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IN THE NEXT ISSUE
'Censorship and Haiti' is the theme of the 2/2008 issue of Media Development. Articles will discuss media coverage of the island and its people and how that coverage may have impacted public perceptions and political policy decisions.
EDITORS

Representatives of governments, civil society, think-tanks, and media organizations in developing countries met last year in Paris, France, to dialogue about the need to ‘deepen voice’ and political accountability in order to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of strategies to reduce poverty.1

As official meetings go, it appears to have been more useful than many. Participants recognized that they were talking about how to empower people in developing countries, including those living in poverty, to impact the decisions that affect their lives. It was a question of how to implement ‘deep democracy’, or representative democracy with an overriding element of participation.

Central to deep democracy and accountability is strengthening communication and information flows, especially around development issues. And while mass and community media play a key role in such processes, ‘organic’ communication channels (those informal channels that exist at all levels but particularly among poor people) should not be overlooked.

Most importantly, participants agreed that the media have a ‘responsibility to contribute to development and poverty reduction and that donors, governments, civil society and academics should see the media not just as disseminators of information, but as active partners in development.’

This view echoes the Statement of the Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty (see pp. 16-18 of this issue of Media Development). It notes that, ‘When people do not have a voice in the public arena, or access to information on issues that affect their lives, and where their concerns are not reasonably reflected in the media, development tends to be undermined and catastrophes such as famines are less likely to be averted. Lack of access to communication undermines the capacity of the poor to participate in democratic processes.’

The poor are marginalised not only in relation to economic issues, but also in relation to information and communication. A recent article in The New Yorker about digitizing books points out that, ‘If you visit the web site of the Online Computer Library Center and look at its WorldMap, you can see the numbers of books in public and academic systems around the world. Sixty million Britons have 116 million public-library books at their disposal, while more than 1.1 billion Indians have only 36 million. Poverty, in other words, is embodied in lack of print as well as in lack of food.’

In a digitized world, does greater access to new information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer a potential solution? There is evidence that providing ICTs results in new technologies must be made judiciously. This implies that the new technology must be appropriate to the circumstances.3

WACC stands by liberation theology’s ‘preferential option for the poor’. This principle is rooted in the biblical notion of justice, where God calls us to be advocates for the voiceless and the powerless among us. Strengthen people’s ability to communicate and they are no longer ‘voiceless’ or ‘powerless’. A question posed by Dom Hélder Câmara (1909-99) – champion of Brazil’s poor and downtrodden – gets to the heart of the liberation issue. ‘When shall we have the courage to outgrow the charity mentality and see that at the bottom of all relations between rich and poor there is a problem of justice?’

Notes
Challenging media: Poverty amidst abundance

Roberto Verzola

The corporate control of media is well explored (Thomas and Nain, 2004). Through direct advertising and strategic programming of content, traditional and new media play key roles in creating, expanding and consolidating corporate markets and in maintaining a consumer mentality that serves corporate goals. To these media, the poor are simply class D and E consumers, whose low/zero disposable incomes make them the least priority strata in the consumer pyramid.

As a topic, the poor are occasionally used to attract more readers, listeners and viewers and therefore more advertisers. This of course does not stop the poor, anti-poverty advocates, and well-intentioned media persons from tapping media for their own goals. These goals may involve calling public attention to specific cases of poverty, raising public awareness and understanding of poverty’s root causes, or actually getting people and decision-makers to act towards presumed solutions.

Before the role of media in creating or eradicating poverty can be further explored, it is essential to gain better understanding of poverty itself.

Low incomes despite resource endowments
A tragic irony of our time is how so many people have remained poor amidst so much potential and actual abundance. A study by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations notes, ‘The negative correlation between resource endowments and GDP growth remains one of the most robust findings in the empirical growth literature’ (Bulte et.al., 2004). In short, the more abundant a nation’s natural wealth, the less income its people make to get themselves out of poverty.

This endowment of wealth can be found not only in nature but in agriculture too. In both, abundance is built right into the processes of Life itself, because every living thing has the urge to reproduce its own kind. Each seed may create a hundred or more of its own kind after one growing season, a 10,000% growth rate that is hard to match in the industrial or the financial sector. As the Internet becomes more available, a new type of abundance is emerging – the abundance of human ideas, experiences and knowledge – one that is fuelled by the human urge to share and to communicate.

Yet, despite the abundance, poverty persists. I suggest several explanations for this seeming paradox:

1. Some people who are deemed poor are not actually so.
2. To create a market for substitute products, commercial interests undermine the abundant resources which are freely available.
3. Laws criminalize access to abundance and help ensure monopoly by private interests or the government over resources and productive assets.
4. Some do not see how much abundance actually exists around them or, if they do, lack or have lost the knowledge to harness that abundance.
5. Communities have lost the traditional institutions and mindsets that enabled them to avoid poverty by sharing resources that are becoming or have become truly scarce.

Some people who are deemed poor are not actually poor
Gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP) are bad indicators of national wealth. Because they are so grossly aggregated, GDP/GNP can hide a mass of poverty behind statistics of affluence. In 2006 in the United States, for instance, a Department...
of Agriculture study found that 10% of adults and 17% of children were so poor that they occasionally went hungry for lack of food (FRAC, 2007). Also, if ‘bads’ are monetized (e.g., toxic products), this increases GDP/GNP too, making a country seem better off than it really is.

The distortion can go the other way too. Goods which are not monetized will not enter the national accounting system. Clean air, for instance, is not counted as national wealth, because it is not sold in markets. Likewise, fertile soil, potable water from springs and clean rivers and lakes, mothers’ milk, heirloom seeds, and similar goods which are freely available are not monetized and therefore not considered part of the domestic/national product.

The encounter between a development expert and a fisherman (Sivaraksa, 2001), told in many versions, illustrates this point:

‘A fisherman who has caught enough for his family is lying leisurely on the beach. Comes a development expert, who urges him to fish for more, so he can buy a bigger net, to catch more fish, to buy his boat a motor, to catch even more fish, to buy another boat, to hire more people to fish for him. Asks the fisherman, “What for?” and the expert says, “So you can have more time for rest and leisure.” Says the fisherman: “That's exactly what I’m now doing!”’

It is in the interest of some, it seems, to make fisherfolk and others appear or feel poor, even if they are not or do not feel so. Governments may exaggerate their poverty statistics to attract more grants and loans. The development expert may insist on calling the fisherman poor to justify his trip; the more fisherfolk are poor, the better for his job security. Commercial interests may try to make consumers feel that some things are lacking in their lives, that they are not complete, to keep them buying new products.

The intrusive non-stop bombardment by media of the public psyche through advertising and content programming that glorify wasteful consumerist Western lifestyles is designed to create and expand markets by making people feel poor when they are not or poorer than they really are.

Even well-intentioned media must take care that their poverty and wealth pieces do not create in people, like the fisherman in the story, a longing for affluent lifestyles, the pursuit of which may take them on paths that will make many even poorer.

Freely available abundance is undermined by commercial interests

Commercial interests do not just make people feel incomplete and therefore insecure to open markets for their products. They actually sabotage abundance to cause artificial scarcity.

Examples: Soil fertility – a free good made possible by all the earthworms, bugs, fungi, bacteria and a rich variety of soil organisms – is being undermined worldwide through chemical treatments, forcing farmers to buy even more synthetic fertilizers. Organic farmers, whose products command premium prices because these are safer and healthier than their chemically-treated counterparts, are losing their organic certification due to genetic contamination from engineered crops.

Similarly, our abundant sources of freely-available clean water are being undermined by industry, which now sells us expensive bottled water instead. Mothers who have just given birth are deceived by hospitals and advertising to try formula milk, leading to a premature decrease and eventual halt in the mother’s production of breast milk, which then makes the mother and her baby completely dependent on formula milk.

People do not change habits so easily, especially if this means buying what used to be free. It takes massive propaganda efforts to get people to acquiesce to these technological substitutions that take away freely available resources. That they manage to pull it off is evidence not only of the political power of business but also of the cultural and psychological power of media.

This callous sabotage of freely available abundance to force the public to buy their products leads not just to poverty but impoverishment, when people who used to enjoy an abundant resource for free become unable to
meet their basic needs if they lack the money to buy the commercial substitutes.

Prevented by law from accessing the abundance around them
If such abundance cannot be so easily undermined, they can simply be banned or criminalized. For instance, the trend among countries to ban farmers from selling their seeds unless these are certified by the government is becoming more widespread. Genes modified through genetic engineering are being patented, and by extension the seeds that contain these genes.

This criminalizes not only the sale, but the simple exchange and sharing among farmers of these seeds. If a traditional variety is genetically contaminated by an engineered variety, then that makes any unauthorized use of the contaminated variety illegal too.

Copyrights are similar mechanisms for criminalizing free exchange and sharing among music lovers, video fans and software users. Recent trends in copyrights enforcement are also criminalizing the photocopying of books and other publications.

In media, a good example is the criminalization of low-power radio stations. Even where they have been allowed after years of lobbying by social movements, bureaucratic requirements and delays maintain a de facto ban on low-power broadcasting. Among various media options, low-power broadcasting provides what is perhaps the best opportunity for the poor to run their own medium (Verzola, 2004).

A low-power transmitter now costs only about as much as one laptop. The technology matches the oral tradition of rural society. The limited range of the station makes the use of local language and a focus on local issues essential. Even the poorest of the poor can have access by buying one transistor radio and few batteries every few months.

Illegalizing processes that lead to abundance is becoming a major cause of poverty and impoverishment worldwide.

In a few cases – the caste system, for instance – the bias that creates poverty becomes deeply embedded not just in law but in the culture itself, making it a greater challenge.

Taking abundance for granted or lacking in knowledge to harness it
In many countries, indigenous food sources continue to grow wild in untended corners of farms and fields and in thickets, meadows and nearby forests. Domesticated but self-seeding food and medicinal plants still grow like weeds in many areas, containing enough nutritive value to keep people healthy and well.

Many have unfortunately forgotten about this wide variety of food sources. Or their food tastes have been so modified by advertising and Hollywood movies that they have lost their taste for native salads, ingredients and cookery. Worse, they might have developed a distaste for ‘last-resort’ foods like root crops that remain available during scarcities of regular cereals like rice or wheat, even if these root crops are actually more easily grown and nutritious.

If media were themselves aware of these freely available resources, they could help by raising popular consciousness about this unappreciated wealth. People oblivious of such wealth will exchange it for more frivolous trappings of wealth.

A common sight in rural areas is a farmer who carries a sack of root crops to the market and then brings home plastic packets of fried potatoes, or a mother who sells a sack of coconuts for a pittance and then comes home with a few bottles of Coca-cola for her kids.
In many areas, the poor could not harness seasonal abundance in cereals, vegetables, fruits and other crops simply because they lack the processing knowledge to add value to these potential raw materials. Hence, they suffer the ‘natural resource curse’ described earlier, where wealth in natural endowments could not help them raise their income levels.

This is a simple access-to-knowledge issue that could be solved by local media sensitive to these problems. Much of the knowledge may also be available on the Internet, which the poor can tap through their Internet-capable partners.

The loss of commons
Where a resource shows precarious abundance or has actually become scarce, communities could still ensure their members availability of the resource by creating a common pool – a commons. Human societies have accumulated a rich heritage of managing commons that have served them well for many generations – be it hunting grounds, fishing grounds, forests, sources of drinking water, knowledge about plants and animals, insights about human disease and wellness, and similar resources (Ostrom, 1990). Through this heritage, communities facing scarcity have avoided poverty by assuring every member of minimum access that meets their basic requirements.

Managing the commons entailed the enforcement of a behavioural rule-set that eventually became a mind-set. Features of this mind-set included: awareness of abundance, focus on the community, concern for the common good, willingness to cooperate, a sense of dynamic balance, and a risk-averse strategy towards uncertainty.

Unfortunately, the dominant mind-set today underlines the commons approach to resource management. It does so by ignoring abundance and seeing only scarcity, focusing on corporate profit-seeking, elevating individual self-interest to the apex of human values, glorifying competition, giving more weight to unlimited growth than to dynamic balance, and adopting a gain-maximizing strategy regardless of health, social and environmental uncertainties.

As these new values undermined the old value-system which had made commons management successful for many generations, they resulted in a tragic breakdown of the commons. This tragedy was then used to further justify government or corporate takeover of common pool resources. The subsequent nationalization or privatization of common pool resources ended in even worse impoverishment, as the commons broke down and corruption and greed took over.

Gandhi’s insight about abundance and scarcity, that ‘there is enough in the world for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed,’ is a cogent summary of both the problem and the implied solution. We can live in abundance if we take only what we need. But if we let greed take over, a few will have much and still not be satiated, while many will have none at all. It is a choice between sufficiency for all, or excess for some but lack for many.

There is no simple reason why people become – or think themselves as – poor. That poverty can be so widespread amidst abundance is probably due to a complex mix of these five reasons, or perhaps additional reasons as well. One cannot help but think that if economics were a science of both abundance and scarcity, then the goals of social justice, sustainability and ecological balance would be better served.

New media, the Internet and the poor
Much as been written about the possibilities of new media and the Internet to accomplish for the poor what traditional media have failed to do. These new technologies do hold a promise of new abundance in human ideas, experience, knowledge, and interaction, driven by our inherent urge to share and communicate. That information goods are neither diminished nor used up when they are shared is now well understood.

But a few issues remain to be settled, before technologies like the Internet can truly be of use to the poor (Verzola, 2004). The cost of access remains a major obstacle that keeps the majority excluded from the technology. Aside from the cost and access considerations, other issues revolve around the deeply embedded biases built into the technology itself, which
favour those who designed the technology. These biases include:

The dominance of the English language. English dominates not only the Web and its contents but also behind the scenes, in the mark-up language (HTML), in the programming languages (Java, PHP, Perl, C, etc.) and even the microcode embedded in the CPUs at the heart of every machine on the Internet. One must learn English to master the technology. It will be hard to learn the Anglo-Saxon tongue without acquiring its taste too.

The logic of automation. This logic dictates that machines replace people. This may sound logical to countries rich in capital or to machine suppliers and vendors. But to countries rich in labour but poor in capital, automation only worsens internal problems in both factors of production. It is often argued that automation creates new demand for skilled high-tech labour. Temporarily perhaps, but they too will eventually become targets of the automation paradigm.

Built-in subsidy for globalization. The Internet charges the same whether bytes are sent/received locally or internationally. Yet, bytes that travel internationally incur higher network costs because they use more network resources such as communication lines and routers. This means local players are being charged higher per unit cost than global players. In effect, local players are forced to subsidize global players, a bias that is built into the technology.

Hidden centralism. Central control of the Internet is exerted through gradual consolidation of ownership of the hardware and communications infrastructure, the assignment of Internet numbers and domain names, and the setting of standards and formats. These may be used to create competitive advantage or make life difficult for unwanted players.

Whether the poor can overcome these inherent biases (which, by the way, are absent from low-power radio stations) to tap the abundance which is inherent in the new medium remains to be seen.

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Roberto Verzola is an engineer by training (BSEE, 1982) and a long-time social activist (political prisoner, 1974-77). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he conducted trainings for Philippine and Southeast Asian NGOs in computers and e-mail. In 1999, he received the ‘Father of Philippine E-Mail Award’ for his pioneering work in introducing electronic mail to the country. In 2004, his analysis of the social impact of new technologies and the emerging information economy was published in the book Towards a Political Economy of Information. In 2005, the alumni association of his alma mater, the University of the Philippines College of Engineering, gave him an ‘Outstanding Alumni Award for Public Service’. Aside from the information economy, his current interests include sustainable agriculture, election modernization, and the political economy of abundance.
Communication poverty: A rights-based approach

Lavinia Mohr

Views about the relationship between communication and poverty are rooted in differing understandings and beliefs about the origin and causes of poverty. When poverty is seen as a human creation, it is not difficult to find links between communication and poverty. Communication is at the heart of human creation, at least those human creations that involve more than one person.

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views about the relationship between communication and poverty are also rooted in understanding public communication processes. The powerful have long seen communication as central to political processes and political power, whether acquired by forceful or peaceful means. For instance, colonial slave owners banned drumming by imported African slaves to prevent them from communicating among themselves across distance, the better to preserve the social order desired by the slave owners.

While the days of formal colonial slavery are over, we see that public communication in its modern forms remains largely in the hands of the privileged. In modern times, radio and television stations are classically the second target of military takeovers, immediately after, if not simultaneous with, the presidential palace. More recently, the Internet has become a target of choice. Those aiming to gain or maintain power continue to seek to control, influence or restrict public communication by direct or indirect means to win support or compliance.

It is almost axiomatic that the powerful and privileged have greater access to and influence over public communication processes than people living in poverty. People living in poverty lack power. One element of that lack of power is exclusion from communication in the public sphere.

How much does this matter to those living in poverty? The ability of any human group to contribute through communication to the creation and exchange of socially shared meanings is essential to creating a world that responds to their needs. Communication inequality is a crucial component of poverty that needs greater attention in contemporary thinking about poverty. Communication inequality was highlighted almost ten years ago as in the World Bank’s Poverty Group’s 1999 report surveying characterisations of poverty by people living in poverty in 47 countries.

Appropriately entitled Can Anyone Hear Us?, it claimed to be the first large-scale comparative research using participatory methods to focus on the voices of people living in poverty. The study found that in addition to obvious dimensions of poverty such as lack of assets, secure livelihoods, food, water, adequate housing and sanitation, people living in poverty identified powerlessness and the inability to make themselves heard as a key aspect of poverty.

According to the report, lack of voice and power is experienced not only in relations with the state but in poor peoples’ relations with the market. Powerlessness and voicelessness also underlie discussions of a heightened sense of vulnerability and the inability of poor people to protect themselves from shocks. In its conclusions about definitions of poverty and implications for measuring poverty, the report says, ‘One of the challenges is to track and measure changes in power and voice together with other measures of poverty, such as estimates of expenditure and consumption, and access to education and health’ (World Bank 1999, p. 51) In its findings and conclusions about strategies for change, it says ‘Promotion of voice and empowerment of poor people becomes the central task’ (World Bank 1999, p. 217).
More recently, the 2005 Human Development Report stated that extreme inequalities in human development are rooted in power structures that deprive poor people and ‘crucially – deny them a political voice.’ The 2005 HDR suggested that the ‘denial’ of voice to the poor constitutes a barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In the years that have passed since these reports were published, it is apparent that their conclusions about the centrality of communicative processes have not resulted in concerted and coherent efforts to put communication high on the agenda of poverty reduction, concern for ‘the digital divide’ notwithstanding. This was again highlighted in the recent Panos report ‘At the heart of change: The role of communication in sustainable development.’ The report calls for ‘a belated recognition that communication is central to all aspects of sustainable development’ (Panos 2007, p. 25.)

The relative silence in public communication processes is a key dimension of the powerlessness of people living in poverty and is closely correlated with the extreme inequalities that underlie human development failures. Strengthening the voices of people living in poverty improves understandings and actions aimed at addressing poverty, injustice and inequality and can inform and influence public agendas locally, nationally and internationally.

Communication assets and communication poverty
Public communications are a public asset, just as education, health or justice systems are public assets. People living in poverty are entitled to, but usually do not have, fair access to public assets. Communication assets are no exception. In attempts to reduce, alleviate or eradicate poverty, insufficient attention has been paid to entitlements to a fair share in communication. The lack of communication processes by, for and about people living in poverty is a significant facet of poverty that is little recognized by others.

The lack of assets including education, legal justice, skills, land, housing, political influence, health, social networks and organisational capacity is a fundamental characteristic of poverty as defined by poor people. It is the lack of assets that underlies the vulnerability to shocks of all kinds to which those who are not poor are not nearly so vulnerable.

High among the lack of assets are communication assets that provide the means for people living in poverty to make their voices heard so that they can influence the wider social agenda locally, nationally and globally. Without access to communication assets, people living in poverty are also less able to engage in communicative acts to hold governments accountable, or to gain access to economic opportunities for better and more sustainable livelihoods or to organise themselves to work together on shared concerns.

It is clear that access to clean water, health care and education are among the most important measures of the level of human development. Public communication responding to the needs of the poor, marginalized and excluded is equally essential to lasting human development. The ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ are visible in communication as well as in access to clean water, health care, education and other elements of human development.

