

‘INFORMATION IMBALANCES’:

Communications and the Developing World

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A Latin American newspaper ignores a historic economic conference between the under-developed nations and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in order to play up the opening of a New York photographic exhibition by Caroline Kennedy. On a single day a newspaper in India devotes three times the wordage to Princess Anne's fall from a horse than it has accorded neighboring Sri Lanka Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike in a week. The *South China Morning Post* prints Peking-watcher stories written in Hong Kong by *New York Times* correspondents whose copy is cabled back after being edited in the United States. A Kuwaiti learns about political developments in Thailand from reports by a transnational¹ news agency based in New York.

These are “information imbalances,” the international media's latest cause for concern, a concept referring to the disequilibria in the structure of communication that result in the preponderance of Western, and specifically American, sources of information in the world today. The post-World War II enthusiasm for democratic principles, which caused the ideals of a free press to be enshrined almost universally, has abated considerably in recent years. With the Third World's acquisition of an “international class-consciousness”² these principles

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1. The numerous authorities consulted differ on whether to term the big four news agencies (Reuters, AP, UPI, AFP) “multinationals” or “transnationals.” This article uses both locutions, interchangeably; the only important distinction to note is that these agencies are not “international,” since each is based in a single country, with activities transcending national frontiers.

2. This article refers frequently to “the Third World.” While it is to be remembered that the Third World is far from being a homogeneous, monolithic entity — it is, in fact, characterized by great diversity in everything ranging from political beliefs to levels of development — the expression is a convenient catch-all when describing the dominant opinions within this group of nations on the subjects discussed. As this article goes to press, it appears that the defeat of Mrs. Gandhi and her Congress Party government in India is likely to result in a significant change in the official Indian position on these issues—a caveat to be borne in mind during the references to Indian views that follow.

have come increasingly into question. While the United States has not quite succeeded in making the world safe for democracy, the less developed countries have begun to doubt whether democracy is quite safe for the world. Democratic dicta like "the free flow of information" are thus being challenged not so much because they are in themselves unupportable, but because they are seen as masking the reality of a "one-way flow" from the developed countries to the developing — with attendant deleterious effects on the latter's economic, political and cultural independence.

The Transnational Power Structure: Colonial Origins, Economic Dependencies, and Capitalistic News Values

Spokesmen for the Third World's point of view on information imbalances are unanimous in attributing them to the same historical inequities that have characterized international economic and technological imbalances since World War II. The end of colonialism, it is argued, has not changed the hierarchical nature of the transnational power structure, which still involves the dominance of the developed West and the subjugation, even exploitation, of the former colonies. The economic disparities created and exacerbated by colonialism and imperialism are, they suggest, merely being perpetuated by the various elements of the transnational system — including the communications media.³

These disparities are seen to be reflected in the role of the transnational news agencies, built up in the colonial era and flourishing on a continuation of the old colonial arrangements. One Asian journalist, accusing the two American wire services of stepping into imperialist shoes, alleged that the world was divided up into "spheres of influence" by the transnational news agencies:

Reuters, the oldest of the news services, had a monopoly over the former British colonies. AFP took firm roots in the former French settlements, and the North American agencies...had a stranglehold in Latin America and other areas of US influence. . . .⁴

The result was the creation of what has been described as the "information framework"⁵— the structure of communications that delimits the range and type of information made available to the bulk

3. This viewpoint is lucidly expressed in Juan Somavia, *The Transnational Power Structure and International Information* (Mexico City: ILET, 1976), esp. pp. 1-3.

4. D.V. Nathan, "A Step to Blow Up Communication Monopoly," *Indian Press*, No. 8, August 1976, p. 8. The assertion is to some extent corroborated by Theodore E. Kruglak, *The Two Faces of TASS* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962, pp. 9-10.

5. Fernando Reyes Matta, *The Information Bedazzlement of Latin America* (Mexico City: ILET, 1976), p. 1.

of the world by the transnational agencies. This framework was in turn founded on what Third Worlders claim are metropolitan-centered distortions in the international communications structure. As UNESCO's Yemi Lijadu explained, "it was not until last year that my countrymen in Nigeria could communicate directly with friends in Dahomey, a few miles away. We had to phone London, get a connection to Paris, and then a line to Dahomey."⁶

Traditional dependencies thus persist, and economic constraints make major changes unrealistic. "In the first place," according to E. Lloyd Sommerlad, a UNESCO official, "poorer countries lack communication resources — equipment, manpower, communication channels and the economic capacity to use them...Historically and naturally, the news networks have developed in parallel with and depending on the transport and telecommunication resources. All three responded to commercial needs and today their patterns are still linked to their colonial origins."⁷

