

Mariano Aguirre, Francisco Ferrándiz

# The Emotion and the Truth: Studies in Mass Communication and Conflict



Humanitarian**Net**

Thematic Network on Humanitarian  
Development Studies



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Studies in Mass Communication  
and Conflict



# The Emotion and the Truth: Studies in Mass Communication and Conflict

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*M.A. and F.F.*

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# **Introduction: Constructing Complex Knowledge on Modern Armed Conflict**

Mariano Aguirre

After the end of the Cold War journalism became an important source of knowledge: political processes and changes became so fast that instant information was very relevant. In practical terms, to write a book needs more time than to write an article and even more than to send a report by television or radio. But a misunderstanding grew. As Debray says, currently there is a confusion of two universes: knowledge and journalism. To know that something has happened does not mean to know why it happened. Information is fragmentary and isolated. Knowledge is an act of synthesis that unifies the diversity of empirical facts by finding a principle of construction or a norm of understanding (DEBRAY, 2001, p. 271).

Armed conflicts constitute one of the most important and crucial issues currently affecting the international system. Around 30 armed conflicts worldwide and nearly 300,000 resulting deaths a year have a powerful impact on the lives of millions of people and the political, economic and social structures of different societies in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. The list of conflicts runs from Afghanistan to Colombia, in a long trajectory through Asia, areas of the former USSR, the Balkans, the Middle East, and countries of northern and subsaharan Africa (SOLLENBERG, 2001).

Modern wars generate death, injuries, internal destruction of societal organisations and infrastructure, environmental stress, internally displaced people, refugees, emigrants and the collapse of countries often rich in resources. The disrupted fragile states generate massive horizontal and vertical migrations and a flow of refugees (around 25 million in the world), apart from the approximately 10 million internally displaced.

These conflicts are internal and most have happened in these so-called fragile States. In these States the institutional system is weak or

non-existent. The legislative body doesn't function or is dependent on the elites and doesn't reflect the dynamic and needs of society and the citizens. There is no judicial system, no system of checks and balances and no holding of government to account. The official security forces, when they exist, operate in the particular interests of the elite that controls the State. One of the principles of the modern State, the legal monopoly of the use of force, is broken. There is a diversification and privatisation of violence and force. Along with the State forces there are paramilitary groups funded by governments, drug traffickers and landowners, guerrillas, self-defence groups, mercenaries, and international and national private security forces contracted by the private sector.

The current wars are being fought less for ideological purposes than for economic aims. There are wars for natural resources (e.g., water, diamonds, timber) or for the control of governments. But most of the groups involved in modern wars have no defined ideology or vision of how to organise their societies. Even more, in some situations war is becoming a way to integrate and organise people and societies. Without any other chance of social and economic integration, millions of young people are becoming part of the structure of violence at different levels, from cheap criminality in the streets of Pretoria, Mexico City or Lagos to crude and real war in Sierra Leona, Angola or Chechnya.

The modern system of war is chaotic at first sight but in fact is a tragic way of getting access to the basic goods for living. At the roots of this massive integration in violence and war as a tool for survival are growing inequality, massive poverty, uncontrolled exploitation of human and natural resources by the local elites and foreign actors, human rights violations and lack of democracy and social participation. Some authors consider that in some regions of the international system a transition is taking place from weak states to post-States or entities with another kind of structure. Other authors such think that for many of the modern African States the corrupted way of anarchy is a rational structure of power and violence and there is "a criminalisation of the State" (BAYART/ELLIS/ HIBOU, 1999).

The consolidation of corrupted elites in some countries, and the fragmentation into illegal economic power groups, are generating growing uncertainty in Northern countries and financial and economic circles. Illegal economies don't pay taxes, and as far as violence goes hand in hand with illegality the international economic system can be weakened. The so-called shadow economies are stimulated in many cases by the legal actors but there is a sort of boomerang effect. The illegal financial sector and the global shadow economies are now partially under scrutiny after the terrorist attacks in the US in September 2001.

The terrorist religious group Al Qaeda have apparently developed a complex financial network over many countries using the globalisation of economic resources.

Due to the impact of a global economic system that generates unjust distribution of wealth, inequality and extended poverty, millions of people have no other chance of prosperity except involvement in illegal activities. Some of them join violent criminal networks that traffick in such resources as diamonds, oil, timber, arms, drugs and people, as well as cars and even international aid (RENO, 2001). There is a growing combination of privatisation of violence, corruption, clientelism and criminal integration in international networks. A factor of special interest is the illegal economies. A return by social groups to identity —national, linguistic, ethnic, religious, racial— is a way of consolidation and resistance against social and political uncertainty. Several groups from Kosovo and Macedonia to Chechnya and Colombia are looking for the control of regions or States. In order to gain legitimacy and the support of the people the identity component is important. The leaders and thinkers who promote identity are in many cases using traditions, are rewriting history if necessary, in order to support their causes.

Violence is also combined with religion to produce massive acts of aggression, like the one mentioned in the US. Religion and violence generate the political phenomenon of religious nationalism. As Juergensmeyer says: "Religion provides the motivation, the justification, the organisation, and the world view". He also refers to "religious imagination (that) (...) always has had the propensity to absolutise and to project images of cosmic war". Violence and religion "also has much to do with the social tensions of this moment of history that cry out for absolute solutions, and the sense of personal humiliation experienced by men who long to restore an integrity they perceive as lost in the wake of virtually global social and political shifts" (JUERGENSMEYER, 2001, p. 242).

In these fragile States there is a break up of the political pact between the citizen and the State. People don't trust States that are not committed to their juridical function. The State lacks any legitimacy and accountability. The people feel vulnerable and without a legal and social framework of reference. These modern wars in fragile States are modifying their societies so that they will never be the same. War is becoming a way of life and they are becoming "societies of fear", as Kaldor and Luckman write. Some characteristics of these societies are:

- increasing social and political polarisation
- increasing social economic exclusion of the population and of the country as a whole

- violence increasingly used to get access to goods and resources
- an absolute absence of law, with massive violations of human rights
- war as an economic activity in itself
- criminalisation and growing illegality of economic activity
- disappearance of the central State system (KALDOR/LUCKMAN, 2001, pp. 60-61).

Externally, these conflicts are often labelled *forgotten wars* but they are linked to the process of globalisation in a deeper way than is apparent. Some of the linking factors to the international economic system are:

- legal and illegal international investments and alliances with local elites
- export of capital and money laundering
- debt
- arms trade (buying and re-selling)
- illegal production and trade in local resources (diamonds, timber and in some cases people)
- the moral impact on democratic societies and the international responses.

Different historical reasons are at the roots of these conflicts: the colonial system imposed over a whole range of mostly agrarian precapitalist societies; the breakdown of the postcolonial Nation-State building processes; the failure of models of development implemented over the last 50 years, whether liberal, communist or nationalistic; and the imposition of structural adjustment plans by international financial bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

These different stages developed in a short period of time of around 50 years, particularly during the decades after the national wars for independence in Africa and Asia. In Latin America most countries gained their independence in the nineteenth century, but they share with the Asian and African States many of the structural problems of being part of the periphery of the world international system.

One of the misperceptions about modern armed conflicts is that they are far from the reality of the democratic industrial societies. Conflicts become an exotic spectacle. Even more, what we are watching is a distant and chaotic image of a reality different from ours. The comparative effect creates the illusion that we are not connected to these nightmares and that we don't have any moral, economic or

political commitment. The impact of this emotional and comparative practice is so powerful that we can become too shortsighted to see the closer signs of violence in the developed, democratic and advanced societies. As Ignatieff says, the media transmit a “chaos narrative” and the connection between us and the victims is through a “humanitarian narrative” (that) is at the same time a “televsual narrative” (IGNATIEFF, 2000).

This humanitarian narrative generates a two-sided phenomenon. On the one hand stands an apolitical humanitarian universalism in which every crisis and all the victims are the same, and even worse, the killers seem to be irrational people with no clear political or economic will. On the other, Governments as incarnations of States can paradoxically use these universal emotional and apolitical feelings to legitimate their particular *Realpolitik* policies (AGUIRRE, 2001).

Understanding and knowledge about these modern wars are important factors for the political reactions of the international community. These responses come from different actors:

- States: according to their interests. The interest is about national security in a broader sense, including domestic legitimation.
- Multilateral organisations: they have the mandate to promote development, peace and security, three of the key issues related to fragile states and armed conflicts. But these organisations are limited by the will and interests of the States that control and pay for them.
- Non-governmental organisations: NGOs don't have the limitations of the other two sectors and they act according to a moral aim. Their actions are finding further complexity in the international environments where they want to intervene.

Knowledge about armed conflicts is important for many actors in the international system: governments, multilateral organisations, the private sector, non-governmental organisations, academia, the media and societies in general. This rational understanding is crucial for the affected societies in order to find solutions for their crisis, and for the international community in order to implement policies that can contribute to peace and sustainable development in the medium and long term.

The way that academia, the media and the NGOs interlink will in part determine the future of millions of people. The debate must include the business sector as well as the international system of financial and trade organisations such as the WTO and the World Bank. The structural crisis in fragile States is a problem that concerns all of us.

There is no clear answer and not a single solution to the conflicts in these fragile States. From a critical perspective we know the main trends to follow:

- Domestically: the promotion of democratisation and sustainable legal economies
- Externally: a fair integration of these fragile States in a more equitable international economic and political order. At the same time, a multilateral conflict prevention framework that links short term diplomatic initiatives with long term structural international programmes.

But before attaining such ambitious aims there is a long road of practice, discussions and urgent hard realities. To understand the roots and the characteristics of the modern wars is a first crucial step.

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## Reporting with Judgement and Politics

Jonathan Steele

The title of this seminar can mean everything or nothing, so the canvas is broad. The stark two nouns also have romantic overtones, like "The Agony and the Ecstasy". There is even perhaps an implicit suggestion that the two things, emotion and truth, are opposed to each other.

Let me say, first of all, that I don't see an automatic contradiction between them. I am not one of those journalists who believe in a so-called "journalism of detachment". To be a good journalist a certain amount of emotion is indispensable in your work. Anger is particularly important. In a world where there is so much injustice, unfairness, misery, and cruelty you have to feel anger. Anger is the fuel which keeps you going.

The biggest occupational hazard for journalists, as well as for people who work in aid agencies abroad, is cynicism: the feeling that you have seen it all before, that nothing can be done, and that life is a perpetually recurring cycle of violence and hopelessness. If you succumb to cynicism, then your work stops being effective. So you should never lose your anger. Of course, your anger must not become so strong that it makes you lose your reason or turns you blind. But a kind of low-intensity, smouldering anger is the crucial force which gives reporters energy and helps them keep going, with luck doing a decent job.

So some emotion is necessary to reach the truth. You should not become excessively partisan or take political or ideological sides in a conflict, at least not to the extent of losing your critical faculties or censoring yourself. Your primary responsibility is to bear witness to the suffering of victims, to report what is happening to them, and why. In a conflict such as the Balkans that may mean you sympathise with members of a particular group at a particular time. It may mean that after reporting their case as well as that of their opponents or enemies

you express an opinion as to which side seems more right; or you may say that both have equally valid points. In no case should it mean that you sympathise with one ethnic, political, religious group all the time or whatever it does.

Throughout 1998 and until June 1999 in Kosovo, for example, it was clear that any sensitive journalist would spend much of the time covering atrocities done to Albanians by Serb security forces. That was the main story because it happened on a large scale and with impunity.

Within it, of course, there were sub-themes. Some Serb civilians were also suffering. They too were murdered, or kidnapped. During the Kosovo war I covered these things, both by reporting murders and by interviewing the families of Serb victims, although it was not always as easy to report what was happening to Serbs as it was to report similar events in Albanian lives. Serbs often refused to talk to journalists, claiming that we would only distort what they said.

But good journalists not only have to report "human interest" stories. They have to put them in a context of scale and proportion. Serbs in Kosovo suffered, but Albanians suffered in greater numbers. That is why the story of Albanian victimisation by Serbs was reported more frequently than Serb victimisation by Albanians, at least until June 1999.

A danger which journalists have to avoid is "false equivalence". The murder of a Serb is obviously just as significant and deplorable as the murder of an Albanian. But if the conflict produces ten murders of Serbs and a hundred murders of Albanians, then one has to report that. This may seem obvious, but it is not always the basis for all reporting. There is often a tendency to say that two sides have been "killing each other for centuries", as though the scale and proportion of the killing was irrelevant.

Situations change, and one has to keep focusing on the changes. After all, that is what news is about. After June 1999 when NATO-led troops entered Kosovo and the Serb security forces withdrew, Serb civilians became the main victims. Their houses were burnt. Dozens were murdered, and the rest were forced into enclaves from which they could only emerge under the protection of KFOR, the international peace-keeping force. So the main post-June 1999 story in Kosovo was about the victimisation of Serb civilians.

The story of the Albanian refugees' return was also important. The cynics, about whom I spoke earlier, tended to underplay this. Their line was that one lot of killing was now being replaced by another. But good news is also news, and journalists were right to spend time covering the happiness and relief of tens of thousands of Albanians coming back home alive from refugee camps in Macedonia and Albania.



We also covered the sorrow and fury many Albanians felt when they saw their looted and burnt houses or found the graves of relatives left behind and killed.

The fact that this anger sometimes turned to murderous revenge against Serbs shows how quickly victims can become villains. This too is a crucial part of war, as well as a further warning to journalists not to "take sides" with whole groups of people. During an earlier Balkan crisis, in the summer of 1995, I remember standing at the border of Serbia and Bosnia when thousands of Serb refugees from the Croatian Krajina came pouring into Serbia on tractors and in overloaded cars. They were a pathetic sight, and clearly victims. We then drove to a nearby village inside Serbia which was largely Serbian but had a small Croatian population. Several of the "victim-tractors" stopped outside these Croatian homes and with the help of local Serbs put pressure on their Croatian owners to abandon their houses and flee to Croatia. In the space of a few hours victims had become oppressors. Many Albanians in Kosovo went through the same transformation in 1999.

Journalism is about judgement. You cannot report everything. You have to select what you cover, and you have to put it in its correct context. That includes the political context.

The unexpected outbreak of fighting in Macedonia in March 2001, when ethnic Albanian gunmen appeared in the mountains above the city of Tetovo, was a good case in point. Dozens of journalists rushed to Macedonia but the overwhelming focus of their coverage was on the violence. Few of the initial reports mentioned there was an Albanian political party in the Macedonian government, or bothered to interview its leader, Arben Xhaferi, even though his office was less than a hundred metres from the main hotel in Tetovo where most journalists were staying. Xhaferi condemned the gunmen's use of violence but this went largely unreported, as did the emergency session of parliament in Skopje where the other main Albanian party also joined in a virtually unanimous call by politicians across the spectrum for the gunmen to stop their activities.

The BBC World Service sent six different TV reporters to Tetovo but was guilty of the same distorted coverage. One BBC reporter who made the inflammatory and inaccurate statement that the Macedonian security forces were worse than the Serbs had been during the Kosovo crisis was pulled out by BBC editors, but this did not alter the bias in the BBC's coverage in favour of the fighting at the expense of what was going on at the political level. The BBC reporters only stayed for a few days each and under the pressure of having to do live "updates" virtually every hour rarely had time to talk to any politicians or visit war-

affected villages. Reporting was sacrificed to "updating" which was often spurious, since nothing had changed since the previous report an hour earlier.

Politics are usually less dramatic than fighting. They are certainly less visual. The impact of war on civilians must be covered, as must the course of a war and the claims and counterclaims of the commanders in charge. But so must the war aims of the politicians who take the decisions, as well as the historical and cultural context in which they operate.

When it concentrates excessively on death and destruction and ignores politics, then war reporting is poor reporting.

Jack Straw calls it the "Kosovo wobble", a moment of hesitation when the public briefly lost faith in Nato's 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia three weeks after it began. How wrong they were, he implies, and how right Nato was to ignore them. True, eight weeks after that wobble, there was still no certainty of victory. On day 78 it suddenly came. Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav president, threw in the towel and agreed to pull his troops out of Kosovo and let international peacekeepers in. Hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees raced home. The war was over, its goals achieved. So the moral for today's war in Afghanistan is clear, we are told. Be patient. The bombing campaign may seem to have little to show for itself but the relentless pressure will eventually pay off. Like Milosevic, the Taliban will one day give up.

The comparison with Kosovo may sound tempting. But in fact it illustrates why the war in Afghanistan was wrongly conceived from the start, and will go on going wrong. In Kosovo there was a clear enemy, a Serbian military and police machine which was fighting a colonial war against a liberation movement representing close to 90% of the population. Using indiscriminate force, this machine shelled villages, torched houses and massacred civilians. It was classic ethnic cleansing, in which Albanians were forced to flee to the hills and were later deported from Kosovo in convoys of tractors and cars or sometimes in sealed trains. Nato's aims —to get Serb forces out and the deportees back in— were simple, though there were major problems with the air war. Many who supported Nato's intervention on the grounds that the cause was just, as I did, thought the over-reliance on bombing and the targeting of bridges and power stations posed excessive risks and punished civilians. We advocated a ground invasion of Kosovo. In the end preparations for one started, and as General Wesley Clark, Nato's commander at the time, said in London this week, that decision —along with Milosevic's indictment by the Hague tribunal and Moscow's warning

that it could not defend Belgrade— led to the Yugoslav president's surrender. Bombing helped, he argued, but it was only one factor out of four.

Afghanistan is different. The Taliban do not run an all-powerful government which can order troops to retreat in as clean a way as Milosevic did. The country has been engulfed in civil war for more than 20 years. Even if the opposition were to take power in Kabul and Kandahar, pockets of resistance and warlordism would continue, particularly in the rugged mountains where Osama bin Laden and his supporters are hiding. So capturing the main cities will not make the task of finding Bin Laden easier. But what a cost the effort to bomb the Taliban into defeat is having. During the Kosovo war it was clear that Albanians were not mainly fleeing Nato bombing. Television pictures of the daily exodus of deportees maintained support for Nato's campaign and stopped the "wobble". In Afghanistan, by contrast, people realise that the bombing is the principal factor forcing frightened families to leave their homes. Aid agencies estimate that up to 80 % of Kandahar's people have fled. The figure for Kabul is similar. The fact that many have gone to the safety of (as yet) unbombed villages rather than towards the closed borders of Pakistan and Iran may sound comforting. It still represents a wave of misery which puts unsustainable pressure on already uncertain food supplies.

Minister of the UK Department for International Development Clare Short reminds us that three years of drought have led thousands of Afghans to abandon their homes in search of food, but she and other ministers are wrong to downplay the extra dislocation caused by the air war. The Taliban did not cause the drought and they are not doing the bombing. They run one of the world's ugliest regimes, but horror over their governance and the suppression of women should not be confused with the question of aid. Before the bombing started the Taliban let food convoys through. The main problem was that the outside world did not respond generously enough to United Nations appeals. Now it is the bombing, not the Taliban, which does most to make aid delivery difficult and prompt lorry drivers not to work.

Ministers also argue that the Taliban are wily propagandists whose claims of casualties cannot be proved. How lucky the allies are. The Taliban's biggest mistake is not to allow even a dozen journalists to work permanently in the country. The images of dead and wounded they would produce, and the genuine assessment of casualty figures they could make would destroy support for the air campaign. Even without them, a majority of the British public has come round to wanting a bombing pause. They rightly sense that this bombing is not

going anywhere, and in spite of advancements in modern weapons' accuracy, too many innocent Afghans will continue to be killed by error.

To end the "wobble" should Washington and London turn to ground troops, as was eventually planned in Kosovo? Beware. In Kosovo, Nato ground forces would have had easily visible targets, the uniformed troops of a conventional army. Even here one needs to be careful. The contrast between the relative inaccuracy of bombing and the surgical precision of a soldier on the ground is a myth. The devastating lethality of hi-tech guns turns the modern infantryman into a "bomber on legs". Remember October 1993, when 18 American soldiers were killed in Somalia, a loss which led Bill Clinton to end the whole mission? Surrounded by an angry crowd, troops of the US Army Rangers and the Delta Force (the same "special" forces who are supposed to move into Afghanistan to find Bin Laden) sprayed their machine guns in panic, killing up to 500 Somalis, a third of them women and children. The only American not killed said after his release from captivity that the men discarded their rules of engagement to shoot only at people aiming guns at them. "We fired on anything that moved," he admitted. His words should haunt us now. In Afghanistan ground troops would face conditions closer to the Somali scenario than the one which loomed in Kosovo. Hunting in rural areas, patrolling in suspicious villages, clambering through shepherds' caves, their carnage of panic could be horrendous.

Donald Rumsfeld, the US secretary of defence, admitted the other day that Osama bin Laden may never be found. Although he retracted later, his remark stands as a monument to the fact that, although truth may be a casualty in war, some truths survive and take wing. The only effective way to defeat the al-Qaida network, most of whose operatives are not in Afghanistan anyway, is by intelligent international police work sustained over several years and backed by political pressure on states which support them. Trying to oust the Taliban by force is a sideshow which has turned hundreds of thousands into refugees, and disrupted aid. Even if, like the war on Milosevic, it were to succeed after 78 days, al-Qaida would still be at large and fighting on.

# Conflicts and the Right to Information

Edouard Markiewicz

Everyone has a right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom... to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UN Declaration of Human Rights).

Even if Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights has established the inalienable right of information for human beings, this right is not guaranteed under international humanitarian law. The perusal of more than 500 articles, protocols and annexes of the Geneva Conventions, reveals only the mention that, "during conflicts, civilians have a right to items indispensable to their survival" (art. 54 of Protocol 1 and art. 14 of Protocol 2 additional to the Geneva Conventions).

Is objective information an indispensable item for survival? Legislators clearly don't consider it so. This stance, unfortunately, leaves the affected populations at the mercy of propaganda, misinformation and rumours of all kinds.

Nevertheless, only reliable information can warn civilians about dangers such as landmines. Only trustworthy information can empower weaker members of society (women, children and elders) and reduce their vulnerability.

There are hundreds of thousands of different newspapers, web sites, radio stations and TV channels around the world to prove that people are hungry for information. This increases in time of war and particularly for people involved in these conflicts. For governments, the ability to broadcast information to populations in danger is seen as an expression of political power. Yet politicians or the military often consider civilian populations little more than pawns. Therefore controlling or destroying radio and TV broadcasts is one of the first objectives in a conflict situation. US bombing of the Radio-Television of Serbia and the Kabul offices of "Al-Jazeera" television network, just

before Northern Alliance forces entered the Afghan capital, is there to remind us.

Operating in this very sensitive environment makes the work of the organisations providing humanitarian information such a difficult task. There are thousands of NGOs defending street children or denouncing human rights violations around the world, but less than ten defend the right to access to impartial information for affected populations in war. The only way that humanitarian media NGOs can implement their operations is by having access to several donors who respect editorial independence and neutrality, which is indispensable for audience credibility.

Since the development of new communications technologies, it is easier to access information. Paradoxically, the major humanitarian agencies, which depend on information for the implementation of their activities, are still not providing the necessary information to the people they are seeking to assist.

There are several reasons for this:

- Agencies working in emergencies do not see information as a priority. They consider themselves accountable to their donors and *not* to the people they assist.
- Providing information requires additional effort and obliges the agencies to create a new dimension to their action by training field workers to communicate more effectively with the victims.
- Agencies would be obliged to integrate information collecting and dissemination in the different stages of assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their activities.

From the donors' point of view, humanitarian activities are seen as international social action or charity, often serving to enhance their public relations image. The programmes are based on traditional models that have not integrated new dimensions of the information society. For real efficiency, donors need to insist on a better grounding of these projects. They need to promote respect for the dignity of victims. This means enabling them to have input and access to credible and impartial information about the actions and the decisions of the relief community.

In war situations, access to information can mean the difference between life and death. Interactive information programmes also serve as the only way of ensuring that health and food programmes are more than just charity. Such programmes can empower people to take relevant decisions and can help affected populations to manage their own problems.

It is clear that it's easier to vaccinate people than to create a more hygienic environment through communication and education. It is also easier to feed them rather than trying to change their behaviour through social planning and education programmes. But, at the same time, AIDS information awareness programmes have proven to be the only really effective weapon against this terrible disease. It is also the only way to avoid a major health disaster.

Some UN agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO or UNHCR are trying to act in this relatively empty field. Except for UNAIDS, however, there doesn't appear to be a global vision or analysis focusing on such needs-based information programmes. Informing refugees and displaced people was not even mentioned in the two-day UNHCR meeting about Afghanistan, held in Geneva on 5-6 October 2001, where governments decided to grant one billion dollars for humanitarian purposes in Afghanistan.

The Afghan conflict raises questions over the role of the military in respect to humanitarian activities. Since the war in Yugoslavia, humanitarian action has been hijacked by the military. This raises serious issues for aid organisations and creates security risks for field workers. The military is clearly not mandated to take humanitarian action, which has to be carefully and professionally done in the field, in order to respect the dignity and culture of the affected population. The emergency food ration drops during the Afghan bombing campaign from the same planes that also dropped real weapons had disastrous results. The yellow colour of the packages had to be changed "urgently" three weeks after the beginning of these drops, as they were the same colour as the non-exploded cluster bombs. Their new colours are blue.

Humanitarian action, which is supposed to give assistance to people in need regardless of their sex, race or religion, is used by the military as a powerful propaganda weapon to sell war to public opinion. "Providing comfort" was the name of the humanitarian-military operation in Kosovo. Today the military are destroying Afghanistan and calling it "Operation Infinite Justice". The Afghan people, who are already victims of their own government, are now victims of "infinite justice" bombing. If journalists often have not enough time to verify the information they are receiving, they should at least watch the words they are using to write their articles. There is a duty for them to treat all victims with equal respect. They all have faces and families. They are not "collateral damage".

\* \* \*

Having access to information doesn't imply accuracy. The new information strategy implemented since the Falklands war by the British

has been improved by the Americans during the Gulf and Yugoslav conflicts and is still going on in Afghanistan today.

War correspondents hardly exist any more. There is less “legwork” by journalists to transmit “the facts” to the public. There is no more evidence for reporting than before, but far greater reliance on military press conferences or interviews of conflict-implicated witnesses. This situation encourages mistakes, manipulation and propaganda, as the reporters have little else to fill their notebooks.

Lessons learned from the Vietnam war have shown that public opinion is sensitive to innocent civilian deaths. This is why the military tries by all means to keep such images far from our TV screens. “People judge with their eyes” said Machiavelli.

The US authorities, who decided to grant \$27 million to create a “Radio Free Afghanistan”, have also requested that the media present the images of Afghan civilian casualties as a consequence of the 11 September terrorist attack. To be fair, it appears that the Afghan civilian dead should be added to the list of innocent people who died in New York and not be counted on the opposite side.

There is also a serious problem of self-censorship in the American media concerning the video statement of Bin Laden, where he claimed US foreign policy in Iraq, Israel and the Gulf area had incurred the anger of the Muslim world. This statement was re-edited or totally ignored at the request of the US government. CBS President Andrew Heyward’s explanation of this decision was “Given the historical events we are enmeshed in, it’s appropriate to explore new ways of fulfilling our responsibility to the public.” This goes far from the media’s public responsibility to provide full and impartial information.

Not much analysis is available about the geo-strategic reasons for the conflict, such as the implication of the oil and weapons sector, or the link between the media and the arms industry. Few journalists are willing to take the risk of losing their jobs by bringing up such issues:

- General Electric with the highest stock market options in the world, is producer of the F-117 and B-52 bombers, AWACS radar plane and Navstar spy satellite. It is also owner of NBC television, one of the five big US commercial networks.
- Cyrus Vance, former head of US State Department, is on the board of directors of the *New York Times* and of General Dynamics, one of the major weapons corporations and media advertisers.
- Harold Brown, former defence secretary, is now on the CBS TV board of directors.



- Robert McNamara, former defence secretary during the Vietnam war, is also on the board of the *Washington Post*.
- George Bush Sr. is now working for Carlyle, reported to be the eleventh largest defence contractor in the US because of its ownership of companies which make tanks, aircraft wings and telecommunications equipment. Carlyle is actually run by Franco Carlucci, a former defence secretary under President Ronald Reagan. In addition, Carlyle employs former Secretary of State James Baker and former British Prime Minister John Major.
- American Telegraph and Telephone (ATT), a giant of the arms industry, subsidises “information programmes” on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS).

The relations between the defense and media industries<sup>2</sup> are not exclusively American. In France for example, Dassault, a builder of warplanes, also owns *Journal des Finances* and *Valeurs actuelles*. Matra, another weapons dealer, is linked to Hachette which controls “Europe 1 radio” and “La 5” TV station.

In 1961, on leaving the White House, General Eisenhower stated, “The military-industrial complex is a threat to democracy”. It is certainly true for accurate war reporting, considering that the arms corporations have investment in the media. It is clearly difficult for journalists working with these big media groups to report fairly in a conflict situation when their information touches directly on the interests of the people paying their salaries!

There is certainly a need for more research into the degree of implication of the weapons corporations in the media. But there is also a need to explore the entertainment industry such as war movies and violent video games, and their consequences on news reporting and psycho-social behaviour.

There is also a social responsibility for the journalists themselves. They need:

- To be aware of the destructive role the media can play in the promotion of sensationalist news. The media preference for drama has a direct impact on activists who realise that only with “loud” violence will they be heard.
- To be aware that the media can influence the course of events in society and that they are able to create or destroy communities.

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<sup>2</sup> LEE, M. A. “Le complexe militaro-médiatique”, *Manière de Voir* No.14, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, p. 28.

- To display the biases of information To try to understand all the points of view; “terrorists” are not always on the other side.
- To always remain a third party; no war should be a journalist’s war.
- To preserve scepticism vis-à-vis their sources of information.
- To maintain distance from all interested parties in order not to be used as a propaganda tool by sources with an agenda.
- To present alternatives on foreign policy instead of relying only on the choices offered by officials.
- To report in the interests of conflict prevention and resolution.
- To serve as a forum where opponents are encouraged to express their views.
- To increase citizens’ ability to follow and understand debates.

Maybe the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society organised by the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva will be a good opportunity to propose a resolution for a kind of Hippocratic oath for journalists. For the first time, in 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society will create a new dynamic by proposing concrete solutions to the existing challenge.

It could allow journalists to engage formally in the UNESCO declaration on the media (1983) and especially article 9, which declares, “Ethical commitment to universal humanitarian values should oblige journalists to abstain from all forms of *apologia* or favorable incitement in support of war... as well as any form of violence, hatred or discrimination...”. This should encourage journalists to respect the first article of “The declaration of the right and duties of journalists” which says:

“Journalists have the essential duty to seek the truth, for the public right to know, whatever the consequences.”

# **Teaching Conflict Analysis: Suggestions on the Use of Media as a Resource for Conflict Analysis**

Magnus Öberg & Margareta Sollenberg

## **Introduction**

In the research community news media are used for identifying past and ongoing conflicts in the world, and for collecting relevant information about these conflicts over time. The information gathered from media resources primarily concerns events, actors, issues, and turning points. Information about structural conditions and the like is more often found in other types of sources. Thus, news media provides information relevant to the dynamics of conflicts.

