

Florence Madenga:

Good afternoon everybody, and welcome to the last panel of the day- Fallout. I'm Florence Madenga and I'm a doctoral fellow at CARGC and at the Center for Media Risk. I'm excited to moderate this panel, which is centered around a lot of guiding questions we've already been talking about and maybe some new ones. What happens to media practitioners in the pivot to a new world order? How do they know? What do they do? What strengths, weaknesses about media practice emerge in situations of fallout. Do tactics of resistance develop? If so, what are they? I hope we can have a generative discussion around these questions. We have three fantastic panelists here to help us think it through. So I'm going to begin by introducing them. Then I'll ask a question to start off and then we can open it up for discussion.

Ricardo Corredor was the director of Communications and the Truth Commission in Colombia until August 2022. Previously, he served as executive director of the Kabul Foundation. He was provost of the Caribbean campus of Jorge Tadeo Lozano University in Cartagena and manager of the Mobilization in Digital Strategy at ANDI Communication and Rights in Brazil. Throughout his nearly 30 year career, he has worked in various Colombian and international governmental and non-governmental organizations in the areas of communication for development, journalism, education and international corporation. He served as chairman of the Global Forum for Media Development from 2016 to 2021 and is currently a board member of the Freedom of the Press Foundation in Colombia.

Our second panelist is Myria Georgiou, who is professor of media and communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She researches the role of media and communications and the shaping of two major phenomena of our times: migration and urbanization. Adopting cross-national and comparative approaches she has studied

transnational mobility and urban change across eight countries and has explored how communications profoundly but unevenly shaped those processes. Georgiou is the co-author and co-editor of 5 books, including *Diaspora Identity on the Media* by Hampton Press 2006; *Media and the City*, Poli Books 2013; and *The Digital Border*, NYU Press 2022. Before becoming a full-time academic, she worked as a journalist at BBC World Service and in Greek press and broadcasting.

Our last panelist is Zoé Samudzi. She is an assistant professor in photography at the Rhode Island School of Design, a research associate at the Center for the Study of Race, Gender and Class at the University of Johannesburg, and a member of the Race Medicine and Social Justice Research cluster at the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University. She's also an art writer and an associate editor with Parapraxis Magazine. Thank you all. Let's welcome our panelists and I'll start with giving Ricardo the floor.

Ricardo Corredor:

Thank you so much. Gracias. It's a real honor to be here at this prestigious school of communication. So as they mentioned in the introduction, I was the director of communications of the Colombian Truth Commission up until a few months ago. I don't think I ever had a job so demanding, so challenging, so difficult, both at the personal and the professional level. Barbie was talking about this earlier in the morning. I really think there is some portion that needs to be dedicated only to how to balance those two things.

Let me talk a little bit about the Truth Commission because I think it's important for you to understand where it comes from. This commission was established in 2016 as a result of the peace accord of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas with the Colombian government to address the country's

six decades of conflict. And it is part of a transitional justice system which wants to achieve justice reparation through non-repetition, which is one of the four pillars of any transitional justice model.

The commission dealt with the truth, but there is also a justice tribunal in place doing the work. And I think sentencing will start in the next months. The impact the armed conflict with FARC had was tremendous. And let me highlight just a few numbers that perhaps can give you an idea of the horrendous dimension of our war. 450,000 deaths, but with major under reporting in the data. So the commission warns that there could be really more than that, more than 800,000, about 120,000 disappeared. That is four times the number of disappeared in Argentina. Again, with major under reporting it could almost double that number. 50,000 kidnappings, 16,000 children and teenagers recruited by force, more than 9 million registered victims overall and 80% of those victims have been civilian non-combatants. And less than 2% of those 450,000 deaths occurred in combat, only 2%.

All these crimes and violations were committed by all the different actors involved. The different guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the armed forces and the private armies of the drug trafficking organizations. All of this happened through an almost 60-year period, and especially in the marginal regions of the country. So, it was more of what is known as a low intensity conflict and not one of those full-fledged wars or open wars that we usually see, like what's happening now, for instance.

After all these horror stories, the commission was created with two main goals. One was to provide an explanation about what happened during the conflict, why it happened, what consequences it cast in the communities and what must be done for the experience not to repeat itself after such a low intensity conflict that lasted for so long. It was important to provide an encompassing account of why it

happened and why it lasted for so long. It's not that common to have such long conflicts.

The second goal is to encourage recognition of the gravity of what happened to us as a society, Colombians, to the victim's dignity and individual and collective responsibilities. This was done through private meetings and public audiences and public sessions where victims and perpetrators face each other. In some occasions there were moments of forgiveness and reconciliation.

So just to say that the mandate of the commission was not just to write a report, it was more than that. Let me share the trailer of our documentary produced by the commission. It's called *After the Fire*. It's a film that followed the work of the commission for two- almost three- years. And it perhaps can give you an idea of what the work of the commission was. [Plays trailer]

So we have this search for the truth with many, many challenges. First, we have to talk about truth when post-truth is on the rise. Second, we have to deal with this painful history that created several wounds within our society, and when there was a legitimate fear about the impact to deal with this past that could reopen those wounds. We also have to talk about peace.

The peace agreement created a political fracture and the government of President Duque, under which the commission worked, was politically opposed to the implementation of the agreement. Finally, we have to ask victims or perpetrators to speak out when symbolically because of Covid, we all had our mouths shut with masks. But amid all those challenges we had to implement our mandate. In particular, I had to design a communication strategy. So, how do you build a communication strategy under such complex circumstances and uncertainties?

