



ISSN: 2582-2829

Communication and Culture Review

A peer-reviewed, open-access, bi-annual international journal

Year 2021, Volume 4, Issue no. 1 & 2

Communication for Social Change

Issue Editor

Samarjit Kachari, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Electronic Media & Mass Communication

Pondicherry University, India

Published by

Department of Electronic Media and Mass Communication

Pondicherry University

Puducherry, India—605 014



Introduction

Samarjit Kachari

In our rapidly changing global landscape, the realms communication for social change have emerged as critical pillars in the pursuit of a more equitable and sustainable world. This special issue of “Communication & Culture Review” delves into the evolving dynamics of the field shedding light on the multifaceted intersections between communication, development, and societal transformation. As we stand on the precipice of a new era marked by complex challenges and unprecedented opportunities, it is imperative that we examine how communication theories and practices are adapting to navigate this ever- shifting terrain.

The discipline of communication for social change have a rich history, dating back to the mid-20th century when scholars and practitioners began recognizing the importance of communication in driving socio-economic development and fostering positive social change. Over the years, these fields have evolved significantly, responding to changes in technology, media, politics, and culture. Since the beginning of the concern for development of the third world and the role of communication therein, the domain of communication for social change has come a long way in setting itself as a specialised area of study in communication. Conceptualisations of the discipline are generally understood in three different ways (Beltran, 2008), although new perspectives of the field continue to emerge. The first being the idea of development communication where mass media is understood to act as the solution to hurdles of development, while another idea of communication for development (C4D) adopts a mixed approach of utilising different channels of communication for development and social change. On the other hand, the Latin concept of participatory communication envisages participation of communities in communication and decision making process in matters concerning them. The overarching goal of communication for social change is to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, information, and resources to enhance the quality of life for individuals and communities, particularly among marginalized sections of societies. It further seeks to catalyse transformation in societal norms, values, and behaviours, addressing issues ranging from gender equality and human rights to environmental sustainability and public health. This discipline has a commitment to leveraging communication as a force for positive transformation, but approaches and strategies can vary widely.

An important aspect of this evolving landscape is the profound impact of digital technology. The advent of the internet, social media, and mobile communication has fundamentally altered the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. As a result,

communication for social change have found new avenues for reaching audiences and mobilizing communities. Social media activism, online advocacy campaigns, and digital storytelling has democratized communication, empowering individuals and grassroots organizations to drive social change in unprecedented ways. Yet, these digital tools also pose ethical and practical challenges, such as issues related to privacy, surveillance, misinformation, and digital divides. Thus it calls for delving into the complex interplay between technology and communication for development and social change. Furthermore, the evolving dynamics of the field are intertwined with the shifting geopolitical landscape. Globalization and migration have brought diverse cultures and perspectives into contact, creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and collaboration. However, they have also given rise to cultural tensions and challenges to effective communication across borders. Communication for social change must grapple with these complexities, addressing issues of cultural sensitivity, representation, and inclusivity.

At the heart of communication for social change lie the power dynamics that shape the discourse and impact of communication initiatives. Historically, this field has often been critiqued for top-down, paternalistic approaches that prioritize the voices of dominant elites over those of marginalized communities. However over a period of time there has been a paradigm shift toward more participatory and bottom-up communication strategies that centre the voices and agency of the communities affected by development or social change initiatives. Aroufoune and Durampart in their article highlight how citizens seek to appropriate public spaces in digital media and how their engagements with authoritarianism are fraught with challenges. Rinku Pegu presents the cultural and aesthetic production of Phatobihu, a folklore in India's Northeast and argues that, notwithstanding the documentation and archiving of the festival in print, digital media have not been utilised optimally to capture the material and affective potentials of the festival. She attributes the digital disinterest to institutional apathy. Hazeena in her article explores the role of community media Radio Kothagiri in amplifying linguistic diversity and popularising the indigenous language of the tribal community the radio caters to. Viviane discusses how media development interventions impact women journalists in Burkina Faso. She presents a vignette of intersectional threats, complexity, education, economy and coloniality and gender that leave female journalists exposed to insecurity. On the other hand, she talks about discrimination women journalists face in this region that obstruct them from getting trained. Kulkarni and Hegde narrate how same-sex marriage is a taboo in India and in what ways media and legal discourses could possibly alter the perception towards it.

Through a collection of diverse articles, case studies, and critical analyses, exploring the evolving dynamics, challenges, and opportunities of communication in the pursuit of a better world, the current issue tries to inspire thoughtful and impactful action that brings us closer to achieving our shared vision of a more just and sustainable future.

Issue Editor

Samarjit Kachari, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Electronic Media & Mass Communication,
Pondicherry University, India.



Intersectionality Matters: Studying the contradictory effects of media development through women radio journalists in Burkina Faso

Schönbächler Viviane 

ABSTRACT

Gender perspectives in media development are common in grey literature produced and promoted by media development actors. Yet, academic research investigating gender dimensions in media development practice and discourse remains scarce. This paper wants to contribute to filling this gap. The empirical data results from my PhD field research with women journalists in proximity radios in Burkina Faso. Based on the perspective of women journalists, the study gathered transversal data that sheds light on how they experience and perceive media development activities. The data was collected in 2019-2021 through interviews and audio diaries with a total of 10 female journalists. This paper examines media development activities and their effects on women journalists' lived experiences. The analysis uses an intersectional lens to grasp the interdependences of different power structures. Findings show how media development interventions might have both positive and negative effects on women journalists' everyday life. As such, media development activities shape the power structures within the media environment, enabling and restricting women journalists' access, interaction, and participation in content production and decision-making. The data also shows how the security situation in Burkina Faso affects women journalists in a different way and sheds light to blind spots in the efforts of NGOs to incorporate gender dimensions in their approaches. The analysis reveals the complexities in which media development interventions at times challenge and reinforce existing inequalities in the media sector.

Keywords: media (for) development, gender, women, journalists, voice, protection, proximity radio

Introduction

The field of gender media studies has a long and rich history. Since the press and the media emerged, as early as the 19th century, research about it asked at times the «gender question». To cite a few examples from German speaking journalism research of the late 19th century (see Duttenhöfer, 2009): under the pseudonym Sophie Pataky, the lexicon of German women of the feather (writers) has been published in 1898[i], Max Osborn conducted a study on women in literature and the press published in 1896[ii], and the feminist Eliza Ichenhäuser wrote in 1905 *Journalism as a female profession*[iii]. These examples show that women's contributions in literature, the media, and communication have always been a preoccupation for research and reflection. Similarly in Burkina Faso, a very different media context, scholarly interest in the question of women in the radio emerged at the same time with the liberalization of the airwaves in the late 1990s and the sharp increase in private radio stations (see Bâ, 1999; Somé, Kaboré, & Ilboudo, 1998).

However, it appears that particularly in research on media and development this long history of gender media studies remains invisible (Schönbachler, 2021). Even though many international, regional, and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed an important body of grey literature and handbooks on gender issues, its academic research remains often genderblind. Moreover, in practice, approaches that do exist seem at times top-down, required by donors and Western organizations, as it is still practised in the development sector (see Bilge, 2019 discussing the example of intersectionality in international development).

This paper critically examines the practice of media and development from a feminist perspective, highlighting the transformative and counterproductive aspects of media projects as experienced by female radio journalists in northern parts of Burkina Faso. The paper asks how media (for) development projects, intended or not, affect women journalists' work experiences in local radio stations. To do so, the paper first discusses the key concepts related to media development, gender and the media, and evaluation. It then describes how data were collected and analysed before examining in depth the different, often contradictory, practices and effects observed in the field linked to vertical and horizontal segregation, monetized training opportunities, and intersectional security threats.

Media & Development Research and Practice: A Gender-Blind Field

Media and development is a complex and fragmented field of research and practice (Benequista, Abbott, Rothman, & Mano, 2019). It can be understood in a rather broad sense or defined more narrowly. In general, the understanding and the reflections in the field depend on the definitions that are underpinning both areas: media/communication and development. Some understand the media as mainstream news media, others include video, magazines, soap operas, etc. and again others include theatre, interpersonal communication, art etc. The same is true for development. In some settings, the economic, neoliberal understanding of development as economic growth is put forth, while others emphasize on the development industry, and again others relate development to political and social cohesion and human security.

Nora Quebral coined the term development communication and the related academic field through her work in Los Baños, the Philippines. She defines it as “the science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic state of overall growth that fosters equity and the advancement of individual potential” (Quebral, 2012, p. 63). This very broad and comprehensive definition is very rich and includes the interrelations of the media/communication and development in all its diverse aspects.

However, anything then can potentially be part of the field. So, how to constitute a field?

Scholars have recently tried to define different concepts: media development, media for development, communication for social change, humanitarian communication, and media representation of development (Benequista et al., 2019; Manyozo, 2012; Scott, 2014; Vokes, 2018). Each of the concepts sets a different focus and highlights different underlying assumptions^[iv]. However, it is important to note that they are not strictly separable and that they are interdependent (Manyozo, 2012).

Media/communication for development (C4D/M4D, also including ICT4D^[v]), can be considered as the vastest sub-field. The underlying assumption here is that the media or communication (or ICTs) are used in order to 'bring about behaviour change', to reach development goals, or to diffuse messages that foster development (Scott, 2014; Vokes, 2018). Manyozo (2012) links the sub-field to early theoretical perspectives of economic development and the modernization paradigm that claims that by diffusing technologies and knowledge, 'development' can be reached, in the sense of Western standards and norms (Nyamnjoh, 2010; Vokes, 2018).

Media development, on the other hand, focuses on developing the media system and structures through in-country, donor-led initiatives (Scott, 2014). As such, it is often part of the development industries, following the same guidelines, funded by the same donors, and implemented by (international) non-governmental organisations (INGOs/NGOs). The underlying assumption here is that a free and independent media environment supports Western-standard democracies and good governance (Manyozo, 2012). Projects in this sub-field include for instance the establishment and support of media outlets, training institutions, advocacy groups and journalism associations. However, the term is sometimes used in a national context to signify the development of the media system per se, without the emphasis of outside actors from the development sector (see for instance Rodny-Gumede, 2015).

Unlike the previous two sub-fields, which are based on Western epistemologies and norms, the third approach draws from the critique of these approaches that emerged particularly in Latin America (see Gumucio Dagron, 2001, 2008; Huesca, 2008; Servaes, 1996; White, Nair, & Ashcroft, 1994). Communication for social change or participatory communication draws from Freire's pedagogy and postcolonial critique (Servaes, 1996). The assumption is that only if communities are at the centre of development processes, the goals can be achieved. To do so, participatory communication processes are key (Manyozo, 2012). Knowledge and processes must be co-constructed from the margins. As such, participatory approaches focus much more on the process, than on the message or structures (Manyozo, 2012).

A fourth, less commonly distinguished approach can be the analysis of how media report about development (Enghel & Noske-Turner, 2018; Scott, 2014). However, this article is focusing on the previous three approaches.

When it comes to gender and feminist perspectives in the literature on media and development, it is important to note that there is a big difference in the quantity of grey literature on the issue and scientific literature. The various organizations and institutions working at the intersection of the media and development have produced a huge amount of handbooks, guidelines, and publications on gender (in)equality and the media. However, the scientific literature is scarce. A literature review, I conducted in 2021, highlights the often narrow, binary, and developmentalist perception of gender on which research on media, gender, and development is based (Schönbächler, 2021). Approaches discussed in the literature include

tokenist approaches like the “add-women-and-stir” approach (see Geertsema-Sligh, 2019, p. 214) and the liberal feminist approach that aim at having a ‘critical number’ of women in decision-making positions in order to promote more gender equality in the media sector (see Byerly, 2019).

A common finding is that even though women are listening to radios, radios are not listening to women (Fortune & Chungong, 2013, p. 87). This holds true for the literature on media development:

Women are only mentioned tangentially in literature on media development specifically. Very little research has been done in this area and a review of the literature shows that the field is male dominated and mostly gender blind. Literature on media development often treats women as an afterthought, for example by listing women as one of the marginalised and disadvantaged groups that should be focused on. (Geertsema-Sligh, 2019, p. 209)

This claim was supported by my literature review, where I found little mentions of “gender” and “women” in general, and if so, they were mostly in relation to gender equality as a development goal, or as one of many marginalised groups or categories (Schönbachler, 2021, p. 12).

As the literature on the media and development is generally genderblind, it is of no surprise that the indirect and unintended effects of media development practices are under-researched. One way how research interacts with media (for) development practice is through project evaluations. However, scholars have criticised the fundamental problem of the field. They argue that the lack of theoretical foundation renders evaluation difficult. Without a clear theoretical ground, it is not clear what and how to evaluate (Abbott, 2019). Noske-Turner (2017) has criticised the “quick and dirty bureaucratic evaluation” (see Chapter 2). Moreover, she problematizes the weak methodologies of many evaluations in the field, their use of ‘global’ indicators, their recurrent lack of baseline data, as well as the absence of genuine participatory approaches in evaluation. Therefore, calls for new and more reflexive approaches to evaluation in the field of media and development have emerged. Lennie and Tacchi (2013), for instance, have called for “new conceptualizations of social change that emphasize the contradictions and paradoxes of the process” (p. 1) as opposed to simple linear cause-effect models based on categorizations, predetermined outcomes, and upward accountability (p. 2). The authors argue that social change is highly complex, non-linear and often contradictory. A process that cannot be understood by simplistic models of cause-effect impact assessment methodologies.

Research Question and Approach

Even though the evaluation of media development was not the central topic of my PhD research, I was able to detect such unintended (often contradictory) effects of media development projects thanks to the broad scope of my research question. As such, my investigation was neither focussing on a particular project nor testing a predefined hypothesis. The present paper, therefore, asks how media (for) development projects, intended or not, affect women journalists’ work experiences in local radio stations in Burkina Faso.

The paper is making use of the data collected for my PhD research in Burkina Faso between 2019 and 2021. It includes the recording of radio programs, programming grids, interviews with radio staff, and a diary study with female journalists. In total, 14 proximity radio stations in northern parts of Burkina Faso were part of the research. This includes associative, commercial, public, and religious radios. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with

managing and editorial staff. The diary study with female journalists comprises an initial interview, followed by a week-long audio diary held by the journalists, and a second follow-up interview. Out of the 14 radio stations that participated in the research, ten female journalists accepted to participate, of which six were able to complete the full diary process and four did only the initial interview due to time restrictions.

The diaries were analysed according to a multi-level intersectional framework adapted from Winker and Degele (2009). Their analytical approach is based on three levels: individual, representational, and structural level. To which a fourth level was added, the relational level, according to previous work done by feminist scholars, such as Anthias (1998, 2013) and Yuval-Davis (2006), and peace scholars, such as Lederach (2003, 2005). The analysis proposes an inductive approach to categories of inequality. As such, the approach allows one to go beyond the limits of dominant Western understandings of gender, race, class, and body. Particularly in non-Western context, such an open approach allows for unexpected configurations and materializations of power relations to be detected.

In the first step, the interview-diary transcriptions were coded line by line according to the four levels. The individual level included data on identity formation and personal experiences, the relational level focuses on interpersonal relationships, the representational level includes norms, values, symbolic orders and discourses, and the structural level includes societal structures, organizations, hierarchies, but also professional structures in the media outlet. Once the interview-diary material was coded by these levels, each case (read journalist) was analysed individually by level and the interrelations between them as suggested by Ganz and Hausotter (2020). The multilevel analysis found different aspects relevant for female journalists: entering the profession, working conditions, radio practices, personal aspects, and societal dimensions.

Interviews with radio directors and editors were coded thematically in order to contextualize the intersectional analysis. Moreover, the programming grids were analysed inductively in order to understand the scope and breadth of their programs as well as to situate women's participation in them. The 178 hours of recorded radio programs collected were analysed according to their radiophonic genre, gender of the host, women's voices, and topics. The findings show a general marginalization of women's voices with only 20% of female guests, 16% of shows hosted by female journalists, 12% of airtime for female voices, and only 7% of all call-ins came from women. Even though not representative in its sampling, the analysis shows a clear gender gap.

Context

Burkina Faso, a small landlocked country in West Africa, has long been a peaceful island in the Sahel. The religious and communitarian coexistence was and still is a key strength of the 'country of upright people'. Despite the economic and political challenges, the media landscape has long been one of the freest and best-rated on the continent (see RSF, 2022). Since the 1990s, the media system has been liberalized and many private, mostly local radio stations, have emerged. In 2018, the country of 20 million people had 154 functioning radio stations (Lamizana et al., 2018). This number, and the importance of orality, indicate that radio remains the most widespread and accessible medium in the country (Balima & Frère, 2003; Capitant, 2008; Frère, 2016; Lamizana et al., 2018). However, a free and diverse mediascape is not a *fait accompli*. Press freedom is a continuous struggle. As such, the murder of investigative journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998 led to social unrest that can be drawn until the 2014 popular uprising that led to the ousting of long-time president Blaise Compaoré (Soré, 2008). Since then, the national press freedom index indicates a brief improvement in the situation with its climax in 2018 (Yaméogo,

2022), and declining rapidly since the security situation deteriorated drastically from 2014 due to internal political struggles, transnational terrorism, and the rise of criminal networks. However, not only non-state armed groups threaten press freedom, but also government measures and counter-terrorism strategies curtail the freedom of expression (see RSF, 2021). In this tense and difficult situation, proximity radio stations face particular dilemmas. Without resources to protect their staff and station, many hide behind self-censorship and silence in relation to the armed conflict (Yaméogo, 2018).

Findings

Media & Development Projects in Proximity Radios

Community media (Boafo, 2000; Fraser & Restrepo Estrada, 2001; Opubor, 2000), indigenous media (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo, 2020), alternative media (Atton, 2002; Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2007; Kenix, 2011; Kidd, 1999), citizen media (Rodríguez, 2011), or, how they are most commonly labelled in West Africa: proximity radios (Ba, 2003; Munimi Osung, 2022) are important elements of many African media landscapes (Balima, 1980; Capitant, 2008; Tudesq, 2002). The same is true for Burkina Faso (Balima & Frère, 2003). It remains the most accessible medium, particularly in rural areas.

However, proximity radios are often in precarious economic situations and therefore depend on foreign funding and development assistance (Frère, 2016; Munimi Osung, 2022). During my field research, I visited and engaged with very different radio stations. Some have many partnerships and are involved in a multitude of projects with different partners; some seem to depend on one big project, hoping that it will last for a long time; while others, particularly in smaller localities, are rarely able to secure funds from international organizations. The situation was particularly difficult for radio stations in so-called red zones[vi], severely impacted by the insecurity situation. Staff in these areas complain that they cannot do anything anymore due to security risks attached to their work. As one chief of program explains, the security of staff goes before extra funds:

We do not leave [the city] anymore. We decided not to leave [the city] because (.) the situation does not allow it. But within the city, there is no problem, we work normally. But some kilometres outside the city, really, we are afraid. Because recently we were supposed to do some radio programs with a partner on the ground, but we told them clearly that we cannot go (.) it would have been extra income for us, but we have to exist to work. If you don't exist, you cannot work. (chief of program L5, Ouagadougou, 2019)

The data gathered for my dissertation and the four years of engaging with the proximity radio stations, show that all different types of media (for) development approaches coexist. Media development projects include journalism trainings (see below), supporting journalist associations, supporting reporting, events, and lobbying for press freedom. To name an example: the International Festival for the Freedom of the Press and Expression (FILEP) has been supported by different partners for years, as well as the national report on the freedom of the press produced by the National Press Centre/Norbert Zongo which is supported by Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA). Fondation Hirondelle created a youth radio studio, Studio Yafa, producing content to be broadcasted by a network of proximity radio stations throughout the country. A similar approach is also done by the Union Nationale de l'Audiovisuel Libre du Faso (UNALFA) in their weekly youth magazine. And UNICEF supports the production of educational radio programs (PER).

Media for development projects often focus on health and family planning. Two women journalists participating in my research were the main hosts of such programs. But airwaves are also full of spots and microprograms aiming at awareness raising on environmental protection, health, tax collection, peace etc. financed by international organizations and state administration.

Even though the radio programs recorded for my PhD show a wide variety of radio content supported, funded, produced, or co-produced by development agencies, NGOs, and state administration, only rarely however, are these programs indicated in the programming grids. The analysis of the programming grids of 14 proximity radio stations shows that externally produced content (excluding publicity and spots) makes up less than 5% of the allocated weekly airtime.

The content analysis of recorded radio shows found different approaches to radio content production related to (media) development projects. Projects or partners can pre-produce radio programs themselves and have them broadcasted by radio stations (external production). They can also send a written script which is then translated and interpreted live on air by local radio staff (scripted programs). There is also the common practice of publi-reportage (see Frère, 2016), where organisations pay for a certain reportage or radio program, which then is produced by radio staff (commissioned production). Finally, there are some projects that support participatory radio shows that are produced by radio stations in close collaboration with the community (participatory production). However, these participatory projects seem rather rare.