Consequently, the role of media in teaching conflict analysis is as a source of facts, evidence and sometimes insights about past and ongoing conflicts. Students and scholars alike, use news media, and other news resources, for gathering the information that becomes the basis for the subsequent analysis.

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate on some of the advantages and problems of using media sources for doing conflict analysis. The ideas and suggestions we offer are based on our own experience, both with teaching and doing conflict analysis, and they reflect what we teach our students. What follows can be seen as a set of methodological advice, or rules of thumb, that we find especially important when using media sources for conflict analysis. The suggestions are geared towards a prospective conflict analyst, be it a university student or a professional. From our own experience we find that these observations, suggestions, and admonitions help students make better and more informed use of media sources in their conflict analyses. We make no special claim to originality or completeness in our treatment of this subject, but explicating what is perhaps conventional wisdom among professional conflict analysts still serves a purpose since it is rarely done.

## **The uses of mass media in conflict analysis: getting the information you need**

### *Introduction*

For several reasons it is often difficult to obtain accurate information about conflicts. First of all, it depends on what kind of information we are looking for. Generally speaking, it is easier to find reliable information on big events than small events, and on extraordinary events than ordinary events. In general so-called hard facts —facts about events, behaviour, and structures— are easier to ascertain than facts about so-called soft issues, such as beliefs, expectations, and cultural codes. Soft issues, or “qualitative” aspects, are really euphemisms difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty and precision. That does not make soft issues any less important than hard ones, but they are more difficult to determine in a consistent and reliable manner.

Second, how much information we can obtain about a conflict depends on, among other things, the openness of the country where the conflict is taking place. It is, for example, extremely difficult to establish what is going on between the Chinese government and the Uighur Turks in Xinjiang, or between the Iranian government and the Baluchis in Baluchistan. There are many indications that there might be armed conflicts going on in both places, but it is very hard to know with any certainty. In contrast, the openness of the societies in Western Europe makes it relatively easy to know in great detail what is transpiring between ETA and the Spanish government, or between the IRA and the British government.

How much information we can obtain also depends on the extent to which we ourselves, or someone else, is observing what is happening and reporting it to the world. Reporting, by journalists, NGOs and scholars alike, is uneven. Some conflicts receive a lot of independent coverage, while others do not. Europe is much better covered than Africa, and North America is much better covered than South America, and so on. In most conflicts there is independent reporting by journalists and NGOs, and sometimes by scholars. In other cases almost no independent reporting is available.

The actors themselves usually make at least some information available, but such information is liable to be skewed in ways that we can only guess. The actors often contradict each other and we might not have access to any independent confirmation. Nevertheless, the parties sometimes unwittingly corroborate each other on some issues. For example they may both say that a battle has taken place. However,

they might have completely different accounts of who did what in this battle, and what the outcome of it was. In this case, it is probably safe to assume that a battle did take place, but not much else.

*Focus: not all facts are needed*

In our experience, lack of focus is a common mistake made by students in writing descriptions of conflicts. Becoming absorbed by their cases they often try to cram as many facts as possible into the study. The guiding principle seems to be “the more the better”. If that was the case we ought to just put all our sources into a big binder and write “Description of case X” on it because that way we would include as much as we possibly could. But that is not satisfactory for most purposes.

The key here is to understand why more details do not necessarily make the description better, or the analysis more enlightening. With too many facts we lose focus, and without structure we lose track. It is exactly by focusing on some things and excluding others, and by structuring information, that we create an account that is enlightening and useful. In our view the structuring of selected facts makes the description intelligible, and evokes a sense of meaning and understanding, because it gives an answer to some question.

A map is a good analogy for understanding what facts should be included and what facts may legitimately be excluded. A good map is an accurate description of the real world, but only of some aspects of the real world. A map on a scale of 1:1 would simply be a replica of the real world; since we already have the real world we do not need a replica. In fact, almost all aspects of the real world are excluded in any map. What is included depends on what the map is intended for. A road map is intended to help a driver to get from one place to another using a motor vehicle. Consequently it contains an accurate picture of the roads and the places that can be reached by road, but usually not much else. It excludes hiking trails, terrain features, geological information and other things that are part of the territory covered by the map, but which are not needed to get from A to B in a car. Other maps include the geological features of the same territory, but not the roads, and so on. So when we describe a conflict we need to know what the description is to be used for before we can make decisions on what to include and what to exclude.

Usually, we want to use the description to answer some question or questions that we may have about this conflict. It is important that we make clear the question, or questions, we wish to answer—otherwise we will not know what information we should include in our map.

In selecting what to include and what to exclude we do not want to miss anything that may lead us to a misleading or incomplete answer. If we are drawing a road map it is not legitimate to leave out some roads without stating this up front. Just because you think you know the best road from A to B does not allow you to exclude other roads from A to B without saying so. Fellow travellers may rightfully find some other path from A to B more attractive, and may be misled into believing that your road from A to B is the only possible road. It is also not permissible to make some roads look longer on the map than they are in reality, while making roads you like look shorter than they are. Both of these points are matters of intellectual honesty, but also of being systematic. Good description is systematic. If you just draw roads on your map in an unsystematic way you may unintentionally miss some roads, not because you are intentionally misleading, but because you are unsystematic. In short, the map should be an accurate portrait of what all of the roads from A to B actually look like in the real world, and to ensure this, the map should be drawn in a systematic fashion.

Having said that you should systematically include information relevant to the question at hand, we should also exclude information that is irrelevant to answering the question we have in mind. Including geological information on a road map only makes the map harder to read, it does not help us to find our way from A to B in a car. It helps to be systematic in this respect too, because including geological information in some parts of the road map may lead users of the map to believe that the geology somehow is important in determining how to get from A to B. Why else was it included in a road map?

In sum, our description should have a focus, which comes from having a clearly stated purpose, or question, as the basis for the description. The information in our description should also be structured and systematic, so that it sheds light on our question in an even-handed fashion.

### *Procedures*

Once we have established a clear question, purpose, or focus to guide our work, we turn to collecting the information needed to address the question at hand. A good way to begin the analysis is to first create a preliminary overview of the conflict, which would include a background description and a basic timeline. This is useful for gaining a basic understanding of actors and issues, and, to identify major events, turning points and relevant political, social, and economic background conditions. This information can best be gleaned from scholarly case

studies, articles and reference literature. A basic understanding of the conflict is very useful, if not necessary, for intelligent and effective search and utilisation of news media and other resources.

The next step is to create a more precise and detailed account of the conflict. Media resources have two advantages over historical literature and case studies at this stage. Firstly, they provide a continuous coverage over time. Secondly, the coverage is more comprehensive in its scope than are scholarly works. Scholarly works contain structured and selected information, which is good for overview, but leaves out a lot of information that may be of interest.

### *Types of media resources*

There are a large variety of media resources that can be utilised. The different types of resources complement each other and each have their strengths and weaknesses. A good strategy therefore is to draw on a variety of types of resources. International media are good for their breadth of coverage, and give you an idea of what about your conflict is considered interesting or important from an international (mostly Western) perspective. Regional media usually provide more in-depth coverage and are generally more insightful regarding regional implications of the conflict. Local media provide the most detailed and in-depth coverage, but are often associated with a party to the conflict—which might mean that the reporting is biased. Another limitation of local media is that freedom of the press is often more restricted than for international media. Finally, local media are not always available to an outsider, either because of language barriers or because they are not distributed internationally.

A rule of thumb when selecting which media organisations to use is to choose those that are well established, independent, and have a good reputation. One way to assess the quality of different media resources is to consult the area studies literature to see what resources area experts use.

Reports published by IGOs and NGOs are another good source of information. IGOs and NGOs operate under different conditions than media and are often able to operate in areas where the media are either not present or severely restricted. However, they often have their own agendas and restrictions that might influence their reporting. Some IGOs and NGOs may sometimes be partisan, or semi-partisan. Even being perceived as taking sides by the warring parties might influence the reporting adversely because it affects what information the organisation can obtain from the parties.

One example of this problem is the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and its work on war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Former Yugoslav Republic. At least until recently, the problem for the Tribunal has been that the Bosnian government has been co-operative and forthcoming with evidence of crimes against their constituency, while the Serbian minority and the Serbian government have seen the Tribunal as a partisan anti-Serb institution and have not been forthcoming with information, not even information on crimes committed against Serbs. As a consequence it is possible that the information available from the Tribunal gives a skewed picture of the distribution of crimes and atrocities committed in the Bosnian War.

Finally, partisan sources, such as media controlled by the parties to the conflict, are a useful resource for establishing their views of themselves and of their adversaries, as well as their goals and strategies. Partisan sources, governmental as well as non-governmental, are often found on the Internet. A special problem concerning Internet material is to establish the true source of the web site: it may be a false flag operation set up by an opponent. To circumvent this problem, one can try to locate official, authorised pages through web sites of specialised academic institutions to see what resources area experts use. Needless to say, partisan sources offer partisan views and any such information should be taken for what it is and treated with caution.

In general, established link collections are a resource for handling the authenticity problem on the Internet. We recommend using link collections at major universities and academic centres of excellence for the geographical area of interest.

## **Too little information and too much**

### *Gluts and shortages*

When wars are extremely well covered by a multitude of journalists and reporters from local, regional and international news organisations, we ought to have the ideal situation. But, given the limited time and resources a student, and even a professional researcher has, this can pose a problem. It is easy to lose track of what is important, typical, and so on. In our experience many students, overwhelmed by a flood of information, experience problems with getting an overall view and distinguishing the important information from the peripheral. This often leads to a loss of focus in the analysis, and, somewhat surprisingly, to a reliance on too few sources. When you easily find hundreds or thousands



of news articles, you do not have time to go through them all and follow up on them to identify the original sources. Perhaps you do not feel a need to search for the more unusual and harder-to-get sources when you can get thousands at the click of a mouse. For this or some other reason students often seem to conclude that there is no point in pursuing information and sources any further. Thus, they end up with few original sources. In short, in conflicts with a wealth of information students face the challenges of selecting sources and information, and distinguishing the important from the peripheral, both of which require experience, overview and familiarity with the conflict. A potential pitfall is that students who are already intimately familiar with a conflict are liable to have sympathies and antipathies with the opposing sides. This bias may, in subtle or not so subtle ways, adversely affect their selection of sources and information.

In contrast, students studying conflicts with a dearth of information by necessity have to pursue information more diligently and imaginatively. As a consequence, they paradoxically often end up with more original sources for their information than do their peers who study conflicts with masses of easily available information. In short, even if they end up with less information about their conflicts, students of conflicts not covered well in the media often dig deeper, use more original sources, and do a better job evaluating their sources, than do students of well covered conflicts. In small, less covered conflicts students need to use all the information they can get. This forces them to consider their sources more carefully and so they may become more aware of the problems with sources. But, since the choices are fewer—they have to use whatever sources there are—they run a risk of reaching biased or inconclusive results since it will be difficult to corroborate sources.

In our experience, the best results are achieved when students are curious, open-minded, and analyse conflicts with which they are not so familiar and about which they do not have strong prior conceptions, and which receive a reasonably broad but not overwhelmingly voluminous media coverage.

### *External restrictions on media reporting*

In many situations there are restrictions to media that lie beyond the control of the media. The nature and extent of such restrictions and limitations is important knowledge for the conflict analyst. Questions that need to be asked are what sources are allowed to have a presence in the area of interest, and, if it is a select few, why are those selected and how might that affect their reporting? A most important aspect of

this is the existence of censorship, formally imposed by one of the parties —most commonly the government— or informally where a warring party will prevent reporting on certain events, making it impossible for reporters to operate freely. When using media as a source, the conflict analyst should try to identify the existence of censorship, which type of information is censored and how this might affect the reporting. It is not unusual for governments to impose censorship on particular types of reports, for instance, on military operations, or to ban journalists from areas of combat. Most likely, such censorship is there because of a wish not to disclose military strategies or because the governments want full freedom in how they portray events.

It is also wise to remember that the media are a part of the battlefield. The media are often used by opposing sides and interested parties as a means to disseminate their views, often to the outside world. If they thereby can create a favourable view of their cause in the outside world, and a hostile view of their opponent, they may gain some substantive advantages. Here, the conflict analyst needs to be aware that some of the actions and events being reported are directed at an outside audience, rather than at the adversary.

For example, actions and events reported may have as their primary purpose to make a statement or convey a particular message to the news audience, the idea being that they damage their opponent or affect the outcome of the conflict indirectly by sending messages to outside parties. At least part of the stone throwing in the Israeli occupied areas in the West Bank and Gaza can be seen in this light. The primary purpose of the stone throwing may in some cases be to damage Israeli standing in the world community and its image in world opinion and to gain sympathy for the Palestinian cause, rather than to hurt Israeli soldiers by pelting them with stones. The stone throwing may thus have been intentionally designed for the cameras, to attract the world's attention to the plight of the Palestinians. The lesson is that we need to ask ourselves if we are seeing actions between the parties to the conflict or between one of them and ourselves as the news consumers.

All this means that the parties often intentionally try to influence reporting in more subtle and manipulative ways than outright censorship or information blackouts. Moreover, they do so not only verbally, but also through various types of actions designed to inspire outsiders to support their cause and oppose their opponent's cause, or to legitimise their actions and goals, and de-legitimise their opponent's actions and goals, or to deter outsiders from intervening, and so on. In sum, we

need to be aware of the fact that conflict actors sometimes play to an audience, using the media for their own purposes, because it may affect how we interpret what we see.

### *Dealing with information shortage*

What can we do if there is little or no independent coverage and all information is more or less controlled by the opposing sides? This is a difficult problem, and severely limits the possibility of serious conflict analysis. Yet, there are some possibilities. The parties, unwittingly or otherwise, sometimes corroborate each other, and when they do the information is probably reasonably accurate. Unfortunately they seldom corroborate each other on pieces of information that interest us the most when doing conflict analysis. We are then left to our own good judgment —not a very satisfactory situation. However, our own judgments can be significantly improved by the use of external information and criteria for judging the reasonableness of the reported facts. It is often possible to draw on existing knowledge of similar situations in the past, and we can use this to try to determine the outer bounds of what can possibly be true, and to guide our critical common sense.

For example, if we consult the professional military literature we can find figures concerning average casualty levels per day for various kinds of fighting, between various types of military units, using various types of equipment, in various types of terrain, as well as the distribution of casualties between attacker and defender. With this kind of historical information and statistics we may be able to determine the range of reasonable casualty figures, and it might give us a benchmark. Though we will still not know the actual casualty rates in the specific case, we get a good idea about what kinds of claims by the parties might be true and what claims are highly unlikely to be true.

As always, the level of uncertainty and the possible sources of error should be stated at the outset. Weaknesses in the available material are not weaknesses of the analyst, and it does not reflect negatively upon the analyst to be clear about problems and uncertainties in the source material. On the contrary, identifying shortcomings in the source material reflects favourably on the analyst, because it shows that the analyst is aware of the problems and is not misleading the reader into believing that the facts are clear-cut. Moreover, uncertainties and possible sources of error should be stated at the outset as a matter of intellectual honesty, as well as to allow readers to form their own conclusions as to the veracity of the analysis.

## Evaluating sources and information

### *What is a source?*

When reading a news report, ask yourself where the information came from originally. The answer to that question is the source. The source is the origin of the information in question, usually a person. The information provided by that person is not the source, the person is. So when we use the standard tools for evaluating sources it is not the information per se we are evaluating, it is the person or actor who related it. Note well that news reports are often secondhand information, i.e. one person's observation related to a reporter who relates it to us in the form of a news report. In these cases, when the reporter is relating not what he himself has observed first hand, but what someone else has told him, we need to evaluate both the reporter, the news agency, and the original source of the information.

### *Criteria for evaluating sources and information*

The criteria for evaluating sources have to do with the reliability and validity of the source. Again the first step is to evaluate the source itself, not the information given by the source. We use the evaluation of the source to evaluate the information given by the source, but the criteria and questions posed below refer to the source of the information.

Basically we are asking questions about the relationship between the source and the genesis of the facts it relates. In doing so we are trying to assess the risk or probability of systematic and unsystematic errors in the information provided by the source. The amount of systematic errors in the information reflects its degree of validity, while the amount of unsystematic errors reflects its level of reliability. Think of it as target practice where the truth is the bulls-eye on the target. An unreliable source will fire its shots unsystematically all over the target, while a reliable source will fire its shots systematically in a small concentrated area. A biased, or invalid source will systematically fire its shots to one side of the bulls-eye, while an unbiased, or valid source will fire its shots systematically at the bulls-eye. Put differently, a reliable source is able to report the information with greater accuracy, while an unbiased source is likely to be closer to the truth. The best source is both reliable and unbiased (i.e. valid).

### *Assessing the reliability of a source*

A first question concerns the proximity of the source to the fact. In general, sources closer—in time and space—to the facts of interest are more reliable than sources further away. For example, information about an event provided by a reporter who personally observed the event is likely to be more reliable than information provided by a reporter who did not observe the event first hand, but who has been told about it by his informants. Firsthand information is generally more reliable than secondhand information. Similarly, reports of an event that took place a long time ago are likely to be less reliable than contemporaneous reports. The centrality of the source to the facts of interest is also important. For example, the actual decision-maker usually has more reliable information about the decision than do outside observers. In short, how well can the source possibly know the facts it is reporting?

### *Assessing the validity of the source*

To assess the validity of the source we ask if it has any reasons for misrepresenting the facts; i.e. does it have a tendency or bias? For example, decision-makers, or parties to a conflict, usually have strong incentives for misrepresenting the facts to put themselves in a more favourable position, or their actions in a favourable light. But the reasons for bias may be more subtle than simple self-interest. A source may misrepresent facts to protect or elevate someone else's standing, or it may be dependent on an audience for which it is providing the information, and that audience may have particular interests that affect the information provided. Roughly speaking there are two kinds of bias. The first, and obvious, is that the information provided is systematically distorted or false, the second and less obvious, is that while the information provided is undistorted and true, particular types of information are systematically left out. It is therefore always a good idea to think about what information is reported and what is left out, and why this may be so. In short, how likely is it that the source gives us a biased picture of the facts?

### *Ways to improve reliability and validity*

While we can never completely eliminate the possibility of getting the facts wrong, there are ways to reduce problems with reliability and validity, thereby improving chances of getting it right. To begin with,

one way to handle problems with reliability and validity is to use several different types of sources, preferably with known biases. If nothing else, this gives the investigator an idea of the degree of uncertainty in the information, and the range of possible answers to the question being asked. Secondly, one should try to find the original source of the information in the news report. This greatly enhances our ability to assess the reliability and validity of the information, since it will depend on the reliability and validity of the source, of which we will know nothing if the original source is unknown. News agencies/wire services usually have an advantage here over newspaper reporting as they normally include a reference to the original source in the reports. Finally, we should try to find independent confirmation of the original source—that is, a second source that is independent in that it did not get its information from the first source. Two newspapers reporting the same information does not necessarily mean that we have two independent sources for that information. It is often the case that the two newspapers use the same original source.

We need to watch out for re-circulation of information in various media, because it is quite common and it sometimes gives the impression that something is an established fact, while it really is not. A pertinent example is the reporting of Bosnian war casualties. If we were to ask any journalist or policy maker about how many people were killed in the Bosnian war, the most likely answer is about 200,000. This figure has been repeated so many times by so many different journalists, analysts and policy makers that it simply “has to be” the correct figure. What most people do not know is that this figure originally came from one source and one source only. This source is not just any source; the figure was given in the summer of 1993 by the Bosnian government, i.e. one of the parties in the war. Perhaps more interestingly, the statement was made at a critical point of the war when the Bosnian government was appealing to the rest of the world for support. There was to our knowledge never any independent confirmation of the number and at the time nobody ever questioned if the Bosnian government might have any political motives for inflating such facts about the war. We now know that at the time of the report on 200,000 deaths, the war was still to rage—although on a much smaller scale—for another two years. It should be noted that the Bosnian government repeated the figure of 200,000 throughout the war without revision, which would mean that all these people died in the period up to the summer of 1993 and nobody after that point. Needless to say, this does not seem very likely, and the reiteration of the same number should have been cause for concern. This is not a claim

that the Bosnian government was inflating death figures; we still do not know the real number of deaths in the Bosnian war.

What the Bosnian example points to are three different problems. The first problem is the re-circulation of information from a single original source to numerous second-hand reports, which gives the impression that the number was an established fact. Secondly, many secondhand reports did not clearly identify the original source for the number, making it difficult to see that they were all referring to the same original source. Thus, it was easy to get the erroneous impression that the figure had been confirmed by several independent sources. Thirdly, the figure came from a party to the conflict (a source with a clear bias), at a time when it was beneficial for the source to inflate the casualty figures. These facts about the original source were also obscured in most second hand reports, making the assessment of the reliability and validity of the 200,000 figure very difficult.

## **Selection bias: a devious little problem**

### *Introduction*

Selection bias is a subtle form of bias found in all news media to a greater or lesser extent. If it is a problem or not depends on what questions we are asking, but one does well to reflect on how selection bias affects our perception and understanding of what is going on in a country or a region. Basically, selection bias occurs when some things are systematically reported, while other things are systematically unreported, or under reported. The consequence of selection bias is that we get a distorted picture of the situation as a whole even if the parts that are reported are reliable and truthful. To see how this works and some of the problems it entails for the conflict analyst, consider the following problems and examples.

Information published in the news media is already selected on a number of unstated criteria. An analyst needs to think about what information is published and what is not published, who made the selection and on what criteria? Often the selection criteria may not be clear even to those providing the news, but culture, political and national interests and the like often play a role. Perhaps most important is to consider towards which audience the media agency is geared. The intended audience will be reflected in the selection of information to publish: what is considered “newsworthy” depends on the intended audience. Consequently we need to consider what the audience’s

interests are, what issues are salient to the audience for cultural, political, or economic reasons. In general, news media with broader audiences are less selective in what they report, precisely because their audience has much broader interests. To see how the intended audience affects the selection of information published, compare CNN's American version to its international, Asian, and European versions with respect to the topics covered and the views and emphases conveyed.

In general, the big international news agencies and wire services like Reuters, AP, AFP, BBC and so on, are less selective than national news media because they tend to a broader audience. Local and regional news media in the conflict area have smaller and different primary audiences than the international news agencies, but may have more comprehensive coverage and make different selections of what to publish, because their primary audience is different and usually more concerned with what is going on in the conflict.

As a general rule, the closeness and/or salience of the conflict to the news organisation's audience has a strong influence on the amount and detail of the coverage, as well as on what issues and events are reported, and what is left out. Things that are unsettling, provoking, or somehow consequential for the audience and how they feel about themselves and about others influence the selection of information included in the reporting. If it is interesting to the audience it is reported, whether or not it is of any major importance to the local people where the conflict is taking place. One example is the major impact in Western media of the dynamiting of the Buddha statues in Afghanistan, compared to the relative lack of attention to events of much greater significance to the Afghan population that were taking place around the same time.

A recent example is the television images of jubilant Palestinians in the West Bank following the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. The interesting point here is what was reported and what was not reported. On 11 September, a great many journalists on the West Bank and in Gaza set out to document the popular Palestinian reaction to the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. Reuters and Associated Press reported on Palestinian celebrations of the attacks, showing pictures of a dancing and chanting Palestinian woman, Ms. Fatma Hussein. Ms. Hussein has later claimed that she had no knowledge of the attacks in America at the time of her dancing, and that she was asked by Israeli television to perform her dance and chant.<sup>1</sup> Whether

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<sup>1</sup> Ms Hussein apparently mistook Reuter's reporter for a reporter from Israeli Television because Reuter's reporter was of Israeli nationality. Note that the bias in the



she was asked to dance or not, and whether she knew about the events in the US, or if she was genuinely celebrating the attacks on the US is not possible to know for sure. But that is not the point. The interesting point here is what was reported and what was not reported. In spite of many journalists all over the West Bank and Gaza actively seeking celebrating Palestinians, almost none were found. But this was not what was reported. Instead, pictures of Fatma and a few friends, dancing in the street, taken by Reuters and AP, were broadcast across the world along with claims of large numbers of Palestinians celebrating in the streets. A more accurate and truthful description of the popular Palestinian reaction would have been that they generally did not take to the streets and celebrate. In fact, of all the journalists that set out to find celebrating Palestinians that day, almost no one found any, and reported this to their agencies —yet news media around the world reported widespread celebrations.<sup>2</sup>

Selection bias does not necessarily imply that what is reported is incorrect, as in the above case. What it does imply, however, is that what is reported is only part of picture. This means that the picture is not representative of what is going on and being felt locally, and if this is what we want to know, we need to take into account that the picture painted by the news media may be lopsided or unrepresentative. Things that are important to people in the conflict zone may not always be reported by international media, and what is reported may be important to an outside audience but not to those on the ground. If we are trying to analyse a conflict to understand its dynamics this presents a potential problem. Local and regional media coverage is often useful here because their threshold for what is newsworthy is often lower, and their coverage of everyday life is more comprehensive. A large number of local and regional newspapers are available at no cost on the Internet. The same is true for reports from many local and regional NGOs.

An even more subtle form of selection bias, which is applicable to all news media, is that contrasts and changes are reported, while the status quo is not. In the news media you will find information about major escalations, the highest level of violence and fighting and so on, but not always lulls in the fighting or de-escalations, unless these are

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international reporting on the Palestinian reaction was not due to the fact that Reuter's reporter was of Israeli origin: the reporter did not make the decision to broadcast the pictures, but Reuter's along with numerous national and international media made that choice.

<sup>2</sup> This example is taken from a documentary programme broadcast by Media Magasinet, Sveriges Television, 11 October 2001. Excerpts from the programme can be found at <http://www.svt.se/mediemagasinet/> (in Swedish).

accompanied by some peace initiative, initiation of negotiations or some such newsworthy thing. This means that the fluctuations covered in the media are somewhat lopsided so that escalations, worsening of situations, and extraordinarily bad or shocking events are over-represented in the reporting. It also means that while the onset and escalation of a conflict may be extensively covered in the news media, the continuation of the same conflict can go largely unreported, even at very high levels of violence, until something new happens. Meanwhile, new conflicts, or for other reasons more newsworthy conflicts, may dominate the news although they are small and insignificant compared to some ongoing but unchanging conflicts that are hardly covered at all by the news media. The continuation of the same patterns is old news, even if the conflict remains very large and bloody. Unchanging conflicts, especially in far away places —from the perspective of audiences of major international news organisations— soon lose interest. The media move on to cover something new or more salient, even if that is a lesser conflict by any standard, and even if that too, is far away. An example is the reporting of such wars as those in Angola, Sudan and Sri Lanka. These are long running, very bloody and to a large extent unchanging conflicts that receive relatively little coverage in the media. These can be compared to coverage of, for example, the conflict in Macedonia, a much smaller conflict but one which is new and close to many media audiences. Changes from attention to oblivion can occur rather quickly. For example, the conflict in Chechnya received major media attention throughout the first war in 1994-1996 and also when it re-erupted in 1999. However, soon after the latest outbreak, reports became scarce although the war was still active on a comparatively high level. It can even be that similar and simultaneous events receive very different degrees of attention. A case in point is the refugee crises of Angola, Sierra Leone and Kosovo which were all highly acute in the first half of 1999, and where the Angolan and Sierra Leonean crises received a fraction of the attention given to Kosovo. The reasons are obvious. Put in the words of a high ranking UNHCR officer later in 1999:

You look at Kosovo: Not only can you relate to it as European, there was also a concern for a major refugee outflow. It's a hell of a long way from Africa to Europe, a great distance till you actually get people landing on your shores (VICK, 1999).

To handle the more subtle forms of biases, such as biases in the selection of what facts are reported and what are left out, you should always ask yourself what is not reported. It is also useful to compare the views reported in local, regional, international news media, as well

as partisan and independent media, because they typically have different forms of selection biases. All of these sources are liable to select different material for reporting and comparing them might give some clues to what is considered interesting or important locally, regionally, and internationally. It is also a good idea to look at both partisan and independent media resources, because they too are liable to have different emphases in what they report.

### *Some notable effects of selection bias in the news media*

On a more general level several modern myths about wars and conflicts seem to be the consequence of the selection bias in international media coverage. For example, it is a commonly held view that the number of civil wars has increased dramatically since the end of the Cold War, that ethnic cleansing and atrocities are worse than ever, and that the proportion of civilian casualties in war has gone up dramatically during the twentieth century. None of these views hold up to serious scrutiny, and they all seem to stem from a shift in media attention—from Cold War issues to civil war issues, from military issues to the civilian consequences of war. In fact, the number of civil wars is declining; it peaked in the 1980s, well before the end of the Cold War. Ethnic cleansing is nothing new, and does not seem to be more prevalent today than before. There is no evidence to suggest that the proportion of civilian casualties in wars is increasing, and as far as it is possible to ascertain, wars in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s were just as bloody and harsh on the civilian populations as are the wars of the 1990s and today. But the media coverage has changed, and the popular view of the wars and their consequences seems to have changed with it, leading to the unwarranted conclusion that the wars have also changed.

Moreover, contrasts and changes dominate mass media reporting, while “business as usual” and the status quo are less newsworthy. This means that from reading the news you will get a very peculiar view of the world, clearly biased towards the more eventful, unusual, changing, shocking, and disaster ridden. You will not find much information about the ordinary everyday life lived by the vast majority of people, most of the time in most places—even in countries experiencing civil war. You may hear about some of the major dislocations in everyday life when they occur, and occasionally thereafter, but for the most part what life looks like for the average person in a war torn country will not be reported. In the media you will mostly find the extremes, and if you think that the everyday life of an average person in a civil war is dominated by what you see in the news you will most likely be seriously

mistaken. In our experience, most people who travel to war zones are quite surprised by the normality of life, the resilience of human society, and the resourcefulness of human beings. At the same time such travellers are often shocked by the misery of ordinary people. These reactions, we believe, stem from prior conceptions about what a war torn country is like which are informed and shaped by mass media reporting. Normality during war is almost never described in the media; resourcefulness and resilience might occasionally be reported but tend to be submerged in a flood of extraordinary and tragic events. Misery is sometimes prominently reported, but then the true dimensions of misery in war zones are very hard to convey to an outsider, and often only become clear when you observe it directly.

### *How to avoid selection bias in searching for information*

There are some pitfalls in the way in which the conflict analyst collects information that may unintentionally create selection bias—in addition to that inherent in media reporting. Relying on a single type of media resource is one such pitfall. As we have argued throughout the text, using a variety of different *types* of media resources is one way of minimising the risk of simply copying the selection bias inherent in the media. Relying on a single type of media resource would risk leaving you with the same selection bias as the resource you used.

