

Media Development

2/2016

WACC

Islamophobia and the Media

+plus Indian democracy and governance
Medios y despolitización

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The 3/2016 issue of *Media Development* will explore “Local Media and Digital Frontiers”.

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actalliance

International principles of journalism ethics stress the duty of professional communicators to seek truth and to provide fair and balanced accounts of events and issues. With this in mind, conscientious journalists try to serve the public with honesty and integrity - the cornerstones of their credibility.

The independence of news outlets rests on high standards of accuracy, fact-checking, and impartiality. Their obligation is not only to inform the public, but to engage people in the practice of good governance and to serve as a voice for those who have been denied a voice. Not everyone will agree with every editorial decision taken, but ethical standards help guide journalists and enable them to be held accountable.

In short, the basic functions of the media in a democratic society are:

- To encourage democratic choice by clarifying complex issues, particularly in an age when information is the driving force of economic advancement and global events impact people's daily lives as never before;
- To provoke public debate leading to greater participation in important decisions;
- To uncover abuses and campaign to rectify them;
- To alert and mobilize public opinion to humanitarian causes/injustices;
- To promote political pluralism by publicising different views/ideological approaches to certain issues;
- To keep politicians and decision-makers attuned to public opinion.

Consequently, while totally impartial media are neither possible nor desirable, it is essential:

- To maintain a distinction between facts and opinion, reporting and analysis;
- To use only trained, professional reporters who are knowledgeable and who check sources;
- To explain issues without trivializing or sensationalizing;

- To publish corrections;
- To avoid using information likely to be harmful to national security or to endanger individuals.

So much for the theory. In reality, media practitioners are subject to the economic constraints facing the industry in which they work, to the demands of the market, and often to the dictates of government or corporate interests. Editorial policies need to cater to a broad range of tastes so that "giving the public what they want" often becomes an argument for dubious, salacious or inflammatory content. In such cases, freedom of expression is used as a camouflage for "anything goes" and satire can be confused with incitement.

In recent years, and for a range of reasons, Islamophobia has "hit the headlines". At times like these independent media have to be especially sensitive and vigilant and to take steps to present balanced coverage, to counter discrimination and stereotyping, and to defuse tension.

Islamophobia has many causes. It can be deep-rooted historically, culturally, and socially. It can take the form of an understandable reaction to an act of terrorism or an irrational prejudice towards migrants. It can reflect ignorance or a fear of the unknown. Often it is seized on by malcontents for political or economic advantage. In such situations, the role played by mass media, but also by community and social media, becomes crucial and, on occasion, a matter of life or death.

In "Islamophobia plays right into the hands of Isis" (*The Guardian* 25 November 2015), Owen Jones pointed out that:

"Some of the media's attacks are beyond sinister. A *Daily Mail* cartoon provoked understandable comparisons with 1930s Nazi propaganda after portraying gun-toting Muslim refugees entering Europe amid rats. It is generally more subtle than that, of course. But it helps create an atmosphere where anything goes; where bigotry seems officially sanctioned and legitimised. Muslims become



seen as the enemy within, a fifth column, a near-homogenous group defined by their hostility to western values – or indeed the west full stop. ‘Muslim’ becomes synonymous with ‘extremist’ and ‘potential terrorist’.”

Many reputable (and responsible) media outlets make a point of offering balanced views of Islam, Muslims, and the difficult situations in which they are caught up – for example the war in Syria, the Israel/Palestine conflict, Hindutva in India, and the struggle in Mindanao, Philippines. Others are deliberately inflammatory and provocative.

The current crisis of Syrian refugees is a case in point, in which some media outlets have stoked public anxiety and intolerance by reporting the words and deeds of certain politicians without offering more moderate or sympathetic views. And then there is political intervention. In “The Elephant in the Room: Islam and the Crisis of Liberal Values in Europe” (*Foreign Affairs*, 2 February 2016) Alexander

Betts makes the point that:

“The simple fact is that European member states don’t really want to welcome Muslim migrants. This has been explicit in the case of countries with vocal far-right parties and in central European countries with Christian nationalist governments. But the liberal political elites of Western Europe have steered clear of admitting that the biggest single barrier to coherent asylum and immigration policies is public anxiety about Islam. Far-right parties have pandered to these fears, stoking xenophobia.”

Predominantly negative and racist reporting in the media strengthens an increasingly dangerous anti-Muslim mind-set, which reinforces stereotypes and leads to an escalation of violent attacks on Muslims. False or inaccurate stories about Muslims are routinely used by far right groups to legitimise their “case” and to gain followers. The Internet is full of

forums using mainstream newspaper reports as “proof” that their intolerant views about Muslims are true.

Silence, of course, is deadly. But some journalists are trying to persuade others to act more responsibly. In “5 Ways Journalists Can Avoid Islamophobia In Their Coverage” (*Huffington Post*, 14 December 2015), Senior Media Editor Gabriel Arana noted that, “It is the duty of journalists to inform and educate. But when it comes to Islam and the Muslim community – in the U.S. and across the world – news outlets have far too often served to spread misinformation and perpetuate prejudice.”

Arana proposed the following remedies:

1. Visit a Mosque: The heart of the problem with the media’s coverage of Muslims is that most of us simply do not know enough about Islam.

2. Be careful whose views you promote: Far too often, “balance” in news coverage has meant providing a platform for ideologues to spew racist garbage. Don’t give bigotry a platform.

3. Challenge prejudice and debunk outright lies: The reason it’s so important for journalists to arm themselves with information is not only so they themselves make sure not to perpetuate prejudice, it’s also so they can challenge it.

4. Choose your words carefully: When journalists use phrases like “Islamic terrorism,” they are implicitly conflating two concepts. While this term is in common use, it is the duty of those of us in the media to be more precise in our use of language than the general public.

5. Provide context: In the age of the Internet – with conduits for information like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube giving the public direct access to raw information – the role of the media has changed. It’s no longer just to “report the facts”, which the public is bombarded with on a daily basis. We must contextualize what’s out there.

The articles in this issue of *Media Development* address these questions from a variety of perspectives in an attempt to open up dialogue and to pave the way for greater understanding. ■

How do the media fuel Islamophobia?

Afia Ahmed Chaudhry

We have to acknowledge that the media, more often than not, shape and actively craft public opinion rather than mirroring it. We still live in a time where the majority of people assume they are being fed facts as opposed to opinions or editorialised facts. They take the media, particularly the news, as the truth.

Most people accept such narratives unquestioningly. So, if the papers say that we have a problem with Islamic extremism, it means we have a problem with Islamic extremism. If non-violent extremism is the same as violent extremism, then it is the same. If we are now left to define extreme ideas, what could that mean? For example, the idea that Jesus is going to come back defies the very laws of nature; so, in theory, surely that idea is extreme? Not to mention the belief in miracles which would require us to suspend the physical laws of the universe.

By this logic we are left with an infinite list of what could possibly constitute “extreme”, owing to its subjectivity and ultimate indeterminacy. This brings us to a critical question: what falls under politically charged categories like “extremist” and “fundamentalist” – and what is the role of the media in legitimising these categories?

The media and Islamophobia

What makes an extremist, “extreme”, is his or her recourse to violence (or the propensity to do so) as a means to get a point or message across. How can there then be such a thing as a non-violent extremism? It treads on common sense. But what are the indicators according to which this propensity is determined? In other words, when does a Muslim become an extremist, i.e. a “threat”? Conveniently, there are no pre-established standards

that define what it means to be a “threat”. More often than not, the definition is pragmatically employed by opportunistic politicians and Islamophobes who are unable to contribute any explanatory scope or power.

But in our day and age, the aura of fear perpetuated by politicians and the media obscures our reality and produces an artificially construed representation of that reality. To appreciate this we must understand that the very process of constructing a discourse (in this case the discourse surrounding “extremism” and “fundamentalism”) is a reality-defining process or, what some scholars have referred to as “world-making”. In a politically charged environment marred by the looming “threat” posed by “Muslim extremists”, objectivity is virtually impossible.

The media no longer serve to challenge hegemonic narratives and discourses disseminated by governments; in fact, they often now act as a fourth branch of the government and a mouthpiece through which these narratives are normalised and brought into our homes.

There are several ways in which the mainstream media go about fulfilling this role. Stephen Schwartz laments that:

“We have reached the fourth anniversary of the terrible attacks of September 11, 2001. I am sorry to say that, in my view, the U.S. and Western media have completely failed to meet the challenge of reporting on Islam in the four years since then, or in reaction to the atrocities that followed, including the extremist violence in Iraq which I would not dignify with the titles “insurgency” or “resistance”; the Madrid metro and London underground bombings, and the terror assaults in Indonesia, Morocco, Turkey and elsewhere.”¹

The myth of the “Muslim Tide”

The media vastly overestimate the number of Muslims living within their country’s borders. In a study conducted about Muslims in the West, a number of myths about Muslims are addressed with regard to, among other topics, population,

immigration and patriotism.² In a recent “Ipsos Mory” study, the average French person overestimated that Muslims accounted for 31% of the French population, when in reality it is closer to 5%. The root cause of such gross misconceptions is due to the constant publication of content in the press highlighting and, indeed, hyperbolising the country’s “Immigration Crisis”.

When the media make these egregious “errors”, they manifest and become a direct cause of the physical brutalisation that is visited upon Muslim citizens. A most notable example is the recent French Islamophobic attack on a Moroccan man who was stabbed 17 times, whilst his killer screamed “I am your God, I am your Islam.”³ In other incidents, 26 mosques around France were attacked with firebombs, gunfire, pig heads and grenades. According to the French National Observatory Against Islamophobia, a total of 60 Islamophobic incidents were reported.⁴

The very fact that such a gross miscalculation and estimation can occur highlights the extent to which the media can obscure a reality rather than presenting it. This is despite the media’s ostensible objective to supposedly create “informed citizens” without which there can be no healthy, political engagement within society. More importantly, the purpose of nurturing informed citizens is to create social cohesion – yet the media’s bias and passive adoption of the Islamophobic narrative only serves to create deeply entrenched social and political antagonism and fuel an aura of hate. The rise of right-wing movements in the West is perhaps the best testimony to the media’s failure to live up to its most basic duties. In short, mainstream media are facing an existential crisis.

The lack of any meaningful balance to countervail a prevailing opinion also heavily contributes to the rise in Islamophobic sentiment. Edward Said calls this the “Islam as News” phenomenon. One of the more prominent instances of this occurred in Canada in 2006. MacLean’s magazine, a Canadian version of *The Times*, published a polemical and Islamophobic article by Mark Steyn. The article opined that Muslims breed faster than mosquitos and that they would eventually constitute the majority of Europe, or what he sardon-

ically calls “Eurabia”. When several Muslim Law students requested space in MacLean’s magazine to respond, MacLean’s stated that they would rather “Bankrupt the magazine” than afford the aforementioned Muslim Students any opportunity to provide balance to Steyn’s inflammatory point of view.

Let us examine an article published by *The Telegraph* newspaper to emphasise this point. In September 2014, Camilla Turner wrote an article entitled “Government donation to Muslim Charities Forum denounced as ‘Madness’.”⁵ The article insinuated the MCF’s “alleged” connections to the Muslim Brotherhood. The author appended the

term “alleged” to any allegation that she could not substantiate, but nevertheless wished to hyperbolise in order to create the impression that mainstream Muslim organisations were working hand-in-glove with “terrorists”. How did she make it stick? Take a look at the following quote:

“According to a report by American think tank Nine Eleven Finding Answers, five of these charities – Muslim Hands, Human Appeal International, Human Relief Foundation, Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief – were early participants in the Union of Good, a fundraising body with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, created to raise money for the terrorist group Hamas”.