In this context, struggles to expand access to communication processes such as, for example, efforts to gain legal recognition for independent community media as a third sector beyond public and private media for the use and benefit of marginalised groups and poor communities can be seen as an effort to reduce communication poverty and are part of efforts to overcome poverty in general. This is more apparent when communication poverty is acknowledged as a crucially important element of ‘traditional’ poverty.

Communication and the public agenda
Through communication, thoughts become words, or images, and words can become actions. Heightened awareness and increased understanding arising from communicative processes can lead to actions. Social attitudes can change when people are able to initiate debates and make their voices heard on issues that affect them to generate support and pressure for change.

If public communication does not address
problems and issues affecting poor people, those ‘invisible’ concerns in effect do not exist in that society’s public agenda. Furthermore, public communication processes that, through commission or omission, represent marginalised groups of people in ways that maintain discriminatory social identities impede thinking that may lead to actions to make changes in such discriminatory realities.

In several Latin American countries, public communications increasingly represent young people from poor urban neighbourhoods in general as delinquents and criminals. This representation reinforces social attitudes that make it even more difficult for young job seekers from those areas to find employers willing to hire them, helping to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Unfair and unbalanced gender representation in the media exemplifies another way in which communication content influences social attitudes and the public agenda with detrimental consequences for women and femininity poverty. The fourth and final Arab Human Development Report 2005 titled ‘Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World’, stated that the hoped for ‘Arab “renaissance” cannot and will not be accomplished unless the obstacles preventing women from enjoying their human rights and contributing more fully to development are eliminated.’

The Arab countries as a region have the second lowest Gender Development Index ratings in the world. The report emphasises that the Arab media are a major factor in holding Arab countries back in human development, as they are a pervasive and central source of patterns and social values influencing discriminatory behaviour towards women and girls. Discriminatory behaviour translates into systemic discrimination underlying female powerlessness and poverty. Media representation of gender recreates and reinforces social attitudes that contribute to gender based poverty. From the point of view of Arab women, their representation and portrayal in the Arab media constitutes a form of communication poverty.

Many other marginalised groups are similarly affected by the ways in which public communication sets public agendas.

In many countries with majorities living in poverty, the gap between the realities of their lives and the content of the media is astonishing. One measure of the gap might be a comparison of the percentage of media coverage of issues and concerns specific to people living in poverty versus the percentage of poor people in the population. Few media outlets have a poverty beat and few journalists specialise in poverty reporting. A society that does not know itself cannot arrange itself to meet the needs of all its members. The low visibility in the public sphere of the concerns of people living in poverty is a sign of a society that does not fully know itself.

Greater transparency in the circulation of information about what governments are doing is one communication process that is relatively widely admitted as contributing to good governance that could contribute to poverty reduction. Shedding light on what is kept from view can help reduce corruption and electoral fraud and make it more possible to hold governments accountable, all of which taken together with other factors could strengthen the voice and increase the power of people living in poverty to influence actions on problems affecting them.

ICTs and poverty
Greater access to communication assets (reducing communication poverty) for people living in poverty is not only a question of making themselves heard, but also about the flow and exchange of information for better livelihoods. It is not only roads that bring economic opportunities: it is communication and the information exchange that communication enables.

There can be little doubt that lack of access to communication assets such as telephones and the Internet presents yet another disadvantage to people living in poverty. The ability to receive and send information to and from others is an integral part of human survival. The inability to do so constitutes another asset deficit affecting people living poverty. More information exchange could be beneficial in many facets of life and provide opportunities for better livelihoods for primary producers.

Information technologies that do or could
provide people living in poverty with greater ability to exchange information support the notion that ICTs could be part of reducing poverty. However, it is important to keep in mind that similar claims made in the last 100 years with almost every new communication technology have not been successful. By themselves, technologies, even information and communication technologies, cannot fundamentally change the creation and perpetuation of poverty for the simple reason that poverty is not caused by the unequal and inequitable access to technology.

Unequal and inequitable access to technology is rather a symptom and result of the social creation of poverty. Expanding access to ICTs will not in itself eradicate poverty. If we have learned one thing in the experience of the rapid evolution of technologies in the 20th century, it is that technologies by themselves neither create nor eradicate poverty. Arguments that technological improvements will help reduce poverty tend to benefit those implementing these solutions rather than the great numbers of poor. It is vitally important that initiatives to increase the technological communication assets of people living in poverty are undertaken from a perspective that goes far beyond a technical basis.

Poverty and communication rights
In October 2006 over 1,000 people from around the world gathered in Rome at the World Congress on Communication for Development organised by the World Bank and the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organisation. They included multilateral agency specialists, consultants as well some NGO representatives and communicators from marginalized groups. At a panel of indigenous peoples held outside the three main agenda streams, speakers called for recognition of communication rights of indigenous peoples, linking the struggle for communication rights to the struggle for land rights. Later in the final plenary session, after considerable unexpected debate, a final declaration was issued urging the adoption of a communication rights perspective in ‘communication for development’.

Poverty appears as a social creation of humans who collectively build societies that benefit some more than others in a world with enough resources to provide food, water and shelter for everyone. Communication is at the heart of human societies and the social creation of poverty. Not only do inadequate communication processes recreate and reinforce poverty, they are also an expression of poverty.

Communication is a basic human need as much as food, water and shelter. Adequate access to communication assets and fair representation in public communication processes need to be seen as a human right – one that is not fully enjoyed by people living in poverty.

We are seeing a rise of rights- and entitlements- based approaches to development and the eradication of poverty. Broader recognition of a rights-based approach to communication to eradicate communication poverty and poverty in general is needed at this point in the search to find ways to make real changes by and for people living in poverty.

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Voice and poverty

Jo Ann Tacchi

In bringing issues of ‘voice’ to the fore in international development and development communications, at least two areas of work – participatory approaches and local production of content – need to be explored. The first is about the need to listen to the voices of the poor in order to both understand and tackle poverty. The second is concerned with promoting a diversity of voices through media and communications.

There is now an established body of work on participatory approaches to understanding poverty, which is concerned to let those who experience poverty tell those who do not what this experience is like, rather than have external ‘experts’ assess it from afar. Similarly, increasing attention is being paid to the local production of content.

Before discussing these two ways of thinking about the connections between issues of voice and poverty, I want to explore briefly what is meant by ‘voice’, and how it might relate to poverty at all. A somewhat slippery word, though at the same time glaringly self-evident, ‘voice’ can be used in a number of ways in relation to development. Voice can be defined as inclusion and participation in social, political and economic processes, meaning making, autonomy and expression. We can think of ‘voice poverty’ as the denial of the right of people to influence the decisions that affect their lives, and the right to participate in that decision making.

The ability to express oneself and participate in social and public spheres through information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be considered another way to promote this idea of ‘voice’ that has relevance to how we think about media and communication and its relevance to poverty reduction. Clearly not everyone has the same levels of access or skills required to be full participants in this way.

We can think about this, for example, in terms of media literacy which can include the ability to create content, which in turn might be considered a fundamental aspect of what it is to be a citizen in a new media world. Debates about digital divides have shifted to focus on issues of digital inclusion and engagement. If we combine such ideas – media literacy, local content creation and digital inclusion and engagement, we can think in terms of ‘creative engagement’ as a suitable goal for ICTs for development. This involves the ability of people to access technologies and be creative with them in ways that enable their voices to be heard.

ICTs and their relevance to voice (and vice versa) can then be related, both for individuals and groups, to access or a denial of access to modes of expression and more generally to freedom of expression. It can relate to opportunity and agency or the lack thereof, to promote self-expression and advocacy and access to technologies and platforms for distribution of a range of different voices. It can also be related to opportunities to participate in the design of ICT for development interventions themselves.

So defined, ‘voice’ insists on a ‘bottom up’ approach – giving people an opportunity to have a voice and influence or drive their own social change - and is of particular relevance to ICTs or communication and development. In other words, nowadays, voice can be considered as a necessary component of development per se, and ICTs for development in particular. This is reflected, for example, in a growing interest in communication for social change which insists that ‘Social Change can be defined as: a positive change in peoples’ lives – as they themselves define such change’.

Firstly then, ‘voice’ can be related to active participation in the development project itself, in establishing what should be the focus of development, in the design and implementation of development initiatives, and in the assessment of whether or not positive social change has resulted. This I discuss as ‘participatory
approaches and voices of the poor’. Secondly, ‘voice’ can refer to local content creation, to the expression of a diversity of voices through a range of local media and ICTs. It can be related to the idea of media literacy and digital inclusion and I present this as ‘local content and creative engagement’. Finally I briefly describe a research project designed to explore issues of voice along these lines.

**Participatory approaches and voices of the poor**

The World Bank’s ‘Consultations with the Poor’ project provides a significant demonstration of the general acceptance of the need for participatory approaches to understanding poverty. It represents probably the largest in scale attempt to ‘listen’ to the voices of those experiencing poverty, having collected together the voices of 60,000 poor men and women, from 60 countries. Generally referred to as ‘voices of the poor’, the study is founded on the idea that those who are themselves experiencing poverty are the people who need to describe it, and that participatory techniques provide the means to ‘get at’ these descriptions and understandings.

The use of participatory techniques to understand poverty has its roots in the work of Paulo Freire and has been developed and promoted in particular by Robert Chambers since the early 1980s. The Voices of the Poor study and its input into the World Development Report 2000/2001 helped both to link voicelessness and powerlessness, insecurity and humiliation to concepts of poverty, and give a boost to the notion that we need to listen to those who have experienced poverty, through participatory approaches to the analysis of poverty, if we are to understand and ‘attack’ it.

The World Bank’s ‘voices of the poor’ project was a huge undertaking which focussed attention on both the issue of voice as self-expression in terms of people speaking for themselves about their own circumstances and what they feel about poverty-related issues, and, on the need for participatory processes in wider conceptualisations and definitions of poverty. The Asian Development Bank has more recently published a study called *Learning from the Poor* (2007). Covering seven Indian states, and including over 20,000 people through participatory poverty assessments, again the desire is to place ‘the poor’ at the centre stage of development and the definition of poverty itself.

Participatory techniques are now used across a range of organisations and projects, from the very small scale to large scale like the ADB and the World Bank initiatives. One problem with such large scale ‘listening’ to voices of the poor is the ‘one off’ nature of that listening. While we can see how *Voices of the Poor* was the first major project undertaken where, rather than assessing poverty from the outside, the World Bank attempted to understand poverty from the inside, and while it has impacted on various approaches to poverty reduction, the question remains, what happens next to those people and their concerns?

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is a more inclusive approach to participatory research, attempting to involve a broad range of participants at every level of the development or social change initiative. In fact, the researcher or ‘external expert’ acts as a facilitator in such an approach while those directly impacted conduct the evaluation. The key principles of PM&E include respecting and emphasising local knowledge; a broad range of stakeholders design, implement and determine the impacts or success of an initiative; any learning has practical value to participants; and the process is educational, empowering and capacity building.

There is a clear intention evident in all of this work to use participatory approaches to listen to the voices of the poor and engage them in decision making and the design of development. The communication for social change (CFSC) consortium shows how participatory approaches can be linked directly to media and communication itself (see www.communicationforsocialchange.org). So let’s turn now to think about voice in terms of the content of media and communication.

**Local content and creative engagement**

The PANOS report *Making Poverty the Story* (2007) tells us it is time to involve the media
PANOS views public service and public interest journalism as a vital ‘public good’ and suggests one key strategy in *Making Poverty the Story* is the inclusion of ‘voice’ to provide the ‘human angle’ in media reports. At the same time it demonstrates a disjoint between the skills of the journalists and the knowledge of Civil Society Organisations and suggests they work together more effectively, to understand each other’s needs and identify opportunities to promote dialogue, debate and change for the poor.

This report stops short of talking in any depth about ‘ordinary citizens’ having a leading role to play, though it advocates the use of ‘oral testimonies’ to provide the voice that will give journalistic features the element of human interest that will engage audiences in thinking more empathetically about issues of poverty.

Perhaps more grounded at the community level and more aligned to ideas of ‘participation’ in content creation, the World Congress on Communication for Development, held in Rome in October 2006, produced a set of recommendations to policy makers based on an understanding that communication is a ‘major pillar’ for development and social change. The *Rome Consensus* places community participation and ownership on the part of the poor and excluded at the heart of communication for development.

Among the ‘strategic requirements’ specified in the consensus are: access to communication tools so that people can communicate amongst themselves and with decision makers (community-based media); recognition of the need for different approaches depending on different cultures (context specific); and, support to those most affected by development issues to have a say (voice). According to the consensus there needs to be more of this, in greater depth, and it must always be adequately monitored and evaluated. There is a stress on the need to build capacity for development communication at all levels, from community members to development specialists.

**Finding a voice**

These ideas of community-based media, the need to develop activities specific to each context, and the potential benefits of giving those most affected by development issues a voice underpin a project that has been working across India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Indonesia for the past two years. *Finding a Voice* began with the assumption that rather than simply understanding ICTs and the media as tools for accessing and circulating useful information, given the opportunity, participants are likely to engage with ICTs in far more complex, creative and expressive ways.

I like to call this *creative engagement* with ICTs in an attempt to move beyond limiting issues of access and to encompass ideas about digital inclusion. This is particularly interesting in relation to questions of engagement with ICTs, self-representation and social, political and cultural participation. Clemencia Rodriguez calls this form of media, ‘citizens’ media’.

Community-based media is seen to offer media pluralism and the diversity of content. It is seen as encouraging dialogue and transparency of administration at local levels. It is considered to offer a voice to the voiceless. This demonstrates an opportunity to develop approaches to new technologies that can tap into local creativity and the desire for self expression that might allow users to explore new technologies on their own terms. Content creation itself is a powerful means of engaging people with media technologies that has added benefits of allowing them to voice their concerns and share and learn locally relevant knowledge.

*Finding a Voice* works with a network of 15 local media and ICT initiatives ranging from telecentres to community radio stations, including community libraries, community multimedia centres and community television. The goal is to increase understanding of how ICTs can be both effective and empowering in each local context, to investigate the most effective ways of articulating information and communication networks (both social and technological) to empower poor people to communicate their ‘voices’ within and beyond marginalised communities. Thus, *Finding a Voice* has two main activities and outcomes:

- **Ethnographic Action Research (EAR)** – a
research and development methodology for improving the effectiveness of community-based media and ICT centres. Participatory local content creation – a variety of content creation activities and a transferable set of principles and processes. These can be overlaid onto the two aspects of voice and poverty that I write about in this article – participatory approaches to understanding poverty, and local content creation. Twelve local researchers are embedded in the 15 community initiatives. The idea is to build the capacity of these centres by giving them the skills to conduct ongoing action research that will help them become more effective. At the same time, we are experimenting across the sites with mechanisms and tools for participatory content creation. The embedded researchers are both feeding into and reporting and reflecting on these content creation processes.

The embedded researchers are not operating in academic roles – the ethnographic action research will only emerge as useful and relevant if it is applicable locally. Unsurprisingly, views of usefulness across the applications are patchy and inconsistent but this in itself is helping us to understand the importance of participation in any such development communication initiatives and the need to fully account for local contexts.

One of the most interesting developments in our research is the emergence of data around what it means to participate in content creation, how to facilitate it, what its utility might be, and how ‘creative engagement’ might differ fundamentally to a more pragmatic skills-based approach to ‘access’ to information and to computer technologies.

In an urban site in India, for example, poor Muslim women have been making short digital stories. A range of story ideas and motivations have emerged. Some of these stories may be more ‘valid’ than others in terms of promoting social change – advocacy on behalf of a marginalised or voiceless group; positive messages about excluded or discriminated groups; messages that promote good health related behaviours – there is no lack of evidence of people wanting to use media to highlight social issues or demonstrate how one might challenge adversity, often through the device of providing an inspirational example.

But we also see other ideas, other forms of self-expression, and other kinds of engagements with media that are as much about self expression as social change. In this particular centre a Media Development Course has been developed which is training 18 young women in media and design software and skills, readying them for employment in the locality. Rather than train them in basic computer skills and the usual Microsoft suite of softwares, this course is built on the development of creative skills, the kinds of skills that are both in greater demand and better paid in the vicinity.

In another example of ‘creative engagement’ from Sri Lanka, the Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) Manager travelled to an underserved Tamil community to encourage participation in their CMC activities (minority ethnic Tamil communities are underrepresented). She encouraged a group of young people to come to the CMC and undertake a training course. But again, the course is not straightforward computer skills. They are learning how to make their own digital stories. Asked why, she responded:

‘I could have done the office course for them... but this time I want to teach them something more important for them, much more creative for a beginning. They can learn office anywhere but this kind of skill cannot be leaned elsewhere. More importantly training on digital storytelling will encourage them to talk openly about themselves about their lives in a different way.’

These are brief examples of how notions of creative engagement are starting to appear across the Finding a Voice sites, which are in turn being monitored by the embedded researchers. The richness that we are starting to see in the data is due to its specificity – it is locally collected and contextualised data. Interesting findings are beginning to emerge that are starting to allow different voices to be heard, demonstrating alternative perspectives and challenging our notions of the appropriate
relationships between ICTs and poor communities, and about the relationship between voice and poverty.

The notion of ‘voice’ represents in many ways a development Zeitgeist, combining participatory approaches to development and local content creation. It is an appropriate time to give these ideas some considered attention in order to learn from experience.

Notes
3. Finding a Voice: Making Technological Change Socially Effective and Culturally Empowering is funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0561848) with UNESCO & UNDP. Examples from India and Sri Lanka were provided by local researchers Aseem and Kosala who were supported by Jo Fildes - See www.findingavoice.org for more details.
5. 2-3 minute stories, constructed using still images and voiceovers using video editing software have been used in Finding a Voice as a mechanism to explore ways of making local content with the ICTs available (computers, digital cameras and so forth). See chapter 9, Hearn, Tacchi, Foth and Lennie. (forthcoming 2008) Action Research and New Media: Concepts, Methods and Cases. Hampton Press.

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Statement on ‘Media, freedom and poverty’

Delegates at the symposium on ‘Media, Freedom and Poverty in Developing Countries’ endorsed a statement expressing concern that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS 2003) was in danger of overlooking, or discounting altogether, key issues in the relationship between media, freedom, and poverty. The conference took place 3-5 October 2003 and was organised by the Panos Institute in association with the Communication for Social Change Consortium and the Rockefeller Foundation.

The Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty explored the links between and to develop a better understanding of current media trends and poverty. This meeting was in part an attempt to bridge differences in approach among organisations involved in media freedom, media pluralism and social advocacy. While we have differences in perspective, we agreed on the following points.

We are particularly concerned that in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) some of the measures being considered run counter to freedom of expression; that insufficient attention is being paid to the crucial role of the media, and to the importance of poverty reduction; and that there is inadequate mapping of development objectives against the proposed actions.

We believe that urgent attention needs to be brought to bear on issues of media and poverty in ways that are rooted in the principle of freedom of expression.

1. Freedom of expression, as expressed in
Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental right which underpins all other human rights, and enables them to be expressed and realised. The eradication of poverty is essential to the realisation for all peoples of the aspirations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

2. People living in poverty face particular obstacles to achieving freedom of expression and access to the media which are associated with the conditions of poverty. These obstacles include economic, social, educational, logistical, and political factors. Economic obstacles include the cost of equipment for production, distribution and reception, and the costs of licences and operation; social obstacles include gender and language; educational obstacles include literacy and language; logistical obstacles include transport, physical access and electricity; political obstacles include repression and lack of will of many states to allow democratic expression and to give voice to the most marginalised groups, as well as censorship by government, commercial and social interests.

3. The interests and concerns of people living in poverty are not sufficiently exposed in the media. Economic and market pressures on the media are tending to deprioritise journalistic investigation and reporting on issues of social and public concern. Because the poor often do not constitute a viable market, issues of concern to them are increasingly and particularly marginalised. New strategies, which address these issues and reinforce freedom of expression, need to be devised. Threats to media freedom and freedom of expression continue to come from undue political influence but we are also concerned about issues of economic control and pressure.

