

# Media Development

4/2016

## Media and Mediated Memory



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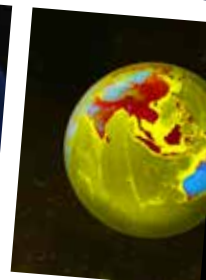
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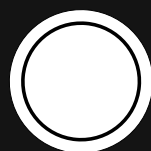
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*Media Development* is published quarterly by the World Association for Christian Communication  
308 Main Street  
Toronto, Ontario M4C 4X7, Canada.  
Tel: 416-691-1999 Fax: 416-691-1997  
[www.waccglobal.org](http://www.waccglobal.org)

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Individuals worldwide US\$40.

Libraries and institutions in North America and Europe US\$75.

Libraries and institutions elsewhere in the world US\$50.

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**Cover design:** Brad Collicott

Published in Canada

ISSN 0143-5558



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## In the Next Issue

The 1/2017 issue of *Media Development* will explore the impact of new information and communication technologies on society in “Digital Futures”.

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The voice of the people is all very well as long as it can be ignored. While official archives and libraries are subject to authoritarian control, while newspapers can be relied upon to reflect the views and opinions of those in power, and while radio and television can be manipulated, people's voices and images can be edited and censored. But with the arrival of the Internet and digital communication platforms, all that has changed.

The traditional guardians of collective memories were state institutions, official historians, and newspapers of record. Collective memories and their social construction were vital to how nations saw and represented themselves, a process that demanded inclusion and omission. And, as Benedict Anderson noted in *Imagined Communities*, "All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives."

Who imagines, writes, or fashions these narratives? And in that process, who is forgotten or omitted? Paul Connerton has articulated seven kinds of ideological forgetting: "repressive erasure" (obliteration, destruction, editing out); "prescriptive forgetting" (erasure believed to be in the best interests of all parties); "forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity" (forgetting is not a loss but a gain that facilitates new beginnings); "structural amnesia" (the tendency to forget links that are socially undesirable); "forgetting as annulment" (flowing from a surfeit of information, discarding or storing vast quantities of data); "forgetting as planned obsolescence" (discarding as a vital ingredient of consumerism); and "forgetting as humiliated silence" (collusive silence brought on by collective shame).

Thinking about these kinds of forgetting in the context of traditional mass media and social structures operated by the state, it quickly becomes apparent that collective identity is firmly and often irrevocably founded on edited versions of national history, on ideologies that are biased or detrimental. In contrast, the potential of today's

digital media lies in their ability to challenge dominant narratives. As the editors of *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age* note:

"Phenomena such as the increasing use of YouTube as an accessible archive of popular and elite/establishment memory, the unprecedented availability of online databases offering media-based documentation of the past, the ease with which conflicting representations of the past can now be evaluated and compared, alongside the ease with which distorted or even fabricated versions of the past can now be created and disseminated – all require a comprehensive inquiry into the ever-changing relations between mass media and the recollection of the past."

The explosion of digital media has created a global scenario in which there are now thousands of competing narratives or "memories" of any happening. They can take the form of personal memories (audio and video recordings, blogs, photos, Instagrams, recollections and histories, and anything that can be uploaded and given permanence in the digital sphere.)

Then there are radio, television, and newspaper corporations – national and global, private, commercial and government – all creating their own versions of day to day events. These historians of the mundane bring their own ideological and editorial take to every aspect of political and social life. So that when it comes to sorting out fact from fiction, reasoned opinion from pure speculation, there is more information than ever, much of it more accessible than ever. The field of collective memories can easily turn into a quagmire of discord and dispute.

Consequently, as the editors of *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age* also point out:

"The fundamental role of collective memories in the formation of modern national identities, the rise of mass culture and mass politics, and the development of new communication technologies have all

led to the current state, in which the right to narrate the past is no longer reserved for academic and political elites. Nowadays, major historical events gain their public meaning not only through academic and state-sponsored interpretations but also through television, films, and the press.”

### **The right to memory**

Logically, the right to memory is a basic human right, as is the right to forget. At the level of the individual, remembering or forgetting are often coloured by questions of privacy and human dignity. At the level of a collectivity, such issues are not so clear cut. Collective memories are often bitterly contested, with claims and counterclaims by imagined political communities (Anderson’s definition of a nation but by extension communities within a nation).

Today, these include imagined digital communities (*imagined* because their members mostly will never know, meet or hear their fellow members, yet they still picture themselves as part of a coherent entity.) Such digital communities have a communicative power unknown before the invention of the Internet, although their potential for organization and bringing about political and social change is still being tested.

In this context, the choice of what is recorded in the public memory and the way it is represented is not neutral, but takes place in accordance with predetermined policies and mind-sets. This politics of remembering (or consigning to oblivion) constitutes a power struggle in which justice is almost inevitably compromised.

Aided and abetted by digital technologies, it falls to civil society to be the defender and spokesperson of history and public memory. In this way, the right to memory becomes synonymous with the right to justice. ■

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## Testing media freedom in “vibrant” Pacific Island democracies

Catherine Wilson

*Despite positive media freedom ratings and dedicated journalists, the geographical and socio-cultural complexity, as well as mineral resource dependency, which characterizes the developing Pacific Island states of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands means that the mass media’s role in effectively supporting right to memory, democracy and good governance faces significant challenges.*

The remote rainforest-covered islands of Bougainville are more than 900 kilometres from the gritty streets of Papua New Guinea’s capital, Port Moresby. But the verbal buzz among some of the internet-savvy citizens of the main town, Buka, in late May 2016 was about brewing civil discontent on the mainland.

Growing anger about Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s perceived attempts to evade investigations into his alleged involvement in corruption entailing public funds of AUD\$30 million led to a rally on the 8 June by one thousand students at the University of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in Port Moresby. But the event turned violent when their plan to demand the Prime Minister’s resignation at Parliament House was thwarted by armed police squads.

Media reports claimed more than 20 were injured in the ensuing shooting and clashes, while physical assault of a female reporter from the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was quickly condemned by the PNG Media Council, Pacific Islands News Association and Reporters without Borders (RSF). Riots followed in other





*In the Solomon Islands, where the population is scattered across an archipelago of 900 islands, remote communities experience geographical barriers to accessing information. Photo Credit: Catherine Wilson.*

cities across the country.

Yet activists were far from impressed by local media coverage, which was hindered by an official reporting ban. Deeming news stories to be pro-government and biased, activists destroyed copies of the country's two main daily newspapers, *The National* and *Post-Courier*, being sold by nearby.

"They were not actual reports of what we students are portraying at the university. That's why, to show our frustration, we went out to the bus stop and burnt those papers... we have no trust in the media," a student protest leader was quoted as saying in an article by Carmella Gware on the news site Loop PNG.<sup>1</sup>

It was a moment to reflect on the media landscape in this island state often labelled a "vibrant democracy". PNG's media is declared free by RSF, but its performance in holding the government to account, supporting right to memory, equitable access to information and informed debate in reality faces substantial hurdles.

It is not unknown for local journalists who tackle politically sensitive issues to be subjected to pressure by politicians and powerful corporate actors or even to suffer physical assaults. Politicians retaliate quickly, in particular, to stories implicating them in corruption or wrongdoing.

### **Curse of mineral resource wealth**

However, discussion about governance and public dissent should not exclude factors related to

the country's immense mineral wealth, such as an unhealthy alliance between the political elite and foreign corporate sector, which is linked to corruption.

Local writer and blogger, Martyn Namorong, has emphasised the connection between corruption and "the distortion of the distribution of natural resource wealth in favour of a few multinational corporations and a powerful rent-seeking class."<sup>2</sup>

Thus low human development, with 40% of people living below the poverty line, persists in a country where reserves of copper, gold, nickel, timber and natural gas have driven some of the world's highest GDP growth rates over the past decade. But the state-corporate alliance is also connected with suppression of citizens' opposition to resource extraction projects and their environmental and social impacts.

Some extractive companies operating in the country have admitted in recent years to providing material support to local police units, such as vehicles and fuel. This assistance has implicated them in state attempts to quash community objections to their projects, for example, when police destroyed homes, attacked and evicted villagers in the vicinity of the Porgera gold mine, majority-owned by Barrick Gold, in 2009.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012 the media's role as watchdog was tested when a devastating landslide emanated from a quarry in the vicinity of the massive PNG LNG natural gas project in Hela Province in the highlands. Tragically, two villages located below the quarry were buried with an estimated 60 people killed. Previously recorded safety concerns about excavation work being carried out in the quarry by an Esso Highlands subcontractor were ignored in the National Disaster Centre's report, which attributed the incident to geological weaknesses and high rainfall.

Critical perspectives on the disaster appeared on social media sites, such as Act Now PNG, PNG Exposed and LNG Watch. But, despite factual and scientific errors being identified in the NDC report by an international landslide expert and serious questions raised by local communities about the company's activities, the stark anom-

alies surrounding the disaster failed to provoke local in depth investigative reporting. And calls by relatives of the survivors and expert observers for a Commission of Inquiry were met with official silence.

Being a journalist in PNG is by no means an easy occupation. In addition to personal security risks, they are some of the lowest paid professionals in the country.

Empowering the professionalism of journalists with more substantial industry training, as identified by the International Federation of Journalists, is also paramount to more rigorous reporting of governance, social justice and development issues. It's also imperative to strengthening the trust of the people they have a role in representing and combating the fear Papua New Guinean informal economist and blogger, Busa Jeremiah Wenogo, expressed on the website, PNG Attitude:

"Thank god we have not surrendered our democracy to extreme forms of government. Yet I cannot help but ask how long we can go on like this before that happens."<sup>4</sup>

### **Geographical barriers to information and the media**

Yet it is not all about state interference. In PNG, more than 80% of people live in rural areas, many isolated due to arduous mountain terrain, dense forest and absence of a nationwide road network. In the neighbouring Solomon Islands the population of around 560,000 is scattered across an archipelago of more than 900 islands.

Thus radio is the most popular and accessible communication medium, while television and newspapers, with rural distribution impeded by difficult transport logistics, only capture a fraction of the audience, mainly in urban centres.

There is also the challenge of limited resources. Newspapers in the Solomon Islands, for example, are unable to support a network of staff in other parts of the country. Nine of every ten journalists are based in the capital, Honiara, with consequences for coverage of events and issues in provincial areas.

And despite the development of telecom-





*Villagers in Hela Province express their anger and grievances following a landslide which devastated their villages in 2012, Papua New Guinea. Photo Credit: Catherine Wilson.*

munications infrastructure gradually improving in the region, internet penetration, even via mobile phones, remains very low; in PNG it is estimated at about 6.5%.

### **The hurdle of illiteracy**

The reach of the print media and internet is further affected by illiteracy. “A tolerant constituency does not necessarily mean it agrees with the government’s views. PNG has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world. A tolerant constituency may not even know the government’s views,” Wenogo writes.<sup>5</sup>

While the national literacy rate in PNG is about 63%, independent studies reveal it to be less than 15% in some rural areas. In Renbel and Isabel provinces of the Solomon Islands, adult literacy rates are 33.9% and 17.5% respectively.<sup>6</sup>

Thus unique island geography and low literacy prevent many people gaining access to information, having their voices heard at the national level and engaging in informed public debate, even with these principles enshrined in both nations’ constitutions. Consequently the gulf between the political elite in the nations’ capitals and vast majority of citizens residing in the hinterlands is also deepened.

“Many citizens [in PNG] feel out of touch with the national government and do not understand the policy development and implementation processes,” ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) International reports.<sup>7</sup>

There are ramifications, too, for the dissemination of critical development information. Geography and illiteracy are factors in the serious knowledge deficit, especially in rural commun-



ities, about breast cancer, one of the most serious diseases affecting women in the Solomon Islands, and Tuberculosis in PNG.

The media's role in generating focus and reach on these issues is under-utilized. Currently inadequate information and poor rural health services are factors in mortality occurring in 59% of women diagnosed with cancer in the Solomon Islands and Tuberculosis reaching epidemic proportions in PNG.

### **Negotiating culture**

Customary attitudes and beliefs influence media coverage of some social and health issues, for instance, rape and sorcery-related violence. Cultural disapproval of such violations inhibits many people who are affected from speaking out.

In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, which experienced a decade-long civil war (1989-98), there are constraints in some traditional rural communities to discussing certain wartime atrocities, including rape. In the northern coastal villages of Bougainville's Buka Island, the routine of daily life seems carefree. But beneath the surface there is a silence about what happened during the conflict. People do not talk about the killings, near deaths during interrogations or the mass graves.

"The major thing is that they [people] are traumatised... and there are some areas where the culture prevents us from talking; it is taboo," Dorcas Gano, President of the Hako Women's Collective, a local community organization, explained.

Community silence and the lack of any official investigation into human rights abuses during the conflict are reflected in limited media inquiry in this area.

Sorcery-related violence, which frequently makes international headlines, is also a culturally sensitive issue in PNG. Belief in witchcraft, known as "Sanguma", and its power to cause deaths, illness and misfortune is widespread throughout the country.

In 2013 the government moved to classify sorcery-related killings as murders punishable by the death penalty. But, even with legislative reform, community and cultural pressure still impedes many victims and witnesses reporting inci-

dents to the police or the media. It is considered particularly dangerous for women, who face a higher risk of sorcery accusations and attacks, to speak out.

According to Dr Arnold Kukari of PNG's National Research Institute, sorcery-related violence drives women to "live in fear and isolate themselves from active involvement in all spheres of development." Josephine, a courageous woman from the highlands region, who has been accused of witchcraft, articulated the challenges for public and local media debate:

"People have to acknowledge and talk about the problem before they can find a solution. At the moment, people don't know how to come out of this thing, 'Sanguma', they don't even know how to defend themselves."

Thus the country's media faces cultural impediments to both rigorously addressing such issues, which are hindering human development and democratic participation, and representing the voices and memories of some of the most marginalised members of society. Yet, as ABC International reports, PNG citizens want progressive journalism which offers "an independent voice that provides all sides of the story without skirting over negative aspects."<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately citizens want the media to more effectively work for and represent them. Population reach would benefit from improving the technical reach and affordability of access to digital media and incorporating more local languages and dialects (there are more than 800 languages spoken in the country) into radio services. Addressing the high level of foreign ownership in television and print media is important to improving balanced reporting and local content.

But a member of PNG's Institute of Medical Research, Suparat Phuanukoonnon, defined an important strategy to making the media work better for ordinary people, their development and democratic participation, when she said that communication should not just respond to local contexts, but also "how people receive and process information and believe the information enough to take action." That, in a country with an estimated

1,000 different cultural groups, is an immense and complex task. ■

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# Media manipulation and the battleground of memory

Eric Tweel

*The Italian daily newspaper Il Giornale runs a front page article with the headline "The Fourth Reich", warning that the "Germans are returning, not with guns but with the euro."<sup>1</sup> An ISIS soldier films a bulldozer pushing down a rampart of sand on the Syria-Iraq border and then pans down to a handwritten poster, announcing "The End of Sykes-Picot."<sup>2</sup> The U.S. House of Representatives votes to ban the display of the Confederate flag at Veterans' Administration ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> Bolivian President Evo Morales proposes that his country abandon the Gregorian calendar and "reclaim its ancestral calendar as part of the rebuilding of our identity."<sup>4</sup>*

In various ways, people around the world are challenging the legacy of the past. Living memory is bursting through the cracks of the disintegrating neoliberal order and demanding to be heard. Alternative political visions are pushing their way into mainstream discourse and practice; at their core is a refusal to accept the standard narrative about how we got into the mess we're in.