In order to understand the subtleties of these tactics, the choice of words needs to be scrutinised. Notice the term “Early Participants”? Obviously, the author was implying that these charities no longer have a relationship with the impugned “Union of Good” charity, but they did at one time; most likely when nobody was aware of any connection between the Union of Good and the Muslim Brotherhood. This is known in logic as the Historian’s fallacy – the analysis of historical information by relying on information that is available today but was not available to the party you are trying to smear at the time. Clearly, the author would claim that she was not accusing Islamic Relief of being involved with a “terrorist” organisation, but was simply presenting a historical fact – the purpose of which is to create a false impression in the mind of the reader that Mainstream Islamic organisations have had dealings



with odious “terrorist” groups, thereby affirming the “Muslims are a fifth column” narrative.

What is all the more puzzling was the author’s reference to so-called expert, Sam Westrop – a right-wing pro-Israeli, pro-UK Independence Party activist. This logical fallacy is known as the Appeal to False authority – the use of an “expert” of dubious credentials to peddle an idea. What are Westrop’s credentials?

He is a 22-year-old music graduate who appears as a “Director”, “Member” or “Founder” of half-baked “Think-Tanks” that lack the academic rigor of any bona fide think-tank, and whose purpose is mainly, and almost exclusively, to advocate for attenuated interests on the right.⁶ These interests include reactionary, reflexive pro-Israel lobbying, as well as anti-immigration and Euro-sceptic activism. Westrop has worked closely with an organisation called Student Rights, which is banned from a number of universities in Britain. The irony is completely lost on the journalist here, who relies on someone with ties to organisations that are themselves banned across the UK, in order to pontificate on the “dangers of Islamism”.

Here is a select sampling from Westrop’s venomous diatribe in 2011:

“[We] need to aggressively attack the very root and cut the head off the network of groups and ideologies that work against Israel. We cannot be insular and solely Jewish, but we must work with conservatives. It is about being on the offensive – advancing with a spear rather than trembling behind a crumbling shield.”

Sam Westrop’s hostility is seemingly not directed to fringe extremists per se but is grounded in a far more venomous radical discourse:

“I did not find the Arabs romantic. I found them interestingly hostile. A mentality of very irrational hatred – mob mentality.”

One can say that it is unfortunately quite traumatising, witnessing first-hand how the media can be the right-hand of State fascism.

With Islamophobia at an all-time high, we

also see journalists, such as the likes of Cathy Newman,⁷ playing on the fear of the general public and “stoking the fire” with their misrepresentation of Muslim communities.

The employment of inflammatory and reactionary headlines, and the ever-rising dishonesty in news reporting, leaves us all with a sour taste. A word of caution to the wise; take all with a pinch of salt, as today’s news reporting is indicative of a much wider issue; the media prioritises ink over blood.

Sordid attempts at continuously inciting hatred towards such a significant minority will surely result in physical manifestations and the Muslim community ends up bearing the brunt of this severe injustice, as illustrated with the recent Chapel Hill Shootings.⁸

The reader becomes saturated with a certain image of the Muslim and Islam while being completely ignorant of any opposing perspective or narrative, and therefore naturally believes that this lack of contestation is evidence of the truth-value of the anti-Islam/anti-Muslim narrative.

Muslims and terrorism: An inextricable relationship?

When does an act of violence become an act of terrorism? And who determines when this re-characterisation occurs? The difference between the two terms is political; the term “violence” is a neutral and descriptive term whereas the term “terrorism” is politically charged and ideologically defined. The criterion, according to mainstream media’s standards, revolves around one fundamental question: was the act of violence perpetuated by a Muslim? It does not matter what the ideological motives or justifications for this act of violence are. Christian right-wing extremist, nationalist movements and other violent acts of racism are excluded from the category of “terrorism” – Muslims are excluded from this general rule of thumb. In fact, the loosely defined and politically charged narrative of “war on terror” serves as a masquerade through which any idea, discourse or action which falls outside the orbit of secular-liberal ideology is suppressed.

In reality, the biases which inform the media’s coverage of Islam are not the product of a post-

9/11 phenomena, nor are they based purely on misinformation. Rather, the roots of this bias date back to the development of an anti-Islamic orientalist discourse, which constituted the identity of the West and continues to shape its discourse. This discourse is premised on the idea of Western superiority and the inferiority of the “rest”. This is because the West has democracy, rationalism and science whereas the “rest” does not. The West has matured whereas the “rest” are dependent on the “West”. The late Edward Said dealt with this orientalist bias at length in his book *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*.⁹

The inability of mainstream media to live up to their obligations has had major implications on Muslim communities. A domineering “war on terror” has stripped Muslims of any outlets through which they can express themselves, which in turn exacerbates the rise of “extremism” – and thus, we are left in a vicious circle.

Edward Said famously observed that “nations are narrations”.¹⁰ Narratives are a reflection of structures of power. This is particularly true of how Muslims have been depicted in the mainstream media, and it therefore becomes a very important site of engagement. There are a number of things that Muslims can and, indeed, should do in order to resist these narratives, thereby resisting the aforementioned structures of power.

The first is to engage in a critical reading of news stories and to not simply accept everything without equivocation. Sifting through the facts, separating them from editorialising, and scrutinising the so-called experts relied upon. One will often find that the average news story embodies a confluence of agendas and interests.

Secondly, Muslims need to advance a counter-narrative by using all the means available to them. This includes social media, blogs and perhaps community-run media installations.

Finally, Muslims need to concentrate on being both politically aware and savvy. Understanding the political factors at work is instrumental and also leads to self-awareness, as is learning to place what is seen and read in its proper context. This includes historical, historiographical, ideo-

logical and philosophical contexts. If one is able to fathom these contexts, learning to respond adequately and commensurately will surely follow. ■

Source: www.islam21c.com

Notes

1. Four Years after September 11th: The Failure of Western Media, Stephen Schwartz http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_7863-1522-2-30.pdf?090211042544
2. 10 Myths about Muslims in the West, Doug Sanders, <http://www.loonwatch.com/2012/09/10-myths-about-muslims-in-the-west/>
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6. http://powerbase.info/index.php/Sam_Westrop
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Islamophobia in Europe

Open Society Foundations

Islamophobia is a term used to describe irrational hostility, fear, or hatred of Islam, Muslims, and Islamic culture, and active discrimination against these groups or individuals within them.

Today, Islamophobia in Europe manifests itself through individual attitudes and behaviours, and the policies and practices of organizations and institutions. Examples—which vary across countries and time—include the following:

- * physical or verbal attacks on property, places of worship, and people - especially those who display a visible manifestation of their religious identity such as women wearing the hijab or niqab;
- * verbal or online threats of violence, vilification, and abuse;
- * policies or legislation that indirectly target or disproportionately affect Muslims, and unduly restrict their freedom of religion, such as bans on wearing visible religious and cultural symbols, laws against facial concealment, and bans on building mosques with minarets;
- * discrimination in education, employment, housing, or access to goods and services;
- * ethnic and religious profiling and police abuse, including some provisions of counterterrorism policing;
- * public pronouncements by some journalists and politicians - across the whole political spectrum - that stigmatize Muslims as a group and disregard their positive contributions to the communities and countries in which they live.

The use of the term Islamophobia is a relatively recent phenomenon and, despite signs that it exists, it remains contested as to what exactly

defines anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic actions or behaviour. Some anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic platforms and networks have sought to delegitimize the term by producing a counter-narrative against Islamophobia.

Why is Islamophobia an issue in Europe now?

In recent years, Islamophobia has been fuelled by public anxiety over immigration and the integration of Muslim minorities into majority cultures in Europe. These tensions have been exacerbated by the aftermath of the economic crash of 2007 and the rise of populist nationalist politicians. They have also been aggravated by high-profile terrorist attacks carried out by Muslim extremists.

In a climate of rapidly expanding diversity in Europe, Muslim minorities have been portrayed as non-belonging and wanting to separate themselves from the rest of society. Government policies have failed to ensure equal rights for all, forcing significant sections of Muslim minorities to face unemployment, poverty, and limited civic and political participation, all of which aggravate discrimination.

Europe is going through its worst economic recession since the 1930s. Minorities often serve as scapegoats in times of economic and political crisis. Islam and the approximately 20 million Muslims who live in the European Union are depicted by some as inherent threats to the European way of life, even in countries where they have lived for generations. The myth of an ongoing European “Islamization” or invasion has been nurtured by xenophobic, populist parties that are on the rise across Europe. In fact, Europeans overestimate the proportion of their populations that is Muslim.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks drastically changed public opinion towards Muslims. Since then, terrorist acts such as the attacks by violent jihadists in London and Madrid, the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and the massacre at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris have increased fear and anxiety. The use of Islam by extremists to justify their terrorist acts has made many Europeans regard Islam as a threat and fear Muslims as the

enemy.

Since 2001, some media in Europe have succumbed to reporting based on stereotypes and used the actions of Islamists to stigmatize Muslim populations. There are concerns that stereotypes and generalizations about Muslims are informing counter-terrorism measures in Europe that restrict liberties for all and negatively impact Muslim communities.

What are the implications for an open society?

Islamophobia is a “symptom of the disintegration of human values,” according to former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg - values such as non-discrimination, tolerance, freedom of thought, justice, solidarity, and equality. These values are supposed to be inherent to European societies; they are values upon which the European Union and the Council of Europe were built.

The extent and nature of the discrimination and Islamophobic incidents perpetrated against European Muslims remain under-documented and under-reported due to a lack of relevant data. Many institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and NGOs like the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) and Tell MAMA in the UK, have acknowledged the rise in this worrying phenomenon and noted the increasingly aggravated nature of the incidents.

For instance, the latest EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey found that on average one in three Muslim respondents faced discrimination and prejudice in the past 12 months, and 11 percent experienced a racist crime. Evidence also shows that Islamophobia can especially affect women - according to CCIF's most recent annual report, about 80% of reported cases of discrimination across France in 2013 concerned women.

What are the Open Society Foundations doing to tackle Islamophobia in Europe?

The Open Society Foundations have worked for over a decade to combat discrimination against

Muslims in Europe and to make sure that Muslim minorities co-exist with equal rights in their national communities. For example:

- * It has published reports on Muslims in France, Italy, and the UK (2002); policy reports on British Muslims (2005); detailed city-level studies on the realities of integration experienced by Muslims in 11 cities across the European Union (2009) including a further seven reports on the specific experiences of Somalis in Europe (2014); and reports that give voice to the experiences of Muslim women wearing the full-face veil (niqab) in France and the UK.
- * It has supported groups that work on a broad range of issues affecting Muslims through various approaches, such as campaigns aimed at countering stereotypes, hate-crime monitoring, capacity building, and opposition research aimed at uncovering and monitoring the counter-jihad network.
- * It engages in advocacy at local, national, and European levels, either by directly calling, for instance, for equality data collection; advocating for improved integration policies based on Open Society research; or through support to NGOs like the European Network Against Racism.
- * It engages in strategic litigation to challenge discriminatory practices, public policies, and laws. ■

Source: *Open Society Foundations*

El elogio de la diferencia

Daniel Prieto Castillo

La pedagogía se ocupa de los seres humanos, de cada uno de ellos. No caben en su discurso las lejanías, tampoco los torrentes de despersonalización a que nos tienen habituados algunos paradigmas con pretensión científica. Quienes nos asumimos de por vida como educadores nos movemos en una comunicación con los otros y con nosotros mismos. No se expresan a través de nosotros palabras de determinada disciplina, como si un lenguaje ajeno nos habitara.

Llamamos discurso de lejanías a aquél que se articula como si no hubiera interlocutores, como si no se hablara con nadie, como si lo dicho se pudiera resolver sin referencias a vidas y experiencias. La pedagogía reflexiona y busca comprender el aprendizaje en el infinito océano de las vidas y las experiencias; en la deriva de cada existencia, como bien lo plantea Humberto Maturana,¹ científico chileno a quien mucho debemos en la reflexión sobre la condición humana:

“... dado que el derrotero del desplazamiento de un sistema viviente en el medio es generado a cada momento como resultado de sus interacciones con el medio en tanto entidad independiente mientras que su organización y adaptación se conservan, el desplazamiento de un sistema viviente en un medio mientras realiza su nicho tiene lugar en forma de ir a la deriva. Los sistemas vivientes existen en una continua deriva (deriva ontogenética) estructural y posicional mientras estén vivos en razón de su propia constitución.”²

Entendemos por “deriva del aprendizaje” los cambios de curso de este último, las nuevas direcciones

El “Elogio de la diferencia” ha sido tomado del libro de Daniel Prieto Castillo *Elogio de la pedagogía universitaria. 20 años del posgrado de la Especialización en Docencia*. Se trata de una obra que recupera la experiencia de dos décadas del Posgrado de Especialización en Docencia Universitaria de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina, 1995-2015, dirigido por el autor.

