



INTERVIEW WITH MONICA DEL PILAR URIBE MARIN, MULTICULTURAL NEWSPAPER DIRECTOR

The next guest in our interview series is Monica del Pilar Uribe Marin, Director, and Editor-In-Chief of The Prisma - The Multicultural Newspaper, a bilingual (English/Spanish) media based in London, made for immigrants and has just been awarded "International Reporting of the Year" at the Independent Media Awards 2022 in the United Kingdom.

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The Prisma – The Multicultural Newspaper, founded in December 2009 is an independent journalistic project, with a professional and bilingual base, seeking to promote multiculturalism, with a focus on Latin-American immigrants and Spanish-speaking residents in the UK. The Prisma Is an independent and multicultural newspaper run by a group of professional journalists, media experts as well as young and enthusiastic graduate people.

The Prisma – The Multicultural Newspaper was born in the context of the complex reality of immigrant life, in particular, that of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the UK, and because of the need to practice ethical, and independent journalism, dedicated to immigrants, who have the right to inform and be informed, according to the high journalistic standards that The Prisma has maintained since was launched. The Prisma believes in the importance of having an alternative way of producing journalism, in the midst of the invisibility that the immigrant community experiences, and to continue with an approach that includes contributors of different origins and nationalities, with a strong commitment to Human Rights. The Prisma focuses on subjects of interest for immigrants and minorities, so that they may gain access to relevant, complete information that is both critical and trustworthy. In addition, all information is made available in both English and Spanish, which is a unique feature of The Prisma; and in this way, assists those communities, which are still in the process of improving their English in particular. At the same time, it allows the English-speaking public to understand, from a wider perspective, the situation of immigrants and their problems, needs, aspirations, and achievements.

The Prisma - The Multicultural Newspaper has been awarded the "International Reporting of the Year" at the Independent Media Awards 2022 by the Independent Media Association (UK).

The Prisma wants to continue to practice ethical and independent journalism, dedicated to serving immigrants, confirming the right to inform and be informed, and with the journalistic quality that The Prisma has maintained until now.

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Monica del Pilar Uribe Marin : “The presence of different cultures in a country contributes to its development... ..”

Q: Let’s begin by introducing yourself to our esteemed readers.

A: I am a professional journalist and the founder and director of The Prisma - The Multicultural Newspaper, a weekly newspaper based in Britain. I was born in Colombia, a country in South America, and I’ve lived in England for a number of years. I’ve worked in journalism constantly, all my adult life. I’ve been a reporter, a researcher, a columnist, editor, and director, mainly in written media - printed and online - and recently also in TV. I am also a translator. My specialisms are the environment, politics, human rights, immigrant issues, and vulnerable sectors of society. And I have given talks on these issues in different countries. I’ve also written a book and co-authored three others. I believe in independent and ethical journalism, and that objectivity in journalism is unattainable. The journalist’s commitment is to tell the truth, without interpreting or hiding it.

The journalist must be involved with what is happening in the world, not simply informing and reproducing facts. They must expose injustice, corruption, murder... analyse, feel and understand suffering, be familiar with the context, the causes and the consequences. And have a sense of humanity.

I am also an activist. In Colombia, it was in environmental issues, and in Britain on issues affecting immigrants. I believe in respecting differences and at the same time preferences. I support ethnic and religious freedoms, as well as in areas concerning age, gender sexuality, and so on.

Q: How did you get into this line of work, what is your background?

A: There are writers and journalists in my family. So, for me, being attracted by journalism was something 'natural'. I studied Social Communication at the Xaverian Pontifical University of Colombia, specializing in Journalism.

I started as a reporter for a local paper, and later worked for the most important national newspaper, El Tiempo, and then I worked as a freelance journalist for nearly all the magazines. I did some radio work, and while I was still very young I was responsible for creating and managing the Revista Prisma (Prisma magazine), which, although it belonged to an institution of the Colombian government, allowed me to bring new national and international writers to the public, and to develop a deeper awareness of environmental issues. For 6 years, I was the Director and Editor of this amazing project. Six years of creative and intense work. In fact, the Prisma magazine positioned itself as a serious and responsible medium and was even nominated for the Simón Bolívar National Journalism Prize as the best contribution to Colombian journalism.

Journalism got me involved in environmental activism, and in some way, I understood that objective journalism is unattainable, but that doesn't mean it has to be any less ethical or professional. Gradually, I became less impressed by the mainstream media, and by the time I was 25 it was already clear to me that independent journalism had more possibilities, if not of making money, then certainly in terms of freedom of expression, a freedom which in a country like Colombia is difficult, because to be a journalist or to think differently is risky.