4. We recognise that these obstacles need to be overcome in the interests of society as a whole, and not only because in many societies poor people are the majority. When people do not have a voice in the public arena, or access to information on issues that affect their lives, and where their concerns are not reasonably reflected in the media, development tends to be undermined and catastrophes such as famines are less likely to be averted. Lack of access to communication undermines the capacity of the poor to participate in democratic processes. Frustration and alienation over lack of means of expression lead to disaffection with the political process resulting in apathy or violence.

5. Realisation of freedom of expression for people living in poverty requires: media pluralism and diversity, including diversity of forms of ownership; more equitable access to communication; support for cultural and linguistic diversity; and promotion of participation in democratic decision-making processes.

**Action points**

i. There is a growing number of initiatives taken by the media, by people living in poverty and by other actors to address poverty reduction, including issues of voice, content and access to information and communication. These should be encouraged and actively supported. Best practices should be publicised and exchanged.

ii. Access for the disadvantaged to information and communication should be an integral part of any strategy to reduce poverty. Such a strategy should include participatory media.

iii. Community media should be specifically encouraged, including through access to licences and spectrum allocation. Frequencies should be allocated in a balanced way amongst community, commercial and public service media. Broadcast licensing should be administered by independent and transparent regulatory bodies.

iv. There is a need for increased resources, better coordination and targeting of training programmes; including training journalists in poverty related issues.

v. Involvement of media in education, and the development of media literacy, should be promoted.

vi. Public service broadcasting mandates should include obligations to provide information and education to address issues of poverty; and to ensure that public service broadcasters provide universal service.

vii. National communication policies should be developed that address access to communication for people living in poverty. Such policies should be developed and implemented in a transparent and participatory manner.
viii. Professional standards and ethics of journalism, as defined by journalists themselves, should be supported and encouraged. The journalistic ethic should include sensitivity to issues of poverty.

ix. Journalists should be provided with living standards and working conditions which enable them to realise these professional standards.

x. South-South and South-North exchanges between media and journalists should be encouraged, including personnel, training, equipment and content.

xi. Support should be provided for civil society organisations in working with the media.

xii. Mechanisms should be encouraged for making newspapers more affordable and more available to the disadvantaged, including measures to cut the price of newsprint and equipment.

xiii. The use of ICTs to provide the media with more diversity of information sources should be promoted; together with combinations of traditional and new information technologies to facilitate better access to communication for people living in poverty.

xiv. Resources should be provided, including by public authorities, to address shortcomings in communication access for those living in poverty and to remove cost and other barriers, in ways that do not compromise freedom of expression.

xv. More research needs to be undertaken on the implications of current media trends for poverty reduction.

This statement was agreed by: Steve Buckley (President, AMARC – The World Association of Community Broadcasters); John Barker (Director of Africa Programme, Article XIX); Professor Cees Hamelink (Centre for Communication and Human Rights); Lindsay Ross (Executive Director, Commonwealth Press Union); Alfonso Gumucio (Managing Director, Communication for Social Change Consortium); Sean O’Siochru (Coordinator, Communication Rights in the Information Society); Mahfuz Anam (Editor in Chief, Daily Star, Bangladesh); Jean Paul Marthoz (International Media Director, Human Rights Watch); Mario Lubetkin (Secretary General, Inter Press Service); Luckson Chipare (Executive Director, Media Institute of Southern Africa); Wafula Oguttu (Editor in Chief, The Monitor Group, Uganda); James Deane (Executive Director and Conference convenor, Panos Institute, London); Diana Senghor (Executive Director, Panos Institute, West Africa); Damian Tambini (Executive Director, Programme on Comparative Media Law and Public Policy, Oxford University); Denise Gray-Felder (Vice President, The Rockefeller Foundation and CEO, the Communication for Social Change Consortium); Gerolf Weigel (Head, ICT for Development Division, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation); Mogens Schmidt (Director, Division of Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace, UNESCO); Ronald Koven (European Representative, World Press Freedom Committee); Guillaume Chenevière (Chairman, World Radio and Television Council).

This meeting was organised by the Panos Institute, London, in association with the Communication for Social Change Consortium and the Rockefeller Foundation. Financial support was kindly provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. The meeting was one of series of ‘Frati Dialogues on Media and Social Change’ organised at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Bellagio Conference Centre in Italy. The meeting built on work carried out at the Global Knowledge Media Forum, a joint activity between Panos and the Global Knowledge Partnership.

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The potential of *dagu* communication in north-eastern Ethiopia

Gulilat Menbere and Terje S. Skjerdal

The Afar people of north-eastern Ethiopia possess a traditional communication system that in several ways resembles modern news media. Properly used *dagu* could be a vital instrument in, for instance, health education.

The Afar region in Ethiopia is not a place Western travellers normally visit. Situated in north-eastern Ethiopia and extending into Eritrea, it stretches across the Danakil Depression which has been named ‘one of the hottest, most inhospitable places on earth’ (*Lonely Planet*) and the ‘cruellest place on earth’ (*National Geographic*). This is home to the Afar people, who are not, however, known for being inhospitable.

Numbering 1.4 million, the Afars are a pastoral and semi-pastoral people. The two major clans are Asahimara (‘white Afar’) and Adohimara (‘red Afar’). Both could possibly be defined as ‘rural poor’ by official standards – but then there is hardly a modern cash economy to talk about in Afar and we feel uneasy using a potentially degrading term such as ‘rural poor’. The Afars are mobile pastoralists and typically live by herding goats, sheep, camels and cattle. Less than 9% live in urban (semi-urban) areas.

Modern mass media are not widespread in Afar. Electricity is a rare commodity and television is not an issue. Newspapers are to a small extent distributed outside the big cities in Ethiopia, and there are no big cities in this part of the country. Radio sets, on the other hand, do exist in the Afar region, but not even close to the average distribution of radios in rural Africa. Also, the expense and poor availability of batteries as well as limited broadcasts in Afari make radio a less attractive medium in this region.

Despite all this the Afars possess a sophisticated system for news exchange. It is called *dagu*, which could be translated to mean ‘news’, but it is more than a package of hard or soft news. It is a social institution with particular purposes in the daily life of the Afars.

‘What have your ears heard?’

*Dagu* functions within a defined set of regulations and expectations, though the rules are necessarily unwritten. The law of *dagu* means that whenever you meet someone on the road who has travelled reasonably far, say from a nearby village, you are required to pause and engage in a news exchange session. The two persons will usually sit down – not over a cup of coffee, but right there and then without interruption – and the session typically begins with the phrases ‘Iyttii maha tobie?’ and ‘Intii maha tubilie?’ (‘What have your ears heard?’; ‘What have your eyes witnessed?’). The *dagu* can be any item of public relevance, such as weddings, funerals, battles, new alliances, missing cattle or the conditions of the trail ahead.

Failure to pass on relevant information is not only an offence to the conversation partner, but a harm to the community. To this end, misuse of *dagu* is subject to punishment within customary law (*Mada’a*), which has a prominent place in the Afar culture. Anyone who passes on unchecked information, for instance, is punished according to the *Mada’a*. Disseminating false or fabricated information is unforgivable.

*Dagu* resembles modern news communication in several ways. Even if the information doesn’t reach a large mass simultaneously, it is meant to reach a considerable portion of the population within a short period of time. The swiftness of *dagu* is indeed remarkable. It can spread to a high number of people within few days. One informant claimed a piece of information can reach from the desert town of Semera to the port cities of Djibouti and...
Massawa (Eritrea) within two or three days – a road distance of 300 to 700 km.

When four Britons and a Frenchwoman were taken hostage by separatists in the Afar region in March 2007, it was dagu which brought the news of their fate to the international public. They were deported to Eritrea by the kidnappers, but were unharmed and safe according to the report which eventually reached Addis Ababa. The report turned out to be trustworthy (Naughton, 2007).

The Internet of the Afar
Many Afars describe dagu as ‘our telephone’. One informant, who is educated, compared it with the Internet:

‘Dagu is the Internet of the Afar. Information is transmitted in the form of relay where an Afar must quickly share anything new to another Afar on his way to daily practice. It is as dynamic as an interesting e-mail message which someone forwards knowing that the recipient will surely forward it to others soon’ (Awel Wogris Mohammed, head of the Afar Regional Health Bureau).

The analogy of the Internet makes sense. Dagu is not only fast and appealing; it is also an active, participant-oriented medium. Although the receiver is not supposed to alter the message, he or she is expected to engage with the news and take proper action. Also, the conveyer must check the information, similar to what a journalist would do before publishing a news item.

In a feature for National Geographic Virginia Morell (2005: 41) observes that dagu is ‘a poetic litany that can be almost Homeric in its detail and precision.’ At the same time, some informants admit that the information may be slightly distorted en route, as in cases of exaggeration. Straight-up false information, however, is strictly reprimanded, not only for the individual, but for the community. In the words of one informant: ‘False claims defame the clan, not only an individual member. So people take care of sifting the right information’ (Ali Yayu, Degagegie village).

Elderly people, especially men, have a particular responsibility to check and affirm the information passed on. A common journalistic tool, namely crosschecking with multiple sources, is one of the techniques used in this exercise. This is reflected in an Afar proverb: ‘Numma sidihawaw jabi haa’ (‘News is heard thrice’). Especially if the information might have disastrous consequences, it is extraordinarily important that the news is double- and triple-checked before it is passed on. The quality of the source will then be one of the testing points. In other words it is not arbitrary who the information came from. This is pinpointed in another traditional proverb: ‘Kok iyiyie kok iyie numuk iyiyie?’ (‘Who told you; who told the person who told you?’).

Gender differences
Social structure and hierarchy are manifested in dagu. As noted above elderly men are particularly trusted to verify the information passed on. They are also observed to have the most passionate relationship with dagu and perform it with utmost patience. To underline the earnestness they often close the session with prayer (du’aa).

The practice of dagu does show some gender differences. In his MA thesis research on dagu, Gulilat Menbere found that it is more frequently used by men than by women. Men are more often seen exchanging dagu, and this is confirmed by the informants. There is an expectation for Afar men of some age to employ and master dagu. As one informant said, ‘It is unmanly to avoid dagu for an Afar man. He would never be considered a responsible member of the pastoral community if he avoids dagu.’

It is however doubtful that the gender differences in using dagu are solely caused by gender prejudice. The fact that men use dagu more than women is largely a result of men’s higher mobility in daily life. They travel more when they look after the cattle and thus meet more outsiders. Still, one informant – an elderly woman from Wasero village – contended that it is because of males’ suspicions and prejudices that women engage somewhat less in dagu. She maintained that ‘our husbands feel that we...
would be more easily sexually abused if we encountered someone from outside of the family.’ Nevertheless, dagu is used by both men and women and there is no principal restriction for women to use it less than men.

There is some concern that urbanization and modern culture will negatively affect dagu. Some locals express the view that hectic town life is not concordant with proper use of dagu. The claim is that respect for dagu requires time and this is not something modern communication cares for. One informant referred to an Afari saying to express this: ‘Yardiee dagu kee defia dagu inkii giddeh binaa’ (‘Settled dagu and brisk dagu do not bring the same return’). This again shows that dagu has a status on its own and stands in contrast to a typical hasty conversation about the latest news as we know it in the North.

**Using dagu in education**

How does dagu fit in with new forms of communication? There seems to be partly contradictory opinions about this among the Afars, and the dividing line appears to go between the young and the mature. Some of the elderly people are sceptical to including information from national mass media in the dagu. Nura Mohammed, an elderly pastoralist from Dohoo, expresses his scepticism to radio broadcasts: ‘If I tune to radio, I am afraid that I miss some important dagu.’ His trust lies much more with dagu than with a distant medium where he cannot see the communication partner face-to-face. In contrast to the radio he calls dagu ‘a reliable source of information’.

Some younger people, on the other hand, say that they sometimes incorporate information from the radio in dagu conversations. Even so, it appears that modern media messages are only to a limited extent incorporated and merged with dagu. This poses a challenge to communication agents who rely on traditional mass communication, including posters, to convey messages in the Afar region.

It would appear that one of the keys to successful mass communication in this region lies in the value of oratory. Oral, face-to-face communication encourages instantaneous feedback and makes use of non-verbal cues. This is dagu in practice. Most importantly, dagu is liked by the rural majority and is the most trusted means to convey public information. Properly used it could be a vital instrument in for instance HIV/AIDS communication.

It is also a means of communication where equality and mutual care is at the heart. As one Afari proverb rightly affirms, ‘Numuktienak dagu abanah numuktenak ogiel defianah’ (‘Inquiring information from someone makes you his contemporary’).

This article is based on interviews and focus group discussion with 86 persons from two woredas (communities) in Afar, namely Awash-Fentale and Dubti.

**References**


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Poverty, advertising and the Indian news media

Keval J. Kumar

The contemporary media scenario in India is marked by a frenetic proliferation of television channels, FM radio stations, daily newspapers, mobile telephony and digital media. Despite this situation, as the following article argues, the poor while highly visible almost everywhere in urban and rural India remain ‘invisible’ in the nation’s mass media. Why?

The media and entertainment industry in India is currently worth Rs. 437 billion (approx. US$ 11 billion) and is expanding at the CAGR (Compounded Annual Growth Rate) of 18% per annum, according to the latest FICCI - Price Waterhouse Coopers Report (2007). It is projected to reach one trillion rupees by the end of 2011 (ibid.).

The fastest growing media sectors are mobile telephony and television channels. Over two hundred million Indians now own their own mobile phones (on average six million mobile phones are bought every month). 120 million Indian households have access to television (including 70 million to cable and satellite TV; five million to Direct-to-Home TV, and two million to IPTV), on average six satellite channels are launched every month. Cable and satellite television subscribers have access to around 300 channels; most are in Hindi, Tamil and other Indian languages.

Further, more than 360 million Indians read daily newspapers and weekly news magazines, nearly half of that population is from rural parts of the country where 75% of the 1.1 billion strong population lives. According to the recent WAN (World Association of Newspapers) survey, India leads the world in the growth of both circulation and readership of newspapers.

And with over 5300 daily newspapers and 50 around the clock television news channels available in India, the country has the potential of becoming the largest market in the world for both the print and television news business. In stark contrast, circulation and readership of newspapers in the United States and Europe is declining steadily.

Despite the global reputation of India being far ahead of most developing nations in information technology, the uptake of digital media like the Internet has been unimpressive compared with the growth of the traditional mass media. No more than 42 million Indians have regular access to the Internet, for instance. Access to the Internet is fairly widespread in the cities, though mainly via cyber-cafes, schools, colleges and offices; the cost of access at home is still unaffordable for most Indians. Home access to the net is limited to a small minority of the upper middle class in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities.

The situation in rural areas is far worse. Except for around five thousand e-choupals (Internet kiosks) and a few other community computer centres, rural India is ill-served. The largest segment of Internet users is in the 18-35 age group; this comprises half of all users. But only 66% of these are ‘active users’, that is those who use the net at least once a month. Most are ‘ever’ users’, those who access the net once in a while (The Marketing White Book: 2007. pp.251-253).

This unprecedented growth of the traditional and the new media, like the rapid growth of the economy itself, has been at the expense of quality in ‘content’ and equity in distribution and access. This article argues that the coverage and representation of poverty and related issues in the media has suffered primarily because of the over-dependence on revenues from advertising, product placement (or in-content advertising) and sponsorship. Thus, the poor while highly visible almost everywhere in urban and rural
India remain ‘invisible’ in the nation’s mass media.

Perhaps the presence of the poor is far too embarrassing for the media to deal with as much as it is for the advertisers who nourish and sustain them around the clock. Advertising and hype require a luxurious environment of entertainment and leisure; the media provide this in abundant measure.

**Measuring success in the media**

Success in the mainstream Indian media business is measured not so much by quality or impact as by circulation and readership figures, ratings, footfalls, hits, impressions and page views. All these modes of measurement relate to evaluating audience reception of ‘content’ for marketing managers and media planners. Audiences are neatly ‘segmented’ for the purpose of targeting those communities with the highest purchasing power. Most importantly though media success is measured by the amount of advertising revenue earned. In 2006, advertising spends in India amounted to Rs. 163 billion, growing at the rate of 33% over the previous year (FICCI-PwC Report: 2007).

For, it is advertising revenue that drives the form and substance of ‘content’. Certain kinds of content attract advertising much more than other kinds. After all, advertising needs a special kind of environment in which it is held to be persuasive and believable. An examination of the advertisements in each medium and each vehicle would suggest that premium (read high-priced) consumer products are advertised or sponsored in lifestyle content (music, fashion, travel and leisure) while mass consumer products (soaps, movies, sports) are advertised in content that appeals to the masses.

This is particularly true of the English language press which despite lower circulation than the Hindi or Tamil press garners much of the advertising revenue. Media content, a public resource, is thus transformed into a ‘commodity’ that is delivered to advertisers to enable them to sell their wares.

**Media dependence on advertising revenue**

The news media in India is, as in other democracies, vigorously supported by the advertising and public relations industries. The print media receive the most generous support. As much as 48% of the total ad spend of Rs. 168 billion goes to the press. Television earns around 41% while radio, the internet, mobile telephony and out-of-home advertising fetch less than three per cent each. Every news bulletin on every single news channel, including the public service Doordarshan, is heavily ‘sponsored’ by advertisers and is frequently interrupted for commercial breaks.

The average number of advertisements aired on television in a week exceeds 260,000. The maximum number of advertisements aired was not on the general entertainment channels but on the news channels, an average of 45,000 advertisements per week (The Marketing White Book: 2007, p.229). However, the average television viewer watched no more than 313 advertisements per week (ibid.).

Besides, television news channels and news bulletins receive the biggest patronage where in-content (‘soft advertising’) is concerned. In 2006, for instance, the news bulletins obtained the highest ‘secondage’ (56.2 million) or 18% share of total in-content advertising across all media genres, including feature films (16%), music shows (9%), soaps/drama (8%), and film songs (5%)(ibid. p.234). ‘Secondage’ refers to the number of seconds of in-content or ‘soft’ advertising in television programmes.

This total dependence of the media on revenues from above-the-line advertising (direct advertising in the mass media) and below-the-line advertising (in-product or ‘soft’ advertising, sponsorship, merchandising) obliges media to peddle certain kinds of content – content that attracts both types of advertising. More significantly, such dependence keeps out from the media the kind of content that disturbs, questions, critiques, and investigates.

Such is the case, for instance, with issues that relate to the plight of dalits, tribals, Muslims and other marginalized groups. Where international news is concerned, distressing news from the war-zones, or from poverty stricken regions like Darfur, find mention in news bulletins only in passing or occasionally in ‘newsbars’.

As N. Ram, editor-in-chief of *The Hindu*, a
secular daily from Chennai, told the students of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, in a recent address:

‘Increasing dependence of newspapers on advertisements was threatening “core journalism”…. some newspapers did not even appoint editors and the marketing forces decided the editorial policies resulting in cutting down the number of journalists. He also pointed out that newspapers were now being dictated to by the corporate world. This resulted in what he termed “propaganda and campaign journalism”. He observed that business journalists were being “bought over” by corporate players to get media coverage’ (Ram: 2007).

But The Hindu’s own newsmagazine Frontline propagates a questionable practice in its regular column called ‘Focus’. Frontline has popularized a section called ‘Focus’ wherein institutes, companies and even state governments receive publicity, even as they provide advertising support on alternate pages of the section. The column nowhere indicates that it is an ‘advertorial’ or a sponsored feature.

The Times of India provided the lead in this type of ‘innovative’ marketing which it termed ‘Medianet’ – the practice of selling editorial space in newspapers (especially in the city supplements) to Public Relations agencies. Paid features occur routinely in the Lifestyle sections of the city supplements of The Times of India. There would be nothing wrong with such a marketing strategy if the reader were told that it is a paid or sponsored feature. All of them carry reporters’ bylines. Such features are presented as news items and lifestyle articles, giving the reader the impression that they are part of editorial space.

Public relations officials have gladly accepted and supported this paid-for publicity. With the focus on celebrities and business leaders such an approach to journalism leaves little or no space for social, economic and cultural issues that really matter to readers. The fear of professional journalists is that other newspapers too would emulate this practice and such ‘advertorials’ would become the norm in the Indian press. This inordinate dependence on advertising revenue also leads to ‘soft stories’ taking precedence over ‘hard stories’ in the Indian news media.