Hablamos de una propuesta de pedagogía universitaria basada en el trabajo de los educadores sobre sus propias prácticas para profundizar en su tarea de promoción y acompañamiento del aprendizaje en distintas disciplinas de la educación superior.

El texto está organizado en dos itinerarios: uno informativo dirigido a recuperar los grandes momentos del desarrollo del Posgrado y otro a través de lo que se denomina “elogios”. Por un lado se ofrecen datos y por el otro se plantean cuestiones pedagógicas fundamentales: “elogio de diferencia”, “elogio del tiempo del educador”, “elogio de la dignidad”...

La base es la mediación pedagógica, línea de reflexión y de acción educativa propuesta por Prieto Castillo y Francisco Gutiérrez Pérez a comienzos de la década del 90, orientada al aprendizaje adulto de profesionales universitarios, en un diálogo con sus formas de relación y de trabajo a través de distintas disciplinas y con un llamado constante a desarrollar la producción intelectual.

Desde esa manera de concebir la educación, la clave de un proceso educativo pasa por la posibilidad de que también los educadores aprendan a valorar sus prácticas y a construir alternativas para apoyar a sus estudiantes.

El elogio de la diferencia significa el reconocimiento de las historias personales en el marco de la labor educativa, desde la diferencia se aprende y se enseña. El texto completo está a disposición de los lectores en la página web del autor: www.prietocastillo.com

que toma o puede tomar, las variaciones producidas en su derrotero merced a las circunstancias, dentro de la deriva de una existencia humana en determinado nicho social, como resultado de las interacciones con el medio en que se existe.

Remarcamos aquí el sentido de cambio de rumbo, de ir por momentos, y muchos, movido por las circunstancias, de conservarse en y adaptarse a determinado nicho social. Nadie puede hoy aspirar a una línea recta de aprendizaje a lo largo de su existencia; nadie puede predecir qué aprendizajes sobrevendrán y cuáles quedarán fuera de esa deriva. El estallido de los límites de las disciplinas, el vértigo de la transformación de los ámbitos de aprendizaje, las presiones económicas y políticas en contra de la cultura y de la educación, que no cesan de aparecer, cambian una y otra vez el escenario.

En el horizonte de esa constante deriva es terrible desde el punto de vista pedagógico despersonalizar el discurso, no hablar con alguien, para alguien, desde alguien, no traer a escena otras voces para alimentar el diálogo.

La personalización (nos lo ha enseñado durante siglos la creación literaria) tiene múltiples caminos: puedo hablar con alguien, puedo hablar de alguien, puedo hablar de mí y desde mí, puedo recuperar voces que nos llegan desde otros tiempos y espacios.

La pedagogía se construye en interlocución; en el intercambio, el juego, el encuentro, el concierto de voces. Nada más carente de sentido que un educador dueño de un discurso diseñado para un interlocutor ausente; nada más vacío.

Dan vida al discurso pedagógico los seres humanos que lo habitan, sin sus voces, vidas, experiencias, poco puede aportarse a la promoción y el acompañamiento del aprendizaje. La pedagogía es una rama del saber empecinada en los contextos, que no sólo de textos se construyen alternativas para la educación.

El primer texto de un ser humano es su contexto, así fue siempre. Y en el contexto están los otros, no los conceptos flotando en el aire, ni las categorías, ni leyes de determinada ciencia, ni las disciplinas. Quienes vienen a nosotros los educadores a aprender, lo hacen con una historia y con

una cadena de relaciones imposible de dejar de lado. No recibimos en las aulas siempre las mismas generaciones, los mismos rostros, las mismas historias. Cuando no se trabaja desde la diferencia, desde la aventura de la construcción de cada ser, poco y nada se puede hacer a favor de la promoción y el acompañamiento del aprendizaje.

El discurso de lejanías se funda en la despersonalización, en el desconocimiento de vidas y culturas, en las generalizaciones. Desde él hablan las burocracias, cuando nos dicen la educación desde cifras, desde la “mortalidad” estudiantil para referirse a la deserción, desde evaluaciones que cada vez dejan más de lado a los seres humanos. Allá ellas, a nosotros nos cabe la tarea de promover y acompañar y eso no se practica desde las alturas de cifras incapaces de mostrar un solo aliento de vida.

Cuando se ignora la diferencia quedan abiertos los anchos caminos de la indiferencia. No estamos, nunca, en el trabajo educativo, ante seres indiferenciados con todo el juego de esta palabra en relación con la negación de lo diferente y la actitud de indiferencia. Distinguir, reconocer lo diverso, lo distinto. Apelamos a la poesía para ilustrar esa mirada y esa práctica, lo haremos una y otra vez a lo largo del libro, en especial a través de la preciosa obra de Pedro Salinas.

¡Pasma de lo distinto!
¡Ojos azules, nunca
igual a ojos azules!
La luz del día este
no es aquella de ayer,
ni alumbrará mañana.
En infinitos árboles
del mundo, cada hoja
vence al follaje anónimo,
por un imperceptible
modo de no ser otra.
Las olas,
unánimes en playas,
hermanas, se parecen
en el color del pelo,
en el mirar azul,
o gris, sí. Pero todas
tienen letra distinta

cuando cuentan sus breves
amores en la arena.

¡Qué gozo, que no sean
nunca iguales las cosas.
que son las mismas! ¡Toda,
toda la vida es única!
Y aunque no las acusen
cristales ni balanzas,
diferencias minúsculas
aseguran a un ala
de mariposa, a un grano
de arena, la alegría
inmensa de ser otras.³

Llevadas esas preciosas imágenes al inmenso territorio de los seres humanos, lo distinto se acrece sin márgenes, educamos en océanos de diferencias, de modos de ser y de sentir, de contextos, de historias, de vivencias, de alegrías y dolores.

Recuperemos la referencia a la alegría inmensa de ser otra, de ser otro. No hay pedagogía posible sin el radical reconocimiento de las diferencias. ■

Notas

1. Sigo para este tema *La realidad: ¿objetiva o construida?* *Fundamentos biológicos del conocimiento*, por Humberto Maturana R. México, Ed. Anthropos, 1996, segundo volumen, p. 124 y sig.
2. Maturana, op. cit., p. 125.
3. Salinas, Pedro. *Razón de amor*, 1936.

Daniel Prieto Castillo (1942-) Nacido en Mendoza, Argentina, estudió filosofía Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, en Mendoza, donde se licenció en 1968. Doctor en Estudios Latinoamericanos por la UNAM (México, 1980). Profesor en materias de educación y comunicación de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo. Secretario Académico de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo y director de la carrera de postgrado de Especialización en Docencia Universitaria desde 1995. Ha sido profesor visitante de numerosas universidades de América latina. Doctor 'honoris causa' por la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana de Medellín (Colombia).

Negative media portrayal of Islam

Belinda F. Espiritu

There is a current obsession in mainstream media and academic discourse pertaining to Islam and the West. This current obsession is tinged with negative signifiers with the global media's predominantly negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims, depicting Muslims generally as violent, fanatical, bigoted, or as extremists and terrorists.

Islamophobia, fear of Islam and Muslims, has intensified with the 9/11 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, the Taliban's fundamentalist proscriptions and restrictions in Afghanistan, the Charlie Hebdo attack in France, and the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State group (ISIS) which allegedly shows videos of the beheadings of their prisoners who are more often journalists.

There are allegations that ISIS is supported covertly by US-NATO forces, just as the Taliban was supported by the US to fight against the Soviet Union, and that the 9/11 World Trade Center bombing was used as a pretext to wage war against Afghanistan (October 2001) and oil-rich Iraq (March 2003). These were often labelled as conspiracy theories, but more in-depth investigations and analysis can bring out the truth behind each of these geopolitical events.

The point is that Islam has been consistently portrayed by global media as a violence-prone religion that is diametrically opposed to the West. The question of "Islam and the West" has been the theme of various academic conferences in the USA, Europe, and other countries including Malaysia; it has also been the theme of analytical writings, discourses, and publications. These trends illustrate the significance of the topic, which has significance for other countries in Asia and Africa



where Muslims can be found.

Noor (2007) argued that, “Muslim identity and the concerns of Muslims are increasingly being defined in terms of an oppositional dialectic that pits Islam and Muslims against the rest of the world” (p. 261), as Islamophobia has become the mainstream media discourse “where images of Muslims as murderous fanatics abound in movies, videos and computer games” (p. 267).

He proposed that the solution to the present predicament faced by Muslims the world over can be found in the corpus of Islamic theology and praxis itself, particularly in the concept of *tawhid*, which refers to the unity of all creation and the fundamental equality of the singular human race. The idea of *tawhid* reminds Muslims that all human beings are equal and are thus entitled to their own share of respect and dignity.

As hostility and misperceptions between Muslims and Christians persist in an alleged “clash

of civilizations”, Noor asserted that there is an urgent need for Muslims to get out of this rut by shifting their focus to other issues and concerns that are more universal in nature such as the debate over globalization, specifically, “the environmental movement, the pacifist movement against war and the trade of arms, the campaign for equal labor, the campaign against exploitation of children and most recently the wave of anti-globalization.” (p. 274).

When Muslim concerns for justice, equity, rights and freedom are articulated in the context of a borderless world where the audience is not only Muslims but the world as a whole, that will be the time when “the image of Islam and Muslims will stand above the crude and poisonous images we see today” (p. 276).

In relation to Noor’s ideas propounded above, it is essential to counteract the predominantly negative media portrayal of Islam and Muslims with a condensed exposition of the phenomenon of Sufism, which is barely portrayed or understood by Western media, through the writings of two Turkish Sufi spiritual masters, namely Osman Nuri Topbas on Sufi spirituality, and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi on the need for Christians and Muslims to unite in a critique of modern civilization.

It is the nature of media to report on the novel, the sensational, the bizarre, the dramatic, the extraordinary but not the ordinary occurrences in life. Hence, with regard to Islam, it does not report about peace-loving Muslims, or Muslims’ striving for holiness and daily *jihad* against their egos and natural temptations, or peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians in different parts of the world. Through an exposition of Sufism, it will be shown that Muslims who genuinely seek the path to holiness and union with God will never be murderous in their hearts but will be filled with profound gentleness and compassion for all.

Sufism: The pursuit of holiness, purification, and the way of love

The riches of Islamic spirituality are best seen in the phenomenon of Sufism, which Osman Nuri

Topbas (2011) defined as “the effort to pursue a lifestyle that is harmonious with the essence of religion, by virtue of purifying oneself from material and moral defects, and embodying, in their place, a beauty of moral conduct” (p. 31).

Sufism existed from the earliest centuries when some Muslims stressed the potential of the Qur’anic message to effect an inner transformation of the believer by adopting many of the harsh ascetical practices of the Christian monks of the desert (Michel, 1997). By the 13th century, Orders or Brotherhoods of Sufis existed, each with its own form of prayer and patterns of spiritual exercises, often with its own distinctive dress, lodges, and methods of initiation. They commonly stressed the transforming power of God’s love in human hearts and understood Islam as a path to attain union of love and will with God (Michel, 1997).

Sufism is still very much alive and active in many parts of the Islamic world such as in West Africa, the Maghreb, Egypt, Sudan, South Asia, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Modern Muslim publications in the last four countries mentioned attest to the resurgence of interest in Sufism, but it is in Turkey where Rumi came from that Sufism is thriving at its best.