For different reasons, I left the country, and in Britain I wrote about Colombia and Latin America, for a number of different publications. And then, since the paper I worked for in Colombia had closed down, I decided to create The Prisma - The Multicultural Newspaper, not only in Spanish, but in English as well, thinking of Latin America and of the immigrants from those countries in the UK. And, although Latin America continues to be our main focus, over time, the multicultural situation in a country like the UK became more important. The needs and problems of immigrants were so unavoidable, that it became essential to discuss and defend multiculturalism.

Q: How has being Director and Editor-in-Chief of “The Prisma - The Multicultural newspaper” had an impact on your career?

A: A big impact. Running a newspaper for immigrants is a unique and rewarding experience. And even more so, being an immigrant myself. For this reason, I chose ethical and independent journalism, produced for immigrants, which provides in-depth information about their different experiences and cultures. The Prisma is, if not the only, then certainly one of the few newspapers dedicated to this issue. And working with a magnificent team - which changes all the time because we are all volunteers - has allowed me to get to know other cultures in more depth, and confirmed the importance of understanding and respecting their differences. In addition, working with journalists, translators, and proofreaders of different nationalities is a constant learning process about different cultures and customs.

Apart from our task of informing, we at The Prisma have joined or encouraged campaigns against raids on immigrants, in favour of recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic minority in the UK, and for diversity and multiculturalism. We have organised events and developed activities for immigrants. An important event was the debate fully organised by The Prisma at a meeting in the House of Commons, called Multiculturalism in the UK - Has it got a future?. 133 people attended the debate.

The Prisma is recognised for its role in help for immigrants, as has been pointed out by British media like The Guardian. And with good reason, because The Prisma is a unique paper, thanks to its multicultural team: Spanish, English, Latin-American, Chinese, French, Italian, Africa, French... In other words people of different nationalities who believe in this project and who make it possible.

Q: And, do you write some of the content for The Prisma yourself?

A: Yes, absolutely. Not as much as I would like, because managing and editing absorb much of my time. But yes, I write articles, generally opinion pieces, or interviews and reports, exposés, or multicultural notices.

Q: What have you learned from working with diverse populations?

A: I have learned about differences, not only in cultures but also in the people

who make up those cultures. Differences from collective or individual customs, to emotional and thinking characteristics. Differences in how to handle one's own and other peoples' history. I have learned about the urgent need to accept that we are all different. And I am not only talking about cultural diversity, but also about sexual, religious, political diversity. It is about acceptance, not tolerance. And I have learned that it is not enough to coexist, but also to communicate in order to really understand others. And from them, not only from the experience of living with this population, I have learned a lot about their political, geographical, economic and religious reality, not to mention their knowledge, in many ways.

Q: When developing the frameworks for Multicultural Development, were you also thinking about its theoretical or pedagogical implications for Multicultural Studies?

A: The creation of a multicultural newspaper (the first and so far the only one in the UK), since it is a communication media, implies the creation and practice of intercultural communication, the promotion of intercultural communication, both inside and outside the newspaper. Undoubtedly, the experiences and knowledge gained and transmitted provide a platform for the emerging theories and approaches that contribute to the study of multiculturalism and multiculturalism, and to the pedagogy of multiculturalism. But our journalistic exercise has sought to promote multiculturalism and diversity, to defend the rights of different communities, minorities and individuals, beyond thinking about whether these principles can be useful for multicultural studies.

Q: Will cross-cultural communication assume a new dimension in the context of multiculturalism?

A: It will and has to do so. Intercultural communication is important and necessary because it is not enough that different cultures exist and coexist in the same place, but that they communicate with each other, that they interact, that there is a genuine interest in learning from other cultures. And it is intercultural communication that allows this to happen, otherwise the multicultural world would remain a passive entity where many cultures coexist but without 'touching' each other, where people do not understand each other's reasons and backgrounds. The best way to accept difference is to communicate with and respect the different. Intercultural communication should contribute to end discrimination and racism, and also hate crimes and other types of violence.

Q: What policies do you think to bring the greatest hope for managing competing interests in multicultural societies?

A: Policies of free markets and free movement, open frontiers and fair commerce. Policies that allow those in host countries to understand the reasons for granting asylum, for immigration; a continuing dialogue and investigation, both of the phenomenon of migration and of multiculturalism in itself. To make known the reasons for migration, which is not only motivated by violence in the countries of origin, but also for economic reasons, from countries impoverished by corruption, or simply because the rich countries have extracted their wealth, obliging the population to migrate.

Q: What opportunities have you had of working and collaborating in diverse, multicultural, and inclusive settings?