Vertical and horizontal segregation

The media landscape in Burkina Faso is highly gendered. Yaméogo (2017) found that in 2016, women make up only 25% of the workforce and only 5% in positions of decision-making. And even if they are appointed to leadership positions they are mostly secondary positions linked to administration, accounting, marketing etc. and only rarely to editorial and managing positions (Yaméogo, 2017). This shows a clear glass ceiling[vii]. This situation can be partly explained by the societal norm that sees journalism as ‘incompatible with the female condition’ (Somé et al., 1998; Soré, 2012; Yaméogo, 2017). Moreover, I found indications in my dissertation that intersectional inequalities further explain why women might not access leadership positions in the media as easily. I found a high symbolic (though not legal) value of formal higher education degrees, which discourages people without these degrees to take up responsibilities within the media. Elsewhere we found that radio directors tend to hold, more often, university degrees and tend to be more literate in French, whereas particularly listeners hold, more often, non or primary school degrees but are more often literate in indigenous languages (see also Schönbächler & Yaméogo, 2022). Education, particularly secondary and university level education, is still gendered in Burkina Faso and shows a strong rural/urban divide (INSD, 2022). Hence, women journalists from rural areas are less likely to access university education and therefore less access to leadership positions in the media. It is important to note however that formal education is by no means a legal precondition for journalists to access the profession (CNPNZ, 2016). However, progression remains in the hands of a patriarchal system that impedes female leadership (Soré, 2012).

When it comes to horizontal segregation, Yaméogo (2017, 2021) illustrated that women are better represented in television (36.8%) and online media (30.30%), than in written press (20.45%); and women are particularly underrepresented and underestimated in technical positions.

For the present study, it is particularly interesting to look at media (for) development's impact on women's employment in the media. In my sample, 4 out of 10 female journalists were hired on a project, and currently, 5 female journalists work for media projects. This has contradictory effects on women's working conditions. On the one hand, it might be only thanks to project funding that journalists can be hired. For instance, a female journalist mentioned that she often got hired on different projects with different partners before the security situation deteriorated:

We had lots of partners coming to the radio. And they always wanted me to be the main presenter in this kind of projects, like radio programs, radio dramas and even animations in the villages (G, female journalist)

On the other hand, their contracts link them to the project cycles. This can be experienced as very precarious as the decision whether a project is continued or not can come very late, as this example shows:

It is a partnership they sign each year. This year, it ends on September 30. Last year there was no interruption. When it finished, they continued directly. [...] this year it ends on September 30th, I don't know if they will continue directly or not. We have to wait for the 30 September to see what will happen (K, female journalist, WhatsApp conversation on September 17th).

Moreover, being hired on a project rather than the radio itself can be a barrier to progress in the media outlet and the profession as a whole.

There is not much research in Burkina Faso that investigates gendered dynamics in media development projects. Nonetheless, the combined processes of gendered societal expectations, gender mainstreaming in development projects, and female journalist's personal commitment towards gender equality, education, and family topics are starting points to explain why female journalists more often treat "social" topics (Ramey, Sangaré Compaoré, & Damianova, 2019, p. 36; Soré, 2012). Women-specific media spaces do not automatically constitute a problem. Damome (2010), for instance, argued in the case of the women's radio Munyu, that the radio was able to constitute counter-hegemonic discourses and to contribute to gender equality thanks to its 'women's focus'. However, the problem emerges when media spaces for women are not valued equally to the male-dominated mainstream (see Ramey et al., 2019; Yaméogo, 2017). Because then the risk is big that women's spaces are cut when more airtime is needed for content that is perceived as more important or profitable. This happened to two research participants, J and K, who saw their own women's shows suspended to leave airtime for project-related shows.

Monetization of Journalism Trainings: Negative and Positive Discrimination

As Frère (2016) and Munimi Osung (2022) highlight, media development plays an important role in journalism training in sub-Saharan Africa. This is reflected in my data. Most of my interviewees are not formally trained in journalism (only one female journalist studied journalism at the university).

I have learnt everything at the radio. If partners wanted radio programs, they would send us to get trained. But the radio has never sent us to any training or school for journalism. (G, female journalist).

Therefore, media development supported trainings - despite their lack of coordination, unsystematic approach, and discrimination - are key elements of media development and contribute to the professionalization of journalists (Frère, 2016). However, training opportunities are not open to all journalists to the same extent. Women journalists seemingly agreed when

expressing their frustration of not gaining the same opportunities as their male colleagues: “It’s men only who go to training. It is only men who go”. (G, female journalist).

Apart from gender as a factor that influences decision-making related to participation in training, it seems that implicit discrimination increases existing inequalities. Several respondents mentioned that the management would send those to trainings who already know and produce their own radio shows, instead of giving the opportunity to staff members who need capacity building:

It is true that those who produce radio shows are sent to trainings. But not all the time! Also those without experience should get the chance to attend trainings so that they can also produce radio programs (J, female journalist)

This can be linked to the lack of a systematic, long-term, and strategic approach to career development and capacity building. On the other hand, it is important to note that due to the precarious economic situation of radio stations, journalists tend to move a lot and might leave to work in NGOs or PR once they were able to strengthen their competencies (Frère, 2016).

An important finding of my research is related to economic incentives and their consequences. The practice of paying per diem allowances for participating in trainings (and other activities) has led to a monetization of media development activities (Frère, 2016). This monetization affected the interests and decision-making practices related to them. Sanner and Sæbø (2014) talk about monopolizing behaviour of senior management. The data collected for my dissertation shows how gender, education, and economic interests are intersecting when it comes to deciding who participates in activities. A female journalist in maternity leave puts it very bluntly: “But the African [man] considers training only for the money, it is only the allowances that he likes” (E, female journalist). As such, trainings and media development activities are considered more for their economic advantage, as “income-enhancing” (Erasmus, Lötter, Tannous, & Stewart, 2018), than their central aim that should be capacity building.

As gendered societal role understandings attribute productive and income-generating roles to the typically male head of a household (Badini Kinda, 2018), the monetization of trainings might be disadvantaging women, as their productive role is considered secondary. This is illustrated very well by an example told by E: According to her, the former director of the radio station decided that a woman should participate in training, and she was already preparing for her trip to the capital. But at the last minute, the director changed his mind and argued that a male colleague should go to the training because his wife is sick and that he needs the money from the training to care for his hospitalized wife.

This is an example that illustrates well the general perception of discrimination expressed by almost all female journalists. However, the absence or underrepresentation of female participants in trainings and media development activities did not go unnoticed by (media) development organizations. Many have been implementing what can be called positive discrimination to promote female participation. Women journalists in my research have strongly emphasized that their chances to participate increase when the call for participation explicitly asks for female participants

If in the invitation they say that they need two or even three women, they won’t let men participate. But if the invitation does not specify, they will send two men. (E, female journalist)

Since the gender quota, all trainings are asking that there is at least one woman. Therefore, women are now benefitting from the same trainings as men (B, female journalist)

Here, the contradictory practices and effects of media development practices come to light. Whereas the economic incentive of per diems indirectly leads to untransparent decision-making processes that disadvantage women, the explicit positive discrimination counteracts these incentives, so that female journalists can also profit from capacity building and economic incentives.

Intersectional security threats

The degrading security situation in Burkina Faso heavily impacts the media system, including proximity radio stations. In the first phase, the impact was mostly felt through direct threats posed by individuals and armed groups. Many misused interactive radio shows to threaten radio stations, their staff, and their families. These threats mostly concerned content that was considered contrary to the armed groups' interests and values (Yaméogo, 2018). However, my research argues that they rarely aim at silencing the radio stations as a whole, because they also depend on the information and communications aired. Later on, governmental measures to counter terrorist-related violence, such as a law against dis/misinformation, impacted radio stations indirectly, being afraid to broadcast false information and being fined or even incarcerated because of that (see RFI, 2019; RSF, 2021). In 2021, Radio Omega FM in the capital was suspended for five days because they diffused wrong information (RFI, 2021). During the latest military coups in 2021 and 2022, media was put under pressure and mobile internet was partly cut (Yaméogo, 2022).

While these later government-related measures impact all journalists and activists similarly, Yaméogo (2017, 2018) highlighted already in 2017 the gendered dynamic of on-air threats. Therefore, I will concentrate on this issue here. There have been some cases in which female journalists have been directly addressed by threats. E tells the story how the other radio station in her locality was threatened:

[the other radio station] was targeted once. They were live on air. And someone called to, tell the husband of the woman [host], to stay at home, to look after the children etc. they do not even want to hear a woman talk on the radio, we are not even talking about shows about the school, family planning, all of that, they do not want that we talk about it (E, female journalist)

The main topics that were often targeted by armed groups include schooling, forced/early marriage, family planning, female genital mutilation and other topics related to gender, religion, or education. However, these topics are often supported or commissioned by development projects. Moreover, as mentioned above, horizontal segregation leads to more female journalists hosting, presenting, and producing these radio programs. Hence, female journalists seem to be more likely to be exposed to on-air threats.

It is important to consider terrorist-related violence and threat intersectionally. Gender, education, schooling, development and religion - topics that are highly exposed to threats - are closely linked to coloniality and colonial continuities (see Lugones, 2008/2016; Quijano, 2007).

Another aspect to consider is the participatory ideal (or paradigm) in development that is also transposed to media development (Drefs & Thomaß, 2019). This idea can explain the preference of many media (for) communication projects to include interactive components in their radio programs, such as call-in elements. However, this preference for interactive formats and the lack of refined technologies to control interaction opens the doors for armed groups and individuals to pose threats easily on air. That is why many radio stations suspended interactive radio shows (see Santos & Schönbächler, 2022).

Figure 1 shows how intersectional experiences of women journalists can be analysed through the radio formats, the topics talked about, and the threats posed. Different contexts, formats, and topics can have different implications for male and female journalists, as highlighted above. Hence, I argue that by ignoring the intersectional dynamics of the threats addressed to radio stations, media development actors are missing to understand that gender and coloniality cannot be separated from each other and shape how (women) journalists experience insecurity. Acknowledging these intersections is the first step in respecting the do-no-harm principles.

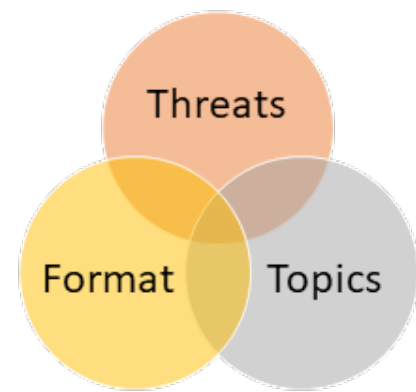


Figure 1: Elements of intersectional analysis

Discussion:

A trade-off between voice and protection

The above presentation of major research findings linked to intersectional perspectives of media (for) development projects has highlighted the following aspects: The scope and practices of a development project in Burkinabè media spheres, the vertical and horizontal segregation in the field, the contradictory practices in journalism trainings, and the intersectionality of insecurity. These aspects together render an important trade-off visible - voice vs. protection (Table 1).

Format/Production	Voice	Protection
Interactive shows	Participatory	Vulnerable to abuse
Internal productions	Control over production	Radio's responsibility
Scripted shows	Negotiated agency	Negotiated protection
External productions	No voice/agency	Responsibility externalized

Source: Own elaboration

Table 1: Voice and protection according to different approaches to media (for) development

As mentioned above, media (for) development projects make use of different content production approaches:

- participatory/interactive approaches in which the audience is an important element that shapes the content and discourses aired through call-in or participatory shows.
- Internal (commissioned) radio production where the radio station is in control of angles and production processes.
- Scripted approaches to content production are based on a written (mostly French) script that is sent to the radio stations and translated and interpreted by local radio staff. These shows at times include interactive elements, but not with the aim to control the discourses.
- External productions are radio shows that are completely pre-produced and only broadcasted by the partner radio stations.

These four approaches highlight different degrees of agency: While participatory and interactive approaches allow for the community and listeners to intervene and co-shape the content and discourses, internal production situate the responsibility and voice within the radio stations, and scripted productions only allow for a partial control over the content through the practice of translation and storytelling by local staff. External productions that are pre-produced do not offer space for local staff or listeners to intervene in the content and situate responsibility within external entities.

However, when it comes to aspects of protection and risk exposure, the tendency goes the opposite way: while participatory and interactive approaches are highly exposed to the risk of abuse through armed groups in the context of insecurity, external productions seem to protect local staff as it is neither their voices nor their responsibility that is enacted: “as it is not with our voices [...] it is not us that gives commentaries” (E, female journalist).

Scripted productions are situated in between, with local staff’s voices being heard, but limiting their responsibility over the content as it was prepared by a project or organisation.

The problem with media (for) development projects in contexts of insecurity lies in the lack of participation of local journalists in decision-making about the approaches of the projects which they then have to implement. As they are the most exposed to the risks related to the radio shows presented or hosted, media (for) development projects should include local staff in the decision-making when it comes to choosing an approach to content production.

Figure 1 above shows how intersectional experiences of women journalists can be analysed through radio formats, the topics talked about, and the threats posed. Threats are inherently linked to coloniality/gender/education/modernity. However, horizontal segregation leads to more women hosting and presenting these topics. Moreover, media (for) development approaches prefer interactive/participatory approaches and therefore increase the risk of abusive calls in live broadcasting. As such, we can see that complex intersectional dynamics result in female journalists being particularly exposed through media (for) development projects in proximity radio stations in Burkina Faso. At the same time, they are less likely to access decision-making positions (vertical segregation) and gain training opportunities.

However, this risk can be mitigated through the trade-off summarized in Table 1. Externally produced content can be a way for radio stations to talk about certain topics while at the same time limiting their staff’s exposure to risk. Yet, this option leaves them without voice and agency. There might not be a perfect solution in these complex situations.

Therefore, this article calls for intersectional analyses of insecurity that should guide the design of media (for) development projects in order to respect do-no-harm principles and to avoid increasing existing inequalities, by actively including women journalists in training programs and in decision-making related to media (for) development projects. So that the people who are actually exposed to the threats can co-decide on the risk they want to take.

Conclusion

This paper rendered unintended and contradictory effects of media (for) development projects in proximity radio stations in Burkina Faso visible through the perspective of female journalists. The broad intersectional approach allowed to perceive contextual dynamics linked to gender, coloniality, education, and economic conditions. The data indicates that media (for) development projects are omnipresent in Burkinabè media landscape, mainly through media development and media for development. Four ways in which projects engage with radio content production were

identified: participatory production, (commissioned) internal production, scripted production, and external productions. The paper illustrates the vertical and horizontal segregation that shapes work experiences and career progression of female journalists. Media (for) development indirectly contributes to horizontal segregation that assigns female journalists 'female' topics, related to social issues, 'women's issues', education, (reproductive) health etc. When it comes to journalism training, a key area of media development, contradictory dynamics came to light: on the one hand, female journalists express unequal access to training opportunities, a tendency that is aggravated through the monetization of training with per diem practices (negative discrimination); on the other hand, female journalists agree that their chances to attend trainings increase when female participation is explicitly required (positive discrimination). Finally, the paper discussed the intersectional dynamics linked to the insecurity situation in Burkina Faso. Here, gender, coloniality, and modernity are challenged by extremist groups, posing threats on air. However, horizontal segregation and interactive radio programs expose female journalists to greater risk. A trade-off is being pointed out, which trades voice/agency against protection. Hence, to respect do-no-harm principles, media (for) development should engage critically and intersectionally with this trade-off, including the exposed journalists in the decision-making over topics and formats of media (for) development radio productions.

Notes

- [i] Sophie Pataky. *Lexikon deutscher Frauen der Feder: Eine Zusammenstellung der seit dem Jahre 1840 erschienenen Werke weiblicher Autoren, nebst Biographien der lebenden und einem Verzeichnis der Pseudonyme*. Berlin: Carl Pataky Verlag, 1898 (Volume 1 und 2). https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/pataky_lexikon01_1898
- [ii] Max Osborn. *Die Frauen in Litteratur und Presse*. Berlin: Taendler, 1896. Reprint 1924 accessible online <https://dp.la/item/9db6562931f8a903850d05bece04a24b>
- [iii] Eliza Ichenhäuser. *Die Journalistik als Frauenberuf*. Berlin & Leipzig: Verlag der Frauen-Rundschau, 1905. <https://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/15823>
- [iv] You can find an overview of the three main concepts in Manyozo (2012, pp. 19–20)
- [v] Even though Manyozo (2012) considers ICT4D as an approach that transgresses the three other sub-fields of media development, media for development, and communication for social change.
- [vi] Red zones are often labelled as such by foreign offices, particularly France and US. Hagberg (2019) highlights the discursive foundation of such labels and the political interests that impact the people living in these areas, isolating them further.
- [vii] An exceptional case is Radio Munyu, a women's radio station which must be led by a female director (personal communication with the director in 2021).

References

- Abbott, S. (2019). Evaluating Success: What Should We Be Measuring? In N. Benequista, S. Abbott, P. Rothman, & W. Mano (Eds.), *Mass Communication and Journalism: Vol. 23. International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers* (pp. 42–52). New York: Peter Lang.
- Akrofi-Quarcoop, S., & Gadzekpo, A. (2020). Indigenizing radio in Ghana. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 18(1), 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1386/rjao_00018_1
- Anthias, F. (1998). Rethinking social divisions: some notes towards a theoretical framework. *The Sociological Review*, 46(3), 505–535.
- Anthias, F. (2013). Intersectional what? Social divisions, intersectionality and levels of analysis. *Ethnicities*, 13(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812463547>

- Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative media. Culture, Representation and Identity Series*. London, Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220153>
- Ba, A. (2003). Les radios de proximité en Afrique de l'Ouest. In J.-J. Cheval (Ed.), *Publications de la MSHA: Vol. 287. Audiences, publics et pratiques radiophoniques: [Actes du colloque organisé par le GRER le 30 novembre 2001 à la maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine]* (pp. 115–127). Pessac: MSHA. Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.msha.4993>
- Bâ, A. (Novembre 1999). *Situation, place et rôle des femmes dans les médias en Afrique de l'Ouest: Des obstacles à l'émergence et à l'affirmation*. Dakar.
- Badini Kinda, F. (2018). *Sociologie de la femme et du genre au Burkina Faso*. Saarbrücken: Éditions universitaires européennes.
- Bailey, O., Cammaerts, B., & Carpentier, N. (2007). *Understanding Alternative Media*. Buckingham, UNITED KINGDOM: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Balima, S. T. (1980). *La Radiodiffusion en Haute-Volta: Système Institutionnel et Évolution Socio-Culturelle* (Thèse de Doctorat). Université de Bordeaux, Bordeaux.
- Balima, S. T., & Frère, M. S. (2003). *Médias et communications sociales au Burkina Faso: Approche socio-économique de la circulation de l'information*. Collection Education et sociétés. Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan.
- Benequista, N., Abbott, S., Rothman, P., & Mano, W. (Eds.) (2019). *Mass Communication and Journalism: Vol. 23. International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bilge, S. (2019). Quand le développement international interpelle l'intersectionnalité. In C. Levy & A. Martinez (Eds.), *Développement international et mondialisation. Genre, féminismes et développement: Une trilogie en construction* (pp. 39–54). [Ottawa]: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa.
- Boafo, K. (Ed.) (2000). *Promoting Community Media in Africa*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Byerly, C. M. (2019). Gender, Research and Media Development: A Feminist Perspective on Media Structure. In N. Benequista, S. Abbott, P. Rothman, & W. Mano (Eds.), *Mass Communication and Journalism: Vol. 23. International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers* (pp. 81–92). New York: Peter Lang.
- Capitant, S. (2008). La radio en Afrique de l'Ouest, un « média carrefour » sous-estimé ? *Réseaux*, n° 150(4), 189–217. <https://doi.org/10.3917/res.150.0189>
- Carpentier, N. (2009). Participation Is Not Enough: The Conditions of Possibility of Mediated Participatory Practices. *European Journal of Communication*, 24(4), 407–420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323109345682>
- Carpentier, N. (2015). Differentiating between access, interaction and participation. *Conjunctions. Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation*, 2(2), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.7146/tjcp.v2i2.23117>
- CNPNZ (September, 2016). *Recueil des lois portant réforme du secteur de la communication au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou.
- Damome, É. (2010). Women's radio in Africa: towards a new configuration of the public sphere: The example of Radio Munyu in Banfore (Burkina Faso). *Radio Leituras*, 1(1), 171–186. Retrieved from <https://radioleituras.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/radioleituras7-11.pdf>
- Drefs, I., & Thomaß, B. (2019). The Participation Approach in Media Development Cooperation. In K. Voltmer, C. Christensen, I. Neverla, N. Stremlau, B. Thomass, N.