A common problem, especially in computerised searches, lies in the construction of a search string. The search string you use systematically determines the information you get, and so if the search string systematically picks up some information but not others, it will give your information selection bias. In general, subject and keyword searches are problematic, because they run a higher risk of systematically missing something important, and thus of leaving you with a biased view. For example, if you search on conflict terms you might well miss co-operative and conciliatory events of great importance, giving you a view biased to the more conflictual. If conflict is what you search for, conflict is what you get, even if in reality, conflict does not dominate the interaction between the parties. So if you are doing a keyword search, you need to be extremely careful in choosing keywords so that your search string does not produce a biased selection of information. Similarly, if you are searching for a particular group or organisation, make sure you use all the names for that group. It is not uncommon for groups to be called one name by the government—sometimes this is obvious due to an openly derogatory name, sometimes not—and another name by the group itself. This could even concern which

language a name is given in. For example, Chechnya is the Russian name for a region in the North Caucasus, while the local name is Ichkeria, and Sendero Luminoso is the local name for a leftist guerilla organisation in Peru, while Shining Path is the English/international name for the same organisation. Now, if you use only Chechnya and not Ichkeria in your keyword search, you will get a sample of texts biased towards the Russian and international sources and views of that region. It might not make a big difference, but sometimes it is crucial.

To minimise these problems we recommend making spatial and temporal searches rather than keyword searches —duly noticing alternative names for the spatial domain, like Chechnya and Ichkeria. Spatial and temporal search strings are better in the sense of running less risks of being biased, but they are also not as discriminating. In other words, there will be a lot of noise to sift through. A fruitful way to go about this kind of search is to begin with finding the turning points in the conflict from the case study and historical literature. You use this information to delineate your initial search temporally, and then systematically move gradually backwards and forwards in time (and perhaps extend outwards geographically) following leads and tracing processes over time until you find the ends and beginnings of the process of interest. But do not stop just yet. Extend the search some more just to make sure you have not missed something. Extending backwards in time you may stumble on some previously unnoticed prelude to the period of interest. Extending forward in time also helps you pick up corrections and clarifications of news reports that were issued at the time. News media have this nice quality of sometimes correcting mistakes in reporting, but it may take some time. Following the reporting even a couple of years after the end of the period of interest is therefore often rewarding. Moreover, it is often the case that new information becomes available over time, and that is another reason for extending forwards in time beyond the period of immediate interest.

## **Interpreting the facts**

### *Labels, concepts, and referents*

Interpretation involves putting labels on the things that we observe, i.e. the facts in the real world. Both labelling and observations can evoke some controversy. We may never agree on what label to put on our observations, but it should always be possible, at least in principle, to agree on the facts. Discussions over labels are often fruitless, because

labels carry political and moral connotations quite distinct from what we might want them to refer to. What labels we choose to use may also have political effects. We do not claim to have a solution to this problem. As social scientists, our primary objective is to get the facts right, and we are not too picky about labels as long as we are in an academic setting —Greek letters would do just fine. But, at some point we need to communicate our findings and ideas to a wider audience, and then the political and moral implications of labels need to be considered.

When we tell our students to get the facts right we mean that they should make their observations as diligently as possible, always mindful of the many types of errors that may sneak into their observations and analysis. When it comes to labelling the facts, we ask them always to specify exactly what the label they are using refers to in the real world. This involves two steps. First we need to give the label, or term, we wish to use, a meaning or connotation. The word we attach to some phenomenon is the label, the meaning we give it is the concept. The concept needs to be clearly defined, or else it will not be clear what we mean by the word. For example, if we wish to put the label “war” on some phenomenon in the real world, we first have to conceptualise war by giving it a clear meaning. Once we have done that, we also need to define the concept operationally. To define a concept operationally is to delineate its empirical referent, that is, to specify exactly what the concept refers to in the real world. For example, to operationalise the concept of war is to list the observational criteria that need to be met before we call something in the real world a war. Thus the operational definition answers the question: how do we know it when we see it?

In an empirical study, such as a conflict analysis, the key concepts should always be defined operationally using a language that is as close to the empirical reality as possible, because that avoids a lot of errors, misunderstandings and controversy. In short, if concepts do not have a clear meaning and a clear referent we literally do not have a clear idea of what we are talking about.

Giving your concepts a clear empirical referent is necessary in order to apply labels to the real world in a consistent fashion, which in turn is a pre-requisite for drawing valid conclusions from your observations. If you apply the same label to many different things in the real world, thereby making different things look alike, you can draw any conclusions you want by simply manipulating the labels you have put on the facts to suit your favourite conclusion.

If we are clear and precise in defining the meaning and referent of our concepts and then apply it in a consistent fashion when we label our observations, we can always determine whether our arguments are

consistent with logic and evidence. That way we can communicate and understand each other even if we disagree on the labels, and more importantly, we can determine the merits of an argument using criteria that are independent of what you and I happen to prefer. It is also a great equaliser, because prestige, status, and power are irrelevant in determining which argument best agrees with the observed facts and which conclusions and interpretations are logically valid.

### *Describing and interpreting*

There is a difference between description and interpretation. To see the distinction, consider the events in New York on 11 September 2001. A simple description would be that "two airliners crash into the World Trade Center (WTC) buildings. Fuel starts fire, people die, the buildings collapse, people observing this event report that they feel terror," and so on. Those are the simple facts. An interpretation of these facts might sound something like this: "Two airliners are deliberately crashed into the WTC. They were full of fuel in order to cause maximum damage and make the buildings collapse." We infer that the planes were crashed intentionally because of the way the facts look, and we infer that the amount of fuel was chosen to maximise damage for the same reason. But we do not actually have access to the pilots' intentions, we infer their intentions from their actions. Therefore we are already one step removed from a simple description, and have added a layer of interpretation of the facts. Normally, intentions and other soft issues are interpretations of the observable facts, and not observations. It is therefore worth reflecting on claims made in the news media about intentions and other non-observable things, and to keep in mind that unobservable things that are reported, like intentions, are inherently more uncertain than observable facts because they rely on inferences that may be wrong. How does the journalist or reporter know the intentions, and on what observable facts might these claims rest?

Continuing our example, most people would label the WTC episode "a terrorist act". But that is an inference made from an inference from the facts (the inference that it was a deliberate act and that a sense of terror was felt). The point is not that this inference is wrong, although at this stage the choice of label might become controversial. If there is a correspondence between what we observed in New York on 11 September and our definition of a terrorist act, then the inference is valid. The point here is that it is an inference, and all inference is uncertain, more or less—in this case less. If instead, we look at the anthrax cases that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center, the

uncertainty of inferences becomes clearer. At the time of writing it is a matter for speculation who is behind the letters with anthrax spores. We have fewer facts, and with fewer facts our inferences become much more uncertain. In the anthrax case we are presently unable to make any strong inference about who is sending the mail and why, because we do not have enough facts to narrow it down to a single culprit. In general, we make inferences in singular cases by excluding alternatives (be they explanations, motives, or culprits). We exclude alternative interpretations of the facts by showing that some alternatives are either impossible or at least highly unlikely given the known facts. This is why we can conclude that the 11 September events were intentional. The likelihood of the crashes being unintentional (accidental or random) is so remote that we may safely conclude that they were intentional. This is a problem for the media, as well as for scholarly works focusing on singular cases: we often do not have enough evidence to safely exclude all interpretations but one. What we end up with is hopefully the most obvious and plausible, given the information that the journalist has. This is probably correct more often than not, but there are inevitably problems. These problems can be resolved, or at least mitigated, by looking at a larger number of cases.

Looking at a large number of cases gives us more information to bear on the problem, more information with which to exclude possible inferences, and thereby helps us reduce the number of plausible interpretations and conclusions. To see how this works consider the "ancient hatreds" explanation for ethnic conflicts, which argues that a major cause of the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s was the ancient hatreds between the peoples living there. This alleged cause of the Balkan wars is an inference from the fact that the peoples living in the Balkans have a long history of fighting each other, and from the fact that expressions of hate and hate propaganda were very prominent in these conflicts. Now, if ancient hatreds were really a major cause of war in the Balkans, then we are claiming also that if there had been no ancient hatreds there would not, or would most likely not, have been any wars. But this we cannot know, because we cannot remove the ancient hatreds and re-run recent history. What we can do is look at other cases to see if ancient hatreds are associated with a higher incidence of war. If this is not the case, then ancient hatreds cannot be a major cause of the wars in the Balkans. The reason is that if ancient hatreds cause war, then they should do so wherever ancient hatreds are present. If we look at the historical record around the world we will find that ancient hatreds are present between a great number of ethnic groups, the vast majority of which have not ended up in war. In this way, gathering information on



more cases can shed light on both general phenomena and on the inferences we make about the particular case we are interested in.

### *Generalising*

We most often need to generalise when we describe, both because we cannot capture every nuance and detail, and because it is useful to know what is true on average. The average, typical, or normal, is a baseline against which we can compare and understand the not so typical and the extreme. It is, for example, very useful to know if an organisation claiming to represent a group really is representative of the people in the group. To know that, we need to know what people in the group think on average. But this is often very difficult to ascertain and thus generalisations become problematic. The generalisations we make are often unwarranted, because we rarely have solid information about what more than a handful of people think, feel, expect, want, or believe—the generalisation is mere guesswork. It might be an educated and insightful guess, but we usually do not have the evidence to back up claims about what people belonging to an ethnic group want—or even what the average or typical person in this group wants. It is, moreover, easy to slip into generalisations that lead to unwarranted reifications of the actors or the people they claim to represent. Ethnic groups themselves are not agents, and so do not have the capacity to think, believe, or anything else. An ethnic group is a label put on a collection of individuals, by themselves or by others, but labels do not act or think. The individuals subsumed under the label may, or may not, share the same identities, beliefs and wants, and may or may not think in the same way. Talking to a few persons in the group does not give us reliable information about what they all think, nor what they think on average.

We often cannot do without some generalisations, but caution is advisable and we should be frank about what information our generalisations are based on. It is also advisable to be aware of the fact that most sources used when studying conflicts—news reports, NGO reports, and the like—are already full of generalisations and reifications, many of which are quite questionable.

### **Conclusions**

Media resources are invaluable tools for conflict analysis, and consequently for teaching conflict analysis. We try to use media resources in teaching conflict analysis in much the same way as we

would use media resources for our own research: as a resource for gathering information about conflicts. In practice, we adopt a very hands-on, learning-by-doing approach to teaching conflict analysis.

But using media resources for conflict analysis is not unproblematic, and part of the training is to become aware of the problems involved. So, to improve our students' skills at working with media resources, we also provide a set of issues that they need to consider, and suggestions for how to deal with them. Awareness of the problems associated with using media resources is important because the veracity of the information we collect is crucial to the analysis. If the information upon which we base our analysis is not correct, then our interpretations of the information and the conclusions we draw from analysing it, will be incorrect as well.

In this paper we have outlined some important problems associated with using media resources for conflict analysis. These problems include various biases found in media reporting, information shortages and gluts, and the reliability and validity of sources. We have also provided a number of suggestions for dealing with the identified problems. The suggested methods and procedures are no panacea, and time and resources put limits on what can be accomplished. Nevertheless we have found them useful both in our teaching and in our own work.

Finally, we also try to give our students a deeper understanding of what it is they are doing when they describe, interpret and analyse a conflict situation. Most students have an intuitive knack of formulating questions and providing meaningful answers to them. But it is still useful to understand what the process entails and how it works, because it helps to avoid many pitfalls and to give better answers to your questions. Most of this is taught in methods classes and is not directly related to media resources, but a few points that relate more or less directly to media resources have been made above. These include the need for focus, concepts and questions to guide the collection, selection, and structuring of information into a meaningful narrative. It also includes some elementary points about the relationship between observable facts, interpretations, generalisations, and the concepts and labels we attach to them.

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# **The Prohibition of Propaganda Advocating War, Racism and Hatred Under International Law: Inter-state Obligations With Far Reaching Consequences**

Hans-Joachim Heintze

The prohibition of “propaganda for war” and “advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred” by modern international law demonstrates more than any other provision concerning mass media a response effected by the horrors of National Socialism (see NOWAK, 1993, p. 359). It is primarily conceived as a special duty by States to take preventive measures to enforce the principle of non-discrimination and the right to life. This provision seems nowadays of special importance all over Europe. After the revolutions in former communist countries in the 1990s the democratic movements are searching for new approaches to guarantee individual freedom, peace and social justice. Freedom of expression plays a decisive role in these new conditions. People have eagerly embraced this new freedom, so long withheld from them, and are using it to express their democratic aspirations. At the same time, this newly won freedom of expression has been misused to disseminate fascism and racial hatred. In the Balkans terrible crimes against humanity have been committed. “Ethnic cleansing” is one of the results of this misuse of the freedom of expression. But also in post World War II democracies —like Germany— one can find books and papers with racist and neo-fascist propaganda, sometime distributed by international networks. The German government’s attempt to prohibit the right-wing National Party of Germany (NPD) shows that the political establishment is trying to undertake some action against neo-fascist activities and propaganda.

This paper examines the legal basis for international prohibitions against media content advocating war, racism and fascism and shows the ways in which democratic countries have handled (or failed to handle) this thorny issue.

## The international legal standard

The United Nations Charter prohibits the threat or use of force and establishes universal respect for and observance of human rights. These principles have their application in the field of communication in three binding instruments of international law that prohibit warmongering, racist and genocidal media content (see LISKOFSKY/ARZT, 1987, pp. 41ff.). The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide makes punishable direct and public incitement to commit genocide. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits propaganda for war and advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred. The 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination makes punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race (BANTON, 1996, p. 202). At the European level, the European Convention on Human Rights is of relevance if media are used to infringe human rights. If mass media incite racial discrimination then they violate art. 17 of the convention which prohibits any activity aimed at the destruction of any of the rights set forth in the convention (KRÜGER, 1993, p. 750). Even if an international agreement does not contain an express obligation on member States to enact legislation, it is implicit in all human rights conventions that the States' internal legal code must secure the rights expressed in those international law agreements (BERNHARD, 1993, p. 17).

Who is included under these prohibitions? *States themselves, including state-controlled or state-financed mass media* (for example, government broadcasting stations) are forbidden from disseminating war or racial propaganda. *Private media* are also included in this ban. The argument often heard is that international law does not apply to private media firms. However, art. 26 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties emphasises that states have general obligations in the sphere of international law which they cannot evade by pointing to domestic laws. The manner in which international law is enforced on private media is a matter of a state's sovereign decision-making; the point is that these measures must be promulgated. Private media must comply with the laws of the state in which they operate. If international law prohibits propaganda for war or racism, the state has an obligation to regulate the private media in this regard.

It is a well accepted rule of international law that the only barrier to private dissemination of information across borders which States are

responsible for ensuring under international law is the prohibition on incitement to violence against foreign States, genocide, and racist propaganda.

### **Prohibition of hate propaganda versus freedom of opinion?**

In the 1940s, these prohibitions were objects of considerable international debate. States party to the 1948 Genocide Convention had no reservations about making direct and public incitement to commit genocide punishable by law. But during the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), most delegates supported the US "free flow" position, that all ideas, regardless of their content, should be freely disseminated. The majority voted against including a clause prohibiting propaganda for war and racial hatred in art. 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This famous article states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Despite this formulation, we must keep in mind that art. 19 does not guarantee absolute freedom of opinion and expression. All freedoms guaranteed by the UDHR are qualified by art. 29, which declares that freedoms necessarily carry with them a duty toward the community. Article 29, para.3 asserts explicitly: "These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purpose and principles of the United Nations."

In the 1960s, during the drafting of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the West once again insisted that the "free flow" doctrine meant that freedom of expression should also guarantee propaganda for war and racism. Article 19 of the ICCPR restates the UDHR formulation:

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

But the majority of states agreed that there were certain kinds of information content that should be absolutely forbidden. Article 20 of the ICCPR declares:

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Even art. 19(3) of the ICCPR goes on to qualify the rights to freedom of expression and opinion:

The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as provided by law and are necessary: (a) for respect of the right or reputations of others: (b) for the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

Thus, both the UDHR and the ICCPR demonstrate the incontrovertible link between freedom and responsibility. Freedom of expression goes hand in hand with a ban on certain communication contents. While the UDHR is implicit, the ICCPR is explicit —with one complication. Article 20(2) of the ICCPR implies that a *causal relationship must be established between media advocacy of racial hatred and actual carrying out of violent acts*. This leaves the clause open to varying interpretations since it is not always easy to provide evidence of this causal connection.

Sometimes the connection is unmistakable. Under present international law, German media of the period between 1933 and 1945 could have been punished for incitement to racial hatred. After World War II, the Nuremberg Tribunal tried, convicted and executed journalist Julius Streicher, editor of the anti-semitic *Der Stürmer* newspaper. He was accused of “crimes against humanity” under the 1945 Charter of the International Military Tribunal. The Nuremberg judges interpreted “crimes against humanity” to include propaganda and incitement to genocide. Based on a content analysis of articles from *Der Stürmer*, the judges found that causal connection and determined that Streicher had aroused the German people to active persecution of the Jewish people (see MASER, 1977, p. 410).

Another binding international legal instrument does not have the complicating factor of the ICCPR. The 1965 International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Anti-Racism Convention) contains a sweeping ban on dissemination of any racist

ideas, with no causal connection demanded. It also categorically outlaws all racist and neo-fascist organisations (LERNER, 1993, p.1). In art. 4 of the Anti-Racism Convention, States party

condemn all propaganda and all organizations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one color or ethnic origin, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form, and undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination and, to this end, *with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 5 of this Convention* [Emphasis added, see below] ... inter alia:

- (a) Shall declare an offense punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another color or ethnic origin, and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof;
- (b) Shall declare illegal and prohibit organizations, and also organized and all other propaganda activities, which promote and incite racial discrimination, and shall recognize participation in such organizations or activities as an offense punishable by law.
- (c) Shall not permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination.

During the drafting convention of the Anti-Racism Convention, the perennial question arose among the Western delegations: does not freedom of expression guarantee freedom even for the most abhorrent statements of racial hatred? In the end, art. 4 was included only on the condition that the additional phrase proposed by the US (emphasis added) be accepted as well. Mahalic and Mahalic summarise the prevailing thinking on this "due regard clause":

The format of Article 4, which focuses primarily on protecting persons from racial discrimination, implies that in cases of conflict the balance between competing freedoms should be struck in favour of persons' rights to freedom from racial discrimination (MAHALIC/MAHALIC, 1987, p. 89).

To summarise, then, these conventions enshrine in binding treaties basic indisputable principles of international law. The ICCPR prohibits propaganda for war. The ICCPR and the Anti-Racism Convention ban

any form of racist propaganda. The Genocide Convention forbids direct and public incitement to commit genocide.

### **The implementation of the obligations differs**

These principles enjoy near-universal respect. In today's political environment, no politician or governmental leader would dare to oppose these principles. Yet the actual implementation and enforcement of these enshrined principles has been irregular at best.

How do the various states parties to these conventions implement the bans in domestic law? States incorporate international standards on human rights into domestic law in a variety of ways. The route usually leads from *signing* the convention, to *ratification*, to *implementation* in domestic law, and finally to *enforcement* of those provisions. There is no "enforcer" of international law. Thus, national legislation provides the legal basis for enforcement.

But difficulties have arisen because some states have neither ratified nor implemented the provisions of these conventions.

As previously mentioned, most western states opposed these prohibitions in the first place. Even after the conventions were adopted by the UN General Assembly, a variety of adherence patterns has become evident, particularly in regard to "reservations" and "statements of interpretation". In general, international law allows a state to make reservations to a treaty; that is, to exclude or modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their national application in that state. Reservations to treaties must receive the consent of other signatories. In contrast, statements of interpretation—deriving from the principles that contracting states should themselves interpret the convention which they conclude with one another—do not require such consent (see BROWNLIE, 1975, pp. 605-608).

Let us now examine how different countries have enforced, or failed to enforce, the prohibitions against war, racial and genocide propaganda.

The United States hesitated a very long time to ratify and implement international UN human rights conventions. For years, the US Senate rejected human rights treaties on the grounds that they diminish basic rights guaranteed under the US Constitution; violate states' rights; promote world government; enhance communist influence; subject citizens to trial abroad; threaten their form of government, infringe on domestic jurisdiction; and increase international entanglements (KAUFMAN/WHITEMAN, 1988). In 1988, after decades of work by Senator



William Proxmire, the United States ratified and enacted into national law the Genocide Convention Implementation Act. After that it became illegal under US law for any group or individual to “directly and publicly incite another” to violate the 1948 Genocide Convention.

This is the only international human rights norm with media consequences to be incorporated into US law. There has been endless discussion in the United States about legal limits on the mass media. We sometimes hear views that “there can be no ‘free speech’ or ‘balanced news’ unless those who advocate racism and apartheid and, yes, war are also free to speak” (*NEW YORK TIMES*, 27 November 1978, p. A35).

At the centre of the discussion is the question of how to reconcile the law with freedom of opinion and expression. The argument goes that the First Amendment supersedes any international legal restriction, even for such worthy goals as prohibiting racism and war (REDLICH, 1993, p. 141). As a consequence, the American Civil Liberties Union even defends the First Amendment rights of such groups as the Ku Klux Klan, whose views are prohibited from media discourse in scores of countries. Consequently President Carter signed ICCPR and the Anti-Racism Convention in 1978 and submitted them to the Senate for ratification with many reservations, among them one concerning rights to free speech. During the ratification procedure the Senate declared the following reservation:

That the Constitution and laws of the United States contain extensive protections of individual freedom of speech, expression and association. Accordingly, the United States does not accept any obligation under this Convention, in particular under articles 4 and 7, to restrict those rights, through the adoption of legislation or any other measures, to the extent that they are protected by the Constitution and laws of the United States.

Other countries have not been so hesitant. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) ratified both conventions without reservation. In contrast, Belgium has ratified and implemented both but has presented statements of interpretation concerning both articles. The United Kingdom is an illustrative example of these tensions between freedom and responsibility. The UK made a reservation to art. 20 of the ICCPR. Nothing in the UK law forbids propaganda for war as such. To this extent, the law falls short of the requirements, as many members of the Human Rights Committee have pointed out during dialogues on the UK's periodic reports. The standard response was always that this propaganda is not a problem in the UK and that any problems which arise might be

expected to be dealt with under the law of sedition or the Public Order Act 1986 (cf. FELDMAN, 1995, p. 432).

Britain made not a reservation but a “statement of interpretation” on art. 4 of the Anti-Racism Convention, namely, that further legislation would only be passed in Great Britain if compatible with other rights—especially the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Why the UK did this is difficult to discern since the statement is in principle merely a repetition of the “due regard clause” of that article 4 itself. Therefore several members of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the organ of the parties to the Anti-Racism Convention, rejected the claim.

The British case in the CERD revealed two things. First, British ratification and implementation of the Anti-Racism Convention did not necessarily mean the United Kingdom had overcome its original opposition to the prohibition of racist propaganda. Second, the case made the CERD adopt a clear position concerning the obligations of art. 4 (cf. BANTON, 1996, p. 206).

In 1972, the CERD adopted General Recommendation 1, which determined that a number of states parties had not passed any legislation in accordance with the provisions of art. 4 of the Anti-Racism Convention. States were called upon to bring their domestic laws in line with the Convention. Already in 1980, after analysing over 100 states' reports over 16 years, the CERD reported that there were still some states parties which had failed to introduce the legislation called for in the Convention. The CERD once again endorsed its General Recommendation 1, pointed to the preventive effect of law in acts of racial discrimination and called on states parties to implement art. 4 in their domestic law.

An analogous experience occurred in the Human Rights Committee, composed of states parties to the ICCPR. When France ratified the Convention, it at first presented a statement of interpretation to art. 20(1), namely that French legislation was already in accordance with the Covenant in this respect. France later wanted this to be considered a reservation. Non-compliance is as much a problem in the ICCPR as it is in the Anti-Racism Convention, for in 1983, the Human Rights Committee called on states parties to the ICCPR to

adopt the necessary legislative measures prohibiting the actions referred to therein ... In the opinion of the Committee, these required prohibitions fully compatible with the right to freedom of expression ... the exercise of which carries with it special duties and responsibilities.

During this time, the Human Rights Committee had an intense discussion about the meaning of the term “propaganda for war”. Some

states parties had submitted a Statement of Interpretation concerning the definition of the term "war". Others questioned whether the prohibition on war propaganda might wrongly ban "liberation propaganda". The Committee resolved that the propaganda for war mentioned in art. 20(1) of the ICCPR refers to "propaganda threatening or resulting in an act of aggression or breach of the peace contrary to the Charter of the United Nations".

Thus, the sovereign right to self-defence or the right to self-determination advocated in the UN Charter is in no way affected by the prohibition of propaganda for war.

Most states parties have complied with the Anti-Racism Convention, though the route of implementation has often been circuitous. The Latin American states have been particular pace-setters. Ecuador incorporated art. 4 in its penal code almost verbatim and Brazil went so far as to make any incitement to racial prejudice punishable by law. Both Italy and Greece enacted laws in accordance with the prohibition on racist propaganda.

But many western states are lagging behind. Although Canada banned the public dissemination of racist ideas, no legislation was passed to ban private fascist and racist groups. British legislation made a similar distinction. In Britain, dissemination of racist ideas is permitted as long as it does not incite racial hatred. Though this still contravenes art. 4 of the Anti-Racism Convention, it nevertheless represents some progress. Britain no longer claims that it has submitted a reservation, and has also reported that laws in accord with art. 4 were in the process of revision.

In 1985, the CERD renewed its appeal to the United Kingdom to bring its legislation in line with the Convention's obligations. The CERD criticised the British position in two ways: it said that art. 4 and freedom of opinion do not contradict one another. It also disputed that a state only has a duty to enact legislation if there are specific problems in race relations. In the end, though, the CERD reported that progress had been made toward implementing art. 4 around the world.

The Anti-Racism Convention also bans organised groups from inciting racial hatred. In this regard, para. (b) of art. 4 qualifies para. (a) to a certain extent. Using this as an excuse, most western countries have pointed to this provision in their attempt to avoid outlawing racist and fascist organisations. For example, in Canada the fascist Western Guard Party still operates. Some of its members have been charged with illegal possession of arms and some racist propaganda has been seized, but the organisation has never been actually banned. Over a number of years this party used public telephone services to warn "of

the dangers of international finance and Jewry leading the world into wars". The only result was, that they were precluded from using the telephone services, in conformity with the express authority in the Canadian Human Rights Act. The Human Rights Committee supported this preclusion because the party seeks to disseminate through the telephone system opinions which clearly constitute the advocacy of racial hatred which Canada has an obligation under art. 20 (2) CCPR to prohibit (NOWAK, p. 367).

Many signatories have openly stated their intention *not* to forbid racist and fascist organisations. The Federal Republic of Germany, for instance, allows the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), the National Assembly, and other neo-fascist organisations to operate freely. The CERD criticised this non-compliance in 1981. Contrary to its obligations under the Anti-Racism Convention, Federal Germany believes that banning the NPD is not a judicial issue but rather a question of political opportunism. The FRG admitted that 34 neo-fascist organisations exist in the country. At the same time it claimed that the neo-Nazi groups have slipped into political oblivion. This position has been accepted by the CERD (PARTSCH, 1994, p. 436). It was not until the year 2001, after many racist attacks all over Germany, that the German government decided to apply to the Federal Constitutional Court to prohibit the NPD. It is the Federal Constitutional Court alone that decides on the unconstitutionality of political parties. Applications can only be made by Parliament, the Federal Council or the government.

The United Kingdom violates its obligation to the Convention by allowing neo-fascist and extreme right-wing groups to operate freely. At the CERD, the British representative did not deny these groups' existence. He argued that such organisations were tolerated because they did not have a great following and that banning them would contradict freedom of opinion and expression. He did not answer whether such organisations would be banned if they did attract a mass following. The status of British compliance has not changed. In 1996, therefore, the CERD again expressed its concern over the British interpretation of art. 4: "Such an interpretation is not only in conflict with the established view of the Committee, [...] but also amounts to a negation of the State Party's obligation [...] to outlaw and prohibit organizations which promote and incite racial discrimination" (UN-Doc. CERD/C/304/Add.9).

In general, Western countries find it difficult to comply with the provisions of art. 4(b). Most do not deny that they are violating international law by failing to take judicial or administrative measures to ban racist or neo-fascist organisations. Instead, they ask for understanding

regarding their domestic obligations. Clearly, states parties' obligation to art. 4 of the Anti-Racism Convention will remain a central issue in the CERD. Similarly, many States have failed to implement art. 20 (1) of the ICCPR. A common argument runs that prohibiting war propaganda does not necessarily prevent war itself. More significantly, they say, there are difficulties because freedom of opinion and freedom of the press must be fully respected.

On closer scrutiny, though, this argument is faulty. When, for example, Iceland's representative to the Human Rights Committee maintained that prohibiting war propaganda would violate freedom of expression, some committee members asked him to justify that country's ban on tobacco and alcohol advertisements. He was not able to give an answer. In like manner, the United Kingdom refused to withdraw its reservations to art. 20 (1) of the ICCPR when called upon to do so by the Human Rights Committee. The government maintained that propaganda for war posed no problem for the United Kingdom and that there was no need to adopt legal measures banning it.

In addition, newly democratic States in Europe like Croatia have some problems with the prohibition of hatred propaganda and racist organisations, especially after civil wars (JACOBSON, 1993, p. 313). In 1999, the CERD articulated concern at incidents of hate-speech directed at the Serb minority in Croat media and the failure of the State party to take adequate measures to investigate and prosecute those responsible for promoting hatred and ethnic tension through print and audio-visual media. The CERD also noted with concern the lack of legal provisions required in order to implement the prohibition of racist organisations, because it is the absence of legislative measures declaring those organisations illegal which promote and incite racial discrimination (UN-Doc. CERD/C/304/Add.5).

## **Conclusion**

There are still some gaps between international law standards and the practice in some States concerning war and hate propaganda. Significantly, however, we do now have a whole body of international law dealing with certain kinds of information and establishing clear prohibitions. Clearly, the concept of free expression as reflected in the human rights instruments is non-absolute and may be subject to restriction in certain circumstances (JONES, 1998, p. 39). These norms are binding on more than 150 States which belong to the Genocide Convention, the CCPR and the Anti-racism Convention. Without any

doubt, some aspects of these conventions represent customary international law. This is reflected by regional instruments. The American Convention on Human Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the Helsinki Accords each codify the right to free speech with specific limitations. However, it is also true that some hesitation can be seen on the part of many States to implement correctly all components of the UN conventions especially, because they are convinced that there are other ways to deal with racist and war propaganda. On the other hand, there is an increasing public awareness worldwide and a greater involvement of civil societies in the States. This gives hope that international law will be implemented more meticulously in the future (MASS MEDIA AND INTERNATIONAL LAW, 1994, p. 112).