The inequality of the relationship between the big transnational news agencies, perceived in the Third World as representatives of alien interests, and the average less-developed country, is astonishing. It has been estimated that "a day's worth of resources of these multinationals often exceeds the total annual expenditure of many small countries in Asia, of which again the expenditure on information must constitute the minutest fraction."⁸ Competition is virtually inconceivable. The big agencies have developed financial and personnel resources the developing countries cannot challenge. Where they have attempted to do so, the multinationals have utilized the "built-in advantage" of West-centered communications links to transmit their messages more quickly and cheaply, thereby stealing the edge on their developing-country competitors.⁹ What is more, the inadequacy of alternative channels leads the smaller agencies around in a vicious circle; they have fewer subscribers because their services are more expensive, and in India, for example, are available only for two to four hours at night, while the transnationals are received round the clock.¹⁰ Increasingly sophisticated technology, which the small agencies cannot, for the most

6. Quoted in Leonard R. Sussman, "Developmental Journalism: A Backward Idea Whose Time Has Come," paper made available to the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, p. 7.

7. E. Lloyd Sommerlad, *Free Flow of Information, Balance and The Right to Communicate* (UNESCO: Conference on Fair Communication Policy for the International Exchange of Information, April 1975), p. 7.

8. Asok Mitra, "Information Imbalances in Asia," *The Times of India*, July 10, 1976, p. 10.

9. Dilip Mukerjee, "Kya Samachar?" *Illustrated Weekly of India*, October 10, 1976, p. 9.

10. Mitra, p. 10.

part, afford, has only exacerbated the situation.¹¹

The case is made even more convincing in figures. UPI, only the third largest of the multinational agencies, has 238 bureaus, is represented in 62 countries, employs a staff of over 10,000 and has over 6,500 subscribers. Samachar, the new Indian national news agency (formed after a merger of the country's four major agencies in 1975) has 80 bureaus, is represented in little over 20 countries, employs a staff of 1,700, and has 800 subscribers. Where UPI circulates 4.5 billion words a day, Samachar sends out 125,000.¹² The comparison would be largely otiose, were it not for its implications. As a leading Asian scholar has pointed out, "the economics of the situation is such that most of this free flow of information has been moving in only one direction — from the developed countries to the developing."¹³

"The economics of the situation" has fueled another resentment against the Western world, one that challenges the West's basic approach to communication. It is a commonplace that mass media, whatever their forms, reflect the power-structure of the societies they emanate from;¹⁴ in the Soviet bloc they are subordinate to the state, in the capitalistic West they are dedicated to private ownership. And just as TASS is viewed around the world as representing the interests of the USSR, so the transnational agencies are seen as representing the interests of capitalism. When this is manifest in the selection and content of the information they disseminate, the Third World feels it has reason to object. The transnationals are accused of treating news as "a non-material commodity that is bought and sold in a highly oligopolistic market."¹⁵ Once the laws of the market govern, the ideal of freedom is of necessity extended to both news and the conditions of its flow. "As implemented by the transnationals," declares Juan Somavia of Mexico's Latin American Institute for Transnational Studies, "the principle of 'free flow' is the formal consecration of 'laissez-faire' in the information field."¹⁶ The truism is manifested in

11. Developments in satellite technology have led to the problem of Direct Broadcast Satellites (DBS), which developing countries fear could be made a further instrument of cultural imperialism. See, for instance, "Latin News Panel Backs Satellite Relay Controls," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1976.

12. The figures are derived from: Mitra, p. 10; Prof. N. Bhaskar Rao, "News Agencies in Non-Aligned Countries," *Times of India*, July 10, 1976, pp. 10-11; and Mukerjee, p. 15.

13. Y.V. Lakshmana Rao, "Propaganda Through the Printed Media in the Developing Countries," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, November 1971, p. 98.

14. See Leo Bogart, "Is There a World Public Opinion?" in Michael Prosser, ed., *Intercommunication among Nations and Peoples* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 108.

15. Third World Journalists' Seminar Resolution, point 5, in *Development Dialogue*, No. 1, 1976, p. 106.

16. Somavia, p. 17.

the London *Economist's* classic description of the head of Associated Press: "...like most big business executives, he experiences a peculiar moral glow in finding that his idea of freedom coincides with his commercial advantage."¹⁷

If there is any corresponding glow in the Third World, it is probably the hot glow of indignation. "There is. . ." argues Somavia,

in the commercial concept of news, a built-in systematic discrimination against these events that cannot be "sold," which therefore, in accordance with this rationale, are not "new," because the controlling market has no interest in them. At the same time, there is a tendency to distortion by the projection of those aspects of events that make them more marketable.

The end-product, is accordingly, "an out-of-context message whose content is determined by the 'logic' of the market."¹⁸ Constructive development programs are ignored while western society-scandals receive full play; worse, "it is a fundamental element in the western newspaperman's understanding that aberration is news," a principle which "obliges newsmen to sensationalize."¹⁹ The result is that "cultural, economic and political progress...is steadily under-reported and indeed undermined"²⁰ by the concentration on "wars, pestilence, murders, sensation."²¹ Many Third World countries fear that, with their own newspapers reflecting these priorities, such journalistic values are actually psychologically dysfunctional to development.