This refusal is what Alain Badiou calls the "Rebirth of History", which he describes as "the emergence of a capacity, at once destructive and creative, whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established order."<sup>5</sup> At their most basic level, the political, economic and cultural struggles that are taking place throughout the world are being fought on the battleground of memory. In re-



interpreting the past with an eye towards the future, the belligerents of these battles are exerting a powerful retroactive force. This force is loud, hopeful, and dangerous. It harbours great promises and poses immense risks.

A catalyst of this challenge to established historical narratives is the proliferation of non-Western media networks with global aspirations. Among the most high-profile networks of these “new global media” are Qatar’s *Al Jazeera*, Russia’s *RT*, Iran’s *PressTV* and Venezuela’s *TeleSUR*, all of which launched their English-language networks within the last decade. They represent a shift in the balance of global media that parallels a broader geopolitical transition from a unipolar, U.S.-dominated world to a multipolar world.

This transition is symbolized by the determination of the Syrian people and their allies to resist the Western forces that have in the last few

decades wrought destruction on countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. In Syria’s struggle, and in countless others like it, “boots on the ground” are complemented by voices on the radio, faces on the screen, and words on the page.

### Obama in Hiroshima

The effect of these burgeoning media networks is felt most acutely on days like May 27, 2016, when Barack Obama became the first sitting U.S. President to visit Hiroshima since August 1945. More than seven decades prior, American B-29 bombers dropped 10,000 pound atomic bombs on this city and nearby Nagasaki, instantly incinerating 140,000 human beings and leaving deadly radiation that would kill tens of thousands more in the years to come. Today, the planes that dropped these bombs, the *Enola Gay* and the *Bockscar*, are proudly on display in national museums in Wash-

*Hiroshima Peace Memorial (commonly called the Atomic Bomb Dome or Genbaku Dōmu, A-Bomb Dome), in Hiroshima, Japan, is part of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. The ruin commemorates the people who were killed in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6 1945. Over 70,000 people were killed instantly, and another 70,000 suffered fatal injuries from the radiation. Photo: Wikipedia.*



ington, D.C.<sup>6</sup> and Dayton, Ohio,<sup>7</sup> respectively.

As he stood in front of the assembled crowd at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Obama spoke of the bombings as though they had been acts of divine intervention rather than of human aggression. Out of nowhere, it would seem, “death came from the sky and the world was changed”.<sup>8</sup> Rather than attributing them to the cruel and deliberate actions of the U.S. military, Obama told the world that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki emanated from deep within “humanity’s core contradiction”, the ability of our greatest inventions to wreak the greatest destruction.<sup>9</sup>

Seeking to downplay the unparalleled horror of the atomic bomb that his country had dropped on Japanese civilians, Obama reminded his listeners that, “On every continent, the history of civilization is filled with war”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, no one in particular was responsible for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and besides, they weren’t that unusual anyway.

Obama, who received the Nobel Peace Prize “for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples [and his] vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons,”<sup>11</sup> did not take the opportunity presented by Hiroshima’s history to explain why he has implemented a \$1-trillion plan to upgrade and strengthen the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Nor did he discuss the tens of billions of dollars he has given to nuclear-armed Israel,<sup>12</sup> his 2014 nuclear arms deal with the UK,<sup>13</sup> or the new US missile defense system in Eastern Europe that has provoked Russia into upgrading its own nuclear arsenal.<sup>14</sup>

Obama was equally silent about the continuing legacy of the U.S. presence in Japan. He did not discuss the recent crimes committed by American soldiers based in Okinawa,<sup>15</sup> in which Justin Castellano raped a Japanese tourist and Kenneth Franklin Gadson strangled a local woman to death after beating her with a stick. These crimes are part of a consistent pattern of violence that surrounds the U.S. bases in Japan, and they evoke painful memories of the U.S. occupation.

Sarah Kovner, a Senior Research Scholar at Columbia University, describes this history of

abuse in her article “The Soundproofed Superpower”:

“Once censorship ended, the Japanese press regularly reported on rapes, murders, and robberies committed by American servicemen. After the Japanese jurisdiction clause went into effect in October 1953, American servicemen were charged with hundreds of serious offenses [□]. But Japanese authorities waived jurisdiction in the vast majority of cases, instead turning the culprits over to their commanders. Victims could not sue anyone during the Occupation, and when the peace treaty was signed, Japan abandoned the right to ask for compensation.”<sup>16</sup>

That a President intent on polishing his legacy would fail to mention such inconsistencies comes as no surprise. After all, Obama was not in Hiroshima to mourn the dead, nor to express any sort of compassion for the Japanese people. He was there to reassert U.S. hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region amid rising Chinese influence and to remind Japan that its national sovereignty was secondary to Washington’s interests.

### **The media reaction**

How did the mainstream Western media react to Obama’s visit? *The New York Times* offered a patronizing article with the headline “Hiroshima Survivor Cries, Obama Gives Him a Hug” that depicted a helpless Japan being embraced by its U.S. protector.<sup>17</sup> *The Economist* reported that, “Given the moral and emotional complexity, the American president was his sonorous self,” noting with praise that he “acknowledged historical nuances”.<sup>18</sup> Canada’s *The Globe and Mail* was perhaps the most obsequious, calling Obama’s speech in Hiroshima “an unflinching look back at a painful history”.<sup>19</sup> In the lens through which the majority of Western citizens see the world, there was scarcely any criticism of Obama’s dissimulation.

Such a complacent response has a long pedigree. Mainstream Western media networks have a history of attempting to downplay the war crimes committed by the U.S. and its imperialist allies. They do this so that the memory of the average



citizen can be aligned with the current interests of the ruling elite. This motivation was well understood by a pioneer of modern mass media, Edward Bernays, in his classic book *Propaganda*:

“Formerly the rulers were the leaders. They laid out the course of history, by the simple process of doing what they wanted. And if nowadays the successors of the rulers, those whose position or ability gives them power, can no longer do what they want without the approval of the masses, they find in propaganda a tool which is increasingly powerful in gaining that approval. Therefore, propaganda is here to stay.”<sup>20</sup>

But the story does not end there. The new generation of global non-Western media networks presented much less complacent perspectives on Obama’s visit to Hiroshima. *Telesur* reported on the protests against Obama’s visit.<sup>21</sup> John Wight wrote in *RT International* that “There could be no greater insult to the victims of Hiroshima than this cynical attempt by the president to deflect the guilt which the US and US alone carries for this crime.”<sup>22</sup> Yujiro Taniyama, a Japanese filmmaker and guest on *Al Jazeera*’s daily TV programme *The Stream*, said that “I don’t seek an apology. However, I want the American public to know that the bombing of Hiroshima was unnecessary and it is morally indefensible.”<sup>23</sup> These alternative accounts of Obama’s visit were written and broadcast in English and directed to Western audiences.

This reaction demonstrates that mainstream Western media outlets cannot try to shape the collective memory of its citizens without resistance. But this resistance is little more than propaganda of a different variety. Although the rising media networks based in cities like Beijing, Moscow, Tehran and Doha offer legitimate criticism of Western policies, their coverage of events involving their own state backers are noticeably skewed. For example, as Canadian anti-war activist Ken Stone explains, *Al Jazeera* has cynically portrayed the barbaric invasion of Syria as a laudable “revolution”:

“In 2011, when the foreign-backed

mercenaries invaded Homs, besides executing all those whom they considered government supporters or followers of faith repugnant to them, besides kidnapping hundreds more to use as human shields in other parts of the country, and besides pillaging anything of value they could lay their hands on, they held several mass meetings in the square in front of the clock tower. For this reason, *Al Jazeera*, the TV voice of the Emir of Qatar, one of the principal funders of the covert war of aggression against Syria, labelled the Homs clock tower as ‘the symbol of the Syrian revolution.’”<sup>24</sup>

Thus *Al Jazeera* and other rising state media outlets are just as manipulative as their corporate Western counterparts. The return to a multipolar world will not put an end to propaganda. However, by creating multiple conflicting narratives, it does open up new room for popular resistance. The seeds of this resistance have long lain dormant. Against the attempts to place memory within the limits of authoritarian control, the wretched of the earth remain as living and irrefutable testaments to past abuses. The possibility of freedom rests on the ability of these memories to be not only expressed, but also heard.

### **Who gets remembered, who gets forgotten**

The insufficiency of freedom of expression in our digital age was best described by Aaron Swartz, an American programmer and activist who committed suicide in 2013 at the age of 26 after being indicted by federal prosecutors. In the documentary *Steal This Film II*, Swartz observes that “In the old system of broadcasting, you were fundamentally limited by the amount of space in the airwaves. You could only send out 10 channels over the airwaves for television, right? Or even with cable, you had 500 channels. On the internet everybody can have a channel. [□] Now everyone has a license to speak. It’s a question of who gets heard.”<sup>25</sup>

Growing social and political unrest around the world is a sign that those who have long been ignored want to be heard. Much of what they want to say concerns the past; the official narra-

tives have lost their sway and must be replaced. The new global media cannot meet this demand. Although they challenge Western influence, networks like *Al Jazeera* and *RT* are funded and operated by states that silence internal dissent and obstruct honest debate. They represent a change in rulers and not a revolution of the ruled.

Democracy is not just a question of who gets heard, but also of who gets remembered and who gets forgotten. If history is to serve as a force of liberation, rather than of oppression, it must be built on the memory of everyday people. Genuine progress in the construction of emancipatory historical narratives will depend in large part on the proliferation and strengthening of independent, grassroots journalism that offers an alternative to corporate and state press. Victors will always write history: so let the people win. ■

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# Historical amnesia and the right to communicate in Indonesia

Rahma Wiryomartono

*The relationship between media and historical perception is a deeply entwined one – as a platform for the dissemination of communication, media possess the power to both strengthen the links and shape the understandings that communities have to their respective pasts. The concept of collective memory fundamentally ties into how these pasts are continually constructed, thus facilitating discussions on the intersections between history, culture, and identity.*

In examining the 1965-66 Indonesian mass killings, one can question how historical perception has been collectively shaped by a regime that has been able to discredit and denigrate a certain group of people due to their ideological affiliation. The post-Suharto era of Indonesia, which commenced in 1998 after the fall of the authoritarian Suharto, has been hailed as the country's transition to democracy. However, the present state of Indonesia regarding its past crimes against humanity reveals that this transition is not complete – the power structures and the suppression entrenched in the Suharto regime carry on to the present.

The full realization of democracy requires that all factions of society be allowed to exercise the right to communicate and to participate in political processes, including groups that have been marginalized, excluded, and in this case, faced massacre. Here the media have a vital role to play.

The years 1965-66 in Indonesia marked a

horrific time of violence and strife, in which an estimated 500,000-1 million people were killed in what initially began as a political purge targeting the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), the world's largest communist party outside of a communist nation (Danaparamita, 2015). These killings were instigated by an insurgency called the 30 September Movement, when six army generals were assassinated in an abortive coup.

## Historical background

Leading up to this horrific incident, Indonesia was afflicted with sociopolitical unrest – under President Sukarno's guided democracy, the nation-state faced economic deterioration and internal political conflict. Major political actors of the time included the military, and the Islamic party Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the PKI. Sukarno maintained his power by balancing the hostile tensions between the different political factions, earning him the epithet "the great *dalang*" (shadow puppet master). The different groups – the military, the religious, and the socialist and communist – all fell under his political concept of *Nasakom*, an acronym derived from the words *Nasionalisme* (nationalism), *Agama* (religion), and *Komunisme* (communism).

The 30 September Movement instigated a crisis-fueled atmosphere. Although the extent of its culpability in the 30 September Movement remains debatable, the PKI with its three million members was blamed for the affair: this served as the pretext for military-led nationwide massacres (Meyer, 2013). The precarious "balance" between the different components of *Nasakom* had irrevocably fractured. By early October 1965, the military had distributed an anti-communist propaganda campaign, successfully demonizing PKI members in the public eye.

Major General Suharto, the commander of the reserve army division Kostrad, mobilized his forces and the campaign of mass violence swept through the nation. Anti-PKI massacres began in Jakarta then spread across Indonesia, concentrating around PKI-strongholds in Central and East Java, Northern Sumatra, and Bali (Wardaya, 2011). Villages were razed and hundreds of thousands of people faced atrocities such as mur-

der, torture, enslavement, sexual violence, forced disappearance, and imprisonment without trial. Thousands of armed vigilantes carried out the violence with the support of the government and foreign powers.

Over the course of many months, victims of the massacres included ethnic Chinese Indonesians, intellectuals, and suspected communists and leftists (Danaparamita, 2015). Communist, liberal, and populist factions of society were targeted because they served both as scapegoats for the murder of the six generals, and as the “common enemy” for the majority of the population to unite against.

Furthermore, Chinese Indonesians were targeted because they were held to be responsible for the political and economic chaos during the mid-1960s. The crimes and murders carried out against these groups were committed by military-backed civilian vigilante, paramilitary, and religious groups which often received aid, training, and encouragement from anti-communist Western powers amid the tense political climate of the Cold War (Roosa & Nevins, 2005).<sup>1</sup>

Amid this period of upheaval, Suharto overthrew Sukarno and commenced his three-decade long authoritarian regime. Suharto’s rise to power was defined as Indonesia’s Transition to a New Order. Such a momentous shift transformed Sukarno’s previous non-alignment politics during the Cold War. With Suharto in power, new political constellations were formed which were more favourable to Western geopolitical interests, especially those of the United States.

Under Suharto, the military penetrated all levels of Indonesian government, society, and economy; media and education were monitored minutely by the now-defunct Ministry of Information, and press freedom was virtually nonexistent. Strident anti-communism became the state creed. The perpetrators of the massacres, who were often active gangsters, were celebrated as national heroes and rewarded with political power.

Ultimately, the fall of Suharto came in 1998 following years of civil dissent. The post-Suharto period paved way for a more complex documentation of what occurred during the 1965-66 killings,

due to a new openness in the treatment of history. For example, the legitimacy of the official transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto through the *Supersemar* letter, however, has been called into question by various historians (Galih, 2016). With regard to the killings, media such as memoirs and films have challenged public silence, yet the topic remains highly sensitive and controversial. Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2012 Oscar-nominated documentary, *The Act of Killing*, chillingly exposes the killers’ total impunity as well as their unabashed first-hand accounts detailing the crimes they have committed.

In spite of the relatively newly raised narratives offered by those directly affected, Indonesians have generally long resisted discussing the killings. Currently, school lessons skip over the events and perpetrators live alongside their victims’ families. Despite the massive scale of murder and brutality, there is little public discussion or scholarly research pertaining to the 1965-66 massacres. No apology has ever been issued. Official history omits the extent of what ensued and the events remain poorly understood, leaving Indonesia still facing the pressing question of how to confront its bloody past.