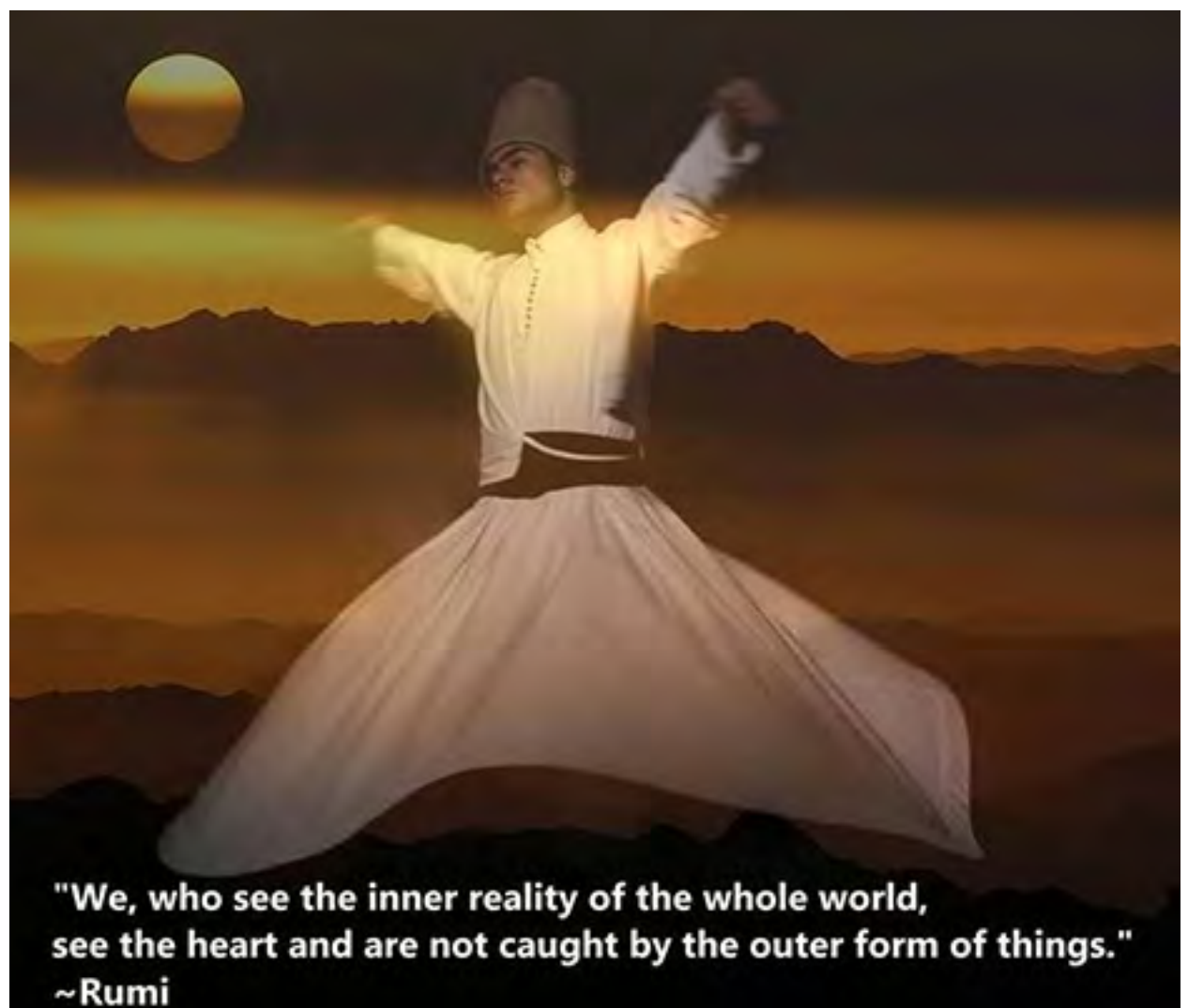
Sufism has its branches depending on the method or *tariqah* used. The first is the path for the good, which focuses on the deeds of worship and piety; the second is the path for the virtuous, which concentrates on purifying the human soul through spiritual exercises and services; and the third is the path for lovers, which aims at attaining the same goal through love.

Osman Nuri Topbas (2011: 32-49) expounded on a few definitions of Sufism offered by saints in accordance with the spiritual manifestations they were privileged

with:

- The Sufi way personifies exemplary character traits and propriety. The Sufi way is about purifying the heart and the soul.
- The Sufi way is a ceaseless spiritual combat against the ego and all kinds of natural temptations that place Muslims away from the path of the Almighty.
- Sufism means sincerity (*ikhlas*) which means offering all acts of worship solely for the sake of the Almighty, without any other consideration intruding on the heart.
- Sufism means standing upright on the straight path which means acting in accordance with the morals and regulations according to the Quran and Sunnah.
- The Sufi way is obedience and submission to God which entails establishing sentiments of contentment and submission to God deep in the heart as to come closer to Him and feel his Divine Gaze watching over him all the time.

Osman Nuri Topbas quoted Ibrahim Efendi, the renowned Sheikh of the Sufi Lodge of Aksaray, who eloquently defined the Sufi path in



verses such as follows:

“Being a Sufi, is to kindle the candle of the heart
with a flame Divine,

And hence throwing it in the fire of love, to
burn forever more[].

Being a Sufi is acquaintance with the ways of
the Lord;

And hence to reach out a helping hand and cure
to the needy.

Being a Sufi is to become joyous and bewildered
in Divine presence,

To be in amazement before the secrets of the
Divine.

Being a Sufi is to reach East and West in the
blink of an eye;

Hence to care for all people and offer them shel-
ter.

Being a Sufi is to surrender the soul to the be-
loved and become free;

To remain with the beloved forever more.”

The verses above are only a few of the elo-
quent, sublime verses written by Ibrahim Effendi
as quoted by Osman Nuri Topbas in his book on
Sufism. With such sublime aspirations of a Sufi on
the path to holiness and considering that Sufism is
the spirit of Islam, the Taliban, Abu Sayyaf Group,
and ISIS cannot be properly called Muslims but
are rather deviants and aberrations of Islam and
humanity.

A critique of neo-imperialism and modern civilization

There are reasons why Muslims feel anger and
antipathy towards the West, particularly towards
America. In earlier times, the anger was due to the
imperialist expansions of the British Empire in
Muslim lands. In contemporary times, Noor and
Moten (2007) explained that Muslims are angry
at seeing their co-religionists killed in Afghan-
istan by the U.S. forces and a thriving Iraq illegally
invaded and occupied with untold death and de-
struction.

They are also against the Americans’ un-
balanced, pro-Israeli policy in the Palestinian-Is-
raeli conflict with its backing of Israel’s continued

occupation of Palestinian lands characterized
by brutal and bloody incursions into Palestinian
camps. These neo-imperialist actions by the US
and NATO forces are part of a larger scheme to
put nations under political, cultural, and econom-
ic hegemony of the global elites, including those
who govern the Bretton Woods institutions
(World Bank, IMF) and the WTO. Both Chris-
tians and Muslims need to critique, expose, and
denounce the neo-imperialist actions of U.S. and
its allied forces.

Muslims stand antithetical to the West in
their theocentric way of life whereas the West
is marked by the separation of church and state,
causing widespread secularism and humanism.
Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (as cited in Michel, 2005:
87-88) was able to identify clearly the five nega-
tive principles on which modern civilization was
founded:

“Might makes right,
Self-interest and competition,
The law of the jungle, everyone for himself,
My race and nation are superior,
I have a right to whatever I want.”

Nursi rightly saw that if people build civil-
ization on the principles of conflict, competition,
and enmity, the result will inevitably be war and
mutual destruction. This was proven by the on-
slaught of two World Wars which ravaged many
nations in the world, and the continuing wars
or threat of wars among nations at present. Said
Nursi also saw that the enemy of human happi-
ness and ethical uprightness is unbelief, irreligion,
which implies that people decide to find their
own path through life without seeking divine
guidance. Facing the common enemy of unbelief,
Nursi called on Muslims to unite not only with
their own fellow believers but also with the truly
pious Christians to offer to the modern world a
vision of human life and society in which God is
central and God’s will is the norm of moral values.

Western civilization has brought much good
and progress to many people but various currents
of thought in Western history have enabled nega-
tive qualities of modern civilization to emerge

and sometimes predominate over the good. Nursi identified two negative developments in Western civilization, which has spread its influence throughout the world (as cited in Michel, 2005: 29-30). The first is that Western civilization became distant and estranged from true Christianity and based its personal and societal views on the principles of an anthropocentric Greco-Roman philosophy which placed the human person at the centre of the universe and pushed God to its margins. The second is the appalling inequality in the means of livelihood of people due to its unchecked market policies.

These negative currents, according to Nursi, seek to destroy both Muslims and Christians by alienating them from the source of spiritual and moral values and by creating enmity between Christians and Muslims. Nursi rejects capitalist culture and decadent civilization which he calls the Second Europe, that which is founded not on Christian ethics but on philosophy rather than religion. The backbone of this global decadent civilization with the primary goal of sensual pleasure is American “popular culture”. Thus, for Said Nursi, the clash of civilizations is essentially the clash between decadent civilization and virtuous civilization, with Islamic civilization being the pillar of “virtuous civilization” (Aydin, 2005).

Nursi interpreted the Qur’an’s injunction to come to a “common term” with the People of the Book to mean that Muslims and Christians should come to a mutual awareness of their common mission to bear witness to the Divine values in the midst of modern civilization. He expressed through his writings that far from being divided by a supposed “clash of civilizations”, Muslims and Christians “are called to work together to carry on a critical civilizational dialogue with the proponents of modernity” (Michel, 2005: 31).

Conclusions

The predominantly negative media portrayal of Islam and Muslims needs to be balanced by widespread knowledge of peace-loving Muslims who pursue the path towards union of love and will with God. Such is the phenomenon of Sufism which has existed since the earliest centuries and

is still active and thriving in many parts of the Islamic world particularly in Turkey.

Said Nursi rightly saw that Christians and Muslims need to unite in a common mission to bear witness to the divine values in the midst of modern civilization. The author agrees with Nursi because there are really deep commonalities in Islamic spirituality and Christian spirituality, and it is on the level of spirituality that these two major religions can find unity and convergence. ■

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Muslim resilience and the right to communicate

Aliaa Dakroury

Forty-seven years ago, Jean d'Arcy, the father of the right to communicate (RTC) argued that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to include a more extensive right than the right to information. He asserted, "This is the angle from which the future development of communications will have to be considered if it is to be fully understood" (d'Arcy, 1969: 1).

A few years later, *Instant World* – a report produced by the Canadian Department for Communications, articulated the RTC understanding to be more of a marker of a civilized democratic society that enforces both *equality* and *inclusion*. It clearly pinpointed that, "the rights to hear and be heard, to inform and to be informed, together may be regarded as the essential components of a 'right to communicate'" (1971: 3).

Viewed in this manner, it is not surprising to see the RTC discourse being utilized recently as an indicator of self-determination by various movements and advocacy groups to voice the notion of cultural and religious rights. Here, it will be argued that this discourse can be seen in current Canadian/international trends to contest the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims by presenting images of them as merely one of the three *Bs* (Billionaires, Bombers, and Belly dancers) promoted by the media (Shaheen, 2009).

Without exhausting readers with many examples of the ways media reinforce colonial stereotypes, one can easily see examples in real-life. They range from a simple slogan in a Turkish delight commercial reassuring its audience that it is "full of eastern promise", to Muslim men in movies who

are portrayed as "oil-rich", "sex-crazed sheikhs", and "inept terrorists" in famous films like, *Indiana Jones*, *Harem*, *The Jewel Of The Nile*, *True Lies*, and *Father Of The Bride 2* (Haider, 2016). Structures of media ownership and control are explicitly linked to Muslim stereotypes in media production and distribution not only in movies, but equally in news reporting. Studies show that media apply "ideological principals each time a news story surfaces" which encourages the "racialization of Muslims by associating them with eroticized images" (Perigoe & Eid, 2014: 16-17).