- Vladisavljević, & H. Wasserman (Eds.), *Media, Communication and the Struggle for Democratic Change: Case Studies on Contested Transitions* (pp. 257–280). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
- Duttenhöfer, B. (2009). Keine “quantité négligeable”: Typologie des Frauenjournalismus um 1900. *Medien & Zeit*, 24(3), 17–27. Retrieved from https://medienundzeit.at/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/MZ_2009-03.pdf
- Engel, F., & Noske-Turner, J. (Eds.) (2018). *Rethinking development. Communication in international development: Doing good or looking good?* London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Erasmus, Y., Lötter, D., Tannous, N., & Stewart, R. (2018). Reflections on per diems in international development projects: Barriers to and enablers of the project cycle. *Development Southern Africa*, 35(6), 717–730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2017.1384364>
- Fortune, F., & Chungong, C. (2013). *Community Radio, Gender and ICTs in West Africa: A Comparative Study of Women’s Participation in Community Radio Through Mobile Phone Technologies*. Carleton University, 3, 71–95. Retrieved from <https://carleton.ca/africanstudies/wp-content/uploads/6-Nokoko-3-Community-Radio-Gender-and-ICTs-in-West-Africa.pdf>
- Fraser, C., & Restrepo Estrada, S. (2001). *Community Radio Handbook*.
- Frère, M. S. (2016). *Journalismes d’Afrique*. Louvain-la-Neuve, [Belgique]: De Boeck Supérieur.
- Ganz, K., & Hausotter, J. (2020). *Intersektionale Sozialforschung. Sozialtheorie*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Geertsema-Sligh, M. (2019). Internews : A case study of gender in media development. *The Journal of International Communication*, 25(2), 206–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2019.1588141>
- Gumucio Dagrón, A. (2001). *Making waves: Stories of participatory communication for social change : A report to the Rockefeller Foundation*. New York, New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.
- Gumucio Dagrón, A. (2008). Vertical Minds versus Horizontal Cultures: An Overview of Participatory Process and Experiences. In J. Servaes (Ed.), *Communication for development and social change* (2nd ed., pp. 68–81). New Delhi, India, Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Hagberg, S. (2019). Ethnography in/of the Red Zone: Challenges, Frustrations, and Engagements. *Mande Studies*, 21, 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.2979/mande.21.1.03>
- Huesca, R. (2008). Tracing the History of Participatory Communication Approaches to Development: A Critical Appraisal. In J. Servaes (Ed.), *Communication for development and social change* (2nd ed., pp. 180–198). New Delhi, India, Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- INSD (June 2022). *Cinquième Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitation du Burkina Faso: Synthèse des Résultats Définitifs*.
- Kenix, L. J. (2011). *Alternative and mainstream media: The converging spectrum* (1. publ). London u. a.: Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849665421>
- Kidd, D. (1999). The value of alternative media. *Peace Review*, 11(1), 113–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659908426238>
- Lamizana, B., Seogo, K. H., Tiemtoré, A., Soulama, I., Semdé, O., Ouangraoua, H., . . .

- Tiemtoré, S. (Avril 2018). *Etude des Radios du Burkina Faso: Typologies, Audiences et Perspectives*. Ouagadougou.
- Lederach, J. P. (2003). *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear articulation of the guiding principles by a pioneer in the field*. New York: Good Books.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lennie, J., & Tacchi, J. (2013). *Evaluating Communication for Development: A Framework for Social Change*. Oxon: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10659450>
- Lugones, M. (2016). The Coloniality of Gender. In W. Harcourt (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development: Critical Engagements in Feminist Theory and Practice* (pp. 13–33). New York: Palgrave Macmillan (Original work published 2008).
- Manyozo, L. (2012). *Media, Communication and Development: Three Approaches*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=477303>
- Munimi Osung, M. (2022). Les radios communautaires. Canaux d'expression pour une information de proximité. *Questions contemporaines - Questions de communication*. Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan.
- Noske-Turner, J. (2017). *Rethinking Media Development Through Evaluation: Beyond Freedom*. Palgrave Studies in Communication for Social Change Ser. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2010). Re-thinking Communication Research and Development in Africa: 4th IDIA Conference 2010, UCT, Cape Town South Africa. 4th IDIA Conference, Cape Town. Retrieved from <https://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/nyamnjoh-2.pdf>
- Opubor, A. E. (2000). If Community Media is the Answer. What is the Question? In K. Bofo (Ed.), *Promoting Community Media in Africa* (pp. 11–24). Paris: UNESCO.
- Quebral, N. C. (2012). The Underside of Communication in Development. *Nordicom Review*, 33(Special-Issue), 59–64. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2013-0025>
- Quijano, A. (2007). COLONIALITY AND MODERNITY/RATIONALITY. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 168–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>
- Ramey, V., Sangaré Compaoré, N., & Damianova, D. (Octobre 2019). *Média, Accès à l'Information et aux TIC, et Émancipation des Femmes et des Filles*. Assistance Technique à la Délégation de l'UE au Burkina Faso. Ouagadougou.
- RFI (2019, June 21). Burkina: la loi controversée sur la divulgation d'information sécuritaire adoptée. Retrieved from <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20190621-burkina-faso-loi-divulgation-securite-information-attaque-terroriste>
- RFI (2021, June 9). Attaque de Solhan: Radio Oméga suspendue cinq jours par le CSC. Retrieved from <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210609-attaque-de-solhan-radio-omega-suspendue-cinq-jours-par-le-csc>
- Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2015). Re-conceptualizing the analysis of media development and trajectories hereof in post-colonial societies. *Global Media and Communication*, 11(2), 131–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766515588416>
- Rodríguez, C. (2011). *Citizens' media against armed conflict: Disrupting violence in Colombia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttvhc> <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctttvhc>

- RSF (2021, June 11). Burkinabe legislative threat to press freedom must be declared unconstitutional. Retrieved from <https://rsf.org/en/burkinabe-legislative-threat-press-freedom-must-be-declared-unconstitutional>
- RSF (2022). Africa: The different facets of Africa. Retrieved from <https://rsf.org/en/region/africa>
- Sanner, T. A., & Sæbø, J. I. (2014). Paying Per Diems for ICT4D Project Participation: A Sustainability Challenge. *Information Technologies & International Development*, 10(2), 33–47.
- Santos, F. O. dos, & Schönbächler, V. (2022). Influencing factors of “local” conflict journalism and implications for media development: A critical appraisal. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, 11(2), 189–209. https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms_00090_1
- Schönbächler, V. (June 2021). Feminist and Gender Perspectives in Literature on Media & Development (Research Reviews for Media Development Practitioners No. 1). Retrieved from Medas21 website: <https://fome.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Media-Dev-Research-Reviews-1-Gender-Perspectives.pdf>
- Schönbächler, V., & Yaméogo, L. (2022). Women Journalists in National Language Radio: A Voice to Mobilize and Foster Female Leadership. In A. Salawu, T. B. Molale, E. Uribe-Jongbloed, & M. S. Ullah (Eds.). *Indigenous language for development communication in the global South* (pp. 103–118). Lexington Books.
- Scott, M. (2014). *Media and Development*. New York: Zed Books.
- Servaes, J. (1996, January). Participatory Communication (Research) from a Freirean Perspective. *African Media Review*, 10(1), 73–91.
- Somé, S. O., Kaboré, F., & Ilboudo, M. (Avril 1998). *Place des Femmes dans les Médias au Burkina Faso: Enquête Nationale*. Bamako.
- Soré, R. (2008). *The Murder of Norbert Zongo: A history of investigative journalism in Burkina Faso* (Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper). Retrieved from University of Oxford website: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/The%2520Murder%2520of%2520Norbert%2520Zongo%2520-%2520A%2520history%2520of%2520investigative%2520journalism%2520in%2520Burkina%2520Faso.pdf>
- Soré, R. (2012). *La femme au Burkina Faso: Sujet et acteur dans les médias*. Saarbrücken: Éditions universitaires européennes.
- Tudesq, A. J. (2002). *L'Afrique parle, l'Afrique écoute: Les radios en Afrique subsaharienne. Hommes et sociétés*. Paris: Éd. Karthala.
- Vokes, R. (2018). *Media and Development*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- White, S. A., Nair, S., & Ashcroft, J. (Eds.) (1994). *Participatory Communication: Working for Change and Development*. New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications.
- Winker, G., & Degele, N. (2009). *Intersektionalität: Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten. Sozialtheorie*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Yaméogo, L. (2017). Place et Image des Femmes dans les Médias Burkinabè. In CNPNZ (Ed.), *Rapport 2016 sur l'état de la liberté de la presse au Burkina Faso: Incluant l'étude sur "Place et image des femmes dans les médias burkinabè"* (pp. 94–151). Ouagadougou,
- Yaméogo, L. (2018). Radiodiffusions et extrémisme violent: autopsie d'un journalisme assiégé. In CNPNZ (Ed.), *Rapport sur l'état de la liberté de la presse 2017: Suivi de l'Etude sur "Radiodiffusions et extrémisme violent: autopsie d'un journalisme assiégé"* (pp. 106–155). Ouagadougou,
- Yaméogo, L. (2021). Genre et technologie dans le journalisme. Sur *Le Journalisme*, About

Journalism, *Sobre Jornalismo*, 10(1), 128. <https://doi.org/10.25200/SLJ.v10.n1.2021.442>

Yaméogo, L. (Octobre 2022). État de la liberté de la presse au Burkina Faso en 2021: Suivi de l'étude "Crise humanitaire et médias: regards croisés sur le traitement journalistique des PDI par les médias nationaux et locaux". Ouagadougou.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and Feminist Politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 193–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065752>

Notes on the Contributor

Schönbächler Viviane is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department for Journalism and Communication Studies of the University of Hamburg. She holds a PhD from the Institute for Media Studies at RuhrUniversity Bochum. Her dissertation investigates the role of women radio journalists in conflict transformation processes in Burkina Faso. She holds a masters degree in International Peace, Conflict, and Development Studies from Universitat Jaume I, Castellón and a bachelor's degree in International Relations from University of Geneva. Her research interests include gender media studies, media and conflict, journalism studies, digital security, intersectional research methodologies. ✉ viviane.schoenbaechler@uni-hamburg.de



Communication and Culture Review

2021, Vol. 4, No.1&2, 19-30

ISSN: 2582-2829

Nurturing Linguistic Diversity in Grassroots: Possibilities of Community Media in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages

Hazeena T

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which community media in India engages with the languages of indigenous communities and reasserts the case for leveraging its potential to nurture those tongues in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. In doing so, it presents a case study of Radio Kotagiri, a community radio in the Nilgiris district in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu. The paper draws its data from a broader ethnographic study conducted in 2021. To situate the arguments, the paper also comes into a dialogue with scholarship on language attrition, community media, media anthropology and minority media studies. Through three thematic sub-sections in the discussion, the paper demonstrates the community media practices in relation to indigenous languages in the local context and the implications of such practices for its stakeholders.

Keywords: Community Media, Indigenous Languages, Adivasi Communities, The Nilgiris.

Introduction

The United Nations general assembly announced the decade 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to emphasise the vulnerable state of languages of many indigenous communities worldwide and called for mobilising resources to revitalise and promote those tongues. It is primarily an outcome of the activities as part of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, especially the Los Pinos declaration. This action plan was put together by participants from 50 countries in a high-level event collaboratively organised by UNESCO and Mexico in February 2020. The preamble of the Los Pinos Declaration foregrounds the importance of language diversity in a spectrum of domains such as knowledge production, understanding human relations with nature, social cohesion, and co-existence. It also reaffirms the right provisions in various other international declarations, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People in 2007, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1966 concerning languages.

Furthermore, human rights and sustainable development frameworks are repeatedly invoked in the Los Pinos Declaration to situate the action plan. It also invited UNESCO to be the lead agency for the proposed decade-long project. Even though the objective of reversing the critical condition of indigenous languages by the end of this plan seems far-fetched, a global-scale intervention stressing the indigenous language vulnerability is highly demanded by many quarters of society. The declaration stresses appropriating technologies, media and the digital in its points listed from 36 to 40 as tools to aid the larger goals of indigenous language empowerment.

It is relevant here to recall that by the end of the 20th century, indigenous people in Australia, North America and Latin America pioneered using media technologies to address their interests which Ginsburg (2008) refers to as cultural activism. Writing on Inuit television, Ginsburg (2002) observes that,

For them, these media practices are part of their broader project of constituting a cultural future in which their traditions and contemporary technologies are combined in ways that can give new vitality to Inuit life. (p. 43)

Thus, integrating the possibilities of media technologies is a strategic move indigenous people adopt to expand their broader struggles concerning territory, culture, language, knowledge, dignity and sovereignty (Belotti, 2022; Ginsburg, 2002; Prins, 2002). The arguments put forth by scholars regarding media democratisation also address the right of people to communicate in their languages using media tools owned and managed by local communities as a response to the dominant capitalistic media order. Given this background, this paper offers an account of community media in India foregrounding its engagements with indigenous languages through discussing a case study of Radio Kotagiri. By doing so, the paper reaffirms the possibilities that exist in community media in the realm of supporting indigenous languages. Qualitative data for the present paper is drawn from a broader ethnographic study conducted by the author in 2021.

Before moving forward, this paper must acknowledge the ambiguities that exist in universally defining indigenous people. A comprehensive analysis of discourses about it is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, as scholars demonstrated, it is critical to realise that conversations around indigenouness encompass the provisions of pursuing a set of aspirations or grievances by groups (Kingsbury, 1998) and more that have immediate consequences on their

lives. This paper uses the term indigenous interchangeably with Adivasis, officially categorised as scheduled tribes in India. The next section of the paper presents a brief overview of the literature on community media.

Locating Community Media

It is difficult to pinpoint one comprehensive definition of community media because of the various ways it has been theorised and practised worldwide. My use of community media in this paper encompasses an umbrella of terms such as citizens' media, alternative media, grassroots media, indigenous media, ethnic media and radical media used by various scholars to refer to the employment of media technologies by lay people and marginalised groups who often lack access to communication infrastructures otherwise. Appropriation of mass media technologies by communities reflects a broad spectrum of objectives, historical trajectories, functioning models and so forth (Raghunath, 2020). Raghunath (2020) writes that some common characteristics of community media include ownership and management by a geographically or otherwise defined community, primarily working as a third tier of media outside the public and private, non-profit model of functioning, and facilitating communities' right to communicate.

During the late 20th century, substantial global disparities in international communication became a hot topic of debate, especially after the MacBride report in 1980. The democratisation of communicative structures through different means was proposed by many to lessen this inequality in a growing globalised world (Rodriguez, 2001). Debates spearheaded by countries known as the third world then suggested New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) as a political project to claim their communicative rights in the international arena. Even though NWICO failed afterwards, it invigorated people to find ways to confront and transform communicative disparities suffered by the poor and marginalised nations and groups. In addition to the failure of the international community to intervene in the unbalanced structure, 'third world' countries succumbed to the modernising pressure whereby they opened their doors to privatising media and communication.

Rodriguez (2001) notes that it is the defeat of both international agencies and national governments that made scholars think about a different route, and "the new perspective visualised social movements and grassroots organisations and their alternative media as the new key players in the processes of democratisation of communication" (p. 14). This alternative communicative infrastructure was about alternative content (contextual/local/community's interest/ignored issues by national and private media) and alternative ways of existing (community participation/non-profit making/horizontal communication).

In this sense, community media was envisioned as platforms that hold the principles of democracy and diversity against the homogenisation tendencies of globalisation. Scholars in the field also locate community media within the framework of communicative rights, where these infrastructures become sites for the marginalised and poor to raise their voices and concerns (Raghunath, 2020). In addition, community media also received much attention within the development discourse, in which it was anticipated to aid the development interests of the states and international agencies. Community media in social change communication also came to life to counter the diffusion models of development communication premised on behavioural changes (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). Among the many forms of media, radio became quite popular in the community media scene worldwide because of its flexibility and affordability. What we now recognise as the earliest community media experiments were done with radio (O'Conner, 1990).

In India, media was the monopoly of the state up until the 1990s. The Indian broadcasting sector has been influenced by its historical relations to colonialism. The state broadcaster All India Radio (AIR) was set up by the British colonial rulers in 1930. And it remained the only broadcaster in the country until the late 1990s. Following independence, AIR was used to promote the national government's development agendas for modernising the country (Backhaus, 2019). In 1999, the Indian government opened the radio spectrum to private players amidst many communities, activists and civil society organisations advocating for the rights of communities to own and operate radios (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). Nearly a decade after the historic ruling by the apex court of India declaring airwaves as public property in 1995, the union government allowed established educational institutions to run community radios. It received criticism from community radio advocates in the country for diluting community radio's philosophy. The persistent effort by various stakeholders continued campaigning for communities' rights to communication. In 2006 the union cabinet approved the policy draft allowing civil society organisations to apply for licences for community radios in India. According to the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 290 community radios are operational across India, catering to diverse communities. The real-world operations of community radio in India are far from the perfect picture because of many reasons, mainly political and economic. There are scholars whose works offer a critical look at the practice of community radio in India (Backhaus, 2022; Pavarala, 2020). Nonetheless, it remains relevant for many marginalised communities as a medium that carries their voice, however limited it might be.

Language Attrition; Causes and Consequences

Among all the languages identified so far, 4000 are spoken by indigenous people worldwide. It is remarkable considering the fact that the indigenous population amounts to just six per cent of the global population. Toth (2022), writing on the death of indigenous languages, notes that we live in a time of mass extinction of languages, particularly indigenous languages that are vanishing at a rate of one every two weeks. Some predictions anticipate the disappearance of half of the identified languages by 2100 and 95 per cent by the end of the century (Toth, 2022). Inuit languages spoken in the Arctic region and aboriginal languages in Australia are examples of languages on the verge of disappearance (Moseley, 2007; Toth, 2022). While facing this grim reality, we must pursue some basic questions to understand why we should be bothered about language attrition. In human societies, language is not only a communication tool but also part of their distinctive group identities, culture and knowledge about the world around them (Toth, 2022). It is through the languages communities pass their knowledge about their habitats and kinships among others from one generation to another. People have written about indigenous languages and their close relations with the knowledge of the communities' natural habitats; thus, language attrition significantly affects ecological knowledge embedded in specific languages (LaPier, 2018; Nations, 2015; Sax, 2019).

...speakers of languages indigenous to a particular area tend to have a unique and intimate knowledge of the flora and fauna and the natural resources of their own habitat, one which often outstrips the widespread Western languages in its ability to divide up and classify the natural world. This would be reason enough for their preservation if language was just the business of naming things; but language is much more than that. It also reflects man's affective relation to the perceived cosmos... (Moseley, 2007, p. xii)

Another critical question is how languages are disappearing, and there has been considerable growth in scholarly interest in this question. Understanding the phenomenon of language attrition became necessary because of the unprecedented rate at which languages have

been disappearing in the last couple of decades. Janson (2002), illustrating the history of languages, writes that languages are not stable entities but constantly emerging and shifting ones. Minor languages face enormous pressures from the dominant languages, and the death of a language means people change from one language to another, not the elimination of communities in most cases (Janson, 2002). There are times when natural calamities and outbreaks of epidemics severely affect already low-populated communities, thereby, their languages too (Moseley, 2007). Reasons for the diminishing state of an indigenous language can mostly be a combination of causes than just one. In the *Encyclopaedia of World's Endangered Languages*, Moseley (2007) argues that the immediate reason for language attrition is "knowledge of the language as a tool of everyday communication is not being passed from one generation to another" (p. viii). In other words, it loses currency as a means of communication over generations and gradually ceases to exist in the practical realm of mundane life. Another reason he cites is the nationalist projects which are always carried out at the cost of many minority languages. In such situations, a handful of dominant languages receive patronage from the state, which puts tremendous pressure on other languages. Unlike the direct prohibition we witnessed in colonial times, the state weakens minor languages by excluding them in education, media, official proceedings and so forth (Moseley, 2007). It gets complicated when in some countries such as Mali and Nigeria a few major indigenous languages are embraced as part of the nationalist vision while the state turns its back on other indigenous languages. And then there are what Devy (2014) calls mega-languages, one or a few globally dominant languages taught in schools countrywide, such as English in the Indian context. Writing on language decline, Devy (2014) notes that,

Sub-national languages or the 'regional languages', in turn, have learnt to expect the migration of yet smaller language communities within their fold as a natural result of 'development', while they themselves feel uneasy in the face of the increasing influence of the 'mega-languages' and the 'national languages.' Thus, quite a hierarchy of fears and anxieties seems to have besieged languages all over the world. (p.31)

The language was always on the list of first casualties whenever a group wanted to dominate others. Colonialism is widely critiqued for its efforts in stripping people from their relations with their cultural and communal life, which the coloniser considered savage. Veronelli (2015), writing on the colonality of language, argues that by reducing colonised to a less than human being status, they were also relegated as people without any "complex form of communication, that means language" (p. 113). Settler colonialism in Canada is an appropriate example that shows how indigenous communities are systematically alienated from their cultural life, including languages, at the pretence of the welfare of those communities. Toth (2022) writes that, through the structure of residential schools for more than one and half centuries starting from 1831, the Canadian government separated indigenous kids from their parents and communities, disabling them from participating in their cultures and learning from them. Consequences of this displacement included trauma, illness, death, cultural alienation, and loss of languages. Fontaine (2010), a former chief of Sagkeeng First Nation, recalls his residential school years in his autobiographical book *Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools* and writes that,

The system was designed by the federal government to eliminate First Nations people from the face of our land and country, to rob the world of a people simply because our values and beliefs did not fit theirs. The system was racist and based on the assumption that we were not human but rather part animal, to be desavaged and moulded into something we could never become-white. (p. 20)

In contemporary times, small communities who face enormous pressures to find means to survive often shift to dominant languages, which they see as a possible way out from their precarious conditions. In the Indian context, Devy (2014) observes that there is a social pressure to increase engagements with ‘mega-language’ (English) and major official language (Hindi) at the cost of other languages to ensure livelihood, and it is felt by both ‘small’ languages as well as some major regional languages with well-established literary traditions. Only languages with the script were counted when India formed linguistic states post-independence. It was followed by these languages being implemented in educational structures of schools and colleges. With the 1971 Indian census, the authorities stopped listing languages spoken by less than 10000 people in the national census and put all such languages under a single category named ‘Others’ (Devy, 2008). Many of the languages that are lumped under this category belong to Adivasi communities in India. According to the 2011 census, 41 languages are on the verge of extinction, and many others are endangered.