The "Deformation of Information": How Free is the "Free Flow?"

Two-thirds of the world's information originates directly or indirectly in the United States.²² As a result Third Worlders complain not only that most information is from and about the West, but that they are forced to see all issues — and often themselves — through Western eyes. Finnish President Urho Kekkonen contrasted, in a 1973 speech,

the ideals of free communication and their actual distorted execution for the rich on the one hand and the poor on the other. Globally, the flow of information between states — not least the material pumped out by television — is to a very great extent a one-way, unbalanced traffic, and

17. Quoted in Sommerlad, p. 3.

18. Somavia, pp. 11-12.

19. Mukerjee, pp. 10-11.

20. *Freedom at Issue*, No. 37, September-October 1976, p. 4.

21. Nathan, p. 8.

22. Cited in William H. Read, "Multinational Media," *Foreign Policy*, No. 18, Spring 1975, p. 157.

in no way possessed the depth and range which the principles of free speech require.²³

The omnipresence of the Western media has two dimensions. For one thing, they are physically present and available around most of the world; for another, they influence the content and approach of most of their Third World competitors. The news agencies already discussed manifest one aspect of this situation: UPI has subscribers in 113 different countries and in 48 different languages²⁴ and one Latin American study has established that, along with AP, it sets "the trends of knowledge for public opinion in the region."²⁵

But the agencies are not all. American journals and news/feature services reach a significant audience, with the *New York Times* news service being transmitted daily to 136 newspapers around the globe. *Reader's Digest* has a foreign readership of 100 million in 13 languages, and though *Time* and *Newsweek* bring out "international" editions, the perspective is distinctly American.²⁶ A survey among "elite groups" in the Asian Pacific region found that the magazine most regularly read was *Time*, followed by *Newsweek* and *Reader's Digest*. The local *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a newsweekly in the *Time* mold but with an Asian emphasis, trailed far behind.²⁷ The result is the perpetuation of the "voices of conformity" Bogart discerned.²⁸ It is a tendency that is becoming more, not less, pronounced with the passage of time. "In the absence of human and material resources to support competing newspapers, news agencies or feature services," Y.V.Lakshmana Rao noted, "the content of newspapers is becoming increasingly standardized."²⁹

American television programs represent perhaps the apogee of media export. According to one recent (American) estimate, "between 100,000 and 200,000 hours of programming are exported annually;" U.S. television companies earned \$130 million in 1973 from foreign sales, with one distributor, Viacom International, reaching over 100 countries.³⁰ The pervasiveness of Western media influence is further reinforced by the domestic press of most Third World countries, whose

23. Quoted in Sommerlad, p. 6.

24. Read, p. 163.

25. Matta, p. 1. The contention is based on an analysis of 16 Latin American newspapers from 14 countries, and is supported by extensive statistical data.

26. Read, pp. 156, 163, 165.

27. Dr. George Hodel in *Media*, December 1974, quoted by Mitra, p. 10. The interests of these magazines, Mitra adds, "are not always identical with those of Asian countries," which have reason to fear "their opinion forming, opinion moulding and reader-holding powers."

28. Bogart, p. 108.

29. Lakshmana Rao, p. 101. Matta, p. 1, terms this "information inertia."

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 159.

anxiety to emulate the foreign ideal leads to a reproduction of much the same kind of emphases. One study found that the ratio of foreign stories to Indian on the front pages of five New Delhi dailies was 7.5:10. "In other words," the study concluded, "we have little to report about our own country."³¹

The result of the continued dependence on Western news sources, according to former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, is that "we imbibe their prejudices. Even our image of ourselves, not to speak of other countries, tends to conform to theirs."³² An American writer corroborates her:

Not only are images of the United States presented around the world by globetrotting American magazines, news agencies, movies, and television shows, but foreigners rely also on these media to be windows on third countries. What a Berliner knows about political developments in Japan may well come to him via a U.S. news agency. . . . Indeed, foreigners even rely on U.S. media to mirror their own societies.³³

The Times of India's Dilip Mukerjee laments that

we have no choice but to see things as they see them. Leaving aside for the moment the question of deliberate bias. . . it is grossly unfair that events, say, in Africa should have to be evaluated only on the basis of what outside observers have to say.³⁴

The various complaints are best exemplified in Fernando Reyes Matta's study of "the information bedazzlement of Latin America," which concludes that "there is obvious manipulation in the international news prevailing throughout the continent, that serves only to perpetuate the dominant structure." The Latin American media's decision to neglect the birth of a country in their region, Surinam, while giving greater prominence to news-agency stories of less immediate impact, "dramatically revealed in all its breadth the deformation in international information." Matta denounces

the continued presence of an information model which should radically be changed. The Surinam case exposes the continent's inability to look at itself. . . . The easy option [of relying on news agency bulletins] was taken, to reproduce a version of the news whose political perception was obviously different from that which motivates the Third World countries.³⁵

31. C.S. Jayaraman, "Reaching the Masses," *Indian Press*, No. 8, August 1976, p. 33. A similar point is made by Dewan Berindra Nath, "Ending news monopoly of the west," *Ibid.*, p. 20; Hitt Ranjan Jaggi, "Why the Non-Aligned Newspool?" *Ibid.*, p. 12; and Nathan, p. 8.