News magazines
This practice is best illustrated in the news magazine market in India. It’s a market that continues to be dominated by the English press. India Today which publishes in English, Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam and Gujarathi, leads this market; its closest competitor is Outlook which besides the flagship publication in English and Hindi (Outlook Saptahik) has a number of other general interest magazines in its stable. These include Outlook Business, Outlook Money, Outlook Travel.

Other news magazines in English are: Frontline, The Week, Tehelka, Alive, Hard News, The Day After, and the Sunday Indian. Time and Newsweek, the American news-magazines, are also widely distributed in Indian cities. Among the Indian language news-magazines are: Desh (Bengali), Swati (Telugu), Chitralekha (Gujarathi and Marathi), Nakkeeran, Kumudum Reporter, Ananda Viketan, Junior Viketan, and Kalki (Tamil).

National political issues dominate the pages of news magazines. International relations and politics get scant attention, except in magazines like Frontline. Sports, especially cricket, cinema and fashion are other staple subjects. All the stories are profusely illustrated with photographs and graphics. A noteworthy trend is the predominance of ‘soft’ features and the focus on celebrities in cinema, cricket, fashion and what has come to be termed ‘Page 3 Journalism’.

Tehelka and Frontline are two of the few news magazines exclusively dedicated to investigative journalism. Their critical investigations of the genocide in Gujarat and of the massacre of a neo-Buddhist dalit family of four in Khairlanji (in Maharashtra) exemplify their ‘public service’ approach to journalism.

News on radio
Radio news continues to be monopolised by the Indian state. The national channel, All India Radio (AIR), together with its regional and
local stations (there is a total of more than 200 broadcast centres), is the sole news broadcaster. The External Service of All India Radio broadcasts news and current affairs, primarily to overseas listeners. The other public radio channel, Vividh Bharati, is a film-based music and entertainment channel; it does not carry news bulletins.

In 2005, 338 licenses for 91 cities were auctioned to the highest bidders but private commercial FM stations are not allowed to broadcast news. Their total support comes from local retail advertisers. Neither are the recently established community or campus radio stations in Chennai and Pune. The fear of their misuse by terrorists and anti-national and separatist groups is the main reason for this disallowance, according to the national government. The same argument is not employed against satellite or cable television or to the 5,300 daily newspapers and news magazines – all of which are owned and run by private entrepreneurs. All India Radio’s news broadcasts in English, Hindi and various regional and local languages report development issues at length but rarely discuss the widespread poverty in the country and its terrible consequences.

Poverty and advertising in media
In all this proliferation of the mass media, the issues that concern the poor and the marginalised sections of urban and rural India, figure only occasionally with any kind of prominence. For instance, during the past nine years, over 150,000 farmers in India’s most progressive states (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamilnadu, and Madhya Pradesh) have committed suicide. Few reports in the mass media have highlighted the plight of India’s small farmers, who are at the mercy of the monsoon year after year, but above all, at the mercy of local money-lenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest.

When the news media do carry such stories they are reported with no attempt to provide context or analysis. Farmer suicides only become ‘newsworthy’ when the Prime Minister flies down from the capital to visit the bereaved families.

Poverty per se has never been a newsworthy event for the mass media. For, poverty is an everyday struggle and experience that cannot be captured in words or statistics. According to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), more than 22% of the population, that is 220 million people, live below the poverty line (BPL). And that stark figure is arrived at by an arbitrary definition of BPL: the consumption of less than 2100 calories per day in urban areas, and 2400 calories per day in rural areas.

So, even as the country’s GDP continues to rise at a steady eight per cent per annum – this is reported widely almost on a daily basis across the media – the BPL population declines at a measly 0.74%. This, according to the NSSO, has occurred over a 11 year period ending 2004-2005.

The news media revel in representing such statistics in graphs, charts and tables. There is an obsession in the media with concrete numbers and hard data as though these tell the whole story. Of course they make for good ‘copy’ and appear to be ‘scientific’. However, they subtly disguise the reality of the experience of poverty, and the dire neglect by governments and society of millions of people.

Images of poverty, malnutrition, famine and drought constitute a discourse and an aesthetic developed over the years by the different media. There is little place in such a discourse for the horrifying and tragic images of human suffering. When such images manage to creep in, audiences are warned that they might find them distressing; suggesting thereby that viewing is at their own risk.

General entertainment television channels, music, sports and lifestyle channels are increasing by the month, so are religious and health channels. Children’s channels number about half a dozen led by Pogo, Disney and Hungamma. Rarely do any of these GEC or ‘niche’ channels, even the religious channels touch on issues of the poor and the oppressed. The dependence of these channels on advertising revenue and corporate sponsorships is almost total.

Shoemaker and Cohen’s (2006) study of news reporting in ten countries, using an extensive sample of 20 newspapers, 20 TV news bul-
letins and 20 radio news bulletins over a constructed week in 20 cities of ten countries suggests that the seven major topics of more than two-thirds of all news stories were: sports, internal politics, cultural events, business, international politics, internal order and human interest stories (see Shoemaker 2005).

According to the study, the Indian news media prioritised the following six topics: internal politics, sports, internal order, business and industry, and cultural events (ibid.). Social issues like poverty, malnutrition, foeticide, and dowry deaths were conspicuous by their absence.

The fantasy world of advertising has nothing to do with the millions of India’s poor and illiterate. Poverty is anathema in advertising discourse. The messages of advertising are targeted at those with purchasing power and aspirations to consume often beyond their means. News stories of poverty alienate the consumer targeted by the advertiser. News media, therefore, play it safe by glossing over social and economic issues that affect the majority of India’s poor.

In their attempts to celebrate an India that is ‘shining’ and ‘rising’ the news media (with several exceptions) conjure up a world that serves the interest of the advertising and marketing industries but betrays the trust of their audiences.

References

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Indian media devote little space to poverty

I. Arul Aram

The zeal for the fight against the colonial rulers did not turn out to be zeal for the fight against poverty in post-Independence India. Even the limited media coverage against poverty lost its relevance in the era of globalization when urban India started flourishing fast and looked more towards the west. The fact that the fight against poverty is a prelude to overall transformation of the country has been forgotten.

Today journalism caters to consumerist clientele that the advertisers target. This means, a product or a service advertised would necessarily get favourable coverage in news columns too. Professionalism defines the relevance of the press in the public interest. It offers journalists tools and guidelines to avoid succumbing to gimmicks, to jingoism and to commercial tricks like sensationalism and infotainment.

Such a professional approach has become a thing of the past in most media in India, the notable exception being The Hindu. According to development journalist P. Sainath (2006), the 1990s can be characterized as the period of the fastest growing inequality among human beings. In 1991 when we embarked on our bold new world of marketisation, the average availability of pulses and cereals to Indians was 510 grams. By 1996/97 it had fallen to 436. This does not mean that 1,000 million Indians were eating 74 grams less; it means that 400 million people suffered a severe contraction of their diet due to poverty and the collapse of their purchasing power under the structure of existing programmes.
The media got the stories of the new executives and their high earnings, but it did not get the stories of the agricultural labourers, many hundreds of whom had committed suicide between 1991 and 2000, in Andhra Pradesh, where in 1997-98 four hundred farmers committed suicide in Warangal and Nizamabad districts.

India has full-time fashion correspondents, glamour correspondents and design correspondents, sports correspondents, and eating out correspondents, but it hardly has development correspondents. The beats related to covering the lives of ordinary people have shrunk. More so, such stories are not covered in the context of structural maladies. Growth for growth’s sake is cancerous.

So this poses the question whether the over 9% GDP growth that India is witnessing now is beneficial or malignant? Poverty is the biggest violation of human rights and human dignity. When India shines for 15 to 20% of the population in this era of globalization, the gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening. When there is a food surplus, farmers are dying of starvation or committing suicide. Even the suicide of farmers does not find a place on the front page of newspapers anymore.

News gets trivialized
Colour supplements of leading newspapers are devoted mainly to advertisements. Commercialization has taken newspapers towards trivia. The print media has been in competition with the rapid rise and popularity of television. At times, television is blamed for trivializing news. Infotainment – a combination of information and entertainment – is the order of the day. Mrinal Pande (1996) argues that, in too many cases, the media have become obsessed with the profit motive. Owners seek to go up-market, where the advertising revenue is, rather than down-market, where the people are.

This is a disincentive to journalists who seek to empathize with the majority, whose lives and human rights are adversely affected by the development paradigm that seeks to privatize resources. While news pages recount the reality of mounting deaths and inequalities, the magazine sections and commercial pullouts celebrate consumerism and narcissism.

Journalism had played a major role during freedom struggles. Indian journalists, whose pride was offended in the subjugation of the country by a foreign power, vehemently wrote against the British rule. Once the British left and India became independent, journalists were left with nothing to fight for. They should have given their attention to frequent human rights violations in independent India which still remains highly stratified in terms of caste, gender, class and the like. But since most journalists then hailed from the upper castes and they did not undergo sensitization in human rights; they lacked social concern.

Freedom was the driving force during the independence struggle. Such a zeal for the freedom of the press got revived when the emergency was imposed three decades later. With a human rights movement gaining prominence in recent decades, rights issues now appear as features in mass media, though rarely poverty and caste oppression as violations of human rights. Greater focus on human rights is a by-product of globalization, though consumerism ushered in by globalization has reduced social consciousness.

Caste-poverty linkage
Most of the poor people in India are from lower castes. Dalits, in particular, are synonymous with backwardness and poverty in India. (Dalits form the lowest end of the caste spectrum and were traditionally considered polluted and untouchable.) People engage in conflict when their needs are not met or when their rights are not consistent with those of others. Conflicts arise from imbalances in relations such as unequal social status, unequal wealth or access to resources, unequal power, or unacknowledged and unforgotten past injustice. But how many of these issues are taken up by the media?

Bhumihars (the landowning caste) in Bihar are in a state of perpetual conflict with Dalits. The problem centres around the sharing of basic land resources. How long should Bhumihars be killing Dalits and ultra left out-
fits be killing Bhumihars? At times, Dalits are killed just because they refuse to work in Bhumihars’ fields as a consequence of previous ill-treatment. Does this mean Dalits not only lack the right to work but also the right to refuse to work?

Journalists covering the issue should expose what is behind the conflict, including its root causes. Potential solutions should include sharing of land resources, or the initiating of some development and educational schemes, or alternative employment. Reconciliation will lead to Bhumihars treating Dalits with human dignity and not violating their rights. But often such killings are mentioned as mere tolls in news reports (or sensationalized) which avoid the root causes of the event. The fact that hardly any Dalit journalist is in the visibility range contributes further to this sort of insensitive coverage.

The mass media ignored the severity of police atrocities at a Dalit rally of plantation labourers in Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu in July 1999 that led to 18 deaths. Police not only chased away the rallyists but also beat them into drowning after they jumped into a river to escape police action. They even stripped some women of their saris (traditional Indian dress) so that an escape became difficult. But newspapers reported that some drowned while trying to run away from police who tried to control ‘an unruly mob’. A few more sensitive stories on the event appeared that must have been due to a dawning sense of human rights among journalists.

Dalit women are considered the ‘the other’ of ‘the other’ in the Indian social system. Another instance to prove this is the parading of Dalit women naked, often done even in the peripheral areas of Delhi. Such a crime is perpetuated by upper or intermediary caste people when a boy or a girl falls in love with a person of the Dalit community. It is a woman relative of the Dalit family who is given this crude punishment. When such instances come to light, the media covers them but in a sensational or matter-of-fact way, rather than elaborating on the process. If such humiliations of lower caste women can happen in the capital city of Delhi what about the downtrodden people elsewhere in the country and how much do you think the media cover them?

Poverty not focused

In August 1991, Ameena, a 14-year-old girl from Hyderabad was married to a 60-year-old Sheikh from the Gulf. The child bride in despair was noticed by an airhostess who rescued her. The media widely covered the incident, mostly giving an anti-Muslim slant. Soft stories about the social, economic and cultural background of the family were also reported in the few weeks after the event. But then, the fact is that many such marriages have been a path to success particularly in the poor Muslim localities of Hyderabad. Some efforts had been made to help Ameena carry on with a vocation but not much had been made to improve the condition of Muslims in the locality – the sort of impoverished situation which leads to desperate marrying of young girls to old Sheikhs.

In 2005, the provincial government of the Chhattisgarh state moved to ban extremist Maoist groups and also banned journalists from covering their activities. The ordinance empowered the local government to jail journalists for periods of up to three years for reporting on the Maoists. Will a rebellion or the underlying cause cease just because journalists stop writing about it? And the Maoists’ struggle is intertwined with the problem of rampant poverty, and a few journalists who cover the issue with sensitivity are also branded as Maoists!

Enormous growth of the middle class in the last half a century and its craving for a lavish lifestyle gets reflected in the media too. Although television is ephemeral, it has strength in offering breaking news and presenting visuals. Television has redefined what constitutes news in newspapers. To attract readers, newspapers publish even trivial stories and pictures on Page 1. Unfortunately, the media tends to relegate the interests of a vast majority of society who have been neglected in the era of globalization.

The space for development stories in the media is shrinking. According to Ganesh K. Sovani (2003), of late, the print media have been receiving stiff competition from television.
with the advent of several news channels such as Star News, Zee TV and Aaj Tak. This competition between print and electronic media has compelled them to carve out a new kind of readership and/or viewership in other areas such as fashion, cuisine, healthcare, real estate, environment and sports. The media industry may justify this trend by saying that it caters for the demands of its readers and viewers. But one fears that in the entire modernization process of the Indian media, human rights will take a backseat.

Indian media traditionally focused attention on politicians and not the people. Of late, lifestyle coverage has been replacing even political coverage. The tabloidization of the mainstream media has ushered in a shift from politics to entertainment. The tendency is to cater for the constituency of the media or rather its advertisers. So the interests of society as a whole are lost sight of. But the mass media are the real democratic arena where people at large can fight for their rights and concerns. The unprecedented expansion of the media that ushered in plurality sets diverse agendas towards eradicating different social evils. On the other hand, liberalization has brought in a market orientation and reduced social concern. But whenever illegitimate authority becomes unbearable, some media do take it up.

Violations by multinational companies too come under the purview of the media when they go against the interests of citizens. For instance, the proliferation of multinational information technology companies in Bangalore has engulfed agriculture lands and the farmers who sold off their lands were reduced to cheap labour for the construction of big complexes of IT companies. Liberalization and multinational companies have not only left a vast section of Indians out of the development thrust but also grabbed their scarce resources.

Unfortunately, the state fails to intervene on behalf of the poor and, on the other hand, intervenes on behalf of the rich and multinationals. The media are expected to intervene on behalf of the poor and the downtrodden. Such interventions can bring out the domination of elites and instil confidence among disadvan-

taged people to protect themselves.

Urban-centric
The media support people in their cause by adding pressure on the government to take steps to solve these problems. The Times of India had set up a human rights cell and had been reporting profusely on human rights. Sainath’s writings appear in The Hindu. His contribution in exposing caste oppression in villages is significant, particularly when the urban elite feign ignorance of the caste evil. Sainath has been highlighting several issues – mainly poverty – concerning rural India. So have TV channels like NDTV24X7 special documentaries on disadvantaged sections.

If only the feudal Indian mindset and the resultant human rights violations are overcome, all sections of India will benefit from the opening up of the economy. In fact, the feudal mindset prevents the vast majority of Indians benefiting from even primary education. Converting the population into human resources (through education) can spur the economy on, as Nobel laureate Amartya Sen predicted. But then, media coverage of issues such as school dropouts and educational infrastructure at the rural level is almost entirely absent.

With an illiteracy rate in India of nearly 50%, the broadcast media’s impact is bound to be more significant than that of the print media. The media are concentrated in urban centres. Most of them have an urban bias. Their circulation and reach, and their commercial revenue are urban generated. Only major incidents like the starvation deaths in Rajasthan or family suicides in Andhra Pradesh are noticed by the media. Even here, a Public Interest Litigation in a court becomes necessary to focus attention on the incident. This is mainly because (a) poverty is taken for granted; (b) the media is preoccupied with politics and entertainment. So less space and airtime are devoted to the reality on the ground (Ramakrishnan, 2003).

The media devotes very little space to poverty-related issues. It rarely follows up stories, even when it reports them. The growing middle class has seen the fruits of liberalization and
this class is the dominant consumer of the media. This does not absolve the cynicism of journalists towards ‘the other’. A kaleidoscopic view of society should be reflected in media coverage. Plurality in the media should also lead to plurality in media content and exposure of different areas of human rights violations, particularly those arising out of poverty.

The media can play a pivotal role in building up public opinion, and also in impressing upon the government the need to incorporate the subjects of human rights and development in schools and colleges. In-service media training too should deal with these subjects.

Messages fighting poverty through the media will be received if presented well and related to people’s needs. Media intervention can be creatively used for social mobilization. The best way of ensuring this is recruiting journalists from different social classes particularly in terms of castes, so that the problem of not understanding the values of ‘other’ people can be overcome.

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Deconstructing media coverage of development

Fackson Banda

Berger (2003) tracked eighteen different media over a period of one month in a bid to establish their coverage of the issue of poverty. He found that almost a third of the articles were about poverty in general, but disconnected to any specific manifestations, such as jobs or housing. An interesting finding was that two-thirds of the coverage of poverty were in the form of the stories where the actual word ‘poverty’ did not feature.

Such findings echo my own research in early 2007 aimed at deconstructing the media coverage of development in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. I conducted an exploratory critical analysis of the ways in which the Herald Online and the Dispatch Online represented the discourse of development, with particular emphasis on the issue of poverty. This article is based on the conclusions of that study.

I selected back copies for the period between 1 January and 28 February 2007 and analysed them in terms of their coverage of issues generally falling under the label ‘development’, namely business, the economy, mining, agriculture, black empowerment, housing, poverty reduction, micro enterprises, etc.

A word about the two publications: The East London Daily Dispatch, owned by mining-based Johnnic Communications, is described by Berger (2003) as having vastly large numbers of black staff and readers. The Dispatch has a readership of 226,000 (Johnnic Communications, 2007).
The *Herald*, also under Johnnic Communications, is described as ‘a conservative-leaning, lower middle class, sensationalist white newspaper’ (Berger, 2003), with a readership of 193,000 (Johnnic Communications, 2007).

**What is critical discourse analysis?**

The definition of, and meanings ascribed to, the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘discourse analysis’ are varied and sometimes ambiguous. Linguists see discourse as language use, psychologists as cognition, and sociologists as social interaction (Vaara & Tienari, 2002). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is concerned with the critical interpretation of texts so as to recover the social meanings expressed in discourse by analysing the linguistic structures in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts. It is preoccupied with the following concerns:

- The real-world complexity of media production and interpretation.
- The analysis of the text, the discursive practices (i.e. the processes of production, distribution and consumption) and the larger social context.
- Questions of societal importance (politics, economics, culture, etc.).
- Critical-ethical position that calls into question power imbalances, social inequities, non-democratic practices, and other injustices in the hope of remedial action.
- The construction of reality largely through interaction, as mediated by the use of language and other semiotic systems.
- Clarity of language use and avoidance of jargon (Huckin, 1997; Van Dijk, 1988; Fairclough, 1995).

**Deconstructing the coverage of development**

The two publications represent development in different ways. Three major issues emerged from the CDA, namely (i) the backgrounding of the concept of ‘development’; (ii) the foregrounding of economic growth in the *Herald Online*; and (iii) the foregrounding of poverty reduction in the *Dispatch Online*.

The concept of ‘development’ does not occur frequently in the content of both publications. Without spending too much time on this matter, it suffices to make two observations.

Where the term occurred, it was framed, firstly, as ‘development aid’ (*Dispatch Online* of 15 February 2007) and, secondly, as ‘property development’ (*Herald Online* of 30 January 2007). Clearly, this view of development somehow depersonalises and depoliticises the concept and renders it more ‘technical’.

The theme of ‘economic growth’ seems to define the development reporting of the *Herald Online*. The discourse of economic growth is given validity in several senses: (i) numerical; (ii) institutional; and (iii) policy.