### **National and international efforts to seek reconciliation**

A government-supported national symposium was held 18-19 April 2016 in Jakarta to discuss the 1965-66 killings and to seek reconciliation – more than 50 years on. It was Indonesia’s first hearing into one of the darkest chapters in its recent history. The conference, titled “Dissecting the 1965 Tragedy: A Historical Approach”, was attended by an audience of 200 survivors, government officials, military members, academics, and human rights activists. In his opening speech, retired General and Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, stressed that although the government was committed to settling past human rights violations, it would not deliver any official apology.

The killings are an extremely delicate subject for senior government officials, since many of the groups who were implicated in the 1965-66





*Members of Front Pancasila protest the National Symposium 1965 event at Farmers' Statute in Jakarta. The group claims the now-defunct Indonesia Communist Party (PKI) is behind the event. The sign reads: "Reject the Symposium, PKI is the enemy of the people." Courtesy: Antara/Rivan Awal Lingga ([www.thejakartapost.com](http://www.thejakartapost.com)).*

massacres comprise Indonesia's political elite. The organization of the symposium itself prompted an inevitable backlash from active and retired army officials, as well as other factions of society who feared that it was a pretext to revive the defunct PKI and to disseminate communist agendas. Groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front and the Pancasila Front protested fiercely against the symposium, burning communist flags and waving signs in front of the hotel where the event was held.

Nevertheless, the symposium managed to bring the survivors and the military, two virulently opposing camps, onto the same panel for the purpose of dialogue that would aid in reconciliation. During the symposium, survivors, now mostly in their 70s, recounted harrowing tales of their trauma and social marginalization. Many of them criticized the emphasis on reconciliation, which lacked a sufficient call to action. They wanted an apology and for facts to be uncovered.

Agus Widjojo, a retired Lieutenant General who was one of the chief architects of the symposium, elaborated on how Indonesia seemed to be at an impasse regarding the issue: "This case has been in our past for 50 years now. We haven't been able to solve it as a nation. Where are we going if the nation is still divided and doesn't want to make any effort to find a solution?"

International pressure has been exerted on Indonesia to resolve the matter. The International People's Tribunal on the 1965 Crimes against Humanity (IPT) took place 10-13 November 2015 in The Hague with the primary objective of en-

suring national and international recognition of the genocide and crimes against humanity committed in and after 1965 by the Indonesian state. Zak Yacoob, the presiding Head Judge and former South African Constitutional Court Justice, delivered the concluding statement of the international panel of judges in July 2016.

The [final report](#) stressed that the Indonesian government must be held accountable for its crimes against humanity. It incriminated Indonesia in violating the United Nations 1948 Genocide Convention – which Indonesia has hitherto neither signed nor ratified – and presented evidence of the complicity of other states, specifically the US, UK, and Australia. Recommendations urged the state to apologize to victims, survivors, and their families; investigate and prosecute all crimes against humanity; and ensure appropriate compensation and reparation to victims and survivors. It was further advocated that relevant authorities recompense victims of sexual violence, fight the cycle of impunity, and establish the truth so that future generations can learn from the past.

Indonesia immediately rejected the ruling. Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Binsar Panjaitan criticized the tribunal, saying, "What business do they have? They are not our superiors. Indonesia has its own system of law. I don't want outsiders to dictate the affairs of this country." Other major political figures gave similar responses. Minister of Defence and fellow retired General Ryamizard Ryacudu said, "Apologize to whom? We don't need to listen to those people. Why listen to foreigners? Foreigners should listen to us."

### **Democracy, media, and the right to communicate**

The present state of affairs concerning victims' right to communicate indicates that a full tran-

sition to democracy is not complete, seeing as democracy requires that all factions of society be allowed to participate in political processes. Survivors of the killings and their families are barred from becoming public officials and members of the army or police. The International People's Tribunal [recommends](#) that the Indonesian state "rehabilitate the victims and remove any still outstanding persecution by the authorities or restrictions on their full enjoyment of all human rights guaranteed under international and Indonesian law."

To victims, an apology and sustained rehabilitation would be considered as evidence of Indonesia's accountability and commitment to be a receptive member of international civil society, given that these are recommendations issued by international bodies. The fact that the country has not been committed to any action points to how – through censorship, silencing, and an intergenerational transfer of a one-sided history – a certain group continues to face silent dissipation in their erasure from public memory, all the while being deprived of their human rights.

As far as collective memory is concerned, mass media, historical documentation, and educational systems play an important role in shaping, establishing, and sustaining ideological constructs in society. This is because these outlets function to transmit information and knowledge. The Indonesian writer Laksmi Pamuntjak explains that educational systems maintain the intergenerational transfer of a one-sided history: "At school, my generation was taught categorically – with no room for other interpretations – that all Communists were atheists and the enemy of the Indonesian state, and that the defeat of the Indonesian Communist party was crucial to the survival of the nation."<sup>2</sup>

Media facilitate the right to communicate by providing the platform for people to have their voices heard. In the case of the 1965-66 mass killings, various media such as memoirs, films, and books can provide alternate perspectives on history that challenge the official narrative and by doing so, challenge established public opinions. Examples of such media that deal specifically with

this subject have arisen, although they are generally received unfavourably or wholly ignored by society.

The Indonesian scenario indicates that if reconciliation is, in fact, an end goal, much progress has still to be made. The media have a role to play in shaping public opinion and the power to contribute to a renewed society based on justice and truth. ■

#### Notes

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# La memoria en los medios

J. Ignacio “Iñaki” Chaves G.

*“No aceptes lo habitual como cosa natural. Porque en tiempos de desorden, de confusión organizada, de humanidad deshumanizada, nada debe parecer natural. Nada debe parecer imposible de cambiar”.*  
Bertolt Brecht

**E**l ser humano es memoria y es comunicación. Ambas nos acompañan a lo largo de nuestra existencia. Comunicar nos permite mantener viva la memoria y construir la historia.

En esa tarea de edificar el pasado los medios tienen una destacada labor, ya que van alimentando los archivos de la historia con lo que cuentan de los hechos acaecidos. Por eso es importante una labor crítica para que los medios no entierren las otras historias y nos transmitan solamente la “historia oficial”.

Gran parte de la memoria social que tenemos viene determinada por lo que nos llega a través de los medios. La comunicación que éstos hagan condiciona la memoria de la sociedad al crear unos imaginarios colectivos que nos homogeneizan y eliminan las diferencias.

## Memoria y comunicación

La memoria es un derecho y un deber. No nos pueden obligar a recordar como tampoco nos pueden forzar a olvidar. Con la memoria tejemos los hilos que nos unen, esos mimbres se entrelazan a través de la comunicación que hacemos. Porque memoria y comunicación caminan juntas desde que el ser humano habita la Tierra.

Ya en el siglo V antes de la era común, el historiador griego Herodoto de Halicarnaso, señalado como el padre de la historiografía, afirmaba en su obra *Historiae* que escribía para que “no llegue a desvanecerse con el tiempo la memoria de los hechos públicos de los hombres, ni menos

a oscurecer las grandes y maravillosas hazañas, así de los griegos, como de los bárbaros.”<sup>1</sup>

La memoria nos sirve para mantener vivos los procesos, los saberes y las narrativas de nuestra historia. Archivamos los recuerdos porque con ellos nos construimos. La pérdida de memoria nos destruye, nos va minando hasta no ser. Un ejemplo son las personas que sufren alzhéimer, una trágica muestra de la gravedad que significa no poder retener nuestras propias evocaciones. El déficit de memoria hace que nuestra comunicación pierda su sentido y que sus significados se vacíen de contenido.

En la frase de Herodoto se condensa una parte importante de lo que le debemos reclamar a los medios a la hora de construir memoria. No deben oscurecer las hazañas, o las simples narrativas de “los bárbaros” porque no sean de los suyos. No han de contar solamente las batallas de los vencedores, sino también las de los vencidos. Porque lo que no se cuenta no existe para los demás, quedando archivado en las memorias particulares de quienes no forman parte de la historia.

La comunicación tiene la tarea de hacer presente el valor de esa memoria que no cuenta, la de la otra cara de la moneda. La “otra” historia, esa que es excluida por los poderes pero que es tan importante como la que sí recogen los medios y los libros.

Es por ello que, en esa labor de servir de memoria, de archivo de recuerdos, los medios ocupan, o deberían ocupar, un lugar destacado. Prensa, radio y televisión, sobre todo esta última, son los medios masivos que hacen de “punta de lanza” en la tarea de trasladar a la ciudadanía lo que ocurre en el mundo. Pero lo que informan no es siempre lo que las personas quieren o necesitan o les puede ser útil. Nos cuentan más bien lo que interesa al poder que los controla.

Sin la comunicación y sin la memoria el mundo sería un espacio deforme. Si aquélla no es bien ejercida y ésta no nos acompaña, perdemos la visión de la realidad y permitimos que nuestra vida sea construida por otros, por quienes detentan el poder de manipular la información y de conducir las memorias.

Los medios tienen esa responsabilidad de



*Durante la marcha del 8 de marzo (día de la mujer) de 2015. Foto: J. Ignacio Chaves G.*

comunicar y de mantener viva la memoria para estar en el mundo. Hay multitud de ejemplos en los medios de mala praxis informativa. En América Latina, por su situación de dependencia informativa, la manipulación y el “olvido” son más graves. Porque la información de los medios contribuye más bien a la desmemoria, al desplazamiento de la realidad hacia espacios de interés del poder mediático. Un ámbito que ha traspasado todas las previsiones y que se ha convertido en mucho más que el cuarto poder. Su presencia es omnímoda, y más en estos últimos veinte años en los que lo comunicativo lo ocupa todo y en donde son los medios quienes construyen una buena parte de las agendas del poder. En ese oficio de contar lo que pasa, tanto los medios como sus profesionales han pasado “de creerse liberados de la sociedad para vigilar al poder a creerse liberados del poder para vigilar a la sociedad” (Gabilondo, 2011: 29).

Medios y poder se unen para contar la memoria oficial, la que ignora las otredades y pretende que todo el mundo las ignore: “La memoria del poder, que los centros de educación y los medios de comunicación difunden como única memoria posible, sólo escucha las voces que repiten la aburrida letanía de su propia sacralización. La impunidad exige la desmemoria” (Galeano, 1999: 34).

Los medios también contribuyen a recuperar

hechos pasados y promueven la formación de cierta conciencia. El problema está en que por lo general no plantan semillas para una conciencia crítica. Más bien al contrario, nos aborregan con una mirada uniforme sobre la realidad convirtiéndonos en meros espectadores de “sus” realidades. Somos ese “rebaño desconcertado” ante lo que nos muestran los medios masivos de difusión de noticias y la manera en que lo hacen “El cuadro del mundo que se presenta a la gente no tiene la más mínima relación

con la realidad, ya que la verdad sobre cada asunto queda enterrada bajo montañas de mentiras” (Chomsky y Ramonet, 2002: 30).

### **Las malas praxis**

Los medios nos desplazan, porque nos presentan “su” realidad que quieren hacernos creer que es la realidad. Hacen que la sociedad piense que lo que nos cuentan es lo que realmente es importante, nos “normalizan”. Lo que nos lleva a considerar que lo que no aparece en esos medios no es relevante, dejamos que sea lo que nos cuentan lo que vale y dando por hecho que lo demás no es importante.

En los últimos años he hecho algunas investigaciones para constatar cómo los medios modifican e incluso construyen la realidad. Lo que supone no sólo manipular la manera de presentar los hechos sino una forma de negar la memoria. Por ejemplo, cuando en julio de 2011 privilegiaron informativamente la masacre de Oslo, en la que un descerebrado asesinó a setenta y siete personas, frente a la hambruna en el Cuerno de África, que causó, según Naciones Unidas, varios miles de fallecidos. Tomaron una posición clara sobre lo que el mundo necesitaba saber. Decidieron que importaban más las vidas de sesenta y siete ciudadanos blancos que las de veinticinco mil niñas y niños negros.



Lo volvieron a hacer en 2015 con la crisis migratoria. En septiembre, los medios desplegaron todo su potencial informativo frente a la noticia del niño sirio que apareció ahogado en una playa turca. Todos los días mueren personas migrantes intentando buscar un lugar mejor para vivir. Esos seres humanos anhelan lo que los propios medios les han vendido a través de sus mensajes: que en Occidente se vive mejor. Pero luego esos países occidentales les niegan la entrada. Para los medios fue más relevante la muerte de un solo niño, que es muy importante, frente a las tres mil setecientasetenta y una personas migrantes muertas ese año en el Mediterráneo, según datos de la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones.<sup>2</sup>

En esos sucesos, y en otros muchos que podríamos citar, hicieron una mala praxis informativa, pusieron en práctica un no uso de la memoria, negaron el recuerdo y opacaron cierta realidad. Le dijeron al mundo, a través de la información que difunden, qué es noticia, qué es importante y qué tenemos que recordar.

### Los medios en Colombia

En Colombia se suele dar una parcialidad interesada en los medios masivos (radio, televisión o prensa). Se destaca más lo espectacular y negativo, con una clara tendencia en los noticieros de las cadenas generalistas a poner la violencia por delante de cualquier otra información. Eso ha contribuido a crear una percepción de inseguridad en la ciudadanía y a que en el exterior vean a Colombia como un país muy violento. Y hay violencias, pero no son lo único ni lo principal de lo que sucede en el país.

La insistencia en resaltar la criminalidad de la guerra ha dejado de lado, como si fueran menos importantes, otras realidades tan graves como el conflicto armado. Así, han predominado tenden-

ciosamente las cifras de muertes por esos hechos y se han ensombrecido los datos de otras causas de muerte como la producida por la violencia intrafamiliar, por las agresiones contra las mujeres o grupos minoritarios, por el consumo de alcohol o por accidentes de tránsito.

Según el Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica<sup>3</sup> en el período 1958-2012 fallecieron, como consecuencia del conflicto armado, 218.094 personas, de las que 177.307 eran civiles y 40.787 pertenecían a las fuerzas armadas. Evidentemente son cifras relevantes. Pero también lo son los 10.402 dictámenes por violencia contra niños, niñas y adolescentes reportados en 2012 por el Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar.<sup>4</sup> O las 75.939 peritaciones en el contexto de violencia intrafamiliar realizadas en 2014 por el Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal,<sup>5</sup> de las que el 64,33 % corresponden a violencia contra la pareja; lo que sitúa a Colombia como el quinto país de la región con mayor número de feminicidios.

En Colombia hubo 32.840 accidentes de tránsito<sup>6</sup> a lo largo del año 2014 con el resultado de 5.632 fallecimientos. Casi la mitad eran “usuarios vulnerables de la vía pública”, es decir, peatones, ciclistas y motociclistas. Con respecto al alcohol, según la Organización Mundial de la Salud,<sup>7</sup> el 3,2 % de la población colombiana es dependiente de esta droga legal. En el mundo, mueren más de 3,3 millones de personas anualmente por culpa del alcohol.

Es una muestra de que hay cifras muy relevantes sobre otras violencias que no deberían quedar oscurecidas por las relativas al conflicto armado. Que, pese a ser un tema grave, no es el más destacable en función de los datos.