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## Humanitarian Intervention, Humanitarian Feelings and the Media

Ivan Nunes

As Cornelia Navari says, in an article entitled "Intervention, non-intervention and the construction of the state", "what makes intervention interesting [as a subject] is that it stands at the threshold between international and domestic politics" (NAVARI, 1993). When we deal with the problem of international intervention, we cannot avoid confronting questions of legitimacy and authority, which usually are the restrained domain of political theory. Intervention is not simply a question of relations between states; intervention asks us to consider the duties of people outside towards insiders. Therefore, it forces us to ask why and how the legal separation of insiders from outsiders was constructed in the first place. In principle, various definitions of legitimate community for political action would be possible: for instance, the family, the religious, the "ethnic" or the international community. Depending on the one we choose, distinct definitions of insiders and outsiders, of who has a legitimate concern in political choices, would be constructed. Intervention is a problem only because we assume that the state is the main, or the exclusive, arena where the ethical and the political meet. It is the principle of *state sovereignty* which makes us think that the legitimacy of a political action depends on whether it occurs inside or outside the borders of a particular territorial space.

How was the state conceived as the sole locus of legitimate political action in the first place? According to Navari, it is Hegel who gives us the most influential answer to this question.

Simply put, intervention prevents self-determination on the part of the political community, which is the only "place" self-determination can be achieved. (...) The fact that we have a problem with intervention derives largely from our view of the nation as an organic cultural

entity. Where we see an entity which has a history, a language and a duration over time, then we get nervous about intervention. In this sense, there are echoes of a nineteenth-century ideology of nationalism. But we seldom seem to ask whether (...) the congruence between the state and such organic entities actually exists (NAVARI, 1993, p. 49, 56).

In fact, the coincidence between state and nation should not be taken for granted. In Hegel's thought, everything a state did in order to become a *nation* was a legitimate historical process. But after the twentieth century experiences of *lebensraum*, mass murder and ethnic cleansing that can hardly be accepted.

On the other hand, if we accept the idea that the state is not the sole locus for ethical and political commitment, we will have to confront the problems that emerge from the idea that the world community is such a locus. For instance: NATO's representatives told us that intervention in Kosovo was perhaps unlawful, according to contemporary standards of international law based on the principle of sovereignty, but that it was at least morally right, because it was humanitarian, i.e. driven by the desire to save human lives. But, if the legitimacy of an international intervention stems not from what international law (whatever its limitations) allows, but from humanitarian *feelings*, we must at least be very rigorous in terms of what are these feelings and what feeds them.

Our common presupposition is, in fact, that western countries will try to stop genocide from happening because democratic public opinion will impel them to do so. Even if western governments would prefer to follow *realpolitik* instead of humanitarian principles, public opinion will put humanitarian principles first. If western countries have a positive role, one might say, that is because growing awareness of public opinion about international affairs compels their governments to do the right thing. Can we trust this?

My answer is that we must at least be very prudent. Not just because the information to which western public opinion is exposed is selective —and, to some extent, manipulated— but also because even enlightened democratic public opinion does not always do the right thing.

Kosovo is a particularly good illustration. Hundreds of civilians —both Albanian Kosovars and Serbs— were sacrificed as collateral damage by a military strategy whose main goal was to avoid having any western soldier killed. That is to say, some hundreds of people were killed because NATO planes struck from a sufficient height in order not to be themselves attacked. NATO could not guarantee not to kill civilians because it was primarily concerned about not risking its soldiers. And it

was not some kind of strange military doctrine that imposed this; it was the plain fact that support for the military campaign in Kosovo among western public opinion could be severely damaged if western soldiers came back home in coffins. Not to have *our* people killed: that was the first moral maxim of western, democratic, free public opinion.

One of the problems associated with casualty-free wars is that western people may become more and more prone to see wars as if they were computer games, both risk-free and somewhat unreal. That is why the Kosovo war was so dangerous: the main decisions were based on the feelings of the public, despite what formal (international) law might have to say about them. And people's *feelings* tend to be volatile, often even inconsistent.

This reminds us that the world community is constructed by way of stories, as journalist Michael Ignatieff tells us (IGNATIEFF, 1998), in the sense that there must be some kind of narrative connecting our lives to the plight of (sometimes physically very distant) others. The reason why journalism is necessarily about involvement —and foreign journalism especially so— is because the public needs a link that connects misery in other parts of the world to the troubles of our daily lives. In the nineteenth century, Ignatieff says, the stories that bound our world were the ones of sheer profit and colonialism. But it was only after the first World War that the general public started to demand a say in foreign policy.

For most of the second part of the twentieth century, a new narrative included not just Europe and its colonies, but the planet as a whole: the danger of global extinction by nuclear war. Incidentally, it was also only in the second part of this century that we for the first time saw a photograph of Planet Earth. In a very real sense it was our destiny that was being played in innumerable localised wars: the superpower rivalry gave those local wars a global meaning, and by watching them we were trying to sort out our own destiny. It was because of the world as a whole, and the possibility of its destruction in a nuclear war, that the Cuba crisis of 1961 had the importance it had.

By putting an end to the Cold War, the disappearance of the Soviet camp —a cause of fear for some, and hope for others— has left us with no reason to get systematically involved in the business of the world. Large zones of the planet, for example in Africa, seem to be mostly irrelevant for our globalised world of today.

In this situation, "the narrative that has become most pervasive and persuasive has been the 'chaos narrative', the widely held belief (...) that large sections of the globe (...) have collapsed into a meaningless disorder, upon which no coherent pattern can be discerned". The "chaos

narrative" demotivates: "it is an antinarrative, a story that claims there is no story to tell and therefore no reason to get involved" (IGNATIEFF, 1998, p. 289).

As opposed to this, the humanitarian narrative seems to be the only one left: the supposedly "non-political" idea that we owe duties of solidarity to other people in the world just by virtue of our common humanity. But the humanitarian narrative is not itself free from ambiguities and dangers.

The media that today connect our lives with the plight of others are images: the humanitarian narrative is a televisual narrative. Visual images have "the virtues of making the abstractions of exile, expulsion, starvation and other forms of suffering into an experience sufficiently concrete and real to make empathy possible" (IGNATIEFF, 1998, p. 294). Images can be very good at connecting our emotions with the plight of others. But, although the identification may be intense, it may also be shallow. "We feel for a particular victim, without understanding why or how she has come to be a victim" (p. 295). "Television is relatively incoherent when it comes to establishing the political and diplomatic context in which humanitarian disaster, war crime, or famine take shape. It has a tendency to turn these into examples of man's inhumanity to man; it turns them from political into natural disasters" (p. 293).

So that our sense of being useful can be sustained, new tragedies must occupy our screens every day; yesterday's drama is supposed to be resolved —otherwise, why shall we bother in trying to help? Politicians, worried by what at the moment most worries us, would commit a great error in spending significant material or human resources on humanitarian dramas abroad only to discover that, by the time the coffins started getting home, their electorate had new priorities, new preoccupations on their minds.

Therefore, the war without (western) victims has become the perfect war, the one which will harm no one's interests and make everyone feel good. "Highly mediatised relief operations (...) conceal the shrinking percentages of national income devoted to foreign aid. The metanarrative —the big story— is one of disengagement, while the moral lullaby we allow ourselves to sing is that we are coming closer and closer" (IGNATIEFF, 1998, p. 299).

Some might have expected that the end of the Cold War would give an impulse to a general redistribution of power in the international order —some kind of "new world order" in which the interests of Rwandan, or Iraqi, or Kurdish, or Albanian, or Serbian people would get a little more attention. Quite to the contrary, the 1990s accentuated the arrogance and impunity of Americans towards the rest of the world.

In this sense, the temporal coincidence between the bombardments of Sudan and Afghanistan and the Lewinsky affair is perhaps ironic; but it is also tragic. After all, if it is public opinion which rules this humanitarian world order, that might not be a good thing.

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## Sharing, Not Shouting, in the Face of Hate Radio

Jonathan Marks

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jonathan Marks. I'm an international broadcaster and I suppose you could say I work in the war-industry, or what *used* to be the war-industry...at least it is a branch of mass-communication that was started in response to conflict. Many of the just over 100 international broadcasters on the air today started because their country had something to shout at an enemy. Most European countries started their overseas service in an effort to scream a message across to their enemies. At the same time most also had to get a message of moral support across to their troops fighting at the front.

In times of war, there is always a public that is hungry for news. Any news —biased or unbiased, from home or abroad, from allies or perceived enemies. The adrenalin of the moment tends to sharpen our antennae. There is news to be compared, discussed and an inner hope that it will soon be over.

Radio Netherlands is Holland's external broadcasting service. Its origins were in a series of broadcasts started by the Dutch government in exile in 1941 as Radio Orange. Using airtime offered by the BBC in London, its mission was to unite Dutch speakers, especially those in occupied Holland. After the war it took on a very different role: to explain how Holland was coping with the aftermath of war, and to act as a bridge between those families that had been separated by war or the economic challenges that followed.

Societies that were founded to commemorate battles in Arnhem and Normandy are being dismantled because their members are passing on through natural causes. Which prompts the statement: we know what you did during the war. That's followed by the question: What is the role for any international broadcaster when we've enjoyed 56 years of peace in this part of the world?

So what do we do now? Well, we work with just over 5,000 radio and television organisations across the globe. Many of the students that we train, both in Holland and places like Costa Rica, South Africa and Benin would like to live in a country that has known peace for 56 days, let alone the half-century that this country has been fortunate to live through. We simply share stories, not shout them —no-one will listen if you raise your voice— guests don't shout if they want to remain guests in your house. We don't believe in radio, TV or the Internet as separate media. We believe passionately in audio, visuals and text, of which traditional forms of mass communication such as radio are still the most important for the majority of the world's population. For major wars on the ground have given way to what we now term conflicts. In the airwaves, the media wars have diversified —the multimedia onslaught through radio, television, e-mail and the world-wide web have created an overload in many parts of the northern hemisphere. But the clandestine media wars of hatred are currently being waged in many parts of the southern hemisphere: wars which are often difficult to follow, both in terms of what is being said and to the extent to which they lead to desperate human suffering.

On 17 April 2001 a media prize for excellence in journalism was awarded at Brown University at Providence, in Rhode Island. Dan Rather, well-known in the US as the anchor of the CBS News, stepped up to accept the honour. And he noted that his own national network carries less than four international stories a week. That's more than many other US commercial television networks. The AIDS crisis in Africa, or a change of administration in neighbouring Mexico, are no longer important. Entertainment and celebrity news on the home front have taken the centre stage; foreign news is most certainly on the back seat.

Indeed many of the thousands of radio and television stations on the air in the developed world right now are guilty of covering fire and not smoke. There is plenty of event-journalism and not enough critical distance thinking or analysis.

The problems in crisis areas that we're discussing today are very different. If anything, there is an information "underload". Take Africa. Television reaches only the cities in Africa. 90 % of Internet access in that continent can be attributed to Johannesburg, Durban and Capetown in South Africa. Radio is the most important medium for reaching any kind of mass audience.

As you scan across that imposing continent there is a vast difference in the way radio is being used for the common good. In some countries, giant government mouthpieces are being dismantled, but with an



almost impossible new mission statement, namely to turn a profit. Broadcast licenses are being granted as the airwaves are liberalised. Community stations erupt from nowhere and flower with enthusiasm. Many wither and fade within a few months when it is clear that proper community radio has to do more than play music. It has to draw people in and stimulate local discussion. But it also needs sustainable funding if it is to make a difference.

Many of the stations we are working with, both in Africa and in Latin America, face a daily dilemma of how to survive. They know that local content is essential. But the growth of commercial satellite music networks threatens the existence of many rural broadcasters. Smooth, sleek jukeboxes are luring away the distinguished advertisers. With no cream of the crop, there is a growing incentive to imitate and not innovate.

Radio has also been a deadly component of genocide. It is easy to point to Rwanda where Radio Mille Collines was responsible for spreading hate like a virus. It was an evil campaign, which directly and indirectly caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Because the transmitter in Kigali was in range of western journalists, its activities were monitored. The minds behind the microphone mixed innocent and deadly news items wrapped up with popular local music. Over a period of months, trust was built between broadcaster and listener until the point that the public was part of the arsenal. We coined the name hate radio in Europe. Not that it was new; there were plenty of examples of hate radio during the second world war. But this time the station wasn't shouting across a border. It was in town; it was part of the community; a trusted friend turned sour.

We've been asked to explain how to counteract hate radio. Obviously, prevention is better than cure. But in situations where sources are biased, the most effective answer is not peace radio or opposition radio, but independent radio. It is difficult to balance a story, especially when the communications infrastructure is failing or simply shot to pieces. But the only way forward is to try. In Burundi, for instance, that means that Hutu and Tutsi reporters have to work together on the same story. They have to ask both sides for their version of events. They must try to maintain a critical distance; even though family and friends may be directly involved in the news they are covering. Colleagues of mine have been sharing these experiences recently in Bujumbura with Kalashnikovs going off in the background.

In many cases, a viewer in Amsterdam has a much better offer of international news than someone trying to keep track of events in Abidjan. Western journalists, many of whom take considerable personal

risks, are out there seeking out stories. Once found, they are usually edited in the field and satellite-fed out of the country under the noses of would-be censors. Tragically, many of these stories don't reach the friends and family of the communities where the action is taking place. Western journalists are getting better at taking the stories out of the region to try and quench the thirsts of the rolling news networks. But the imbalance of information flow means that not enough of both positive and negative coverage is reaching the areas of conflict.

Any news medium in a conflict zone is only credible if there is trust. That takes time to establish and is only as good as the last broadcast. You can't turn it on or off like a tap. On 8 April 1999 we watched with amazement as NATO planes started their own psychological warfare campaign in Kosovo and Serbia from a fleet of Lockheed aircraft flying above the target. With on-board mediumwave transmitters, the Allied Voice of NATO broadcast a strange montage of anti-Milosevic comments read by men and women with strong US accents. It was a repeat of similar psycho media wars we've seen in Grenada in 1983, or later in Haiti, the Gulf and Somalia. But these "here today and gone back to base tomorrow" attempts at changing public opinion are very crude. I dare say they are great morale boosters for those involved; I doubt if they have the desired effect on the audience they are intended to reach. You can't drop a message and then run for cover. NATO TV was like a bad-power-point presentation.

In Latin America, Radio Netherlands now uses a mixture of e-mails, audio via the Internet and radio broadcasts to share ideas with that part of the world. We work with over 1,100 partner stations. They are fledgling democracies, where less than 10 years ago if we tried to organise a meeting of broadcasters in the region, the list of those to be invited would look more like a guest list of a military academy than professional communicators.

The way we're trying to help today is in the war against ignorance. We try to encourage south-south dialogue as well as north-south and south-north. We have no illusions that there are giant steps to be taken, often three forward and two back. But technology and a growing demand for different opinions is helping us to share.

Some NGOs are also learning about the value of supporting independent media initiatives in areas of conflict. Every situation is different. You cannot compare East Timor with Angola. But if any trust is to be built between communities, it is essential that amongst the local media mix, there is at least one station or network that is operating as an independent entity. We've seen cases in the past where international aid agencies have been happy to talk to foreign journalists

knowing that the coverage will reach stakeholders back home in Europe or North America. But not enough is done to explain actions, however worthwhile, to local journalists working in the communities. Yes, the local media may not be operating to the same charter as foreign media; but they are reaching an audience that many NGOs are trying to help. And silence is almost as deadly in areas of mistrust.

The modern war against ignorance has to be fought in the region in a different way from the home front. In media rich countries, the challenge now is to package the information in the right way. Journalists and broadcasters have the duty not only to explain what and where, but also why. We need to involve audiences, taking more advantage of informed debate. And that can only happen if we use all our creative talents to draw people in rather than shutting them out. Just making more isn't enough. We have to measure if the message got across. It will have to be a better mix of news you can use, and relevant information for the communities that are actively involved in conflict zones, rather than just those observing from the safety of their remote control.

Radio Netherlands doesn't have all the answers. But we're proud to be working with a growing number of committed partners who are making progress towards finding solutions. More information on our website at [www.rnw.nl](http://www.rnw.nl)



## A Complex Relationship: The Media and NGOs

Amanda Sans

Just before coming to Amsterdam, I had dinner with a Spanish war correspondent whom I have met in the course of many emergencies and who specialises in covering armed conflicts. We talked about the relationship between NGOs and the mass media and we both shared the opinion that during humanitarian crises they both profit from each other, information being the link binding them together. Furthermore, on many occasions they even share a common objective: changing and informing about the situation of the affected populations. We also discussed the fact that during the last few years NGOs have increasingly turned into a valuable information source during humanitarian crises. My friend ended up by saying: "Earlier, when I used to travel to a country in conflict, I made use of those contacts whose telephones I kept in my address book: consulates, embassies, diplomats... all of them extremely useful during the Cold War years. However, not so long ago I decided to get rid of them and replace them by the contact numbers of those NGOs working in this kind of crises".

Indeed, along the lines of this journalist's comments, NGOs constitute an important source of information in conflict situations. The press turns to them more and more, seeking relevant reliable data and accounts which only they can provide. Through their presence in the field while carrying out long term projects or emergency interventions, humanitarian agencies have become legitimate witnesses of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law violations, of all kind of abuses, and of lack of assistance or access to health.

At the same time, NGOs, aware of their access to firsthand information and of the amount of information they produce, also use the media, basically with two objectives:

- To advocate or accuse as well as to make their activities widely known
- To obtain human and economic resources

This is why communication has turned into a crucial tool for NGOs. To achieve these objectives is no easy task. From my experience, communication within MSF has to face two types of humanitarian crises:

- those drawing the attention of the media (especially natural disasters), e.g.: Hurricane Mitch, the floods in Mozambique, the earthquake in El Salvador
- those often chronic crises which are cast into oblivion and neglected by the mass media, only drawing their attention when providing them with “sexy” images, especially for TV stations, such as: the Buddhist statues in Afghanistan,<sup>1</sup> Kabila’s death, the guerrilla twins in Burma, the ship with child slaves.

In both cases, the media use the information provided by NGOs and NGOs use the press to achieve the previously mentioned objectives.

But these two types of humanitarian crises embody very different situations from the point of view of communication within NGOs.

### **Media emergencies such as the Kosovo crisis or natural disasters**

Dozens of NGOs and journalists immediately arrive on the field. Journalists, however, will only stay about one week (except for those emergencies where political interests assure long media coverage).

In this kind of situation, the media not only profit from the information relayed by NGOs but also try to use their logistic infrastructure to go where the news is. (In Mozambique, helicopters were the only possible means available to reach the camps for the displaced or to obtain images showing the magnitude of the floods.) Yet, NGOs also benefit from the so-called “media pull” to make themselves as visible as possible in order to make their accounts widely known, in a rat race to be more visible than the competition.

Information is the link binding both actors in this kind of situation:

- Journalists turn to humanitarian agencies to know about the populations, their conditions and needs, the type of activities and projects carried out by the NGOs and to gather all sorts of data (for instance: number of people affected, number of victims, magnitude of the disaster in percentages, responsibilities).

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written before the current crisis in Afghanistan.

- NGOs, in turn, use the media to become more visible and make their work known to the public (helping them as a result to obtain funds). Besides, NGOs use the media to advocate or to accuse when needed (for instance, to denounce situations like aid being diverted, lack of assistance, and local or international authorities unwilling to collaborate). The media are also very useful to NGOs to gather information about the situation in the rest of the country.

On many occasions, NGOs use the media to filter data or hints about a given situation that NGOs themselves cannot denounce because of their mandate or lack of evidence. In this case, NGOs contact journalists they trust and tell them “off the record” about these situations (for instance, when aid is being diverted) so that they can proceed to investigate the subject and later publish it. NGOs’ ultimate aim is always to change or alleviate the suffering populations have to endure.

In this kind of situation, both actors tend to get along smoothly and easily because they need and profit from each other. In emergencies, journalists don’t stay long and must gather the best possible information in the shortest time. NGOs hardly have to make any efforts to contact the press, since the first thing journalists do when they reach the field is to contact them, as my war correspondent friend admitted.

### **Neglected crises with hardly or no media coverage at all**

In neglected crises, except for special occasions, NGOs usually have to make use of their address books to contact journalists.

In Spain, for instance, where I have to deal with the Spanish media, it is not easy to get the press or television to cover the humanitarian situation in countries such as Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia to quote just a few so-called chronic crises. The fact that none of these countries happens to be a former colony and there are no cultural links, makes the task of including these countries in the Spanish media’s agenda extremely laborious. It is not so, however, with Latin-American countries, for which the Spanish media always seem to have a soft spot.

But the problem does not only affect the Spanish media: during the Kosovo crisis, for instance, hundreds of journalists were on the field covering it; meanwhile, 250,000 refugees in Congo-Brazzaville were suffering the consequences of the war and there were no journalists on the ground. All the human resources were in Kosovo; to the delight of

warriors elsewhere, who could threaten and attack the population without any witnesses.

This is the reason why NGOs' Communication Departments must use different strategies aiming to help remember neglected crises.

To quote Angola as an example: in November 2000 Angola celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its Independence. MSF has been working in Angola for 17 years, during which it has witnessed the atrocities perpetrated by both warring parties: the Angolan Government, through the Armed Forces, and UNITA.

This long-lasting conflict has taken its toll:

- one million dead
- two and half million internally displaced
- thousands of Angolan fleeing to neighbouring countries (200,000 in Zambia and 170,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo) and over 100,000 people mutilated
- one of the highest number of landmines in the world (Angola has 16 million inhabitants and 29 million landmines)
- in a list showing the Human Development Rate in 174 countries, Angola takes place number 160
- 76 % of the total population is deprived of access to the country's health care system.

At the end of 1998 war was resumed and since then, while the population has been dying through the deliberate negligence of UNITA and their own Government, both the Angolan Government and the United Nations have sought to convey the message that "the situation in the country has returned to normal". As a result, MSF decided to launch a campaign to denounce the situation endured by the Angolan population, and to counter "gone-back-to-normal" messages supported by both the United Nations and the international community.

Making the media include Angola in their agendas was no easy task. In a country like Spain, for instance, Angola is a forgotten country, never appearing in the news except when, as happened a few weeks ago, a plane crashes with only one survivor: a white Spanish citizen.

MSF drafted an extensive document including a number of data about the situation of the population in Angola which was presented in several press conferences in different countries over the world coinciding with Angola's 25-year-independence anniversary. In Spain we had to use several strategies to draw the media's attention:

- Some weeks prior the press conference, we started contacting them to explain about the MSF campaign on Angola. Our aim



was to create awareness among the journalists so that they, in turn, would raise awareness of this subject among their editors-in-chief.

- We invited some journalists with whom we had a friendly, reliable relationship to visit our projects in the field so that they could see with their own eyes the suffering endured by the Angolan population.
- After their visits, some articles published by them in several Spanish newspapers helped stir up interest in this subject among the media.
- We recorded some video releases and took photos of our projects in Angola. These visual aids were distributed to the media to facilitate and encourage their including an item about Angola in their programmes.
- And in the end we organised a press conference to present the campaign... followed by lunch, of course.

In this case, we succeeded in having Angola covered by the Spanish media over several days, as also happened with other international media thanks to the efforts of other MSF sections. Angola finally got media coverage thanks to the efforts made by the organisation's Communication Departments and thanks to the tools used and the perseverance shown by some journalists in trying to sell the subject to their networks.

Without these strategies, making the media include a forgotten crisis on their agenda is extremely difficult: sending a press release about the situation of the refugees in Guinea or the nutritional situation in Burundi, the crisis in Somalia or Chechnya hardly has any impact on the Spanish media.

I therefore think it is essential for journalists and NGOs to make a common effort to bring back to the agendas those forgotten crises to which the international community turns a blind eye while populations endure endless suffering. Journalists and NGOs both work with a shared aim of protecting the victims, and alleviating their suffering: journalists by informing and reporting; and NGOs by working in the field and denouncing. Let's then find the mechanisms to strengthen our relationship so as to remind public opinion and the international community that so much still needs to be changed.



# **Why and How News Media, NGOs and Academics Get it Wrong**

Ladislav Bizimana

Information has been proliferating. Increasingly cheap as its flow increases, information is more and more polluted and contaminated—exactly as in the case of air and water (RAMONET, 1997).

## **Introduction**

Seven years ago, in early September 1994 to be exact, I was unexpectedly offered a job by the Swiss section of the Paris-based association for the defence of freedom of speech and the protection of journalists, Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders - RSF). They had just set up a radio station, Radio Agatashya, (“Good News Radio” in Kinyarwanda: Rwandans’ mother tongue). Originally conceived as a professional human rights-oriented radio station that would counter-balance the partisan news media in Rwanda, and thus help implement the peace process, Radio Agatashya was suddenly turned into an emergency “independent” and “humanitarian” radio station: the first in news media history. Its primary objective was to assist humanitarian actors in carrying out their activities in the wake of the Rwandan genocide. Implicitly linked to this objective was another: to counter hate propaganda in the region, and thus help promote peace and reconciliation. The Radio Agatashya project was based on the assumption that “hate speech is best combated by more speech rather than censorship” (CURTIS, 2000, p. 1). In this sense, Radio Agatashya was a “positive action” project the activities of which were centred on informational and educational objectives. The strategy to achieve this was the provision of accurate, balanced and non-partisan information

on the daily situation in the Great Lakes region. In other words, Radio Agatashya's aim was to tell and help tell "the truth from the field" in a humanitarian way. No other task could be more challenging in the context of the 1994 Rwandan tragedy and the ensuing humanitarian disaster that two years later led to the first continental war in African history.

I was reluctant to take the job. Being both a victim and an actor in this unprecedented catastrophe, I found it almost impossible to dissociate the humanitarian from the emotional. But I finally decided to give it a try. One expatriate journalist reminded me, among other things, that it was wrong to presume that only foreign journalists, allegedly neutral and more professional, could do better. Now in retrospect, I want to reflect on such a challenging yet important task of providing "humanitarian" news. Methodologically, I first look at local news media, *before* addressing the foreign ones. This is followed by a critical assessment of the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academics in the social process of truth telling, opinion shaping and action-prompting. In concluding, I try to provide some thoughts for the way forward. My otherwise general analysis is supported by illustrations from the region which I know best: the African Great Lakes Region.<sup>1</sup> The first question to address is: Why are news media not humanitarian enough, or humanitarian at all? Perhaps we first need to agree on what we mean by "humanitarian".

## **"Humanitarian" news media**

In a world of monopolised globalisation supported by monopolised global communication, and characterised by an increasing gap between rich and poor against a background of mortal conflicts for social justice, identity recognition and fair distribution of available resources, being "humanitarian" firstly means being sensitive to the fate of those unjustly left behind and marginalised, those threatened with epidemics, starvation, violence, and extermination. Secondly, being "humanitarian"

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, the *African Great Lakes Region* comprised Rwanda, Burundi and ex-Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) because of the numerous large lakes found there. Following more recent events, among which the outbreak of "Africa's first World War", affecting peoples of central and eastern Africa, the term has expanded to include Angola, Uganda, southern Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, Congo-Brazzaville and Central African Republic. Very rarely, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea (normally belonging to the Horn of Africa) are included to refer to what Washington defined as the *Greater Horn of Africa*, in 1994.

means doing one's best to help them overcome their critical situation and take care of themselves in the long term. "Humanitarian" news media are those that help achieve this objective. They can do so by providing information that fosters mutual understanding, confidence, dialogue and appropriate action. Unfortunately, modern news media, whether local or international, still have a very long way to go in this direction. To use Galtung's metaphor (in his preface to Roach's (1993) authoritative work on the destructive role of media war propaganda), modern media often rather amplify the sound of the guns instead of silencing them. Reasons are as varied as the media themselves.

### *Local news media*

In the case of local news media, there are five main obstacles to their *professionalism* and *humanitarianism*. These factors are inter-linked and will be addressed separately only for methodological purposes. The first one is the pervasive interference of various interested parties among which are the state, political parties and moneymakers. This interference is accompanied by endless intimidation, harassment and repression, or withdrawal of broadcasting licences, frequency and financial support. The situation becomes extremely alarming in times of social strife and armed conflict. Africa, though not alone, has been a unique setting for this kind of violent control of news media, due to a combination of different factors. On 16 May 2001, a Chad government directive prohibited private radio stations, among them the most influential one: FM Liberté (Freedom FM), from covering the electoral campaign and from broadcasting any political programmes during this campaign, for quite inexplicable "public order" reasons! In 1998, Amnesty International was to complain about the truth from the Rwandan field: "The picture projected by the media is heavily influenced by government control over information and is often misleading. Attacks attributed to armed opposition groups sometimes receive extensive publicity, but killings of civilians by RPA [the Rwandese Patriotic Army] soldiers are rarely reported." This is due to the fact that, in post-1994 genocide Rwanda, "Allegations of 'taking part in genocide' have been widely used by the regime to prevent opponents and journalists from speaking out." Hence, "The private press, which is made up of fewer than ten publications, seems to have lost any independence from the authorities, and the columns of the most extreme newspapers are still sprinkled with racist remarks. As for the state media (one daily and state radio and television), which receive generous official funding, they are totally under the government boot" (REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, 2001).

In some instances, the spreading of political narratives from above is unequivocally codified in legal instruments. In virtue of Article II of Law no. 1-136 of 25 June 1976, for example, the role of the Burundian media was "to present objective information inseparable from the civic education and formation of Burundians and the mobilisation of the masses in order to implement the governmental plans." Under Article VI of the same Law, Burundian journalists were required to "always behave as patriots convinced and self-conscious of the ideals of the party [State Party, i.e. UPRONA], the only organ responsible for the national life" (NDAYISHIMYE, 1998, p.8).

The second reason is the lack of appropriate formation and training not only in journalism but also in the field of conflict analysis and resolution. In many developing countries, many people become journalists without any required education or training. This is due partly to a deliberate strategy not to have enough well trained watchdogs and to patronise the few generously sent to study journalism abroad. For instance, as late as 1998, there was no school or (university) department of journalism or mass communication studies in Rwanda. In Burundi, the first school of journalism, *Ecole de journalisme de Bujumbura*, was created in 1981 only to be closed in 1990. The third reason is the lack of adequate resources required by modern mass communication. Unable to raise private funds through good and diversified programmes, most print media, TV and radio stations rely on official funding for basic equipment, such as a tape recorder or a TV camera, and for meagre salaries. This makes them heavily indebted to their money provider(s) and exposes them to constant, easy manipulation and total control. The fourth reason underlying the absence of professionalism and humanitarianism by local news media women and men is the lack of alternative resources to support oneself and one's family in case of dismissal, voluntary or forced resignation. The material poverty that has brought most developing countries to their knees has been accompanied by a moral decay that has not spared the professional conscience of our society watchdogs - journalists. As constantly reminded by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), "There can be no press freedom if journalists exist in conditions of corruption, poverty and fear".