Islamophobia¹ has been recently seen and practiced in various forms, and it is argued in this article that it represents lack of understanding about the right to communicate. Evidently, a recent case of a grade 11 math teacher in British Columbia who said "don't make her angry otherwise she'll bomb you or she's going to blow everything up" in-class to a Muslim student is just one example of an Islamophobic stance that even targeted children (CBC, 2016).

On a more international scale, a recent study concluded that the New York Times, a very reputable media outlet internationally, is voicing a "significant bias" against Islam and Muslims "that is likely to lead the average reader to 'assign collective responsibility to Islam/Muslims for the violent actions'" (Mastracci, 2016). The study argues that such portrayal is even more negative than the portrayal of a disease like cancer.²

Ironically such Islamophobic attitudes are grounded in nothing more than discomfort and perceived racism toward Muslims in day-to-day life. The Independent newspaper also published a story about four men thrown off an American Airlines flight because they "looked too Muslim" (Ross, 2016). Relating that to the RTC research, Servaes pleaded that, "there is an urgent need for a global ethics that begins from a global cultural perspective" (2004).

More crucially, stereotypes of Muslim women are unmistakable in the media, as the Muslim women's veil - or Hijab, or the headscarf - has always been a site of struggle in western societies. For them, it is simply "the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Is-

lamic societies . . . And the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies” (Ahmed, 1992: 152).

If we consider that a true democracy consists of three major dimensions: equality, participation, and a public sphere, it is important to assess some initiatives taken to challenge Islamophobia in the media, and particularly social media in recent years.

Awareness-building campaigns

In 2014, Laurier University Students’ Public Interest Research Group (LSPIRG) started a campaign - “I am not a costume” - during Halloween to produce awareness on cultural appropriation and stereotyping and to start a “social conversation” on the dynamics of dress, symbols, and words used to paint a picture about a certain culture or religion. LSPIRG posted on its website that:

“Sharing and exchanging cultural and spiritual practices is great, but it gets more complicated when we’re not all on equal footing. It gets more complicated when meaningful things are taken, commodified, and exploited for a profit, with little respect shown to the community

they were taken from.” (LSPIRG, 2014)

During the campaign, students posed holding photos that imagined one culture in the media, and not in reality, asserting that a human being is not simply a costume: a very successful campaign that covered a variety of stereotypes (Chinese, Aboriginal, Hispanic, South-Asian, Arabs, etc.).

It was an interesting experiment to document in this discussion what Canadian comedian Davidson discovered. Launching “Muslim versus Christian” profiles on Tinder website, the comedian intended to show the degree both profiles match on dating sites. In fact, the result was remarkable. While following the number of likes for both pages (which were in favour of the Muslim Sara), the “Muslim” account came under review and was then blocked. The Christian Sara account remained operating. Reactivating it and e-mailing the website administrator failed. Davidson commented:

“I have no way of knowing if it’s that users were angry because they saw I had two identical profiles, or if it had something to do with the fact that I was Muslim that I was banned. But I find it very interesting that until



today, I have a fully functioning Christian Sara profile and a completely blocked Muslim profile” (2016).

While some were offended by this experiment, I would argue that it has really underscored the degree to which Islamophobia exists in real-time.

The advertising industry steps in

Despite the critique of being simply a market-driven idea run by a giant multi-national corporation, some would argue that there is a trend in the fashion and design industry lately to cater to the “Muslim-Hijabi” style, or to be more inclusive in their products by acknowledging Muslim women and their right to cultural expression. In September 2015, H&M featured its first Muslim model wearing a hijab, followed by the famous Italian Dolce & Gabbana which announced that it will produce an exclusive new line of designer hijabs and abayas (Crane-Newman, 2016).

At the beginning of 2016, a Hjarbie [Barbie as a hijab-wearing Muslim] provoked international debate between supporters and opposers, especially after Mattel introduced three physically different shapes of the famous Barbie doll. Crane-Newman documents that the Instagram account, which sees Hjarbie modelling the latest glam looks while sporting chic hijabs, amassed thousands of followers in just a few short weeks (2016). The originator of the Hjarbie, Adam who lives in Nigeria, asked the Barbie company to introduce the Hjarbie into their line in order to “better able to represent the millions of Muslim girls around the world who play with the toy” (Ibid).

Another interesting attempt to dispel the myth behind the image of Muslim women in the media is the story of Australia’s first hijabi-ballerina in the world. Inspired by two African-American ballerinas, the first hijabi Emirati weight lifter, and the first hijabi news anchor on American television to pursue her passion, Stephanie Kurlow (14 years old) stated, “Dancing is like flying for me. It makes me feel free” (Pesce, 2016).

Kurlow wants only to share this form of art after converting to Islam a few years ago. She

adds, that she wants to “inspire other young people who maybe don’t feel so confident to follow their dreams due to the outfits they wear, religious beliefs or lack of opportunities” (Pesce, 2016).

Dispelling Muslim stereotypes

I have argued elsewhere that the “communication media are one of the significant indicators of the practice of pluralism, diversity and the right to communicate in everyday existence” (Dakroury, 2006: 36). Such an understanding has been squarely articulated within both the RTC literature as well as in advocacy groups. Toby Mendel, the programme director of Article 19, pointed out on World Press Freedom Day, that an RTC will never materialize unless “the right of every individual or community to have its stories and views heard” is enforced within cultures and societies (2003). In this respect, one can notice a strong tide of advocacy work in dispelling Muslim stereotypes within Muslim communities themselves (as part of their own resistance against stereotypes and islamophobia).

One interesting attempt is led by the Canadian Council of Muslim women that provides some ground work, engages in societal dialogue, and produces policy proposals on perception and attitudes towards Muslims (especially in Canada in the wake of the 2015 shooting). I would argue that *Muslim Link* (<http://muslimlink.ca>), an online community hub that aims to “build community through storytelling” (Muslim Link, 2016), is one means of expressing the right to communicate for the Muslim Community in the Canadian capital city.

Topics vary from education, business, arts, culture, and community service to showcasing Muslims as an integral part of Canadian society. One can see unconventional headlines like “Using art to address the impact of Islamophobia on children”, or sponsorship for an initiative like “Ottawa Hijab Solidarity Day”, or “Walking with our Muslim Sisters”. These are important initiatives to challenge Islamophobia, to share stories, to give voices to the voiceless, and to practice the right to communicate in real life.

Notes

1. Islamophobia is characterized as “a fear or hatred of Islam and its followers”. It translates into individual, ideological, and systematic forms of discrimination and oppression (as cited in Eid & Karim, 2014: 107).
2. Islam was portrayed negatively in 57% of headlines during the period of analysis, with cancer and cocaine being evaluated at 34% and 47% respectively (Mastracci, 2016).

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Photo page 21: “Hijab day”, available online at: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/197810-islamic-scholars-warn-ban-hijab-say-wearing-act-faith.html>

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New Zealand newspaper coverage of Islam and Muslims

Shah Nister Kabir,

The following article provides an overview of New Zealand mainstream newspapers' coverage of Islam and Muslim nations' issues from 2012 to February 2016. The discussion outlines "Islamic religious politics", international politics and policies, and Western "party politics", which are experiencing a surge in far-right ideology such as the anti-Muslim speeches of the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. These issues are discussed as they impact both the West and Muslim nations.

The data that this discussion is based on come from New Zealand newspapers' web sites. The discussion also refers to the findings of my PhD thesis at the University of Otago (Kabir, 2014); and other contributions published since 2010 and based on research between 2006 and 2007. Discussion is confined to two mainstream newspapers' coverage – the *Otago Daily Times* (ODT) and the *New Zealand Herald* (NZH). The NZH is the highest circulation paper in New Zealand and the ODT is the oldest. One caveat is that there are many issues pertaining to Islam and Muslims during this time-frame and it is not possible to explain all of them as space is limited.

To start with, it should be noted that September 11, 2001 (here after 9/11) is marked as one the most significant events in the history of the relationship between Islam and the West (Poole, 2011). Later incidents such as the July 2007 bombings in London, the Muhammad Cartoon controversy, and the two Paris attacks in 2015 (one in

January that killed 12 people at the *Charlie Hebdo* office and the November attack that killed 129 people), innocent tourists killing on a Tunisian beach; and the rise of Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East also impacted the world. In addition, the desperate immigrants from the Middle East seeking shelter in Europe and elsewhere, the Iran nuclear issue, the Arab Spring (which started in 2010 in Egypt) among others became significant issues which are prominently featured in the Western media.

The Arab Spring was initially given a constructive slant, but later coverage created an opposite perception. For example, the Arab uprising, which started in Egypt and toppled Hosni Mubarak's dictatorial rule of 30 years, received positive coverage in both the NZH and ODT. However, when it was observed that the uprising paved the way for the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the election began to receive negative coverage in NZH editorial and news.

The NZH did not criticize the military takeover of Egypt and the dictatorial rule of Fatah al-Sisi. It perceived that the Mohammad Mursi government had failed and that Egypt was searching for alternative leadership. After decades of dictatorial rule, they did not understand that a year or so is not enough time to achieve a democracy. They did not see that dictatorial rule cannot be simply changed to a democratic system; and that a democratic system may require many years of trial and error so that citizens can choose an appropriate leadership. The NZH newspaper's editorials never focused on the need for a democratic government and the price the Egyptians would pay in the case of military rule.

In contrast, ODT editorials rejected the al-Sisi military government. After the fall of Brotherhood government in Egypt, the newspaper, in its editorials and cartoon images, underlined Egyptians failure to benefit from the "fruit" of the uprising as what they gained from the revolution was snatched by the military. The ODT also played a constructive role in the context of Libya. It argued against the killing of Gaddafi. The ODT also argued for "the West" not to do anything in the Middle East without the sanction of the United Nations.

The news coverage of these newspapers implied that because of the continuous violence in Iraq and the Middle East and the rise of IS, New Zealand should play a role as an “ally” of Western nations by providing training for Iraqi soldiers. Their editorials and editorial cartoons, however, were critical not only of the New Zealand government but also of the Western elite nations’ policy in Iraq. All editorials and editorial cartoons rejected the New Zealand government’s decision to send their troops to Iraq. New Zealand did not join the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and these newspapers recognized that invading Iraq was unethical (Kabir, 2014; Kabir and Bourk, 2012) and that the current Iraqi crisis was the responsibility of the invading party.

My finding (2013) in the coverage of the Iran nuclear issue was that New Zealand newspapers provided an Orientalist perception that promoted Islam as a threat. However, recently that situation appears to have changed. The ODT encourages a peaceful relationship between Iran and the US. Its editorials advocate a firm Iran-US relationship for the Middle East peace process.

Previously, editorial coverage in the NZH dehumanized Iran and its leadership – for example, by using words such as “Mullah”, “Islamist”, “Islamic cleric” and so on. Further, until 2008, both these newspapers’ editorial cartoons pushed a negative perception of the US, e.g. the US is going to invade Iran to cover up its failure in Iraq. Both newspapers welcomed the lifting of sanctions against Iran in 2015 and neither published any adverse cartoons. Both newspapers’ editorials were of the opinion that to defeat IS, the US should negotiate side Iran.

While covering the Palestine-Israel conflict the news coverage reinforced the notion that Israel kills only “Muslim militants”. Both these newspapers’ editorials and cartoons, nonetheless, blamed Israel for its “irrational” and “unethical” action against Palestinian people. They also blamed the US for its blind support (see the cartoon images appearing in the ODT) of Israel that caused huge casualties in Palestine.¹ Nevertheless, the NZH rejects “Islamist” Hamas and reinforces the assertion that “Islamic politics” should have no

place in the world as their “ideology” goes against women rights and human rights.