### Las negociaciones de paz

Pero también en el cubrimiento del conflicto



*Durante la marcha por la paz (9 de abril de 2013). Foto: J. Ignacio Chaves G.*

armado se han obviado, o no se le ha dado la importancia merecida, ciertas noticias de gran calado. Volviendo a centrarse más en destacar lo negativo que en darle valor a las situaciones de mejora respecto a la guerra. Por ejemplo, las cifras derivadas del desescalamiento bilateral acordado a finales de junio de 2015.

Un medio digital como *Confidencial Colombia*<sup>8</sup> resaltó lo menos positivo al titular en julio de 2016 “Conflicto se resiste a desaparecer”, cuando lo que realmente recogía la noticia es que según el Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos (CERAC) “con la implementación del acuerdo bilateral de desescalamiento, el conflicto armado entre las FARC y el estado colombiano ha caído a sus niveles mínimos en 52 años, en número de víctimas, combatientes muertos y heridos, y de acciones violentas.”

Pero el medio prefirió realzar en su noticia el hecho de que persistieran ciertas “acciones criminales por parte de núcleos duros del grupo insurgente”, lo que, en un momento tan especial como el que se vive en Colombia, no contribuye a reducir esa polarización política y social presente en la sociedad. Por eso es importante observar y analizar el papel de los medios en la construcción de imaginarios colectivos que crean gran parte de la memoria social.

En el tema de las negociaciones de La Habana, los medios han estado un poco al margen. Por supuesto que informaban, a su particular manera, de lo que se negociaba. Pero sin tomar partido claro por la causa del fin del conflicto entre dos de los actores y por la paz que

eso supondría. Se podría decir que no han manifestado claramente su compromiso. Hubo que esperar a la firma de los acuerdos el 28 de agosto para que cambiaran su tendencia y se mostraran más cercanos a lo ya rubricado.

No ha sido solamente el caso de los medios masivos, también instituciones académicas y otras organizaciones relevantes se mantuvieron en la orilla sin subirse al barco hasta que el Gobierno declaró firmados los acuerdos. Un apoyo que fue mayor después de la rúbrica pública llevada a cabo entre el presidente Santos y el líder guerrillero Rodrigo Londoño en Cartagena el 3 de octubre.

Los medios pasaron de un extremo a otro, de la ausencia a la celebración, lo que, según Mario Morales, profesor de la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, recogido en *El Espectador*,<sup>9</sup> nos deja una enseñanza para el futuro “debemos aprender a narrarnos desde los fragmentos que somos” y que debemos “prepararnos para la conciliación y el posconflicto (□) con todo aquel que piensa distinto.”

### Una nueva ruta

La memoria colectiva se construye, en parte, con lo recogido por los medios, con lo archivado en las



*Durante la manifestación del 1º de mayo (día de las y los trabajadores) de 2015. Foto: J. Ignacio Chaves G.*



hemerotecas. Necesitamos de la comunicación y de la memoria para pensar sobre qué valores construimos nuestra sociedad, contribuyendo a que la memoria no sirva solamente para recordar los hechos, sino para reflexionar sobre sus causas.

Hemos de recuperar el sentido y el significado de la comunicación primigenia, la que nos hace compartir y comulgar, y el valor de la memoria. Ambas son más necesarias si cabe en sociedades con un alto nivel de conflicto. Comunicar es construir memoria, como dice Schmucler “La memoria, que en el presente actualiza el pasado, puede ayudarnos a reconocer esplendores de ayer rápidamente opacados; o a precisar el verdadero sentido de disputas que a veces se muestran ciegas a la experiencia y que reiteran una *doxa* empobrecida de ideas” (Schmucler, 2008: 12)

La memoria común que compartimos a partir de lo que nos llega a través de los periódicos, de las ondas o de las pantallas es lo que se archiva y que, en gran parte, la población acepta como única y verdadera.

Si antes era la palabra del cura en su sermón la que construía la verdad de las gentes, desde que los medios se apropiaron del edutretenimiento son sus palabras, sus voces y sus imágenes el sumo poder sin un dios claro pero con muchos dioses que controlan informativamente el planeta.

El buen uso de la comunicación y de la memoria contribuye a la formación de una ciudadanía con mayor responsabilidad frente a la sociedad, con más criterio para poner en contexto la historia y con una posición más ética sobre la realidad y el mundo en que vivimos. Tenemos que contribuir, desde la academia y desde los medios, en la construcción de la memoria colectiva de la sociedad. Formando en saber mirar hacia atrás para comprender la historia y hacia delante para encarar el futuro.

Desde Latinoamérica requerimos hacerlo con una mirada crítica, con la que se ha construido gran parte del campo de la comunicación. De esa “otra” comunicación, la participativa, la que nos pone a dialogar, la ineludible para evitar el adormecimiento ante las modas impuestas. Porque la memoria es casi sinónimo de justicia ya que “abre expedientes que el derecho o la historia habían ar-

chivado” (Benjamin, s.f.). ■

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# La responsabilidad de hacer memoria

Jineth Bedoya Lima

*Hace 20 años que ejerzo el periodismo. Inicié muy joven, en medio de la difícil situación que afrontaba mi país. Era un momento determinante porque el narcotráfico había permeado todas las esferas de la sociedad, incluso el mismo periodismo. Desde que tengo memoria me gustó escribir; escribía ensayos y poesías. En la secundaria hacía crónicas sobre lo que pasaba en el país y veía a través de la pantalla del televisor.*

**P**ero la vida y el esfuerzo de mi madre me dieron la posibilidad de ir a la Universidad, estudiar periodismo y mi primer encuentro con la reportería en la calle me llevó a una de las cárceles más peligrosas del mundo, en el corazón de mi ciudad: Bogotá. Tenía apenas 22 años.

En la cárcel La Modelo me encontré con la realidad del país. Había reclusos de las guerrillas, el paramilitarismo, la delincuencia organizada y la mafia. Nunca antes un periodista les había dado

un espacio para que pudieran expresar sus opiniones y para denunciar las crueles violaciones de derechos humanos que allí se afrontaban. Ellos eran criminales, pero aun así tenían derechos.

Entonces decidí combinar mi trabajo de reportera con la acción social. Apoyé campañas para que aprendieran a leer y escribir, les ayudé a hacer un periódico en la cárcel y cuando no estaba en el campo de combate cubriendo la guerra, iba a la cárcel a darles clases de escritura, redacción y fotografía.

En medio de ese ejercicio, descubrí como desde allí, desde la cárcel, se movía una de las redes de tráfico de armas y secuestrados más grandes del país. Era una organización criminal dedicada a negociar con la vida de seres humanos. Comerciabán con armas de todos los calibres, desde granadas hasta fusiles y morteros; y lo más triste era que integrantes de la Fuerza Pública (el Ejército y la Policía) participaban en la red corrupta.

Unos se dedicaban a comprar, otros vendían y los paramilitares y guerrilleros les compraban. Todos comían del mismo plato corrupto. Públicamente se combatían y en privado eran socios.

Fue así como empecé a denunciarlos desde las páginas del diario *El Espectador*, pero el poder que estaba detrás de esta organización quiso silenciarme y el 25 de mayo del año 2000, cuando intentaba entrevistar a un jefe paramilitar fui

secuestrada en la puerta de la cárcel, llevada a 130 kilómetros de Bogotá, torturada y violada por tres de mis secuestradores.

Me mataron en vida.

Tenía dos opciones: el exilio, que fue la alternativa que me dejó el Estado colombiano y el suicidio que era lo que yo quería. Pero un profundo amor me llevó a escoger lo que salvó mi vida: el periodismo.

*Cubrimiento periodístico, en el Caguán, durante el desarrollo del Plan Patriota en el 2004.*





Me consagré en cuerpo y alma a documentar la guerra en Colombia. Pese a las amenazas que persistían y la obligación de movilizarme escoltada todo el tiempo, me metí en las entrañas del conflicto armado. Mi vida se trasladó a las zonas de combate. Perdí la cuenta de los centenares de muertos que vi en estas décadas, de todas las historias que encontré y escribí, del inmenso dolor que intenté plasmar en mis escritos.

Me dediqué a encontrarme con esa otra Colombia, la que muchos periodistas cubrían desde sus escritorios en las ciudades capitales. De esa Colombia que la inmensa mayoría desconoce.

Pero había algo que me pesaba, que todas las noches, cuando quedaba sola en la oscuridad de mi habitación o del lugar donde me encontrara el trabajo, me atormentaba. Era el silencio de no reconocermme como víctima. Siempre pensé que solo podía ser periodista y nada más.

Pero en agosto del 2009, cuando decidí hablar

públicamente de mi secuestro, sin ser consciente en ese momento del giro de 180 grados que iba a dar mi vida, me convertí en la voz viva de las mujeres víctimas de violencia sexual. En esa misma fecha nació mi campaña No Es Hora De Callar (It's No Time To Be Silent). Esta frase se convirtió en una consigna de lucha, de reivindicación, de visibilidad para miles de afectadas.

Y entendí, una vez más, que el periodismo tenía una gran responsabilidad social. Y más que eso, tenía que hacer memoria. Durante largos años los periodistas de los grandes medios de comunicación nos dedicamos a hablar de la guerra sin un hilo conductor, sin llevar la cuenta de la barbarie que azotaba a Colombia, sin tener conciencia de que éramos en verdad los responsables de construir el documento fiel de la memoria de un país.

Creo, con todo respeto por mis colegas, que hicimos un trabajo muy mediocre en gran parte, a la hora de informar sobre el conflicto armado

*Marcha de la campaña No Es Hora De Callar, el 25 de noviembre de 2013, en contra de la violencia hacia las mujeres.*



colombiano. Tenemos una gran responsabilidad y aunque también hubo muchas víctimas que puso el periodismo, no puedo dejar de sentir que quedamos en deuda.

Y lo analizo con mayor determinación cuando veo la falta de visibilidad que le hemos dado a crímenes tan atroces como los de la violencia sexual. Los grupos armados usaron los cuerpos de las mujeres como arma de guerra. Por décadas la violación se usó para castigar al adversario y para sembrar el terror en poblaciones que fueron expropiadas y sometidas por quienes tenían el poder del fusil. Los medios guardaron silencio. Y ese silencio alimentó la impunidad que hoy aún arroja a los victimarios y fustiga a las víctimas.

Es por eso que en este momento en que se acaba de firmar un proceso de paz con la guerrilla de las Farc, el papel de los medios masivos de comunicación y los medios sociales y comunitarios cobra tanto valor.

Darle voz y rostros a las víctimas es el mejor mecanismo de incentivar la no repetición. Cuando los periodistas tuvimos que llegar a los sitios donde acababan de ocurrir las masacres paramilitares y las tomas guerrilleras, siempre teníamos en frente los cuerpos impactados y mutilados y el olor a muerte que quedaba en la nariz por semanas.

Pero la misma dinámica de la guerra nos llevó a que esa barbarie se tradujera solo en cifras, en números. Los muertos ya no tenían nombre y la desolación se convirtió en parte del paisaje. Sin saberlo, los propios medios y los periodistas renunciaron a la memoria y se inclinaron por la estadística.

Ese es el reto hoy, porque de cara al posconflicto podemos resarcir en algo la falta de documentación de nuestra propia historia. Tenemos el reto, seamos medios grandes o pequeños, de tejer y contar una nuevo capítulo en la vida de Colombia. Pero no es solo la responsabilidad de un país; América Latina afronta dos problemas catalogados como transnacionales: el narcotráfico y la violencia contra la mujer.

Esas no son las guerras del futuro, son las del ahora y le quitan –entre las dos– cerca de 8,6 por ciento del producto interno bruto a nuestros países.

Hoy la campaña No Es Hora De Callar, la iniciativa que me cambió la vida por segunda vez, cuenta con el apoyo del periódico El Tiempo (el más importante de Colombia), es reconocida no solo en mi país, también a nivel internacional. Esta frase busca incentivar a las mujeres para que denuncien cualquier tipo de violencia en su contra.

La violencia contra las mujeres fue declarada como una pandemia mundial por las Naciones Unidas, pero también es el principal factor de afectación a las mujeres en toda América, más que el cáncer. Desde Canadá, hasta la Patagonia argentina, la violencia de género ha dejado a miles de mujeres asesinadas, violadas, estigmatizadas, golpeadas y sometidas. No necesitamos un conflicto armado para que las mujeres sean víctimas. Son más las mujeres afectadas en el seno de su hogar que en las propias áreas de combate.

Y por ellas también debemos hacer memoria. Los retos en la comunicación son inmensos y nuestra responsabilidad como agentes sociales también. Habremos ganado una gran fortuna cuando emporios de comunicación, medios masivos, medios sociales, periodistas y comunicadores, entiendan que están llamados a transformar realidades, pero sobre todo a construir memoria. Y cuando existe la memoria es posible el cambio.

¡No Es Hora De Callar! ■

Jineth Bedoya Lima es periodista colombiana secuestrada en mayo de 2000 y en agosto de 2003 por grupos paramilitares y de guerrilla en Colombia. En 2000, Bedoya fue galardonada con el Premio CJFE patrocinado por la asociación de Periodistas canadienses para la Expresión Libre. En 2001, Bedoya fue galardonada con el premio al «Coraje en Periodismo» de la Fundación Internacional para las Mujeres en los Medios. Actualmente trabaja como periodista y subdirectora de judiciales para el periódico [El Tiempo](#).



# Digital nostalgia

Katharina Niemeyer

*Some miss and regret past times or places, others are nostalgic for a past that has never been. But nostalgia is not only recalling what is gone or what will never be (again) exactly as it was. It is also a mnemonic source of creativity, helping us to cope with painful memories, a difficult present or an unknown future. Mass media and new technologies are decisive tools and agents in this context. Their interplay with nostalgic feelings navigates between political abuse, commercial exploitation, appeasing homesickness, and artistic freedom.*

This complexity is what it makes difficult to offer a confined definition of nostalgia, as a common word but also as a scholarly concept. At first sight, nostalgia does not seem to match communication technologies. However, this powerful emotion takes part in shaping collective and individual memories and the current nostalgia boom can be observed in the media, in digital communities but also within “offline” activities and this does not facilitate research on this multi-layered phenomenon.

Nostalgia is omnipresent in current political discourse, in religious ideologies, in commercials and media productions, ranging from movies to computer games. Nostalgia is also expressed and experienced by individuals and networks in digital social media or even “offline”. The television series *Mad Men*, *Vinyl*, *Stranger Things* or *Better Call Saul* and some revivals (*Dallas*, *Twin Peaks*), people joining for swing dance (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1 Friday 7 October – Genesis Cinema and Swingdance UK invite you along to our monthly nostalgia dancing night (print screen, source: <http://www.swingdanceuk.com/classes-socials-2/socials/special-events/>).