The fifth and, perhaps, the most deplorable reason is *personal partisanship* and *militancy* in defence of a chosen ideology. Here, not only are rumours, personal wishes, emotions and beliefs intentionally taken to be of public interest but they are mainly presented as the *only facts and truths speaking* for themselves, with no need to be cross-checked, investigated and compared with other possible interpretations. Combined with the lack of conflict analysis and resolution skills, this

active militancy through lies, defamation, calumnies and dehumanisation leads journalists to explain any social conflict as a perverse attempt by the “bad guys”, that is, those who view things differently, to commit the “sin” of challenging “established facts and truths”. Needless to say, the first victims of what a Rwandan human rights defender and outstanding journalist, late Bishop André Sibomana once angrily named “journalism prostitution”, are *truth* and *justice*. For some Rwandan journalists, the Rwandan tragedy started with the Belgian colonisation and ended in July 1994 with the military victory of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), in power since then. This view is strongly contested by those Rwandans who claim that peace and harmony in Rwanda were destroyed by the October 1990 war, which was ignited by the same Rwandese Patriotic Front. Here it becomes very difficult to dissociate *truth* from *emotion*, *factual interpretation* from *pure propaganda*.

### *Foreign news media*

While one would expect foreign news media to make a difference when reporting on and from conflict zones, due to an assumption of their greater independence, professional behaviour and far better working conditions, things are unfortunately not that much better. Reasons for this failure include the following:

#### Ignorance

First, foreign news media reporters often show an astonishing degree of ignorance of the social, economic, cultural and political realities prevailing in the field. This ignorance often leads reporters to make unfair, distorted and confusing accounts. Entire continents, populations and different group identities are portrayed as indistinct subjects about whom little or nothing “humanitarian” can be done. A month after the beginning of the anti-Mobutu military campaign in October 1996, a BBC1 reporter (BBC1 broadcast, 21.00-21.30 p.m., 8 November 1996) was to say:

Today, the situation is a million or so people from the Hutu tribe poured into Zaire to escape the civil war in Rwanda. The Hutu refugees have been accused of attacking their old tribal enemies, the Tutsis, both in Zaire and back across the border in Rwanda. The Tutsis have retaliated by taking on the Hutu-dominated Zairian army. The net result [is] chaos and a humanitarian crisis to which the world is unsure how to respond (Glasgow Media Group, 1997, p. 38).

Here the former Zairian armed forces (FAZ) are wrongly presented as being mainly composed of and controlled by the same ethnic group, that is, Hutus, as in the case of the former Rwandan armed forces (FAR). Moreover, there is a confusion about which identity group is a "tribe" and which one is an "ethnic" entity in which country: it is asserted, again wrongly, that Zairian communities are basically built upon tribal origins or ethnic groups exactly in the same way as Rwandan and Burundian communities. Finally, the report could not end much worse: nothing can be done about the "chaos and humanitarian crisis" in eastern Zaire. The result of this media-encouraged inaction has been, as, alas, we all know, Africa's first continental war, more than a million civilian casualties according to various human rights and humanitarian organisations, millions of displaced persons and refugees, a country threatened with total partition and a regional instability greater than it has ever known.

### Oversimplification

The second reason underlying the lack of professionalism and humanitarianism in foreign news media reports from the field is *oversimplification*. This is driven by the search for "quick-fix" understanding and explanation of complex realities. In the example above cited, portraying the 1996 conflict in former Zaire as opposing "old tribal enemies", that is, Tutsis and Hutus, is a much easier task than investigating the root causes of this protracted conflict. Yet easy explanations call for quick fix, cheap solutions. In the circumstances under consideration, nothing could be done to bring peace between old tribal enemies, as all the troubles seem rather pathological among primitive societies! Another equally misleading and dangerous approach, often used as a remedy for the first one, consists in denying the existence of Tutsis and Hutus as distinct ethnic groups in the African Great Lakes Region, presenting them as pure inventions by colonial theorists. In both cases, we are far from the truth and much closer to confusion. All in all, oversimplification in journalists' reports hinders efforts to solve some conflicts, by failing to assist in identification of all issues, all actors and their conflicting interests, as well as the mechanisms to address them efficiently.

### Partisanship and overt activism

Thirdly, the absence of humanitarianism and professionalism in foreign news media reports from the field is due to overt partisanship and activism. Some media institutions and individual reporters take



sides to defend a cause, promote certain values, gather support and prompt action from policy-makers. As REDDING (1998) pointed out, "International action —diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, military intervention or peacekeeping, political action such as sanctions— or international *inaction* in the face of crimes against humanity, may all be driven or justified by the paradigms in reporting". This is known as "the CNN effect", by which everyone goes only where mainstream media report a disaster emergency and call for action. This is particularly true in western countries where relatively more democratic and independent media play a major role in shaping rulers' behaviour in both national and international arenas. As a former contributor to CNN news reported, in the US,

Television had an impact on public opinion, which in turn affected the government's formulation of foreign policy, during and after the Tet offensive in Vietnam in 1968, the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran in 1979, the terrorist attacks on the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1982, and the killing of American troops in Somalia in 1993 (UTLEY, 1997, p. 4).

The excessive dramatisation of the Somalia incident prompted a radical revision of US peacekeeping policy under Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25) of 5 May 1994. The latter imposes excessively restrictive criteria on American participation in and support of peacekeeping missions. This new policy has had disastrous effects on international peacekeeping in third world countries, best illustrated by the reaction of the international community to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and to the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Reflecting the extraordinary development and expansion of communication technologies in the last century, the CNN effect reached its perverse climax during the Gulf War campaign. As one media analyst would remind us,

For anyone not having lived in the United States in 1990 and 1991, it is almost impossible to convey the wholesale contribution of the mass media and mass culture to the country's war frenzy. The mass media's complicity in the war effort was so total that by the time the thousands of Iraqi soldiers departing Kuwait were being incinerated, many of us were so sickened by the spectacle that we could no longer even look at television (ROACH, 1993, p. xxiii).

Likewise in 1995, a research study of the coverage of the 1994 Rwandan tragedy by two Belgian daily newspapers, *Le Soir* and *La Libre Belgique*, concluded that the two newspapers intentionally dodged

Rwandan colonial history (by passing over Belgium's negative colonial legacy in silence), and showed all along frustration, jealousy of France's takeover, and partial ideological commitment in favour of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) whose war crimes and massacres were overshadowed by the genocide. The RPF combatants were presented as the *good guys* rescuing Rwandans from a French-Rwandan murderous coalition. The study came to the conclusion that the two newspapers emotionally and ideologically treated the Rwandan problem exactly like the internal Belgian conflict between the Flemish and French speaking communities (DEMON, 1995). In the same year, another researcher (CREPEAU, 1995) found that the Quebec media, in general, reported the 1990-94 Rwandan conflict with too much ignorance, thoughtlessness and precipitation, "making of this drama their headline, not always with the objectivity and modesty that could be expected". In the Rwandan case, partisanship and militancy have led some foreign media to carelessly formulate genocide charges and pronounce sentences against selected individuals or groups without any proof or trial.

#### Lack of time, interest and means

The lack of time and means constitutes the fourth main reason why foreign media fail to promote peace and reconciliation abroad. Collecting information on the ground in a remote and hardly known part of the world requires extra time and effort to familiarise oneself with the socio-economic and political complexity underlying the situation being covered. More importantly, it implies high costs that profit-oriented mass communication multinationals are not ready to spend for the sake of affected populations living in politically, economically and strategically less interesting places. In trying to overcome this constraint, some reporters rely on "second hand" information. Yet, this strategy often renders them easy prey to misinformation and manipulation. In February-March 1994, an imagined military coup reported by an ill-informed western news agency envoy was followed by generalised panic, disturbances that caused deaths and left the Burundian capital Bujumbura upside-down. In April-May 1995, a manipulated South African journalist was also fatally injured in an ambush on his way back from a massacre grave to the Burundian capital whilst guided by Tutsi extremists and militias who apparently did not want his filmed testimonies to reach the international audience (OULD-ABDALLAH, 1996, p. 111).

On the other side, intentional dehumanisation, criminalisation and arbitrary indictment of people, the distortion, omission or dramatisation

of reality by foreign news media may be driven by self-interest. In the twenty-first century world, "seeing is believing" (BERGER, 1989) and "the commercialisation of human feelings" (HOCHSCHILD, 1983) has become a successful strategy for conquering and distracting more and more alienated audiences. As in the ancient Roman Empire where the delivery of bread and circus games was enough to keep the public away from certain political issues, the modern world's audiences are more and more bombarded with news of violence and sex scandal on the principle that "only sensational news sells". This strategy often leads to the type of dehumanisation that various analysts have described as the "horror and disaster pornography" (DUFFIELD, 1996) or "the pornography of suffering" (MINEAR *et al.*, 1996, p. 37). Reflecting this sensationalism flavoured with ethnocentrism and afro-pessimism was *The Economist's* (13-19 May 2000: 17) lead article, "Hopeless Africa", on the renewal of violent fighting in Sierra Leone in May 2000. According to a former UN Special Envoy to Burundi, only a sensational, exotic story can be told and a "scoop" made, even if it means reporting the Burundian conflict like the "mad cow" disease case (OULD-ABDALLAH, 1996, p. 107). In fact, the "sensational stories"-driven approach makes it impossible to provide in-depth and extensive coverage of otherwise newsworthy situations. The White House sexual scandal, "Monicagate", monopolised radio, television and press in summer 1998, just at a time when humanitarian disasters of famine, epidemics and wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America were at their peak. One month after the world was saturated with images of starving South Sudanese in mid summer 1998, no one could know their fate. Likewise, East Timor is no longer newsworthy since the arrival of UN troops there in 1999. Nor is the day-to-day struggle for survival of war-displaced persons in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka or Colombia worthy of news coverage as long as the mainstream media consider such stories too old to attract their audience.

Hence, successful efforts to deter endemic famine, painstaking endeavours by local communities to overcome poverty and violence in Asia, Africa or elsewhere, have no space in world media reports. More important, mainstream media coverage rarely informs us that, in most instances, endemic epidemics, famine and other "conquerable" (DE WAAL, 1997, p. 1) disasters are indisputably consequences of persistent denial of peoples' fundamental rights, including *the right to entitlement and empowerment* (SEN, 1981), by inept, illegitimate and unaccountable local authorities with active help or passive complicity of self-interested aid agencies, donor governments, international institutions and multinationals (DE WAAL, 1996, 1997).

*NGOs and academics*

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and academics play a crucial role in raising public awareness and prompting action for the promotion of certain values, ideas and actions. Depending on the paradigm and approach adopted, and the objectives pursued, both groups can, like news media, either dampen or amplify the impact of news. Through their research activities, their teaching, conferences and publications, academics play a much more important role as they provide the doctrinal and conceptual orientation for the rest. Eighteenth and nineteenth century “development theories” were crucial for the justification and dissemination of the “modernity project”, whilst early studies by Western ethnographers and anthropologists proved instrumental to the practice and institutionalisation of racial discrimination, slavery and colonisation world-wide. In the same vein, Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* triggered the anti-capitalist conscience and revolution, as well as the spread of socialist ideology worldwide. In his well argued essay, Weiss (2000) recalled how “the politics of humanitarian ideas” by a certain intellectual leadership of the twentieth century has been crucially influential in shaping public opinion and foreign policy priorities in favour of humanitarian actions in the post-Cold War era, despite the damaging effect of ethnocentric and apocalyptic warnings in *The Coming Anarchy* (KAPLAN, 1994) and *The Clash of Civilizations* (HUNTINGTON, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in times of crisis, news media, NGOs and government policy and decision makers turn to academics in search of deep knowledge, expertise and well-thought recommendations. With the development of the Internet, academic works are more and more accessible to the wider public. Audio-visual broadcasts and printed materials are instantly made available through the Internet, and NGOs’ reports and research products no longer need to be sent to publishing houses, libraries or through the traditional mailing system in order to reach the audience. Due to this nearly instantaneous outreach, public opinion can today be more easily and quickly manipulated, intentionally or naively, in favour or against one or another action. In this sense, NGOs, news media and intellectuals become interlinked in a *de facto* three-way relationship,

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<sup>2</sup> Huntington’s and Kaplan’s works were apparently written for foreign policy makers. The two works, read and critiqued world-wide, substantially called for the West’s retreat from international engagement and self-protection from unavoidable yet foreseeable tragedies that would unfold in third world places following the end of the Cold War.

the complexity and impact of which still need further research. Briefly, humanitarian NGOs resort to news media to raise public awareness, generate funding, elicit decision makers' response, as well as to enhance their public image. This latter aspect often generates negative competition for high visibility among NGOs. On their side, news media often turn to NGOs to "get it right", that is, for news and views from the field. This assistance may include "free rides" to remote conflict-torn areas for on-the-scene coverage. For example, "Journalist-reporter teams can embark on [Doctors Without Borders] missions according to the availability of mission teams and upon suggestion of the Communication Department or of the teams" (Médecins Sans Frontières, 1994, p. 29). This may in turn have a negative impact in the case where the NGOs' help and "the type of information that aid agencies produce are geared more to satisfying organisational needs rather understanding the new political formations that are emerging in the global periphery" (DUFFIELD, 1996, p. 174).

As for academics, they are solicited by news media and NGOs for their expected critical stance and in-depth analyses, while they also need NGOs and media produced material to feed into their research. Thus, the three actors should better recognise and maximally exploit this three way-interaction to the benefit of peace, social justice and humane development. Unfortunately, various reasons make academics and NGOs fall prey, like news media, to the same problems of manipulation, complacency, biases and negative competition earlier mentioned. In the African Great Lakes Region, some NGOs have their reports and publications sold by local authority agents at airports, hotels and public stands while others have been declared "personae non gratae" and their work censored. In some instances, this type of patronage or excommunication has led to "an open war" between interested parties. In 1999, Amnesty International was forced to publicly denounce what it considered "unfounded, discrediting criticisms and attacks" against it, carried out by another London-based human rights organisation, African Rights. The contentious issue was their differing methodology in reporting the counter-insurgency operations in north-western Rwanda. Amnesty International vigorously rejected all the charges, particularly those of partiality and use of unreliable sources. In its "Public Statement", Amnesty International reproached African Rights for relying on the official version of events and relaying criticisms made by the Rwandan government officials, as well as for endangering the life and safety of its respondents by disclosing details of their identity to the public. Whilst recognising the extremely challenging task facing organisations and individuals working on human rights in post-genocide

Rwanda, Amnesty International regretted, "that some organisations, such as African Rights, have gone beyond presenting their version of events and have launched unnecessary attacks on other organisations and individuals who are motivated only by a desire to protect human rights in Rwanda and worldwide" (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 1999).

The same goes for academics. Whilst it is not uncommon to have some governments treat one or another analyst as a "Salman Rushdie" for their "unfriendly" views, such blame and accusations become more incomprehensible, unacceptable and more destructive by far when they are made in bad faith by professional colleagues. Those familiar with the growth industry represented by the African Great Lakes Region are aware of the "pro-Hutu and pro-Tutsi schools of thought", particularly in the French and Belgian academiae. In 1995 and 1998, Filip Reyntjens, a Belgian professor and acknowledged expert witness to the UN and its criminal tribunal for Rwanda, denounced what he considered "character assassination" and defamatory, "ill-intentioned trials" led against him by another Belgian colleague, who accused him of "revisionism", "negationism" and "anti-Tutsism" with regard to his analyses of Rwanda and the region (REYNTJENS, 1998). More recently, a well-known French historian wrote to the mediator in the Burundian peace process, Nelson Mandela, strongly advising him not to read another researcher's publication on Burundi. For Mandela's correspondent, the author of the book in question is a defender of Hutu extremists (LEMARCHAND, 2000, p. 4). The crises in the African Great Lakes Region have ended up by antagonising and polarising some external interveners as much as they have done so to local actors. Again, the first victims here are truth, justice and reconciliation.

## Conclusion

In spite of the bleak picture depicted above of the media's behaviour when reporting on conflict zones, there have been significant attempts to redress the situation, following the Rwandan tragedy. Radio Agatashya was followed by similar initiatives of independent humanitarian media in crisis areas, such as Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Bosnia and Kosovo. Without creating new stations, other leading world news media such as the BBC and the Voice of America introduced special programmes in local languages with exclusive focus on the daily humanitarian, political, social and cultural developments in the conflict-affected regions (Rwanda-Burundi, Afghanistan, Somalia). The final verdict on the actual impact of these media initiatives on peacebuilding is yet to

be passed, and it should be made on the basis of further high quality evaluations.

Certainly, improvements are required to efficiently exploit the potential of alternative news media for supporting lasting peace and development. Such improvements are urgently needed for the definition of the nature of the intended project, its objectives, operational strategies and programmes, as well as its evaluation criteria (CURTIS, 2000). Nonetheless, preliminary assessments support the positive contribution of alternative media to peacebuilding and sustainable development. In general, the main originality of some of them has been first to give the floor to the unheard and oppressed voices, as well as to other low profile men and women assisting them in their daily struggle for human dignity and survival. Second, though with very limited resources, these alternative news and views media have focused on providing moral, technical and material support, as well as training to local media and other peacebuilding actors.

Their main shortcomings have been the lack of a critical approach, realistic perspective, and long-term, comprehensive and contingency planning. Radio Agatashya's early focus on the precarious life in refugee and displaced person camps earned it many suspicions and charges of working for and/or with genocide criminals, as well as serious harassment, from the Rwandan government. The latter denied it a broadcasting licence and frequency, despite sustained public acknowledgement of and support for Radio Agatashya activities, as shown by one sociological evaluation (CASTAGNO, 1996).<sup>3</sup> Its reports on security issues in refugee camps, its "cross border" reports and programmes, its active participation in family reunification by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and its involvement in the UNHCR repatriation campaign notwithstanding rarely reported serious security problems inside Rwanda (arbitrary arrests, summary executions, imprisonment and disappearances were common nationwide), led some refugees and relatives of the victims of revenge and retribution acts on returnees to accuse Radio Agatashya of spying and working on behalf of the Rwandan government and some humanitarian agencies. This, along with Radio Agatashya's strict policy of not using

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<sup>3</sup> The denial of this licence forced Radio Agatashya to broadcast from Bukavu in eastern Zaire. Its continued activity became impossible, partly because of the outbreak of the first war by Rwanda and Uganda-backed Zairian rebels against late Mobutu's regime, in October 1996. Since then, Fondation Hirondelle, an NGO based in Lausanne (Switzerland) which took over responsibility for the project from Reporters Without Borders in 1995, has been, jointly or separately, involved in other "humanitarian media" projects in Sierra Leone, Kosovo (upon request of the UN mission there), and the Central African Republic.

Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa ethnic labels in all programmes, and of avoiding any “negative news” (i.e. “sensitive and divisive”) that, though fact-founded, could fuel more animosity and violence, earned it accusations of maliciously hiding or negating the “truth”. To the best of my knowledge, the worst attack was made by Jean Musy, a Swiss journalist. In his articles, published in two Swiss weeklies, *L’Objectif* and *Gauchebdo*, in 1997, he accused the Swiss *Fondation Hirondelle* and its Radio Agatashya project of “escroquerie morale” (ethical deception) by which they “pretended to provide neutral and impartial information”. After two unsuccessful appeals, the defendant was finally sentenced (by the Swiss Federal Supreme Court) to two months’ imprisonment and a SFr.1,500 fine for defamation, in November 2000 (AGENCE TÉLÉGRAPHIQUE SUISSE, 2000).

The lesson from this otherwise too-often-heard criticism (of “political naiveté”, at best, and “political correctness” and “ethical deception”, at worst) and symbolic trial is that there is a lot of work remaining to be done to attain the quality and quantity of information and analyses which would improve the current situation. Indeed, even the most humanitarian news media can help deter violent social conflict and endemic crises only in contexts where “freedom from famine” (SEN, 1981), or any other preventable disasters, exists as a right upon which “political legitimacy is founded” (DE WAAL, 1996, p. 194). In other words, “the free press only works if those vulnerable to famine are considered full citizens of the country” (p. 195). In de Waal’s view, this right has to take the form of an anti-disaster “Social Contract” between citizens, political and social institutions, and international partners, be they inter-governmental organisations (IGOs), international NGOs or multinationals. As shown by the tragedies of Biafra (1968), Southern Sudan (1986-9), or Ethiopia (1982-4), or by the April-July 1994 Rwandan genocide that was perpetrated live on television, “Information about famine [or any other humanitarian crises] is not enough to ensure action; there has to be a political trigger for governments to act” (DE WAAL, 1996, p. 195). Nonetheless, more genuine concern, critical reflexivity, analytical lucidity, concerted pressure and well-thought partnership by news media, NGOs and academics can crucially contribute to the establishment and strengthening of this “Social Contract”. More appropriate approaches, strategies and mechanisms can help better use existing knowledge and experience for the promotion and defence of humanitarian values, ideas and projects. Only then can one avoid being rightly put in the category of “knowledgeable third-party bystanders to contemporary genocidal warfare” who should be held accountable for their action or inaction (VETLESEN, 2000).



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## **Victims and the Media in Divided Societies: Some Thoughts about the Northern Ireland Conflict**

Stephen Ryan

Everything that I most dislike about the business I am in was camped in one shouting, seething, self-regarding compost at the entrance to the air base —the hype and hysteria, the tyranny of rolling news, the deference to a distant newsroom, the live-shot lunacy, the inane exchanges with an anchorman called Mort... The electronic circus that came to town was reputed to have cost six million dollars. It left me thinking, what else might Tuzla... have done with that six million dollars (Martin BELL, 1996, p. 291, on US news coverage of the arrival of American troops in Bosnia).

The media is often an unheeded area of research in the study of divided societies.<sup>1</sup> This is certainly true of Northern Ireland, where it has been observed that the media “is one of the most neglected areas of study” (DUNN/O’MAOLAIN/McCLEAN, 1995, p. 261). This claim receives endorsement from ROLSTON and MILLER (1996, p. xv) who state that ‘the literature on the media and Northern Ireland was widely scattered and, furthermore, that there was in fact a surprisingly small amount of work in the area despite the length and intensity of the conflict’.

It is also very rarely that the literature on the media touches on the question of victimhood, which is also another widely ignored topic in conflict research. It is, therefore, encouraging that this seminar in Amsterdam has devoted a session to this issue. No definitive answers

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<sup>1</sup> Inevitably when talking about the media in general one has to make overgeneralisations. Of course there is good and bad journalism and there are crucial differences between the way that different newspapers, and newspapers and the broadcast media cover issues. Space, however, inhibits any serious discussion of these differences in this paper.

can be given in this paper about the relationship between these two under-researched topics. Instead it will make some observations and raise some questions about the media and victims, using Northern Ireland as a special reference point. In this rather impressionistic account three issues will receive particular attention: what is a victim; what status do victims deserve; and how can the media help to “unvictimise” the victims?

### **What is a victim?**

To begin with it is necessary to point out that victimhood can be a problematic and politicised concept, largely because of the way that victims are used by politicians and others to justify certain courses of action. It is a common characteristic of the media to portray a violent conflict in terms of victims and perpetrators, indeed, the media can play an important role in determining not just who are the victims, but also which victims are worthy of sympathy and which are not (“innocent” victims like the Kosovo Albanians and “guilty” victims like the Kosovo Serbs—a position no doubt reversed in the Serbian media)

Statistical analysis of the Northern Ireland conflict would allow us to engage in this sort of depiction of the conflict. From the work done by Marie SMYTH (2000) and her colleagues on the “costs of the Troubles” we learn that there were 3,601 deaths between 1969-98, that 54 % of these deaths were civilian, and that 89 of the deaths were children under the age of 15. Over 90 % of those killed were male. We also learn that 80 % of all deaths were caused by paramilitaries, and that 55.7 % were caused by Republican paramilitaries. In the Catholic community 47.6 % of deaths were caused by Loyalist paramilitaries and 17.2 % by the army (though it killed 30 % of Republican paramilitaries). However, 24.7 % of Catholics were killed by Republican paramilitaries (which was more than the combined total of the killings by the army and the RUC).

The evidence is out there, then, to construct a narrative about the Northern Ireland conflict in terms of victim and perpetrator. However, this would be problematic for one important reason. This is that those doing the killing probably think of themselves as victims as well. Republican perpetrators may regard themselves as oppressed and humiliated by four hundred years of British colonialism. Protestant perpetrators may believe that Irish irredentism threatens to destroy their way of life. One problem with this victim-perpetrator dichotomy, therefore, is that it tends to focus on cases of direct violence but tends

to omit any understanding of what GALTUNG (e.g. 1996) has termed "structural violence" (exploitation, marginalisation) and "cultural violence" (racism, sexism etc.) which may have led individuals to commit acts that have created more victims. In addition, some of those who kill might have been led to that course of action because they have had members of their own family killed. SMITH (2000, p. 134) quotes research by Colin Crawford that claims that 30 % of loyalist prisoners had "members of their family" killed by republican terrorists. VOLKAN (1997, p. 161) reports the findings of Katherine Kennedy, who interviewed 23 "state-labelled" terrorists in 1990 and found that "all of them had experienced traumas in their formative years". Some evidence, then, that not only does violence breed more violence, but victimhood breeds more victims. The step from victim to victimiser may be a very short one.

In the whole debate about victimhood we also need to beware least we create categories of victims in a manner that may not be in their long-term interests. It will be argued in the next section that victims seem to have a moral claim over us, the recognition of which might be part of the process of post-conflict peacebuilding. However, images of suffering and human degradation do not always produce empathy. There are other possible reactions to victims: pity, alienation, even revulsion. Consider the growth of hostility in many western European societies to refugees from the Balkans. Here the victims of violence have been re-categorised as problems in their new homes and they have become victims of another kind of prejudice. Was this made easier by the way that the groups that individuals are from were presented in the media in the first place? One authoritative study certainly alerts us to the undesirable effects of labelling people as victims. The Machel Report, sponsored by the UN, on "The impact of armed conflict on children" (par. 242 ) appeals to us not to treat young people "as problems or victims, but as key contributors in the planning and implementation of long-term solutions".<sup>2</sup> One should also note here the work of PRENDERGAST (1996, p.174). He has been critical of what he claims are western over-estimations of trauma in places such as Rwanda and Nicaragua, because NGOs and others have focused on post traumatic stress disorder responses by victims but have ignored other indications of resilience and coping. He continues "such an approach reinforces the passivity of the 'victim' and the knowledge of the 'expert'" (*ibid.*).

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the report can be downloaded from [www.unicef.org/graca/](http://www.unicef.org/graca/)

It seems undeniable that many Loyalists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland have a strong sense of victimisation that arises out of their culture and the general environment in which they live rather than any specific and personal experience of violence. Therefore, any attempt to restrict the definition of victim to those who have suffered violence directly is not going to facilitate our understanding of the conflict. We need a much broader definition of victimhood than the one traditionally used by the media.

### **What status should we accord to victims?**

It was George Orwell who stated that the history of wars is always written not just by the victors, but also by the survivors, implying that if those who did not survive were to have their say then the story might be told in a different way. In all violent conflict situations there are people who have been damaged either physically or psychologically through direct experience of violence, and the question is what sort of status should we accord to these victims? There is a sense in which the concept of victimhood seems to imply that victims have some moral claim over us, perhaps for no other reason than that they remind us of our toleration of, or indifference to, suffering. Being forced to face up to this neglect and indifference might be an important learning process for divided societies coming out of conflict, but does it mean that victims of direct violence should have a privileged voice in the debates about what a new society should look like?

Many who approach the problem of transformation in terms of changing the actors through reconciliation seem to take the view that there is wisdom in suffering. On the night of Martin Luther King's assassination and two weeks before his own murder, Robert Kennedy addressed a group of African-Americans on a street corner in Indianapolis. He told them: "in our sleep, pain which cannot forgive falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God" (SCHLESINGER Jr., 1978, p. 875). In the Irish context GALLAGHER and WORRALL (1982, p.3) regard reconciliation as something that comes from a higher synthesis made possible, in part, by a "common experience of suffering as a basis for common understanding".

One problem here is determining what the victims have to say, since in a divided society like Northern Ireland the victims speak with different voices. It has been suggested that there are nearly fifty victims' groups in the Province. Some of these are highly partisan and concentrate on one

type of victim. Groups such as HURT (Homes United by Republican Terror) or an umbrella body like Northern Ireland Terrorist Victims Together offer a voice to groups that are anti-Republican, whereas a bodies like Relatives for Justice or the Bloody Sunday Trust focus their work on the actions of the British State and its role in controversial incidents involving nationalist or republican deaths (SMYTH, 2000). We find little evidence here that victimhood will lead to the transformation of political conflict through forgiveness and a common experience of suffering as suggested by some of the reconciliation literature.

Another difficult question can be: to what extent should victims be allowed to veto actions that could result in "political progress". One example of this was the debate over how to treat leaders in the former Yugoslavia who were accused of war crimes and were also important partners in peace talks about the future of Bosnia. Here, it seems, at the time at least, priority was given to the talks rather than issues to do with international justice in relation to gross violations of human rights, though subsequently a tougher line has been taken against some of these figures. Another example can be taken from Northern Ireland. Here many victims or the relatives of victims of terrorist attacks (but by no means all) expressed opposition to the early release of paramilitary prisoners, who also received cash handouts provided by the British taxpayer. Many informed commentators argued that the release of prisoners, even those guilty of indiscriminate murder, was a necessary part of the peace process in that it made it more likely that the paramilitary organisations on both sides would sign up for a negotiated settlement. The release of prisoners did take place despite the anguish this caused to some in Northern Ireland.

So how seriously do we take the victim's perspective? In Northern Ireland, and elsewhere, there has certainly been a growing concern about victims in many conflict situations, even if this is not allowed to intrude too much on political talks. This growing concern is a welcome development in that it can help to empower victims and restore their humanity, dignity and well-being. It can also ensure that they are provided with economic reparations

As well as the potential benefits to the individual victims, another reason for taking victimhood seriously is that the trauma induced might actually perpetuate conflict. MACK (1990, p.126), for example, argues that victimisation can contribute to violence because it can be used to justify vengeful behaviour and locks communities into a pattern of "collective mutual victimisation" (Protestants and Catholics, Israelis and Palestinians, Hutu and Tutsi, Tamil and Sinhalese and so on). Victimisation can also reduce trust between the parties because victims often have

feelings of immobility, guilt, shame and fear. It is, therefore, important that steps are taken to break this cycle.