Furthermore, the penetration of urbanisation and market economy drastically transformed the lives of Adivasi communities along with their land, language, and culture. Their languages, being small fishes in the vast sea, started losing their grip because of different combinations of reasons in each case of language attrition. As Devy (2008) writes,

The communities that are already marginalised within their local or national contexts, the ones that are already a minority within their cultural contexts, the ones that have already been dispossessed of their ability to voice their concerns, are obviously placed at the frontline of the phonocide. (para. 8)

Considering the vulnerable state of many Adivasi languages, civil society organisations and right-based groups are actively working on language sustenance and preservation through several means, including the formation of scripts (Devy, 2008).

The Multilingual Context of Radio Kotagiri

Radio Kotagiri, located in the Nilgiris (meaning Blue Mountains) is a community radio launched in 2013 by Keystone Foundation, a non-profit organisation primarily working in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve region. According to the 2019-20 annual report of the parent organisation, the objectives of their community media unit include strengthening the agency of communities in and through media and supporting storytelling via various mediums. The Nilgiris district, where the radio is situated, is part of the Western Ghats mountain chain, making it an ecologically rich and vulnerable geography. In addition to its environmental significance, it inhabits several Adivasi communities that come under the official category of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. Apart from those, Badagas, the largest ethnolinguistic community, have historically co-existed with Adivasis in the upper elevations of the Blue Mountains. Their presence makes Badaga an important local language in the region. The place witnessed large-scale migration from the plains following the British occupancy of the hills. Hence, one would find a bouquet of languages being spoken by various groups currently residing here, including Malayalam and Kannada.

The parent organisation of Radio Kotagiri has several decade-long interactions with Irula, Kurumba^[1], Toda and Kota Adivasi communities in the hills. All of these communities have their own languages belonging to the Dravidian family, which do not have scripts.

Because of the small population of these communities, their tongues are currently spoken by only a few thousand people. For instance, according to the 2010-11 survey of the Tribal Research Center, Ooty, 1370 is the Toda population, excluding a small number converted to Christianity (Sathyanarayanan, 2011). Toda, Kota, Kurumba and Irula languages are listed as endangered by various institutions and projects, including the Encyclopaedia of World's Endangered Languages (Moseley, 2007). Even when expressing strong optimism regarding their language survival, these communities are also aware of the intergenerational changes happening to their languages. Loss of language is looked at with great concern because most of them consider language as an essential part of their community identity. In conversations, the declining use of tongues in everyday practice is often mentioned by community members as a worrisome pattern. Knowing multiple languages is an essential skill for the Adivasi communities here due to the inevitable inter-community exchanges that take place on a day-to-day basis.

Thus, Tamil, the dominant vernacular language becomes the link language in this geography. Tamil or English is the medium available for schooling consequently kids from these communities achieve competency in these languages through their schooling. Achieving proficiency in these dominant languages is important for people to enter job markets or other public domains. Moreover, from a very young age, they are exposed to media content in Tamil and other languages while they have rare or no option of media in their own languages. Therefore, most often the Adivasi languages have currency only within their villages/communities. According to several community members, social changes such as migration to urban areas and transformations in their relationship with the surrounding ecology also contribute to linguistic changes. While having a strong practical approach to multilingualism, community members do feel uneasiness about the transformations at the cost of their language.

Radio Kotagiri was started as an addition to the community media facilitated by the parent organisation, such as a newsletter run by Adivasi communities in the hills. It has a radius of 15 kilometres around Kotagiri town, covering a few Adivasi settlements. As a community radio situated in a multilingual geography, it engages with more than half a dozen languages, including Tamil, Badaga, Toda, Kota, Irula, and Kurumba. In its initial days, they used to broadcast a considerable share of their programs about Adivasi communities, including their songs, stories, music, interviews and so on.

However, the limited reach of the radio in the surrounding Adivasi villages turned out to be an issue. Even though the team tried narrowcasting to circumvent this limitation, it did not see anticipated success due to insufficient human and material resources. Over the years, the radio expanded its scope to a broad spectrum of themes, including biodiversity, organic agriculture and health, while remaining committed to giving room for content in Adivasi languages and communities. For example, to date, they broadcast folk songs and music in Adivasi and other local languages instead of cine songs. The team now uses a few social media to expand their reach to interested audiences beyond 15 kilometres. Even though the team running the radio kept changing throughout these years, broadcasters from the Adivasi communities always have been part of its operations along with other locals. In the current team, the most experienced broadcaster of Radio Kotagiri belongs to the Irula community.

Discussion

The following thematic sections attempt to capture the ways in which everyday practices of Radio Kotagiri involve interactions with multiple Adivasi languages in their context and how it is being experienced by different participants. The discussion is spread out into three subsections

through which the paper illustrates the potential of community media in supporting indigenous languages in their local contexts.

Media Making in Indigenous Languages

When you get into the station of Radio Kotagiri, you see many things on its wall, pasted or hung. It includes a few accolades won by the radio for its programming over the years. There are two laminated certificates hung on top of the adjacent sides of the door opening to the recording room. When I saw it for the first time, I immediately noted in my mind that I should ask about what those are, and later I got a chance to listen to its story from one of the broadcasters. It was an award from Commonwealth Educational Media Center for Asia for their programs on Kota pottery in 2016. It was done by a Kota broadcaster in their language, discussing the various issues about the sustenance of their traditional craft with a brief introduction in Tamil by another broadcaster. For its production, the broadcaster interviewed his community members, recording their voices regarding the matter. It is one example of many similar programmes the radio has been doing since its inception. In doing so, the radio allowed indigenous communities in the context to make media content in their languages about themes that matter to them. As Pietikäinen (2008) argued,

Participatory programs in endangered languages create a vibrant Indigenous-language domain where one's own language can be used and heard: a public proof that one's own language is good and vital enough to be used in the media context and by new generations of speakers. (p.209)

To locate the relevance of such media making in indigenous languages in India, we have to look at the larger media environment in the country. Like many other minoritized languages across the world, Adivasi languages hardly find any space in dominant media in India, even when their population, as per the last census data, is 104 million (Dutta, 2016). Dutta's (2016) paper on Adivasi media in India illustrates the marginal presence of Adivasi-led/based media operating across forms. However, in the same article, he comments about the role of community media in foregrounding the issues of several Adivasi communities. He attributes a part of the credit to its participatory nature. His observations agree with Pavarala and Malik (2007), who wrote about the nurturing capacity of community radio concerning local languages and culture. Continuing the conversation, the recent article of Belavadi and Jena (2022) demonstrates how Radio Dhimsa in Koraput of the Eastern Indian state of Odisha safeguards the cultural and linguistic interests of the Desia-speaking community.

In many ways, safeguarding linguistic diversity was conceptualised as a function of community media from its early days. For instance, discussing the rights-based approach to communication, Pavarala and Malik (2007) note that all such articulations share the view that state or private entities should not monopolise communicative infrastructures such as mass media; instead, they should serve the communities and their plural and diverse cultures and languages. Pastapur Declaration of 2000, one of the earliest documents on community radio advocacy in India, recites the Milan Declaration on Communicative and Human Rights which asserts the media's responsibility to sustain the diversity of languages. Along the same lines, the definition of World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC Asia-Pacific) also foregrounds community radio's role in mediating communication in local languages.

In the case of Radio Kotagiri, observations from the field also suggest that it actively welcomes creative expressions in Adivasi languages, which seldom find a place in any other media. For instance, there was a song about Corona in the Toda language made by the

community members that got broadcasted on Radio Kotagiri during the crisis. Such actions spotlight the creative capabilities of Adivasi languages and invigorate the community to indulge in many more of those. Apart from these, the music and songs of the Adivasis in the hills sourced from the communities are frequently played on this radio. It also facilitates storytelling in these indigenous tongues by the communities as well. By doing so, these languages find a space of engagement beyond the boundaries of the villages and communities.

Radio Kotagiri also supports a Wi-Fi radio named Kwol Radio facilitated by Keystone Foundation formed from its collaborations with several other actors. It operates in an Irula village in the Nilgiris and broadcasts in the Irula language managed entirely by the young people from the village for their consumption. By providing assistance to Kwol Radio's operations, Radio Kotagiri takes part in the decentralisation of communication technologies that allow communities to customise media in their language to act on their interests. Given all these, it is fair to interpret the engagements of Radio Kotagiri about the content in indigenous languages as a form of cultural activism (Ginsburg, 2008), whereby the languages are exposed to enhanced communication possibilities.

Amplifying the Linguistic Diversity

Responding to my question regarding the benefits of having a community radio, a listener said that it allowed him to learn that people in the hills speak different languages. Adding to that, he also mentioned how listening to Radio Kotagiri made him realise that all natives of Tamil Nadu do not speak Tamil as their first language. This particular listener from the neighbouring district happened to get Radio Kotagiri accidentally and liked listening to it, and later became a participant. Similarly, for several listeners of Radio Kotagiri, it is a space that allows them to get to know and appreciate the linguistic diversity of the hills. According to them, their exposure to cultural expressions in indigenous languages is scarce due to the lack of avenues. Therefore, Radio Kotagiri broadcasting in indigenous languages bridges this gap through which non-indigenous people in and around the place get exposure to those tongues. Furthermore, it also reinforces the pride in the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of a place like Nilgiris in its inhabitants. In other words, it builds a sense of community that embraces the diversity that exists within it.

Talking about the feedback from the audience, one broadcaster explained how he received positive responses from listeners regarding the music they play in local languages and how the audience demands its continuation. Even when a section of the audience wants film songs to be broadcasted, the radio team double downs on its stand on playing folk and indigenous music because they believe that community radio must prioritise local cultures and, thus, local languages. In this way, it expands the scope of everyday engagements with indigenous languages in a sense where these languages become part of the listener's mundane media experience, both indigenous and non-indigenous people.

The Language Reservoir

Pietikäinen (2008) discusses the concept of language reservoir in connection with the implications of Sami media that turns into a site of remembrance in practice. By becoming a language reservoir, Sami media enables the 'reliving and transmitting' of everything that is braided in the Sami language. Drawing on that metaphor, here I suggest that Radio Kotagiri also acts as a language reservoir of Adivasi languages in its specific context. Over the years, Radio Kotagiri has accumulated a large pool of audio materials resourced from Adivasi communities, both in Adivasi languages and not. Hence, it becomes a space where these communities can come back

and listen to those recordings. In addition to that, the radio team was also open to communities utilising the infrastructure to record whatever communities wanted for themselves. In other words, it extends support to make community repositories of content in their languages.

Before moving into the conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the scarce resources with which Radio Kotagiri runs its day-to-day operations, like most community media out there. It limits what can be done through the medium in many ways. For example, one of the broadcasters I interviewed was very much interested in the multilingual production of programs which is not feasible at the moment due to financial constraints. Even when the possibilities of engagements concerning diverse languages exist, financial resources to actualise the ideas seem out of reach in the community media scene. It certainly demands more attention from concerned institutions, groups, and policy bodies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrate how community media engages with indigenous languages in the Indian context by presenting a case study of Radio Kotagiri from the Southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. In doing so, it showed how mundane practices in community media create positive effects on Adivasi languages. Although not a panacea for the linguistic vulnerabilities experienced by indigenous languages, the discussed case study reasserts the possibilities of leveraging community media spaces to support indigenous languages in India. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages seems a promising time to pay more attention to this possibility.

Even though the paper only discusses the case study of a radio community media is more than that in practice. Marginalised communities committed to cultural and linguistic causes have been using various mediums to aid their struggles. One recent example from India would be Asur Adivasi Mobile Radio, established in 2010 in the Eastern Indian state of Jharkhand. The objective of the initiative was to put media to address the diminishing state of the culture and language of Asurs, a particularly vulnerable tribal group in the state. The objectives of this radio include popularising the language and culture of the tribal community and preserving it for the coming generations. Its team records programs and broadcasts them through loudspeakers in public places. The exponential rise of digital penetration in India will only add more to the opportunities in the community media landscape.

Notes

- [1] Even though official machineries treat Kurumba as a single community, it consists of different Kurumba groups such as Alu Kurumba, Jenu Kurumba and Bettu Kurumba. Much of the Kurumba community members that work with Keystone Foundation belong to Alu Kurumba (field observation).

References

- Backhaus, B. (2021). *Polyphony: Listening to the Listeners of Community Radio*. Routledge.
- Barik, S. (2020, February 15). Radio Aids Revival of Dying Tribal Language. *The Hindu*. Retrieved November 2022, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/radio-aids-revival-of-dying-tribal-language/article30831074.ece>
- Belavadi, V., & Jena, A. (2022). Reinforcing Desia Culture Through Community Radio: A Cultural Analysis of Radio Dhimsa in Koraput, Odisha. In A. Kaushik & A. Suchiang (Eds.), *Narratives and New Voices from India* (Vol. 8, Ser. Communication, Culture and Change in Asia, pp. 73–83). Springer.
- Belhiah, H., Majdoubi, M., & Safwate, M. (2020). Language revitalisation through the media: A case study of Amazigh in Morocco. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*,

2020(266), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-2114>

Belotti, F. (2022). *Indigenous Media Activism in Argentina*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Cassels, M. (2019). Indigenous languages in new media: Opportunities and challenges for language revitalisation. *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria*, 29(1), 25–43.

Chikaipa, V., & Gunde, A. M. (2020). The Role of Community Radio in Promotion of Indigenous Minority Languages and Cultures in Malawi. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 28(2), 327–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2020.1751633>

Cormack, M. (2007). The Media and Language Maintenance. In M. Cormack & N. Hourigan (Eds.), *Minority Language Media: Concepts, Critiques and Case Studies* (pp. 52–68). essay, *Multilingual Matters*.

Devy, G. N. (2008, October). Indigenous Languages. Retrieved November 2022, from https://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_ganesh_n_devy.htm

Devy, G. N. (2014). *The being of Bhasha: A General Introduction*. Orient Blackswan Private Limited.

Dutta, U. (2016). Adivasi Media in India: Relevance in Representing Marginalised Voices. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, (3), 213–231.

Fontaine, T. (2010). The Menage. In *Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: a Memoir* (pp. 13–20). Heritage House.

Fraser, C., & Estrada, S. R. (2001). *Community Radio Handbook*. UNESCO.

Ginsburg, F. D. (2002). Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media. In F. D. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod, & B. Larkin (Eds.), *Media worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (pp. 39–57). The University of California Press.

Ginsburg, F. (2008). Rethinking the Digital Age. In P. Wilson & M. Stewart (Eds.), *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics* (pp. 287–305). Duke University Press.

Janson, T. (2013). How Languages Disappear. In *Speak a short history of languages* (pp. 232–250). Oxford University Press.

Kingsbury, B. (1998). “Indigenous Peoples” in International Law: A Constructivist Approach to the Asian Controversy. *American Journal of International Law*, 92(3), 414–457. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2997916>

LaPier, R. R. (2018, October 5). How the Loss of Native American Languages Affects Our Understanding of the Natural World. *The Conversation*. Retrieved November 2022, from <https://theconversation.com/how-the-loss-of-native-american-languages-affects-our-understanding-of-the-natural-world-103984>

Lhawa, Y. (2019). Language Revitalisation, Video, and Mobile Social Media: A Case Study from the Khroskyabs Language amongst Tibetans in China. *Language Documentation & Conservation*, 13, 564–579. Retrieved 2022, from <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/24902>.

Los Pinos Declaration [chapoltepek] lays the foundations for global planning for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. UNESCO. (2020, July 21). Retrieved November 2022, from <https://en.unesco.org/news/pinos-declaration-chapoltepek-lays-foundations-global-planning-international-decade-indigenous>

Moseley, C. (2007). General Introduction. In *Encyclopedia of the World’s Endangered Languages* (pp. vii–xvi). Routledge.

Nations, J. D. (2015). *Naming the Dragonfly | Why Indigenous Languages Matter in the*

21st Century. *Langscape Magazine*. Retrieved 2022, from <https://medium.com/langscape-magazine/naming-the-dragonfly-why-indigenous-languages-matter-in-the-21st-century-885025c8cbc1>.

O'Connor, A. (1990). The Miners' Radio Stations in Bolivia: A Culture of Resistance. *Journal of Communication*, 40(1), 102–110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1990.tb02254.x>

Pavarala, V., & Malik, K. K. (2007). *Other voices: The Struggle for Community Radio in India*. Sage Publications.

Pavarala, V. (2020). Beyond the Development Trap: NGOisation of Community Radio in India. In K. K. Malik & V. Pavarala (Eds.), *Community Radio in South Asia: Reclaiming the Airwaves* (pp. 103–116). Routledge.

Pietikäinen, S. (2008). "To Breathe Two Airs": Empowering Indigenous Sámi Media. In P. Wilson & M. Stewart (Eds.), *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics* (pp. 197–213). Duke University Press.

Prins, H. E. L. (2002). Visual Media and the Primitivist Perplex: Colonial Fantasies, Indigenous Imagination, and Advocacy in North America. In F. D. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod, & B. Larkin (Eds.), *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain* (pp. 58–74). The University of California Press.

Raghunath, P. (2020). Media Policy Studies and Community Media. In *Community Radio Policies in South Asia* (pp. 1–46). Palgrave Macmillan.

Rodriguez, C. (2001). From Alternative Media to Citizens' Media. In *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media* (pp. 1–39). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Sathyanarayanan, C. R. (2011). (rep.). *Scheduled Tribes of Nilgiris District*. Tribal Research Centre.

Sax, S. (2019, July 2). For Ecuador's Sápara, saving the forest means saving their language. *Mongabay Environmental News*. Retrieved November 2022, from <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/07/for-ecuadors-sapara-saving-the-forest-means-saving-their-language/>

Toth, K. (2022, January 19). The Death and Revival of Indigenous Languages. *Harvard International Review*. Retrieved November 2022, from <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-death-and-revival-of-indigenous-languages/>

Veronelli, G. A. (2015). The Coloniality of Language: Race, Expressivity, Power, and the Darker Side of Modernity. *Wagadu*, 13, 108–134.

Notes on the Contributor

Hazeena is a PhD Fellow in the Department of Communication at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India.



Citizen expression and engagement in an authoritarian context

Billel Aroufoune
Michel Durampart

ABSTRACT

Starting with the so-called smile revolution that floods the Algerian streets every Tuesday and Friday, with the strong mobilization of students and teachers (Tuesday) on one hand, and citizens from all sides (Friday) on the other, this contribution focuses on citizen mobilization and forms of expression of the revolt. For us, these forms of expression lead to structure and form a new space of demand, commitment, position-taking and, more particularly, participation in socio-political life. This space would be for us the establishment of a democratic framework, in the sense that Algerians would wonder about an alternative to their daily political life, which has been stagnating for decades. Thus, we suggest, through an X-ray of materials collected on the Web, via some social media, to understand how contestations, in their different compositions, form a “new” partial public space that is structured and mature, comparable to the polis of ancient Greece. These forms of claiming show both complementarities and asymmetries between digital communication and the physical contestation in place that re-appropriate public spaces that are often confiscated, framed or fenced off. It is in this interlacing that we will have to specify between distanced action and action in presence, we make the hypothesis that manifestations of expression occur that signal a form of citizen public space emerging in Mediterranean societies. These can renew with participative, claiming, and citizen movements that prove to be complex and often controlled or even fought or denied.