The communication strategy was based on the notion of narrative; a system of stories that

helps people make sense of their experience and create a coherent view of the world. A narrative is the set of stories that you tell in order to position publicly a political idea that is competing with other political ideas. Therefore, those narratives in the public sphere are about politics. The Colombian Truth Commission understood itself as a political actor and didn't shy from the political debate of the country.

But when you cannot do that, when you're working in a transitional justice process that is like this one, and especially if you want to provoke a national conversation about what happened and what we have to do for this not to repeat, you need to get in the mud. You get dirty, but you don't play dirty. And of course, we also were an independent government body, so we were constrained by the rule of law.

So, the second idea is that when you deal with a strategy that is based on narratives, you understand that stories are about emotions as much as rational arguments. One temptation that we the practitioners of strategic communication tend to believe that we need to explain in a logical way what we do and why are we doing what we're doing. And in a sense, I think sometimes we reduce communication to information. Of course, we need to provide serious and reliable information to different stakeholders. I'm not advocating against that. I'm just saying that that is not enough in the current context that we are living.

One thing that was helpful to me and my team was a sentiment analysis research made specifically for us that explored three different narratives. One narrative was specifically listening and telling the truth in Colombia as the foundation of a possible truth. The second one is listening and telling the truth in Colombia as a story that is built between all of us to turn the page. And the third one was listening to the truth in Colombia as a way of publicly pointing out the actions of those responsible for the conflict. The first one was more like a projection

message, the second was a call to participate and the third one is more of a punitive message. We tested those three narratives and messages, the one that was more appealing was the first one with 40% compared to the punitive message, which was only 20%.

We understood that there was a need for a feeling of hope, a longing for a sense of future, a value for the truth. That is why we called our final report: *There is Future if There is Truth*. That was the main message we conveyed, and it has been widely used since we launched our report at the end of June.

The third idea is using narrative and emotion expressed through a trans media storytelling approach; sharing a story across multiple different platforms and different technologies, using digital technologies but also analog formats. We created theater plays, music songs, comics, graphic novels and art exhibitions.

Of course, we used traditional media: radio, print, TV and social media. We even went into TikTok, which was a very interesting challenge. If you want to do something and you want to reach out as many people as possible, you need to do all these things; it's just not one or a few.

I understood that I wasn't in control of communications. I was playing in a game where there were other players and what we need to do was actually do things, act. The way I approach our strategy was to compete in the public arena with our narratives and messages, but we were not obsessed to win the narrative battle or to impose our institutional point of view. We understood that we were in a contested political terrain. In the end, I understood that we needed to play, that we needed to act and try to do whatever it took in order for our narrative to compete. We needed to act with humbleness and understand that uncertainty is the only principle under those types of transitions that we're facing now. Thank you so much.

Myria Georgiou:

Okay. That's a hard act to follow and I think there's so much to digest there. I have to zoom out with my remarks because I was asked to talk about media practice in the context of migration crisis. I should start by saying that even though this is what I was asked to do, this is not what I will do. I will not talk about migration crisis, but actually I want to talk about the crisis of the migration crisis. So what do I mean by that? This is hopefully a conversation that is relevant for us all to reflect both as media practitioners and also as academics. Because someone said before that it is those divides in the responsibilities and the issues that we have to deal with that sometimes are problematic in themselves.

I will try to explain why migration itself is not the crisis. It's not the fallout, but the particular ways in which we imagine and frame migration as a crisis are. Let me try to first briefly outline what this means and why it matters for media practice. The obvious thing to say at the beginning of this argument is that, of course, migration is not a new thing. Human societies are made through migration. Look at the society which we occupy now. Even if we look at migration in relation to more recent history, we know that for the many decades, even if we just focus on the post-world war order, there has been a lot of migration, including forced migration.

Many people have been uprooted, mostly from parts of the Global South that have experienced colonial and post-colonial impoverishment. Why talk of a migration crisis now like migration is something out of the ordinary? If migration is not new, what is new? What is out of the ordinary? The argument that I want to put forward here is that it is the crisis imaginary that is new and very much the media, of course, and the way that we imagine a world turned by crisis are very important here.

This is the first point I want to make. To expand a bit on that, when we talk about migration crisis, we're talking, of course, from the vantage point of the West and the position we occupy in the global geography. At times of compounded crises for the West, including the internal crisis of the West, crises including the crisis of liberal democracy in the West, migration seems to have been elevated as one of the main causes of world disorder in public discourse.

This is a discourse of dual emergency that seems to drive the imaginary that we see often circulated in the media and which is expressed in two ways. Migration is very often an unmanageable event for the present and an event of unpredictable menace for the future. And this discourse, of course, this lens of crisis is very much centered in the western interests, fears, and internal struggles of Western societies. We're very often invited and very often media invite us to think of migration as crisis and what it means for us western publics. Of course, the western publics themselves are constructed in certain ways. If we were to have a meaningful conversation about how media practitioners understand migration, we should start by questioning that very framework of crisis.

My second point is that the crisis imaginary produces and reproduces a polarized humanity. We have heard different experiences from different parts of the world today and about the war and destitution of many people, but not all people are the same when they're uprooted. Very often this imaginary invites us to understand world disorder by asserting the familiar from the strange. This polarization is becoming more apparent now in the current moment and as a consequence of the war in Ukraine that we have been thinking and talking about a lot. So on the one hand we have the war in Ukraine, which has led to the uprooting of more than 5 million people. And on the other hand, climate change, which we have not been reflecting about a lot.

Of course, this is a humanitarian disaster that cannot be underestimated. Europe and the West have exceptionally opened their doors to Ukrainian refugees and quietly offer protection to Ukrainian refugees. However, it is not only a response to a humanitarian crisis, at least it's not just a response to humanitarian crisis. After all, there are so many humanitarian crises happening around the world on different scales, but many of them are also very devastating for people.