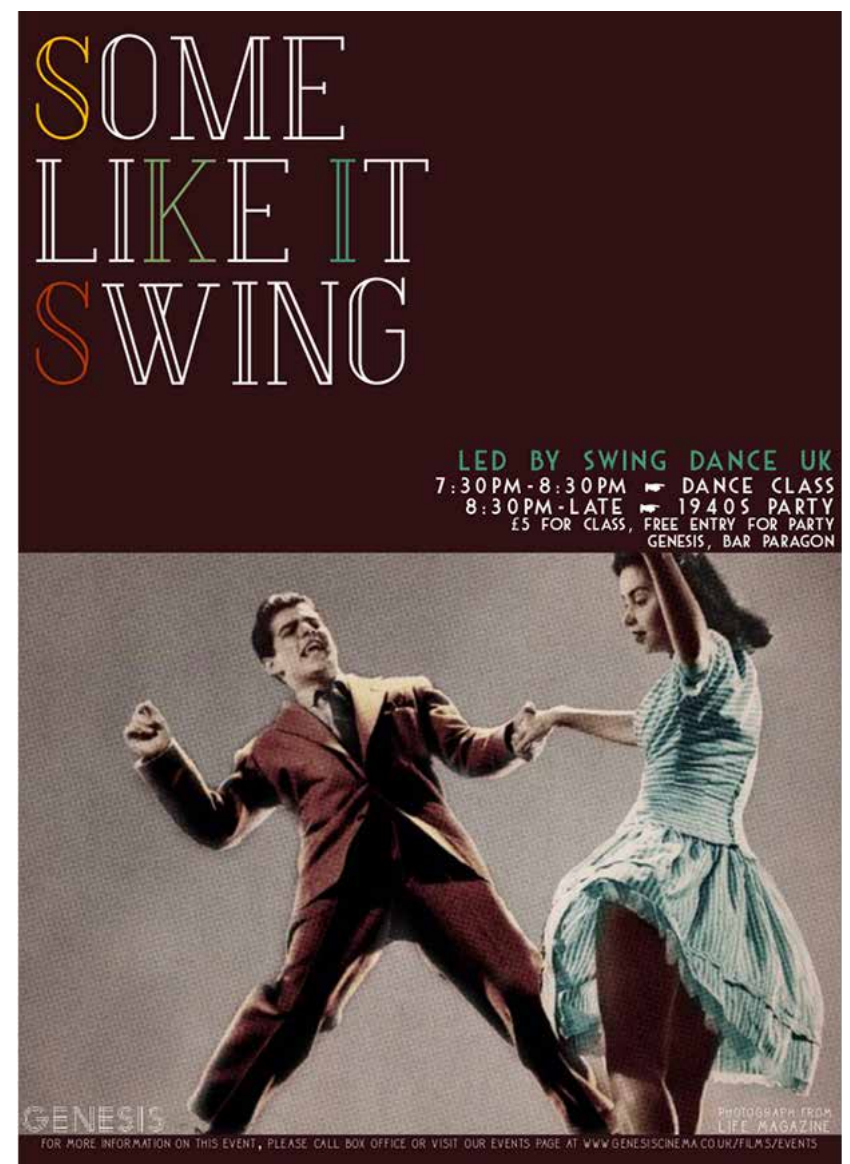
or retro-gaming sessions, sepia filters on our cell phones: these are just a few examples of a seemingly overwhelming nostalgia in everyday life.

This not only concerns aesthetics of the past, but also rituals, techniques and analogue or digital objects. Nostalgia for former times and places is not new, but why are we observing an increase in nostalgic expressions right now?

## Nostalgia yesterday and today

Nostalgia, a medical neologism signifying homesickness (from the German *Heimweh*), appears for the first time in a doctoral dissertation published in Basel, Switzerland, written by Johannes Hofer in 1688. The notion is etymologically based on the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (longing) and refers in Hofer’s case to a Swiss mercenary’s disease.

But historically, nostalgia existed before it was even named so. Homer’s *The Odyssey* depicts it clearly by recounting Odysseus’ interminable yearning for home. Even if it is no more part of the medical discourse, this type of nostalgia, re-



vealing homesickness and asking the question of belonging, still – and maybe more than ever – prevails. This is not only the case for people who were forced to leave their homes because of war or distress, but also for those who feel displaced in the society they were born or live in.

In contrast to what was believed for a long time, nostalgia is not just a postcolonial invention of Western societies. It is a universal feeling, shared here and there, as Alastair Bonnett (2016) has shown in his recent work on *Geographies of Nostalgia*. The original meaning of nostalgia, in contrast to its regressive or bittersweet superficiality in ordinary speech, needs therefore to be rethought. Why? Because the current seemingly entertaining nostalgia boom hints at this older type of nostalgia: a search for home, identity and authenticity. And this double-sided nostalgia comes with the digital world and that is why I wish to explore here the idea of digital nostalgia.

### **What is digital nostalgia?**

Digital nostalgia encompasses several not necessarily separate types of nostalgia expressed, experienced, or made because of, *via* or within the digital world. In other words, there is nostalgia for the digital, nostalgia expressed via the digital or both (Niemeyer, 2015). The first type means that nostalgia has arrived in a world where the digital is omnipresent, but it does not alter the forms of nostalgia already in existence before the invention of the web. For some this can mean a longing for access to the technologies that connect, especially in places where the infrastructure is not established or access is politically forbidden.

For others it might be the other way round, a longing for a society with less social acceleration. Media and communication technologies are, therefore, an essential part of such longings: they can be the reason for the need to escape the apparent acceleration of time and reduction of space; they can trigger nostalgic memories of our past; and they are sometimes the object of our nostalgic feelings. Likewise, media and communication technologies can become a space for “nostalgizing” (Niemeyer 2014; Sedikides et al., 2015). Here, digital environments become a space for express-

ing various types of nostalgia.

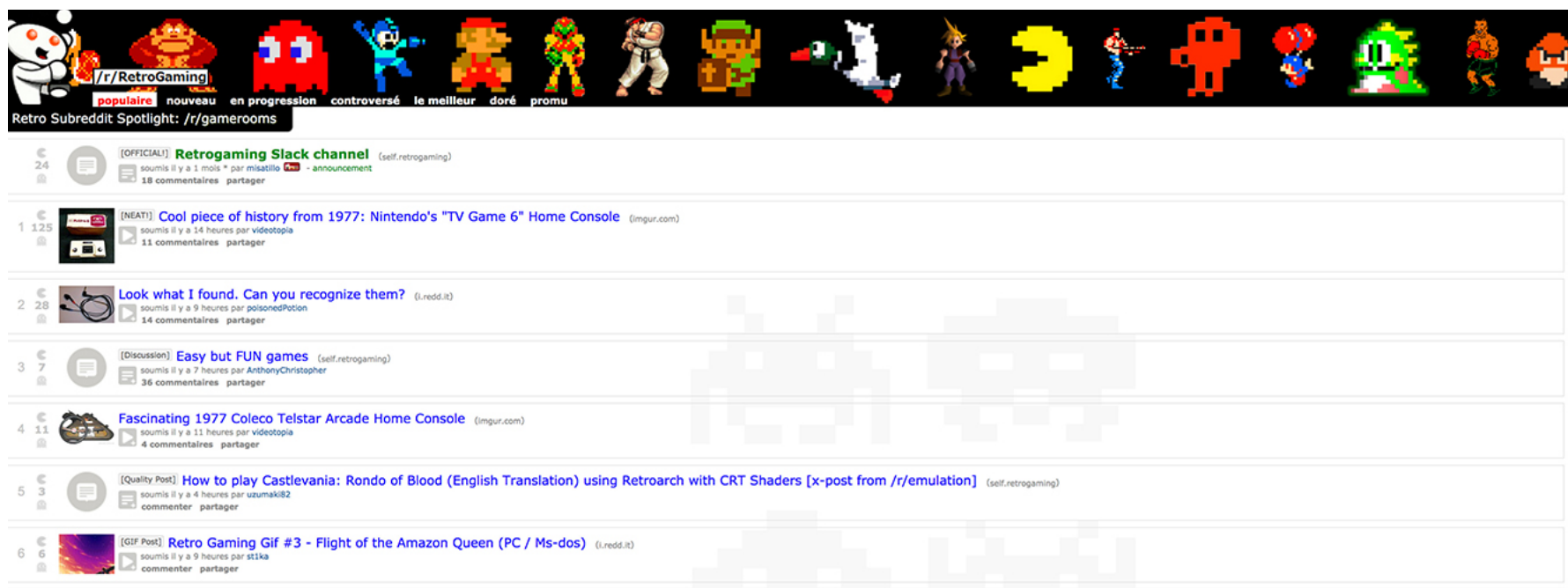
There is of course nostalgia for a geographical place or a time that is no more or will not be for a while. Refugees use technologies and media to cope with the painful present, to connect within their linguistic communities. Media, culture and language even at distance are here what used to be the old medicine for Swiss mercenaries (folk songs, meeting people with the same language), and it works also for those who never left or never had to leave their country: reconnecting to people, music, food, even in the digital world can appease homesickness. And this nostalgia can expand into urban spaces and become a mixed nostalgia of online and offline activities.

### **Nostalgia for the analogue and the digital**

If your friend publishes a picture on the web with her or his cell phone, adding a filter to make the shot look old even if it was just taken minutes ago, we could ask whether the notion of nostalgia is still adequate here. Even if time passes the same way from a physicist’s point of view, some of us no longer have the patience to let our experiences become, silently or loudly, what we once called memories. This is only one small example of what we might call the “instant past” (Bartholmeyns, 2014), but this is not to judge this playful and aesthetic type of a nostalgic past. Even so it might hint at one of the ways to cope with the rapid communication flows by still using it and I would call it *instant nostalgia*.

It can be closely related to the nostalgia of the analogue, very often expressed online. Programming and encoding non-digital media objects or sounds can simulate their analogue existence. Vintage media narratives, aesthetics or objects can be reproduced or re-invented exactly as if they were originally from the past. Vintage items can also provoke a nostalgia whose origin is located in the special relationship a person feels with a vintage item, no matter if it is analogue or digital. Objects have material and symbolic power of agency; and this is also the case for digital objects. An “old” animated GIF can make us nostalgic the same way as a computer game (Fig. 2) postcard from our aunt sent in 1995 to our home; it feels “homely” and





because we shared the experience and the stories with others.

Nostalgia for the digital is a yearning for the early digital culture, a longing for the human relations it created but also their devices, techniques and related user rituals. This is why this type of nostalgia is not only practiced “online”, but also in places where people meet, as for example retrogamers (Fig. 3).

From social networks to blogs and websites, the nostalgia for the digital is actively expressed and practiced but also commercialized. Nostalgia was and is a business. Not to forget that the creative freedom of the digital world can also produce the contrary. The rise of populist and extremist movements in Europe or the idea of a new caliphate are part of a *restorative nostalgia* (Boym, 2001) that aims to reproduce the past as it was (not) or to prevent being open to change at all. Digital tools provide the opportunity to produce and spread dangerous nostalgia.

Fig. 2 (top): Print screen of the retro-gamer website <https://www.reddit.com/r/retrogaming/> Fig. 3 (bottom) Print screen: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retrogaming>

The idea of “making America great again”, obscures the dark places in American history. This type of nostalgia does not encompass being a reflective activity, but creates a naïve feeling of and a fabricated yearning for something that has never been. In this sense, critical reflections on nostalgia are today more than ever needed.

### Nostalgia for the future

Of course, nostalgia is a common topic in scholarly works, mainly in literature, psychology, philosophy and history, but also in other fields such



as sociology or anthropology.<sup>1</sup> Until very recently, media and especially communication technologies have only been considered on the margins of research on nostalgia or the latter was only related to one medium such as cinema or television (Dika 2003; Holdsworth, 2011). Over the past few years, research interest in the interplay of nostalgia, media and communication technologies has increased (Niemeyer 2014; Lizardi 2015; Kalinina and Menke, 2016) which might be related to a certain kind of nostalgia that younger and older researchers not only observe but that they also experience themselves.

Studying nostalgia within media, communication or memory studies is in this sense not very “new” anymore, but more empirical case studies and likewise the deepening of theoretical approaches are needed in order to seize the complex and slippery phenomenon of (digital) nostalgia we are all at some point confronted with. It is not only the idea of a better scholarly understanding of it, but also an attempt to acknowledge nostalgia’s multiple layers. It can be joyful, creative and help us to cope with loss and the irreversibility of time.

Nostalgia connects people and this is equally where its danger lies. We should not only ask what nostalgia is *good for* or what it is *not good for* as it can be used in terms of rhetoric political manipulation or commercial interests. Nostalgia should be put into perspective. Learning about the multiple faces of nostalgia relates closely to how we can deal critically with the past and the present, how we can communicate and experience our longings, and how we can design our nostalgia yet to come. ■

## Notes

1. A recent overview of publications on nostalgia can be found here, on the website of the International Media and Nostalgia Network: <https://medianostalgia.org/general-bibliography/>
2. John Tierney, *New York Times*, July 2013: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research-shows.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research-shows.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

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# The Caribbean and the right to memory

Christopher Laird

As we are discovering every day, with an increasingly elderly population succumbing to Alzheimer's, when we lose memory we lose what makes us who we are. How many wives or husbands exclaim when their dementia suffering partner loses his or her memory, "This is not the man (or woman) I married, it is a stranger."

The ancestors of the majority of the Caribbean population were brought to the region against their will and their traditions and culture were systematically repressed, whether it was the banning of the drum or traditional religions. These strictures were assaults on our very sense of self.

But through incredible strength of resistance, through existential need, we came up with strategies to preserve what we could by devising instruments to make music without a skin drum (the steelband), by storytelling, or by syncretising traditional African religions with Roman Catholicism (whereby Orishas were given aliases matching Catholic saints) and many other ways.

All these strategies depend on oral transmission for survival. The coming of video, however, presented an ideal opportunity to record and preserve our traditions and cultural practices. Television should have provided us with the facility to objectify our lives and so observe ourselves as people in other countries can do. <sup>1</sup>

Television began in much of the Caribbean on Independence day, replacing the British administration with a Neo-colonial presence of the US in our bedrooms and living rooms. Now, the Caribbean is the region in the world most penetrated by foreign television images.

It is in this context that we at Banyan wanted to provide Caribbean people with ac-



cess, provide an opportunity to see themselves and the world through their own eyes.

## What is Banyan?

Banyan is the Southern Caribbean's first independent television programme production unit, established 40 years ago. <sup>2</sup>

And in those 40 years we have produced over 400 television programmes. <sup>3</sup>

In our archive vault, one wall is just packed with those programmes. The racks? Over 2000 tapes of raw footage that fed into the making of these programmes, and other footage that has not even been made into programmes yet. Invaluable, priceless records of the cultural and social life of the region over the past 40 years. – Ever since the invention of the video cassette.

All of this is safe now because it has been digitised. Over 2500 video files, over 1000 hours of video accompanied by 14,500 records in a linked database. All accessible by a click. <sup>4–7</sup>

Some of the highlights of our productions feature the Southern Caribbean's first television Soap Opera, *Who The Cap Fits*; its first made for television movie, *THE RIG*, written and directed by Derek Walcott and the ground breaking cultural magazine, *GAYELLE*, that ran for six years chronicling our creative and cultural lives; the award winning documentary, *And The Dish Ran Away With The Spoon*, on the effect of US television on Caribbean Culture shown in 150 countries; *Caribbean Eye*, the only television series on Caribbean culture made in and by the Caribbean,



still in demand by institutions the world over. <sup>7</sup>

Unable to convince local television to programme endogenous content, in 2004 Banyan started the Caribbean's first free to air television station that programmed 100% Caribbean content for general audiences, GAYELLE: The Channel.