The ODT promoted a similar perception in its news coverage, but its editorials put forward a different argument from the NZH, arguing that “the West” needs to be more practical towards negotiating democracy in the Middle East. Its editorials maintained that an optimum result may never come about and this is why “the West” needs to accept Hamas in the democratic process in Palestine. Indeed, the ODT specifically rejected “Israel’s contentious settlements” in Palestine, identifying them as one of the main obstacles in Israel-Palestine peace negotiations.

Misrepresentation and incitement

The “Western” attack against IS in Syria is accepted in news coverage. However, the Russian attack against the same group (IS) is rejected and the Russian attack is identified as an action that saves “dictator” Bashar al-Assad and “kills innocent people”. In contrast, “the Western attack” is perceived in a way that will “establish democracy” in the region. The coverage rarely focuses on the causes of the loss of lives and rights in Syria from “the Western” attacks.

For many years the world has been observing the mass killing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. They were desperate to find refuge in Bangladesh because of socio-economic and cultural discrimination. Muslims are subjected to continuous harassment due to their religious identity (New York Times, 2014; 2016). Neither NZH nor ODT said anything about the religious discrimination, racism and killing of hundreds of Muslims in Myanmar although coverage of the democratization process in the country and news about Aung San Suu Kyi were prominent. The negotiation process between the military and political parties demanded media attention, but not, apparently, the abuse and violation of human rights.

The attack on the office of Charlie Hebdo (2015) killed 12 people – eight journalists, two police officers, a maintenance worker and a visitor; and the later Paris attack killed 129 innocent people. In the news narratives it was common to read that they “epitomized Western author-

ities' greatest fear: Islamic radicals". In their explanation, the central concern became "Islamic radicalism", and "Islamic terrorism". In some narratives, "terrorism" and "Islam" become interchangeable. However, when Muslims were attacked or killed by some "attackers" after the Paris incident, the events were presented less critically, identifying the person as "a psychiatric" patient or similar. The narratives never disclosed the identity of the "attacker".

Their editorials and editorial cartoon images also reinforced a similar perception of an "Islamic threat". However, some editorial cartoons promoted a constructive view. For example, the NZH published one image by a Brazilian cartoonist, Carlos Lotuff, which shows that the "terrorist" attack does not kill innocent people only; it eventually backfires on "Islamic faith" (see the cartoon image).

Both newspapers fell into a controversial trap when they failed to criticize the US presidential candidate, Donald Trump, in the context of his anti-Muslim speeches. One might argue that his speeches are similar to some Muslim "Imams", such as Abu Hamza in England, who preach anti-West hatred. Abu Hamza is seen as a "hate-preacher" but in news coverage Trump is never perceived as a hate-speaker against Islam and Muslims. However, Trump is rejected as a leader. Photo-coverage was also negative (see the photograph).² Editorials observed that Trump is not a "moderate" person". For example, an ODT editorial argued that the Republicans are searching for a "moderate candidate" to be selected (i.e. other than Trump). Similarly, an NZH editorial observed that in Trump's win in New Hampshire, the "Republicans picked a demagogue".



Residents of Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, protest in favour of welcoming refugees in the wake of Europe's migration crisis. Glasgow was the first city in Great Britain to accept Syrian refugees.

In the context of the immigrant crisis in Europe, newspaper coverage referred to migrants as "refugees" and the "refugees" were sometimes portrayed as "Islamic terrorists", "members of IS", "rapists", "people with anti-West values" who will destroy "the West". The coverage constructed this image without exploring the roots of the crisis and without acknowledging that they are victims of their own governments and "the West". They also promoted a discourse of fear by stating that Europe is vulnerable and its nations would soon "collapse" due to the "refugees".

Coverage ignored the fact that the "refugee" issue is critical in Muslim nations too – for example, Turkey has taken in 1.7 million Syrian "refugees" (UNHCR, 2015). Further, when a "refugee" is identified as Muslim and involved in "criminal" activity, his/her identity, including their name and nation of origin, for example, are mentioned prominently and repeatedly. In contrast, in cases where the "refugees" become victims of the "local people" or any "organized group", their

identities are rarely published and their activities are presented in a less inflammatory way, such as “gunman” instead of “terrorist”. However, the readers of the NZH and ODT can see a different picture in the editorial cartoons.

Tackling inherent contradictions

New Zealand newspapers focus on a limited number of themes – terrorism, fundamentalism, criminal issues, Islamic religious politics – in covering Islam and Muslims. However, all these issues in one way or another relate to “Islamic terrorism”. New Zealand society does not have a first-hand experience of Islam and Muslims and they receive information from media. The representation of these themes may function to negatively influence New Zealand people.

It needs to be noted that in many cases New Zealand newspapers receive stories from the international newsfeeds including news agencies and foreign newspapers. This can cause readers to receive contradictory images of Islam and Muslims in news coverage and in opinion-making. Specifically, the ODT does not have any correspondent stationed overseas and the NZH sometimes covers international events through its own correspondents. Thus, one might argue that the negative coverage of Islam and Muslims in the news is not the result of the New Zealand newspapers per se.

However, all media outlets have gate-keepers that check and select what is going to be published. It is very common in the world’s media for the frequency of news coverage to be several times higher than the publication of editorials and editorial cartoons. Thus, regular focus on an issue in a negative, prejudicial way in news can be a problem. Readers see news coverage frequently but see opinion only occasionally, sometimes ignoring opinion pages altogether. ■

Photo credit page 26: Scottish Refugee Council (2015).

Notes

1. There is no recent cartoon available on this issue.
2. The NZH published the cover page of the *Daily News* (US) after his defeat in Iowa.

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Opinion

How Jerry Falwell Jr. is spreading Islamophobia

Eboo Patel

As an American Muslim who speaks at about 25 college campuses a year, I suppose I should thank Jerry Falwell Jr. for the trigger warning.

This month [December 2015], Falwell, president of Liberty University, used the occasion of a weekly convocation to urge his students to obtain guns so they could “end those Muslims before they walked in.” The students at Liberty cheered.

Although he later tried to tone down his remark, Mr. Falwell’s comment has the virtue of being quite clear. He is stating in no uncertain terms that his university will proudly magnify a signature prejudice of our times.



Liberty University is a private, non-profit Christian university located in Lynchburg, Virginia, United States. In 1967, Jerry Falwell decided to build a Christian educational system for evangelical youth. He began with the establishment of Lynchburg Christian Academy, an accredited Christian day school for grades K-12. In 1971, he founded Liberty University, an accredited Christian university for evangelical believers. Liberty is well known as a stage for politicians seeking to reach an evangelical Christian audience and it was here in March 2015 that Ted Cruz announced his intention to run for president in the 2016 election.

While Liberty is undoubtedly an outlier as far as colleges go, the incident still raises provocative questions for higher-education leaders more broadly. Given the barrage of anti-Muslim talk across America, is it possible that students at more typical colleges might cheer a call to violently target Muslims? What is the role of colleges in engaging a prejudice like Islamophobia? Ought the presidents make some sort of statement condemning it? Do colleges have curricular and co-curricular programs where students whose curiosity has been piqued by the current climate of prejudice can study college-level material about Islam and Muslim communities?

Such questions are made more potent by recent campus movements with respect to race, gender, and sexuality. If buildings named after historical figures with racist views, like Woodrow Wilson and John C. Calhoun, contribute to

a hostile environment for black students, then the constant debates about Islam blaring from the televisions in the fitness centre has to have some effect on Muslim students.

If multicultural requirements are needed to correct for the absence of African-American history in the standard high-school curriculum, then courses on religious diversity could do the same for the shameful lack of knowledge about the contributions of Islam and other traditions to human civilization. If co-curricular programs that facilitate meaningful dialogues between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds reduce racism, then the same type of programs involving religiously diverse students could do the same for Islamophobia and other forms of religious prejudice.

Most colleges make fighting bias part of their core mission because prejudice is the ene-

my of both knowledge and democracy. To make a race analogy, institutions that advance the pursuit of truth and prepare young people for civic and professional life want to make sure that when white students hear “black” they recall the names of great black writers and scientists who were highlighted in the curriculum, and black housemates and classmates befriended in a dynamic campus environment. In other words, colleges are well aware that we are all susceptible to making inference errors.

Too many people right now, including college students, think “terrorist” when they hear “Muslim,” despite the fact that white supremacists have killed more Americans since 9/11 than have Muslim extremists. Yet the broad concern in the United States is about jihadist violence rather than right-wing terrorism, an association based on the constant volley of highly skewed information available in the public square. As they are increasingly more proactive on race questions, colleges have to become more intentional on religious issues as well.

Why colleges? No other institution in our society has reducing prejudice as a core value, and the requisite knowledge and resources to succeed at this in a large-scale way. Campuses (and here I emphasize the experience of four-year residential institutions) gather young people from a wide range of backgrounds, eager to explore their own identities and learn about others. They hire staff who are expert in both nurturing particularity and facilitating healthy community across a range of identities.

Campuses have faculty members whose purpose is both to advance the frontiers of knowledge and make the unfamiliar accessible to 19-year-olds. They pride themselves on a culture where students can get inspired by big ideas and start concrete initiatives that put those ideas into action. Our democracy, in all its various diversities, literally depends on colleges succeeding at such tasks.

One final point. Jerry Falwell Jr. chose to make his statement at convocation, a stage infused with religious meaning. By doing so, he connected the Christian mission of his institution with fear and hatred of Muslims.

Perhaps he was playing to the crowd. Anti-Muslim bias among Christians is rampant. A Pew study found that, on a “warmth thermometer” of 1 to 100, with 50 being lukewarm, Roman Catholics rated Muslims a 40, white mainline Protestants scored Muslims a 37, and white Evangelicals gave my community a 30. This was in July 2014, before Donald Trump took up his full-time residency in the American media and very likely made all this a lot worse.

I think this has special implications for the leaders of the hundreds of institutions in the United States that take their Christian heritage seriously. Islamophobia is steadily taking root in Christian theology. This is a result of deliberate action; educators from pastors to university presidents are teaching that fear and hatred of Muslims is holy, a Christian thing to do.

This stark reality should serve as a call to those in Christian institutions that have a different theology when it comes to relating with Muslims, or any other identity group for that matter. Are the climate, the coursework, and the co-curricular activities of your institution nurturing a theology of the friend, or are they forfeiting students to Jerry Falwell Jr.’s theology of the gun? ■

[Source: Commentary.](#) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. December 11, 2015.

Eboo Patel is president of the Interfaith Youth Core, a non-profit organization that teams up with higher education on issues of religious diversity. He is the author, most recently, of *Sacred Ground* (Beacon Press, 2012).

Indian democracy and governance

Vincent Rajkumar

Democracy as a system of governance is supposed to allow extensive representation and inclusiveness of as many people and views as possible to feed into the functioning of a fair and just society. The definition of democracy is incomplete unless it is defined in social and individual contexts.

Democratic ideals represent various aspects of the broad idea of “government of the people, by the people and for the people.” They include political characteristics that can be seen to be intrinsically important in terms of the objective of democratic social living, such as freedom of expression, participation of the people in deciding the factors governing their lives, public accountability of leaders, and an equitable distribution of power. Therefore, when we say Indian democracy, we mean not only that its political institutions and processes are democratic but also that the Indian society and every Indian citizen is democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in social sphere and individual behaviour.

Democratic governance, the term recently added to the vocabulary of politics, signifies more than what the two words signify separately. A compound is not what its constituents are. From the term itself it is clear that democratic governance is not merely being democratic as it is usually understood in its minimalist sense as government of people’s representatives elected in a free and competitive situation; nor is it merely governance as one of limited government charged with the task of enforcement of law and order, and overseeing the contracts among individuals living in a state or to facilitate, promote and regulate markets. Democratic governance is a condition in

which the promise of justice, liberty and equality is realized in a democratic political framework, where the government is sensitive to the people’s identities, aspirations and needs and where people feel secure and content.