32. Mrs. Gandhi's inaugural speech at the New Delhi conference of non-aligned information ministers, July 8, 1976.

33. Read, p. 155.

34. Mukerjee, p. 13. Italics in original.

35. Matta, pp. 22, 13, 14.

The case is taken one step further with the charge of deliberate manipulation of the news to suit Western purposes. In early 1976, in a statement later echoed at the non-aligned conference in New Delhi, the Libyan news agency, ARNA, accused transnational media not only of news distortion but of outright fabrication of news hostile to the Third World as well as a "conspiracy of silence regarding anything advantageous to Third World countries."³⁶ Somavia cites the media's treatment of OPEC as one example of this. OPEC's actions, he notes, are portrayed "as responsible for world inflation, as wrecking the international economic system, as an irresponsible use of power" because news selection is "based on the political and economic interests of the transnational system."³⁷ Other leftist critics cite the Vietnam war as a blatant instance of this phenomenon: the war, they claim, was not only presented in the most favorable light, but "the world was being fed with the so-called 'atrocities of the Viet Cong' " while "saturation bombings and psychological and chemical warfare reports were written with a slant...to justify these inhuman acts."³⁸ One author goes so far as to declare, "one could easily presume that reporting was not being done by press people on the scene but by military generals from their field tents."³⁹ Somavia adds a more tenable postscript: Vietnam, he says,

ceased to be news (except for sporadic articles) after the United States was defeated, despite the fact that its reunification and its efforts to develop after such a devastating war are of world-wide significance.⁴⁰

A more subtle extension of the argument suggests that semantics is used to make pejorative implications that may not substantively be warranted or acceptable. "An African freedom fighter is a terrorist. Palestinian guerrillas are Arab terrorists."⁴¹ The use of " 'labels,' adjectives and persuasive definitions" is a "political method" to

stigmatize targets of the system....Reference is made to the "marxist" President, Salvador Allende, without any agency thinking or willing to speak of the "capitalist" President Richard Nixon or Gerald Ford. Progressive political leaders in the Third World are described as "extremists" or "rebels" but conservative or reactionary politicians are unlabelled. The international negotiators of progressive countries are "rhetorical" while those of the industrialized world are "pragmatic" ⁴²

36. Quoted in Stanley Swinton, "Background to UNESCO Initiatives in Media Field," paper made available to the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, p. 2.

37. Somavia, p. 8.

38. Nathan, p. 8.

39. Jaggi, p. 11.

40. Somavia, p. 11.

41. Jaggi, p. 11.

42. Somavia, p. 8.

Such terminology, it is argued, considerably weakens the media's claims to objectivity.

Not surprisingly, economic and cultural imperialism is charged. To Somavia, the communications system

is the vehicle for transmitting values and life-styles to Third World countries which stimulate the type of consumption and the type of society necessary to the transnational system as a whole.

Politically, it defends the *status quo*, where this is in its own interest; economically, it creates the conditions for the transnational expansion of capital.⁴³

Thus Richard Gott of *The Manchester Guardian* accuses Western news media of "obvious class, race and political bias" as a result of which, for example, "the nationalisation or expropriation of a foreign firm in a third world country is normally written about with barely veiled hostility."⁴⁴

That charge leads on to one of "cultural imperialism," the 'selling' by western society of its lifestyles with a view to co-opting the cultural norms of the rest of the world — a process that coined the anti-American neologism "coca-colonization." Advocates of a "free flow" have argued that we "cannot have understanding — and thus peace — among the peoples of the world unless they have better and fuller information about one another."⁴⁵ Yet the problem of one-way flow has been especially marked in the visual media, the primary vehicle of cultural dissemination. As early as 1971 complaints arose that "most of the major [television] programs shown in Latin America are North American productions that portray a North American way of life and code of values."⁴⁶ In Asia, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew suggested that "at their best. . . these programs can entertain without offending good taste. At their worst, they can undo all that is being inculcated in the schools and universities."⁴⁷ As Sommerlad concludes,

a few [of these shows] may give an interesting view on another kind of world, but when the few becomes a torrent which inhibits local creativity and production, raises expectations which end in frustration and threatens national culture, it is time to be concerned.⁴⁸

At the root of the problem lies the lack, in the West, of the one

43. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

44. Gott, in letter to *Sunday Times*, quoted in *Times of India*, August 4, 1976.

45. Lester Markel of *The New York Times*, quoted by John C. Merrill, *The Elite Press* (New York: Pitman, 1968), p. 5.

46. Malcolm W. Browne, "Latin Nationalists Annoyed by Yankees on TV Screen — Leftists and Rightists Regard Programs as Imperialism," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1971, p. 4.