The Truth Commission would be an important tool for this work; the most notable, and arguably, the most successful example being the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, perhaps because it was inspired by the South African concept of “ubuntu” which emphasises restorative rather than retributational justice. Here the media played a significant role, since it is unlikely that it would have been nearly as effective if it had held its hearings in secret, as the National Party proposed in 1994. Northern Ireland has not gone down the Truth Commission road, perhaps because so few people seem to feel they have anything to say sorry for, but has adopted certain other mechanisms that may be worth mentioning:

- Monetary compensation. Over £1 billion has been paid to the victims of violence in Northern Ireland since 1969. This might help victims to meet some of their more pressing physical needs. However, it is unclear how this mechanism can meet the emotional needs of victims or the requirements that society as a whole “neutralise history”.
- Government sponsored inquiry into the situation of victims. In 1997 Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (former head of Northern Ireland’s civil service) was asked to investigate the situation of victims created as a consequence of the situation in Northern Ireland in the previous 30 years . His report, entitled “We will remember them”, argued that victims should be as well served in terms of rehabilitation and employment as people who were responsible for the attacks on them.<sup>3</sup> He also called for a review of the compensation scheme and suggested recognition of victims by way of memorial schemes (an extensive list of suggestions is contained in an appendix to the report) and the creation of a Memorial and Reconciliation Day. The report acted as a catalyst for the creation of a “Minister for victims” and a Victims Liaison Unit was also established. Education bursaries for children who had lost a parent during the conflict were set up and the “Touchstone Group” was formed as an umbrella organisation to be a more effective champion of victims.
- Investigations into specific incidents. The best known of these is the Bloody Sunday Tribunal, which has been convened to examine

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<sup>3</sup> The text of the report can be downloaded from [cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/victims.htm](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/victims.htm)



the shooting dead of 14 unarmed nationalist marchers during a civil rights march in Derry in 1972. This has had a somewhat divisive impact in the city, where Unionist spokespersons have condemned the millions of pounds that this Tribunal will cost and have called for other Tribunals to investigate Republican atrocities.

### **A more positive role for the media?**

Several of the studies of victimhood already mentioned in this essay warn us against easy optimism about the future. In her analysis of victimhood in Northern Ireland SMYTH (2000, p. 132) argues that a political culture "based on competing claims to victimhood is likely to support and legitimise violence, and unlikely to foster an atmosphere of political responsibility and maturity". Mack, through his work on the psychodynamics, of conflict has developed a term he has called the "egoism of victimisation" which refers to the incapacity of an ethno-national group to empathise with the suffering of another group. He claims that such groups "that have been traumatised by repeated suffering at the hands of other groups seem to have little capacity to grieve for the hurts of other peoples, or to take responsibility for the new victims created by their own warlike actions" (MACK, 1990, p. 125). This raises the interesting and crucial question whether the media can actually play a constructive role in breaking this destructive cycle through "unvictimising" those who think of themselves as victims. There are grounds for being sceptical about the capacity of the mainstream media to do this.

To begin with, the notion that the television media have tried to promote of their role in the conflict is that of detached commentator, reporting events and gathering views on them. The self-image is one of the independent and impartial observer (see, for example, FRANCIS, 1996). In a seminar on the media held in Derry several years ago Mary Holland argued that this might have led to one of the biggest failings of television during the Troubles —its unwillingness to become a medium through which one community could explain itself to the other. In other words, television's definition of its role as impartial reporter has been too "safe" and narrow.

In fact, however, the impartiality of the media may be something of a myth. Researchers interested in conflict often condemn it for its pro-state bias, its jingoism, its partisanship, its self-censorship, and its complicity (wittingly or unwittingly) as an agent of state propaganda.

CHOMSKY (e.g. 1997) has produced some well-known work on the role of the mainstream US media with particular reference to the way it is used to “manufacture consent” for US policy and the way that it acts as an agent of corporate power.

In Northern Ireland the idea of an independent and neutral media has been compromised through self-imposed censorship or through government-imposed restrictions. The best known example of the latter occurred in 1988 when the British government restricted interviews with eleven organisations in Ireland, though it did allow party political broadcasts by these organisations (MILLER, 1996). These organisations included Sinn Fein, a political party linked to the IRA, which represented between 10-15 % of the population in Northern Ireland and had democratically elected members on many local councils. This meant, for example, that interviews with Sinn Fein representatives had to be subtitled or dubbed with the voice of an actor. Broadcasters were also not allowed to transmit anything that might support, or solicit, or invite support for a listed organisation. This even led to the banning of a Pogues song about the Birmingham Six (maintaining the innocence of the six men from Northern Ireland wrongly imprisoned for their involvement in a bomb attack in Birmingham).

Self-censorship has been common throughout reporting of the Troubles, especially by the broadcast media. A comprehensive list of cases of censorship between 1959 and 1993 has been compiled by CURTIS (1996). One of the most celebrated of these cases was a programme that was due to be broadcast by the BBC in August 1985 entitled “Real lives: at the edge of the Union”. It was about the lives of two leading political figures in Derry, Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein and Gregory Campbell of the Protestant DUP. It was banned by the BBC’s Board of Governors, after strong pressure from the government, against the wishes of BBC executives and journalists (who called a 24 hour strike to protest the decision). It was eventually shown a few months later after some minor changes. The irony is that the two central figures involved are both now members of the Northern Ireland executive.

Often, far from being agents of conflict transformation, the media make a significant contribution to conflict formations through their role in the construction and reinforcement of identity. Here we can refer to the work of Benedict Anderson, who famously defined the nation as an “imagined community”. One of the things that helped to create the nation as a key reference point in the identity of so many people was the development of print capitalism. Anderson claims “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human

language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 46). We in the liberal west are rightly appalled by the way that the media were used to disseminate hatred in Rwanda in the prelude to the 1994 genocide. Yet is it not the case, as Anderson seems to claim, that a lot of the national media is either explicitly or implicitly implicated in the construction of an us/them view of the world?

As already indicated, the media often identify victims as those who have suffered as a result of direct violence. This is a problem identified by Ignatieff in a discussion of the ethics of television and its coverage of violent conflict. He points out that there is a strong criticism of media coverage that argues that

The shame of televised images of horror would lie not in what they show, but in what they suppress. The culture of the visual image... moralised the relation between viewer and sufferer as an eternal moment of empathy outside history. Television presents economic and political relations as human relations... [but] the charity unleashed by empathy is a form of forgetting, the reproduction of amnesia about the responsibility of the West for the causes of famine and war (IGNATIEFF, 1998, p.16).

This is not an argument that Ignatieff accepts since he believes that media coverage of famine and war in Africa has acted as a catalyst for the asking of questions about causes of such humanitarian disasters. Nonetheless, one could argue that this remains a telling criticism, especially about the way the media cover some violent conflicts. In fact, it is hard to disagree with SHAW (1996, p.181) that media attention when covering distant violence is "often brief, sporadic, narrowly victim-orientated and far too dependent on the availability of visual images... Despite global reach, the main media are still primarily Western and national organisations".

Of course one can overstate the criticisms of western media, which very often may be presenting a relatively accurate picture. Some of those who criticise western media are doing so as a way to criticise western policy, and their own analysis may not be objective or impartial either. Thus, claims that western media demonised Milosevic and other Serb leaders in the Bosnian conflict and had overstated Serb responsibility for the fighting were in reality a denial of atrocities and undervalued the suffering of Serb victims (see SHAW, 1996).

Given these criticisms about the way that the media covers violence and victims, is there anything one can say about how it could help

break the cycle of violence and reduce the number of victims that are created? Here we can mention briefly two useful contributions to thinking about this issue.

The first signpost arises out of the work of the American pragmatist philosopher, Richard Rorty. He can be placed in a tradition of thought that emphasises the power of intersubjective dialogue and the role of story telling/narrative in reducing hostility and cruelty between individuals and groups. Rorty rejects the correspondence theory of truth (i.e. the idea that there is a necessary link between the language we use and "reality"). Therefore, we should not try to resolve human problems by searching for a final vocabulary as a way of uncovering truth (a strategy found, most notably, in the work of Habermas). We should, instead, deal with the problem of cruelty through building solidarity. Rorty characterises this as the move away from rigid rationality towards flexible sentimentality. The way forward, then, is not to appeal to common humanity or common moral consciousness (the Kantian approach). Because all individual human natures are the result of a complex interplay of contingent factors there is no such thing as a fixed human nature. Therefore, the key question should be not who we are but what can we make of ourselves.

However, the question remains, how do we operationalise Rorty's insights? In his own work the philosopher concentrates on novels as a way of promoting the sentimental connection, especially books "about the ways in which particular sorts of people are cruel to other particular sorts of people" and which "show how our attempts at autonomy, our private obsessions with the achievement of a certain sort of perfection, may make us oblivious to the pain and humiliation we are causing" (RORTY, 1989, p. 141). Yet this seems too narrow a strategy. Rather we should be thinking about how to create more of what Elise Boulding has termed "learning sites". My own personal view is that in cases of intercommunal conflict these should be concentrated on the main agents of cultural reproduction in divided societies: that is, the schools, the family, the churches, the arts and, of course, the media. But what should the media do to become an effective intercommunal learning site? This leads us on to a second interesting contribution.

For some years now GALTUNG (e.g. 1998) has been championing the cause of peace journalism. Galtung has developed this concept as a way of countering the negative impact of more conventional war journalism, which he believes suffers from a number of defects. Television, in particular, seems obsessed with images of destruction; what has been referred to as "war pornography". It is zero-sum in its thinking, adopts an us/them perspective, and dehumanises the enemy. It is also

reactive, elite orientated, and shows little interest in the post-violence stage. Peace journalism would aim to balance some of these defects. It would be focused on conflict transformation, truth orientated, proactive (with a preventive role), humanising, people-orientated, and focused on structures and cultures. One element might be the sort of intersubjective, sentimental education championed by Rorty.

Finally, if we are to visualise the media as a tool for conflict transformation and peacebuilding, then we probably also need a very broad definition of what the media are. Such a definition should include not just television news and documentaries and newspaper journalism. It could also comprise peace museums, drama groups, the Internet, children's television programmes, video diaries, and photography. All of these could provide victims with a voice and the rest of us with a conscience. IGNATIEFF (1998, p. 23) believes this is where the media can retain or recover a conscience. He wants journalists "to pay attention to the victims, rather than the pieties of political rhetoric; to refuse to make a distinction between good corpses and bad ones; and to be a witness, a bearer of bad tidings to the watching conscience of the world."

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## Drugs and Drugs Policies at the Roots of Conflicts

Virginia Montañés<sup>1</sup>

An issue that is increasingly becoming a root cause of some current and potential armed and political conflicts is the production and trade of prohibited drugs and the international and national policies that try to control this phenomenon. Burma, Afghanistan and Colombia —major producing countries— have been involved in armed conflicts for years. The Alto Huallaga Valley in Peru, the Chapare area in Bolivia, the border areas in Laos, Vietnam and Burma are all areas with social and economic instability, increased by social exclusion, the violation of human rights and the development of illegal activities.

In this volume, Mariano Aguirre has described the characteristics of current armed conflicts. One of the trends he mentioned is the primacy of illegal economies over the legal economies. In some of the current conflicts, the drugs economy—in which almost all the armed actors are involved—is a part of the illegal economic structure fuelling the armed conflict.

Illegal economies find a favourable environment in countries where the state is fragile or non-existent, as in most of those involved in armed conflicts. In some of the countries experiencing the drugs phenomenon, there are areas where the state does not have control or is involved in the criminalisation and corruption mentioned by Aguirre. In some cases, some of the fighting factions gain control of part of the state's structure. This means not only control of power, but also control of social and public services and the management of daily life.

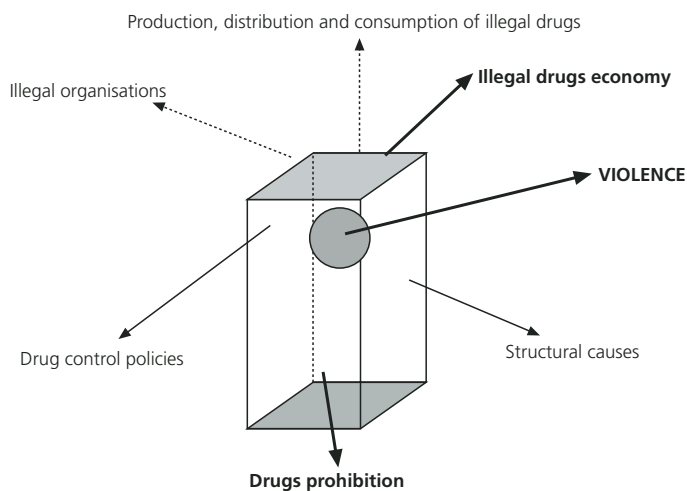
At the same time, the militarisation of the War on Drugs in developing countries has contributed to the intensification of conflicts

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<sup>1</sup> The author wants to acknowledge the contributions of Sandra Gil, Tom Blickman and Anabel Torres to this text.

that already existed and it has increased the risk that potential conflicts become real conflicts, as has been the case of Bolivia. On the other hand, the current drug control policies do not provide feasible alternatives to transform the illegal economy into a legal economy.

The geometrical figure of a prism illustrates the global drugs phenomenon. The illegal drugs economy and the prohibition of drugs constitute the bases of the prism. The lateral sides of the figure represent illegal organisations; the different phases of production, distribution and consumption of illegal drugs; the drugs control policies designed and executed at the national and international level; and the structural causes that force millions of people to risk their lives or their freedom by adopting an illegal, and consequently conflictive, way of living. The core of the prism represents the violence generated by both drug control policies and drug trafficking and consumption.



### Global Drugs Phenomenon

In Colombia, for example, the government is implementing *Plan Colombia*, which includes an important anti-drugs aid package from the United States to support the Plan's military strategy. The fight against drug trafficking through fumigation of the illicit crops with chemical herbicides is the central point of this Plan. The use of fumigation



strategies sets in motion a vicious circle. Aerial fumigation causes chemical pollution affecting humans, animals and vegetation and destroys the livelihood of peasants and indigenous communities, forcing these groups to migrate deeper into the rainforest. This displacement accelerates the pace of deforestation where slash and burned plots are planted with illicit coca or poppy crops replacing those previously fumigated. The new plots are eventually fumigated and the cycle starts over again exacerbating the current armed conflict.

In Bolivia, the US-sponsored militarised eradication campaign, *Plan Dignidad*, implemented in 1998, has succeeded in drastically reducing coca cultivation. But the failure of the programme to address poverty and inequality at the root of drug production has exacerbated Bolivia's economic crisis, and sparked great social tension. The enormous reduction of coca hectares has only been possible via massive police and military interventions in Chapare, daily human rights abuses, dead and injured people, criminalisation of the peasants and destruction of the basis for negotiation with the associations of producers. The compensation for voluntary eradication has had no effect. This has generated a polarisation of the conflict.

## **The role of the media**

The mass media play an extremely important role in transmitting ideologies, opinions and attitudes to the population as a whole. As most people acquire information from them, the media have a crucial impact in the construction of collective images. This is even more significant when the media are the only possible source of information, as is the case with the global drugs phenomenon.

Producing information means reconstructing reality, because it entails cutting, selecting, excluding and summarising it. At the moment of deciding what is news and what is not, the present is being constructed in a certain way. Several factors influence this process, from the editorial line of the newspaper to the background of the journalist writing the story.

The event, as newsworthy matter, is a media product. The media build social reality when they inform us about it. This means not only the transmission of hegemonic views, but also the consolidation of certain interpretative structures. The media not only pass on what people should think, but also how they should do so.

The media guide the conduct of the institutional and non-institutional actors. Social unrest, as any kind of newsworthy phenomenon, begins to

take shape in the collective imagination when it appears in the media. And the social perception created is going to linger despite subsequent corrections. The first interpretation can activate prejudices and reinforce them.

When disadvantaged populations, such as peasants, refugees or migrant communities, appear in the press, two factors contribute to the reinforcement of a series of prejudices: on the one hand, they are not involved in the production process of the information, so they cannot control what is and is not said about them. On the other hand, they usually make the news due to exceptional incidents: tragedy, outbreaks of violence, crime, police operations.

This is how the stigmatisation of certain sectors of the population or even entire communities is shaped. This stigmatisation results in social alarm at events that would not be perceived as a danger or problem if they were to occur in other spheres.

Therefore, a collective perception arises that the presence of this people is a major source of insecurity. Consequently, measures that intensify social control are demanded, such as raids, reports and arrests. These measures strengthen the criminal image. The "reality effect" produced by the simplistic discussions and the implementation of measures of prevention and repression reinforces the common criminalising belief. It is a circular process in which the media play a strategic role.

## **European press and drugs issues**

During the year 2000, the network of NGOs, European NGO Council on Drugs and Development (ENCOD), carried out a study on how the global drugs phenomenon is covered by the European press, entitled *The good, the bad and the real truth* (ENCOD/Narcomafie, Torino 2000). The aim of the research was to clarify the image that is created in the media and to analyse in particular how this image leads to the public perception of the global drugs issue, its underlying causes and, eventually, the policies that could contribute to improving the situation. The Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action (IECAH) and the Transnational Institute (TNI), as members of ENCOD, actively participated in the research. Amongst its conclusions are the following:

- There is a clear predominance of solely institutional sources in the articles: they appear in seven out of ten articles on this issue (70 % of the articles), whereas both types of sources are used in only 15 %. The European media tend to use institutional sources

almost without questioning the veracity of official declarations or the effectiveness of the strategies they expound. Events and interpretations are reported without contrasting the official version with those of independent observers or representatives of civil society in the involved region.

- The European media interpret the international drugs issue as a clash between forces, the so-called War on Drugs. On the one hand there are those representing the police, legal institutions and governments (of developed countries) and on the other there are drugs traffickers, insurgent groups involved in the drugs trade, corrupt governments in the developing countries, (illegal) immigrants smuggling drugs and, to a minor extent, peasant farmers involved in drugs production. To present the whole situation as a military conflict supports the call for a military response.
- The structural causes for drugs production and trade in developing countries, the social, economic and cultural context of this phenomenon and the possibility of non-repressive measures are hardly dealt with in the European press. Nor are the political and economic interests of developed countries in maintaining the drugs industry referred to, as for instance the role of Western banks in money laundering operations.

As we said before, the presentation of a biased picture of reality, even if subsequently denied or corrected, reinforces superficial interpretations and strengthens prejudices. The broader public, whose awareness of the situation in developing countries is largely dependent on newspapers, radio and television, is usually confronted with this issue only when certain important events take place (such as international seizures, violent conflicts, arrests of important drugs traffickers, etc.). The reporting of these events solely from an institutional point of view, with an emphasis on the responsibility of non-European criminal groups allied with guerrilla movements and corrupt governments, easily leads to the stigmatisation of entire countries or communities. The next step is the perception of their population as the main source of insecurity, and their consequent criminalisation.

## **NGOs and the media**

NGOs can play an important role as a source of information for journalists and policy-makers but they tend to be ignored by the media.

The results of the ENCOD research show what a low profile the NGO community has in the media.

This is not just a question of journalists not resorting to NGOs, but has a lot to do with the fact that NGOs themselves do not make constant and conscientious efforts to supply the information in a more effective manner. Communication between NGOs and the media is not always fluid. Sometimes organisations lack a good media strategy or simply do not take into account the importance of being present in the press.

This is unfortunate because the information that the media may obtain from NGOs can provide an alternative view and help to challenge institutional information. Ultimately this would help the media to provide a fuller and more objective view of "reality".

With the goal of improving our presence in the international press, the Transnational Institute has evaluated the media strategy of one of the current campaigns, the Campaign to Stop the Chemical and Biological War on Drugs, ran by TNI and Acción Andina (AA).

TNI's Drugs and Democracy Programme is a joint project of TNI, Acción Andina (AA, a platform of non-governmental organisations and individuals in the Andes) and Acción Sur (a recently established similar network for the Mercosur countries, co-ordinated from Argentina), focused on the socio-economic and political impact of the illicit drugs economy and present anti-drugs policies. The aim of the programme is to stimulate a re-assessment of conventional repressive policy approaches and propose policies based on principles consistent with a commitment to reduction of harm, fair trade, development, democracy, human rights and conflict prevention.

The purpose of the campaign is to stop the aerial fumigation of illicit crops and the introduction of biological control agents in the War on Drugs. In Colombia, the fumigation of coca and opium poppy fields with chemical herbicides and the threat of introducing a biological eradication agent (a coca-killing fungus) in these areas have been major obstacles to the peace negotiations. In January 2001 Roberta Cowan, former TNI Communications Coordinator, drafted a report on the media strategy during the course of the campaign. The main weakness of the strategy can be summarised in three words: lack of resources. This leads to:

- A passive media strategy, targeting only some reporters actively (although the reporters attending TNI/AA events tend to write sympathetic pieces and repeatedly call on the authors and research for evidence to back up their arguments);

- Campaign material that is not newsworthy. The campaign material is based on in-depth analysis of various issues rather than on concise news information.
- Not enough integration between the media and the campaign's policy strategies.

The main success of the strategy has been that the campaign has become a key source of information for a core group of journalists with whom we have good contact. The campaign is at the point where journalists come to us for information. TNI/AA material and contacts are considered "experts" in the areas of environmental science, sociology and policy, rather than campaigning activists.

We have talked about the role of NGOs as a source of information, and the role of the media in disseminating it, but the media also play an important role as a source of information for many NGOs. For many NGOs and researchers active in the field the only way of getting information somehow related to their work is through the media.

The better the communication between the media and NGOs, the better the information published on the issues that we are interested in will be.

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## **The International Media and the Lebanese Hezbollah in the Wake of the September 11 Attacks: Reporting or Supporting a Third Party?**

Victoria Firmo-Fontan & Dominic Murray

Two terrorists saying hello

—el salamun alaykoun

—wa alaykoun el salam warahmat allah wa barakatahoum

(SALEH, 2001)<sup>1</sup>

Published in an anthology of poems before the September 11 events, this quotation highlights the sense of injustice that Lebanese people feel when confronted by international news reports on their country. As depicted in the 1998 film *West Beirut*, Lebanon still seems to be perceived by the rest of the world as a breeding ground for terrorists and hashish. The presence of two Lebanese citizens in the list of September 11 hijackers, as well as the recent US demand for the freezing of Hezbollah's assets, have plunged the country into yet another crisis. Will the US retaliate over the issue, and if so, how much will the country's reconstruction programme suffer?

In an era which has seen a fast-food type media industry develop, the object of this paper is to demonstrate how academia could contribute to break through the stereotypes and simplifications often found in snapshot media reporting. While it will not put the media coverage of the Middle East on trial, this exercise will aim to assess its impact and also to deepen the understanding of one chosen case study: the Lebanese Hezbollah. Moreover, in the present context of a global war against terrorism, this paper will explore how unscrupulous governments could use the western media to further a foreign policy which they cannot pursue overtly.

For a new generation of "parachuted" journalists, compiling succinct reports on a conflict whose origins can lie in the structural dynamics of a given area, is a Herculean task. The requirements of a

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<sup>1</sup> Two terrorists saying hello

—may God's peace be with you

—peace be upon you, may you have God's mercy and benefit from his good giving

fast changing media industry, relying increasingly on bearing witness to an event rather than promoting a better understanding of it, can ultimately distort reality. In relation to these issues, the following question can be asked: How much harm can fast-food-type reporting do in an already sensitive situation?

The case of Lebanon seems an appropriate context to study these questions. When asked about the Lebanese conflict in general, most people in Ireland would immediately think about peacekeeping, and then about an everlasting low intensity conflict with Israel. When asked about the nature of the conflict, those more “aware” of, or interested in, the details would almost invariably answer that Israel was retaliating against a terrorist aggression of some sort, promoted by the terrorist group Hezbollah. Depending on where the question was asked, “a breeding ground for terrorism and drugs” is almost the unanimous answer given when asked to describe the country. This paper will build its argumentation on the general public’s perception of Lebanon, and of Hezbollah as a terrorist group, as a result of the media coverage of the region. The harmful effect of snapshot reporting can be of many kinds. First and foremost, in the case of Lebanon, it can provide a false picture of a country trying to emerge from seventeen years of a civil war, a war fuelled not so much by ancient hatred as the general public is encouraged to believe, but rather, as will be demonstrated below, by foreign interference. For a country that was once called the “Switzerland of the Middle East”, Lebanon is finding it difficult to attract foreign investments to rebuild its economy and infrastructure. Moreover, when trust is finally given, foreign “retaliation” or “aggression”, depending on who is reporting it, can still cause investments to be frozen or brought to a halt (SHORT, November 2001). Western coverage of the Israeli “Operation Grapes of Wrath”, in 1996, illustrates this issue.

At that time, the two newly built power stations and motorway in South Lebanon were respectively destroyed and heavily damaged by Israeli strikes (JABER, 1997). Western coverage of the “operation” finally reached a sustained level after the intentional<sup>2</sup> Israeli shelling of a UN compound in Qana, South Lebanon, killing 109 Lebanese refugees. Reports following the massacre emphasised that Israel had retaliated to a terrorist attack on Israeli territory. In the UK, for instance, media coverage of the events included a press conference by the

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<sup>2</sup> While described by Israel as a mistake, a UN investigation carried out in the wake of the shelling concluded that it was “unlikely” that the IDF had hit the base by mistake (JABER, 1997).



Minister of Defence, Michael Portillo, on the occasion of a visit to Israel. He condemned "terrorist operations that count upon a human shield provided by the local civilian populations" and praised the proportionate measures taken by Israel to defend its territorial integrity (JABER, 1997, p. 190). There is no doubt that such unquestioning and simplified reporting led to a slow-down in foreign investments in Lebanon. The Manichean "human shield" image had been used once more to dismiss any kind of condemnation of the attacks before it could even be formulated, to the despair of the Lebanese population. In addition, the image of Hezbollah that was presented was one of terrorists bent on slaughter as their path to martyrdom. A more insightful explanation of the Qana carnage would refer to the cycle of violence which preceded it: 231 Israeli breaches of truce between 1993 and 1996, provoking Hezbollah retaliation on thirteen occasions, including the Katyusha strike on the Israeli border immediately before Qana. In this light, one can see that the rhetoric of "retaliation against terrorism" has to be understood and reported with extreme caution, for both UN military and Western diplomatic sources have confirmed Hezbollah's version of events (JABER, 1997).

The narrative of ancient atavistic nationalist/religious hatred leading to terrorism has been vividly used by the media when reporting from the field, and is a direct result of the need for short and easily understood black-and-white news items. In drawing the reader's attention to imperfect reporting, one does not necessarily mean to criticise the professionalism of the media industry. The point is that one is assessing a service industry as opposed to an independent organisation. While, admittedly, the public's attention span may be short and may require as concise a report as possible, the fact that the media delivers a service to consumers makes it an object of capitalism, geared principally to consumer demand.

Another effect that snapshot reporting has had on Lebanon, concerns the relentless foreign intervention in its internal political affairs. Reporting on the Lebanese conflict as an expression of ancient hatred is more significant than ever as we go to press. Part of the problem that Lebanon is facing today stems from the fact that numerous interested parties have been able to play a role in its internal Lebanese politics, and this as early as the onset of the civil war in 1975. The United States, Syria, Israel and France were responsible for supplying weapons and for supporting the different factions during the civil war. A clear example of this is provided by the infamous Sabra and Shatila massacre, where following the withdrawal of PLO forces brokered by the US, the Israeli government "allowed" the Lebanese

Forces, a coalition of Christian Lebanese militias, to enter Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and kill 1,800 defenceless civilians. An internal enquiry at the time found the then Israeli Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon, indirectly responsible. Sharon's election as Israeli Prime Minister in February 2001 once again sparked fears among the Lebanese Muslim population. Since then, international and local news agencies have made the most of this fear. An article published by the Lebanese-based *Daily Star* illustrates the process of describing and capitalising on Muslim/Christian polarisation. In an article meant to expose the continuing post-war political and ethnic tensions in Beirut, BLANFORD (April 2001) interviewed a sixteen-year-old named Adib and Milad, a former Lebanese Forces militiaman:

[Adib] "I have always had Muslim friends but now I don't speak to them because they cause the problems...If I see Muslims in the street, I will do nothing. But if they insult my religion, I will beat them...All the young men around here are ready for war. They are all very excited..." [Milad] "Imagine a garden you have to keep clean. Every day you tidy and clean this garden. Then in the autumn, the leaves fall and you have to start again. Lebanon is like this, every 20 years or so it needs a good cleaning."

The impact of Blanford's article is difficult to measure, but the point to emphasise here is the effect it could have on a fragile peace and on group polarisation. One has to question the editorial decision to publish such a potentially inflammatory article. Post-war Lebanon is currently in a state of negative peace, where one has to take taxis from two different services to cross Beirut's ethnically divided districts. It is not too difficult to predict what a former Christian militiaman and a sixteen-year-old living in a politically polarised part of Beirut might have to say about the religious "other" when interviewed. While it remains necessary to acknowledge the ills of a society, what is questionable here is the use of stereotypes to reinforce a preconceived idea. Another question that comes to mind when reading this kind of article concerns the provenance of this kind of polarised material, for any researcher living in Lebanon would have reservations about such a representation. The recent merging of the *Daily Star* with the *International Herald Tribune* could bear on this question, whereby the local partner of a Western newspaper could be seeking to meet the expectations of a newly enlarged public.

Directly linked to black-and-white journalism are rumours, proven to have been instrumental in the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war (see TAR KOVACS, 1998). Constant rumours of violence from 1975 to

1977 have been exposed as a means of understanding the precipitation of the country into armed conflict. Directly preceding the conflict, rumours of fear have been identified, intensifying group polarisation. Two types of rumours have been exposed: rumours of assault and rumours of ruthlessness. After being identified and polarised, the different groups may start to perceive themselves as being opposed to a potentially dangerous enemy:

“At the beginning of the war, we were told that the Palestinians would come and slaughter us, so we left... We were constantly told that the Palestinians would invade Ashrafieh [a Christian district of East Beirut]...” “There were a lot of rumours about the Phalangists the main Maronite Christian militia also known as Ketaeb; at one stage, horn honking in the street would mean that the Ketaeb was on its way to slaughter us...” “After Black Saturday the systematic Ketaeb massacre of Muslims, it was said that the Palestinians would get into East Beirut to massacre the Christians, many fled” (TAR KOVACS, 1998, pp. 57-58).<sup>3</sup>

After the first massacres were committed, and the fears of each side had been confirmed, rumours related to the ruthlessness of the enemy started to spread. This is a clear case of self-fulfilling prophecy:

“Palestinian boys start intensive military training as early as the age of seven years old, while our youngsters go to school or attend University...” “Ketaeb fighters train in pools of blood in order to take any sense of humanity and compassion out of them” (TAR KOVACS, 1998, respectively p. 61 and p. 79).

These rumours of fear apparent at the onset of the war, were soon replaced by rumours of inhumanity, involving torture, abductions, sexual mutilation and dismemberment. This ultimate dimension of horror had the effect of polarising the different groups to the utmost, thus making any future reconciliation process extremely difficult.

Hasty and partial reporting which relies on accounts such as the above can have a harmful effect on a country and its people, and can eventually help precipitate a country into renewed civil strife. The next section will attempt to show how academia could help prevent similar occurrences from happening again.

Field expertise and analysis could provide a much needed safeguard against the harmful errors of snapshot reporting. In the wake of the

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<sup>3</sup> Although these rumours refer exclusively to the Palestinians, the Palestinians were considered to be the head of a Palestino-Progressist force, including a coalition of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims and Druze forces, formed to defeat the Maronite Christians.