Why such exceptional welcome? The offer of protection, and again, I have to emphasize that this is the way things should be, to Ukrainian refugees by the West is very often framed in the media and by policymakers as fundamentally dependent on Ukrainians fighting our war. Our enemy, Russia. This importantly is largely driven by imaginaries of Ukrainian people as people like us white Europeans who even use Instagram, as we've seen in different stories in the media. So in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, we saw how the familiar has become even more familiar. This has nothing to do, of course, with the struggles of the Ukrainian people, but relates to those frames of the crisis imaginary. More and more we recognize the deserving migrant as the migrant whom we know already, whom we can imagine being us. And we can contrast that with other migrants on our screens. The racialized migrants who day after day, instead of becoming more familiar, become more strange.

I have seen in my research again and again, in the consequences across Europe from Poland to Greece, racialized migrants end up becoming more and more often framed within a binary of reduced humanity, either as voiceless victims or as threatening strangers. The presentation of the threatening strangers we see visually through the masses of bodies that are constructed as moving aggressively towards the West. This anxiety of the West about migration from the Global South is intensifying as we speak, especially because it is entangled with

this other crisis. The environmental crisis that we talk less about, perhaps prefer not to see, is much more complex to understand, and it is displaced in the crisis imaginaries towards a focus on migration.

The fallout, I think comes as Western states desperately try to raise higher walls, especially in expectation of the rising numbers of environmental migrants. Importantly, the western states deal with the real or imagined crisis or intensification of crisis through the digital border that makes violent exclusions from life and rights for many people invisible. The Transnational Institute, for example, has said that the border industry, which is primarily focusing on using artificial intelligence and biometric technologies, is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. That same industry of the digital border also externalizes the sorting process of migration that keeps migrants out of the western territorial and symbolic spaces as much as possible. For example, the European Union is now externalizing its border and it's sending its border guards and exporting technologies of the border to sub-Saharan Africa and demands from sub-Saharan countries to act as their proxy-police force. The certain migrants we don't even see anymore, and they're stranger than ever, they become undeserving. Not only of our territories, but also of our screens. They're not seen anymore.

My third and final point raises the question about where we're going, the question of resistance, hope that we heard already about. So can we think of alternative imaginaries for media practice that move beyond the crisis imaginary of polarized humanity and divided geography? The fallout, if we think about that as the crisis of migration, has also become generative and revealing of new possibilities or many different possibilities for media practice. And I can think about three ways that this happens.

The first relates to voice, of course, an old and still very important question about thinking about who speaks and who is seen in our media spaces. Most migrants remain silent in the media. The good part of the story is that in the case of the Ukrainian War and the Ukrainian refugees, we have seen those possibilities of thinking about voice and visibility of migrants in different ways. So even though this is not universal, of course, and there are problems reporting on Ukrainian refugees, we've seen many occasions of good practice where Ukrainian refugees have voice and have individuality, unlike what we see with other migrants. So this becomes an example and a reminder of the different kinds of media practice that are possible where actors of migration can be recognized and seen and heard.

Then there is the diversification of the media spaces that are intensified through migration that raise questions of accountability of western media practice. Migrants are not, of course, only subject to western publicity. They're themselves storytellers and archivists of a life on the move. So we see many migrants becoming smartphone media makers, filmmakers and youth makers, media practitioners, who through their witnessing and narrating, which of course in itself is diverse, stabilize the cartography of western news making. Migrant media storytelling reminds us that media practice is not just happening here, it's happening elsewhere and it's also happening in the many elsewheres of the world. Then there is the reshuffle and what happens with the reshuffle. So there is no doubt that the geographical and communicative terrains of migration are becoming more unstable. This is an opportunity. Perhaps it is possible to consider instability as an opportunity to reshuffle what we take for granted in media practice.

Perhaps we can think about these opportunities also as a way to learn, to learn of different

practices and to also recognize different systems of knowledge and different ways that we see, especially in migrant or solidarity journalism, of how to destabilize those divides between western and non-western models of doing media, between the actors who speak and the actors that should be spoken about. Thank you.

Zoé Samudzi:

Good afternoon everyone. I had different remarks prepared, and then I rewrote them last night after a kind of eruption of discourse was happening on social media. So for my remarks today, I'll kind of move between different roles I play as a writer, as an educator and as a regular Black person on social media to think about the ways that we integrate these ideas into our everyday practice. This past semester I taught a grad seminar called Looking at Violence, which was about the ontology of the atrocity image. And through the past 11-ish weeks, my students came to the kind of cynical conclusion, obviously prompted by yours truly, that the 118 years since Alice Seeley Harris's photographs of the atrocities in the Congo Free State, the humanitarian photograph has arguably failed in its effective appeal. And in fact, the poverty and the violence that it was attempting to capture and project around the world seem to have intensified.

We talked about how the atrocity image, the humanitarian photograph, is structured by our gravitation towards the spectacle, which horrifies and intrigues in equal measure. This has been clear from the visuals used throughout the humanitarian industry to the state media nexus of military propaganda to the rise of Trump, I guess not to be too dramatic. At the very beginning of the society of the spectacle, which they really loved, Debord describes how the spectacle is a social relation that is mediated through the image, what I described to them as visual intertextuality or intervisuality ala Nicholas Mirzoeff, as well as an interplay

between the fragmented views of reality that then regroup into a new unity as a separate pseudo world that is detached from this one. Most of the panelists today have talked about and grappled with the kind of crisis existence of a multiplicity of truths and the contestation of what we understand to be fact.