47. Lakshmana Rao, p. 99.

48. Sommerlad, p. 10.

commodity the Third World values above all else — commitment to the ideology of development. As one American expert acknowledged, the world press "calls upon the people of the world to play. It does not call them to think, to assess, to become concerned, involved, or empathic."⁴⁹ This lack of commitment has another problematic dimension: "the agencies are currently neither socially nor juridically responsible for their acts either to the foreign countries in which they operate or to the international community."⁵⁰ The Third World's perception of injustice has led to a strong desire to ensure the accountability of the media in some form. Their resultant attempts, at international conferences and in Third World forums, to create a new international information order where such accountability could be guaranteed, constitute the crux around which the issue has now crystallized.

Developmental Journalism, the Non-Aligned Nations, and UNESCO

International reaction to the transnational media has traditionally been to individual aspects of it, and has not been directed at more fundamental structural changes; it has therefore been only superficially effective. "Virtually every week, either *Time* or *Newsweek* (or both) is censored, banned, or confiscated by a government somewhere,"⁵¹ but their dominance of the international newsweekly market remains. The Allende government in Chile once cancelled an episode of "Mission Impossible" which depicted the overthrow of a ruler rather like Fidel Castro, but 55% of Chile's television programs continued to be imported shows.⁵² The growing realization of the need for a more profound change, in consonance with Third World objectives, has led to the articulation of a new philosophy of communication that has acquired the label "developmental journalism."

With the communications media being seen as "Trojan horses for the transnational styles of consumption"⁵³ and the Third World viewing the battle as a "liberation struggle,"⁵⁴ it is not entirely surprising that their new approach to information should see it more as a necessary public utility. Dilip Mukerjee advocates a complete break with the Western philosophy of journalism:

Our need is urgent and acute: we belong to societies which are in the process of restructuring and reshaping themselves. In our environment

49. Merrill, pp. 5-6.

50. Somavia, p. 6.

51. Read, p. 164.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

53. Somavia, p. 16.

54. Nathans, p. 24. This sentiment has been echoed frequently in Third World forums.

there is, and there will be for a long time to come, much that is ugly and distasteful. If we follow the western norm, we will be playing up only these dark spots, and thus helping unwittingly to erode the faith and confidence without which growth and development are impossible....

"In other words," he adds, "we need a new style of journalism which asserts that good news is just as newsworthy as bad news."⁵⁵

This journalism, it is further suggested, must be integrated into national development policies if those policies are not to be subverted by contrary media influences. In a more positive sense, too, communication is vital if development is to receive the support and cooperation of the masses. With this aim in mind, the developmental journalist will need to be not an objective reporter of "newsworthy" events but a social analyst and educator, playing a vital part in a national struggle for human progress.⁵⁶ There are admittedly some grounds for disquiet in this thesis; the thin line between education and propaganda is one few Third World analysts are prepared to draw. And little is said explicitly about whether development and developmental journalism will both be directed from the same source: a government.

Corollary to this new conception of the media is a belief in its "social control." Banning or expulsion has, at best, a cosmetic effect; and, as Somavia points out, "the transmission of information confers power and every society should be organized so that those holding power are socially responsible for its use."⁵⁷ Third World countries have used this argument to demand that transnational media be placed within a "framework of legal and social accountability" which would ensure that national developmental goals would not be subverted. They have called for a "balanced flow" of information rather than a "free" flow and attempted to strengthen indigenous national communication structures to this end.

Most active in this regard have been the non-aligned nations, which — after conferences at Algiers in September 1973, Lima in August 1975, and Tunis in March 1976 — demanded a new international information order "as vital as a new international economic order" and announced the formation of a news-agency pool in New Delhi last July.⁵⁸ With delegates calling for, in Tanzanian Information Minister

55. Mukerjee, p. 11.

56. See Somavia, p. 4, Nathans, p. 24, and M.V. Desai, "Communicators as Partners in Development," *Times of India*, July 10, 1976. p. 11.

57. Somavia, p. 13.

58. Swinton, "Background," pp. 8-9; Reuter wire services, February 3, 1975; Nikhil Chakravarty, "A non-aligned news pool," *Times of India*, July 10, 1976, p. 10; *The Hindu*, Madras, July 14, 1976. 62 countries were represented at the conference whose conclusions were affirmed at the Nonaligned Summit Meeting in Colombo later last year. For details, see news reports, July 9-14, 1976.