September 11 events, we can show how academia could assist the media and the general public to question their government's foreign policy, through an alternative account of the activities of the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Whether dismissed as a terrorist group, or labelled an Islamic fundamentalist group, Hezbollah finds itself vilified by the Western media on a daily basis. Few journalists have reported the words of French President Jacques Chirac, who, when addressing the Lebanese Parliament in 1993, compared Hezbollah to the French *Résistance* that fought the German occupation during World War Two. In justice to Hezbollah, not one drop of blood was shed in South Lebanon after its liberation from Israeli occupation in May 2000. The slogan "One hand resists, the other rebuilds" can be an alternative way of looking at Hezbollah, literally Party of God, for it is composed of several associations geared towards alleviating socio-economic differences and educating a sector of the Lebanese population traditionally ignored by the Lebanese state. Its women's section is a prime example of how the organisation helps by empowering the Lebanese population at its grassroots. Founded on the belief that woman is the bearer of future generations, the women's section focuses on the development and enhancement of women's abilities to live a fulfilled and rewarding life as integrated members of their community. While abiding by the rules of Islam, the women's section does encourage women's empowerment through education, social interaction and culture. Its activities vary from lectures on health, environment and nutritional issues, to computer classes or sex education for teenage girls. In the summer, it also organises camps and sporting activities for daughters of the most destitute families. Critics might dismiss the women's section's activities as brainwashing or preaching to the already converted, but as a non-veiled and non-Muslim observer, I would emphasise firstly that I was always warmly welcomed to attend their meetings and activities, and secondly that not only veiled women could attend their gatherings.

The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Jihad al-Binaa is another example of Hezbollah's development concern. Dedicated to rebuilding infrastructures and private houses destroyed as a result of Israeli bombardments at the height of the occupation, it is now mostly concentrated on sustainable agricultural development in the most deprived regions of Lebanon. Its two centres for agricultural development, in Baalbeck and Hermel, attract farmers interested in enhancing and developing their production range, or finding an alternative to drug manufacturing. They provide services ranging from training, the analysis of soils and water, the artificial insemination of livestock and

meteorological data. Finally, the Mou'assassat a-Shahid, or Martyrs' Foundation, looks after the families of the fighters who died in acts of resistance or who are still detained by Israel. Hundreds of families receive substantial financial help that amounts to \$1,500 per child per month. In order to provide decent living conditions for martyrs' wives and children, widows are given their own house by the organisation. These accounts, derived from participant observation of the Hezbollah apparatus, provide an alternative to the Manichean account that can be found in the Western media.

Since the September 11 events, the adding of Hezbollah to the US government's terrorist list is justified for the Western media by its role during the 1980s, in the kidnappings, plane hijackings and the bombing of a US Marine barracks and the US embassy in Beirut. As Peace Studies academics, the last thing we should do is justify these killings. However, if we consider that they took place during a period of war, a comparison with the activities of the IRA in Britain may show the issue in a different light. The Western media seems to be unanimous in acknowledging that the success of the Good Friday Agreement derives from President Clinton's invitation of Jerry Adams, a former IRA member, to the US.<sup>4</sup> While this initiative was criticised by the British press at the time, it seems to be accepted now that Mr Adams is no longer an active member of the organisation, and that in order to achieve sustainable peace, his past should be put aside. The same understanding of Hezbollah could well be applied, as since 1992, the Party has been engaged in a redefinition process, building a sensible and clear political programme that culminated in the election of eight of its members to the Lebanese Parliament. Could it be that the recent distinction that the British government has made between the terrorist and the political wings of the IRA could be applied to Hezbollah (KAWAS/FLEIHAN, November 2001)? Why should such a distinction be made, when a general perception could be that the military wing of the Party derives directly from a 22-year occupation of Lebanese territory by Israel, involving the systematic imprisonment, torture and killing of civilians who refuse to collaborate with the occupier?

The role that academia could be given, in providing an alternative vision to what the news media has to offer us, should not be seen as a way of dismissing the media's valuable service, but as a way of offering the public a choice and more importantly a voice. While breaking though harmful stereotypes could be the contribution that academia

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<sup>4</sup> Again, this "consensus" among the international media lacks insight and accuracy, as the matter is more complicated than it looks.

has to offer the media industry, the industry could also offer academia its most valuable field experience. As there seems to be a dangerous gap between conceptualising an event and witnessing it, leading eventually to misinformation, a possible solution could be a symbiotic partnership between academia and the media industry, which would allow taxpayers to exercise their right to challenge their government's foreign policy. In the wake of the September 11 events, the general public in the West should more than ever question their governments, and expressly demand answers for what has happened. For the question is not only who is to blame for the atrocities, but also why and how were they allowed to happen. When raised by certain journalists, these questions are usually dismissed as just being sympathetic towards the al-Qaeda network, as finding excuses. An early expression of this can be found in Middle East reporting, where "the abuse being directed at anyone who dares to criticise Israel is reaching McCarthyite proportions" (FISK, December 2000). More than ever, the general public should question government's explanation of the origins of attacks and justification of their current policy against global terrorism, for it seems to go beyond the limits of a Manichean battle of good against evil. As the atrocities committed by the Northern Alliance under our "good" name gradually undermine the principal aim of a campaign for "civilisation" and "democracy", the Western media seldom challenges US policy in the Middle East and its use of the campaign to settle old scores (FISK, 25 September 2001; 14 November 2001). More disturbingly, the Western media's coverage of the current "war" against terrorism can even be qualified as unethical, as the words of CNN Chairman Walter Isaacson demonstrate:

"It seems perverse to focus too much on the casualties or hardship in Afghanistan...we must talk about how the Taliban are using civilian shields and how the Taliban have harboured the terrorist responsible for killing close up to 5,000 innocent people" (FISK, 8 November 2001).

The actions of the Northern Alliance may seem all too reminiscent of past US foreign policy backing brutal regimes, and it seems a pity that news reports are not offering an alternative view on the subject.

In an ideal democratic world, the setting up of a symbiotic consultancy relationship between the media and academia would be a step towards giving the general public the choice to affect foreign policy. The question is, however: Does the public want, or even care to know about the facts? Will it insist on exercising its legitimate right to hold Western governments accountable for the actions taken in its

name? The recurring answer provided by the defenders of fast-food-type media reporting is no, the public does not care, does not need and does not want to be given the choice. I strongly disagree, as such an argument could also be used against universal suffrage and is an insult to human intelligence.

Precautions should be taken when absorbing the media coverage of the Lebanese Hezbollah and its recent adding to the ranks of global terrorism. "Fanatics driving trucks" is the defamatory term used in the BBC2 programme War Zone (23.20 on 19 November 2001) to qualify the organisation. A legitimate question arises from a researcher who spent weeks investigating their ranks: has the BBC lost its soul to Western foreign policy?

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## **From Lara Croft to the Kosovo Girl: Identity, Counterculture, and the Role of the Internet in Serbia during the Kosovo Conflict**

Robert C. Hudson

The Internet is an instrument of globalisation, which employs English as its main medium for communication and expression. By accessing the Internet any individual, identity group or counterculture may be empowered, not only because the Internet affords them the opportunity of voicing their own ideas and aspirations, but also because individuals and groups have, with some notable exceptions (mainly those disseminating child pornography), generally been able to escape from the censure of state enforcement agencies; something which the conventional media such as radio, newspapers or television does not normally allow.

In *Postmodern war: the new politics of conflict*, Chris HABLES GRAY (1997) has shown how from the Gulf War in 1991 to the wars of secession in the so-called "former" Yugoslavia (1991-1995), computerisation and related scientific advances have brought about a revolution in warfare. Although he concentrates on the effects of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), in the areas of computer technology and the potential of "cyber war" on the United States Industrial Military Complex, Hables Gray also demonstrates remarkable insights into the role of Internet communications across borders, particularly in time of conflict. Amidst his analysis of the impact of "smart weapons", the concept of "bloodless combat" and "cyber war", Hables Gray considers the nature and growing importance of the Internet in both giving a voice to and empowering any counter cultural group in times of tension and violent conflict. According to Hables Gray: "The global increase in human communication has fundamentally changed both the nature of land conflicts as well as the potentialities for peace," and through the growth of international networking, "the internationalization of human culture" is producing

many important effects, from multinational companies —resistant as never before to the powers of nation-states— to the growth of what the Zapatistas call “international civil society”. He takes the Chiapas/Zapatistas as his model of the empowerment of the counterculture through the Internet, adding:

Zapatista communiqués flash around the world on the Internet propelled by an electronic alliance of human rights and solidarity groups, appearing in Mexican newspapers and on hundreds of thousands of personal computers within hours of their release. The Zapatistas are very conscious users of “counter information”, mainly distributed through the Internet (HABLES GRAY, 1997, p. 5).

By using the Internet in this manner to spread “counter information” a counterculture can reach beyond the frontiers of a nation state in a bid to build international solidarity. What has proven to be so effective for the Zapatistas, can also work for other countercultures. The aim of this chapter is to show how this proved to be the case for the Serbian counterculture during the Kosovo conflict in 1999.

During the 1990s, a considerable counterculture arose in Serbia that was to play an influential role in the criticism and questioning of the domestic political scene. This counterculture was made up of loosely related organisations, networks, communes, music and drugs scenes, centred on the students and young intellectual elites of Belgrade, Novi-Sad and other urban centres in Yugoslavia. This Serbian counterculture voiced its criticism of the raft of secessionist and ethnic conflicts that were to afflict Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s, exacerbated by foreign sanctions and a concomitant growth in mafia-led violence that fed on the endemic corruption, cronyism and anti-democratic nature of the Milošević regime. Various groups, such as the anti-war circles, OTPOR, Studio B92 and the less well-known Studio B radio station led campaigns against Slobodan Milošević, as witnessed by the whistling revolution of the winter of 1996-7 and the OTPOR-led campaign which resulted in Milošević’s ousting from power in November 2000. All of these events coincided with the rapid growth of the Internet as a major means of communication in the second half of the 1990s. As early as 1995, the radio station Studio B was communicating directly with the international community through its web-site, which is still operating; and it soon became clear to all that the Internet had great potential as a tool that could evade censorship, as was first noted during the Whistling Revolution. If the Internet served as an important instrument of the Yugoslav counterculture in domestic politics, then it would certainly prove to be of great use to those same individuals and

groups on the international scene, especially during the conflict over Kosovo.

From the early 1990s the young, educated élites of the western Balkans had been using the Internet and furthermore, they had been speaking and operating in English when communicating with the outside world. It is my belief that this young élite was able to both criticise the Milošević regime and also reaffirm Serbian cultural identity during a time of crisis, when they felt betrayed by the West. This élite was therefore fulfilling one of the classic roles of the intellectual, as defined by Anthony SMITH (1991) and the late Ernest GELLNER (1983), which is to play a major part in the creation, development and affirmation of national identity, whether this be in the period of nation-state building in the mid-to-late nineteenth century or more recently in the last decade of the twentieth century and at the dawn of a new millennium. Contiguously, this educated élite had also been criticising the Milošević regime throughout the 1990s. In so many cases, these individuals had also served as *les chiens de garde* (watchdogs) to paraphrase Paul Nizan (1932), in his evocation of the role of intellectuals in the France of his own day, by commenting upon, criticising and watching over the society in which they live.

A model of the different platforms used by the intellectuals in expressing their ideas was provided by the French writer and Marxist intellectual, Régis DEBRAY (1981), in *Teachers, writers, celebrities (Le Pouvoir intellectuel)*, in which he described three ages in the historical development of intellectuals in France. According to Debray, in the 1880s, the powerhouse of intellectual activity had been the University. This lasted until the 1930s and 1940s, when intellectual reviews and journals, such as Emmanuel Mounier's *Esprit* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps modernes*, both still publishing, took the centre stage until the 1960s; this was then followed by the period of television, when intellectuals became effective media stars, disseminating their ideas on programmes such as *Apostrophes* and more recently *Bouillon de culture*. What went for France, has been reflected elsewhere. For example, a similar format could be applied to the United States, with emphasis being placed upon the Ivy League universities and upon intellectual journals such as *Partisan Review*. The British experience, whilst falling back upon its academic traditions, differs only in that more emphasis has been placed upon the role of the radio, especially the BBC Home Service, renamed BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, in the 1960s. But essentially, the pattern remains the same.

SMITH (1991) and GELLNER (1983) have both analysed the role of the intellectual as a national awakener. Smith has described a longer

process than Debray's model of the three ages of the intellectual, situating the rise of the secular intelligentsia within the context of Modernity. According to Smith, the declining authority of the Church at the time of the Reformation was led to a concomitant growth of secular society, the Enlightenment, and with it, the rise of a civil society, alongside the rise of capitalism, the development of science and technology, and, in particular, the establishment of a secular intelligentsia, with the emphasis shifting from the Church to the university, whilst novels, plays and journals served as the main platforms for the dissemination of ideas. Above all, it was the printing presses of Early Modern and Modern Europe that laboured as the main technological means for their expression and dissemination.

The intellectuals, as a small circle of creative talents (SMITH, 1991, p. 94), were assisted in their project of generating cultural nationalism by the intelligentsia, which Smith has defined as "the professionals", an educated middle class, who worked both within and outside the administrations of court and state. For example, in the case of the French Enlightenment, the university would have a major impact on the national community, especially by reinforcing revolutionary Jacobin and patriotic regimes with a language which became the main symbol of nationalism. For Smith: "Nationalism, as an ideology and symbolism, legitimates every cultural configuration, summoning intellectuals everywhere to transform 'low' into 'high' cultures, oral into written, literary traditions, in order to preserve for posterity its fund of irreplaceable cultural values." (SMITH, 1991, p. 84). Ultimately, "Nationalism as a form of culture" was transformed into a form of politics (p. 94) in a process which may be interpreted as the colonisation of the political by the cultural. Gellner transfers this process to an eastern European setting, by presenting a scenario of the cultural and political mobilisation of intellectuals (poets, musicians, painters and historians *inter alia*) as the national awakers of the people of Ruritania in their struggle against the Empire of Megalomania (GELLNER, 1983, p. 58-62).

Now, if Debray's and Smith's paradigms are to be applied to the contemporary world, it would seem that we are entering a fourth age, whereby the Internet is replacing the university, the review and the television as the new platform for intellectual debate. The power of the Internet is based upon its ability to escape censorship; that it is unregulated and allows for anonymity and that it crosses frontiers, reaching a global audience and providing access to millions. The global increase in human communication has fundamentally changed both the nature of land conflicts as well as the potentialities for peace (HABLES GRAY, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, it has become far more difficult

for tyrants to control people, especially dissidents. As a means of communication and an instrument for the propagation of ideas, this author believes that the Internet triad, made up of telephone network, computer and modem, is as important to communicating ideas now as printing was to the Reformation and the Enlightenment, a theme explored by STEINBERG (1955), DICKENS (1974) and EISENSTEIN (1983).

It has been noted in this conference that, among the raft of changes that have confronted the international community in the decade which followed the events of 1989, there exists an apparent dichotomy between, on the one hand, the collapse of the nation state (at least in some countries), and the reassertion of national identity elsewhere. Clearly the intensification of globalisation is beginning to weaken the nation state, and has broken its power over the economy, defence, the media and culture (GUIBERNAU, 1999, p. 174). The Internet as an instrument of globalisation serves to intensify this condition even further, by weakening the power of the nation state over the control of information, in terms of use, access and dissemination. Yet, by contrast, the Internet has assisted the reassertion and reaffirmation of national identity elsewhere.

The role of the Internet as a means for intellectual comment, criticism and influence, can be applied directly to the role of the intelligentsia in Serbia, during the Kosovo conflict. For in the Serbian context of the late 1990s, the Internet served a double purpose, both as a tool for national and cultural reaffirmation, during a period of crisis and conflict, and also as a means of attacking the Milošević régime. Witness the activities of OTPOR, the various anti-war circles, Za Mir and ANEM and B92, which have fulfilled Sartre's existentialist plea that: "L'écrivain doit s'engager" (the writer must be involved), written in the aftermath of the Second World War, in his *Qu'est ce que la littérature?* (1948), and in the first editorial of the intellectual journal *Les Temps modernes* (1945). "On a raison de se révolter" (It's right to rebel) (GAVI *et al.* 1974), and how better than on the Internet?

### **The Internet in time of war**

The conflict over Kosovo was unlike any other war. It has been described by some as a war in the defence of humanity, a point which has been heavily criticised by Noam CHOMSKY (2000), Tariq ALI (2000) and others. The Kosovo conflict has also been described as a virtual war, a postmodern war and especially, within the context of this article, as the first Internet war (IGNATIEFF, 1999). According to Ignatieff, it was a

war in which for the first time one could communicate with the enemy whilst one's state was engaged in military operations against the enemy state. Ignatieff takes this point further, contrasting cross-frontier Internet communications during the conflict over Kosovo, with the complete disruption of communications in previous wars, in which the mail and telephones normally had been cut, as the state literally imposed its control over all communications. In the conflict over Kosovo links with the "enemy" were maintained through the use of the Internet. Furthermore, during the period of conflict, the number of Internet users in Serbia grew from 25,000 to around 55,000 (COLLIN, 2001, p. 163).

During the Kosovo conflict, the state was no longer able to control the way we communicated. Although one can be sure that the various intelligence services monitored what was being said, they were not able to or did not wish to stop it being said. It may also be, that the power of the state to control our access to information was to some extent weakened by the Internet. So, the Internet allowed us to continue to communicate with our states' enemies throughout the conflict. Ignatieff provides the example of the wife of a State Department official who was able to communicate with a Serbian friend in Novi Sad, with the request that she "stay off the bridges".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, this writer was able to communicate with a friend on the afternoon before the bombing started. His family live in Batajnica, north of Belgrade and Zemun. Their house was literally within one kilometre of the biggest Yugoslav air base, a likely bombing target in the event of hostilities. A friend remained a friend, whilst being transmogrified into a virtual enemy. We stayed in touch!

## Forms of representation

Given the theoretical and methodological contextualisation, the paper now considers the way in which members of the Serbian intelligentsia were able to re-affirm their cultural and national identity during the Kosovo conflict through the Internet, by focusing upon the types of electronic images or illustrations which were conveyed. Often these involved humour, usually of the black variety, even occasionally resorting to the use of pornography, as demonstrated by electronically-altered pornographic images depicting President Bill Clinton and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the conflict, Serbs were demonstrating on the bridges and wearing target badges in defiance of the NATO bombings.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Clearly humour served as a way of maintaining sanity in time of war. The references and images used in this paper are taken from a wide variety of popular cultural sources, such as comic postcards, graffiti, T-shirts and computer game images. The techniques of photomontage were often employed, reminiscent of John Heartfield's techniques in his posters attacking the Nazi Party in the 1930s.

An example of the use of photomontage on the Internet was provided by reference to the F-117 Stealth Fighter that was shot down in the first week of the war. There were several versions on this theme. One shows an F-117 flying over the faded background of a sleeping child and across it is sprawled the legend "Soory [sic] we did not know it was invisible..." referenced to a graffiti in Belgrade.

There is a rich graffiti culture in Serbia, usually made up of black-humoured comments on the political situation. Graffiti and the Internet proved to be mutually re-enforcing means of communicating ideas from the mid-1990s, with lists of Serbian graffiti being published on the Internet. Reference has already been made to the conflict over Kosovo having been a postmodern war, a virtual war and an Internet war; it was also a graffiti war. Examples of this graffiti culture are taken as follows from the streets of Belgrade in the summer of 1998, one year before the conflict:

—First there is this rather premonitory and black-humoured:

*Govori srpski da te ceo svet bombarduje<sup>2</sup>*

Speak Serbian so that the whole world can bomb you.

—Then the self-critical irony:

*Jugosloven - to nije nacionalnost. To je dijagnoza.*

Yugoslav - that's not a nationality. It's a diagnosis.

—and then in reference to the myth of Kosovo as the "cradle of Serbian civilisation":

*Svi smo mi deca dezertera iz 1389*

We are all children of the deserters of 1389.

Play is made of the actual information technology employed in communicating with the global community. Again on the Stealth Fighter incident, there is a photograph of a Stealth Fighter flying along what looks to be the Adriatic coastline (Figure 1). Superimposed upon this image is an adapted Windows 95 error box, bearing the following message:

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<sup>2</sup> The original graffiti version of this was the equally ironic: *Govoriti srpski da te ceo svet razume* (Speak Serbian so that the whole world will understand you).

This Airplane has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down.<sup>3</sup>

If the problem persists, contact the plane vendor.



**Figure 1**

Bombing clearly lay at the heart of the technological discourse, and this theme is returned to regularly in the forms of Internet graphic representation used during the conflict.

Apart from the humour, the illustrations also served to reinforce Serbian identity and pride by harnessing the tools of globalisation to empower Serbian identity and culture under conditions of duress. Yet, as in practically every other aspect of cultural life, the Serbs had turned in upon themselves. They had been forced into isolation, into a

<sup>3</sup> Still more effective would have been to replace "shut down" with "shot down".



collective Serbian solipsism, or a Serbian *Sonderweg*. These were themes that had frequently featured in the Serbian sense of self, identity, and community in the past.

Four main types of representation can be identified. They are: the use of cartoon imagery; advertising brand slogans; the use of traditional cultural references taken from the fine arts; and a bitter irony directed against either NATO or President Milošević.

## Cartoons

There seem to be two main sources. The first is the home-grown variety, reproductions of postcards with emphasis upon the *balkanac* stereotype (Todorova, 1997, p. 4): isolationism, primitivism, pride in oneself, especially if the rest of the world is "against us". And if we are denounced as primitives, or "monkeys", as in cartoons published by the *Independent* newspaper in Britain, demonising the Serbs, in May 1992, then so be it (BURGESS, 1997, p. 41). Burgess demonstrates western journalists in a poor light, adding that "When it comes to Serbia, the ideological shortcomings of opposition forces are subject to a scrutiny that would appear peculiar in other circumstances." Here is the nub of his concern:

It is the Serbs of the former Yugoslavia for whom the most vitriolic attacks are reserved, particularly the Bosnian Serbs. The presentation of the Serbs, particularly in Britain and the United States, has been frequently little short of hysterical. According to a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, the Serbs are the "...new barbarians... motivated by nothing more complicated than primitive ethnic fanaticism." Nothing more, just fanaticism. In British newspapers like the *Independent*, the Serbs were portrayed as monkeys in cartoons reminiscent of the crudest racial propaganda (BURGESS, 1997, p. 41).

We will return to this simian theme later; suffice it to say here that the Serbian reaction to this vitriolic criticism was to produce cartoons and other images which served to reinforce Serbian uniqueness and Serbian identity in the face of world-wide hostility. As Serbian Cabinet Minister, Djura Lažić commented, on the opening of the Fifth Folk Art Festival in Istok:

...the preservation of the Serbian culture and tradition helped us keep the Serbian spirit alive in the recent dire times and similar manifestations will help us be what we are and to remain masters of our future. We

are faced with many threats that our borders will be redrawn, but they forget that the Serbian roots in Kosovo and Metohija are very deep and that they go back many centuries. That's why these roots cannot be eradicated easily (*SERBIA TODAY*, 16 June 1997).

He is reported to have added that: "the borders of Serbia have been drawn in blood in the honourable struggle for survival that marks the history of the Serbian people" and that: "These borders cannot be re-drawn with ink or by the will of some prompted individuals. We will survive on this land!"

Despite the essentialist and primordialist "blood-drenched earth" rhetoric, this kind of approach has been recognised by members of the Serbian academy. Serbian ethnologist, Ivan ČOLOVIĆ (1994, p. 23), in his seminal *Bordel Ratnika* (Warrior's Brothel), commented that Serbian politics is full of folklore and that from the late 1980s every political leader and every political battle in Serbia was based upon folkloric texts. Similarly Serbian academician Antonije Isaković commented that:

Our myths give us greater strength and we must live with them. Each time that we have been faced with difficulties, we have returned to Kosovo, to Karadjordje and to popular poetry (ISAKOVIĆ, 1992).

The late and celebrated Serbian poet Desanka Maksimović referred to a similar concept in her poem *Balkanac* (Man from the Balkans), which is a celebration of difference and of something essentially barbaric, that serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy:

I am not ashamed of being,  
as you would say,  
a barbarian from the Balkans,  
home of all that's unclean and stormy....

And a later verse continues:

In your country, certainly, everything is prescribed exactly,  
how one should eat, speak, and dress;  
but we shout when we speak  
and wave our hands  
and sip our soup noisily  
and when we wear gloves  
we are simply in torment (MAKSIMOVIC, 1988, pp. 14-19).

Returning to the Internet, I have included three examples of the primitivist typology. The first example depicts a moustachioed Serbian peasant, wearing his *šubara* (a traditional type of headgear) from the Sumadija region of Serbia, drinking from his leather-wrapped bottle of

*sljivovica* (plum brandy) (Figure 2). The *šubara* is quite significant, as this was the traditional headgear of Drača Mihailović's *četnici*, or royalist soldiers, during the Second World War. The term *šubara* implies *šubara sa kokadom* (hat with the *kokada* - Serbian double headed eagle badge) which reinforces the cetnik image in the climate of the 1990s, with all its connotations of Serbian nationalism. According to the picture, the plum brandy is reputed to be 40 % proof and a litre bottle—a "man's" drink, not for effeminate westerners, as the image implies, who drink Coca Cola. The masculine, sexual message is strong. He looks to be a man of proud bearing, a hardy son of the soil, full of testosterone, beneath a branch of three plums, which somehow seem to represent the male reproductive organs, if not another variant of the Serbian three fingered salute. The print bears the legend:

Fuck the Coca  
 Fuck the pizza  
 All we need  
 Is Shljivovitza



Figure 2

Clearly this text signifies Serbian masculinity and anti-western, specifically anti-American, sentiment, as is shown by the use of the Coca-Cola logo and reference to pizza. The use of coarse, aggressive language seeks further to reinforce the message that the West is effete, by comparison to a strong Serbia.

This illustration originated as a postcard, printed in Belgrade, as did the second example. Here we have two Serbian children, boy and girl, dressed as stereotypical "cavemen", although the boy wears a *šajkaca* (another traditional example of Serbian headgear) on his head, and a furry bib across his chest, which bears the Serbian cross, surrounded by four cyrillic "S"s, representing the legend, *samo sloga Srbina spasava* (only unity will save the Serb), the motto of the Serbian state which harks back to the Battle of Kosovo (1389). The girl by contrast has a bone in her hair, reinforcing the neolithic image, and she holds an onion in her right hand, another Serbian symbol of plenty, and a club in her left hand, which has a string and an acorn, but seems to represent both a weapon and a *gusle* (the traditional one-stringed Serbian musical instrument). The boy, meantime, holds a bottle of *šljivovica* in his right hand, which bears the legend *domaća brlja*, which, at 102 % proof, is the very strongest brand of home-made plum brandy, again denoting the hard-drinking, male virility symbol. He makes the Serbian salute with his left hand, representing the Holy Trinity as celebrated in the Serbian Orthodox Church; the much-used victory symbol of the past ten years, rather reminiscent of Churchill's two-fingered salute signifying "victory" during the Blitz. Beneath them the line "Born in Serbia". This image celebrates Serbia and Serbian primitiveness in the hell-fire spirit of *zašto ne?* (Why not?) a defiant oft-quoted gesture used by Serbs during the period of sanctions, and once again, during their own Blitz.

My last example of the cartoon-culture variety of illustration is a Serbian rewrite of the globalised, or at least Europeanised reference to Asterix the Gaul, that doughty little fighter and cartoon character from a Gallic France defying Roman occupation, which was itself a symbol of French individualism, pride and defiance in the 1950s and 1960s. The original image is normally found on the first page of any Asterix album, accompanied by the following text:

The year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely... One small village of indomitable Gauls still holds out against the invaders. And life is not easy for the Roman legionaries who garrison the fortified camps of Totorum, Aquarium, Laudanum and Compendium....

The Serbian version one carries the text:

The year is 1999 A.C.  
 Europe is entirely occupied by the Americans.  
 Well, not entirely...  
 One small country of indomitable Serbs  
 still holds out against the invaders...

The usual magnifying glass image of the village in Gaul, shifted from the Channel coast to the South East of Europe, shows that the "Roman" banner has been struck between Zagreb, Rome and Tirana, represented by tents guarded by Roman legionaries, decked out in the checkered flag of Croatia and the flags of Italy and Albania. Meanwhile, Belgrade, reverting to its Roman name of Singidunum, stands defiant against the "invaders". A "Roman" standard has been pitched into the ground. The standard is surmounted by an American eagle, bearing the dollar sign on its chest, and below that there is the "Stars and Stripes" flag and a second eagle, bedecked with a swastika and the legend NATO instead of SPQR. Meanwhile Obelix and Asterix both wear *šajkac* (the traditional Serbian hats, featured in the last cartoon) and are to be found in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture, falling about laughing over what is presumably a barrel of "magic potion", though it would surprise this writer if it were not actually a barrel of *šljivovica*.

### Advertising brand slogans

The second theme is that of the application of advertising brand slogans to the climate of events in 1999. Here, particular reference is made to the Yugoslav marketing company, known as Hammer Propaganda. Directed by Miloš Jovanović, this Novi Sad-based marketing company set out to create an anti-war project in 1999, as a means of coping with the conflict and communicating with the West, by using the "unreality of advertising to communicate the reality of the situation" (CARTER, 2000). This was a process which allowed those who stand outside the "news" media to represent their reality to a wider circle.<sup>4</sup> They sought to criticise the war by turning the marketing images and globalised brand names and slogans against their originators in the west. In the words of Alexandra Jovanović:

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<sup>4</sup> Comment made in a letter from Mark Fiddes to this writer on 7 August 2000. Davies Little Cowly Fiddes are the advertising agency in London which organised Hammer's London exhibition in London, in August 2000.

When we first put *Windows 99* on the Internet we targeted “western” consumers audience. The people who had just one opportunity: to watch war live. We wanted to show them other side, not just images you received on your computer (three fingers etc.) [a reference to the cartoons described above]. We used ads because the audience was like that and images were well known all over the world. We want to show the people who want to see that there are some different people in Serbia, not just those faces on TV screen. To show that war affected ordinary people like they are.<sup>5</sup>

Originally distributed as an anti-war project through the auspices of the Internet, then exhibiting their work in a number of exhibitions, Hammer Propaganda produced nine posters under the project title *Windows 99* (a pun on Microsoft Windows). According to a recent Email to this writer, from Hammer, about 100,000 people saw “*Windows 99*” during the war, after which they lost count. Interestingly, it turns out that the idea of the new version of the Windows 95 logo —gaffer taped windows in Novi Sad (Figure 3)— was born out of the humour and graffiti then current in Novi Sad, that had been spread about by an “anonymous protector of the peoples” who had created a “good joke that hurts” (DJURKOVIC, 1999).



**Figure 3**

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<sup>5</sup> From an Email correspondence between this writer and Hammer, on 28 April 2001.

Their aim was to “present the war, suffering and hardships of the civilians in Novi Sad during the NATO bombardments of Yugoslavia in 1999”, and to promote a “...political attitude implying that every political act is a matter of culture,” by using “advertising as anti-advertising” in a process whereby “visual and graphic art comment upon military intervention.” Hammer was subverting international brands to capture people’s despair and yet giving all the brands a new meaning. The exhibition catalogue of *Windows 99* claims that Hammer’s aim was not to mock a brand name but to maintain sanity and broadcast to the world what was really happening in Yugoslavia. This had to be done in a coded way in a world where it was dangerous to criticise Milošević. As Jovanović commented: “When the bombing started and we could not work, this became a way of dealing with the situation” (CARTER, 2000).