Banyan set out to show how we, as a people, had, through patience and determination, built a foundation for a Caribbean civilisation.

We assumed that, by documenting and mirroring our culture and society, a repository could be constructed, a resource would be created for a more Caribbean centred perspective.

So we did our work. Documenting, exploring, creating dramas, telling stories up and down the Caribbean for 40 years.

In the process we constantly analysed the region's media environment which was becoming even more alienating as satellite and then cable systems came into play flooding us with even more US content.

As Errol Sitahal asks in *And The Dish Ran Away With The Spoon*: "What happens when you dream other people's dreams?"

As a people we've become adept at decoding the images in our media and reinterpreting them in terms of our own experience.

But with Banyan, with its cameras in the communities, those filters can be discarded and communication comes directly to the viewer for the first time in our history. The effect is phenomenal.

In 2004, the first year of transmission of our

all Caribbean television channel, Gayelle:The Channel, there were incessant complaints from viewers that : They were late to do household chores, collect the children from school or get to appointments because they were looking at Gayelle. Some said they had to leave the house walking backwards so that they would not miss what they were watching on Gayelle. In fact when we went off air late at night people kept their sets on in case something happened on the screen. In the first few months of operation we stopped programming on weekends, put a camera pointing at the street and a crawling graphic on the screen which said: "Why don't you turn off your television and do something with your family because that is what we at Gayelle are doing. We were not heeded. People came outside the station and held placards up to the camera for their family and friends, they enacted dramas, played cricket and football in front of the camera.

Even though we had had television for 40 years before Gayelle, the very presence of a channel which gave access to people, spoke their language, told their stories was intensely emotional and liberating.

### How did we reach there?

In the Caribbean region we live in at least two parallel worlds, on the one hand, the intimate world of the family and folk traditions where we comfortably use our first language, a creole; and on the other hand, the formal, jacket-and-tie world of the



European languages of the establishment, whether that be colonial or neo-colonial or the ruling elite who cynically exercises its self-contempt by attempting to edit our heritage.

If we don't have access to the traditional, to our legacy, as living memory fades, our culture is doomed to be, at best, a mediocre pastiche. But after 40 years of work and the last four years spent digitising our archives and composing comprehensive metadata, we now have the world's largest digitised archive of Caribbean Culture and society on video. Have a look at just an infinitely small sample of its content:

Apart from those still with us who inhabit the archive,

Think of the giants who passed in the last 40 years, captured forever in the collection:

The Inside The people TV mural is itself a document of memory and the archive gives us, as Caribbean people, for the first time in our history, the opportunity to step back from the rush of NOW and look at our culture and society ever since the invention of the video cassette and add voices – some born more than 100 years ago – to our ever present inquiry into who we are and where we're headed.

For the first time we now have an accessible, vast and rich resource of visual/oral records of ourselves compiled by ourselves articulating our view of the world.

We no longer have to rely solely on the odd Caribbean production or the mass of material generated outside the Caribbean about us and have to decode the stories of others to arrive at our truths.

At long last the voices of the post-independence Caribbean can be heard among the video records of the world, demanding attention in their own right and inviting appreciation of the region's richness and stunning complexity.

As media workers we are all engaged in the act of preservation every time we record and event, an interview. We need to be constantly aware of the role we are playing in building memory. But that is not enough. These records have themselves to be preserved, digitised



*Pat Bishop (1999)*



*Michael Anthony (1989)*



*Derek Walcott (1980)*



*Leroy Clarke (1985)*



*Rosa Guy (1990)*



*Denis Williams (1989)*



*Alfred Mendes (1983)*



*Byron Lee (1990)*



*Dunstan St. Omer (1990)*

and catalogued to create reservoirs accessible by our people, especially our youth who in the absence of access to these records latch on to 'other people's dreams' and lose all grounding. Like a huge library burning in a slow fire the video records of the last 50 years are disappearing.

In 1997 through the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) we received a grant of \$16,000 US which enabled us to complete the outfitting of our archive vault, thus doubling the life of the 3000 videotapes in the archive and laying the groundwork for the digitisation process which, with the assistance of York University in Toronto and the National Library Services of Trinidad & Tobago we accelerated over the past five years to construct the largest digitised archive of its kind in the world.

Television stations in the region and other bodies have repositories of videotape that are on the verge of being irrecoverable due to care-





Lloyd Best (2002)



Ras Shorty I (1988)



Boscoe Holder (2000)



Perry Henzell (2000)



Henk Tjon (1982)



Rex Nettleford (1989)



Louise Bennett (1984)



Roaring Lion (Rafael de Leon a.k.a. Hubert Raphael Charles) (1990)



Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts) (1988)



C.L.R. James (1980)



Carlisle Chang (1985)



Beryl McBurnie (1982)



Martin Carter (1984)



Philip Moore (1989)



Aimé Césaire (1988)



The Mighty Spoiler (Theophilus Philip).

less storage and the decreasing availability of legacy machines to play them or technicians to maintain what machines are available. For the past half a century we have had many conferences and meetings about digitising Caribbean archives, to no avail. It is a huge task which gets more and more daunting with each day. In order to achieve this, money is less important than commitment and will. How else could a small private facility like Banyan achieve what large corporations and government failed to do?

I leave the Mighty Spoiler (Theophilus Philip) with the last words. From his calypso LOST MEMORIES (1960) about a village that had lost its memory. In his last verse he sings of Mr. Cornelius who, like Albert Camus' OUTSIDER, is treated like a criminal because he didn't cry at a funeral. Mr. Cornelius had forgotten how to cry. Have we as a society become a Mr. Cornelius?

Are we condemned to continue to forget how to remember?

"Just because he lost his memory  
What an awful thing to stand up and see  
Put yourself in his position to imagine  
He forget to remember that he forget remembering."

Lost Memories by Mighty Spoiler  
(Theophilus Philip) ■



# Preserving India's palm leaf manuscripts for the future

Deepti Ganapathy

*India's rich repository of knowledge has been passed down for generations through oral and written traditions through a variety of writing materials such as stones, copperplates, birch bark, palm leaves, parchments and paper. Palm leaf manuscripts form an invaluable part of India's documented heritage. Written in different Indian languages, these manuscripts are scattered all over the country in monasteries, temples, libraries, museums, with individuals and in several private collections.*

India has the oldest and the largest collection of manuscripts. Various scholars have documented the preservation of these ancient manuscript collections, including indigenous methods of preserving palm leaf manuscripts like wrapping, applying extracts of natural products and other chemical treatments. Studies have also been conducted on the digitization of these manuscripts for passing on their wealth of wisdom to future generations.

While efforts have been taken to digitize these endangered documents and prevent deterioration due to factors such as biological, chemical and climatic conditions, digital archiving has not been centralized to enable the present generation of digital citizens of the world (also known as 'Millennials') to benefit. The life of a palm leaf manuscript is far longer than a modern-day device like CD or microfilm. The increasing popularity of printed books has revitalized the interest for

collecting and preserving of manuscripts in India. The Government of India has made consolidated efforts in preservation and providing access to manuscripts through many Research Centres across India.

This article seeks to document the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts in India and to highlight the role that these institutions are playing in creating awareness about these cultural heirlooms for Millennials. There is a pressing need to preserve these manuscripts that have been beautifully expressed in the form of an idea, thought, and imagination for posterity. They give a lasting impression of the multicultural society that India is, and its deep rooted knowledge system that has been passed down from generations.

**"A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people" (Mahatma Gandhi)**

India and its rich heritage spanning more than two millennia is a storehouse of manuscripts. Given the cultural diversity of India, there are manuscripts that have been preserved in all corners of the country in diverse languages, calligraphies, illumination, illustrations and materials.

Communication is about sharing ideas, feelings and emotions with fellow human beings. It is with this intent that manuscripts came to be evolved forms of communication and, today, their preservation is a step forward in commemorating this form of communication in the annals of our cultural history.

"My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books (manuscripts) and in the possession of a few only, hidden as it were, in monasteries and in forests-to bring them out; to bring the knowledge out of them, not only from the hands where it is hidden, but from the still more inaccessible chest, the language in which it is preserved, the incrustation of the centuries of Sanskrit words. In one word, I want to make them popular, I want to bring out these ideas and let them be the common property of all, of every man in India, whether he knows the Sanskrit language or not."<sup>1</sup>

Profound words from a Swami Vivekananda who was instrumental in spreading the Eastern society's knowledge to the West during his speech at Chicago in 1893 at the Parliament of the World's Religions.

Scholars have tried to ascertain the exact period when palm leaf manuscripts began to be used for writing. Palm leaf writing is the oldest form of writing and has a life span of 300-350 years. The scholar Richard Salomon ascertains the existence of palm leaf manuscripts and other materials in the following passage:

"Before Asoka, writing was probably used principally, if not exclusively, for economic and administrative, as opposed to literary and monumental, purposes; perishable materials such as palm leaves, tree bark and (according to Nearchos) cloth, which have little chance of surviving the rigors of the Indian climate, were used. Thus, according to this view, we need not be surprised that no early specimens of Indian writing have survived and their absence does not prove that they never existed" (Salomon, 1998:14-15).

Authoritative literature on palm leaf manuscript conservation is scarce. Manuscripts continued to be copied until the 19th century but declined after the invention of paper. On 14 February 2007, the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) launched Kritisampada, the National Database of Manuscripts that contains information about over a million Indian manuscripts

The National Mission for Manuscripts works with the help of 57 Manuscript Resource Centres across the country. These include well-established institutes, museums, libraries, universities and non-government organisations that act as the Mission's coordinating agency in their respective regions. They are primarily responsible for surveying and documenting every manuscript in their area. The Mission liaises with them for awareness campaigns and outreach activities such as lectures, school theatre programme and training workshops.

The 34 Manuscript Conservation Centres

consists of a team of trained conservators with a laboratory equipped to undertake manuscript conservation. They also provide technical know-how on the preventive and curative conservation of manuscripts throughout the country. Various outreach programs are conducted to promote knowledge about conservation and the skill-sets of the conservators are regularly updated with workshops and training sessions.

The 42 Manuscript Partner Centres identified by NMM consist of certain prominent institutions with large holdings of manuscripts for collaboration with the Mission and they are required to document and catalogue their own collections. The third initiative by NMM is the 300 Manuscript Conservation Partner Centres with which the Mission collaborates to advice on storage and maintenance of their collections in a scientific manner.

### Google and digitization

In 2006, my interest in palm leaf manuscripts was stimulated when I got unconfirmed reports as a journalist that Google was going to digitize these manuscripts in Mysore. The article revealed that the University of Mysore would be documenting history for all time when the world's largest search engine Google digitized at least 800,000 books and manuscripts including India's first political treatise, *The Arthashastra*, written by Kautilya in the 4th century BC.

A Google spokesperson was quoted saying, "We are always interested in working with libraries to digitize content and make it discoverable online. While we are in talks with the University of Mysore, no agreements have been reached. At present the Google Book Search does not support Indian language digitization."

Though the partnership did not finally take place, the Oriental Research Institute (ORI) under the University of Mysore has continued to preserve its rich collection of paper and palm manuscripts though there exists the risk of these manuscripts becoming fragile and fragmenting from constant handling. ORI has been preserving these manuscripts with periodic oiling (in the case of palm leaf manuscripts) and fumigation (in the



case of paper manuscripts) for many years now.

The 100,000 manuscripts in the library, some dating back to the 8th century are on subjects of Ayurveda, mathematics, medicine, science, astrology, economics as well as several paper manuscripts of the royal family of Mysore. Established by Chamaraja Wadiyar in 1891, the manuscripts preserved here have been collected from the surrounding areas. More than 30,000 palm leaf manuscripts and paper manuscripts have been copied into the Devanagiri script.

### **Challenges in preserving manuscripts**

Google has been aggressively expanding its book search program to include non-English material and, given India's strategic importance, the company's open-source tools like OCRopus has a handwriting recognizer. But how do you translate handwritten texts into searchable characters? An even bigger task is storage and mark-up of the data. Optical character recognition can work well on handwritten pages, if the handwriting is regular enough, like Greek manuscripts. However, Indian manuscripts were written by different scribes.

Engaging in documentation, conservation, digitization and publication of manuscripts is a Herculean task, given the sheer volume in India. However, digitization will help in creating awareness about manuscripts among scholars and the general public. Creating a common national manuscripts library and the publication of unpublished manuscripts will result in India leading the way not only in preserving the manuscripts, but also for this unique initiative to document them.

In ten years, NMM has digitized more than 149,000 manuscripts which is only one percent of the total. At this pace it will take more than 600 years to digitize the estimated 10 million manuscripts. Will the manuscript survive till then? In addition, although India has the largest collection of manuscripts, there are few scholars who can decipher them, especially for the rare dialects used by tribes. Workshops on Manuscriptology and Paleography have been organized to tackle this challenge.

The country's diverse languages, culture and geography make it a challenge to document

manuscripts in the 27 odd states. The NMM has been able to provide 23 states with trained conservators who also discovered manuscripts in the state of Mizoram, which was not known before 2010. In 1931, shepherds in Gilgit in the Kashmir valley discovered a large cache of manuscripts which opened a new chapter on Buddhist Kashmir. The Gilgit manuscripts are among the oldest surviving manuscripts in India.

There are also a large number of Indian manuscripts in foreign libraries and digital copies of these should be made available. The common cultural link between India and South-East Asian as well as South Asian countries should enable the sharing of the literary heritage available in the manuscripts of these countries.

### **India's tryst with knowledge sharing**

India constituted several small but independent states ruled by royal families who had their own scholars. These learned men were considered to be the jewels in the court of the enlightened rulers. It has been a tradition for the rulers of the state to undergo intensive training from a very young age under the guidance of learned men. Hence, after spending a considerable amount of their youth under the tutelage of these scholars, the young rulers were quite naturally inclined to be patrons of various forms of learning. Thus they encouraged the cultivation of knowledge in their courts. Even in the remotest corners of the country, one can find Sanskrit scholars who own a large number of manuscripts as their family treasure.

These outstanding scholars, well versed in philosophical literature and accomplished speakers, were able to explain difficult matters in a simple and interesting way, thus making knowledge accessible to everyone. These scholarly families across the country are good collectors of manuscripts and some of them have even donated manuscripts from their collection for preservation to the libraries and research institutes.

### **Conclusion**

While the government of India is taking steps to ensure that this tangible cultural relic of the country is preserved for present and future generations,

the efforts needed to undertake this task need to be taken up on a war footing. This is because of the fragile nature of palm leaf manuscripts and the cost of digitizing such a massive collection. The relevance and significance of these treasure troves of knowledge has to be first made known to the present generation, which can be done with various outreach programmes and incentives such as scholarships and fellowships.

Unless the present generation is drawn into supporting the heritage structures that protect these collections of manuscripts, the mission to digitize them will end up on the shelf, like the manuscripts themselves: forgotten and dwindling into oblivion. ■

#### Notes

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Deepti Ganapathy has over ten years of experience as a journalist with leading Indian media groups. She was also the finalist for CNN Young Journalist Award in 2007. Her research interests are in areas of using social media for image building, effective communication, and on understanding the imaginary audience and writing on social media. Her research has been published in *Media and Politics: Discourses, Cultures and Practices*, *International Journal of New Media Studies*, *Intellectual Resonance*, and a few other national and international journals. She has been an invited speaker in a range of academic and media events. She has a doctorate in Social Media and Communication from the Department of Studies in Communication and Journalism from the University of Mysore. She is currently a Visiting Professor at IIM Indore, full time faculty at Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies.