India is proud to be the largest democracy in the world. For more than sixty-five years, we have witnessed the conduct of successful elections, peaceful changes of government at the Centre and in the States, people exercising freedom of expression, movement and religion. At the same time, we quite often experience rampant inequalities, injustice or nonfulfillment of social expectations.

Today, people believe that their government is not keeping pace with their expectations. In the last two years, India has seen two groundswells of popular protest in which crowds largely composed of middle-class urbanites have taken to the streets to demand a more accountable and responsive government. The moral outrage is entirely justified, and the factors linked to India’s governance woes are well known – a rise in corruption, cronyism, and criminalising among the ranks of elected officials, and a crushing government bureaucracy. India’s governance challenges come against these backgrounds of dramatic economic and political transformation.

Glorification and dehumanization

The transformative approach addresses the problem mentioned earlier of the creation of virtual wealth which has enriched some but harmed many, creating poverty, unemployment, hunger and death; widening the gap between the rich and poor; marginalizing peoples, eroding the whole meaning of life and destroying eco-systems. The financial crisis indicates the immorality within a system that glorifies money and dehumanizes people by encouraging acquisitive individualism: This greed-nurtured culture reduces the value of human life, erodes the moral and ecological fabric of human civilization.

Even the current understanding of development has not produced economic freedom in any substantial way. Due to the implementation of Globalization and free market economy, many changes have occurred in the production rela-

Trains are still a major means of transport for urban and rural communities in India.

Photo: Infiniteunknown.



tions, and the life of the people have been taken for granted and human rights have been violated and the basic rights of the common person are being neglected. Globalization has not only been able to adopt free market economy but at the same time the rights of millions to live a dignified life have been denied. The state-controlled economic sectors were opened up to private holdings; regulations and welfare measures were reduced considerably and labour laws and policies were restructured, mostly in the favour of the market economy and to enhance the productive capacities of the respective sectors. As much a major share of national wealth is in the hands of a limited section of people. A majority of the population is poor and live in the rural areas. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening.

The conditions created by such lopsided economic arrangements have produced new forms of hierarchies within gender, regional, caste and at the community levels. For instance, the Dalits, who comprise almost 17% of the national population, have a negligible presence in the formal economy. They consistently suffer discrimination with respect to land, labour and capital. The greater dependency of Dalits on agriculture for their livelihood – mainly as landless labourers with low wage rates – has created the condition described

as “chronic poverty”. Such discriminatory disparities remain also in the educational sectors. Market practices further show subtle discrimination in allocating resources, employment, loans and other facilities to this particular group.

The greatest threat that democracy is facing in India today is the scourge of corruption. Despite having a vigilant press, an outspoken civil society and an impartial Judiciary, the most disheartening fact of Indian democracy is corruption. Corruption in public life has been a major concern in India. Corruption continues to exist in covert and overt ways at all three levels - political, bureaucratic and corporate sector. One can see the nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and industrialists which has resulted in corruption and corrupt practices. The high level of corruption in India has been widely perceived as a major obstacle in improving the quality of governance. In fact, corruption is a sign of political instability. and institutional decay, challenging seriously the validity and propriety of governance.

Criminalization is a fact of Indian electoral politics today. Criminalization of politics means to use politics or political power for immoral gains. Criminalization of politics is the very negation of democratic values and has no place in a democratic set up. The voters, political parties

and the law and order machinery of the state are all equally responsible for this. There is very little faith in India in the efficacy of the democratic process in actually delivering good governance. The unholy nexus between politicians, civil servants, and business houses have a baneful influence on public policy formulation and governance.

If there is one word that occupies headlines in India today, it is intolerance and the country is debating rising radicalism and the shrinking liberal space. The recent resurgence of religiosity has been associated with the growth of intolerance and, in some cases, the outbreak of conflict in the country. The government of India contemplated a move to bring an anti-cow slaughter law and the whole thing just snowballed from there. The beef ban gave the power to many radical groups, who took it upon themselves to implement it. A Muslim man was dragged out of his house, lynched and killed on the suspicion that he and his family in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh had stored beef in their refrigerator. The road to making India's government more accountable goes uphill and the problem seem to get worse.

Never before in independent India's history have so many writers and public intellectuals mounted a collective protest against the government's failure to protect freedom of expression and contain religious intolerance. Over 30 writers have returned their state awards citing the reason that they are "raising their voice against the changing secular fabric of the country". They were joined by many other scientists and artists in this exercise. It is important to note that this response is not born out of an anti-government or pro-minorities bias. It is the result of accumulation of growing dissent over a variety of repressive measures against individual freedoms. But the government seems to be blind towards public opinion.

The crisis of governance in India today is a consequence of the breakdown of democratic institutions and the emergence of an unholy nexus



between inefficient, corrupt civil servants and vote-hungry politicians. As a result, more than six decades after independence, despite low place in the human development. The basic fabric of good governance does not occur by chance. Good governance is associated with responsible political leadership, enlightened policy-making and a civil service imbued with a professional ethos. The presence of a strong civil society including a free press and independent judiciary are the pre-conditions for such good governance. It must be demanded by citizens and nourished explicitly and consciously by the nation-state. ■

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Medios y despolitización

Carlos A. Valle

El vertiginoso y deslumbrante desarrollo de la tecnología se encuentra enmarcado por la creciente economía trasnacional, la progresiva concentración de la propiedad de los medios de comunicación en pocas manos, la mayor dependencia en el campo de la información y el conocimiento, y un incesante afianzamiento de este poder.

El usufructo de tal situación está en las manos de un puñado de países, mientras el acoso que la pobreza y la deuda externa imponen a muchos otros, abortan el desarrollo de una vida digna para la inmensa mayoría de los seres humanos. Ésta y muchas otras realidades golpean el corazón de nuestros pueblos. ¿Qué es necesario hacer para que el progreso tecnológico sea una herramienta al servicio del desarrollo de los pueblos? ¿Cómo podrán las mayorías enmudecidas y sumergidas ejercer su derecho a la vida y a su propio desarrollo?

La expansión de este sistema económico tiene efectos directos en el desarrollo de la democracia y en la naturaleza de la comunicación que en ella se ejerce. Por un lado, la tecnología se democratiza, posibilita el acceso a la comunicación a millones, provee la creación de un sinnúmero de redes solidarias, permite compartir la información entre grupos de base de las más remotas partes del mundo permitiendo que la voz de muchos pueda ser oída.

Pero, por otro lado, el acceso a la tecnología está inserto en la creciente brecha entre ricos y pobres. Como dice J.L. Cebrián en su libro *La Red*: “Las diferencias entre los distintos estamentos sociales se verán agigantadas por esta nueva frontera existente entre los ciudadanos enchufados y los desenchufados. Los elementos igualitarios de Internet son aplicables sólo a los primeros y aumentarán, paradójicamente, las desigualdades re-

specto al resto.”

En consecuencia, el respeto por la dignidad de las personas se ve crecientemente afectado. Es cada vez mayor el número de decisiones que unos pocos toman en nombre de todos, bajo la aparente participación de la gente.

Las elecciones, por ejemplo, se están convirtiendo cada vez más en un proceso mediático. Los candidatos venden su imagen y hay “especialistas” que organizan la promoción y la venta de esa imagen en cualquier parte del mundo. El mundo asiste a la proliferación de puestas en escena colmadas de mentiras con las que los candidatos buscan conquistar a su audiencia. Nada está ausente, ni el peinado, ni la ropa, ni la sonrisa medida o la promesa esperada.

Los medios comerciales de comunicación están provocando, al menos, tres efectos principales. En primer lugar, tienden a reforzar la despolitización de la gente. Como alguna vez lo indicó G. Gerbner – uno de pioneros en el campo de la investigación en comunicación – los conglomerados de medios “no tienen nada para decir, pero mucho para vender”. En segundo lugar, tienden a desmoralizar a la población convenciéndola de que es vana toda esperanza de cambio y que sólo resta aceptar la realidad tal cual la interpretan.

El tercer efecto es la producción de realidades paradójicas. Por un lado, se verifica un mayor y creciente acceso a la recepción de medios y, al mismo tiempo, los medios están cada vez en menos manos. La influencia que ejercen las corporaciones globales se extiende a todas las esferas de la vida, mientras que se procura que el papel de los estados nacionales sea cada vez más irrelevante. Son los grandes medios los que exaltan la importancia de la libertad de expresión en la vida de la sociedad, especialmente porque son ellos los que poseen los mayores centros de información. La libertad de expresión se ha ido convirtiendo en la libertad comercial para conducirla.

Centralización y manipulación

Marshall McLuhan, el recordado teórico de la comunicación, estaba convencido de que los medios de comunicación habían convertido al mundo en una *aldea global*. La aldea es el lugar de

las relaciones cara a cara. Es el ámbito en el que se conoce el origen de la información, porque hay poca distancia entre el que emite la información y quien la recibe. La aldea es el lugar donde los problemas y las necesidades se pueden identificar con nombre y apellido.

Pero la *transnacionalización* nos ha sumido en un ámbito caracterizado por la centralización y, por ello mismo, su tendencia a la manipulación antes que el diálogo al dejar el poder de la información en pocas manos, que ejercen su influencia y poder político, económico y social. Con este poder el mundo transnacional puede interferir y dañar la cultura local e introducir su propia cultura, su definida ideología. Por eso más que de una *aldea global* debemos hablar de una *aldea corporativa*.

En el ya lejano – y para algunos olvidado – 1977, la UNESCO aprueba la creación de una comisión internacional, presidida por Seán MacBride, un ministro del gobierno de Irlanda y un prominente político internacional. El trabajo que llevaría a cabo esta Comisión – en la que se encontraba Juan Somavía y Gabriel García Márquez – buscaba dar respuesta a una serie de problemas en el campo de la información y la comunicación. En buena medida esos problemas todavía están sin resolver y, algunos, se han agudizado.

Damián Loretti y Luis Lozano, en su muy valioso libro *El derecho a la comunicación*, indica que “los primeros desarrollos teóricos y jurídicos en torno a la democratización de las comunicaciones se remontan a fines de los años setenta y resultan inseparables del hito que implicó la publicación en 1980 del informe *Un solo mundo, voces múltiples*” y que este proceso “tuvo lugar en simultáneo con múltiples acontecimientos que lo atravesaron de manera directa, entre ellos, cuestiones ligadas al contexto político global”. Ese era el momento en que la revolución tecnológica experimentaba un gran impulso en los países desarrollados. No debe olvidarse que el Informe debía ser apoyado por las Naciones Unidas y fundamentalmente en

la UNESCO.

El Informe Mc Bride proponía una fuerte participación en el acceso a las nuevas tecnologías y la plena libertad de todos a emitir cualquier tipo de información. Esta postura no fue bien recibida por los países desarrollados porque afectaba sus intereses económicos. Paralelamente EE.UU. desarrolló su propio programa en el que establecía enormes restricciones a la eliminación en todas las áreas de los desequilibrios mundiales de comunicación. Con fuertes acusaciones sobre amenazas a las libertades de las sociedades democráticas EE.UU. se retira de la UNESCO en 1984.

Dado que era uno de los mayores contribuyentes a ese programa, su salida deteriora enormemente el funcionamiento de la institución y el Informe es prácticamente dejado de lado. En 1989 la UNESCO vuelve a debatir el tema de los flujos de información y el papel de los medios de comunicación con los viejos principios que el Informe MacBride había intentado cuestionar y enmendar. Es valioso rescatar, al menos, cinco problemas básicos que planteaba el Informe.

Primero, la creciente dependencia de los países del Tercer Mundo de los países ricos industrializados en términos de tecnología, en su progresiva integración al dominio de las multinacionales cuyo interés básico es la ganancia. Esta situación trae como resultado un rápido deterioro de las culturas locales y la creación de valores que refuerzan la dependencia y la sumisión a los dictados de esa nueva cultura del consumo.

El segundo se refiere a la consideración de la información como una mercancía y no como un bien social. Juan Somavía entiende que hay que añadir otros dos conceptos básicos a tener en cuenta: que hay un proceso educativo que se lleva a cabo por los medios de comunicación, y que debe considerarse el derecho a la participación del receptor en el proceso de la comunicación.