Hammer Propaganda was bringing people the reality of the war, through direct, punchy images, in what they considered to be a “smarter way of communicating with people” (*ibid.*) than having them wear target badges and stroll along the bridges over the Danube against the background of folk music, which has been one of the most effective vehicles of forging and reasserting ethnic Serb identity over this last decade. To quote the black humour of the Belgrade graffiti of the summer of 1998:

*Ne slušaj narodnjake  
Umri prirodnom smrću!*

Don’t listen to the folk music  
Die a natural death!

Serbian folk music, as an instrument of national affirmation and cultural politics, was in the foreground of the protests against NATO in 1999 and also in the Serb demonstrations of Kosovska Mitrovica in 2001. In a quotation from *Glas*: “Hammer’s designers have shown that the urban spirit of modern Serbia is still alive and strong, despite the neo-folk aestheticism which dominated antiwar meetings and concerts” (cited in DJURKOVIĆ, 1999).

Returning to the Coca-Cola image and icon of the United States, there is a pun on the “Always” advert. Here one is presented with a “sawn-off” Coca-Cola bottle being used as a funnel to pour petrol into the fuel tank of a car. Beneath the Coca-Cola logo is the statement: *U vreme NATO bombardovanja gractani Jugoslavije su gorivo tocili na razne nacine*. This is translated as: “During NATO bombing the citizens of Yugoslavia filled their gas tanks in many different ways.” This is a reflection on a roadside scene that had become familiar throughout

Serbia during the period of sanctions and then later, during the Kosovo conflict.

A second example shows the control panel and logo of a Sony play station, the missile sights of a NATO bomber locked on to an industrial complex and the legend "It's not a game". This is a powerful message. This is not virtual war, fought at a distance. It is not a computer game, but the real thing in which people get killed. One thinks of Jean Baudrillard's 1991 trilogy on the Gulf War: "The Gulf War will not take place", "The Gulf War is not taking place", "The Gulf War did not take place" (BAUDRILLARD, 1995). Similarly, a comparative survey of the experience of bomber pilots in the Second World War with those in the Gulf War discovered that while the dominant emotion of the Second World War pilots was one of terror, that of the Gulf War pilots was the excitement of playing games in an arcade (YUVAL-DAVIS, 1999, p. 107). This is to say nothing of the language used at the time, such as "collateral damage", referring to hitting objects instead of people, as though they were targets in an arcade game.

The last example shows a Ballantine's whisky bottle holding a lit candle in an air-raid shelter, with the statement: "Inspiration" and in English and Serbian, the comment: "NATO planes bombed the electrical power system of Yugoslavia".

## Use of traditional cultural images

Another representational variant was a visual play upon traditional cultural images based upon the fine arts. The two examples chosen would both resonate with the mood of Serbian cultural identity and national feeling. The first is based upon Paja Jovanovic's *The Great Migration under Arsenije III Carnojević in 1690*, painted in 1900 and referring to the Great Migration of the Serbian people from the Serbian heartland in Kosovo to the Vojvodina, where the Serbs were settled as frontier troops under the Austrian Emperor. The reference is to being led out of a "Babylonian captivity" by Metropolitan Arsenije. Described as "a large format, pompous picture of the past" (MEDA-KOVIĆ, 1995, p. 215), it nevertheless strikes a chord in the nationalist soul.

The version in this writer's possession originated in the satirical Belgrade paper, *Naša Krmača* (our sow), in which the heads of well-known historical figures have been pasted onto the bodies of the key protagonists of the Serbian *grand récit*, such as Petar Njegos, nineteenth-century bishop, man of letters and playwright who produced *Gorski*



*Vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath); educationist Dositej Obradović; King Alexander Karadjordjević, and writer, academician and one-time Yugoslav president, Dobrica Ćosić, who allegedly had been one of the key members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences behind the 1986 Memorandum. This photo-montage carries the title "Refreshment for a long journey" (*Osvećenje za duga putovanja*) and the message becomes clearer when one's eye is drawn to the ubiquitous red Coca-Cola cans and spent condoms scattered across the foreground against an otherwise black and white image. This is a despairing example of photomontage at its most cynical, self-destructive and self-abusive, given that this is a postmodern revisit to one of the most "glorious moments" of the Serbian historico-mythological metanarrative.

If Paja Jovanović's classical realist painting of the 1690 Migration strikes a chord in Serbian cultural identity, then Uros Predić's *Kosovka Devojka* (The Kosovo Girl) has become an iconic focal point of Serbdom. Two key themes running through the mythology of Serbian identity are: the "warrior hero" and the "mother/sister" paradigm. The "warrior-hero" can be traced back to the Kosovo epics, with Prince Lazar, Miloš Obilić and the fallen heroes on the field of Kosovo, through to the myths and tales of Marko Kraljević, the brave soldiers of *Vojvoda* General Mišić in their agonising retreat through Serbia in the First World War, the *četniks* of the Second World War and more recently Arkan's Tigers or the mythical Kapitan Dragan in the so-called wars of Yugoslav secession (ČOLOVIĆ, 1994, p. 61-70).

The theme of *majka/sestra* (mother/sister) is a dominant one in the poetry and literature of Serbia, and has resurfaced many times in the patriotic songs that emerged into the popular culture domain during the 1990s, with titles such as *Srbija naša majka mila...* (Serbia our darling mother...). But perhaps the greatest icon of Serbian womanhood is the Kosovo Girl who went to give succour to the fallen warriors on the morning following the battle of Kosovo Polje.

The best known depiction of this great mythological event was painted by Uros Predic in 1919; *The Kosovo Girl* has been used and re-used, reproduced in photomontage many times in a variety of metamorphoses. For example, the septuagenarian former president of the Republika Srpska, Biljana Plavšić, has been represented as the Kosovo Girl by superimposing her head onto a copy of Predić's painting. Similarly the "Queen of Turbofolk" and widow of former para-military, Željko Raznatović (a.k.a. Arkan) has been described as playing the part of the Kosovo Girl to Arkan's wounded hero (PRITCHARD, 1999, p. 147).

The image and veneration of the mother/sister who either gives birth to the nation through her sons, the future soldiers who will

defend the national community, or gives succour to her brother the wounded warrior-hero, is a primordial image in the Serbian nationalist discourse and common to many other European discourses. Witness Marianne for the French or Britannia to an older, and now discredited sense of British identity. But in the Serbian case there is also something of the sacred, with reference to the Marian image of the *Pietà* or, indeed, the nativity.

One of the most compelling images sent across the Internet during the Kosovo conflict was the recruiting of Lara Croft to the Serbian cause (Figure 4). Lara Croft is the feisty, internationally-renowned, girl fighter who features in Sony's Tomb Raider computer games. In the Serbian image of Lara Croft, she is clearly the new, postmodern Kosovo Girl. She is kitted out in paramilitary gear. And, as in the aforementioned primitivist cartoon illustrations, she makes the Serb three-fingered salute, against the background image of a Serbian *kokarda*.



**Figure 4**

Yet the use of the image of the woman as the symbolic embodiment of the national identity is not new. According to YUVAL-DAVIS (1997, p. 45), women are often constructed culturally as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour. This "burden of representation" often requires women to breed for the benefit of the nation, whilst they serve to symbolise something of the spirit and purity

of the community. This symbol has frequently been exploited for both nationalistic and propagandistic purposes, in the images of Britannia, Marianne and their sisters, as mentioned above, if not, in some cultures, the image of the very Virgin Mother herself? This writer is reminded of the application of the female burden of representation to the plight of Belgium in 1914. Here, a postcard was produced in the aftermath of a national disaster, of a woman dressed in rags and armed with a *Lebel* rifle in her right hand, standing amid the ruins of Belgian defeat by the Germans in the battles of Louvain, Termonde and Malines. She stands defiantly, waving a tattered Belgian flag in her left hand. This desperate scene is entitled: "Debout quand même! Pour le Droit et la Liberté." This is national pride, in the face of a desperate conflict and a national disaster, embodied in the symbol of a proud woman. Is this not a First World War forerunner of the Lara Croft imagery distributed on the Internet in 1999?

But with the Lara Croft version, some interesting transformations have taken place in terms of representation. Lara is the new Kosovo girl, the new icon of a reaffirmed nationalism and cultural identity. Yet in the process there has been a gender change and a change in role. Lara has become the embodiment of both the warrior and the mother in this new discourse. Lara Croft has been portrayed in one of the classical roles as the warrior hero, defending "women-and-children". The enlarged bosom, not uncommon to the comic strip heroines upon whom she was no doubt modelled, has empowered her. The image can still be that of the empowered mother/sister of the nation, but this time the fantasy of a feisty, active, fighting woman has been created. She may well be capable of giving succour to the warrior in the male imagination, but she is also a formidable fighter. Images of women soldiers have often been threatening unless they have been controlled and distinguished from male soldiers by emphasising their femininity, *ergo* "castrating" their roles to the male imagination (YUVAL-DAVIS, 1999, p. 101).

### **Bitter irony directed against either NATO or Milosevic**

Finally, let us consider the images directed against either NATO or Milošević. These images could almost be presented *bez riječi* (without comment). I have chosen just four examples of images over the Internet which employed bitter irony. They all come from the Serbian diaspora, via the Serbian community living in Canada, especially Vancouver. Witness first, the image of the bomb-damaged RTS studios in Belgrade,

with the slogan: "NATO bombs against the freedom of information." This would seem to be ironic, given the ferocious behaviour of the Serb authorities against the electronic media in the second half of the 1990s, especially in their actions against the two private radio stations in Belgrade: Studio B and B92. In a similar vein, there follows a photograph of a placard, bearing the slogan: "Bombs kill people. Lies do kill too. CNN -Mean Company". The third example is that of an image of Milošević in dinner jacket having his hand kissed by President Clinton, with the comment: "Only this way, Clinton", emphasising the "moral superiority" felt by some Serbs, embodied in the image of Milošević over that of Clinton, so-called "Master of the Universe". The reference is to the film *Godfather*.

Further criticism of the United States President comes in the gradual transforming of a chimpanzee's head into that of President Clinton through a sequence of twelve frames. In the discourse of Exclusion and Identity in time of conflict, we have returned once again to the theme of monkeys and primitivism; except that in this case, it is the Serbs who are referring to President Clinton as the monkey, just as western cartoonists, as mentioned above, had already depicted the Serbs in a similar simian light.

## Conclusion

At first sight, one of the surprising features of the conflict over Kosovo was that although the intelligence operatives on both sides took a close interest in the flow of e-mails, neither side took any steps to directly attack the Internet's infrastructure (IGNATIEFF, 2000; COLLIN, 2001). Ignatieff suggests that this reaction from the state security services was due to the fact that the material communicated in both directions over the Internet was actually of use to them, thus negating any desire to muzzle the Internet (p. 139). Collin (p. 166), on the other hand, argues that military planners at the Pentagon had prepared a document on the potential of launching cyber assaults on Serbian computer networks to disrupt the operations of Milosevic's forces, raid bank accounts, shut down electricity plants and terminate phone connections. But, apparently such plans were dropped when US Defence Department lawyers argued that such a policy could lay the US open to war crimes charges.

It has since been alleged that America has already begun to assemble a "cyber arsenal" for use in future wars, including computer viruses or "logic" bombs to disrupt enemy networks, the feeding of false information to sow confusion and the superimposition of video images

onto television stations to deceive (COLLIN, 2001, p. 166). The potential application of computer viruses and "logic" bombs to cause chaos in a state's security and financial systems became apparent in the first quarter of 2001, when American and Chinese "hackers" tried to spread viruses and clog up the Internet systems in each other's countries. Furthermore, if the bombing of television stations, power stations and electricity systems is already considered acceptable in time of war, as was shown during the Kosovo conflict, then why should computer systems themselves not be targeted in future, despite the alleged concerns of Defense Department lawyers over the risks of committing war crimes.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about the Kosovo conflict in 1999, is that it will probably prove to be the first and last "Internet war". In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, and the subsequent declaration of a war against terrorism, state security organs in the West have been considerably empowered. This has already impinged upon the ease and comfort of people's movement, particularly by air. The implications of this might be that in the near future the traffic of censorship-free communication across frontiers will come to an end. This would have a major impact upon international networking. More seriously, it could entail the stifling of any attempt to establish international solidarity against oppression in non-democratic states, thereby curtailing the freedom of any counter culture to reach beyond the frontiers of the nation state.

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## **Conclusion: Media on Fire**

Francisco Ferrándiz

The collection of papers presented in the HumanitarianNet/TNI 2001 Amsterdam Conference underscores the need for the continued dissemination of in-depth, well-informed, critical and independent information in conflict situations. If this war against ignorance (Marks) manages to break mainstream media monopolies in the war and humanitarian industries, it will contribute to a more nuanced knowledge of the structural conditions and evolution of conflicts, the changing faces and political strategies of the local and international actors, the cultural context and local meanings, or the mechanisms by which international solidarity and empathy are triggered or deactivated. This alternative information would, in turn, be crucial in the establishment and maintenance of relevant international coalitions, the articulation of more adequate and long term responses to disaster situations, and the empowerment of international and local peace building actors. Few of the journalists, activists and academics present in the meeting would not subscribe to such a formulation. Yet most would also agree that this aim remains a Herculean task, plagued with short-circuits, blackouts and raging fires of all sort. Maintaining a critical and revisionist approach throughout this process seems crucial if difficulties are to be overcome.

Due to the diversity and complexity of the industry, analysing the media is necessarily an incomplete and somehow unfair task. Generally speaking, some widespread limitations of the mainstream media in packaging conflicts for mass consumption are related to the shortcomings of news formats and the economic and political agendas that determine the timing, content and structure of the news. Referring more specifically to television, the accelerated rhythm of the most common news formats means that tragic conflicts are interspersed with trivial news, presented simplistically without context and have limited exposure in prime time;

their explosion on the screen, as Amanda Sans reminded us, is necessarily followed by silence and oblivion as other news spectacles appear. Also, contemporary televisual languages act as a deforming screen that further denaturalises events. In the news editing rooms, sound bites and images are scanned into high-tech formats where, as Caldwell writes, “scenes of reality, chaos and suffering are immediately rendered as pictures, reflective surfaces, and flying text-image projectiles. Social trauma and rebellion are turned into artifice” (1995, p. 159).

At the peak of media hype over conflict, military-media packages such as *Desert Storm* or, more recently, *Enduring Freedom* are here to stay, although their ability to metamorphose should not be underestimated. Media coverage uses technological and discursive sophistication to drastically twist an international conflict into a one-sided show. Enemies are thoroughly demonised as savages, societies and cultures are simplified to the point of caricature, landscapes become geographies of military targets, the historical and structural conditions of conflicts are obscured by the verbiage of so-called experts, weapons are transformed into artefacts of civilisation and disguised in a video game aesthetic, suffering and death are swept under a thick carpet of sanitising and high-tech metaphors. Given the blatant information control, manipulation and self-censorship displayed in these media spectacles, it is difficult to doubt the straightforward complicity of mainstream media coverage with powerful political and military agendas in conflict situations.

When economics, politics and audience ratings become the priority stock of media interests, when we find famous, well trained, sophisticated broadcasters competing with Pentagon briefers for the role of top spin doctor (CALDWELL, 1995, p. 111), when conflicts are systematically reduced to attractive fireworks by means of television, we have reached a point where sustained critique of the mainstream news industry becomes a necessity. Although the power and impact of the media should not be overestimated or simplified, the question raised by Firmo-Fontán and Murray is an important one: how much political, social, and economic damage is done by ill-informed, stereotyping, politically motivated and overhyped reporting of conflict situations? Research into this issue and exposure of distortion must continue.

The ways in which the mainstream media package conflicts for mass consumption were critiqued in the Conference through the analysis of diverse conflict cases. Virginia Montañés, writing about the links between drugs and conflict in Colombia, regrets how prejudices can be reinforced in the hegemonic media, often producing unfounded and indiscriminate *criminal images* of vulnerable populations in the third world - in her case, poor peasants cultivating coca for survival. These



misrepresentations eventually become accepted wisdom though their exposure in the media, and are liberally used to justify controversial programmes such as the Plan Colombia. Obviously, local populations have few chances of countering in kind and, unless alternative means for disseminating their interpretation of events are found, they will remain on the losing end of both international policies and representations. Similarly, in their paper on the Lebanese Hezbollah and its most widespread media representations in the West, Firmo-Fontán and Murray expose the ethnocentric nature of the stereotypes often found in snapshot reporting. These stereotypes ignore the complexity of the situation on the ground and project Manichean conflict schemes, breeding or justifying retaliatory military action. On his part Bizimana, both a journalist and an academic, goes one step further when he doubts the very possibility of average foreign media *getting it right* in situations as complex, volatile and traumatic as, for example, the Rwandan genocide. The common coupling of the commercial and ideological interests of the networks with insufficient knowledge of local history, meanings and social conditions and the use of second hand information by some journalists on the ground leads to oversimplified, fragmented and confusing reporting.

Discontent with mainstream media coverage and management of conflict was, thus, widespread. Nobody doubts that the control of media infrastructure, content and flows is and will remain a most powerful weapon in conflict situations (Oberg and Sollenberg). The question is more how partisan uses and misuses of the media can be minimised, and this should start with the gathering of information on the ground. For journalists, an important discussion regarding fair reporting is related to the controversial tension between *information* and *truth*, and how foot journalists should perform in the field. While Dutch war reporter Arnold Karskens bluntly defended in the debates the existence of a *truth out there* to be recorded in a free-lance, detached and professional manner, Steele's contribution factored in the important role of emotions in the production of media content in conflict situations. For him, some emotion —specifically, a *low-intensity, smouldering anger*— is necessary in the practice of war journalism to prevent cynicism - in his words, journalists' *biggest occupational hazard*. But it should be a different kind of emotion from the one arising from media hysteria and sensationalism, the *adrenalin of the moment*, in Marks' words. Steele talks, rather, about a feeling rooted in injustice, cruelty and trauma.

Breaking through hegemonic representations of conflicts in the media demands rethinking the received wisdom on the production and

dissemination of information, and creating and encouraging fresh strategies of representation and informative agendas. Steele proposed that, out of anger, journalists' main role in conflicts should be to bear witness to the suffering of the *victims*, beyond the commercial and political constraints that necessarily condition their work. One might add that anger and commitment to the victims is also an important motivation behind many activist and academic careers. Yet the relationship between victims, media —or academic— representations and peace building is far from straightforward. We enter slippery terrain. Steele himself affirms how easily former "victims" might become "perpetrators", both on the ground and in media discourses, and how the victim for one group is the perpetrator for another. To him, due to the volatility of the situation during violent conflicts, empathy for the victims should not turn into full-fledged partisanship. Moreover, as Ignatieff suggests, understanding and communicating conflicts would not only demand empathy for the victims but also an effort to enter the minds of murderers in order to discern the power of conviction of the ideologies of death (1999, p. 29).

Steele's reflections introduced into the discussion the crucial problem of the politics of victimhood, an exercise in power and representation endemic to conflict and constantly played out in the media. If the media can show or suppress incidents according to politically motivated allocations of guilt and innocence, we should never forget that, as Oberg and Sollenberg state, some events are also *produced for the media* by natives to convey particular messages of victimhood to the international community, in order to influence international reactions to the situation on the ground. This dyadic conflict between victims and perpetrators, or innocent and guilty, so widespread in the media, can be counterproductive for peace building. In his discussion of the Northern Ireland case, Ryan states that the promotion of senses of victimhood would only contribute to the crystallisation of tenacious states of reciprocal stereotyping and the perpetuation of conflict. For Ryan, the media - and as his paper shows, also academics - should rather play a more thoughtful role in the redefinition of the concept of victimhood and, ultimately, in the *unvictimisation* of conflict actors. This would imply an about-turn in the ways in which the media generally approach conflict and, definitely, an end to the simplistic binary plots in which it is constructed.

Unvictimising and discouraging vicious circles of blame attribution is one element in a broader strategy. Many comments stressed the benefits of promoting a media scheme akin to Galtung's concept of *peace journalism*, as opposed to conventional war journalism. For

Bizimana, media actors should be committed to produce information that, instead of *amplifying the sound of guns*, as media operatives of the Enduring Freedom type so clearly do, is capable of enhancing long-term mutual understanding and dialogue in conflict areas—in short, one that truly contributes to peace building, has a preventive focus, explores the roots and transformations of the antagonisms, and does not abandon the field whenever the most dramatic shootout is over. Ryan, on his part, finds this formulation insufficient in that a new, more comprehensive and flexible concept of the media needs to be created and put to work; one that includes such spaces as peace museums, drama groups, children's programmes, photography or the Internet. A multiplication and diversification of media spaces promoting cultures of peace would help to refresh conventional contents and formats, opening ways to overcome media monopolies over information and the reign of conflict over peace and reconciliation story lines.

Promoting peace in the media also implies denouncing and eradicating war, hate or racist propaganda. International lawyers remind us that there should be a legal barrier to what the media can transmit. Calls for a more democratic and open structure in the production and dissemination of information are limited by the many ways and situations in which such freedom can be, and has been, abused. Historically, the gross misuse of freedom of expression and the power of the media to promote hate and violence have called for the definition and implementation of significant regulation measures, as exemplified in the kind of international legal debates around free speech and freedom of expression discussed by Heintze. As he suggests, in such slippery terrain, there is a permanent tension between prohibition of hate propaganda and freedom of opinion.

Also, if historical experience calls for the development of international legal regulations, as definitions of terms are in contention—what for one side might be *propaganda for war* might turn out to be *liberation propaganda* for the opposing party—legal clauses are open to interpretation and the implementation of the obligations differs from country to country. Legitimate worries arise about the political, partisan or *double standard* use of these prohibitions. The danger of hyper regulation or *legal inflation*, where the complication of the legal landscape creates increased power for a restricted body of experts to muse over esoteric and redundant covenants, appears also as a drawback to adequate regulation. For Heintze, despite the setbacks and controversies, the continued development of international law regarding the regulation of the media and the removal of *legal gray*

*areas* remains crucial, and a balanced tension between *freedom* and *responsibility* should be a key to overcome the obstacles.

Discussions pointed also to the need of reassessing media influence on both international audiences and local communities. Regarding the impact of media coverage of conflicts on international audiences, Nunes raised the important point of the media role in the manufacturing of world-wide empathy, a fundamental mechanism that has resulted in the formation of, in Ignatieff's words, a "World Humanitarian Community" (1998) committed to *do something* whenever a conflict bursts onto the TV screens, transforming western audiences into tourists in a landscape of anguish (1999, p. 17). The characteristics of this media-based community—volatility, short attention spans, shallow understanding—are obviously linked to the range and structure of media markets and languages. The transformation of wars into what Echeverría calls *telewars*, and the conversion of the living room into a *domestic front* (1995, pp. 168-175), has diversified the scenarios where wars can be won or lost. While many recognise the potential of public opinion in the shaping of international policy, Nunes questions the very legitimacy of such a humanitarian community, often structured around superficial information and dubious criteria for organisation and action, to become a relevant actor for such matters.

Moreover, the conditions in which this world-wide community initially took shape are changing. Generally speaking, the conflict media market seems to have reached a point of saturation. The proliferation of armed struggles and humanitarian disasters and the increasing media hype surrounding them (AGUIRRE, 2001) have already produced a *fatigue of empathy and solidarity*, one with overly *anaesthetic* effects in the short and long run (FELDMAN, 1994; IGNATIEFF, 1999). As the accumulation of corpses, refugees or high-tech images of smart bombs becomes routine, tolerance for sorrow and misery increases and empathy disengages from concrete humanitarian causes, blurring into a looser sense of global injustice. Media excess may already be transforming conflict into a full-fledged demobilising, domesticating entertainment. With all the drawbacks that the building of international solidarity might have, this is a most discouraging outcome of information surplus, and alternative media have to struggle for original ways of re-engaging audiences with the predicament behind conflicts and humanitarian crisis. The exhaustion of current humanitarian narratives, following the hegemony of what Ignatieff calls the *chaos narrative* in conflict coverage (Nunes), also seems to demand new plots that overcome the anaesthetic effect of news reporting.

If world-wide audiences are very significant, if controversial, actors in the unfolding of global modes of solidarity, and rightly demand access to information, the population trapped in conflict situations has an even bigger stake in being fairly informed. Marks calls for the importance of correcting, if partially, the imbalance of the information flow that leaves the most vulnerable inhabitants of conflict areas in dangerous information blackouts. Starting from the *inalienable right of information for human beings*, Markiewicz remarks how access to trustworthy news can make the difference between life and death for vulnerable civil populations displaced and traumatised by conflict. In environments where rumours, propaganda and all kinds of misinformation run wild, and where the alliance between multinational media corporations and the arms industry becomes particularly harmful, the availability of reliable information becomes an important instrument of survival.

This proposition is crucial. But, is it truly possible to break the cycle of news elites monopolising the production and circulation of information? Then, who is to provide this kind of information to the people at risk? And how to go about it? For Markiewicz, radio is the key medium to perform this duty. It is comparatively cheap, unspecialised, portable and thus accessible to the widest audience possible. Also, for him, NGOs should play a relevant role here. In general, NGOs have failed in not considering information a priority in humanitarian action and have mostly surrendered their responsibility in this crucial matter, a statement supported in Montañés' summary of the ENCOD research. A critical re-evaluation of the role of NGOs regarding their communication strategies in conflict situations—that should involve not only reinforcing those communicative strategies oriented to international audiences, but also providing the victims with credible news about the events taking place and the decisions and actions of the very relief community—can not only contribute to the amelioration of the conditions on the ground during emergencies, but also to the promotion of more stable political environments and the prevention of conflicts.

In response to this challenge, Sans' contribution to the book acknowledges the extent to which communication is becoming crucial for NGOs, and offers some suggestions for the development of long term alliances between NGOs and the media in the production and dissemination of reliable information in conflict situations. Given the fact that journalists already use NGOs' infrastructures and gather information from activists in long term missions on the ground, and that the NGOs increasingly need an international visibility that allows them to tell their stories and bring important issues to the international political and humanitarian agendas, more structured cooperation is

mostly a matter of optimising existing relations. Her call for NGOs to assume responsibility for rescuing chronic conflicts and crises from oblivion also points to an important drift of alternative media away from the routines of mainstream media.

Beyond the future role of the NGOs in becoming more relevant media actors, and the role that international media should play in conflict areas, in some of the contributions to the book and in the debates that followed the presentations it became clear that the development and empowering of significant local media should continue to be one fundamental link in the construction and maintenance of independent media networks that can promote long-term stability in conflict regions. Due to the globalised structure of media circuits, this effort calls for both the strengthening of local infrastructures and specialised personnel, and the development of flexible and fair forms of cooperation between local and extralocal actors in the media sector.

These issues are also plagued with controversies. Drawing from his knowledge of the Rwandan case, in his paper on "humanitarian news" Bizimana warns us of the difficulties that local media might face in their route to professionalism and relevance in peace building. Lack of resources and training (both in journalism and in conflict analysis and resolution), or partisanship, hinder a proper development of independent and well-informed local media. The experience of Radio Netherlands discussed by Marks, on the other hand, brings in some elements that would seem to overcome Bizimana's pessimistic view. For Marks, a believer in the importance of building partnerships between global and local media, a crucial departure point is the building of trust between indigenous communities and international media professionals. The training and promotion of local staff, the use of local languages in broadcasting, and the relevance of media content to local communities are all steps in this direction. In Rwanda, according to Bizimana, Radio Agatashya itself increased its relevance on the ground when it modified the programmes to include native languages and information regarding the daily experience in conflict areas.

Finally, as an emerging and rather unique medium, the Internet appears to hold some clues to overcoming the mainstream media monopolies over information and reporting, and is bound to become the crucial link in the interfaces between the local and the global. This is not to deny that gross misinformation or extremist contents are and will be rampant on the net. But, for example, the intelligent and efficient use of the Internet's slippery networks by the *zapatista* and the antiglobalization movements points to the availability of a totally new

environment where communicative strategies can be thoroughly refashioned. It is clear that much more research has yet to be done in this matter.

Hudson's analysis of the use of the Internet by the Serbian intelligentsia during the NATO bombing of their country raises some important issues in this respect. On the one hand, the Internet's ability to escape censorship and its instant access to global networks is bound to transform the traditional battle landscape in issues as important as the control of the flow of information and propaganda, or the definition of the lines between friends and enemies. In terms of content, the flexibility of the Internet's tools allows for the production of powerful counterhegemonic images and messages. The way in which Serbians reaffirmed their cultural identity by humorously manipulating symbols and iconographies with little more than a computer and their fingertips demonstrates the emergence of new ways of empowerment with an undeniable potential to circumvent information short-circuits and build new types of world-wide allegiances and networks of solidarity.

While mainstream media were busy broadcasting high-tech images of the smart bombing of Serbia interspersed with political propaganda, Internet images provided concerned surfers with an unprecedented glimpse into the hardships and perceptions of the civilian population under the bombs. Obviously the Internet is as yet only accessible to elites in many regions in the world, especially in those places where conflict is endemic. But its irruption into the media system is bound to break into the current hegemonic network's monopoly over information and thus, over the construction of *reality*.

Although most of the participants in the conference share a critical assessment of the current situation regarding the entanglement of media and conflict, this book is more an invitation to further discussion and cooperation than the formulation of a coherent alternative media project. The exchanges that took place in the conference between actors situated in different structures of knowledge, commitment and action showed us to what extent we are all forced to operate in somewhat impermeable environments with different projects, expectations and even languages. A certain sense of reciprocal mistrust has developed on top of this situation. All agreed that further discussion and cooperation between the three different actors present at this meeting is necessary.

What is the homework left for all of us? In every case, consciousness of our goals, ranges of action, strengths and limitations should be the base for further debate and cooperation. Journalists should keep on

questioning the ways in which information is produced, disseminated and consumed in the humanitarian media market, as well as the consequences of the current state of affairs. Alternatives to the prevalent hegemonic media structure should be imagined, put into place and then sustained, both in conventional and new media, both in relation to international and local audiences. NGOs should re-evaluate their media policies and bring in information and education closer to their fundamental humanitarian goals, optimising for this purpose their current infrastructure, their knowledge of situations on the ground and the rapport they are able to establish with local communities. If academics want to increase their relevance in raising public awareness and providing doctrinal and conceptual tools for international actors in conflict situations, as suggested by Bizimana, they should find strategies and formats to make the kind of knowledge they produce more accessible to broader audiences - from global to local - contiguous, if always critical, to the projects of journalists and NGOs, as well as pertinent to policy oriented action.

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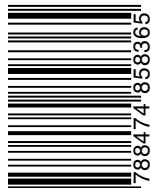
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