# Select annotated bibliography: Media and memory

**Aggleton, P. (ed.) (2013). *Memory Studies* 6(4). London: SAGE Publications.**

This edition of *Memory Studies* centres on the theme of digital media and its role in storing cultural memory. It emphasizes how digital media in a post-scarcity culture of data acquisition and hyperconnectivity allows for an annexing of the past. Further, the articles explore how media enable certain commemorative practices that contribute to the continual creation of cultural memory.

Article	Author
Editorial- The end of decay time	Andrew Hoskins
Catching fleeting memories: Victim forums as mediated remembering communities	Sara Jones
At the edge: <i>Balnakiel</i> , a video and sound installation by artist Shona Illingworth	Caterina Albano
Online war memorials: YouTube as a democratic space of commemoration exemplified through video tributes to fallen Danish soldiers	Britta T. Knudsen, Carsten Stage
Cognitive realism and memory in Proust's madeleine episode	Emily T. Troscianko
Perpetuation, imagination, and subjectivity: Investigating the effects of expressed traditionalist Caymanian memories	Christopher A. Williams
"When the sea of living memory has receded": Cultural memory and literary narratives of the Middle Passage	Jennifer Terry

**Assmann, A. (2011). *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

Aleida Assmann provides an introduction to the concept of cultural memory, specifically focusing on the "arts" of its construction through various media such as writing, visual representations, bodily practices, places, and monuments. By examin-

ing the period from the European Renaissance to the present, Assmann reveals the connection between cultural memory and the arts. This book ultimately provides a comprehensive overview of the history, forms, and functions of cultural memory.

Part	Content
I. Functions	1. Memory as <i>Ars</i> and <i>Vis</i> 2. The Secularization of Memory – <i>Memoria, Fama, Historia</i> 3. The Battle of Memories in Shakespeare's Histories 4. Wordsworth and the Wound of Time 5. Memory Boxes 6. Function and Storage – Two Modes of Memory
II. Media	7. Metaphors, Models, and Media of Memory 8. Writing 9. Image 10. Body 11. Places
III. Storage	12. Archives 13. Permanence, Decay, Residue – Problems of Conservation and the Ecology of Culture 14. Memory Simulations in the Wasteland of Forgetfulness – Installations by Modern Artists 15. Memory as <i>Leidschatz</i> 16. Beyond the Archive Conclusion: Arts of Memory

**Erll, A. (2011). *Memory in Culture* (S. B. Young, Trans.). London: Palgrave Macmillan.**

*Memory in Culture* is an introduction to cultural memory studies, a contemporary interdisciplinary field. Erll provides a background to the ideas of pioneering figures such as Halbwachs and Nora, traces the development of cultural memory studies, and addresses theoretical questions about the socio-cultural aspects of remembering. Of particular interest is Part V: Media and Memory, the section that examines the concept and function of media memory, and the question of how cultural memory is mediated.

Part	Content
I. Introduction: Why 'Memory'?	1. Why "memory"? 2. Why now? 3. What is meant by 'memory'? 4. Memory, remembering or forgetting? 5. Goals and structure of this book

II. The Invention of Cultural Memory: A Short History of Memory Studies	6. Maurice Halbwachs: <i>Mémoire collective</i> 7. Aby Warburg: Mnemosyne – pathos formulas and a European memory of images 8. Pierre Nora’s <i>lieux de mémoire</i> – and beyond 9. Aleida and Jan Assmann: The Cultural Memory
III. The Disciplines of Memory Studies	10. Historical and social memory 11. Material memory: Art and literature 12. Mind and memory: Psychological approaches
IV. Memory and Culture: A Semiotic Model	13. Metaphors – productive, misleading, and superfluous, or : How to conceive of memory on a collective level 14. Material, social and mental dimensions of memory culture 15. Autobiographical, semantic and procedural systems of cultural memory 16. Related concepts: Collective identity and cultural experience
V. Media and Memory	17. Media and the construction of memory 18. The history of memory as the history of media 19. Medium of memory: A compact concept 20. Functions of media of memory 21. Concepts of media memory studies
VI. Literature as a Medium of Cultural Memory	22. Literature as a symbolic form of cultural memory 23. Literary text and mnemonic context: Mimesis 24. Literature as a medium of collective and individual memory
VII. Afterword	Whither Memory Studies?

**Garde-Hansen, J. (2011). Media and Memory. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.**

This textbook examines the dynamic relationship between memory and media. It explores how media – particularly radio, television, celebrity culture, digital media, social networks and mobile phones – supports the human desire to capture, store and retrieve memories. Additionally, it offers analyses of representations of memorable events, media tools that facilitate remembering or forgetting, media technologies for archiving, and the role of media agents in collective memory construction.

Part	Content
Introduction	Mediating the Past

I. Theoretical Background	1. Memory studies and media studies 2. Personal, collective, mediated and new memory discourses 3. Using media to make memories: Institutions, forms and practices 4. Digital memories: The demonstration of archives
II. Case Studies	5. Voicing the past: BBC Radio 4 and the Aberfan Disaster of 1963 6. (Re)media events: Remixing war on YouTube 7. The Madonna archive: Celebrity, ageing and fan nostalgia 8. Towards a concept of connected memory: The photo album goes mobile

**Hoskins, A. (ed.) (2009). Memory Studies 2(2). London: SAGE Publications.**

This edition of *Memory Studies* focuses on our immersion into and construction of densely mediated and mediatized environments. It seeks to reach a closer understanding of how memory is digitally diffused by examining cross-cultural cases.

Article	Author
Editorial- Flashbulb memories, psychology and media studies: Fertile ground for interdisciplinarity?	Andrew Hoskins
The witness in the archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies	Marianne Hirsch, Leo Spitzer
When history isn’t made but happens: Memories of victimhood in Halberstadt (Germany)	Klaus Neumann
Apology, historical obligations and the ethics of memory	Janna Thompson
Forgetting and remembering in the margins: Constructing past and future in the Romanian Danube Delta	Kristof van Assche, Patrick Devlieger, Petruta Teampau, Gert Verschraegen
‘We were all there’: Remembering America in the anniversary coverage of Hurricane Katrina	Sue Robinson
Fixing the floating gap: The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia as a global memory place	Christian Pentzold

**Hoskins, A. (ed.) (2010). Memory Studies 3(1). London: SAGE Publications.**

This articles in this edition of *Memory Studies* thematically focus on the relative powerlessness of the individual in the processes of collective memory construction. A diversity of memory settings are represented, including Germany, Poland, the U.K., the U.S., and Argentina.



Article	Author
Editorial- Memory, Media and <i>Menschen</i> : Where is the individual in collective memory studies?	Wulf Kansteiner
Re-Narrations: How pasts change in conversational remembering	Harald Welzer
Historical legacy, social memory and representations of the past within a Polish community	Christopher J. Hewer, Malgorzata Kut
Film sound and American cultural memory: Resounding trauma in <i>Sophie's Choice</i>	Neil Narine
"The good memory of this land": Reflections on the processes of memory and forgetting	Ana Margarita Ramos
Book review- Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds) <i>Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook</i>	Jens Brockmeier, Robyn Fivush, Patrick H. Hutton

**Lee, P. and Thomas, P. (eds.) (2012). Public Memory, Public Media and the Politics of Justice. Palgrave MacMillan.**

Exposing how memory is constructed and mediated in different societies, this collection explores particular contexts to identify links between the politics of memory, media representations and the politics of justice, questioning what we think we know and understand about recent history.

Chapter	Author
Justice in Peru: Public Amnesia and Public Memory	Germán Vargas
Images of Disappearance in Argentina	Claudia Feld
East Timor, the USA and Mass Atrocities	Joseph Nevins
Justice, Media, Memory: South African Transition	Charles Villa-Vicencio
Politics of Commemorating Tutsi Genocide in Rwanda	Rachel Ibreck
The European Roma: An Unsettled Right to Memory	Anna M. Reading
The Chechen Memory of Deportation	Aurélie Campana
"Media Memories" in Bosnia and Herzegovina	Zala Volčič, Karmen Erjavec
The Caribbean: Preserving the Public Memory	Hopeton S. Dunn

**Liebes, T., & Curran, J. (eds.) (1998). Media, Ritual and Identity. London: Routledge.**

Inspired by the work of Elihu Katz, *Media, Rit-*

*ual and Identity* examines how media shape society through the lens of cultural anthropology. This collection reflects on how media influence democratic processes and the construction and affirmation of social identities. Comprised of case studies ranging from political ritual on television to broadcasting in the Third World, *Media, Ritual and Identity* offers a commanding overview of contemporary media debates.

Chapter	Author
1. The intellectual legacy of Elihu Katz	1. James Curran, Tamar Liebes
2. Mass communication, ritual and civil society	2. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ronald N. Jacobs
3. Political ritual on television: episodes in the history of shame, degradation and excommunication	3. James W. Carey
4. Television's disaster marathons: a danger for democratic processes?	4. Tamar Liebes
5. Minorities, majorities and the media	5. Larry Gross
6. Particularistic media and diasporic communications	6. Daniel Dayan
7. The dialogic community: "soul talks" among early Israeli communal groups	7. Tamar Katriel
8. The dialectics of life, story and afterlife	8. Yoram Bilu
9. Broadcasting in the Third World: from national development to civil society	9. Daniel D. Hallin
10. Public sphere or public sphericules?	10. Todd Gitlin
11. Crisis of public communication: a reappraisal	11. James Curran
12. Public journalism and the search for democratic ideals	12. Theodore L. Glasser, Stephanie Craft
13. Promoting peace through the news media: some initial lessons from the Oslo peace process	13. Gadi Wolfsfeld
14. Relationships between media and audiences: prospects for audience reception studies	14. Sonia Livingstone

**Morris-Suzuki, T. (2005). The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History. London: Verso.**

*The Past within Us* examines the processes of how knowledge of the past is communicated in an age of mass media. It draws on examples from East Asian, American, and European history to study what occurs when accounts of history are transferred from one medium to another. Moreover, Morris-Suzuki expands on the key challenges for the communication of history in a multimedia age.

Chapters
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The Past is Not Dead
Unimaginable Pasts: The Horizons of Historical Fiction
Shadows on the Lens: Memory as Photograph
Moving Pictures: The Filming of History
Angles of Vision: Comic-Book Histories
Random Access Memory: History in a Multimedia Age
Towards a Political Economy of Historical Truthfulness

**Neiger, M., Meyers, O., & Zandberg, E. (eds.) (2011). On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age. London: Palgrave Macmillan.**

Twenty concise and thought-provoking essays comprehensively expand on the concept of media memory. Leading scholars of communication and collective memory research study the significance of media and mediation in collective memory construction, address essential conceptual challenges, and analyze specific case studies with the aim of illuminating theoretical questions.

Chapters	Authors
1. Cannibalizing memory in the global flow of news 2. The democratic potential of mediated collective memory 3. "Round up the unusual suspects": Banal commemoration and the role of the media 4. Media remembering: the contributions of life-story methodology to memory/media Research	1. Barbie Zelizer 2. Jill A. Edy 3. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi 4. Jérôme Bourdon
5. Between moral activism and archival memory: The testimonial project of 'breaking the silence' 6. Reclaiming Asaba: old media, new media, and the construction of memory 7. Joint Memory: ICT and the rise of moral mnemonic agents	5. Tamar Katriel, Nimrod Shavit 6. S. Elizabeth Bird 7. Tamar Ashuri
8. Television and the imagination of memory: <i>Life on Mars</i> 9. Life history and national memory: The Israeli television program <i>Such a Life</i> , 1972-2001 10. History, memory, and means of communication: The case of Jew Süß 11. Localizing collective memory: Radio broadcasts and the construction of regional memory 12. Televising the sixties in Spain: Memories and historical constructions	8. Paul Frosh 9. Ben Amos and Jérôme Bourdon 10. Na'ama Sheffi 11. Motti Neiger, Eyal Zandberg, Oren Meyers 12. José Carlos Rueda Laffond

13. Obamabilia and the historic moment: Institutional authority and 'deeply consequential memory' in keepsake journalism 14. Telling the unknown through the familiar: Collective memory as journalistic device in a changing media environment 15. Journalism as an agent of prospective memory 16. Memory-setting: Applying agenda-setting theory to the study of collective memory	13. Carolyn Kitch 14. Dan Berkowitz 15. Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt 16. Neta Kligler-Vilenchik
17. Memory and digital media: Six dynamics of the global memory field 18. Archive, media, trauma 19. Mediated space, mediated memory: New archives at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin 20. Anachronisms of media, anachronisms of memory: From collective memory to a new memory ecology	17. Anna Reading 18. Amit Pinchevski 19. Irit Dekel 20. Andrew Hoskins

**Volkner, I. (ed.) (2006). News in Public Memory: An International Study of Media Memories across Generations. New York: Peter Lang.**

This cross-cultural collection compares and contrasts media-related childhood memories across three generations. It studies the role of media in the intergenerational transfer of collective memory in nine countries, specifically focusing on the role and influence of the news industry.

Article	Author
1. Introduction 2. Australia 3. Austria 4. Czech Republic 5. Germany 6. India 7. Japan 8. Mexico 9. South Africa 10. USA	1. Ingrid Volkmer 2. Christina Slade 3. Theo Hug 4. Jan Jirák 5. Gebhard Rusch, Ingrid Volkmer 6. Keval J. Kumar 7. Reiko Sekiguchi 8. Margarita Maass, Daniela Rivera, Andres Hofman 9. Matthew D. Payne, Jill Dianne Swenson, Thomas W. Bohn
11. Perceptions and memories of media context 12. Construction of memory 13. Memory and markers: Collective memory and newsworthiness 14. Globalization, generational entelechies and the global public space	11. Christina Slade 12. Keval J. Kumar, Theo Hug, Gebhard Rusch 13. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli 14. Ingrid Volkmer



Williams, D. (2009). *Media, Memory, and the First World War*. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

*Media, Memory and the First World War* studies how the dominant mode of communication in a popular culture – from oral traditions to digital media – shapes the structure of memory within that culture. It inspects the history of memory from the Trojan War to World War I and theorizes that contemporary digital media facilitate changing memory structures.