El tercero considera el acentuado desbalance entre el flujo de información de los variados



medios de comunicación. La centralidad de la provisión de la información se traduce, muchas veces, en la falta de respeto por las culturas locales, el desconocimiento de las realidades que soportan esos países, un desprecio por lo local y una marcada arrogancia por parte de quien es el dueño del medio.

El cuarto destaca la concentración de poder en las manos de las grandes potencias a partir de la información que poseen gracias a las nuevas tecnologías. Eso les permite tener acceso a un enorme banco de datos, la mayoría de los cuales son manejados por las empresas multinacionales para su propio beneficio.

El quinto, quizás el que produce mayor irritación: la soberanía de los diferentes países frente a la intromisión extranjera a partir de la información y las comunicaciones.

Hay que recordar que, en la primera reunión de la Comisión, MacBride había planteado cuatro preguntas claves que Josep Gifreu resumió así: “¿Qué se entiende por una circulación libre y equilibrada de la información? ¿Qué significa ‘un nuevo orden mundial de la información’, y cuál es su interrelación con el ‘nuevo orden económico internacional’? ¿Cómo puede lograrse el ‘derecho a la comunicación’, con sus implicancias éticas y legales como una nueva línea de pensamiento y acción en el campo global de la comunicación? ¿Cómo pueden garantizarse y protegerse la objetividad y la interdependencia de los medios?”

Los cinco problemas básicos contemplados en las preguntas de MacBride constituyeron y constituyen buena parte de los campos en los cuales hay que considerar el tema de la comunicación y la despolitización en un mundo que se debate entre la ilusión de la aldea global y la creciente realidad de la aldea trasnacional. ■

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On the screen

Saarbrücken (Germany) 2016

The Ecumenical Jury at the 37th Film Festival Max Ophüls in Saarbrücken awarded its Prize of €2,000 donated by the Evangelical and Catholic Associations for Adult Education in the Saarland, to the film *Der Nachtmahr* (The Nightmare) by AKIZ (Germany, 2015).

“The Nightmare” deals with anxieties. The audience takes part in Tina’s growing self-awareness. She meets her own “dark” side in the form of a strange creature which she learns to accept – Tina’s internal world becomes visible via the nightmare. At the same time the film is about the acceptance of personal peculiarities and the way society approaches anomalies. For these issues AKIZ has found extraordinarily artistic expression, provoking, irritating – and convincing.

The Members of the Ecumenical Jury in 2016 were: Gerhard Alt, Dillingen (Germany) – President; Melanie Pollmeier, Köniz (Switzerland); Wolf-Dieter Scheid, Saarbrücken (Germany); Sarah Julia Stross, Vienna (Austria).

Berlin (Germany) 2016

At the 66th International Film Festival Berlin (February 11-21, 2016) the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in the International Competition was awarded to the documentary *Fuocoammare / Fire at Sea* directed by Gianfranco Rosi (Italy/France, 2015).

Fuocoammare interweaves the destinies of African refugees with the life of an Italian fishing family on the island of Lampedusa. Through poetically meaningful images, Rosi illuminates these separate worlds, connecting them through the character of a doctor, and through the motif of



Still from *Les Premiers, les Derniers / The First, The Last* directed by Bouli Lanners (Belgium/France, 2016).

the sea, which nourishes some and kills others. A film that crafts a new perspective of the catastrophe, a film that refuses to allow the status quo to go unquestioned.

The Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in the Panorama, endowed with 2500.- € by the Catholic Film Work in Germany, was awarded to *Les Premiers, les Derniers / The First, The Last* directed by Bouli Lanners (Belgium/France, 2016).

Two outcast lovers on the run. Two hitmen on their trail. Many gunshots. And it all oddly leads to a powerful plea for humanity. With gorgeously photographed lonely landscapes and endearingly hopeful characters, this playfully apocalyptic western paints a desolate road toward salvation, but the journey is worth the wait and the work because, as one character beautifully states, “There is more to life than breathing.” Bouli Lanners’ *Les Premiers, les Derniers* urges us to breathe and travel together.

In the Forum the Jury awarded its prize, endowed with 2500.- € by the Evangelical Church in Germany, ex aequo to the films *Les sauteurs / Those Who Jump* directed by Abou Bakar Sidibé, Estephan Wagner, Moritz Siebert (Denmark, 2016) and to *Barakah yoqabil Barakah / Barakah*

Meets Barakah directed by Mahmoud Sabbagh (Saudi Arabia, 2016).

Les sauteurs depicts the plight of African refugees from a bold new perspective. Entrusting the camera to their co-director Abou Bakar Sidibé, a young Malien hoping to enter Europe across the notorious fences of Melilla, directors Moritz Siebert and Estephan Wagner create an intimate portrait of a community in harsh conditions. The film encourages us to look beyond countless dots on a computer monitor to see individuals who suffer, hope and endure.

Barakah Meets Barakah is a classic ‘boys meets girl’ story transposed to a refreshing and challenging context. It proposes a reflection on freedom and the role of the women in Saudi society, on the expression of self in spite of cultural impositions. The film uses humour and charm to render its political message about youth seeking freedom accessible.

The members of the 2016 Jury were: Marisa Winter, Germany – Jury President; Micah Bucey, USA; Hans-Joachim Neubauer, Germany; Aurore Renaut, France; Callum Ryan, Australia; and Jacques Vercueil, France. ■

Book review

Emerging Trends in Gender, Health: and Political Communications in Africa, edited by Monsignor Prof. Obiora Ike and Prof. Sunny Udeze. Rhyce Kerex Publishers, Enugu-Nigeria (2015), pp. 474.

Emerging Trends is one of the most illuminating and thought provoking compilation of works in communication. Chapter 1 takes us behind the scene to clearly address the distinction between sex and gender. This contribution by Nnanyelugo Okoro, Ijeorna Ajaero and Chidiebere Nwachuckwu titled "Contemporary Issues in Gender Studies" offers an in-depth knowledge of the evolution of gender as a concept with vivid explanations on leading-edge issues and theories that have emerged over the years.

Chapter 2 titled "Professionalism and Ethical Standards with Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives: Challenge to Journalism Education and Practice in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa" gives an insight into the dimensions of gender inequalities as experienced both at informal and formal institutions. The informal institutions refer to gender inequality as long lasting codes of conduct, norms, traditions that contribute to gender inequality in all spheres of life, while formal institutions embrace economic, political, legal, social and labour markets (p. 41).

Chapter 3, "Reading Gender in Nigerian Football Media Narratives" is a well written contribution by Chuka Onwumechili and Koren Bedeau. The Nigerian Football administration was blamed for often neglecting or at best giving lip services to the needs of female teams. More so, an accusing finger was also pointed at the mass media for the gender biases in reporting women football.

Chapter 4, titled "Health Communication Strategies" sees the mass media and interpersonal communication as effective channels that can play pivotal roles in all health communication interventions. The authors make the observation that health communication is not executed haphazard-

ly, but it is process-driven.

An attempt is made in Chapter 5, "Awareness Creation on Discordant Couples and HIV/AIDS Transmission in Nigeria: Implications of HIV Prevention Policies", to analyse empirical studies conducted by some scholars which revealed that not much awareness has been created in the area of HIV discordant relationships. Public campaigns targeting couples are not as vibrant, memorable and personalized as messages targeting individuals.

Godwin B. Okon's contribution in chapter 6 titled, "Contextualization of Non-Communicable heart disease (NCHD) in selected Nigerian Newspapers: Approaches and Patterns" draws attention to the potency of the media in handling health-related issues. As an agent of change and strong influence, the media help individuals make sense of their health issues. The author noted that as things stand today, the media (newspapers) have not adequately projected issues on NCHD.

Chapter 7 titled "Emerging Developments in Political Communication in Nigeria" by J. A. Sambe highlights the idea that political development in the country is strongly related to the media. This means that Nigerian mass media have been shaped by, as well as shaped, the political realities of Nigeria. Given that the media played a crucial role in fighting colonialism and achieving a nationalist government, it would be difficult to divorce media from politics within the country.

In a related title in chapter 8, "Emerging Trends in Political Communication" Gregory Ezeah and Celestine Verlun Gever x-ray political communication from the point of view of new media's influence on the scheme of things. To the authors, political communication was a major aspect of political activities and the old media made it possible. However, the emerging trend now is the place of new media in political communication, which includes high reliance on new communication technology.

"Media, Politics of Change, and the End of Jonathan's presidency via the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria" is the title of chapter 9 handled by Nnamdi Ekenyanwu. The paper argues that, while the relationship between the media

and politics has not been that smooth, the infiltration of politicians into media ownership has jeopardized the power of the media in being the fourth estate of the realm.

Chapter 10 written by B.J.C. Anyanwu titled “The Role of Money in Political Communication in Nigeria: An Expose” indicates that in Nigeria, politicians are encouraged to give money to electorates to ensure their votes. The author argues that while the money may not influence voters to vote for the candidate sharing the money, it will certainly influence the stakeholder party agents and electoral officials.

Umaru Pate and Sharafa Dauda, who made their contributions in chapter 11 of this work titled “The Media, Responsibility and Conflict – Sensitive Reporting in Nigeria” look at the level at which the media in Nigeria have thrown caution to wind in the media clamour for attention and recognition. They argue that it is not about being the first to report an issue, but reporting sensitive issues with high sense of responsibility.

“Bad Governance, Corruption and the Image of Nigeria in the Media” which constitutes chapter 12 of this work and was contributed by Sunny Udeze, Julius Aja and Julius Nwosu, examines bad governance and corruption as cancerous vices that have eaten deep into the fabric of the country. The authors propose that if there is no bad governance, there won’t be corruption; if there is no corruption, most of the social ills experience won’t be seen in the society.

Ike Ndolo, Sunny Udeze and Julius Ajah, in chapter 13 contribute “Legal Constraints on the Practice of Journalism in Nigeria”, which examines the various laws affecting the practice of journalism in the country. The authors argue that the substance of democracy and the full implementation of the freedom of information Act 2011 will ensure the freedom of press with responsibilities.

In chapter 14 Uwen Akpan and Julius Nwosu in their article titled “Journalism, Politics and the Blurring Line: the Dissolve of the Watchdog and the Master”, noted that some media houses, in their quest to stay afloat, have crossed the line between politics and watchdog. They argue that the media in some quarters have become an instru-

ment in the hands of the government.

Levi Chnaka Nwodu and Venatus osike Agbanu in chapter 15 wrote on “Social Media and Political Transformation in Africa: Bridging the Rural-Urban Information Gap.” This study shows how social media have aided the political transformation of Africa. The authors argue that the media have helped the Western world in a remarkable way and are presently benefiting African countries, especially on the political frontiers.

Chapter 16 titled “Media Power and Elections: A Review of the March 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria” written by Cosmas Nwokeafor media’s power in electioneering processes. The author argues that during elections, the media’s power lies in its ability to sway electorates in favour of one candidate or the other.

Chapter 17 is on “Challenges and Usage Pattern of the Internet among, Academics in Nigerian Universities”. The use of the Internet in teaching and research is identified by the authors (Ike Ndolo and Cornelius Ukwueze) as indispensable to academics, owing to their career demand of, either “publish” or “perish”.

Innocent Okoye and Agnes Ahmadu explore “The Psychology of Mass Communication” in chapter 18 where they argue that media psychology deals with the understanding of the interactions between individual, groups, society and technology.

Writing on communicating the faith, Obiora Ike, in his article titled “Communication faith in the Diversity of cultures: Mission of the Catholic Intellectual and social Ethical Tradition” proposes that the only way to solve the social problems of the world vis a vis Nigeria is to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who enjoined everyone to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Chapter 20 looks at “The Press and Mainstreaming of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy” by K.O. Nworgu and Samuel Ezeanyika. The authors argue that the media have actually done a great deal to promote the country’s foreign policy.

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