So then throughout 2020 and into 2021, I worked as a research fellow at the Political Research Associates, which is basically a think tank that tracks far right activity and gives out information to different social justice actors, organizer's organizations and so on. It was actually in a group chat that we all went onto Instagram and saw the January 6th insurgency or whatever you'd like to call it, which was kind of surreal. I was writing a report on white nationalism in white supremacy about the distinctions between the two and the similarities between state and non-state actors, and more or less about the kind of invisible machinations of the settler state that by and large many people had decided to issue in favor of understanding Trump as this kind of political anomaly and a political spectacle that singularly heralded in the rise and the entrance of American fascism.

We saw his botching of Hurricane Maria, which eclipsed George Bush's abandonment of Black people in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We saw his heinous border policy and the Muslim ban as kind of singularly evil as though George Bush, who has been transformed into our kind of silly granddad, didn't create the Department of Homeland Security. And that deportations didn't escalate under our first Black president. Then upon his departure in 2020, an election that was heralded as the saving grace for American democracy that had been pulled back from the brink of fascism, the continuation of different policies including the incredibly hostile policies towards Haitians, the incredible violence that we're seeing at the border and elsewhere became not so spectacular under Biden because there were

presumably partisan controls around policy that under Democratic presidential policy could only get so bad. One of the many horrors of the Trump years is the growing comfort with which anti-Semitic discourse could be publicly articulated by both political officials and media talking heads alike. This is more or less what I'm going to focus on today.

The way that Trump's support for Israel allowed for some conservative organizations to less harshly condemn the anti-Semitic ecosystem that he was cultivating around him. And in the way that anti-Semitism was and continues to be deployed to disrupt and undermine support for Palestine solidarity, the anti-racist discourse has become kind of muddled and inconsistent at best. It's with all of this in mind that I want to talk about Kanye West on Infowars last night. As a kind of zenith honestly, of the spectacle as a conceptualization of media and political ecosystem. His deeply unnerving praise of Hitler was met by Alex Jones allegedly appearing uncomfortable. I didn't see it, I just saw it on Twitter because I wasn't going to waste those minutes of my life. But his allegedly appearing uncomfortable led to an incredibly strange and incredulous conclusion by a lot of reporters that Alex Jones was less anti-Semitic than Kanye West, and that if you are more anti-Semitic than Alex Jones, you have somehow completely lost the plot, which I think all of the reporters saying that have completely lost the plot.

As kind of amusing as that is, many of the people who were making these pronouncements about Kanye West being the reincarnation of Goebbels were actually reporters of wing movements of people that I've interacted with at different meetings where we've talked about our beats back when I was doing that writing. To me, this quite alarmingly highlighted how much reportage and analysis of American fascism is actually devoid of racial politics beyond the kind of spectacularity of the rhetorics that are espoused by different actors. There's a preference to focus on the spectacle

of Charlottesville's Unite the Right rally over, for example, George Jackson's indictment of the carceral system as producing fascist exclusions through the mass incarceration of non-white people across the country. And this of course precedes above insured de Sousa Santos talking about societal fascism pre and post contractual exclusion by decades.

The scales of antisemitism and euphemistic racism and plausible deniability were kind of seen when Kanye brashly said that Hitler was pretty great, Alex Jones kind of sat there shocked. We forget that it's not a matter of whether it actually matters that one person is more anti-Semitic than another. Rather, it's about the recognition of the kind of political euphemisms that people are able to use in public in order to continue to espouse and to foment anti-Semitism without being dinged for it. It's a matter of the way that Kanye West, whatever moment he's in, can be assimilated into these right wing echo chambers, into these ecosystem spaces that he can say explicitly what, I'm not going to say what they don't believe, but what they know that they cannot say.

We're not going to pretend that Alex Jones hasn't created an ecosystem in which people can come on and talk about, I don't even need to repeat it, but every single one of every single stereotype and every single bullet point that was originated in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, we're not going to pretend that all of these spaces and all of these right wingers who have welcomed Kanye with open arms haven't utilized an exploited anti-Semitism as a part of their money making tactics.

His appearance on their show is not a good faith engagement of wherever he is. Rather it's a matter of exploiting the massive platform that he has and the exploitation of the fact that he has become a pariah and that he's willing to say whatever he wants in a way that most other people in media know that they can't. So, in this kind of declaration that Kanye West is less anti-

Semitic than Alex Jones, which I'm still baffled by, we're coming to understand anti-Semitism is a form of racism that is completely stripped from materiality. We're understanding it solely as tropes of proclamations and love for Hitler and neo-Nazism and Nazism, and revolving our own stereotypes and not understanding it as a part of Euro Imperial Christian race-making that was very deliberate about drawing boundaries about what was white and what was not. Even prior to what was understood as anti-Semitism in the 1860s, there were centuries and centuries of medieval Judeophobia in which race, as we understand it, did not yet exist, but there were still exclusions of European Jews by Old Christian families on the basis of difference by blood, this idea that it would be heretic for these Old Christian families to marry non-Christian people. Alex Jones, again, is able to appear less anti-Semitic, when for years his Fox News adjacent infrastructure relied on fatal anti-Semitic ideas. I cannot imagine that there is any act of anti-Semitic violence in the past six years or since Trump's election that cannot in some way be attributed to part of a media ecosystem in which Alex Jones is implicated. If race is about prejudicial ideology and power, the discursive space inhabited by and animated by Jones and his ilk has complimented Trump and his bigoted antagonisms in a way that Kanye West has not, frankly.

These new allegations and discourses around Black anti-Semitism become obvious in their misapplication. Kanye West is not animating armies of Black people. Kanye West is going onto InfoWars. He's having dinner with Nick Fuentes. Although he is undoubtedly influential and he has a particular subjectivity that is inflected by his Blackness, which is to say Black Hebrew Israelism, which is a part of Black and hip-hop communities, even though it exists on a relative fringe, these politics have affinity with the media system that has emboldened and magnified the political atmosphere of the Trump administration, though they're not the

progenitors of anti-Semitism in a way that is often attributed to them.