Firstly, to illustrate numerical validity, let us take the headline ‘Tourism on a roll in SA as arrivals grow at great rate’ (*Herald Online*, January 10, 2007). The newspaper quotes the minister of tourism and a university researcher. Specifically, the report says:

‘And although figures are not available yet for the Eastern Cape, tourism experts say the province is following the national trend, with an upsurge in visitors...’

‘Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University tourism research unit director...said although regional figures for 2006 were not yet available, he could say “with a reasonable amount of confidence” that there had been growth in the province.’

It can be concluded that the intimidating nature of numbers accounts for this recourse to establishment sources of information who are treated as better informed.

Secondly, the idea of economic growth is substantiated by frequent references to what I should like to call institutional validity. The newspaper places faith in the ‘authority’ of institutionally placed sources of analysis, without being sceptical, a key professional ritual of conventional journalism.

The invoking of ‘tourism experts’ as justification for extrapolating the national growth rate of tourism to the Eastern Cape, in itself a leap of faith, would seem to foreclose debate on the subject. The ministerial statement, from which this extrapolation is made, seems to be held in awe, as if all else is suspect.
This faith in elite or ‘establishment’ sources of news and information, of those often located in institutions of power, is well-established in academic literature. The demand for ‘source credibility’ combines with the time pressures imposed by the news production process to favour establishment sources.

Such sources are not disinterested and may have different perspectives from other groups in society on, say, the optimal levels of inflation and unemployment which a government should seek to maintain (McNair, 2001: 76).

Thirdly, economic growth is foregrounded through the invocation of policy validity. Here, the Herald Online seems to quote sources that can comment on the policy implications of some macro-economic trends. An example is the January 25, 2007 edition of the Herald Online which reports that ‘while the December Consumer Price Index was softer than initially predicted, analysts are divided on whether the 5% increase will affect the monetary policy committee’s decision next month.’

The use of the comparative term ‘softer’ by the newspaper suggests that the newspaper approvingly appropriated the description of the rate of inflation. This would seem to be at odds with the news genre which suggests a disinterested reportorial register.

In fact, the word ‘softer’ seems to have originated with a market analyst, who is quoted to have said ‘It’s marginally softer than expectations.’ The very lack of attribution in the headline shows a tacit endorsement of the positive characterisation of the inflation outlook.

Furthermore, to the extent that the ‘formal function of a headline is to draw readers’ attention’, and to the extent that newspapers ‘dramatise the event or issue’ (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts 1978: 84), it can be argued that the wholesale adoption of the comparative term ‘softer’ was designed to convey to the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) the idea that the macroeconomic outlook was positive.

This one-dimensional reportorial stance, if it is not accompanied by any counterargument, would reinforce the discourse of a growing economy in need of further growth policies.

The Dispatch Online represents development in terms of poverty reduction. The foregrounding of the theme of poverty is consistent with the fact that the newspaper seems to cater largely for the black majority in the Eastern Cape, most of whom are poor. Here, the key themes can be categorised as follows: (i) the disembodiment of poverty; (ii) the vicarious liability of the wealthy; and (iii) the bantustanisation of poverty.

The representation of poverty seems devoid of the people most affected by poverty. There are several devices used to achieve this. Firstly, poverty is sanitised. The labels used to describe desperately poor South Africans are clinical. Such impersonal descriptors include the following: ‘RDP1 houses’; ‘housing imbizo’ (Dispatch Online, January 25, 2007); ‘black economic empowerment’ (Dispatch Online, January 25, 2007; Dispatch Online, January 15, 2007; Dispatch Online, January 10, 2007); and ‘lower income earners’ (Dispatch Online, February 15, 2007).

Secondly, the disembodying of poverty is achieved through dissimulation in relation to foreigners. Particularly revealing is the headline Foreigners profit from RDP houses (Dispatch Online, January 25, 2007). By topicalising immigrants, and placing their presupposed purchasing of RDP houses in juxtaposition with the impoverishment of black South Africans, the newspaper, wittingly or unwittingly, reinforces the xenophobic ideology that seeks to unify poor South Africans against foreigners who are described by the housing department as living ‘lavishly in the posh suburbs, whilst the majority of South Africans have no shelter over their heads’ (Dispatch Online, January 25, 2007).

Despite making such allegations, the story does not seem to carry any evidence to substantiate its claims, in itself a subversion of the genre of disinterested news reporting.

The vicarious liability of the wealthy
The term ‘vicarious liability’ suggests the assumption of responsibility by superiors for the acts of their subordinates. As such, the expression connotes the idea of poverty eradication as the burden of the wealthy whites, something akin to Tony Blair’s suggestion that
the state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world’. It can be argued that some rich white people feel their wealth was accumulated at the expense of redistributive justice. Take, for example, the headline ‘Bid to make black farmers “earn” right to land’ (Dispatch Online, February 26, 2007).

The newspaper reported that the ‘government is being urged to change its “narrow focus” and buy farm land to lease to new suitable candidates, with transfer based on demonstrated commitment and the achievement of certain milestones, rather than just transferring land.’ It highlights a study commissioned by a group of ‘prominent Afrikaner businessmen and academics’ which ostensibly describes ‘practical solutions to support land reform and black economic empowerment in agribusiness’ (Dispatch Online, February 26, 2007).

This represents a powerful imagery of Afrikaner unity of purpose in attempting to resolve the development challenge facing black South Africans. There is a strong presupposition of failure on the part of the ANC government. Deleted from the text is any oppositional voice, suggesting that the ‘workable model’ being proposed has indeed no alternatives.

The very headline – ‘Bid to make black farmers “earn” right to land’ – suggests that black farmers must ‘earn’ the right to land, that the black economic empowerment programme is charitable, that blacks are not ready to exercise their right to own land, and that they are still technically incapable.

This smacks of the very ideology of apartheid colonialism that the African National Congress (ANC) and others have been struggling against – an ideology which saw black South Africans as not being ready to take over the reins of political power and the institutions of government.

The news report does not present any counter argument that the black economic empowerment strategy is not a charitable programme, but a strategy designed to meet the challenge of disempowerment and reverse the course of history by breaking the cycle of underdevelopment and marginalisation of the majority of black South Africans.

The ‘bantustanisation’ of poverty
The newspaper seems to perpetuate the geographical distribution of poverty. Take, for example, the headline of the February 15 edition – ‘Low-cost homes may be built next to mansions’ (Dispatch Online, February 15, 2007). The text refers to the ‘Eastern Cape property experts’ as saying that ‘the proposed national policy that could force developers to build low-cost homes smack next to mansions would turn the house market on its head.’ The sub-text suggests the near impossibility of undoing the apartheid-related demographic distribution of poverty. A possible outcome of such a racially integrated housing policy, it is suggested, would be an economic slump.

There are parallels to be drawn between this phenomenon and the policy of separate development or ‘Bantustanisation’ promoted by the apartheid regime in the 1950s. The policy of creating Bantustans ‘involved massive social engineering with the forced relocation of millions to the Bantustan margins of “white” South Africa’ (Jones 1999: 583).

In effect, this text seems to endorse the notion of separate development, the barricading of the majority poor away from the affluent suburbs. Poverty thus becomes ‘bantustanised’, taking place away from the affluent residential areas populated mostly by white people. Indeed, this orientation by the contemporary housing industry players would seem to reflect what bantustanisation itself engendered. Just as the ‘beneficiaries’ of Bantustan independence were more likely to use state influence to promote support for, and suppress resistance to, separate development (in Jones 1999: 580), the property developers are likely to use market influence to advocate for separate housing development, perpetuating a geo-economic apartheid.

Media fail to provide informed and balanced coverage
This article attempts to deconstruct media representations of development in the Eastern Cape. Broadly, the Herald Online seems to represent the discourse of development in terms of economic growth. Representing development as economic growth is justified through three
strategies. Firstly, it is given numerical validity. Secondly, it is given institutional validity, whereby institutional sources are used. Thirdly, it is ascribed policy validity. Here, the *Herald Online* quotes sources that can comment on the policy implications of economic fundamentals, suggesting that economic growth is more amenable to public policy discussions.

The *Dispatch Online* seems to foreground the discourse of poverty reduction, perhaps because it is located in a largely poor, black-dominated metropolis of East London. Three tendencies can be discerned here. Firstly, poverty is disembodied, represented in highly sanitised terms. Secondly, the newspaper represents poverty in terms of what the wealthy, usually whites, can do for the poor. While this may look like a noble philanthropic goal, it masks the faces and dulls the voices of the poor themselves. Thirdly, the discourse of poverty is represented in terms of what can be described as the ‘bantustanisation’ of poverty. It invokes both the geographically and economically unequal distribution of poverty across the post-apartheid South Africa.

Note
1. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) refers to the development policy adopted by the post-apartheid South African government in 1994 aimed at redressing the economic injustices of the past.

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Homo academicus: Quo vadis?

Jan Servaes

What value knowledge and the search for ‘truth’ in today’s institutions of higher education? And what relationship do these ideals have with creating a ‘good society’ and with the public sphere? These are two of the themes of the following article which calls for a return from a business corporation mentality (‘where quantity rules over quality, form over substance, and management over the homo academicus’) to the highest standards of real education.

‘Insiders promote special interests, but intellectuals should be the ones to question patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege’
Edward Said (1996: xiii)

In his famous analysis of the French academia, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) analyses tensions and trends in French higher education, with particular attention to the historical circumstances of the student protests in May 1968. Habitus is a term featured in much of Bourdieu’s work and is a useful shorthand expression for much of the socialization that individuals of particular groups have undergone. Habitus is what forms faculty opinions about what represents legitimate expectations for junior scholars, the length of time appropriate to spend developing a thesis, their prospects for appointment and promotion, etc.

Using both statistical and qualitative assessments, Bourdieu eloquently describes how the backgrounds and agendas of different academic groups first led to conflict and then uneasy transitions as a result of changes in university demographics and economics. His discussion of various opposed forms of cultural capital in faculty provide insight into the ways that academic elites tend to react to changes and pressures on the circumstances of higher education.

Bourdieu characterizes academia as a fundamentally conservative institution that reproduces and reinforces social class distinctions as a result of internalised faculty outlooks and expectations. Attempts to challenge this conservativism in academia meet with resistance by the vested power interests of the faculty. Bourdieu therefore maintains that fundamental change in academia is more likely to be driven by changes in the demographics of students and the economic needs of society as a whole.

Two English scholars, Frank Furedi (2006) and Mary Evans (2004), start from Bourdieu’s analysis and position it in the British university landscape. By doing so they also broaden the argument to a critique of the way in which intellectual life has been degraded. Mary Evans describes the process that has turned the British university from a ‘collective world in which independent and critical thought was valued, to a collective world in which universities are expected to fulfil not these values but those of the marketplace and the economy’ (Evans, 2004: 3), where academics and students are enslaved by the principles of audit, assessment, and regulation.

Regulatory bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), have, according to Evans, pushed knowledge, creativity, and education out of British universities, to be transformed into ‘the painting-by-numbers exercise of the hand-out culture and of much research into an atavistic battle for funds’ (Evans, 2004: ix). In other words: contemporary society seems to value knowledge (with a small k), culture and education only in as much as they can play a practical role in people’s lives.

Furedi argues that two of the key objects of intellectual inquiry are the disinterested search for the ‘truth’ and determining what constitutes a ‘good society’. Furedi reminds us that ridiculing these endeavours has serious consequences for everyone, not just political philosophers. Once the truth loses its importance, we cease to
care when our leaders lie and, once we accept that they do so, regularly, we lose our respect for them.

Similarly, once we stop caring about what a good society is, ideals cease to matter, and instead of being a clash of competing ideas in the public sphere, democracy becomes technocratic and dull, and election campaigns become a series of appeals to our xenophobia, fear and greed. (For an interesting discussion of universal values, such as ‘truth’, in a global and ethical perspective, see Appiah, 2005; Elliott & Lemert, 2006; or Christians & Traber, 1997).

Assuming that no one cares because the issues are too complex, politicians make the problem worse by further dumbing their messages down in an attempt to connect, Furedi concludes, resulting in a further dumbing down in our institutions and a loss of confidence in our cultural and intellectual leaders:

‘Sadly the authority of the past has been replaced by a far worse option, which is the unacknowledged authority of a disparate group of professionals, hucksters, celebrities and cultural entrepreneurs. This is a group without a mission, a sense of purpose or a coherent worldview. They have a lot to say about the virtues of inclusion but very little about what it is that is worth being included in. They are good at undermining the legacy of the past but inept in constructing an alternative focus for authority. Their main accomplishment is to call into question conventional forms of authority and dumb down our cultural and intellectual life. What they offer is not progress but intellectual and cultural stasis’ (Furedi, 2006: 175-176).

Cultural institutions like universities no longer challenge us or encourage us to question what we know. Instead they flatter us:

‘Flattering students is fast becoming an important institutional norm. Students are frequently not expected to study but to learn. Because complex ideas are not in fact learned, but studied, the intellectual horizon of the learner is restricted to the assimilation of information and the acquisition of skills’ (Furedi, 2006: 116).

Instead of flattering the public and appealing to the lowest common denominator, Furedi wants to challenge them to aspire to betterment, for themselves and the society they live in. Therefore, it’s time for intellectuals to engage with the public’s desire to be taken more seriously in all areas of public life, media, culture, economics, education, politics.

I am afraid that the situation described above in France and England is not fundamentally different from other countries. Universities worldwide have transformed or are about to transform themselves from educational institutions into business-like corporations where quantity rules over quality, form over substance, and management over the homo academicus. The US (Giroud, 2007), Mexico (Ordorika, 1999) and Australia are no exceptions.

At a time when the British RAE system is on its way out, Australia has decided to introduce a similar system, called RQF (Research Quality Framework), from 2008 onwards. This doesn’t mean that the above-described processes aren’t already visible in the Australian context. If you are not convinced, read Shelley Gare’s (2006) popular analysis of ‘The Triumph of the Airheads and the Retreat from Commonsense’. Under the chapter ‘How to Educate a Goldfish’ she assesses the Australian education system:

‘The trend now in OECD countries is for the university system not to be academic-driven but to be performance-driven and market-oriented. Australian universities now operate more like large businesses. That has had universities chasing the dollar, doing research for industry, and concentrating on full fee-paying students, especially those from overseas. The sideshows, introduced to raise funds, have ended up changing the main show. Now that overseas enrolments have dropped, several universities are in trouble. Academic standards have fallen because of workloads and lower staff numbers, but they have also been affected by the way students, especially the full fee-paying ones, see themselves as ‘clients’ with a client’s privileges and expectations. Academics have come under pressure to give degrees to stu-
dents who should have failed or to give them higher grades generally... The move towards the business model has also led to a host of performance indicators and benchmarks being developed and imposed so that managerialism is now entrenched’ (Gare, 2006: 144).

In other words, a combination of political, cultural and especially economic agendas has set the modern university and its ‘employees’ on a disastrous trajectory.

Consultants, social engineers and spin doctors rule
Is the situation in other sectors of society different? For instance, in the field of communication for development with its local, national, regional and international bureaucracies managing it? I am afraid not. In the course of the last decades one has observed similar trends as those described for universities and academics. My experience, since 1989, mainly through UNESCO, of the UN-Agency Roundtable Biannual Meetings on Development Communication (Servaes, in press), as the coordinator of the bi-annual IAMCR-UNESCO Seminars, my membership of the High-Level Panel on the future of the Sustainable Development Department of FAO in 2005, and my Chairmanship of the Scientific Committee of the World Congress on Communication for Development (Rome, October 2006), organised by the World Bank, FAO and the Communication Initiative (Servaes, 2007), has been quite sobering.

As a result of bureaucracy and managerialism, more so than in the past, many UN-agencies outsource their intellectual capacity to consultants, sometimes NGOs but more often for-profit foundations. They often prefer consultants because they are always available on short-term notice, while academics often cannot be easily freed-up, or have become ‘too costly’. A range of self-proclaimed experts and consultants fill the gap and provide the background papers and policy recommendations as commissioned by the system. Judge calls it ‘the art of non-decision-making’ and lists nine basic practices in non-decision-making and 14 forms of category manipulation, all meant to keep the status-quo: ‘Indeed decision avoidance has become an art form in its own right’ (Judge, 1997: 1).

The process is more or less similar to what has happened in the political arena (see Louw, 2005). It is therefore not surprising that these consultants are often former journalists or PR-people, or retired members of UN-agencies. Recently, Hernant Shah (2007) completed an analysis of 167 items (123 journal articles, 38 book chapters and 6 books) on development communication, covering the 1997-2005 period. This is the third in a series of systematic meta-research projects over three ten-year time frames (see Fair, 1988, 1989; and Fair and Shah, 1997). Though the meta-research technique may still need some fine-tuning, some of the findings confirm my worries:

Most authors work at Western institutions (70% compared to 48% fifteen years ago), rather than in the Non-Western world (29%) or at Inter-Governmental (IGO) or Non-Governmental (NGO) Organizations (1.5%). Of those working in the Non-Western World, 47% work in Asia, 33% in Africa, and only 7% in Latin America and 1.6% in the Middle East.

Funding for development communication has decreased over time: While 36.2% of studies were funded in the previous periods, only 11% were funded in this period. ‘In the 1997-2005 time period, US university funding disappeared almost completely. In contrast, funding of development communication research from IGOs and NGOs and US government funding (exclusively from USAID, however) increased in 1997-2005’ (Shah, 2007: 9).

Obviously, this was clearly different in the past. For instance, let’s remind ourselves that the IAMCR was established 50 years ago on the initiative of UNESCO and ‘at one time constituted its research arm in the field of journalism and mass communication’ (Nordenstreng, 2007: 4; see also Hamelink & Nordenstreng, 2007). The quality of the service man and women in many of the UN-agencies is also deteriorating as a result of a ‘politicised’ selection process and quota-system. Often the few remaining ‘experts’ have been promoted into
bureaucratic or managerial positions and are no longer available for more content-based jobs.

Therefore, on the occasion of the inauguration of the new UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Thomas Weiss and Peter Hoffman pleaded for the removal of spin doctors from the UN system:

‘Communication with constituents – from diplomatic missions of member states to NGOs and to global public spaces – should be informed and direct. Hollow rhetorical flourishes and dodging duties and responsibilities in the past had sometimes contributed to a dwindling of support for the UN, and therefore the new SG should have a media strategy based on transparency’ (Weiss & Hoffman, 2007: 21).

They recommended the following actions to be taken at the level of the UN Secretariat and its management: reinvigorate the International Civil Service, improve the transparency of Senior Appointments, invest in analytical capabilities, increase transparency as media strategy, develop International Civil Service Career Tracks and tap the global human resources market, build and preserve institutional memory, and strengthen accountability standards for staff (ibid, 2007: 20-24).

Kermit in the boiler

Systems thinkers and marketeers have given us a useful metaphor for a certain kind of human behaviour in the urban legend of the boiled frog. It is said that if a frog is placed in boiling water, it will jump out, but if it is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will never jump out, it will unresistingly allow itself to be boiled to death. (Real scientists argue that the story is not true biologically, see Gibbons, 2007).

The story has been reprinted many times and used to illustrate many different points, for instance as a warning against people sympathetic to the Soviet Union during the Cold War; as a warning about the impending collapse of civilization; as a warning against being in abusive relationships; or as a warning against inaction in response to climate change. Al Gore used the analogy in his An Inconvenient Truth to describe people’s ignorance towards the issue of global warming.

If we would consider ourselves in the position of the frog, what would we do? Jump out, or has that opportunity already passed and are we slowly being ‘boiled’ in our role as academics and researchers?

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Los diarios digitales ¿Acabarán con los de papel?

Por Lidia Baltra M.

La noticia del mundo periodístico impreso nos convulsiona: una revista internacional clásica, la norteamericana Life, decide no aparecer más en su edición de papel y valerse sólo de páginas virtuales en su sitio web. Life, que medio siglo atrás había sorprendido al mundo con sus excelentes fotografías del devenir mundial predominando sobre los textos, se transubstanciaba y se trasponía en el ciber espacio.

En mayo de 2007 se realizó en Pekín, organizado por la Federación Internacional de Publicaciones Periódicas (FIPP), el XXXVI Congreso Mundial de Revistas, donde representantes de las mayores editoriales del mundo se reunieron para analizar la crisis de las publicaciones periódicas en papel y la fuga de los anunciantes a los nuevos medios, como internet y los teléfonos móviles.