Mawakawago's words, "a decisive assault against the establishment structures of our misinformation and denigration,"⁵⁹ it was not surprising that the emphasis was on co-operation and resource-sharing. As the Delhi *Economic Times* editorialized:

While none of the news agencies in the non-aligned nations can possibly match the resources of the big news agencies based in the U.S., the U.K., or France, a common pool of their flow of news may perhaps be able to compete with the giants on somewhat equal terms.⁶⁰

The pool is not devoid of problems, however. Not the least of these are the financial burdens (which will have to be borne, in all probability, by governmental subsidies) and the technical infrastructure, which for all practical purposes does not yet exist. More important, perhaps, are the nonaligned countries' own widely differing news agencies, each with distinctly individual ideas of how things should be done.⁶¹ The news pool's constitution has been careful to tread gingerly on sensitive issues of national sovereignty. (The conference itself was not entirely successful at glossing over the political heterogeneity of its participants; the Qatar delegate was reported to be "tearing his hair" over the time spent in "talking about socialism. . . imperialism. . . etcetera.")⁶² For instance, it is emphasized that the pool is "not a supranational news agency," nor is it "intended to substitute news exchange arrangements already existing among non-aligned countries."⁶³ Each member country will bear the costs of its own participation. As Mrs. Gandhi explained, the major purpose is to enable the non-aligned "to hear Africans on events in Africa. . . and get an Indian explanation of events in India."⁶⁴

Obviously, the issue is more complex than that. In a dispute between two non-aligned countries, neither is likely to entertain the other's version of the dispute in the pool. Bangladesh Information Minister

59. Quoted in *Overseas Hindustan Times*, July 22, 1976, p. 16.

60. *The Economic Times*, Bombay, July 15, 1975. As this article goes to press, India's Mohammad Yunus, Chairman of the pool's Co-ordinating Committee, has announced that the pool will set up 50 offices — 17 each in Asia and Africa, and 10 each in Latin America and Europe. Pool dispatches will be in English, French, Arabic and Spanish. Only regional headquarters are being set up; "we do not regard ourselves as one bloc," Mr. Yunus explained (*Asian Student*, January 29, 1977). In what is virtually a confirmation of the Third World's complaints about the western media, this development went largely unreported in the American press.

61. "Co-operation on Information," *Intermedia*, August 1976, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 1. A meeting of communications experts was held in Baghdad in January 1977 to discuss the technical problems.

62. Shyamala Shiveswarkar, interview with Osman Abu Said, *Overseas Hindustan Times*, July 22, 1976, p. 5. The other interviews on the same page bear testimony to the widely differing attitudes and perceptions of the delegates, though the article's headline stresses that "Co-operation is the basic theme." See also Chakravartty, *op. cit.*

63. "Objectives," point 5. The constitution of the news pool is reprinted in *The Hindu*, *op. cit.*

64. D.M. Silvera, "A Challenge to Transnationals," *Indian Press*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Azizul Huq declared that "as a matter of policy, the pool should accept and disseminate information about a country emanating from the news media of that country."⁶⁵ Yet where that information is merely propagandistic, or where it appears unlikely to "sell as news," it may never be published. Kenyan newspapers, for instance, would scarcely have published Uganda's version of the events at Entebbe. Non-alignment, to mix a couple of metaphors, may produce strange bed-fellows, but the bed is not always one of roses.⁶⁶

Another concern which has arisen out of this policy is one that the news pool might seek to replace entirely the existing facilities offered by the transnationals. The USIA found in Samachar's decision to discontinue UPI services "an earnest of this intention."⁶⁷ The Chairman of the Delhi conference, India's Mohammed Yunus, who reportedly "drew attention" to this action,⁶⁸ remarked that "the so-called free flow of opinion at the very least has to be dammed in." Yugoslavia, which had described its own pool as a contribution to the "democratization" of news, disagreed, telling a Swiss paper that, rather than replace Western news facilities, it would "augment" them and serve as a "corrective."⁶⁹ It remains to be seen which school of thought will eventually prevail.

A corollary development has been the increasing competition between the Yugoslav news agency, Tanjug, and Samachar for the leadership of the news agencies' pool. Tanjug, which has been the beneficiary of a \$13 million "modernization" program by the Yugoslav government, used its four 38,000 watt transmitters to "win the contest" by serving more non-aligned newsmen at the Colombo Summit Conference.⁷⁰ Samachar, however, plans "to be one of the larger agencies of the world" and intends to station correspondents in 50 countries.⁷¹ While the rivalry has thus far not been acrimonious, it portends interesting developments within the news pool as time wears on.⁷²

65. *Ibid.*

66. See Ranjan Gupta, "Nonaligned Nations' Press Pool Plan Stymied," *The Boston Sunday Globe*, October 31, 1976, p. 11.

67. "Non-Aligned Countries Organize News Agency Pool," USIA Research Note (unclassified), August 4, 1976, p. 2.