Keywords: Citizen mobilization, Digital space, Mediterranean area, Policy commitment, representations.

“The difference between tyranny and authoritarian government has always been that the tyrant governs according to his will and interest, while even the most draconian of authoritarian governments is bound by laws”.

Hannah Arendt, 1954.

The succession of popular movements in Algeria between ruptures and the permanence of authoritarianism

The events in Algeria since February 2019, the Hirak, are not “historic” as some commentators put it. On the other hand, it is true that they, along with other historical episodes, constitute the limits of the resilience of the Algerian people. Let us mention some of the events that have marked this society: the ‘Berber Spring’ of 1980 – known for the identity claims of the Kabyles and particularly the demand to make the Amazigh language official –, the riots of October 1988, demanding the end of the single party and the liberation of the citizen and popular voice, the countless demonstrations against the representation of the deposed president, Bouteflika, repressed cogently. At the same time, the solutions suggested by the Algerian state to deal with each conflicting circumstance were failures. Following the example of the promise of opening up to a multi-party system and the concrete implementation of a democratic transition, in fact ‘there has been no alternation and the same regime that emerged from independence in 1962 still remains in place’ (Addi, 2017).

During the Arab revolutions of 2011 (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya...), the international community was waiting, with its eyes riveted on these Arab areas across the Mediterranean, for the reaction of the Algerian ‘street’. Thus, several foreign (Western) media foreshadowed an awakening, a spring, demonstrations in Algeria. In reality, this was on the fringes of the Tunisian and Egyptian protests, but the state and the Bouteflika regime had prepared for it, especially since an economic crisis was ravaging the country. In April 2019 Bouteflika gave a speech on public television (ENTV) in which he announced several reforms in terms of employment, housing, and above all an increase in social subsidies (especially for so-called basic necessities).

This speech comes after the explosion of speeches and protests in the member countries of the Arab League, including Algeria. Did the state fear that the people’s anger would translate into violence? The soaring prices of a few products were one of the reasons why citizens took to the streets. For Ait Dris Hamadouche and Dris (2012), the government’s attitude towards the neighbouring revolts drew attention to Algeria’s “complicity with the despots who tried to stay in power by all means”. The former head of state returned in his speech on the risks of changes in Arab countries, declaring: “Algeria is, of course, following the changes taking place on the international scene, particularly those that have occurred in some Arab countries. Faced with this situation, Algeria reaffirms its attachment to the sovereignty of its brotherly countries and to their unity, its rejection of all foreign interference and its respect for the decision of each people stemming from its national sovereignty”^[1].

Finally, the coercive political model long exercised over all regions of the country and particularly against Algiers and the Kabyle regions, where the dynamic of protest is different from the others, no longer stops the popular enthusiasm. According to the politician Layla Baamara (2016), the democracy displayed by the Algerian state is only a decoy that crystallizes in its conduct and actions vis-à-vis civil society and its political appetite, in the context of the citizen dynamics of 2011-2014. It recalls that “the obligation to request authorization to organize a meeting or the restriction of access to the media constrains the protest activity” (Baamara, 2016). However, during these citizen mobilizations (2011-2014) other channels

of protests emerged. For the sociologist Fanny Gillet, who studied this period based on an ethnographic field analysis with a few students from the capital's School of Fine Arts, these artists would form "an ephemeral attempt (...) a form of expression of resistance" circulating in digital social networks. In fact, the issue is clearly at stake, whether or not the political discourse of the Algerian authorities and government says so explicitly or not.

Algerians and people of the southern Mediterranean would not have the necessary maturity to organize systems of representation and citizen participation in the manner of Western democracies, which in any case would not fit the cultural and historical identity models of these countries. As a result, autocracy, the prevailing or authoritarian control of street demonstrations and opinions, is justified and legitimized as an inexorable fact in itself, with its procession of nepotism and confiscation of economic resources for the benefit of a clan. It is obvious that the spread of the web and the Internet in Algeria and elsewhere has posed many problems to this conception of the organization of the leprosy movement. Tunisia offered one of the most obvious examples.

Under Ben Ali, a very effective policy aimed at promoting ICTs as an instrument to reinforce the country's catch-up in terms of development and its access to the groups of large modern nations was systematically accompanied by a policy of surveillance, blocking, repression of citizen use of the Internet and the expression of protest. The paradox reaches its climax at the Second World Summit on the Information Society (SMSI), which at the same time may be seen as the apogee of modernism and the international opening up of the power willing to promote its very active policy towards ICTs and which also foreshadows its downfall. We can say that "the king is naked" insofar as the assertion of this modern Tunisia displayed was subject to incessant operations, police, control, and repression aimed in particular to prevent any porosity between Tunisian activists demanding more democracy and foreign nationals, particularly through an accentuated control of the web that has become almost unbearable. Examples are legion, from this lawyer imprisoned without trial or charges, sewing his mouth shut to express the confiscation of his speech, to the inscription of Tunisia in a very good place (not far from China) on the map of Internet black spots (displayed for a moment by Reporter Sans Frontières in the alleys of the summit itself). Can the web, the Internet, and communication 2.0, then embody a democratic expression that prolongs otherwise or in coexistence those who express themselves in presence?

Citizen expression and engagement in the face of modern authoritarianism

Today, a few years after these uprisings, with the peculiarity of each country that saw them pass, what would be the similarities between the recent "smile revolution" in Algeria and the other springs hastily called "revolution 2.0"? Let us recall that most often the president (tyrant, authoritarian or despot) is banished by social movements made up of different social strata. How are these movements organized? Assuming that digital information and communication technologies (DICTs) participate in the gatherings of demonstrators in the citizens' arena, to what extent do they contribute to them?

Far from wanting to compare the above-mentioned citizens' movements in order to draw a picture of them, highlighting the obvious similarities and disparities. We will try to bring out the singularity of Algerian popular expression in the face of the authoritarianism of the political regime of the Bouteflika era and probably its legacy.

In Egypt, to take just one convincing example that speaks for all, the hoped-for democratic transition finally gave way to the military. In Algeria, after the forced resignation of Bouteflika,

it was the Chief of Staff Ahmed Gaïd Salah^[2] who took command, particularly with regard to the organisation of 'forced' elections. He occupied a strategic position because he was Deputy Minister of Defence (Bouteflika was the minister). He accumulated weekly speeches that became almost daily. At the same time, mobilisations intensified in response to each speech, calling on the people to end the movement and go to the polls. Meanwhile, the demonstrators brandished new messages and demands in response to each speech and to all the political news (concerning the interim government) as well as those relating to the organisation of elections. Scheduled by the interim President of the State for 4 July 2019 in the first instance, and then for 12 December, at the request of the Army, to take up only a few headlines from international newspapers "The Army goes by force to organise a presidential election"^[3] or national newspapers "From one sham to another"^[4]. The French-speaking Algerian press is full of praise for Hirak in editorials such as *Liberté*. The traditional media warns against false promises: "the electoral solution aims to recycle the system to maintain it rather than to liberate it"^[5]. It is a former Minister of Justice who was elected to chair the Independent National Electoral Authority (Anie), whose mission is to organise elections. The general observation which is obvious in this situation is that "Gaïd Salah is hardening the tone"^[6] after each protest in the streets, the Hirak refuses to hold elections, claiming instead from the slogans carried on his steps 'dawla madaniya machi askaria' [a civil and not a military state].

In Egypt, to stay within this crude analogy, there is a place that has become an international symbol. The Egyptians see it as a representation of freedom: Tahrir Square [literally liberation]. In addition to this emblematic square, the Egyptian Revolution is also Mohamed Mahmoud Street and its graffiti. In addition to bringing demonstrators together, the Egyptian street, through artistic expressions, is transformed into a "new form of citizenship" (Carle and Hugue, 2015). In Algeria, if we speak of its capital Algiers, it is at the Grande Poste, in the city centre, that the great moments of the protest movement are played out (in the same way, the other Wilayas make their voices heard). While demonstrations and public gatherings are banned and repressed, the weekly marches have opened up the field of the possible to citizens who want a space for production, expression and exchange. For a long time confined and stifled, citizens have shouted their indignation and have been able to free their speech. It is simply a form of catharsis in that the citizens have expunged their exasperation through permanent theatre by exalting their revolt without unleashing violence. Not far from the Grande Poste, on a roundabout, these citizens can attend plays telling the story of the revolution, the uprising, but above all the national unity and the inextricable links between Kabyles (and the other Berbers of Algeria) and "Algerian Arabs". Also, through this street scene we see young actors ironing about the situation and using a very humorous tone to ridicule the "power" and the "system".

On the other hand, during the first weeks of the "peaceful"^[7] revolution the street became a space for debate and discussion. Several national personalities joined these spaces, and the agenda was updated as political actors put forward "absurdities" or questioned public opinion on the risks of socio-economic instability that the movement might face. It is then finally appropriate to note how, since the Arab Spring, the direct expression of discontent and aspirations for change has been woven into this complex and shifting association of citizens' presence in advocacy activism, against the backdrop of paternalistic and stifling authoritarianism of the powers that be. The cybernetic expression would reinforce or otherwise express this manifestation of a new societal catharsis. In fact, expression on the web, digital social networks, often allows a more liberated claim or at least complementary and coexisting or even continuous with the demonstrations or struggles that are taking place. If we evoke the

ancestral link with catharsis, it is precisely to show the function of the “release”, the indictment, the direct address towards the rulers that can provoke a snowball effect (the “release” addressed to Ben Ali, Bouteflika and Gaid Salah).

This function allows citizens to regain a place to express themselves and sometimes say more than they can in the public space in times when speech is stifled. It is also to say that it is possible that this dematerialized expression allows one to express with force what cannot be said without real violence if it is expressed in the street and in materiality. Moreover, this electronic agora can also prolong demonstrations and confrontations in forms that may appear more direct and intense, especially when there is no direct confrontation as was the case for the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt. In other words, between resilience, continuity or contiguity, extension or diffraction, the permanence of digital social networks or other forms of electronic media maintains the permanence of claims or disputes (Durampart, 2012). These can be expressed without, however, taking the form of a physical and direct confrontation outside periods of crisis. We could refer to the work of Miège (2005), Proulx (2013), about renewed partial public spaces, online social participation, or Christophe Varin who refuses to make distinctions between strong and weak signals by showing that expression on the web can also be on the side of strong signals of citizen evolution in Mediterranean societies. On the other hand, as in Syria, a cyber-war that will allow the Syrian security services to flush out activist opponents in a formidable tracing operation taking the appearance of opening up and decompartmentalizing the web. What appearances and forms does this cyber presence of democratic protest take?

The people's arena, crystallization of demands towards a new space of expression

Popular marches and rallies carry messages in response to the deterrents of decision-makers. These responses are first given on social media and then expressed in public space. The Internet and cyber communication have enabled the extension of the public space and according to Dominique Cardon, “society has taken a few steps ahead of institutional policy. By freeing the expression of individuals and the right to express themselves in a public space without constraint or censorship, the Internet nourishes what is the most essential source of the exercise of popular sovereignty”^[8]. In this perspective, can we speak of a displacement or a continuity of the claim via physical space to a digital space? from the Web to the street? Several research works have questioned this field, relying on the relationships caused by digital social networks between users and forms of self-presentation (digital ethos). In many cases, users imagine an identity that goes beyond their reality, and so they put on a mask. On the other hand, “the image that the Internet user has of his body is projected into the future, frozen in the past or idealized in the present, all traces (...) show bodies that are ‘in potential.’ (Casilli, 2012). For Cardon (2013), users of digital networks apply, consciously or unconsciously, the principle of “strong ties” and that of “weak ties”. The social web would lead more and more Internet users to socialize with people who are rarely (or never) visited in “real” life. On the other hand, “digital tools and devices cannot be approached only as sociotechnical constructs, but rather as nested objects in contexts where there is a permanent co-influence of the technical and the social” (Durampart, 2012). This can be observed within HIRAK and particularly from group pages or personal content on the digital network Facebook, as well as video-sharing platforms such as Youtube. Indeed, there is a concentration of messages and demands on these social media that move, like a continuum, to the field of action. From participatory media, and alternative social media activists (Granjon, 2001), to the structuring of a space specific to the new “relationships

between media, communication and democracy” (Dhalgren, 2000), we see a link between these concepts and the power to act formulated by Serge Proulx based on Anglo-Saxon work, as he reminds us: “The power to act is the affirmation of life, and ultimately, the affirmation of the desire to exist individually and collectively, the desire to survive even in a difficult economic and political context” (Proulx, 2013).

What are the prospects for a new modernity and democratic renewal for Mediterranean societies in their context and specificities? This readapted form of a permanent catharsis may in some way accentuate the maturation of citizen expression in countries such as Algeria and Egypt. It would set up certain permanent communication facilities that would promote, if not in a structured way, then at least in a way that would encourage public opinion, at least citizen public expression in diffraction or in complementarity with direct expression in the public space in question. In diffraction, because often in times of crisis, tension, confrontation, or riots, the web at the very height of control and repression offers a space where expression is transported differently. Thus during the Tunisian Arab Spring, mobilized activists used it to play a funny cat-and-mouse game with police and security organizations by spreading false information about gathering places or by occupying their attention to better prepare a protest in front of them. And so, during the WSIS or the uprisings provoking Ben Ali’s departure, when control and lockdown were at their peak, web activism continued either to destabilize the police state or to polarize it in the form of diversions. In reverse, during the WSIS, while all forms of protest were systematically sought and fought on the web, a porosity between opponents and representatives of Western NGOs and associations was woven while the authorities had their attention fixed on the agitation present on the web. It should not be forgotten that this phenomenon can be totally reversible, as Varin (2012) expressed it about Syria, where stopping Internet filtering is in fact a trap set for opponents to better identify them, what Morozov calls “spinternet”. “The Google doctrine, this ‘enthusiastic belief in the formidable capacity of the liberation of technology’ is ‘turned’ by the Syrian regime, just as the Iranian regime had done before it during the Green Revolution” (Bazan, Varin, 2012).

However, in times of relative calm or lull, the web can be the receptacle of unbridled expression, diffuse or firm protest. In Lebanon, for example, some sites take societal taboos such as mixed marriage or homosexuality head-on, which can therefore represent a certain permanence of citizen expression, all the more so when public spaces and demonstrations are tightly controlled and framed, as is currently the case in Egypt. What is important is to note these phenomena of coexistence, extension, and continuity that can persist in different forms and contexts. A public expression that is all the more present, even in a diffuse way, when authoritarianism is increased, all the more coexisting when repression is weakened, without forgetting this reversibility that also allows regimes to track down and flush out their opponents by turning this space against its users. Can this form of catharsis, intertwining expression in the presence and expression at a distance in subtle interactions, promote a habit of claiming and demanding citizen participation that builds a shift towards a political public opinion of the citizens of these countries? In any case, Pandora’s box is now open, which means that protests can be sustained in different ways by maintaining a permanence of this strong and/or weak citizen expression that can serve to keep this citizen expressiveness out of and during the crisis or confrontation. It could progressively nourish the habit, continuity and maintenance of a citizen presence so feared by authoritarian powers that they are thus challenged by the emergence of a citizen or public consciousness in the making before we can speak of a citizen democracy as it is understood in the West. For the time being, this would rather resemble the presence of the

spoken word, amplified expression, polemics or cacophony, cathartic between the demand for participation on the basis of contestation, which could constitute one of the possible models of the civil society in the making in the Mediterranean countries.

Notes

- [1] Speech by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 15 April 2011
- [2] Deceased following a cardiac arrest on December 23, 2019 announces a press release from Algeria press service (APS), <http://www.aps.dz/algerie/99310-deces-du-general-de-corps-d-armee-ahmed-gaid-salah>
- [3] Médiapart, septembre 12, 2019, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/120919/algerie-l-armee-passe-en-force-pour-organiser-une-election-presidentielle>.
- [4] Liberté, septembre 29, 2019, <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/editorial/dun-simulacre-a-un-autre-5357>.
- [5] Liberté, octobre 10, 2019, <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/editorial/presidentielle-une-perspective-hypothetique-5362>.
- [6] Le Soir d'Algérie, septembre 14, 2019, <https://www.lesoirdalgerie.com/actualites/gaid-salah-durcit-le-ton-30176>
- [7] *Silmya, Silmya*, [Peaceful! Peaceful!] chanted the demonstrators during the first marches to deter the use of violence by law enforcement officials.
- [8] Interview given to the magazine *Transversalités*, available on the link : <https://doi.org/10.3917/trans.123.0065>.

References

- Addi, L. (2017). Système politique et paix civile en Algérie. *Confluences Méditerranée*, 100(1), 27-39. Doi :10.3917/come.100.0027.
- Arendt, H. (2014). *Condition de l'homme moderne*. Paris : Calmann-Lévy.
- Baamara, L. (2016). L'écart difficile aux routines contestataires dans les mobilisations algériennes de 2011. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 211-212(1), 109-125.
- Bazan S. et Varin C. (2012). Le Web à l'épreuve de la « cyberguerre » en Syrie, *Études* /12 (Tome 417), pages 595 à 606.
- CARDON D. (2013). « Liens faibles et liens forts sur les réseaux sociaux », in *Les Cahiers français*, n° 372, janvier-février, p. 61-66.
- Casilli, A. (2012). Être présent en ligne : culture et structure des réseaux sociaux d'Internet. *Idées économiques et sociales*, 169(3), 16-29. doi:10.3917/idee.169.0016.
- Daghmi, F. (dir.). (2018). *Arts, médias et engagement : Actions citoyennes et soulèvements arabes*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Dahlgren P. (2000). « L'espace public et l'internet. Structure, espace et communication », *Réseaux*, vol 18, n°100, Communiquer à l'ère des réseaux, p. 157-186.
- Durampart M. (2012). « Expression et engagement sur le Web et les réseaux : une polarisation », *Multimed*, n°2, p. 37-51.
- Dris Aït Hamadouche L. & Dris C. (2012). De la résilience des régimes autoritaires : la complexité algérienne, *L'Année du Maghreb*, VIII, 279-301.
- Miège B. (2005). *La pensée communicationnelle*, PUG.
- Morozov E. (2011) «The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom», *Public Affairs*."
- Proulx S. (2013), « Agir dans un monde fortement connecté : l'émergence de nouvelles militantes dans la société de contrôle », dans Siham Najar (dir.), *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques* ».

Carle Z. & Huguet F. (2015). « Les graffitis de la rue Mohammed Mahmoud. Dialogisme et dispositifs médiatiques », *Égypte/Monde arabe*, Troisième série, 12, <https://journals.openedition.org/ema/3449#quotation>

Notes on the Contributors

Dr. Billel Aroufoune is an associate researcher in information and communication sciences, a member of the IMSIC laboratory and a teacher at the UFR Ingémédia at the University of Toulon. His research focuses on the forms of audiovisual expression of radicalism in the public space and on social networks. He is also interested in citizen mobilisation and expression during political transitions in the Mediterranean region.

Prof. Michel Durampart is Director of the Humanities and Social Sciences doctoral school (ED 509) at the University of Toulon and Director of the IMSIC laboratory. He is a full Professor at the UFR INGEMEDIA. He is also coordinator and manager of several national and international research programmes linking digital devices and transformations or developments, mainly in the fields of education, health and culture.



A study on the impact of media portrayal and judicial intervention in changing social attitudes toward same-sex marriages in India

Arundhati Kulkarni
Sudha Hegde

ABSTRACT

At the global level, across cultures, the social imagination of sexual identities has undergone a radical change. However, social and legal acceptance of same-sex marriage has remained a contested terrain. While it has obtained legal acceptance in several countries, same-sex marriage continues to be a social taboo in many parts of the globe, including India. Following the legalization of same-sex marriage by nations like the US, Sweden, Belgium, New Zealand and Canada, the sexual minority communities have intensified their campaign demanding the legal recognition of same-sex marriages in India as well. The present study analyzes the impact of media representation and construction of same-sex relations and the role of the judiciary in changing the social attitude towards accepting same-sex marriage. The study employed a survey method to understand how media representation and legal interpretations have impacted people's perception towards same-sex marriages and to find out what roles media portrayal and judicial decisions can play in reducing stigma and social dissociation towards the marital rights of the sexual minority.

Keywords: media construction, media influence, legal protection, same-sex marriage, attitude studies

Introduction

Indian society is witnessing a sea change in social attitudes toward the LGBTQ community. People belonging to these communities have realised that they have to fight for their rights and find increasing support from all sections of the society especially the judiciary, media and the intellectual community. Recently, in the year 2018, India revoked the draconian, colonial-era law that made homosexuality illegal as a result of the Supreme Court's ruling stating that the application of Section 377 to acts of homosexuality between consenting adults was unconstitutional. It has been five years since homosexuality was decriminalized, but the public morality around same-sex relationships in general and same-sex marriages, in particular, remains ambivalent.