Entre los participantes hubo quienes anunciaron ‘el fin del papel’. En la mayoría de los ponencias se estableció que cada vez ‘menos gente lee revistas (exceptuando la China, donde los lectores aumentan) cambiándose a las nuevas tecnologías, sobre todo Internet, para conocer lo que antes buscaban en las publicaciones periódicas.’ Uno de los ponentes, del Business Weekly de Taiwán, declaró sin dar más vueltas al asunto que ‘los medios digitales reemplazarán a los impresos’.

¿Qué está ocurriendo con los antiguos lectores de periódicos y revistas? Hace un par de
años, en 2005, en Estados Unidos sólo el 51,6% de los adultos leía el diario cotidianamente, comparado con el 58,6% que lo hacía en 1998 cuando empezó la explosión de internet, según datos de la Asociación de Diarios de Estados Unidos. La cifra de lectores de diarios de papel ha caído en los últimos cuarenta años, ya que en los 60, eran lectores habituales un 80% de los estadounidenses.

Nubes grises parecen amenazar el horizonte del diarismo impreso. En marzo de 2007, en Ciudad de Guatemala, el invitado de honor de la reunión anual de la Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (SIP), que reúne a los propietarios de los principales diarios del continente, fue Bill Gates. Los empresarios periodísticos querían aprender del magnate de Microsoft cómo desenvolverse mejor en esta ‘revolución digital’ que nos invade, por temor a desaparecer.

En un mundo vertiginoso que se solaza devorando datos, imágenes, textos informativos o de conocimientos, la imprenta y el papel parecieran estar quedando a la zaga. El factor velocidad en la entrega de la información, es vital. El informe que condenó al ex presidente norteamericano Bill Clinton por su aventura con la pasante Mónica Lewinsky en la Casa Blanca, en 1998, se publicó primero en versión digital.

La noticia sobre la insurgencia zapatista recorrió el mundo entero en segundos por Internet la misma noche de Año Nuevo de 1994 cuando los rebeldes armados pusieron en jaque al gobierno de México. Algo similar ocurrió el año pasado (2007) en Myanmar y la rebelión de los monjes budistas. La carrera por el golpe noticioso no se puede concebir ya de otra manera que no sea por las ondas electromagnéticas.

Las computadoras son el nuevo oráculo del siglo XXI. Allí se puede encontrar casi todo lo que necesitamos saber y más. Y ya son más de mil millones los internautas en el mundo, que acceden a ese tesoro intelectual, pese a que los equipos y las conexiones son caros, cantidad que aumenta a pasos agigantados: para finales de 2008 se calcula habrá 1.000 millones de computadores o PC en el mundo y en 2013 llegaremos a los 2.000 millones.

Esto, según estudios de mercado que consideran solamente el incremento tecnológico de los países del Primer Mundo, pero que no pueden predecir bien lo que ocurrirá en los del Tercero. Y puede traer más de una sorpresa, pues en estos últimos ya se están produciendo y difundiendo computadores de 100 dólares que los pondrán al alcance de las capas sociales menos favorecidas (proyecto ‘Un computador por niño’ de Nicolás Negroponte). Además se espera que la Banda Ancha – esa que nos permite estar conectados a Internet las 24 horas – baje mucho su precio en la medida que se descubran y ofrezcan nuevas vías en la supercarretera de la información.

Las llamadas TIC o nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación – la televisión satelital, la televisión digital, la telefonía móvil y en especial la Internet – están provocando y produciendo cambios significativos y definitivos en el modo como la información se produce y distribuye. En pocos años, recoger, producir y difundir información a través del nuevo soporte se ha hecho algo relativamente barato y fácil, en comparación con el proceso que requiere la prensa escrita.

Nacen los diarios digitales
‘Si no puedes vencerlos, únete a ellos’, parece haber sido la consigna y los periódicos de papel comenzaron a emitir sus noticias también por el ciberespacio.

En 1992, el Chicago Tribune y el San José Mercury News fueron, en Estados Unidos, los pioneros en colocar su versión en la pantalla electrónica. El primero se aventuró sólo en trasladar su misma edición impresa al formato digital. El segundo, tal vez por estar situado cerca de Sillicon Valley, fue más osado y original al ofrecer interactividad a sus lectores, es decir, posibilidad de opinar sobre las informaciones que leían.


Según un reciente estudio de la Unión Internacional de Telecomunicaciones (UIT), organismo de Naciones Unidas, la población
mundial dedica más horas semanales a leer estos diarios digitales que a ver televisión, radio, periódicos o cine. En efecto, sucede que los adultos de entre 18 y 55 años son los que más horas semanales (16) dedican a la lectura en pantalla digital, y solamente los adultos mayores aún dedican igual lapso a ver televisión.

El primer grupo, el que más lee diarios digitales, ve la TV sólo 13 horas semanales, escucha radio 8 y ocupa 2 en los diarios impresos. En cambio el segundo, los adultos mayores, disponen 16 horas semanales para ver TV, 8 para los medios digitales, 7 para la radio y 5 para los periódicos impresos.1

Pasada una primera etapa, en que el diario electrónico reprodujo fielmente al impreso, se empezó a tomar más en serio al nuevo medio y se estudiaron sus características. Es distinto leer un hipertexto en la web, que una novela; o navegar en la web a leer un periódico.2 Los diseñadores debieron esforzarse por presentar una pantalla atractiva, con imágenes y colorido y los periodistas debieron escribir informaciones más breves y concisas, aprovechando al mismo tiempo las ventajas del hipertexto, para evitar que el ciberlector se cansase y cierre la página. Se abrió además la posibilidad de que los lectores se comunicaran con la redacción comentando las noticias al instante y que pudieran consultar los archivos del diario impreso.

Lo máximo ocurrió en junio de 2007, cuando El Mundo de España inauguró en su sitio web un portal con televisión, donde se reproducen partes de programas noticiosos televisivos en los cuales los locutores de ese medio entregan las noticias y conversan con el internauta. El sitio contiene, además, foros, blogs, rankings de audiencias y parrillas interactivas con 96 canales de videos. La convergencia tecnológica, donde los multimedios interactúan, es también un dato indispensable de considerar.

El mundo electrónico es una realidad sin vuelta atrás. Pasados ya tres lustros de esta revolución tecnológica, y más de diez de surgido el primer diario digital, ya no hay periódico importante que no cuente con su versión digital. La pregunta es si ello afectará el futuro de los diarios impresos.

Ya en el año 2000 lo advirtió Nicolás Negroponte, el gurú cibernético del Massachussets Institute of Technology (MIT), al enviar un mensaje tranquilizador – si no para los diarios impresos, sí para los periodistas – a través de La Vanguardia de Barcelona: ‘El papel desaparecerá, no las noticias, porque siempre habrá necesidad de información, análisis, editoriales... El papel, aunque es el mejor soporte que hemos encontrado hasta ahora, no es la solución de largo plazo. Los nuevos soportes nos permitirán distribuir noticias en forma personalizada.’

Gates clausuró la reunión de la SIP en 2007 en Guatemala con una clase magistral sobre ‘Innovar en la década digital’, donde anunció que en la presente década todo se digitalizará, incluyendo la educación, los bancos... y los medios. Y advirtió a los periodistas que si hace 50 años el periodismo impreso no afrontaba riesgos, hoy sí y que tenía que ‘reinventarse’ para sobrevivir.

El periodismo cambia
Las características propias del diario digital están obligando al diario de papel a hacer cambios, tanto en aspectos externos como internos. Por ejemplo: como la información impresa demora más en llegar al lector por el largo proceso de escritura, diseño, impresión y distribución, tiene que ofrecer una información ya no sólo con los hechos escuetos, sino una más interpretativa, con mayor contextualización, análisis y proyección.

La sala de redacción ahora es única y abierta con el fin de que en ella trabajen más coordinados periodistas, editores, fotógrafos y diagramadores, de ambos diarios (impreso y digital). Todos en ella deben saber manejar la multimedia y permanece abierta 24 horas al día y 7 días a la semana. Las ‘noticias de última hora’ tienen que ser actualizadas constantemente y al instante.

Y hay que dar espacio a la voz ciudadana, porque otro factor que ha incidido en la forma de hacer periodismo en ambos diarios (de papel y digitales), ha sido la explosión de los weblogs, o blogs simplemente, sitios individuales donde cada persona escribe lo que se le da la gana y en el espacio de libertad único que ofrece la red (aunque eso depende del país
Sorprende el desarrollo vertiginoso de los blogs. A comienzos de 2007 se calculaba que sólo en Occidente existían más de 60 millones y que aumentan a razón de 175.000 diariamente. Otros miden su crecimiento de otra forma: a cada segundo se crea uno nuevo. Analistas de prensa preocupados por el tema, calculan que para 2021 la mitad de las noticias que circulen por el espacio serán producidas por estos blogeros.

La mayoría no son diarios: a veces un cibernauta lo funda un día y no vuelve a alimentarlo hasta un mes después. Otros carecen de nueva información y terminan extinguiéndose. Hay quienes los califican de caprichos o meras expresiones de narcisismo. Pero algunos blogs dicen lo que la prensa tradicional no puede o no quiere publicar y esto ya justifica su existencia.

En países con serias restricciones a la libertad de expresión, como Irán, China, Egipto o Túnez, hay bloggeros que han ido a la cárcel por emitir opiniones que han molestado a sus gobiernos. Y existen algunos tan buenos que a veces compiten con los diarios digitales. En Estados Unidos, en enero de 1998 Matt Drudge reveló en su blog personal, Drudge Report, la pista que desencadenó el escándalo Clinton-Lewinsky. Por eso, hoy son tomados muy en cuenta en la sala de redacción.

Los bemoles de Internet

¿Peligran realmente los diarios de papel? Al parecer, la irrupción de los diarios digitales no sólo arranca aplausos.

En primer lugar, porque no están disponibles para todos. Como todavía es un bien costoso, no hay computadoras ni conexión de Internet en todos los hogares. Fue problema central en el Congreso Mundial de la Sociedad de la Información y la Comunicación (CMSI) convocada por la ONU en 2003-2005. La ‘brecha digital’, es decir, el abismo que existe entre los ciudadanos conectados y los no conectados (con la Gran Red) tanto entre países del primer y tercer mundo, como dentro de los países, entre las capas sociales más y menos favorecidas, no tiene solución cercana a juzgar por los resultados descorazonadores de aquel congreso de la ONU realizado en Ginebra y Túnez.

Otro problema es el superávit de información. En la última década, esta información ha aumentado en un 60% solamente con lo que aportan los usuarios comunes y corrientes, vale decir, con sus correos electrónicos, la música en formato MP3 y las fotografías de sus cámaras digitales. Y la tendencia sigue: se estima que en 2010 el 70% de la información digital será creada por los cibernautas particulares. Ya hay preocupación por este constante incremento. No se ve cómo este aumento pueda hacerse más lento o disminuir, y temen que llegará un momento en que no habrá espacio suficiente para almacenar más información.

Esta enorme cantidad de información dificulta enormemente encontrar lo que uno quiere. ¿Dónde informarse? ¿En un portal, en el blog de un conocido o en un diario electrónico? Lo recomendable pareciera ser el último, porque sólo un periodista profesional sabe seleccionar mejor del maremágnum de información disponible, la más relevante para el ciberlector. A su vez, con tamaña cantidad de datos y atenazado por la rapidez de la entrega, el periodista digital novato puede confundirse y, por ende, entregar una información no fidedigna. Y luego... ¿cual diario electrónico elegir dentro de una cantidad aplastante de oferta?

Andrew Keen, autor del primer libro crítico de la Gran Red, recientemente publicado3 aporta otro bemol: afirma que la revolución de la Gran Red, alabada por la democracia comunicacional que conlleva, está matando nuestra cultura y provocando un caos, porque donde ‘todo importa, nada importa’ y resiente que la opinión de un aficionado valga igual que la de un profesional. Según Keen, la proliferación de blogs de acceso libre y publicidad gratuita constituye una amenaza para la supervivencia de los medios tradicionales.

¿Será el diario digital el predominante en nuestra sociedad del siglo XXI y siguientes?

Mientras escribo este artículo, debo imprimir el texto en papel para una mejor revisión y corrección. Lo que me muestra la pantalla es fragmentado y no me permite visualizar el conjunto. Otros lo hacen para asegurar su conservación, pese a los respaldos en discos o dis-
quetes que se aconsejan, porque los textos virtuales del ciberespacio son frágiles. La fuerza del papel es grande todavía, pese a que los diarios impresos, también han debido trasladarse a microfilm para su conservación en las bibliotecas mundiales.

Ya hace seis años, el economista norteamericano Seymour Bruce Owen, experto en Internet y diarios digitales, aseguró que estos últimos no amenazan la existencia del periodismo impreso por su alto costo para países en desarrollo y porque la lectura en pantalla es más difícil y cansadora. Esto fue reconocido por Bill Gates en su clase magistral a la SIP en Guatemala, agregando que se busca superar este problema.

Poco después, Mitchell Levitar, director de ediciones de The New York Times, lo reafirma aduciendo las mismas razones y agregando que la información que aparece en la Red es breve y cambiante.

En su asamblea de junio último en Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica, la Asociación Mundial de Periódicos informó que la venta global de periódicos aumentó en el mundo un 2,3% en 2006. Este incremento tuvo lugar en países de todos los continentes, excepto en Norteamérica, y con mayor énfasis en los mercados emergentes chinos, indios y sudamericanos. Y si se agregan los diarios gratuitos, la cifra aumenta a 4,6% anual. Timothy Balding, el director general de la Asociación añadió con satisfacción que el 38% de quienes usan diariamente Internet declaran hacerlo a costa del tiempo que dedican a la televisión, y no a la lectura del periódico impreso. Concluyó triunfal: ‘Lejos de ser una industria en declive, como dicen algunos desinformados o miopes, los periódicos están vivos y exhibiendo innovación y energía para mantener su puesto como el medio preferido para cientos de miles de personas diariamente.’

El factor económico es importante. ‘Las empresas periodísticas pueden aumentar su público en la Red, pero no sus ingresos’, afirmó Chris Caramer, Presidente de CNN Internacional Networks. Se refería a que los métodos de sustentación económica de los diarios digitales a través de suscripciones o de los ‘banners’ o avisos en la pantalla digital, no son suficientes. Afirma que la publicidad sigue con-}

Bibliografía
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago
Agencia Efe
Agencia Espacial Europea
Agencia CyTA-Instituto Leloir
www.actualidadespacial.cl
www.elpais.es
www.elmundo.es
www.nowpublic.com
Recortes de prensa de mi archivo personal.

Notas
2. Un hipertexto es una información horizontal con tercera dimensión a través de links o ligazón a otros espacios en ella sobre el mismo tema o vinculado a él.
3. Keene, Andrew, El Culto del Aficionado: cómo Internet está matando nuestra cultura y asaltando nuestra economía (ed. Nicholas Brealey, EE.UU., 2007).

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In memoriam
Edwin H. Robertson
(1912-2007)

Edwin H. Robertson, who has died in London (United Kingdom) of bronchial pneumonia, was Executive Director of the World Association for Christian Broadcasting (WACB) from 1964 to 1968. WACB was one of the groups of Christian communicators that preceded the formation of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) in 1968.

In the words of Canon Paul Oestreicher, he was ‘a renaissance man with a breadth of knowledge and a sharpness of wit that never diminished and never ceased to delight. He was a Baptist minister, broadcaster, author, translator and editor, notably in making known the life and work of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’ (The Guardian, December 11, 2007).

After the 1939-45 War, Robertson was a senior officer in the British Control Commission for Occupied Germany. It did not take him long to realize that the broadcasting industry was highly developed technically, but that production had been subordinated to the State. He vividly remembered that experience when he joined the staff of the BBC in 1949 as Assistant Head of Religious Broadcasting.

A few years later, in consultation with a senior colleague, he planned a conference of European broadcasters to work out objectives and methods for religious broadcasting in the context of the latest technical developments. It was held in Chichester, England, 9-13 October 1950 and the Rt. Revd. George Bell was the host. That conference created an informal group of professionals in religious broadcasting that led to the eventual birth of WACC.

Born in West Ham, London, Robertson began his ministerial life in 1938 in Stopsley, Luton. Having gained a first-class degree in physics and chemistry at London University before training for the Baptist ministry at Regent’s Park College, Oxford, he was directed into oil research, specifically on fuel for Spitfires.

Robertson took a deep interest in German Christians who resisted Hitler and he befriended those in exile in England as well as German prisoners of war. Like George Bell of Chichester, to whom Dietrich Bonhoeffer sent his last letter, Robertson deplored the bombing of German civilians. Speaking fluent German, he became close friends of the survivors of the German opposition, such as Martin Niemöller, who were now Germany’s church leaders.

In 1949 Robertson joined the BBC and from 1956 he spent six years in Geneva as study secretary of the United Bible Societies (whose history he wrote and published in 1996) and consultant to the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council.

From 1964, as executive director of the WACB, he was responsible for the mass media training of students from around the world and, together with the Evangelical Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church, he set up the churches’ advisory committee for local broadcasting.

Robertson wrote several biographies, and discovering that the only serious account of the life of Bishop Bell neglected his involvement with Germany and Bonhoeffer, he wrote Unshakeable Friend: George Bell and the German Churches (1995). Robertson treated academic theology with scepticism and the growth of religious fundamentalism disturbed him.

Edwin Robertson never lost faith in the work of WACC, keeping an avuncular eye on the positions and directions it took. He regularly wrote letters of support to the editors of WACC’s journal Media Development, commending such themes as ‘The News Embargo on Iraq’, ‘Impunity and the Media’ and, most recently, ‘Media and Terror’. He was one of the
earliest recipients of Honorary Life Membership of WACC, an honour he accepted with characteristic modesty.

According to Paul Oestreicher’s obituary in The Guardian, Robertson preached at his own Hampstead Baptist church only days before his final brief illness. For hospital reading, he took a biography of D. H. Lawrence. He found depth of meaning in Lawrence’s poem ‘The Ship of Death’, an unflinching reflection on our vulnerability and our need for cheerful courage in what lies ahead. Asked, near the end, what that might be he replied, ‘There will be work for me to do on the other side.’

Philip Lee (WACC Deputy Director of Programmes)

WACC was officially formed in 1968 at a meeting in Oslo, Norway, where Bishop Fridtjof Birkeli (above left) was named President Emeritus and Edwin H. Robertson (above right) was appointed to the post of Secretary for Broadcasting and Education.

Analysis of thousands of English-language articles about human rights in China produced answers simultaneously surprising and expected. Anglo-American media have been downplaying the scope, severity, and systemic nature of abuses in China. As a result of looking for change in the wrong places, journalists scour official manoeuvres while often discounting shifts in political culture and grassroots civil action. Thus, under the current climate in which both Western and Chinese elites are content with the exploitative status quo, Chinese people are, effectively, ‘unworthy victims’.

In 2005, Philip Lee wrote in this journal about media’s potential to serve as ‘bastions of sanctuary’ with the ability to mobilize public opinion over human rights. Indeed, for those
who wish to see rights protection and social change effected through civil society, materialising the press’s constructive capacity is essential. For a global civil society, in-depth, consistent, and contextualized coverage of distant suffering is as vital.

The proposition is thus a normative one: Media should empower audiences with the ability to make more informed decisions about their relationships with the suffering of others. In other words, a Swedish mother buying a toy for her daughter benefits from knowing not only that it contains lead, but also that it was assembled by a political prisoner under threat of torture.

The utilitarian counterargument, of course, is that media entities, as businesses, have no such obligations; if human rights violations ‘sell’ – and if reporting on them does not create trouble – they can be prominently featured.