68. Nathan, p. 7.

69. USIA, p. 2.

70. Swinton, "Background," p. These transmitters have a world-wide range. See Reuters wire service, February 3, 1975.

71: Mukerjee, p. 15; Bhaskar Rao, p. 11.

72. See Gupta, *op. cit.* One report on the penultimate day of the New Delhi conference, however, noted that "there were also lingering doubts among some of the smaller countries about the possibility of the technically more advanced pool members acquiring a dominant voice, to their detriment, in the proposed pool." *The Statesman*, Calcutta, July 13, 1976, p. 1. The Tanjug-Samachar contest may not entirely be welcomed.

Of more international import, however, have been the actions of UNESCO, which has increasingly been used by the Third World as a forum for their grievances. UNESCO, which began surveying the issue in 1967 and has produced several monographs on information imbalances since, received a fresh mandate with a 1972 Soviet resolution calling for the drafting of "fundamental principles governing the use of the mass media." After several discussions, notably in Paris in December 1975 and San Jose in July 1976, UNESCO experts presented a draft declaration of these principles to the General Conference in Paris last December. Among other things, it declared (Article XIII) that "states are responsible in the international sphere for all mass media under their jurisdiction" — a statement that touched off a raging controversy between the Third World and those in the West who feared that, as one American put it, "UNESCO is already inventing for the world the moral and political authority to justify repression of the press."⁷³ As accusations and counter-charges were traded, the issue crystallized at Nairobi:

Here, in effect, the nations of the world will be voting on what constitutes the proper, sanctioned use of the media in today's world.⁷⁴

By a 78 to 15 majority, the resolution was referred to a negotiating committee, where it will remain for two years.

"The Free Press Threatened" or "Overdone Outrage?"

American reactions to the Third World moves have been emphatic, with the U.S. press citing everything from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷⁵ to the liberal belief in a free press as essential to a free society.⁷⁶ Some columnists went so far as to term the proposals "clearly a Soviet plot to extend the USSR philosophy of state control of the media into the international sphere and thereby give it UNESCO sanction."⁷⁷ What has caused most concern is the Third World espousal of "social control" of the media and governmental regulation of information, as in the non-aligned news pool. "Developmental journalism is, by

73. Sussman, p. 22.

74. William G. Harley, "International Showdown on Press Freedom," background paper, U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, p. 7.

75. David Anable, "A Russian Threat to the International Press," *The Washington Post*, May 25, 1976, p. A15.

76. *Freedom at Issue*, p. 4.

77. Anable, p. A15. Sussman, p. 14, makes the point that when American media in the future run afoul of foreign governments, "the onus thereafter will be on this country for having defied an international agreement."

definition, the handmaiden of government,"⁷⁸ objects Freedom House's Leonard Sussman. "[It] is a denial of the developing peoples' right to know more than any government may choose to tell."⁷⁹

By contrast, the *Manchester Guardian* chided "some quarters" for their "overdone outrage."⁸⁰ For one thing, there was little recognition in the American press that some of the Third World's basic complaints were legitimate and reasonable; for another, as the *Economist* pointed out, "as the non-aligned plan now stands, it should pose no great threat to press freedom either. Member agencies [in the news pool] will still have the option of supplementing pool reports with news from other sources, including Western ones."⁸¹ Certainly in the few months the pool has been in operation there has been no evidence of an impending demise of the transnationals.

Nevertheless the issue is too important to remain in the state of suspended animation to which the Nairobi vote has consigned it. Information imbalances do exist, and there is "a widespread resentment in many developing countries of the dependence on external organizations, in whose running they have no voice, who select news according to a foreign philosophy, and whom, rightly or wrongly, they do not fully trust."⁸² Few arguments could be less appropriate than that of the *Washington Post*, which averred that press freedom is "a simple matter of principle coinciding with commercial self-interest,"⁸³ for developing countries believe that the profit motive should be curbed by some social accountability. The question which greatly troubles Western newsmen is whether social accountability will merely be a euphemism for repressive government control. The fact that some Third Worlders are urging press curbs as part of a "right to security of information"⁸⁴ does nothing to ease their doubts. As Sussman asks:

78. Sussman, p. 22. There is a fascinating discussion of this question in the Indian context, by the Managing Editor of the *Sunday Times*, London, in Ron Hall, "Development Journalism or Just Good Journalism," *Vidura*, Bombay, No. 1, 1976, pp. 3-6.

79. Sussman, pp. 2-3, 10, 7.

80. The *Guardian*, Manchester, August 14, 1976. There has been some resentment in the Third World, especially of the veiled threats in the British fourth estate that Western aid and economic policies would be contingent on good behavior at Colombo. See the statements of The *Daily Telegraph* and the President of the British Institute of Journalists, Maurice Green, in "Non-Aligned News Pool: Western Misconceptions," *The Hindu*, Madras, August 3, 1976. UNESCO's Director-General M'Bow has also been critical. See *Neue Zurcher Zeitung*, September 21, 1975.