Despite social marginalization and denial, the homosexual community has shown an unswerving determination to get legal sanctions, especially a legal status for same-sex marriages. Several petitions for the legalization of same-sex marriages are under consideration in courts across the country. A petition filed by the gay couple Supriya Chakraborty and Abhay Dang in the apex court of India seeks to make the Special Marriage Act, 1954 gender-neutral and legalize same-sex unions (Mohapatra, 2022). As per the recent report by the Human Rights Campaign Commission, 32 countries around the world have legalized same-sex marriages, out of which 22 have legalized through national laws and 10 have legalized through court decisions (HRC Foundation, n.d.). It shows that societal sentiment across the globe is tilting towards an inclusive world concerning personal rights. India is not an exception as the apex court of the country has taken up the matter of giving legal status to same-sex marriages for hearing and had asked the central government to submit its position on the issue. In India, the judiciary is called the third estate of democracy while the media is considered the fourth estate. Both institutions have a tremendous responsibility in steering the democratic nation and guarding constitutional rights. Hence, the stand adopted by both organizations will have a bearing on the collective attitude of the public. And being isolated from society, young people from the sexual minority community may turn to media to form their perspectives on their own identity (Padva, 2008). And to lead a dignified life, members of the sexual minority community will seek legal rights on par with other citizens. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to understand how the Indian media and judiciary have been treating homosexuality.

Media and same-sex relationships

We are living in a world overwhelmed by mass media from print to digital. People interpret the world around them and make sense of social realities using mass media. In the present world, where physical boundaries could not prevent the dissemination of information and ideas across cultures, thanks to digital media's proliferation, minorities, be they, social, religious, economic or sexual, have achieved a long-overdue presence on the media platforms. Especially the clamours of sexual minorities for an accurate media portrayal of their lives and struggles seem to resonate with various kinds of media. No one can deny the fact that homosexual unions are social realities in India.

However, the Indian media until the landmark judgment by the Delhi High Court, which decriminalized homosexuality had stereotypically projected the marginalized LGBTQ community. Hindi cinema had traditionally adopted an attitude of denial or mockery toward the LGBTQ community (Sabharwal & Sen, June 2012). Print media have been more vocal in covering LGBTQ issues and news related to the marginalized community of homosexuals. Of late, post the decriminalization of Article 377, Indian movies, especially Bollywood, have

started depicting the community in a never-seen-before way prompting a public conversation on human and psychological issues of being a homosexual. Movies such as *Margarita with a Straw* (2014), *Aligarh* (2015), *Kapoor and Sons* (2016), *Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Aisa Laga* (2019), *Badhai Do* (2022) and *Maja Ma* (2022) are a few films that did not fall prey to the stigmatized portrayal of homosexuality. Content on Over the Top (OTT) platforms and social media platforms such as YouTube also features homosexual content and many of them are educative in their approach like *All About Section 377* (2016) and have tried to portray the social struggle of the community as in *Romil and Jugal* (2017), *The 'Other' Love Story* (2016) and *A Married Woman* (2020).

A fair treatment of the issues faced by homosexuals in the popular visual media will augment the process of mainstreaming the community and provide a social and cultural space for the discussions on gender and sexual identity and also construct the concepts of gender identity, gender expression and socialization process. Media is also a dominant force in deconstructing the patriarchal perspective and stigmas associated with homosexuality. Sensible representation by the visual media can also prove beneficial in ending social isolation and disowning by the family.

Most of the previous studies conducted have analyzed the nature of the portrayal of homosexual relationships by the media but very little literature is available on the studies which have tried to analyze the impact of media portrayal in changing the social attitude in India. The present study strives to find the relationship between the changed narrative of sexual identities in the media, especially in films, web series, and social media reels and the societal attitude towards same-sex relationships. It tries to reveal whether Indian society is prepared to fully recognize same-sex marriages or is limited to partial recognition and how progressive judicial interpretations have impacted the social attitude towards the legalization of same-sex marriages in the Indian context.

The Legal status of same-sex marriages in India

Although people warmly accept Bollywood movies made on same-sex marriages and appreciate the concept, such marriages are not legally valid in India. Decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the Supreme Court of India does not automatically translate into a fundamental right for a same-sex couple to marry. The Supreme Court's ruling granted same-sex couples the freedom to lead a dignified private life (Moot Court - Same-Sex Marriage - Dr. M.V.V Murthi 2nd National Moot Court Competition Memorial - Studocu, n.d.). It allows them only the basic right to companionship so long as such a relationship is consensual, free from the vice of deceit, force, and coercion and does not result in the violation of fundamental rights of each other. The ruling applied to the personal and private domain of individuals is akin to the right to privacy and it does not include the public right to privacy (Moot Court - Same-Sex Marriage - Dr. M.V.V Murthi 2nd National Moot Court Competition Memorial - Studocu, n.d.). Also, it does not include the public right like recognition of same-sex marriage and thereby legitimating particular human conduct.

Marriage in Indian society is a socially recognized union of two individuals which is governed either by uncoded or statutory laws. There is no acceptance of the institution of marriage between two individuals of the same gender either in personal laws or codified statutory laws.

The judicial construct of same-sex relationships in India

The constitution of India strives to secure equality of status and opportunity for all citizens and directs the state to promote the welfare of the people and create a social order free from injustice and inequality. The state shall in particular strive to minimize the inequalities and endeavour to eliminate all forms of discrimination. It means that the state shall not discriminate against any of the Indian citizens based on their gender, caste, creed, religion or place of birth. If there is one constitutional tenet that can be said to be underlying the theme of the Indian constitution, it is that of 'inclusiveness'. The courts in India also believe that the Indian constitution reflects this value deeply ingrained in Indian society and nurtured over several generations.

On 2nd July 2009, the High Court of Delhi ruled that the provision in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes private consensual sex between same-sex adults is against the spirit of the Constitution of India and International Human Rights Conventions. The two judges' bench ruled that consensual sex amongst two adults is legal. (*Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT Delhi*, WPLC No. 7455/2001, 2nd July 2009. Further, the matter went to the Supreme Court of India. The Supreme Court overturned the High Court judgment, which had declared Section 377 of IPC as unconstitutional criminalizing carnal intercourse against the order of nature.

The Supreme Court, which is known as the guardian of the fundamental rights enshrined in part III of the Constitution disappointed everyone with such a regressive decision.

In 2014, the Supreme Court delivered an important judgment in *National Legal Services Authority V. Union of India* [(NASA) 2014, 5 SCC 438], which construed Articles 15 and 21 of the Indian Constitution as including the right to gender identity and sexual orientation and held that just like men and women transgenders could enjoy all the fundamental rights that other citizens of India could enjoy. Thereafter in *Justice Puttaswami (Retd.) and Another V. Union of India and Ors.* [(2017) 10SCC1], a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court unanimously declared that there is a fundamental right of privacy which is guaranteed in favour of all persons, the concomitant of which was that the right to make choices that were fundamental to a person's way of living could not be interfered with by the state without compelling necessity and harm caused to other individuals.

Finally, on 6th September 2018, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* partially struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860 which made carnal intercourse against the order of nature a criminal offence and punishable under law. While reading down Section 377, the Court excluded from its ambit - consensual sexual intercourse between adults in private. In *Navtej Singh Johar's* case, Justice Malhotra goes so far as to state that "History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families, for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through the centuries." It makes us think of other important apologies made for causing historic injustice such as the German nation to the Jews. In "*Navtej Singh Johar*" the judges take responsibility for the wrongs committed and seek to atone for it by clearly spelling out how things must become better today and in the future for LGBT persons. The verdict applies in India, but their words have a universal appeal.

Media influence on attitude

In the field of communication research, one can find several studies on the topic of media effects on society and human thoughts. Considered to be the father of persuasive communication,

Aristotle also discussed the skills required to persuade and bring attitudinal change. The Hypodermic Needle Theory proposed that media can have a direct, immediate and strong effect on the users (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). It assumes that mass media can have a direct and uniform effect on a large audience where media users will accept the message without any resistance. The theory proposed that the media has the power to exert a similar effect on many people and condition the masses as it expected them to behave. However, scholars like Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet disapproved of this magic bullet effect and suggested limited effects theory (Berelson et al. 1968). They asserted that media can exert limited effects on those users who paid continuous and close attention to it and had lesser effects on the audience who had limited exposure to media. This theory which was also called a Two-step flow theory did not rule out the media's effects on the masses.

Herold Lasswell argued that through a well-planned and long-term media campaign, it is possible to create favourable responses (Baran & Davis, 1995). Walter Lippman was also of the opinion that media messages can have effects on public opinion (Lippmann, 1997). While observing the potential of mass media in influencing voting behaviour during the American presidential campaign of 1968 McCombs and Shaw found that mass media exercised a noticeable effect on the decisions of the voters who relied primarily on the mass media for election-related information (McCombs & Shaw, 2006). Their study led to the conclusion that intentionally or unintentionally mass media can shape public opinion and agenda. Based on several studies on how media, which is an independent subsystem of society, constructs our social reality by continuously transmitting information, we can assume that media constructs a model of the world for its audience and influences human perception of the world around us (Chistyakov, 2020).

Research Objectives

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made a statement in the year 2013 that “I respect culture, tradition and religion, but they can never justify the denial of basic rights. My promise to the lesbian, homosexual, bisexual and transgender members of the human family is this: I'm with you” (Dideriksen, 2015). He also declared that religion, culture and tradition can never be a justification for denying them their basic rights. According to Pew Research Centre, the revocation of Section 377 led to an increase in acceptance of homosexuality by 22 points from 15 to 37 (Rising Acceptance of Homosexuality by People in Many Countries Around the World Over the Past Two Decades, 2020). Whereas in India, Justice of the Supreme Court Dhananjay Chandrachud who is one of the members of the bench which decriminalized homosexuality in India says that in addition to law and judiciary what we need is the structural and attitudinal changes in society to let the LGBT community live a life of autonomy and dignity (Anand, 2022).

The media needs to play a significant role in making decisive changes in the public's perceptions of the LGBT community. Individuals with an overall higher media exposure showed more acceptance towards the issues of homosexuality (Gonta et al., 2017). It is also established that television and blog viewing is associated with a progressive attitude and suggested conducting further research to find how other forms of mass media impact the audience attitude (Lee & Hicks, 2011). The present study strives to find the relationship between the changed narrative of sexual identities in the media, especially in films, web series, and social media reels and the societal attitude towards same-sex relationships. It tries to reveal whether Indian society is prepared to fully recognize same-sex marriages or is limited to partial recognition and how

progressive judicial interpretations have impacted the social attitude towards the legalization of same-sex marriages in the Indian context.

Therefore, the present study has been undertaken to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Whether media portrayals help people to broaden their understanding of the homosexual community.
2. Whether people know the present legal status of same-sex marriages in India
3. What is the current attitude of people towards same-sex marriages?
4. What is the relationship between media portrayal of same-sex relationships and social attitudes towards same-sex marriages?
5. What is the impact of judicial intervention through progressive judgments in cases relating to homosexuality?

Research Methods

The present study is a descriptive research where a survey method was employed to collect the primary data. The study intended to analyze the impact of media construction of same-sex marriages and judicial decisions on the attitude of people towards same-sex marriage. We have adopted a purposive sampling method where the respondents are exposed to media content on same-sex relationships and are also aware of the judgments of the courts relating to homosexuality.

A questionnaire consisting of a total of 38 questions was administered to 136 respondents via Google Forms and also in physical form. Out of 136 questionnaires distributed, 103 responses were received of which 74 respondents submitted their responses through Google Forms and 29 respondents answered through a physical questionnaire. Among them 50 were males and 53 were females. Responses were collected from the respondents of different age groups ranging from 18 years to 61 years and above. With regard to their geographical location, 81 respondents were from urban and 22 respondents were from rural backgrounds.

The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions, the structure of which is as follows: the initial 8 questions were designed to collect the demographic information of the respondents like age, location, educational qualifications, etc., The next 7 questions were framed to ascertain the nature of media consumption and exposure to homosexual content. In the present study, exposure to same-sex relationships in media such as films, web series, short films on social media and social media reels were only taken into consideration. The next 5 questions tested the knowledge of the current legal status of same-sex marriages and the public opinion about the progressive approach of the judiciary towards same-sex relationships in India and the implications of recent judgments on social attitudes towards same-sex relationships.

The remaining 17 questions were derived from the standard psychology scale of 17 items on a 5-point scale developed by Marcia L. Pearl and M. Paz Gulepo of Towson University (Paul & Gulepo, 2008) to assess the Attitude Towards Same-sex Marriages (ATSM scale). These questions measured the overall attitude of acceptance toward same-sex marriages on a 5-point Likert scale. A total score of 17 indicates a highly negative attitude and 85 indicates a highly positive attitude. The 17-item ATSM scale questions measured the attitude toward same-sex marriages on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Can't Say, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Among the 17 items, positively framed questions were scored like this: Strongly

Agree=5, Agree=4, Cannot Say=3, Disagree=2 and Strongly Disagree=1. Negatively framed questions had a reverse scoring.

To measure the internal consistency and reliability of the questions framed, the questionnaire was subjected to the Cronbach Alpha test, which yielded a score of .935 for the initial responses gathered from 31 respondents for the pilot study. The Cronbach Alpha score suggested adequate internal consistency and reliability.

Results and discussion

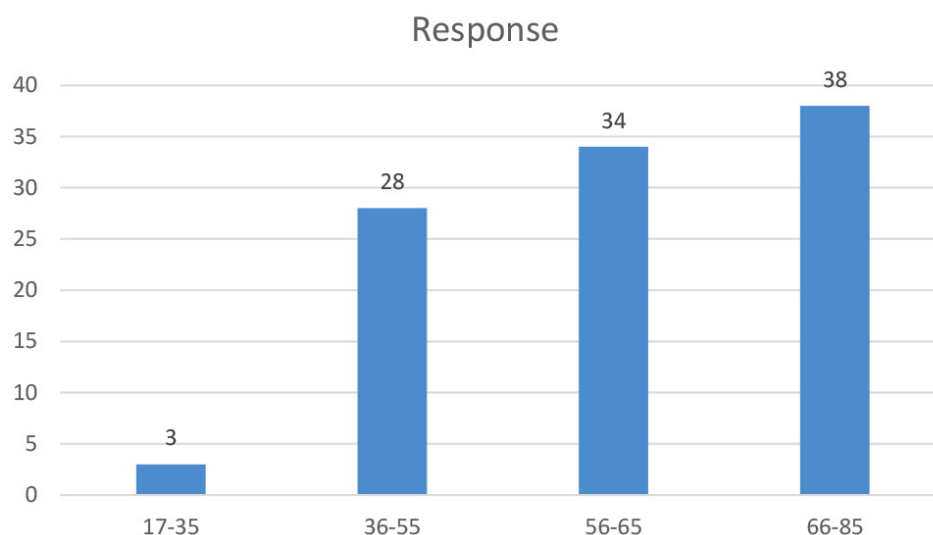
Data analysis of the responses indicated that there is a reasonable positive shift in the social attitude toward same-sex marriages in India.

Research Question 1. Among the 103 respondents, 27 replied that they strongly agree that media portrayal helps them to understand the issues of homosexuals, 56 of them agreed, 15 had marked can't say, 5 disagreed and none of them strongly disagreed. The total score of the question amounts to 515 and the total response score was 414. The average response score was 80.38%, which suggested a high percentage of agreeableness among the respondents towards the usefulness of media portrayal in understanding the issues related to same-sex relationships.

Research Question 2. Out of 103 respondents, 74 respondents replied that they are aware that even though consensual homosexuality has been decriminalized there is no legal validity for same-sex marriages in India. 71% of the respondents knew the present legal status of same-sex marriages.

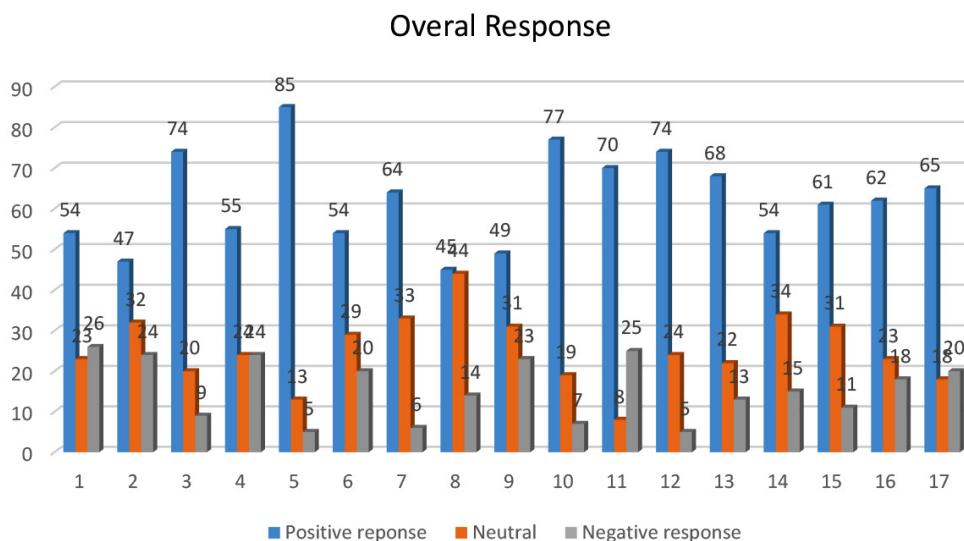
Research Question 3. As disclosed earlier, the attitude of the respondents towards same-sex marriages was measured using the ATSM scale of 17 items. The highest score on the scale would be 85 and the lowest would be 17. The median value of this range is 51. Our study yielded the highest score of 85 and the lowest score of 19 with a median score of 52 which shows a slightly positive attitude among the respondents. The score range of 17 to 85 has been divided into 4 categories of 17-35, 36-55, 56-65, and 66-85. The result shows that 38 respondents have highly positive attitudes toward same-sex marriages and 34 respondents have a positive attitude (Figure 1). And the graph of the individual score of attitudes toward same-sex marriages is displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 1. No of responses in each score range



17-35 – Negative , 36-55- Slightly positive, 56-65 – positive , 66-85 – Highly positive

Figure 2. Individual scores of ATSM scale



The above graph indicates the overall attitude of the respondents towards same-sex relations in which the positive attitude is on the higher side in comparison with a negative and neutral attitude.

Research Question 4

One of the research questions was to ascertain the relationship between media portrayal and attitudes toward same-sex marriages. The correlation between those who were exposed to media content and had said media helped them to understand the issues of homosexuality and those who said they support the legalization of same-sex marriages stood at 0.349 indicating a slightly positive correlation. The covariance score between the same two variables was 0.221587664 suggesting a slightly positive relationship between the variables under examination.

Research Question 5

When the respondents were asked whether they welcome the judgment of the Supreme Court which decriminalized same-sex relationships, 22 respondents strongly welcomed the move by giving their responses as strongly agree, 60 respondents agreed, whereas 11 respondents answered can't say, 8 respondents disagreed and only 2 respondents strongly disagreed. 68.93% of respondents welcomed the judgment. The correlation between those who welcomed the judgment and those who said they would support the legalization of same-sex marriages was 0.533374483 and the covariance was 0.389110984. This indicates that there is a slightly positive correlation between the two variables.

One of the objectives of the study was to find out whether Indian society is prepared to fully recognize same-sex marriages or is limited to partial recognition. As per the data obtained, out of 103 respondents, 65 have opined that there is a need for the legalization of same-sex marriages in India. This is analogous to the opinions of people in many other countries. However, when it comes to parenting by same-sex couples, respondents are not fully convinced that same-sex couples can provide the same kind of parenting as that of heterosexual couples.

With more than 80% of the respondents agreeing that media portrayal helps them to better understand the homosexual community, it becomes explicit that there is a positive shift in the media portrayal of same-sex relationships. Hence, the study established a slight positive

shift in the attitude towards same-sex relationships among people who were exposed to the sensitive portrayal of same-sex relationships by the media and progressive judicial interventions.

Limitations of the study

The present study has a few limitations. The study collected responses from 103 respondents, and the sample size could have been larger. It has taken films, web series and social media reels or posts into consideration. However, exposure to other types of media is not measured. Apart from media and judiciary, many other factors may influence the attitude of people towards homosexuality, which are not taken into consideration in the present study. There is a scope for undertaking a study on the above-mentioned aspects.