So I say all of this to ask: in a political atmosphere that is governed by anxiety and violent unpredictability and which the buzzy heuristics of stochastic terror victimizes Black and Jewish communities that are made even further vulnerable by these unpleasant bedfellows in the co-constitutions of anti-Blackness and anti-Semitism, how do we as scholars, instructors, media practitioners, responsible consumers of social media, construct patterns of so-called fact that crystallize intercommunal and anti-racist solidarity against a spectacular media discourse that is intended to fragment? The way that I understand a frame of anti-racism contra to this idea of spectacle is quite solidly in the work of Michael Rothberg and two books of his in particular, this idea of multi-directional memory, which discourages competition and memory as zero-sum, and then this idea of the implicated subject, which strategically deploys implication in an analysis of simultaneous complicity and vulnerability/victimization.

I still don't have the answers to this. Otherwise, I would have something maybe much more optimistic to tell my students on Monday when we have our last class of the term. I'm wondering about how we produce more thoughtful, less panic-driven, less reactive media that mediate the panic that accompanies the production of spectacle rather than perpetuate it because, obviously, when we continue to perpetuate the spectacle, we are only ever lending more credence to the right, whether it's a right wing that is attempting to rehabilitate whatever moment is happening and make a new set of unities that are better or it's a right that is actively capitalizing on whatever chaos is being sown and is actively attempting to move us towards something much, much worse. So thank you.

Florence Madenga:

Thank you. So the panel's theme, fallout, was purposely up ended, and I'm so glad it was. When we conceptualized this panel before all the happenings on social media, we were thinking about the falling out of alliances and geopolitical positions and the reorientation of media practices and strategies that follow. But obviously, it could mean a lot of other things. So one of the benefits of being the last panel is we got to hear all the other prior remarks and panels, and now we've heard everybody's talk. So having heard all this, wondering if you want to maybe further connect or tease out how you're conceptualizing fallout in some of your other work, if you want to add any examples, if you want to connect to some of the things that have been said here already about how you've come to understand global crises or imaginaries that we currently find ourselves in.

Ricardo Corredor:

Well, let me jump in with one thought that I want to share, and it has to do with this idea of polarization. I think it's been something that's been around the conversation today. We hear the world is polarized, but in the case of Colombia, of course, our assertion was that we are not as polarized as we thought. The polls that we had and the research that we had really indicated that what we had was two extremes. And even I have some info that it's 10% on the right and about 20% on the left, but there was 70% in the center. But those extremes are very loud, and they really know how to use social media. So it gives the perception that we are divided, and at least for us in the way we approach the strategy at the commission is of course there are those extremes, but there is a huge, huge center. And we are more of a center country than a radical country. That's at least our perception of what we had.

It's the perception of those extremes that are very radical, very good at using social media and give that perception that we are very divided

when at least, again, in Colombia, it seems to me it's not the case. But the interesting thing with the center is that, of course, in the center you find very different nuances. And especially I think there are two things that we identify that were interesting for us in terms of thinking about narratives and strategies and things. On one side, you have the people that are completely disengaged, skeptical, that they don't believe in anything really. They're just frustrated with the political system, and they don't give a damn. They don't vote. We have an average of 50% of people that don't vote in Colombia, but there is another part in that center that is more disinformed. It's not that they are disengaged. It's that just they don't have the tools to deal with what's happening. And that group, it's interesting because I think it's the group that the right and the left, those extremes, tend to go after because they can go either way.

But what I want to say is that the way we see these things is that we tend to not perceive those nuances, and we see just the most radical positions. And those areas, that center, it's where you can really have more interesting conversations or where you can really develop more interesting dialogues in terms of the things that you want to build. In the case of the Colombian Truth Commission, the idea of a future. Who do you work with? Do you work with the left, the radical left, the radical right, the center? Of course, you have to work with all of them, but usually, that center is completely overlooked. And I thought it was that idea that really stuck with me, and I think it's something that we need to explore more. We tend to explore more the radicals and not that center, which is still, from what I see, not very clear what's happening there, but something happening there that we need to understand.

Myria Georgiou:

I will follow from Ricardo because I'm thinking of this idea of fallout, of course, in relation to

crisis and what I try to speak about the crisis imaginary. I think we see precisely this in the context of migration. If we think of the current moment through that lens of crisis, especially with the way that it is very often framed, we see the polarization of narratives and creation of categories that are very binary that very often were reproduced in the media also, very often very fast and without much reflection of the consequences, because that frame of crisis creates limited opportunities to see outside what we already know. So we think around those boundaries that make it very difficult to think if there's a fallout or if our times are difficult, how can we think about it in relation to our own responsibilities as well or the different factors that we have to take into account as partners or perhaps as factors that we want to or should be critical of, as you said?

I think, again, that the idea of fallout is that it very often comes with this reflexive space of reproducing a crisis, and the crisis produces and reproduces an external reason for why things are going wrong. And just to say something positive about that, which comes out of my research because you ask about our other research, is that sometimes we have to look at what is going on from the margins and, to paraphrase bell hooks, to think of the margins as a space of possibility and a hope, so to see what's happening, the other ways of thinking about the fallout and the other ways of doing media practice that sometimes can be very enlightening.