Part	Content
I. Memory and Media	1. Modern memory 2. Mediated memory
II. Classical Memory: Orality and Literacy	3. Oral memory and the anger of Achilles 4. Scripts of empire: Remembering Virgil in <i>Barometer Rising</i>
III. The End of the Book and the Beginning of Cinema	5. Cinematic memory in Owen, Remarque, and Harrison 6. “Spectral images”: The double vision of Siegfried Sassoon
IV. Photo/Play: Seeing Time and (Hearing) Relativity	7. Photographic memory: “A force of interruption” in <i>The Wars</i> 8. A play of light: Dramatizing Relativity in R. H. Thomson’s <i>The Lost Boys</i>
V. Virtual Presences: History in the Electronic Age	9. Electronic memory: “A new Homeric mode” on history television 10. Sound bytes in the archive and the museum

# Down memory lane: Reflections and recollections on the dawn of participatory media in Nigeria

Ifeoma Vivian Dunu and Gregory Obinna Ugbo

*Community radios were often established as a response to different kinds of struggle about socio-economic or cultural issues. In Nigeria, the establishment of community broadcasting is in direct response to the pressure from civil society on the Federal Government for the democratization of the airwaves in order to facilitate the emerging Nigerian democracy, create a more pluralistic media system and for rural development.*

The campaign for community radio in Nigeria was not unconnected with the development of community radio globally, which was gaining momentum in other African countries like Mali, Benin, Ghana, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Senegal, Zimbabwe etc. Moreover, radio activists and development scholars at the time (Akingbulu, 2006; Opubor, 2006; and Alumuku, 2005), argued that the philosophy of the prevailing broadcasting environment needed a paradigm shift to participatory media since radio then was still trapped in the regimes of State and commercial principles unsuited to achieving the ultimate results in development. It is within these contexts that the journey that led to the transformation of the radio media landscape in Nigeria began.

This article briefly recounts the role media

scholars and activists played in framing and driving the national agenda for participatory media development in Nigeria and looks at some of the questions that need to be addressed through the particular lens of a campus radio station, UNIZIK 94.1 FM; relaying its trailblazing experiences as a pointer to other forms of emerging community radios in Nigeria.

### **How it all started**

The struggle for community radio (CR) in Nigeria was initiated in 2000 by concerned community broadcasting advocates. In 2003, three collaborating organizations - The Panos Institute West Africa, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), and Institute for Media and Society - joined the initiative. This sent a message to the Nigerian authorities that captured the urgent and crucial need for community radio development in the country.

Known as "Initiative for Building Community Radio in Nigeria", the committee developed an action plan which included seminars for CR stakeholders in four zonal centres across the country. This gave rise to series of awareness-raising and interest-generating workshops that took the message of CR development to the various regions of Nigeria.

With this action plan, the initiative succeeded in putting Nigerians in the driving seat of advocacy. It also provided the forum for sensitization and knowledge concerning CR. It is important to recall that prior to this period of heightened advocacy, the concept of community media was relatively unknown in the country even though it was gaining popularity across the globe. This era, therefore, was significant in educating and sensitizing Nigerians about CR broadcasting.

This era was not without some challenges such as: misconceptions and low commitment to CR issues within government and other agencies; inconsistencies in government policies and poor policy implementation regarding CRs. These challenges trailed the first type of CRs in Nigeria - campus CR stations - and were a major obstacle to their advancement. The challenges, notwithstanding, helped to define and reignite the strug-

gle for CR development as in 2005 the initiative metamorphosed to become Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC), the umbrella body for community radio development activities in Nigeria. This body had the aim of educating the public and policy makers, stimulating continuing discourse and helping to actualize a truly plural media landscape in Nigeria (Akingbulu, 2006).

In 2006 the NCRC organized a high level policy dialogue in Abuja that led to the government setting up a 17-member committee to produce a draft Community Radio Policy (CRP). The CRP draft has long been produced by the committee but the Federal Government is yet to effectively use this draft to develop an enabling policy framework crucial to the success of CR broadcasting in Nigeria. NCRC up until now is still spear heading the advocacy for the development of other community radios in the country which somewhat materialized in the second quarter of 2015 with the licensing of 17 community radios in the six geopolitical zones. But then, before the licensing of these community radios, campus community radios had emerged in the country.

### **Dawn of campus community radio in Nigeria**

Arguably, campus community broadcasting in Nigeria started with the clandestine transmission of radio programmes by three students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in 2002. The students' illegal transmission sent a strong signal to the Nigerian government that the time was ripe for radio stations on campuses. This, some have argued may have partly contributed to the granting of a license to the University of Lagos the same year and for the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission's (NBC) initial revision of the National Broadcasting Code to accommodate community broadcasting in the code. Other licenses were issued to 10 other campus community radios in 2007 and 18 campus radios in 2009.

It took the Nigerian government almost a decade - since the first set of private/commercial radios were licensed in 1994 - to issue the first license for campus community radio (UNILAG, 103.1 FM) in 2002 and another five years for 10 more licenses to be granted to other campus



community radio stations in 2007. Several reasons presented for this slow uptake of community broadcasting in Nigeria include:

- The experience of Rwanda with hate radio and genocide.
- CR was perceived to be capable of sometimes producing independent content that could be dangerous and inimical to constituted authority.
- CR has been viewed by some in the country as a political tool with the capacity to inflame and fan the embers of political destabilization.
- The nature of Nigeria's ethnic and religious configuration, which is multifaceted.

It is pertinent to recollect at this point that the establishment of campus community radio stations in Nigeria was possible because of the existing campus broadcasting studios in the departments of mass communication around the coun-

*Student volunteers working in the UNIZIK studio.*

try. A cursory look at the structure and operations of UNIZIK 94.1 FM exemplifies this point.

### **UNIZIK 94.1 FM in perspective**

UNIZIK 94.1 FM was one of the campus radio stations licensed in 2007 and domiciled in Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), one of the Federal Universities existing in Nigeria. Like other CR stations in other parts of the globe, UNIZIK. 94.1 FM was set to operate under the principles/philosophy of CR. Among the key principles are: access, popular participation, community ownership and not-for profit motive.

There was clear evidence of similarities in licensed campus radio stations' operations across the country in their embryonic stage, because during that period, the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) continued with capacity building workshops for these emerging stations, thus providing a forum for learning but also for networking and sharing of experiences among CR stakeholders. The coalition provided the seed knowledge for all the campus stations which went



a long way towards consolidating their existence.

Conversely, we also observed a serious oversight on the part of the coalition in their commendable efforts – the omission of university management and senior education stakeholders in these seminars. The result was internal conflict and tensions between the stations and their various universities, lack of take-off funding for these stations, employment of radio professionals and a misconception regarding these stations' ownership status.

CR principles such as community ownership, volunteerism, community participation in the development of contents and the general management of the station etc. were often misunderstood and contested by the academic communities across all the campus community radios. Some community radio stations in religious institutions and those owned by state governments particularly operated a model of campus community radio that had a near absence of student participation and used radio professionals entirely for their operations. The running and management of these stations and programme content was similar to the existing commercial stations except in quantity of commercials.

### **Management and staffing**

This was a major challenge that UNIZIK 94.1FM had to contend with during the kick-off phase. To solve the problem of staffing, however, a technician was employed for the station. He was the only permanent staff for the station, while the rest of the workers at the FM were student volunteers, drawn from different disciplines in the university. Although the idea of running the station with volunteers is in keeping with one of the philosophies of community radio, at that time, it was a major limitation. The development of programmes, presentation and studio operations became a task since most of the student volunteers had never worked in a station before.

What the department did at this point was to engage in on-the-job training of the students by inviting experts from mainstream broadcast stations operating within the state and also using lecturers teaching broadcasting. The effort paid

off considering the speed with which students learned the ropes of radio broadcasting in a very short period. Using student volunteers presented yet another huge challenge for the station because they still had their academic works to attend to apart from other social engagements. Staffing and management, therefore, are stark realities that emerging community radios have to reckon with.

### **Financial sustainability**

The issue of funding is generally regarded as the biggest challenge of any community radio. For UNIZIK FM the issue was complicated in several ways viz.: There was no grant from the University management to start off the station; the University did not allocate any monthly subvention for the station even when they saw the station as one of the various units of the University. The issue of not-for-profit motive of community radio as interpreted by the regulatory body (NBC), also greatly restricted the revenue source for the station. The NBC 2010 code (p.65) limits sources of funding to membership fees, levies, contributions, gifts or grants and local spot announcements.

In our case, no member was willing to donate to a non-profitable venture and gifts/grants were not forthcoming either. Recounting this experience is of immense importance to other emerging community radios as a vital issue that needs to be addressed with the regulatory body. Without clear alternative means of funding, keeping the FM station running was a challenge.

### **Accessibility**

Another experience worth recalling was the issue of community access to the station. The easiest way to ensure access is through community participation, but this is not without its limitations. UNIZIK 94.1 FM made a conscious effort to ensure access, popular participation and representativeness in the station by giving every member of the university community chances to be heard. UNIZIK as noted earlier is not a homogenous community, where it is easier to define the community since the population is less segmented.



In a heterogeneous community like our campus and other universities, this can be a challenge because there are so many different social groups that comprise University life. Ensuring that such sub-sectors of the academic community participate in campus radio was somehow difficult for the stations to achieve since most of the Universities had yet to understand the concept of community participation and the idea of non-professionals being involved in producing media content was unfamiliar.

### **The journey so far**

Presently, Unizik 94.1FM is a success story. The activities and indeed the rich programming content of the FM that is community-based and people-oriented have proved critics wrong that campus radios are not merely educational or instructional tools but also a tool for development. The programmes of UNIZIK 94.1 FM serve development in various ways through a selection of key themes such as students' forums, gender issues, education, health issues and others. The radio station, because it regards itself as a window through which Nnamdi Azikiwe University talks to itself, ensures that the above discussed themes are participatory in their production format.

A recurring programme of this nature is "Good Morning UNIZIK". The Vice-Chancellor has used this programme on several occasions as a platform not only to inform students about developments within the University but to quell rumours that could have caused serious unrest. Other programmes that are getting high acceptability are the "Students' Parliament" where the Students' Union Government showcases its activities and answers questions from various constituencies; the "You and the Law programme" where issues of students' rights and the citizens' rights are discussed. These all reflect the participatory and development roles of the station.

Besides programming, the use of student volunteers also speaks volumes about the participatory nature of the FM. The whole

essence of the public sphere as propounded by Habermas (1962) was a site where citizens have the opportunity to engage in dialogue and debate, and UNIZIK FM strives to uphold that. A majority of the student volunteers who are from disciplines other than Mass Communication department have become active producers of radio content through the station.

Another key success story is the training of the student volunteers. For us this empowering process is indeed worth mentioning. These students from non communication discipline learnt the ropes of broadcasting at the station. This way, campus radio serves a valuable economic function to the society by providing viable training for students and other members of the community in radio broadcasting.

### **Bridging the missing gap: Lessons for the emerging community radios**

It is important to point out some gray areas that might be a constraint for the emerging community radios if left unaddressed. One such area is the full integration of all elements that make up a given community. This has not really been fully captured in the UNIZIK 94.1 FM and all other existing campus community radios in Nigeria. The operation and functionality of the FM currently favours certain segment of the stakeholders – students and staff – while excluding the third component – host community. Programming contents should be tailored to serve the needs of the entire community; being a campus station, musicals of course should dominate but then so should educational programmes. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the campus radio stations existing in Nigeria. Another problem with the dominance of these musical programs we observed was the use of foreign professional artistes which is in conflict with the very idea of CR practice of promoting indigenous talents.

One other area that has not been fully explored and yet remains amazingly possible is the use of the station for educational broadcasting – using the station by various lecturers as an 'on-air classroom', as supplement lectures for students

not opportune to attend classes; report on research breakthroughs as well as to promote arts and culture within the university community.

### Conclusion

The licensing by the federal government of 17 more community radio stations across the six geopolitical zones of the country in 2015 is a clear indication that campus radio stations in the country have passed the litmus test for the operationability of CRs in Nigeria. The campus CRs by their doggedness in operating a different radio philosophy that was relatively unknown within the Nigerian radio broadcasting landscape ensured the full establishment of the community radio sector as the third tier of radio broadcasting in the country. As the newly licensed community radios take off, the need for NCRC to further scale up on advocacy and sensitization, including workshops with key stakeholders of these new CRs across the six geopolitical zones in the country remains vital so that participatory radio will be consolidated in Nigerian media terrain. ■

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## On the screen

### Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic) 2016

At the 51st International Film Festival (July 1-9, 2016) the Ecumenical Jury Prize went to *Le Confessioni* (The Confessions) directed by Roberto Andò (Italy, France).

*Motivation:* A film with a balanced use of symbolism and a clean aesthetic, reflecting on silence, time and human vulnerability as well as the possibility of redemption, which calls out for breaking away from pragmatic cynicism and control in power decision making as opposed to consciousness and return to essential principles of Christianity.

*Synopsis:* A charismatic monk named Roberto Salus is a guest at a meeting of G8 finance ministers held at a luxury hotel on the Baltic coast. But who invited the taciturn friar in the snow-white habit? And who killed one of the financiers who are planning radical changes to the world economic order? (Festival information;

*Members of the 2016 Jury:* Susanne Charlotte Knudstorp, Denmark; Maria José Martinez, Ecuador; Joel Ruml, Czech Republic; Stanislav Zeman, Czech Republic.

### Yerevan (Armenia) 2016

At the 13th Golden Apricot International Film Festival 10-17 July 2016 the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to *Immortal* directed by Seyed Hadi Mohaghegh (Iran, 2015).

The film is about a sixty-year-old man searching ways for ending his life as he feels guilty for the death of his family. It touches upon family relations and reveals the humanity and dignity of a



person who, until his death, has a living love towards his only surviving grandson.

The film manages to realize its objectives in a highly aesthetical and impressive quality. Through traditional oriental film-making the images of the nature and the local inhabitants seem quite vivid which helps to convey the essential issues of our death and life.

Members of the 2016 Jury were: Ákos Lázár Kovács, Hungary (President); Anita Uzulniece, Latvia; Very Rev. Fr. Garegin Hambardzumyan, Armenia.

## Venice (Italy) 2016

At the 73rd Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica the 6th INTERFILM Award for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue went to *White Sun* directed by Deepak Rauniyar (Nepal, USA, Qatar, Netherlands 2016).

Motivation: A light-footed multi-generational story after the irreconcilable conflicts between royalists and Maoist guerrillas (1996-2006) in a small Hinduist village in Nepal. The film opens up interreligious access for a wide audience by showing in a humorous but respectful way how the authorities of the village argue with each other about burial rituals, politics, castes and a fatherhood.

The director stages the conflict between a religious and a secular way of life, between tradition and modernity. Rauniyar's hopeful message: Let the open-minded next generation try a new beginning!

Members of the 2016 Jury: Johanna Haberer, Germany (President); Tiago Ignacio Branchini, Italy; Ivan Madeo, Switzerland; Denyse Muller, France.

## Warsaw (Poland) 2016

At the 32nd Warsaw Film Festival (October 7-16, 2016) the Ecumenical Jury appointed by SIGNIS and INTERFILM awarded its Prize to

*Heartstone* (*Hjartasteinn*) directed by Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson (Iceland/Denmark 2016) for its comprehensive vision of a childhood close to nature in a remote Icelandic village.

The film (poster below) describes the shifting feelings of two friends at the verge of maturity searching for their identity. Adapting to changing social surroundings, their relationship will have to get along with their family members and friends, boys and girls and ongoing gossip. In a delicate way the director describes the ability for rebirth.

*Synopsis:* A remote fishing village in Iceland. Teenage boys and best friends Thór and Christian experience a turbulent summer as one tries to win the heart of a girl while the other discovers new feelings towards his best friend. When summer ends, it's time to leave the playground and face adulthood.

Members of the 2016 Jury: Ingrid Ruillat, France (President); Mariola Marczak, Poland; Jan Piotr Michałowski, Poland.