Conclusion

Based on the present study and after the thorough examination of the data it can be concluded that there is a slightly positive shift in the attitude of people towards same-sex relationships including same-sex marriage. The study has established that media portrayal has broadened the understanding of people on the issues relating to same-sex marriages. Judicial inclination in favour of the homosexual community through judicial pronouncements and interpretations in favour of the LGBT community has to some extent influenced the attitude of people toward homosexual behaviour. In order to lead a dignified and harmonious life, both legal protection and social acceptance are indispensable for the homosexual community. In this regard, progressive judiciary and proactive media which positively highlight and are empathetic about the issues of sexual minorities can play a vital role as the study established a positive relationship among them.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this paper declare that there is no known conflict of interest associated with this study and no fund of any kind from the funding agencies in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors was received for the present study that could have influenced its outcome.

References

- Anand, U. (2022, August 31). Need change in society's attitude for LGBTQ to live with dignity: Justice Chandrachud. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/need-change-in-society-s-attitude-for-lgbtq-to-live-with-dignity-justice-chandrachud-101661970330437.html>
- Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (1995). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Berelson, B., Lazarsfeld, P. F., & Gaudet, H. (1968). *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. Columbia University Press.
- Chistyakov, D. (2020, January). Media Construction of Social Reality and Communication Impact on an Individual. 5th International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities.
- Dideriksen, C. (2015, May 25). Culture, tradition and religion can never justify the denial of basic rights... — Equal Eyes. Equal Eyes. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://equal-eyes.org/archive/2015/5/25/culture-tradition-and-religion-can-never-justify-the-denial-of-basic-rights>
- Gonta, G., Hansen, S., Fagin, C., & Fong, J. (2017). Changing Media and Changing Minds: Media Exposure and Viewer Attitudes Toward Homosexuality. *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research*, 5(5), 22-34.

- HRC Foundation. (n.d.). Marriage Equality Around the World. Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>
- Kaur, P. (2017). Gender, Sexuality and (Be) longing: The Representation of Queer (LGBT) in Hindi Cinema. *Amity Journal of Media & Communication Studies*, 7(1), 22-30.
- Kielwasser, A. P., & Wolf, M. A. (1991). *Gay People, Sex, and the Media* (A. P. Kielwasser & M. A. Wolf, Eds.). Haworth Press.
- Lee, T.-T., & Hicks, G. R. (2011, November). An analysis of factors affecting attitudes toward Same-sex marriage: Do the Media matter? *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58.
- Lippmann, W. (1997). *Public opinion*. Free Press.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Mccombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (2006, February). The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2), 58-67. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228007598_The_Evolution_of_Agenda-Setting_Research_Twenty-Five_Years_in_the_Marketplace_of_Ideas
- Mohapatra, D. (2022, November 26). SC seeks Centre's response on legalising same-sex marriages. *Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sc-seeks-centres-response-on-legalising-same-sex-marriages/articleshow/95774460.cms>
- Same Sex Marriage - Dr. M.V.V Murthi 2nd National Moot Court Competition Memorial. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.studocu.com/in/document/bharati-vidyapeeth-university/constitutional-law-i/moot-court-same-sex-marriage/20890149>
- Padva, G. (2008, October 12). Media and Popular Culture Representations of LGBT Bullying. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 19(3-4), 105-108.
- Rising acceptance of homosexuality by people in many countries around the world over the past two decades. (2020, June 24). Pew Research Center. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/pg_2020-06-25_global-views-homosexuality_0-02/
- Sabharwal, S. K., & Sen, R. (June 2012, June). Portrayal of Sexual Minorities in Hindi Films. *Global Media Journal – Indian Edition*, 3(June 2012).
- Same-sex marriage court, Parliament and the court of public opinion. (2022, December 3). *Times of India*. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/times-special/same-sex-marriage-court-parliament-and-the-court-of-public-opinion/articleshow/95953330.cms>
- Cameron, C., & Elliott, D. (2018, September 6). Reportable in the Supreme Court of India Criminal/Civil Original Jurisdiction Writ Petition (Criminal) No. 76 Of 2016 Navtej Sin. Amazon AWS. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from https://s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/case_document/document_upload/418/377IPC-Judgement-Nariman.pdf
- Chelameswar, J., Naidu, D. S., & Jain, M. P. (2018). *Indian Constitutional Law* (J. Chelameswar & D. S. Naidu, Eds.). LexisNexis.
- Gulia, K. (2018, September 6). Navtej Singh Johar vs Union Of India Ministry Of Law And ... on 6 September 2018. *Indian Kanoon*. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/168671544/>
- Misra, G. (2009, December 03). Decriminalising homosexuality in India. *An international journal on sexual and reproductive health and rights*, 17(34), 20-28. <https://www.tandfonline>.

com/doi/citedby/10.1016/S0968-8080%2809%2934478-X?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab

SIROHI, S. (n.d.). Section 377 IPC Decriminalised Partially By Supreme Court For Sex Between Consenting Adults. Lawsisto. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://lawsisto.com/artcileread/MTIw/Section-377-IPC-Decriminalised-Partially-By-Supreme-Court-For-Sex-Between-Consenting-Adults>

Smith, T. W., Son, J., & Kim, J. (2014, November). Public Attitude Towards Homosexuality and Gay Rights across Time and Countries. Williams Institute. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Public-Attitude-LGBT-Int-Nov-2014.pdf>

Syiem, A. H., & Kumar, P. R. (2022, March). Trans - Rights Are Human Rights : An Evaluation of Law on the Protection of Transgender Rights in India. Indian Journal of Law and Justice, 13(1), 207-229. <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/handle/123456789/4606>

Marcia L. Pearl MA & M. Paz Galupo PhD (2007) Development and Validation of the Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale, Journal of Homosexuality, 53:3, 117-134, DOI: 10.1300/J082v53n03_07

Notes on the Contributors

Dr. Arundhati Kulkarni is presently working as a Dean at Karnataka State Higher Education Academy, Dharwad. She has completed her LL.M. and Ph.D from Karnatak University, Dharwad. She has published widely in reputed National and International journals and published a book on Patent Law.

Sudha Hegde is an Assistant Professor of Journalism at Government First Grade College, Kalasa, in the Chikmagalur district. Her research interests lie in communication theories and the diffusion of educational innovation.



Negotiating 'Challenges' to folklore in Digital age: Case Study of Phatobihu in India's Northeast

Rinku Pegu

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to trace the digital impact on folkloristic practice in India, in a context where the country has notched up record levels of digital engagement both in the private and public sphere. The attempt is to gauge whether digital technologies are shaping folkloristic traditions and how the local people embedded in such practices are responding to the presence and circulation of such technologies. Is it still possible for practitioners of folklore to retain its organic form and essay a nuanced relationship with technology in the digital age without being overwhelmed? Spatially, the focus area of this research is Assam located in India's Northeast, a region steeped in various folkloristic traditions as opposed to the 'mainland' characterised by classical genres. The research in particular dwells on Phatobihu, whose practice is intertwined with the onset of the spring season and which as a folkloristic genre combines dance and song aided ably by food recipes.

Keywords: Phatobihu, folklore, digital technologies, Assam

How does the practice of local performative folk art engage with the digital media? On one hand, digital media enables to capture for posterity, current practices in art forms and contributes towards its archival purchase/value. On the other, there exists constant tension of being overwhelmed by the medium to lose the very essence of a particular expression or practice.

The object of this research is an annual event called Phatobihu which is celebrated as part of the Spring Bihu festivities and confined largely to the specific Dhokuakhana sub-division in the northern bank of upper Assam, an area criss-crossed by several rivers. Spread across three days, Phatobihu celebrations fall within the last Sunday of the Bohag month of the Assamese calendar (mid-April to mid-May) and are unlike other Bihu festivities. Characteristics unique to Phatobihu is its emphasis on 'collective' and 'inclusivity'. There is a preference for team competition under various categories, be it dance, drums and songs as opposed to 'Mancho Bihu' (Bihu performed on stage), marked by an array of individual competition. Phatobihu is considered complete only with the participation of local communities with specific identities, apart from the dominant people whose mother tongue is Assamese. Phatobihu celebrations bring closure to the month-long Bihu festivities observed during Bohag in Assam.

Bihu as a generic cultural term is associated with Assam and its observance tied closely with the agrarian calendar. The festival of Bohag Bihu coincides with the Assamese New Year, characterised by performances across several genres, dance, songs, drums, and wind instruments on the eve of the sowing season. Next comes the autumn Bihu known as Kati or Kongali, a sombre occasion in which people offer prayers for a bountiful harvest. The last Bihu called Bhugali is observed during winter, mid-January devoted to feasting coming as it does post-harvest, when the granaries are full.

Bihu, celebrated in the Assamese calendar of Bohag with which Pahtobihu is associated, is memorialised as a spring festival. Just as the natural world comes alive in this season with a burst of colours, Bihu celebrations are meant to reflect this positivity through a revelry of songs, music and dance. The predominant emotions are appreciation of beauty, love and harmony steeped in inculcating a reverence for nature, reiterating an organic bond between man and nature. The underlying agrarian import of Bohag Bihu lies in these festivities which are considered as a prelude to the hard labour that awaits in the fields for sowing paddy. The first day of Bohag Bihu celebrations is dedicated to domesticated cattle, particularly the cow, crucial for ploughing when they are feted with a bathing ceremony and special feed.

Literature Review

Prior to the digital age, the introduction of technology into everyday living has not sat down well with folklorists as well as practitioners. Opinions have broadly been divided into two broad schools. One is apprehensive about technology making folklore redundant, other argues that technology would facilitate transmission of folklore and in the process generate new converts and frontiers (Dundes, 1980). Since then several new shifts, persuaded largely by associated technological developments, have been clocked. Notably, efforts have been made to locate folklore in the backdrop of industrial society in the last two decades of the twentieth century, for instance exploring folklore vis-à-vis mass media communication pioneered by historians. These developments were then marked by anthropological and literary turn (Ben-Amos, 1998). Recent scholarships have examined folklore in the backdrop of digital media technologies and the latter's impact on the manifestations of folk performances in digitised and virtualised form (Bronner, 2009).

The current research attempts to investigate two pivots on the site of folklore in the community. One, how does the object of the study, Phatobihu celebrations in Assam located in India's Northeast, engage with media technologies? Second, given the ubiquitous presence of both analog and digital technologies, to what extent is it possible for practitioners of traditional art forms to engage with media technologies and remain unscathed by retaining their organic essence?

In the scheme of Pahtobihu, audiences share the same equivalence as participants and to figure out the significance of their gaze and location, it was essential to borrow the concept of 'experiencing the city' from the review essay, Walter Benjamin for Historians written for the American Historical Review by V Schwartz (2001). Further, to explore the significance of the Phatobihutoli both as a site of performance and practice and dynamism this space lends to the assembled participants and audiences, this research draws upon the rhizomatic pattern of beginnings and relationships elucidated by Deleuze and Guatarri's (1984) in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for carrying out the research has been a multi-pronged qualitative approach. One is a textual analysis of the annual souvenir titled Bihuwan, published to coincide with the Phatobihu festivities for representing and reflecting the literary and cultural heritage of the event, and the other, in-depth interviews of past office bearers representing various committees associated with Phatobihu celebrations.

Within the genre of textual analysis, for decoding the embedded meanings, messages and structure associated with Phatobihu celebrations, the study relies upon qualitative content analysis, more particularly, the readings of various texts such as essays and writeups published in the annual souvenir, Bihuwan, whose subject matter constitutes Phatobihu.

In-depth interviews with former office bearers of the various committees were conducted to elicit the views and valence of Phatobihu for local residents of Dhokuakhana. These interviews were conducted face-to-face in the town of Dhokukhana and largely followed the conversational style format with open-ended questions. They pertained to organisational rationale and institutional drive without which Phatobihu festivities would not be possible. Phatobihu has a permanent committee with elected members to run throughout the year. This organising committee is assisted by other committees like editorial committees, celebration committees etc.

Two issues of Bihuwan have been taken through purposive sampling method due to their content material as primary sources. The 2013 issue of Bihuwan focuses on media and media technologies in relation to the circulation of Phatobihu as well as its archival merit. It raises the crucial issue of the nature of Phatobihu's media engagement or rather the lack of it. The 2016 issue commemorates forty years of the Bihuwan publication and marks a milestone in carrying a dedicated colour photography section with a special exposition on cultures of various communities inhabiting the region, including neighbouring states like Arunachal Pradesh.

Historicity and Genealogies of Phatobihu

One feature that lends distinction to Phatobihu is its claim to historical lineage as being the oldest form of Bihu in Assam. The name 'Phato' has multiple origins. Writing on the history and traditions of Phatobihu, author Ismail Hossain lists no less than eight such probabilities (Hossain, 2002). Of these, two are widely accepted through circulation via print media. One of them, 'Phat' in Tai-Ahom language refers to an assemblage of people in large numbers for trading and payment of tax. Boasting an exceptional drainage system, the Habung region graced by seven tributaries of Brahmaputra was considered the most fertile and hence open to trade and a haven for government revenues. The other refers to severance, which in the Assamese language means phat or breakaway. The idea behind the move was to make Bihu celebrations more inclusive, engaging all communities inhabiting the land rather than confining it to a single community of Assamese-speaking people.

Legitimacy for Phatobihu is drawn from historical documents. The narrative begins with Edward Gait's description of Habung as the initial capital of the Ahoms, then referred to as a Shaan tribe in his famous 'History of Assam' (Gait, 1984). The Ahom monarchy is famed for securing the longest uninterrupted reign of over six hundred years in India's medieval history. Coinage of Dhokuakhana is of more recent origin, for the area historically referred to as Habung. In common parlance, Gait (1984) is credited with introducing the practice of history writing into Assam by mastering no less than several Indic and local languages and referencing multiple sources (Saikia, 2008).

This assertion legitimised through history texts gets traction through circulation in most expositions and commentaries on Phatobihu. Be it monographs on Phatobihu like Pahtobihur Itihaas aru Oitijya (Hossain, 2002) and Pjatobihu aru Ananya (Gogoi, 2020). Bihuwan, the souvenir brought out each year to time with the Phatobihu festivities, echoes this through dedicated articles on its historicity. For instance, the 2016 edition carried articles like Phatobihur Ayurekha (Periodicity of Phatobihu), Looking Back: Childhood Memories of Phatobihu, etc. (Bihuwan, 2016).

While Phatobihu's origin can be traced to the medieval period around 15th century, it has nurtured ties to events shaping the emergence of independent India. Popular parlance narrates how local youth from the Mishing community, inspired by the concept of the Non-cooperation Movement at Kheda of 1918, raided the godowns of Marwari merchants, called Keyas. Few narratives even allude to the influence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 on the people behind the incident. The backlash from the colonial government was so harsh that, it became impossible for the Mishing men to return to their homes for fear of imprisonment. As an expression of solidarity with the hounded fellow neighbouring community, the Phatobihu celebration was suspended. The period of suspension from 1918 to 1947 coincides with the commencement of the First World War till India achieved independence.

Spatio-temporal aspects of Phatobihu

Phatobihu comes with a geographical patent. In popular parlance, the word Phatobihu conjures up simultaneous images of two associated spaces. One is the Charikoriya river on whose banks Phatobihu is said to have originated, followed by Moghuli Sapor, the very site hosting the Pahtobihu ground. This ground christened as Phatobihutoli, was secured in 1996 after many meanderings mimicking the rivers crisscrossing the region.

Spatial references and adjectives abound in the writings and narratives on Phatobihu. Be it in the public sphere like the Assam Tribune, an English daily from Assam, carrying news headlined 'Phatobihu of Dhokuakhana: A unique folk tradition in nature's bounty'. Another English daily The Sentinel too is not far behind in inscribing the locality with the event by announcing that 'Phatbihu will be celebrated in Dhokuakhana' and goes on to highlight the various activities and programmes lined up for the festivities. Focus on Phatobihu does not elude national newspapers like The Telegraph, by dwelling on the local government's initiative to nurture the oldest form of Bihu as a form of institutional recognition.

Articles published in Bihuwan bear titles like 'Phatobihu a unique festival of Dhokuakhana'; 'Bihu Dhokukhania: Phatobihu'; 'The Gem of Assam's culture: Phatobihu'. Such titles, for instance, 'Historical Phatobihu'; The Past and Present of Phatobihu; 'A page from Assam's Glorious History: Dhokuakhana', have temporal dimensions too with hints at their historicity.

Bihuwan carries on an average five to six articles devoted to Phatobihu. Most of them would come with prefixes like 'Privileged to participate in Phatobihu'. Ties to the land feature as a recurring motif in the artistic stable of Phatobihu. Highlighting this aspect, chapters titled 'Geography of Dhokuakhana as reflected in Bihu songs' form parts of manuscripts on Phatobihu. What materialises is the pronounced influence of geography on the cultural expressions of Phatobihu, a concept popularised by Ogbo Kalu in his exploration of the impact of ecology and cultural orientation on the adoption and practice of 'masquerades' among the Igbos of Africa (Kalu, 2004).

The Environmental Turn

Nature holds the centre stage in the Pahtobihu worldview, be it to frame the Bihutoli grounds, the actual site of performance, or in the narrative through songs, compositions and textual representations. Unlike other festival grounds, Phatobihutoli is remarkable for exhibiting green vegetation and sporting trees while also exercising a strict ban on any artificially made wares be it headgear, kitchen wares, serving dishes, etc. from the celebration venue. Conventions prescribe strict adherence to things natural be it flowers adorning the dancers' hair or clay cups for serving tea /water and dried tree leaves for platter.

The lyrics of the Bihu songs are replete with allusion to the natural world, of birds, bees, and trees. Rivers have been integral to Phatobihu celebrations since yore. The sanctuary that the river bank provides with its tall grass both in terms of secluded space, where amorous longings could be expressed while also inspiring creative compositions for Phatobihu festivities. Bihuwaan carries articles chronicling the myriad ways nature features in Bihu songs, with titles like 'Influence of rivers, boats and oarsmen on Bihu songs'(Bihuwaan, 2016).

Trees are mandatory for Pahtobihu venue without which 'Mukoli-bihu' or open celebration closely associated with Phatobihu would not be possible. Of the total three days of celebration, one day is earmarked for dancing and merry-making beneath the trees. Each team from different communities, exhorted by the enthusiastic public, rotates among trees by swapping them. On beholding the Mukoli-bihu, a chief invitee to the celebrations is noted to have remarked how Bihu would have been organically observed thus amidst natural surroundings. It affords an immediacy and intimacy rarely witnessed in Manchobihu or staged Bihu.

Space as relational: the many meanings of 'Tholua'

The Assamese term 'tholua', implying local, has multiple readings when deployed in association with Phatobihu. This festivity serves as a special marker of the significance of inhabiting a region of Dhokuakhana. In such a context, the term Dhokuakhania 'raij' gets traction and foregrounded. Dhokuakhania as a sub-set of the larger Assamese identity rests largely on the celebration of Phatabihu and its register of unique characteristics.

The other is that of local produce, what the land has to offer and how human ingenuity makes the most of it. Dhokuakhana is home to a distinctive breed of silkworms out of which women spin silk threads to weave the Muga fabric that goes on to adorn the Phatobihu participants and audience alike. Tholua also means using locally sourced metals, the bell-metal in this case as a base for artisanal products of kitchenware and traditional decorative symbols, including ornaments. Reiterating this aspect, Indira Gogoi associated with the editorial committee asserts that 'Dhokuakana is written all over Phatobihu, be it specific dance gestures, attire made out of muga silk, food served on bell metal utensils and Bihu songs inspired by the myriad rivers and rivulets of this region.

In several published articles, the land of Habung is referred to as a rural idyll, where people are self-reliant growing their own food, weaving fabric spun out of locally produced thread and engaging in art and craft. Phatobihu celebration is an occasion where all of these traditional practices converge to serve as a brand ambassador for all things 'Dhokuakhania'. Phatobihutoli is a site where the 'Tholua' is in full display for the audience gaze to soak in and immerse themselves.

Ritualistic sanction of conventions

Phatobihu originates in the performance and observations of certain rituals during the designated three days of celebration. These rituals lend the celebrations a certain distinctiveness. The cultural practices associated with Phatobihu are informed by the idea of the world as interdependent. Just as the succession of seasons is a certainty carrying within it the values of persistence and continuity, this desire to retain the authenticity of the cultural expressions, particularly performances associated with Phatobihu can be read as a measure to reflect these conditions.

A set of codifications governs the observance of many facets of Phatobihu celebrations. These rules given the sanctity of conventions are carefully regulated and monitored. Right from performance both in form and dance moves, lyricism, exhibition, attire, to food sold in stalls and utensils on which food is served is codified. Strict adherence to these conventions is mandated. Rules are mandated for teams to qualify as participants in the Phatobihu festivities. Both men and women have to clad themselves in traditional attire woven in silk reared in the region, called Muga. Apart from natural fiber, artists are required to adorn themselves with materials sourced locally. Be it the orchid that graces ladies' hair-bun, to their armlets to headgear of men.