Zoé Samudzi:

I feel like my thoughts are a bit more cynical. So, I study genocide, and I studied German colonialism. I studied the German genocide in what is now Namibia. I also studied the Armenian genocide because I was interested in what was the pathway and trajectory of German statecraft that brought us from Imperial Germany all the way to the Shoah and how it didn't come out of nowhere. What are

the machinations of the state that brought us to this moment? One thing that I have come to really be frustrated by, even as I do comparative genocide, is the project of making analogy. I think that you said something really apt about how upon the moment of crisis we create these boundaries that reproduce things that we understand and, I think more than that, reproduce things that are familiar. Violence, unfortunately, is familiar. Political homogeneity is familiar. Trying to walk a mile in another's shoes has nothing to do with the way that you're able to understand them as people in themselves and everything to do with how you understand your own self in a different space than the one that you exist in.

In the years that I've been doing this, I feel like I've gotten quite frustrated with the project of empathy because I don't think empathy produces anything for us other than new ways of thinking about ourselves. One of the best and most difficult books that I have read in the past couple of years is Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*. He has this concept about the right to opacity and he talks about how an attempt to walk a mile in another's shoes is ultimately consumptive, that you're eating an other in order to place them approximate to yourself. But you have no regard for their differences. You have no regard for their lives. You have no regard for their subjectivities or for their crises. Instead, he talks about an understanding of solidarity that does not require other people to be like us, an understanding of solidarity that rather emphasizes the fact that we are different and, even in the fact that we are different, we are able to construct more imaginative, more interesting, more radical, maybe not more peaceful, but safer worlds for and with one another.

When I was in Armenia, there was this video game that came out by this Lebanese Armenian video game developer. The goal of the game was to survive the Armenian genocide, but it wasn't actually the Armenian genocide because

if you did survive, it's like it could be any crisis. It could be Syria. It could be this. It could be that. So in the production of empathy and in the construction of analogy, all of the uniqueness is disappeared into oblivion. Once you've disappeared everything into oblivion, you have no space to learn anything about anyone else. There's a kind of arrogance and a conceit to the way that we understand empathy. So I feel like in these moments of crises, we have to step into this uncomfortable space where we don't coalesce and restructure our boundaries around the panic and instead pause and look around to see who are our allies because they're far more numerous than I think that they are. I guess it wasn't too cynical.

Sylvia Ryerson:

Hi. My name is Sylvia Ryerson, and I'm a PhD student at Yale. Thank you so much for this panel. And I just wanted to follow up on your point, Zoé. What you're talking about reminds me so much of Pooja Rangan's work against the humanitarian impulse of documentary. How do we create platforms that make it possible to pull people in a way that isn't towards either a humanitarian impulse or towards fascism? Thinking about your example, that our role is trying to mediate the crisis of spectacle rather than giving it more credence, knowing that social media is designed for spectacle. And then like you're saying, there was this moment of spectacle in this interaction between Alex Jones and Kanye West, and then the commentary itself in saying that, "Wow, is Kanye West more anti-Semitic than Alex Jones," becomes a spectacular statement in itself. I'm just thinking about that stark contrast compared to something that the space that the Truth Commission opens up that Twitter does not and the reality that now not only is there Infowars, but Twitter itself is owned by Elon Musk. And so how do we find those spaces, and what spaces should we even be looking for? Do we need to abandon other spaces?

Zoé Samudzi:

Twitter is a tough one because, on one hand, I think I am with the old anti-fascist idea that you cannot seed any particular space to fascists, that only creating a social media infrastructure where they're the only ones that exist is even more dangerous than continuing to be there to some extent. But I think that what I've at least found is that in your own counter-narratives, they don't need to be grand. And I feel like I tell this to my students all the time. You don't need to solve every single set of questions that you're asking yourself in every photograph that you take because you're going to hate photography and you're going to hate yourself. And I think this documentary is beautiful, and I'm really looking forward to watching it. And even in watching it, I don't get the impression that it's trying to give us a singular, totalizing answer of what happened over 60 years. That's not possible. And instead, it's approaching different actors in different individuals in their own processes in hopes that we can extract pieces of meaning for ourselves in our own respective contexts. And I think even in a hellscape like Twitter, there are so many beautiful spaces and moments and interactions that can continue to happen. And I don't know if I'm a believer in every documentary, every project, every interaction having to do the thing.

In my class, I showed my students these two Palestinian artists in the West Bank, who were imaging checkpoints in a way that was very, very different. One of them took photographs only of hands, of the exchange of passports, of items between the Palestinian trying to go through the checkpoint and the IDF soldier on the other side that refuse the spectacular gaze of this moment of the checkpoint and instead distilled it to this moment of interaction that is completely lost otherwise, that is so taken for granted in the milieu of all of the violence.

And the other photographer created this guerilla exhibition at the checkpoint. So there were images of IDF soldiers looking at images of

themselves at the checkpoint. Even though in this moment the control system was not disappeared, there was an opportunity for Palestinians, for folks in the West Bank to have this set of small confrontations and force soldiers to account for their actions in a way that would otherwise be impossible in this moment of carceral interaction. So I think, again, it didn't end the occupation. But something moved a bit.

Jessa Lingel:

Hi, my name is Jessa Lingel. I'm a faculty member here. And I briefly wanted to lift up the work of Dr. Jade Davis, a librarian here at Penn, who wrote a zine on being anti-empathy. I have been thinking all day about how we balance the institutional versus the individual as a form of critique, which partly comes from the second panel. Matt's (Sienkiewicz) question on talking about people and not just institutions. And it got me thinking. I teach two undergrad classes in this room on pop culture and feminism in media. And I realized that I think when students get energized about hope, it's after hearing about individuals. And when they get angry, it's on the institutional level. But at the same time, I've just finished reading Ruha Benjamin's *Viral Justice*, where she talks about the need to say we have to account for individuals and their actions as also evil. So Derek Chauvin is evil, and so is the institution of the police. And so I'm trying to think how do we balance this need? It tracks when I'm teaching them feminism that they have this institutional critique, and that's where power lies. But also, thinking about the individual is somehow at fault. And when you can critique Kanye in a different way than Alex Jones, because Alex Jones has InfoWars, although Kanye almost bought Parler. So then these institutional critiques kind of creep in. But I'm interested in thinking of how do we balance, in the institutional, in our scholarly work, and our artistic work, and our teaching work, how do we balance these critiques, and hold them at

the same time? So it's possible to find both hope and critique, in the institutional, and at the individual level?

