Florence, and 15th anniversary ICA pre-conference in Toronto. We would use this pre-conference in Cape Town to expand this community by bringing in new and early career scholars. ICA 2026 will be a milestone in this continuing journey.

### **Potential subjects for papers could include:**

- Work on the contemporary hazards of war, conflict and disaster journalism
- The practices of contemporary conflict reporting
- Theoretical approaches to understanding the shifts in such journalism that are presently underway
- Inequalities across and within war and media research, including power imbalances in knowledge production within the field (in line with the ICA 2026 theme)
- Ethical challenges: for those reporting on war and/or for researchers

- Explorations of specific cases of journalism in conflicts/disasters
- The visual economy of war, photojournalism, and emergent digital visual cultures
- Mediated forensics (Smith and Watson 2022), open-source intelligence (OSINT), surveillant technologies, and crowdsourcing in the visualization of war
- Grassroots and alternative media challenges to official narratives of war and peace
- The gendered and/or ethnocentric nature of war reporting
- Disinformation, 'fake news' or falsified imagery in war and conflict situations
- Creative narrative and visual methods in war and peace research, reflections on researching journalism in conflict
- Artistic, film, performance and practice projects
- Decolonizing the field of war and media
- Witnessing, ethics and spectatorship
- Memory, commemoration and archives
- Media coverage of political violence, uprisings, riots and terrorism
- Reporting of military scandals, abuse, and war crimes

We intend this pre-conference to be a welcoming space to forge new interdisciplinary collaborations across visual communication, journalism studies, digital culture, international studies, and beyond. We are keen to hear about artistic, film, performance and practice projects in addition to news and social media studies, and encourage research on conflicts and political violence from regions that traditionally receive less scholarly and media attention.

### **Two types of in-person participation are invited**

- **Paper or practice presentations:** We are interested in scholarly and practitioner contributions that speak to the above themes. Prospective presenters should submit an abstract of up to 300 words. Submissions will be selected by the conference committee on the basis of originality and relevance to the conference theme, and to ensure a diversity of viewpoints and geographic origins. Presentation submissions are open to people at any stage of career. Due to time constraints, practice-based submissions should primarily be spoken presentations about the practice (with possible clips or images). We hope to further promote practice work through our associated preconference website.
- **Poster presentations:** PhD researchers and early career scholars are also invited to submit an abstract of up to 300 words for a poster presentation addressing the preconference themes. This can be 'work in progress'. The poster session will allow

for feedback from an assigned mentor and other pre-conference participants and organisers.

We will be prioritizing in-person participation but are presently investigating remote options. We also intend to offer bursaries to assist accepted scholars to attend the event, so would encourage you to submit an abstract even where you may not yet be sure about your financial ability to travel to South Africa for the event.

Abstracts, indicating which type of participation is requested (paper or poster), can be submitted at <https://bit.ly/mwcpconference> and any questions can be emailed to the organisers at: [r.j.stupart@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:r.j.stupart@liverpool.ac.uk). The deadline for receipt of abstracts is 31 January, 2026. Accepted participants will be notified by 28 February 2026.