81. The *Economist*, London, September 7, 1976.

82. Sommerlad, p. 9. See also Rosenfeld's reassessment, *op. cit.* p. 162.

83. *Washington Post*, July 30, 1976, p. A22. There is some suspicion in the Third World that commercial self-interest is perhaps more important here than principle. Mukerjee, p. 10, quotes Yugoslav Minister for Information Muhammad Berberovic as attributing the West's "hostile reaction" to the fact that "they have a monopoly today and want to maintain it at all costs."

84. Somavia, p. 16.

Who or what will monitor the news? Who or what will balance the flow? Who or what will "integrate" the various communications media within countries and in the international sphere? And who or what will regulate the inevitable conflicts with present international news agencies operating inside and between the third and free worlds?⁸⁵

The answer he provides — "governments" — does not please him at all.

The Third World is not as dismayed by governmental involvement. Many newsmen defend state financing on the grounds that the private media in most less developed nations lack the economic and personal resources to sustain an agency. While Sussman argues that even the "mixed" system "places the non-state media in impossible competition with the government's power, funding and control of resources,"⁸⁶ a Third Worlder could well reply that that would still be better than the present impossible competition with the power, funding, and resources of the transnational agencies. Belated Western exhortations, that the private media in developing countries be strengthened instead, provide no answer to the objection that this will not solve the disequilibria inherent in the world's transnational power structure. In any case, were any clash to occur between transnational desires to unrestricted communication and a state's wish to control its channels of information, there is little doubt in international law as to which would win out. The sovereignty of states is a principle considerably higher on the hierarchy of laws than the norm of free speech.⁸⁷

This is not to say that the Third World position is entirely without loopholes. When Mrs. Gandhi speaks of "an Indian explanation of events in India," she obviously means not an explanation by those Indians opposed to her policies, but by the Indian government. As the London *Economist* remarked about its own suggestion that the non-aligned news pool be of private media, not governments: "this too can only be as free as its member papers which, under pressure from governments, are getting less free every day."⁸⁸ The political freedom to dissent publicly is being increasingly circumscribed and there seems little the media can do about it. As more and more developing countries stress stability over pluralism as an essential precondition for development, it is frequently argued that debate is a luxury when food

85. Sussman, p. 19. Italics in original have been omitted.

86. Sussman, p. 20.

87. Sommerlad, p. 4. Also see Kaarle Nordenstreng and Herbert Schiller, "Free Flow of Information: Helsinki and After," *Journal of Communication*, Winter 1975-6, for the application of the question to Soviet-American relations.

88. *The Economist*, op. cit. For a comprehensive list of Third World governmental sanctions against the media, see *Newsweek*, September 6, 1976, "A Bow to Big Brother?"

is more important than freedom.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that things will ever come to the sorry pass feared by some of the more imaginative Western critics. London's *Financial Times* urged the West not to be "unduly offended by the rhetoric, for the reality is different...because most of the things the third world wants...if they come at all, will have to come mainly from the West."⁸⁹ The *Times of India* supported this assertion, suggesting that a solution of the "basic issues" demanded "co-operation with rather than antagonism toward the West."⁹⁰

This does not mean that the question can be forgotten or even indefinitely ignored. The Third World is not likely to give up its charges of unfair treatment at the hands — or teletypes — of the transnationals. Instead of seeking to combat such criticism with pressure or polemic, the West could contribute greatly to a more genuinely free flow of information by encouraging the development, with money or know-how, of Third World media—both private and governmental—as a useful additional source of information. It could assist in a restructuring of international communication links—revising discriminatory cable tariffs, helping set up new channels—that would be both fair and rational. It could welcome the existence and expression of views and opinions colored by different ethnic and cultural perceptions. It could make developmental news "sell" by presenting it as a response to mankind's most dramatic and elemental challenge, the challenge of survival.

What is a genuine cause for universal concern is the decision of an increasing number of societies to restrict the flow of information in order to shut themselves off from the iniquities of the information order. An opportunity to participate more fully in international communications is necessary if these societies are to open themselves to the world again. The need is not for outrage, but understanding; for information structures that will "open windows on the world" but preserve the socio-cultural integrity of Third World nations; for communications channels that will maintain a balance between "independence from monopoly control" and "enrichment of information resources."⁹¹ An accommodation is vital if there is to be any meaningful flow of information at all. Meanwhile neither the votaries of an unrestrained press nor the advocates of absolute government control are likely to spend the two years before the next UNESCO meeting letting sleeping dogmas lie.

89. *The Financial Times*, August 12, 1976.

90. *The Times of India*, August 11, 1976.

91. The phrases are from Sommerlad, p. 10; Bhatia, *op. cit.*; Read, p. 187.