Ricardo Corredor:

That question has all to do with the Commission, because the Commission is an institution. And the power of what it did, it was the power that it was a government institution, created as a result of a peace agreement. That doesn't mean that we had the official truth. Didn't make any sense. So that is something that you have to... I don't think there is an answer for that. You just have to do it, the best way you can.

But perhaps the way I see it is, you try to be more of a platform than our media, in that sense. You try to provide the space, so you can have those interactions. So you have the perpetrators, and you have the victims, and how to try to give voice to those two. And especially, with the more tricky how to approach the perpetrators in a human way, and not in the demonized kind of way that we all deal with them, throughout the war. And the way of the narrative was constructed was you have this good and bad. But that is a tight rope kind of thing, that I don't think there is any way to solve. It's just, you have to embrace it, and understand the dynamics of the two things, and give space for the individuals. But also understand that there is, in the case of the Commission, an institution that was created for that particular objective, and that it had a mandate to provide. So, it is like that. I don't think there is an answer for that, but you have to just navigate those things.

Myria Georgiou:

Yeah. If I can say something about the individual as a category, when we think about migrant reporting, in particular. Very often in positive initiatives, and there are lots of initiatives taken by media professional organizations, to tackle

stereotypical representations of the migrant. And very often, the answer given, and the examples that we see as good practice, is the individualization of the migrant. Of course, a problem here is sometimes, these positive representations of the individual migrant are as harmful to understanding migration as the negative is. Because very often, what we see, of course, is the exceptional individual. The exceptional individual that makes it, against all odds. And again, it fits within what we know already. So it's the entrepreneurial migrant, it's the resilient migrant. It doesn't matter that they don't have any rights. They're heroes, and they can make it, unlike everybody else.

And I saw that having also extremely painful and difficult consequences on the way that migrants themselves might see themselves. And doing research in different European cities, I heard people who feel like they have to perform the part, if they have any chance to get rights and recognition. And the part is this specific way, very Western, and a liberal way to think about the individual. So very often, we think the individual is the way out of the institutional structures of oppression. But actually, they might just reproduce the same structures.

Zoé Samudzi:

I have to go back to this idea of implication, because I think in Michael Rothberg's book, that to me was the best kind of theoretical approach to simultaneously understanding institutions and individuals. To understanding that some... It's like intersectionality, before intersectionality got bastardized by DEI initiatives, of thinking that someone can simultaneously not only exist on an axis of domination or oppression, but that someone can simultaneously actively participate in violence while also being in another way victimized. And the participation in violence often happens in the context of the institution. And often, doesn't. And I think that book, more

than anything, really helped me to resist a lot of carceral designations of kind of good and evil. Because in reading that, it forced me to think about my family is Zimbabwean, about the fact that there were a lot of good guys, freedom fighters, who did some really horrible things, that we have never, as a people, recovered from.

It's this question of, "Okay, we got our independence on paper. What has come of it? How are our families traumatized by it? How are people that we love party to atrocious things, in the name of freedom?" Unfortunately, it opens up more questions than it answers, but I think that it's the kind of difficult wading through and the refusal to believe that there is an answer that gets us somewhere useful. And I think again, back to this idea of opacity. We're not going to have one. We just kind of have to figure out a place that makes sense for us, to kind of... What is it? Just do the thing.

Sarah Banet-Weiser:

Hi, thanks for this. I'm Sarah Banet-Weiser, faculty here at Annenberg. By the way I just got a notification from the *New York Times* that Kanye's account has been suspended indefinitely, right underneath an article that said that hate speech has risen dramatically on Twitter. So you've got the institution and the individual right there, and it just happens to be Kanye.

So I also actually wanted to kind of connect some things that you said, Zoe, with some things that you also brought up, Myria. I'm thinking about the ways in which both of you talked about a crisis of a crisis. So, the crisis of the migrant crisis is one thing. And then Zoé, this crisis of... It depends on where you are, I guess, how you're going to identify the crisis. But the crisis of rising fascism, so that it becomes an exercise and trying to determine who is most anti-Semitic, Alex Jones or Kanye. And how that somehow addresses that crisis.

So that, and your comments about spectacle I thought were just so brilliant and astute. And then I started thinking about this notion of the migrant who is familiar. And the migrant who is familiar, it's not a banality. It's not that kind of banal or mundane familiarity. Actually, it seems to me a spectacular familiarity. And the spectacle is often created by the media. So I was thinking, Myria, I didn't know if you wanted to comment on this, about what was happening in the UK, after February of this year, where there was a State effort to help out Ukrainian migrants or Ukrainian refugees the same time as there was a continuing demonization, and disciplining, and punishing of any non-white migrant who happened to be in the UK. So you've got a plane to Rwanda, filled with Brown and Black migrants, to where nobody really knew. And you've got Instagram posts of Ukrainian families, who were basically branding themselves as a positive, to be adopted by UK families. So I was wondering if you could talk about the spectacle of that, and how the familiar becomes spectacular, in that way.