Current state of oppression

If coverage patterns are any indication, human rights in China do not sell. To illustrate, a Nexis search of four major US newspapers for keywords China, Chinese, or Beijing in headlines and lead paragraphs that appeared on the day of writing, 30 November 2007, found 17 articles; none was about human rights. Identical searches for each of the past five years found that on this date only two of 46 articles were about human rights. Is it because rights abuses in China are currently not an issue? Just the opposite. According to official Chinese government figures, the number of prisoners in Chinese reform-through-labour camps more than doubled from 1993 to 2003. Some estimates place the number of camp detainees in the millions. Many are prisoners of conscience; all are held without trial. The number of journalists jailed in 2007 more than doubled since 2001, according to Reporters Without Borders. Amnesty International reports escalated persecution of defence lawyers, and that thousands of Chinese are annually executed or sentenced to death — many more than all other countries combined. Tibetans, Falun Gong, and Christians all report ongoing arrests and torture of their adherents.

Increases in civil rights abuses are accompanied by decreases in socio-economic rights fulfilment. Primary school education, once free and available to all, now comes at a price beyond the means of poorer Chinese. At least 600 million rural Chinese live without health insurance, as do many urbanites. The World Health Organization has ranked the PRC’s public-health systems behind some of the poorest African countries.

According to Human Rights Watch, instead of improving the situation, the approaching 2008 Olympics ‘is exacerbating problems of forced evictions, migrant labour rights abuses, and the use of house arrests to silence political opponents’. Yet, how prominently are any of these issues reported and how are they framed?

A point in case study

To begin answering these questions, I analysed how Western media report on the campaign to eliminate the popular Falun Gong spiritual group. The study, presented at a University of Westminster conference on media and China in 2006, unearthed both quantitative and qualitative findings that might, at first, seem bizarre.

The most noticeable finding is an inverse correlation between the number of articles about Falun Gong and the number of adherents who have reportedly died of abuses in custody; the more time went on and the more people died, the less media reported the story. Analyses of leading American newspapers, as well as Australian, British, and French media found parallel patterns, suggesting that Western press is experiencing collective compassion fatigue. Torture in Chinese jails, like starvation in Africa, has become old news.

Findings also show Communist Party sources playing a dominant role in framing articles about human rights in China. Consider the following example: In March 2006, the New York-based Falun Gong Infocenter issued a press release titled, ‘Concentration Camp for Falun Gong Disclosed; Prisoners Killed for Organs’. The article described a camp-hospital operation in north-eastern China that supplied on-demand organs for transplant. The organs were said to be harvested from living bodies of Falun Gong adherents jailed for refusing to relinquish their spiritual discipline.
After seven years of well-documented persecution, these allegations represented a marked escalation. The claims – made by a former hospital employee – were gory, sensational, and new. In other words, they would have made perfect headlines given the journalistic practice of, ‘if it bleeds, it leads’. But the Associated Press, like most foreign media, ignored the story. Weeks later, however, an official Communist Party dismissal of the accusations triggered an AP report. Curiously, AP, which did not find the organ harvesting allegations worth reporting in the first place, deemed a denial of the non-story newsworthy.

Ironically, my study finds that the Chinese government is most often the catalyst for reports about the very group it is persecuting. An analysis of sample headlines and opening paragraphs shows that official Party actors were cited as the main source of news four times as often as Falun Gong sources. These findings reaffirm what media scholars have long known: Governments greatly influence the production of news, whereas community-based groups struggle to gain attention or frame discourse.

Articles are often strewn with factual inaccuracies as well as ‘loaded terminology employed by those in power’.7 For instance, China or Chinese people are often conflated with Chinese government or Chinese Communist Party. Thus, activists seeking to defend fellow Chinese are often labelled anti-China – precisely the term used by Chinese officials. Moreover, factual errors derived from oversimplifying complicated issues are replicated word-for-word between articles, suggesting that rushed journalists are finding shortcuts, or perhaps lending too much credit to online sources like Wikipedia.

In fairness, foreign journalists working out of China face many difficulties. Torture is often hidden behind labour camp walls and beyond journalists’ reach, organ harvesting takes place in military hospitals and execution vans, and unarmed civilians are shot in a remote village or mountainous region. Persecuted groups often operate in secret and are hard to contact. Journalists rightfully fear that their informants will be arrested as soon as they have left. Journalists are followed, interrogated, detained, and even physically assaulted by state security. Their office phones, mobiles, and email are often monitored. Crossing the line on sensitive topics might suddenly cost them their ‘right to report’ from China.

Some foreign journalists have overcome such obstacles to produce bold reports about rights abuses – the Wall Street Journal’s Ian Johnson, BBC’s Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, and Sky News’ Dominic Waghorn come to mind. All three, one wonders if by coincidence, are no longer China-based.

Journalists also not always have their editors’ blessing to pursue controversial topics.8 What then are the structural dynamics that would propel media professionals to avoid Chinese atrocities? Why would CNN’s Wolf Blitzer ask Wang Wenyi, the woman who interrupted Chairman Hu Jintao’s speech in front of the White House, not to mention organ harvesting on television?

Long-live the status quo

Coverage patterns of rights abuses in the People’s Republic of China suggest that the Chinese people are, to borrow Robert Herman and Noam Chomsky’s term, ‘unworthy victims’.9 This conclusion is counter-intuitive because the PRC is still ostensibly a communist state. During the Cold War, American media highlighted Soviet abuses and disregarded allied state violations. The current Bush administration, which has made democracy promotion a public priority, has also termed authoritarian China a ‘strategic competitor’. All these suggest that Chinese suffering should figure prominently in the international press.

At present, however, China is still militarily and economically far from matching US clout, and as James Mann argues, American elites appear content with China’s status quo.10 While corporations like Wal-Mart are happy with China’s role as the world’s factory, the Bush administration is happy to have Chinese cooperation in the War on Terror and if innocent Uighur Muslims end up in Guantanamo, or worse, a Chinese gulag, so be it.

In coverage of China, mainstream Anglo-
American media reflect elite preferences. One reason is that media conglomerates – eager for a share of the China market – are willing to soft-pedal human rights, as the Murdoch Group has demonstrated.

Another reason is that media reflect and reinforce popular discourse. Since the aftermath of the 1989 Beijing Massacre, US elites have successfully shaped and perpetuated what Mann terms ‘the soothing scenario’. The logic, coined by the Clinton administration, justifies an unrelenting commitment to free trade and business investment in China on the grounds that such engagement, in fact, is benevolently delivering democracy and human rights to the Chinese.

Google has argued that even restricted access to information and international contact is morally preferable to staying uninvolved on high-minded grounds. Academic institutes, EU rights dialogue representatives, and the International Olympic Committee have made similar claims.

Fear of losing access to China breeds further caution. These are not hypothetical fears – *Time* magazine, for example, was removed from Chinese newsstands after running interviews with dissident Wei Jingsheng and the Dalai Lama. In October 2007, the Canadian Broadcasting Company, owner of rights to covering the Beijing Olympics, responded to pressure from the Chinese embassy by withdrawing a documentary about Falun Gong. Inside sources have admitted that fear of losing a Beijing bureau (BBC) and cooperative projects with Chinese institutions (two US think tanks) prevents them from delving into the most sensitive of China’s human rights issue.

**Sometimes worthy victims**

These trends are not absolute. Allusions to human rights in China are regularly found in the press. Articles about Chinese rights abuses periodically appear in tandem with prominent international developments – as we are witnessing prior to the Beijing Olympics. Even without major events, occasional reports about dissidents being jailed are expected. They fit into the overarching frame of growing pains accompanying China’s maturation into a prosperous, yet still cute, country.

But coverage of Chinese abuses rarely appears in one of two paradigms. First, abuses are seldom framed within the context of six decades of continuous Communist Party atrocities that have led to the deaths of tens of millions of Chinese. This suggests the Party has improved its public relations strategies and changed its appearance to the extent that its market economy now overshadows its still-Leninist political system. Or, conversely, because some in the West still hold hopes for the Party’s long-abandoned socialist project.

Second, abuses are rarely framed in ways that pose moral questions about our subjective roles. Reports only rarely challenge our consumer activity, the behaviour of companies in which we have invested, or the China-policies of our elected officials. The Beijing Olympics currently presents a perfect opportunity to reverse this trend.

One final trend is that conservative media take the lead in covering Chinese suffering. Alongside discussions of long-term PRC security threats, some conservative writers are taking a principled stance on human rights and freedom. These words, traditionally central to liberal discourse, are now in some circles viewed cynically. Especially post-9/11, US liberal media have turned inward to American abuses at home and abroad. Chinese abuses are perceived as a distraction from US evils at best, a justification for neo-conservative policies at worst.

**What are we missing?**

Perhaps as a result of these above biases, mainstream media appear to be looking for change in China in the wrong places. Reports often take a top-down approach, focusing on regime manoeuvres that may mean very little to Chinese people’s lived realities.

Furthermore, most media fail to seriously entertain the possibility of the Communist Party being removed from power. Grassroots resistance is often overlooked or marginalised. For instance, media now commonly refer to official Chinese statistics about tens of thousands of protests annually. Yet, when was the last time an article took an in-depth look at the causes behind even one such protest? Instead,
the phenomenon is often summarised in a perfunctory sentence about ‘labour unrest’.

While some violent protests might receive coverage, quiet acts of defiance do not. A seventy-year old who sets out at three in the morning to stuff mailboxes with tracts denouncing the ruling Party simply does not make headlines, even if she is one of millions who do this every night.

The tract, the *Nine Commentaries*, is one of the topics most censored by PRC Internet filters. But as millions of ordinary Chinese now say the publication inspired them to withdraw from the Party and its associations, a development unparalleled even during the 1989 democracy movement, journalists dismiss the phenomena as unverifiable. Reluctance to report the story is so entrenched that even when Chinese officials, celebrities, and prominent dissidents take part in the *Nine Commentaries* movement, it fails to garner media attention.

Other phenomena, like the national relay hunger strike or increasing solidarity between defence lawyers and China’s have-nots, described in Gao Zhisheng’s new book, fare only slightly better.

**Looking ahead**

Common perceptions that Anglo-American media unfairly exaggerate rights abuses in China appear tenuous. Media patterns instead play into the short-term interests of both Chinese and Western economical and political elites.

Though Internet resources and alternative media can potentially ameliorate the situation, Western audiences still do not have the information needed to understand China today. Given current patterns, if genocide is one day discovered in China, the world will be as shocked as it had repeatedly been in the 20th century. If the Chinese Communist Party were to crumble, we will be caught off guard as we had been by the Soviet collapse.

Even if these events do not take place in the near future, media coverage of China can play many constructive roles, including defending human rights. Chinese activists, torture survivors, and former officials insist that foreign attention to rights violations restrains abuses. This is also an assumption underlying the work of Amnesty International. Rights organisations, meanwhile, must find ways to communicate and cooperate better with media professionals. The latter should not feel guilty about being biased in favour of safeguarding basic rights.

An empowered global civil society that serves as a guardian of human rights is up to us to create or abandon. How media cover the suffering of millions of Chinese like the Falun Gong is one of our biggest test cases.

**Notes**

3. Only Burma, Cuba, Iran, Turkmenistan, North Korea, and Eritrea rank behind China on Reporters Without Borders’ Press Freedom Index ([http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20779&Valider=OK](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20779&Valider=OK)).
11. See the Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society report ([http://www.opennetinitiative.net/china/](http://www.opennetinitiative.net/china/)).

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Nigeria’s spiral of violence: Can the media build a culture of peace?

Kate Azuka Omenugha and Allen Nnanwuba Adum

The recurrent violence in Nigeria has continued to be a threat to its existence as a nation. The media have often been seen as complicit in this violence. Accordingly, several academics have examined the roles the media have played in reporting violence in Nigeria; but what the media can do to douse the rising conflicts and violence in the country has received insufficient attention. This paper discusses how the media in Nigeria may be positioned to ensure that a culture of peace is instituted in the nation.

Nigeria seems to be having a large dose of violence as concern grows over the latest spate of kidnappings in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. These violent acts are only one aspect of the violence that Nigeria seems to have been engulfed in since its inception as a nation. It might not be an overstatement to say that media’s action or inaction might be helping in aggravating the situation. The question now is: can the same media that are deemed complicit in fostering violence help check this deadly spiral of violence?

The history of violence in Nigeria is often traceable to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorate by the British colonial masters. With this amalgamation, ethnic groups who had very little in common were brought together as one country. In living out this foisted nationhood, Nigerians seem to find that ‘difference’ is a problem. This often gives rise to violent actions, often in the struggle to get a share of the ‘national cake’.

The nature of the Nigerian state since its inception has thus been a violent institution, and has sought to maintain control and hegemony in society through the mechanics of violence. Attesting to the spate of violence, Ken Saro Wiwa noted during his trial by the Abacha junta, ‘The Nigerian military dictatorship survives on the practice of violence and the control of the means of violence’ (Saro Wiwa, 1996: 43).

In recent years, thousands of people have died in Nigeria’s spiral of violence. Violence in Nigeria can be grouped under the following headings.

Political violence: The election violence in 1983 claimed a lot of lives. Most of the political parties right from the first republic in 1960 have displayed a predilection for violence in the pursuit of political power. Edwin Madunagu puts it poignantly:

‘The nature of politics, whose ultimate form is the struggle for power, compels every political organisation at a certain stage in its development to acquire an armed detachment, or be militarised…. It does not matter what you call the armed group: youth wings, thugs, intelligence officers or bodyguards’ (Madunagu, 2000.)

Religious violence: Recurring religious riots in the 1980s, 1990s and as late as 2006 have claimed lots of lives. Of particular note is the major crisis that engulfed Kaduna State on 21 February 2000, following the introduction of the Sharia in the predominantly Moslem Northern states of the country. Recently, too, was the violence that erupted in many states in Nigeria, triggered by an alleged cartoon of Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper. Again, thousands of lives and property were lost in religious violence, a continuous indication that Nigerians have not learnt to live with...
their differences (see Omenugha & Okunna, 2006).

**Ethnic violence:** Perhaps more frequent is the recurring ethnic violence in Nigeria, typified by the recurring Niger Delta crisis which have claimed untold number of lives. The irony of the dynamic of violence is that once it starts, it often engulfs the entire society as reflected in the phenomenon of inter-ethnic, inter-communal and inter-religious violence that threatens Nigeria’s nascent democratic process.

**Can the media help?**

In the wake of the deadly violence and conflicts in Nigeria, the Nigerian media have often been accused of ‘partisanship’; journalists as enshrined in a ‘cult of ethnicity’ and the news product as helping to escalate tension in the country. On the other hand, however, are those who believe that the Nigerian media are doing their best in the midst of the ‘confusion’ they operate in given the cacophony of voices clamouring to be heard.

Accordingly, several academics have identified the roles of the media in various conflicts in Nigeria; but what the media can do to douse rising conflicts and violence in Nigeria has received insufficient attention. Yet, the power of the media in conflict situations, especially in vulnerable societies such as Nigeria cannot be underestimated. As Jamie Metzi writing in *Foreign Affairs* (1997: 15) observes: ‘the mass media reach not only people’s homes, but also their minds, shaping their thoughts and sometimes their behaviour’.

Tejumaiye (2005: 149-150) amplifies this position when he refers to ‘the influence and power of the mass media in building, unifying and destroying a nation state, particularly a complex multicultural and multi-linguistic society such as Nigeria.’ If the media have such great influence, and can intervene in conflicts, then they need to be closely examined, their inflammatory effects mitigated and their positive output magnified.

**What the media can do**

Media cannot stop violence, but they can contribute to a better climate. There are several possible approaches through which they may do this. These approaches are however classified under two broad headings: Media Structure and Media Behaviour.

**Media structure** refers to the way the media sector in Nigeria is set up. What type of media ownership is prevalent in Nigeria? What kind of journalists does Nigeria have – those tending towards professionalism or those that write unsubstantiated stories filled with rumours? Do Nigerian media laws and legislation take care of libels and rumours?

Regrettably, assessment of the Nigerian media by scholars shows that the media tend to toe ethnic lines in terms of ownership and the pattern of reports. According to Tejumaiye (2005: 149-150); There still exists the southern media axis and the northern media axis dichotomy. This polarisation of the means of mass communication and the practitioners has, in no small measure affected the stand of each of the two axis whenever national issues are discussed. The resultant effect is that they (the media axis) have toed ethnic, religious and sectional lines in their news reports.

This scenario has raised a fundamental professional question for Nigerian journalists. What degree of professional integrity and skill do they exhibit in carrying out their charge? The Nigerian journalism practice is still susceptible to invasion by charlatans, who have neither received relevant training in journalism profession nor have the skills to practice it.

The resultant effect is that professionalism is sacrificed at the altar of ‘ethnic, religious and sectional lines’. There is no doubt that this heightens the tension in the country, especially in times of crisis, as what is reported may be laced with prejudices, half truths and sometimes blatant lies.

Analysing the Nigerian press reports of the Yoruba/Hausa ethnic clash of 2002, Omenugha (2004: 74) noted that:

‘The Nigerian press reports operate within certain ideological frameworks. It is these frame works which are explored, relived, made explicit for the readers in the repeated mulling of tales. The newspapers are interested not in reporting the truth, as it is, the events as they occurred, but to reconstruct
and reaffirm their ethnic and cultural positions and identities.’

While there are existing media laws and ethics in Nigeria to guard against defamation, libel and slander, these laws and ethics seem to be silent over the ‘hate speech’ that fans crisis and violence. Over the years also, there has been little sensitization of the people about the existence of libel and slander laws and what mechanisms are available to them to report such incidences of libel or hate publications. There is, therefore, a dire need for setting up a healthy legal environment for crisis reporting. If preventing crisis and violence is a goal that needs to be achieved in Nigeria, enabling laws need to be promulgated to provide the possibility of sanctions for media houses and journalists who fan violence and crisis. There is also an urgent need for training and re-training of journalists on peace reporting. The goal is to learn how to appease hatred by providing non-partisan information and help reduce tension and the emphasis on difference. Journalists need to sharpen their journalistic skills as poor professional skills could lead to passive incitement to violence. If Nigeria is committed to fostering peace and oneness within the nation, there is also the need to look into employment patterns in media houses (whether government or private owned) in relation to the ethnicity of media professionals. There is a need to promote diversity by employing more ethnically diverse personnel. This could possibly lessen reports that tend to champion the cause of one ethnic group over another.

Media behaviour: Media behaviour is linked not only to the content of the media, but also the way the content is presented to the audience. Two pointers to violence need to be discussed here: agenda setting and framing. Nigeria as a multi-ethnic society is vulnerable to conflicts and violence as we have shown above. One of the greatest problems facing Nigeria is how to create oneness without having recourse to a common language, a common tradition and a common religion. One way through which this might be achieved is through ideological means – a role that the media are positioned to play. According to Omenugha and Okunna (2006):

‘The necessity of ideology in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria can be argued thus: if the country wants to remain an indivisible nation, there is the utmost need to shape this desire into the belief systems of the citizens. Ideology thus defines the very nature of the citizenry and serves as a guidepost for the society to achieve certain predetermined goals.’

The media as purveyors of information and opinion moulders can be used to shape the belief system of Nigerian citizenry. Writing about this power of the media, Pietikainen (2005: 17) says: ‘news is one of the most influential public spaces of contemporary society, perceived as offering trustworthy and accurate stories about the world, its events and people.’ Thus, because the media often operate in this taken-for-granted manner, it is easy for them to shape and mould opinions, and to set public agenda. Tejumaje (2005: 147) is right when he suggests that: ‘The public agenda or what kind of things people discuss, think and worry about (and sometimes ultimately press for legislation about) is powerfully shaped and directed by what the news media choose to publicise.’

In media content, what programmes and issues are discussed and prioritised? What traits are encouraged and discouraged? How does the Nigerian nation come out in the reports and issues: as an indivisible entity or as one enshrined in the ‘cult of ethnicity?’ Are reports such that create panic in the citizen or do they stress solutions to the crisis? The point is that a causal link exists between order of importance given in the media to issues and the order of significance attached to the same issues by the public. D’Haenens and de Lange (2001: 849) suggest that although the media agenda is not automatically the same as the public agenda, the media do nevertheless have a means at their disposal with which to influence the public, public opinion and with it the public agenda. One of these means is
through framing and shaping news content.

**Media framing – how can it help?**

Framing simply means how news contents are shaped and contextualised by journalists within some familiar frames of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning (McQuail 2000: 495). Framing also involves selection and salience (Entman 1993). ‘Framing’ is achieved through the use of certain words and phrases, making certain contextual references, choosing certain pictures, referring to certain sources.