A: Cultural diversity implies a rewarding diversity of ideas and customs. The presence of different cultures in a country contributes to its development. Working in a multicultural environment offers a bigger picture of things, and hence a better understanding of differences. It also makes you aware that, although sometimes they are not noticeable, racism and other kinds of discrimination are a reality in countries with a history of invading, colonizing, and domination, countries which nevertheless don't accept other communities arriving in their territories.

Q: Describe a situation in which you used your multicultural skills to solve a problem.

A: There are many, being able to help other immigrants, and not just to understand what it's like to feel and live in an environment that is not your own. Because I speak English, although my native tongue is Spanish, I've been able to help immigrants who had problems with documents or who were detained, as a translator or interpreter. And through the newspaper, not just me, but other journalists and translators, have been able to explain to British readers a situation which many of them were unaware of, or didn't understand. And also, by guiding and advising immigrants who don't know the customs of the country in which they are living.

Q: Tell us about a time when you changed your style to work more effectively with a person from a different background.

A: I always have to keep in mind that talking to someone from a different culture requires me to be more open to different ideas and ways of doing things, and the usage of a language which is not our own, but which universally connects us: English. This means asking and trying to know how the members of The Prisma who are in Britain feel and live, whether they are British or not. This allows me to know and understand them, and be able to make a journalism which is close to immigrants. Multicultural journalism.

Q: Is there anything that you wanted to mention specifically about your multicultural newspaper, or for our audience?

A: The Prisma is an independent newspaper. The hundreds of professionals who work together here to produce a high-quality weekly newspaper, dedicated to immigrants, work as volunteers. We have been working now for seven years as journalists for immigrants (thousands of them; their lives, their problems, their campaigns, their opinions, have been published on our pages), but the time has come when we need help in order to continue.

People need to understand that the point we have reached in the UK as a multicultural newspaper, requires a lot of effort. But although supporting multiculturalism is not profitable, even so it is rewarding.

Q: You have probably communicated with leaders and intellectuals from other cultures. What is their attitude to all this?

A: It depends on the politics and the interests that they support. But in general, if they represent the US, the UK, or the strong countries in Europe, it is a tacit rejection. Public discourse (because it is politically correct) is all about openness and embracing multiculturalism, but in practice, they are implementing policies that block access to immigrants, make their lives difficult, or stigmatize them. The same thing happens among intellectuals. But those who have a well-thought-out standpoint, and have a thorough understanding of multiculturalism know that it is inevitable and they defend it. The history of every nation is based on multicultural relations. And of course, there are leaders who understand the importance of multiculturalism and support it.

Q: How do you evaluate the importance and perspectives of the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism, as the means of serving peace and stability in the world?

A: A country where there is religious freedom, where more than one language is spoken, and which is open to multiculturalism, has all the possibilities for cultural, political, and economic development. By encouraging the acceptance of differences, the government becomes social democratic, whose people can be sure that peace and equality are possible.

Q: As a multicultural country, what kind of role can Azerbaijan play in multicultural dialogue?

A: A multi-ethnic country is necessarily multicultural. Hence, it has to create democratic opportunities for its inhabitants who belong to different ethnic groups, cultures, beliefs, and customs. It has to take on, in some way, the international calls in defense of multiculturalism, even more so at the present time, when countries like the UK, and others in Europe, have shown government policies that are racist and discriminatory, and generate hatred and intolerance. It is necessary to encourage platforms and media which promote multiculturalism.

Q: Thank you for your time, any final words for our readers?

A: It is important not to trust media controlled by capitalists, and where there is no defence or respect for human rights. People need to understand multiculturalism and know that it is both necessary and inevitable, and although the Right has again taken over many platforms, it is necessary to make the maximum effort to promote tolerance and respect.

Anti-multiculturalist attitudes have increased in response to immigration and asylum seekers, and this is the enemy of social democracy. To disparage multiculturalism is as common as stigmatizing immigrants. And this is what we have to combat. We must campaign for a world without borders; even if it looks like a not possible dream that never will be fulfilled.

Q: If you could give one message to the Multicultural World, what would it be?

A: It is a fact that ethnic minorities and immigrants are rapidly growing and expanding populations. Unfortunately, it does not happen because people migrate to learn about new cultures or to study, it generally happens because of wars, violence generated by repressive and authoritarian governments, poverty, or because others have entered their countries and taken away their natural resources and land. As the growing multiculturalism is a reality that will not change, it is important to be open, welcome cultural diversity, the diaspora, and to be open to understand and integrate into the new territory it occupies, bearing in mind that integration does not mean losing one's identity. There is too much to learn from each culture. There is too much war, racism, and discrimination, and the way to overcome it is to show the multicultural world the importance and necessity of its existence.

Q: Thank you.

This piece has been edited and condensed with approval from the interviewee.

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