Myria Georgiou:

Yes, I think there's definitely a spectacularization of migration. And I think the frames through which we see migration in the media are more and more about the spectacle. Frankly, also because within the political economy of the media, that's the only way that migration becomes part of the story. But of course, this spectacularization is also embedded in the histories and politics of race, of colonialism, and of whiteness. So yes, the familiar is not banal. It is spectacular. But it's also historically situated already within this sphere that we understand, and we feel that is superior to other kinds of life.

The Instagram twist is very interesting. I don't know if you saw the stories. I think it was in the American media as well, this idea of the Instagram refugee, and how often the social media savvy Ukrainian profile was built into

media representations. So I think what becomes interesting... And I think there's some similarities with a Kenyan story. That we have something that is familiar, that we recognize within the history and politics of race, but it makes it less racially defined if we think of the good refugee as being also a digital refugee, because it's not racial anymore. It doesn't have to do with proximity. It's about being advanced in other ways. Being progressive or a more advanced kind of human, in those ways, that it's digital. So, they know better. They have agency. They're political actors.

Another thing that was so strange to me about the quickness with which the United Kingdom opened its arms to Ukrainian refugees, which of course they should, was the amount of time that the British government has spent demonizing Eastern Europeans. So I think that what was so interesting about the arms opening moment, it was about the kind of movement and the expansion of the boundaries of whiteness. So Ukrainians were able to enter the fold of western European whiteness, both via attempts to join the European Union, their ability to be more assimilable into western European culture than all of the Black people, and Roma people, and other minoritized people in the Ukraine, who did not have the same ability to be welcomed with open arms. So it was kind of tremendous to see the movement from 60 years ago or whenever... When was the '40s? 70 years ago?

Zoé Samudzi:

This is why I'm a sociologist, not a mathematician. But this moment of the figure of the quote unquote, "Slav" being far outside of the borders of whiteness. So all of a sudden now, England is accepting all of these people. While at the same time, we are hearing all of these stories of sexual violence against Ukrainian women. So there's this kind of conditionality also to this entrance into whiteness, that I also see with anti-Semitism.

It's this idea that you can be white, but you can be white with caveats. And you have to be reminded that as quickly as whiteness can be given to you in a particular moment, or through a particular process in time, it can also be taken away. So I guess that's my kind of two cents.

Silvio Waisbord:

Thank you. I'm Silvio Waisbord, George Washington University. It seems to me that here we have a conclusion, at least an argument that spectacle is necessarily fascist, which of course people have said for the last 80 years. So how do you think about an alternative to spectacle, considering particularly the new economics of attention, and everything that we have known even before the digital era? For example... And that's why I have a hard time thinking, because I can think of Ricardo's experience, the experience of the Truth Commission, that deliberately is set up not to be a spectacle. It may have sort of symbolic power, etc., but it's not spectacle. It's about dialogue, understanding, reconstruction, listening.

So if any form of spectacle is at least suspicious, if not necessarily problematic, how do we think about different forms of large scale communication that do not fall into that? The spectacle of migration, the spectacle of anti-Semitism, the spectacle of humanitarianism are problematic. What are the alternatives, that in some ways can be, let's say, compete in today's sort of attention economy, vis-a-vis this tremendous power for engaging, for attraction, for getting conversations, going for virality, for everything that we know? Just to think about where hope is, rather than saying, we prove again what the Frankfurt School, Susan Sontag, Barthes, all kinds of people have said, "This is fascism, anyway." So how do we find the hope, based on the possibilities, of non-spectacular forms of large scale communication? In one sentence, please.

Ricardo Corredor:

I don't know if this is going to answer the question, but while you were talking, and while I was thinking about this and preparing this, I really thought about this book by Leigh Payne called *Unsettling Accounts*. It's a book that talks about how the testimonies of perpetrators are not as healing as we think they should be. But the thing is, what she's saying is those testimonies you can either see them as a way of a spectacle, or not. But the testimonies of perpetrators, and the testimonies of the victims, the way they play out, is that the only possible thing is that they both have the possibility to be expressed. If it isn't a spectacle or not, it's a very complex question. Because I think it has to do depending on how you do it, and the way you do it. You said the commission is not a spectacle. I think sometimes we had to, in the sense of this wasn't a scenario for these things to happen. And the way of spectacle is depending on who is watching, and what position the person that is watching the spectacle takes. And also the person involved in the debate, what position they take, as they want to see themselves portrayed.

But coming to Leigh Payne, what she says is in the end, the only thing that there is what she calls contentious coexistence. So the only thing we have to understand is that this won't stop. It's there. And that contentious coexistence is the only thing that we have, and the only thing that we need to do is help deal with it.

Myria Georgiou:

My sentence will be very long, but hopefully not too long. So I think a problem with the spectacle, it's because it creates a closed text, as much as a text can be closed. And many of the texts that we criticize as being spectacular is because they create a closed text, precisely for the fast economy of and the short attention span of social media. And I think the answer to what is the alternative has to be normative, and it has to be value-driven. But I think that it's not

normative, in this kind of utopian out there way. I think we might have, on the one hand, this economy of low attention spans. But at the same time, we see mobility flows... I remember various words that have been going around. Reshuffles in society, where we see more and more people being interested in knowing. The environmental crisis, I think, is one of those cases where especially young people want to know.

So it is possible, I think, to do media practice, which contextualizes more, historicizes more stories. It doesn't have to be an encyclopedic contextualization. We know that contextualization can happen in different ways, and in interesting and creative ways. And new technologies, of course, allow us to do that in many interesting ways, as well. And most importantly, to do media practice that seeks also responsibilities, and does not depoliticize issues that are deeply political. And I think this is possible, and we see cases of good practice. So normative, yes. But utopian? No, I don't think it is.

Florence Madenga:

I'm so sorry. We are out of time. Please forgive me. But thank you so much for such a generative panel. And thank you all for the fantastic questions.