In targeting peace reporting, careful coverage must facilitate societal discourse. Media workers must not succumb to the pressure to sensationalise stories which would not only traumatise society but add fuel to the flames. Regrettably the Nigerian media seem to be doing just that at present.

Writing about this tendency to sensationalise, Omenugha (2004: 73) in the analysis of the Hausa/ Yoruba ethnic clash of 2002 writes of the *Daily Champion* and *The Guardian* newspapers reports:

‘There is an apparent celebration of the crisis through sensationalism especially by *The Daily Champion* and *The Guardian* newspapers whose affiliated ethnic groups are not direct players in the crisis. Like two naughty children encouraging a fighting duo to go on with their fight, the two newspapers through their pattern of reports continue to add embers to the fire of the crisis and create unnecessary tension in the country.’

Omenugha’s assertions collaborate earlier research (e.g. Galadima and Enighe, 2001) on the Nigerian media and the reporting of crisis. In their assessment of the Nigerian news reports, Galadima and Enighe referred to the newspapers as ‘viewspapers’ a reflection of the armchair reporting of many Nigerian journalists where often what is published are the views of people on the issue, rather than investigated facts. While this situation apparently has some demerits, Nigerian journalists focused on building a peace culture in the country can use it to their advantage. They could give voice to people whose views would add to unity rather than disunity; oneness rather than divisiveness.

A good example was when Governor Sheriff of Borno State was quoted in a recent violent situation thus: ‘government is therefore determined to ensure that justice, equity, understanding and harmonious existence prevail in the state.’ His call on the people to unite to give peace a chance was given prominence in the media. Similarly, in the story ‘Makarfi warns troublemakers’ the governor of Kaduna State was reported as warning against any act capable of influencing people to disturb the peace being enjoyed in the state.

The above views as reported undermine the idea of a nation which Nigeria strives for as there is implied ethnic exclusiveness and othering of other groups. This type of framing may incite violence or inflame passions, creating impression that a particular group is more victimized and thus giving the ‘victimized’ group an added incentive and justification for reprisal, regardless of whether their grievances are actually legitimate.

Herein lies the importance of media laws to guide such ‘hate’ reports. Very crucial too, the media capacity for public shaming should be exploited. For instance, how do the media treat perpetrators of violence? What follow up stories do they carry on them? For example was any legal action taken against them? It is when the press follows the arrest, trial and possible imprisonment of the perpetrators of violence that the citizens may begin to have faith in the institutions and begin to identify with a national identity.

The media can build as well as destroy. They can promote healthy conversations or inflame. Conflict may seem natural and normal but violence is a choice. Rather than incite divisiveness and violence, the Nigerian media can help foster ‘nationhood’ and facilitate national conversations among the multi-ethnic groups. They can do so through careful reporting with the utmost sense of social responsibility. Ensuring that this happens is a challenge for the Nigerian government, the mass media and civil society.

**Notes**

1. Yakubu, Abdulkareem (2006) 17 killed in Maiduguri
Déclaration de Dakar sur le Plaidoyer Genre et Médias

Préambule

Constatant que le Projet Global de Monitoring des Médias (GMMP) de 2005, coordonné par la WACC a révélé que seulement 21 % des sources des nouvelles, des sujets et des auteurs sont des femmes, et qu’en Afrique, seulement 17 % des femmes constituent des sources des nouvelles alors que les femmes forment 52% de la population mondiale;

Notant que les nouvelles dans les médias soit excluent, soit dévaluent les femmes, ce qui montre l’insensibilité des Médias et le non respect de l’éthique;

L’actuelle insistence sur le Genre et Développement comme résultats de la Plate Forme d’Action de Beijing amène à percevoir la nécessité pour les praticiens des médias et tous ceux qui s’y intéressent à reconnaître l’urgence et la situation critique des femmes et par conséquent à promouvoir l’équilibre du genre dans toutes les branches des mass média, y compris les structures, les politiques et les contenus ;

Notant que lors de la Quatrième Conférence...
Mondiale de l’ONU sur les Femmes, 53 pays ont reconnu que pour atteindre le développement, l’égalité du genre était cruciale et que les médias devaient être intégrés dans le processus.

Il est crucial pour les médias d’avoir un équilibre dans la couverture des sources des nouvelles en reconnaissance du rôle intégral des femmes et des hommes dans le développement national.

En conséquence, nous appelons les médias à exercer leurs responsabilités face au public et à appliquer les standards et pratiques de la bonne gouvernance et démocratie dans le cadre de la liberté d’expression.

Il est urgent d’aborder le problème et de contribuer à un meilleur équilibre entre les genres dans les médias en partenariat avec les éditeurs, les institutions de régulation des médias, les associations des journalistes, les instituts de formation, le gouvernement, les officiels de la communication et l’information et la société civile entre autres. Nous proposons par conséquent les actions suivantes:

1. Sensibilisation des patrons de presse et institutions de formation au Genre et Médias
   Renforcer les capacités des patrons de presse, directeurs de publication, directeurs généraux des Radios et TV, directeurs généraux de publication, rédacteurs en chef, directeurs de programmes et d’informations, les producteurs et animateurs sur les questions liées au genre, sur la nécessité de faire de leurs entreprises, des institutions respectueuses de l’équilibre de genre dans le traitement de l’information et offrant les mêmes opportunités de carrière aux hommes comme aux femmes professionnelles de médias.

   Encourager la création des modules « genre et médias » dans les écoles, centres et instituts de formation en journalisme, en formant les encadreurs et enseignants, en promouvant des études et des recherches sur le sujet pour produire des futures professionnelles des médias sensibles au genre.

   Organiser une formation régionale des formateurs en genre et monitoring des médias pour l’Afrique sous-Saharienne.

   Multiplier les formations de formateurs au niveau national et étendre l’exercice du prochain GMMP de 2010 à travers de nouveaux pays.

   Développer un manuel de formation sur le genre et monitoring des médias.

2. Promotion du leadership féminin dans les médias
   Sensibiliser les patrons des médias pour améliorer l’accès des femmes des médias à des postes de responsabilité.

   Amener les femmes à occuper les postes de prise de décisions.

   Favoriser la formation et le recyclage des femmes des médias.

   Combattre les stéréotypes et l’image négative de la femme dans les médias.

3. Adoption et application des lois sur la parité et les médias
   Favoriser l’adoption et l’application des textes législatifs et réglementaires sur la parité. Faire en sorte que les lacunes soient rectifiées.

   Influer les politiques et les législations en matière de médias. Mener des actions pour renforcer les systèmes législatifs et réglementaires propices au développement des médias et à la promotion du genre dans les médias.

   Établir la collaboration entre les ONG qui travaillent sur le Genre et les Médias en matière de plaidoyer (lois sur les médias, lois sur la parité,…).

4. Monitoring sur le genre dans les médias :
   Outiler les professionnels des médias, associations, syndicats et ONG des médias pour une utilisation efficace et efficiente du plaidoyer.

   Faire des recherches sur le genre dans les médias afin de disposer des statistiques et des éléments de référence (banques de données).

   Établir un répertoire des femmes expertes dans tous les domaines du développement dans les deux sous régions (Afrique Occidentale et Afrique Centrale) en vue de mettre à la disposition des médias et autres utilisateurs, une base de données des expertises locales.

   Vulgariser les outils de plaidoyer avec un accompagnement matériel,humain, financier et logistique.

Fait à Dakar le 19 décembre 2007.
Nairobi Declaration on Gender and Media Advocacy

We the media practitioners, CBOs, NGOs, trainers and media monitors from Southern, Eastern, Central and Western African countries attending the Gender and Media Advocacy Training Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, 3-5 December 2007, are concerned with gender imbalance and portrayal within news media reporting in Africa.

Recognising that the 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) in which 76 countries participated, reveals that only 21% of news sources, subjects and authors are women; yet women comprise 52% of the population. In Africa, only 17% of women are news sources.

Noting that news media either exclude or objectify women, which shows insensitivity and poor media ethics.

The current emphasis on Gender and Development as an outcome of the Beijing Platform for Action, brings to bear the need for media practitioners to recognise the agency and plight of women by promoting gender balance in all ramifications of the mass media, including structures, policies and contents.

During the 4th UN World Conference on Women, 53 countries recognised that to achieve development, gender equality was crucial and media were integral to the process. It is critical for the media to have a gender balance in the coverage of news sources in recognition of the integral role of women and men in national development.

Therefore, we call upon the media to exercise their responsibility to the public and apply the standards and practices of good governance and democracy in line with freedom of speech and expression.

We see many opportunities to address the problem and contribute to more gender balanced media reporting in partnership with editors, regulatory institutions, journalists’ associations, government, communication and information officers, and civil society among others. We therefore propose the following actions.

1. Gender and media sensitisation
   - To sensitize the media on gender balanced reporting. This can be done by exposing practitioners and civil society to the GMMP 2005 findings; particularly on how best the media can respond to the critical observation that women still do not make news. To achieve this,
we will engage the media in debates on the GMMP 2005 findings.
- To expose media to existing gender instruments which would guide gender responsive coverage.
- To target mainstream and community media through workshops and informal sessions.

2. Training of trainers
To organise a regional training of gender and media monitoring trainers workshop, covering sub-Saharan Africa.
- To replicate the training of trainers nationally and facilitate expansion of GMMP 2010 into new countries.
- To develop a training manual for gender and media monitoring.

3. Regional directory of women experts
To create a regional on-line and print version of the directory of women experts covering diverse thematic areas.
- To partner with existing networks and contacts in the region to develop the directory.
- To distribute the directory to media in order to increase the ratio of women as news sources.

4. Media literacy training
To raise critical gender and media awareness with consumers and encourage their active engagement with media.
- To create an interactive gender and media monitoring website for media users.
- To promote the use of traditional forms of communication, radio and short text messages to enhance critical media literacy.
- To establish annual gender media awards in recognition of best practices in this area.

5. Gender sensitive media codes of conduct
To review existing media codes of ethics and communication policies in sub-Saharan Africa to establish whether or not they are gender sensitive.
- To propose amendments of the codes to make them more gender responsive.
- To advocate for the adoption, dissemination and enforcement of these codes.

3-5 December 2007, Nairobi, Kenya.

Cinema as metaphor: Montreal 2007

Heike Kühn

Montreal’s 31st Festival des Films du Monde (2007) – at least the first few days – might have confirmed the impression that rumours about a loss of quality were true. However, while many film critics have favoured the Film Festival of Toronto in recent years, Montreal is fighting back.

The two main programmes of the international competition, one reserved for film debuts, and in the thoughtfully investigated section ‘Focus on World Cinema’, were rich in beautiful films. But the international competition itself suffered from a lack of aesthetic knowledge.

DP75-Tartina City, for example, a contribution from the Chad, combines a devastating story of systematic torture with a parable of the eternal return of immortal despots. Politically engaged, the film hesitates to translate its embarrassment into a language of images which reaches beyond the status of information.

A gripping vision of ethical admonition, interwoven with a provocative film aesthetic, Ben X, the Flemish contribution to the international competition, won the prize of the Ecumenical Jury as well as the Grand Prix of America and the Most Popular Film award.

Director Nic Balthazar uses critical views towards society and media, as have been seen in other movies dealing with pestered juveniles, in order to thwart these well known motifs in the end. Starting like a drama of the gifted, autistic child driven to death by rudeness and prejudice, Ben X develops as a refreshingly unorthodox revenge-satire.

Seventeen-year-old-protagonist Ben is the
hero of a computer game, killing monstrous creatures on the highest level. In real life the boy suffers from a condition of hypersensitivity, leading to constant implosions. From his point of view, every detail is blown up to the size of a universe; every little task is a gigantic challenge.

Whereas the simple minds that make Ben’s life a misery search for originality by looking alike, Ben is strikingly different. His playful reception of the world opens windows into a widened reality where he can talk fluently with fictive characters, such as the heroine of his beloved computer game. This heroine is the virtual character of a girl, who in real life is as shy as Ben. They agree to meet but fail, because Ben’s worst enemies make him arrive late. Ben compensates for his disappointment by creating a ghostly companion, visible only to him. This apparition of the girl accompanies him and suggests committing suicide.

‘One has to die first’, says Ben’s mother, bursting into tears in front of a TV-camera. This sentence is more enigmatic than we think. Indeed, it is a triumph of fantasy. If it is only the sacrifice of the innocent that moves the TV-cameras, why not fake it? After arranging his suicide, seemingly ‘proven’ by his own video-camera, Ben appears safe and sound in a church to bring a little life back to his funeral. His resurrection blames the media that refused to report the daily war at school, but is willing to capture every single tear of his devastated family.

Ben’s revenge is completed by an accidentally taken mobile-picture of his humiliation in front of a yelling class, not focussing on his bitter role, but on the delighted faces of his torturers and the cheering crowd. The imagery strikes back and claims an alternative power.

The Passion of Christ needs no repetition; one crucifixion is enough to save us from our sins. The scapegoats of today, states this cunning movie, will not die, but rehearse their death as part of a cinema strategy. No use killing, if a picture brings us back to life.

A worldly life? A spiritual life? Ben X is a fascinating example of my personally preferred film-theory: a movie with a strong and unique aesthetic is a good candidate for discussion about more or less hidden religious impact. Why so? Maybe because digging deep into the parameters of aesthetics reveals the roots of humanism – and its blossoms.

*Talk Film, Talk Faith*

*Ben X* might be the perfect choice for one of the next Talk Faith, Talk Film seminars, ‘which were begun by, and have continued under the direction of Interfilm, North America’ as James M. Wall, senior contributing editor of *Christian Century* magazine, located in Chicago, Illinois, USA, wrote. He continued, ‘From the beginning the seminars have involved support, as well, from the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). Under the leadership of the Rev. Andrew Johnston, now the pastor of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, and formerly pastor of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church, in Montreal, Talk Faith, Talk Film, has energized and informed film viewers since its first sessions in 1997.

Referring to the work of Susanne Langer, the art philosopher, Jim Wall suggests a way of decoding images, which, by the way, should also be the overriding concern of every film critic who deserves the privilege of writing.

‘The methodology appears simple enough, but most viewers fail to make the distinction, remaining largely fixed on the film’s “about-ness”, rather than remaining open to its “isness”. Sadly, this is also how many religious...
people view faith and doctrine, fixing on the surface data rather than its deeper significance.’

Participants at the 2007 seminar, held during Montreal World Film Festival, asked to meet the members of the ecumenical jury. We were asked a complicated question: What do we expect from movies? My colleagues, Alyda Faber, Scott Malkemus, Guy Marchessault and Roman Maurer, found these crucial keywords: transparency and translucency. An open-minded view, which neither underestimates our imagination nor our sensitivity. A vision of humankind and the world which is universal, but neither predictable nor dogmatic.

As for me, I believe in metaphors. Such as in Edward Yang’s film Yi Yi, telling the story of a disconnected family. The grandmother is the only person caring for the family literally and symbolically. One day, she has a heart attack and is found lying next to the litter box. She goes into a coma and a doctor recommends speaking with her, luring her back to life through thrilling narrations.

Her little grandson is too scared to do so. To console and distract him, he is given a photo camera. He starts photographing mosquitoes, which no one appreciates. A heartless teacher mocks him. ‘There is nothing to see,’ the teacher howls with laughter. ‘You need to look better,’ the boy replies and is instantly punished.

Even so, he does not give up the idea that some things are just invisible to the unsophisticated viewer. Claiming you don’t see a thing does not necessarily imply that things do not exist. Obviously, touching the sphere of religion and philosophy in the frame of childlike perception, the film confronts us with our limited and narrow perspective of the invisible and visible world. With the help of a little boy and a great filmmaker we are challenged in our stubborn belief of reality as a one-way street.

The next project of the boy is to photograph the backs of heads of people. Interrogated by his uncle why he would do so, the boy states: ‘You cannot see yourself from the back.’ I wonder if a philosopher could have expressed it any better. We have no idea of our appearance in the world: we neither see our what is behind us nor what is behind the mask people wear in order to protect themselves. A mirror is an impostor, betraying us at the core of our self-understanding. A cinematographic image, referring to a sublime aesthetic, emphasizing the intense self-interrogating process of filmmaking, is a window on the world, enlightening foreign visions of life as well as the routine in which we might be stuck.

Inspiration from China
At Montreal 2007 we were lucky enough to see amazing films. If Ai Quing De Ya Chi (Teeth of love) by Chinese director Zhuang Yuxin had been shown in competition, it could have been Ben X’s greatest rival. It is almost unbelievable that this elegant piece of work is a debut. ‘The teeth of love’ leave their traces on the body of a beautiful woman, acting as representative of so many supporters of the communist party who never doubted the almighty rules of a regime that defeated the smallest sign of individuality or personal pleasure.

From 1977 Qian Yehong, the female protagonist, discovers that love is not a party member. Violent towards her own feelings as well as towards the beloved enemy, a handsome young poet, her self-abnegation is literally painful: a chain reaction of physical injuries and invisible wounds, which will never heal. For ten years this is the credo of the Red fundamentalist – until she realizes that the communist credo of discipline, restricting emotions and sexuality, denies life itself.

From the beginning of her medical studies to her work as a doctor, Qian Yehong’s failed love-stories are part of a bigger frame: The private moments of a forbidden love with a married and high-ranking party member, an abortion that is found out, and the punishment of ‘re-education’ in a factory, symbolize the agony of a whole decade.

It’s the killing of the inner voice and the cutting of the roots of humanity that interest the filmmaker. Reflecting utter subordination and embodying self-deception, he shows what made the disaster of Tiananmen Square possible. That’s what cinema is all about.

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Media Development 1/2008
ON THE SCREEN...

Cottbus (Germany) 2007

At the Festival of East European Cinema held 6-11 November 2007 the award of the award of the Ecumenical Jury went to Travelling with Pets directed by Vera Storoschewa (Russia, 2007). The film tells the story of a young woman finding self-confidence after the death of her husband.

In carefully arranged shots, the director develops a modern fairy tale about a woman who defends her independence against the expectations of others. The poetic strength of the main character lends significance to the film beyond its specific circumstances.

Lübeck (Germany) 2007

At the 49th Nordic Film Days festival INTER-FILM Church Film Prize went to the film Den man älskar (To Love Someone) directed by Åke Sandgren (Sweden, 2007). The Award carries prize money of €2,500.

The Jury citation says: ‘To Love Someone centres on the complexity of violence, dependence and love. By means of constant changes in perspective as well as superb acting the film avoids any particular consolidation. Despite its drastic depiction of the destructive potential of love the film simultaneously generates hope that love has the power to change people and to offer them a new future.’

Leipzig (Germany) 2007

At the 50th International Film Festival for Documentaries and Animated Film, held 29 October to 4 November 2007 the award of the Ecumenical Jury went to Kamienna Cisza (Stone Silence) directed by Krzysztof Kopczynski (Poland, 2007).

The Jury wrote: ‘In this Afghan village, has Amina, a married woman, been stoned for adultery? The fascinating images of the movie drive the viewer through a the labyrinth of truths and lies, unsaid and contradictions, whereby the village community endeavours to confront the pressures it faces from law, religion, tradition and human feelings. Through a tense search for truth, the film provocatively puts on stage the biblical words “He who is without sin, let him throw the first stone.”

Kiev (Ukraine) 2007

At the 37th Molodist International Film Festival held 20-28 October 2007 the Ecumenical Jury awarded its prize to Bikur Haizmoret (The Band’s Visit) directed by Eran Kolirin (Israel/France, 2007).

The citation of the Jury reads: ‘The Band’s Visit unfolds its little but universal story with a lot of warmth and fine humour. It tells about different kinds of friendship and loneliness which people of different religions and political systems feel the same way, and it tells about the universal call to care for other people. For the Alexandrian Ceremonial Orchestra, a band from Egypt on a visit to Israel, ending up by mistake in a small village in the desert is a kind of catastrophe. But for them and the Israeli inhabitants – and, above all, for the viewers of the film – the day and night they spend there becomes a strong, liberating and entertaining experience.’

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to Mutum (Mute) directed by Sandra Kogut (Brazil/France, 2007). ‘Full of maternal love and tenderness as well as little and simple human desires, Mutum gives hope for families living in their limited world by opening a window into the universe of possibilities.’