Language is another aspect that is closely guarded. Modern Assamese words are not allowed to inform the lyrical expressions of the Phatobihu repertoire, be it songs or poetry. The rhythm of the accompanying instruments, as well as the tune of the songs, are jealously monitored by an insistence on using traditional instruments like drums made out of Deer skin, Bamboo flute, Gogona made out of Bamboo, Pepa made out of Buffalo horn and Taal again of Bell-metal. Competitions in various categories during the festivities are adjudicated based on proximity to laid down conventions and adherence to the aforementioned rules. It needs to be mentioned that a few of the dance moves and manoeuvres are unique to Phatobihu.

Focussing on the gatekeeping aspects of the organisers, Manju Gogoi, former Vice-President of Udjapona committee for several terms, explains 'as a collective the onus is on us through a strict vigil on the usage of words in the Bihu lyrics, implementing specific attire bound rules in terms of colour, texture, and tonality, etc. She further claimed to take pride in enforcing the dress code uniformly across all people irrespective of their positions.

Conventions are not confined to participants alone. Sporting non-traditional attire to the Phatobihu venue is considered a sacrilege. It is mandatory to be clad in handwoven traditional dress. There have been instances when renowned cultural personalities have been denied entry to the venue for being found wanting in this aspect. The insistence on conventions even for the audience stems from the idea that Phatobihu is complete only with their active participation. This removal of audience passivity considers them as co-creators of the very festivities they have come to witness. This resonates with Schwartz, who describes a historical mode of experiencing the city in which the viewer is situated to observe, command and participate all at the same time (Schwartz, 2001).

As a tribute to the exemplary discipline on display, a chief guest invitee to the 2012 Phatobihu celebrations, litterateur Nirmal Kumar Choudhury, swayed by a sea of people sporting handwoven customary dress, could not help remarking that 'surely Bihu would have been celebrated thus in days of yore' (Bihuwan, 2013).

Documenting Phatobihu: Souvenir as archives

The contribution of intelligentsia to keeping the tradition of Phatbihi alive cannot be ignored. Represented by teachers, professors, lawyers, authors and literary figures, they are deeply implicated in this project through their independent literary contribution as well as in Bihuwan. This practice of documentation deploying the print medium was institutionalised in 1976 through the publication of Bihuwan as an annual souvenir. With an average of over 200 pages, the Bihuwan is officially described 'as a cultural and literary souvenir to the Phatobihu festival'. It carries articles, essays, lyrics, and poems dedicated to various expositions of Bihu, its relevance to everyday life, and the larger question of Assamese identity.

The Bihuwan does not come across as a customary souvenir but is essayed with an eye to posterity. Apart from sections dedicated to the historicity of Pahtobihu, creative aspects, relationships and impact on society, every edition serves as a template for creating a corpus of institutional memory. Each edition carries the list of office bearers for various Phatobihu committees, like the welcome committee, celebration committee, and editorial committee since the launch of the souvenir, even while incorporating the latest. Importantly, the elected committee responsible for organising Phatobihu, functions throughout the year, with offices built within the Phatobihutoli.

All these work toward creating the Pahtobihu celebration as an event of pride and prestige. The organisers are buoyed by the fact that invited guests do not merely grace the occasion but memorialise their experience at Dhokukhana through narratives. Renowned litterateurs like Ismail Hossain and academicians like Nirmal Kumar Chowdhury are a few such instances. Both were guests of honour during Phatobihu celebrations on different occasions. The former has authored a book titled 'Historicity and Significance of Phatobihu' where he asserts Phatobihu as the organic representation of the actual form of Bihu celebrations. Through the pages of Bihuwan one can map out the famous personalities associated with Phatobihu festivities by giving time through attendance.

Interestingly, the photo essay carried to mark forty years of Bihuwan was divided into several sections. One was titled 'From the old files', and another 'Generating harmony: Phatobihu' showcasing the participation of different indigenous communities in Phatobihu clad in their traditional dress. This entanglement of media and technology with Phatobihu continues to inform discourses around it.

Through his article titled 'The role of news media in promoting Phatobihu' Indivar Buragohain chronicles how for the first time Phatobihu made a mark in the Assamese public sphere in 1985 with Prantik, a cultural magazine from the leading news group carrying a lengthy exposition (Bihuwan, 2013). The article maps out the media trail about when and how Phatobihu was featured in Assamese newspapers and television channels. The daily, Dainik Assam, gets special mention for running a feature series in 1990 coupled with a coloured photo feature. With an eye on the *longue duree*, essaying a letter to the organisers, B Buragohain goes on the offensive by raising the parochial nature of the organising committee due to its disinterest in the digital medium. He asks why the members have not thought of a simple website showcasing Pahtobihu celebration. Joining the issue, Indivar Buragohain too attributed the misrepresentation of Phatobihu in the public sphere to the lack of digital presence, even in the simplest form of a website, as a source of authentic information.

B Buragohain takes the trouble of drawing the attention of organisers to the curation facilities that digital media affords without much expense and little effort in each year's

celebration. The engaging aspect of his letter was its insistence on garnering an international audience not merely for curiosity, but for translating it into scholarly interest that would beget academic footfalls into the Dhokukhana area through research. The article further underscored the need for a digital version of Bihuwan published in English and the official language, Hindi, to take its contents beyond provincial and national shores (Bihuwan, 2013).

Apart from documentary value, such exhortation to cater to an international audience through uploads in multiple languages goes contrary to the celebration of the 'local' that Pahtobihu remains embedded in practice. In continuation of this spirit, till date, the organising committee of Phatobihu has not been compelled or persuaded to engage with either digital medium or technologies. No official website was launched nor Compact Discs to record and archive the various creative expressions spurred by Phatobihu festivities. Be it songs, dance, drum beats and notes of other musical instruments. Such an attitude does not spell the absence of digital footprints on Phatobihu. A facebook Page titled 'Fato Bihu - Dhakuakhana' stands out for its disclaimer stating 'not the official page of Fato Bihu'. The official inaction is replaced by a multitude of individual initiatives on Phatobihu across all popular social media networks.

Meanwhile, mired in the world of print, Pahtobihu celebrations serve as an occasion to launch books, essayed by noted litterateurs like Ismail Hossain, titled Phatobihu History and Significance to independent publications like Phatobihu and Anyana by Dimebshwar Gogoi. The latter seeks to memorialise the untimely death of their son. Even as the former unabashedly works to document the historicity of Phatobihu, the latter too attempts to inscribe the same by carrying two testimonials. One, a letter from leading cultural icon Moheswahr Neog complimenting the songs and lyrics of Phatobihu, the other, Ram Goswami, a former librarian of Central Library Assam commending the author's first publication 'Deha Gorokhile Prem' in 1972 as an effort to locate the centrality of Phatobihu songs as a cultural expression of Dokuakhana. Indeed, few such publications run into reprints.

'Performative site' as master enabler

If the codification of rules and regulations pertaining to the Phatobihu celebration has helped retain its organic self, then credit for facilitating strict compliance and adherence goes to the performative site for engendering a gatekeeping function. In this case, it is the Phatobihutoli on the erstwhile Mohghuli Chapori.

The three-day celebration within the Phatobihutoli is steeped in organisational heft. The public gaze is well choreographed by inviting a host of eminent personalities as invitees to the three-day event. Customary practice designs a four-tier guest list straddling multiple sites of the capital, social, political, economic and cultural (Bourdeiu, 1986). A chief guest along with a host of other invitees as special guests, guests on whom honour would be conferred, adorn the festival. Literary figures, cultural icons, institutional heads like the Assam Sahitya Sabha and political representatives of Assam often tend to figure in the guest list.

The performative site takes on a layered meaning aided ably by ritualised conventions. It is a site, which facilitates the public to engage with Phatobihu intimately and meaningfully. More importantly, experiences are scored and memorialised as conventions demand the public to co-produce the festivities rather than remain passive recipients. This explains why Phatobihu as an event in the cultural calendar of Assam has a lot of purchase. From the common man to the intelligentsia all like to flag their association with Phatobihu.

Carefully calibrated visual imagery that emerges from the three days of Phatobihu is a giant assemblage of people clad in traditional attire and engaged with local customary practices.

Three colours dominate the Phatobihutoli - red, golden and white in their many hues. The golden of the Muga silk competes with that of the bell-metal products. Red dominates the patterns on the dress fabric and the matching blouse of the women, both participants and audience. White is what graces the Gamucha, a hand-woven native garment of honour. Framing them in a collage is the green of the natural world as the overarching backdrop. The materialities of colours, bodies and the event space jostle for the attention of the visitors' gaze.

What is at work here is Gertrude Stein's assertion that 'visual culture is what is seen.' If what is seen depends on what there is to see and how we look at it, then a montage of images is achieved through the careful choreography of time-tested conventions ensured by the members of the organising committee. Not merely another assemblage but ascribing itself the task of continuing traditional folk festivals in an organic way, maintaining the authenticity of everyday agrarian life. Encapsulating this experience, Rekha Gogoi, a general member of the Phatobihu organising committee, described 'the energy which emanates from the assembled people to watch the participants perform is something to behold as a living tradition'.

Creating a collage of place and memory through a series of impressions and experiences collected across three-day days of festivities at Phatobihutoli contributes toward building the 'performative notion of space' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Phatobihutoli is not just a static space to behold and witness but to carry away evocative impressions, where the site itself comes into being while marshalling and enabling the subjective experience of individuals present, framed by conventions aural, auditory and visual.

As inheritors of 'tholua' legacy, the Phatobihu organising committee of Dhokuakhana pitches itself as the custodian of this unique cultural expression through the insistence on conventions parleyed through punitive measures and ritualised observance in an otherwise a-religious setting. In return, the public of Dhokukahna responds with a commitment to participation.

Key Findings

Phatobihu originates in performance and the three days reserved for this festivity resonates with practices considered organic to the Dhokuakhana region and is reminiscent of a period when life was governed by rhythms of seasons privileging agrarian life, where rivers and its tributaries formed the main artery of navigation. What stands out in the commentary on Phatobihu carried in Bihuwan is an emphasis on the event's exceptionalism in terms of people and place. Phatobihutoli is a site to showcase and behold the local traditions of everyday life, a peek into a bygone organic self. A site where people from various communities inhabiting the land gather to partake in an annual ritual of harmony and co-existence. It is not merely as a site of rituals for an organic living, but also as an assemblage of people.

The accent on the local, be it produce like silk, metals, organic lyrics or songs, works to project an immersive experience of what it means to be 'sons of the soil'. It can be read as a challenge to the idea of globalisation. A period during which descendants of the not-so-distant inhabitants of Habung detach themselves from the world and goes back to being organic without any form of mediation. Within the kernel of this insistence on the 'tholua' carry several symbolic meanings like saluting the craft of silkworm rearing for threading, which in turn begets the art of handloom. Or for that matter, nurturing the craft of making utensils and decorative pieces work to project in sharp relief the rural idyll of independence and self-sufficiency.

This desire to retain the authenticity of local cultural expressions, particularly performances associated with Phatobihu through conventions can be read as a measure to keep

harmony among the people like the assured succession of seasons with the flow of time. The performative space of Phatobihutoli helps in ensuring compliance by enabling close monitoring and implementation of conventions which are backed ably by organisational heft.

Subscription to the rules and conventions willingly by the people cannot be ruled out entirely given the pride involved in the evocation of an immediate identity of 'Dhokuakhonia Raij'. Dhokuakhonia emerges as a badge of honour to be worn literally and locals are preoccupied simultaneously with exhibiting, engaging and participating. Through a calibrated coordinated accent on historicity, continuation of tradition and custodians of an organic legacy, Phatobihu serves as a special marker of the significance of inhabiting the region of Dhokuakhana and reiterating this relationship every year. Phatobihu represents the aural, auditory and visual culture of celebrating everyday life in an organic form shaped by environment, people and place. A period when the micro-identity of Dhokuakhana, a region that can be traversed in one's lifetime as opposed to the nation, which implies distance, is fore-grounded.

Conclusion

The conventions, rituals and projection of 'tholua' collectively work to solicit for the Phatobihu festivities respect, attention and collective engagement from the Dhokuakhana raij 'public' cutting across ethnic, linguistic differences, particularly between the tribal and Assamese-speaking people. A time when the term 'Dhokuakhana Raij' takes on a resonance in shaping a unique identity away from the minefield of mediated realities. This explains the official disinclination to engage with digital media yet, despite persuasions from several quarters.

In the process, this digital indifference opens up spaces for archiving and interpreting the Phatobihu folklore by a multitude of foot soldiers through individual initiatives in the digital sphere and thus echoing the very pluralistic and inclusive attributes that the celebration is associated with.

References

- Ben-Amos, D. (1998). The Name is the Thing. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 111 (441), 257-280. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/541311>
- Bourdeiu, P. (1986). Forms of Capital. In J Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Greenwood.
- Bronner, S. J. (2009). Digitizing and Virtualising Folklore. In T. J. Blank (ed) *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular expression in a digital world*, (pp 21-66). Utah State University Press.
- Buragohain, I. (2013, May). Phatobihur Prosarort Sangbad Madhyom. *Bihuwan*, 37, 77.
- Buragohain, B. (2013, May). Phatobihur Ayujok Hokoloi Duaakhar. *Bihuwan*, 37, 199.
- Choudhury, B. (2022, April 14). Phata Bihu of Dhakuakhana: A unique folk tradition in nature's bounty. *The Assam Tribune*. <https://assamtribune.com/culture/phata-bihu-of-dhakuakhana-a-unique-folk-tradition-in-natures-bounty-1364712>
- Deleuze, G. & F. Guattari. (1980). *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press.
- Dundes, A. (1980). *Interpreting Folklore*, Indiana University Press.
- Gogoi, J. (2016, May). Ubhoti Saisu: Soisobot Dekha Phatobihu -Haei Bihu aie Bihu Nohoi. *Bihuwan*, 40, 31.
- Gogoi, Dimeshswar. (2020). *Phatobihu aru Anyana: a collection of articles on Phatobihu and others*, B L Enterprize.
- Gohain, P. (2016, May). Phatobihu Ayurekha. *Bihuwan*, 40, 34.

Hazarika, H. (2016, May). Bihugitot Noi, Nau aru Naoriya. Bihuwan, 40, 88.

Hossain, Ismail. (2002). Phatobihur Itihaas aru Oitijya, Jyoti Prakshan.

Kalu, O. U. (2004). The Embattled Gods: Christianisation of Igbol and 1841- 1991, Africa World Pr.

Rahman, D. (2007, June 22). Back to Bohag Bihu Beginnings. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/back-to-bohag-bihu-beginnings-assam-initiates-project-to-revive-popularise-the-festival-s-oldest-form/cid/705350>

Saikia, A. J. (2008). Gait's Way : Writing history in early twentieth Assam in R Aquil & P Chatterjee (eds) History in the Vernacular, Permanent Black.

Sentinel Digital Desk (2021, April 4). Phat Bihu festival in Dhakuakhana from May 7. <https://www.sentinelassam.com/north-east-india-news/assam-news/phat-bihu-festival-in-dhakuakhana-from-may-7-532137>

Schwartz, V. R. (2001). Walter Benjamin for Historians. American Historical Review, 106 (5), 1721-1743.

Notes on the Contributor

Rinku Pegu, PhD is an alumni of Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and presently Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, India. Areas of Interest and research focus are Community Media, Gender, Global-History and Intersection of Culture with Communication Technology.



BOOK REVIEW

'This is the Congress Radio calling on 42.34 meters from somewhere in India'

S. Arulselvan

Usha Thakkar. (2021). Congress Radio: Usha Mehta and the Underground Radio Station of 1942. Penguin Viking, India.

The enchanting world of media and journalism history has been meticulously documented by authors from various backgrounds, including historians, journalists, media experts, and academics. Among India's prominent pioneers in this field is Nadig Krishna Murthy, whose groundbreaking work in 1966 laid the foundation for future scholarship. Building upon this legacy, scholars like D. Sadasivan, a former historian turned journalism professor at the University of Madras, delved into the growth of public opinion in the colonial Madras Presidency, offering insightful narratives published by the University of Madras. Another significant milestone in India's newspaper landscape was explored by the erudite Canadian-born professor Robin Jeffrey in his 2000 publication, shedding light on the country's newspaper revolution with a specific focus on the language press. Esteemed historian A. R. Venkatachalpathy has made valuable contributions to the field by examining the colonial print culture of Tamil Nadu, uncovering the rich tapestry of the region's intellectual heritage, and pioneering research in print culture within South India.

When it comes to the history of radio broadcasting in India, [i]Academic contributions have been relatively scarce. Nonetheless, Thangamani, a distinguished Professor of History[ii], has admirably filled this void by meticulously documenting the captivating tale of broadcast history in Tamil Nadu during its formative years from 1924 to 1954. In addition to the academic community, many firsthand accounts and insider perspectives have emerged from high-ranking officials who served in Akashvani, popularly known as All India Radio. Notable works by officials such as Baruah (1983), Awasthy GC (1965), PC Chatterji (1991), and Mehra Masani (1985) offer unique insights into the inner workings and evolution of broadcasting in India. Across the seas, Asa Briggs, one of the foremost historians of broadcasting in Britain, has deepened the field with a series of notable works. His recent masterpiece, 'A Social History of the Media from Gutenberg to the Internet', encapsulates the transformative power of communication technology throughout the ages.

A substantial addition to the realm of Indian radio history comes from a captivating recent book by Usha Thakkar: "Congress Radio: Usha Mehta and the Underground Radio Station of 1942." Usha Thakkar presents a compelling narrative that chronicles the story of

Usha Mehta, who, driven by a staunch commitment to India's independence, established an underground radio station to disseminate hope and resistance during the peak of the freedom struggle. Thakkar's meticulous research provides a profound understanding of the power of media in shaping social reform.

1942 holds historic significance, shaped by World War II and the Quit India movement. As conflicts raged across Europe, Asia, and the Pacific, thousands of people gathered at the Golwalia Tank Maidan in Bombay on August 7, 1942, for the All India Congress Committee meeting. The momentous Quit India Resolution was passed there, and Gandhiji's mantra of "Do or Die" was proclaimed. This proclamation began a series of revolts and conflicts between the British rulers and Indian citizens. Amidst the reverberation of Gandhi's mantra and the nation's unwavering focus on freedom, a 22-year-old student named Usha Mehta, participating in the AICC meeting, took Gandhi's motto to heart and established an underground radio station to react to the propaganda broadcast through the British government's mouthpiece, the All India Radio.

Recognizing the pivotal role of communication with the public in its past campaigns, Congress conceived the idea of a secretive radio station, with Usha Mehta becoming its compelling voice. The Congress Radio was the secret anti-imperialist voice of the Indian National Congress, shrouded in secrecy from all but those involved. On August 14, 1942, Usha Mehta helped establish Congress Radio, just seven days after the proclamation of the Quit India Movement by the Congress Committee. Broadcasting at 42.34 meters, Congress Radio fearlessly transmitted its messages for 104 calendar days until it was forcibly taken off the air on November 12, 1942.

The clandestine Congress Radio brought messages from Gandhi and other leaders to the masses, reported the unofficial version of events and fought disinformation until its members were arrested and imprisoned in November of the same year. Though grounded in Bombay, Congress Radio's impact resonated far beyond the city's seashore, inspiring freedom fighters nationwide. The British responded to the Quit India Movement with heavy repression, arresting nearly 60,000 Indians within twenty-four hours, including Gandhi, Nehru, and most of the Congress leadership. Protests burst forth in Bombay, with thousands of freedom fighters taking to the streets, targeting post offices, railway stations, and telegraph offices, as deactivating the communication network and transport system would render the ruling British in solitary confinement and undermine the government.

Radio served as a powerful tool for propaganda but came at a significant cost. To acquire the necessary equipment, a next of kin of Usha Mehta offered jewellery. The team included Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Vithaldas K. Jhaveri, and Chandrakant Jhaveri. Vithaldas Jhaveri solicited the help of Nariman Abarbad Printer, a professionally trained radio engineer, to construct the Congress Radio transmission set. The owner of Bombay's Chicago Radio, Nanik Motwani, supplied the necessary broadcast equipment. At precisely 7:30 p.m., Usha Mehta announced, "This is the Congress Radio calling on 42.34 meters from somewhere in India."

The Congress Radio team feverishly determined to frequently change their operational spaces, often moving from one flat to another. Since newspapers quite often hesitated to cover politically sensitive subjects, Congress Radio became the only reliable source of information for the people. Usha Mehta famously stated, "When the press is gagged and all news banned, our transmitter certainly helps a good deal in furnishing the public with the facts of the happenings and in spreading the message of rebellion in the remotest corners of the country." Dr. Ram

Manohar Lohia, and a few other members of the team, read the news in English, while Usha Mehta read it in English and Hindustani. Their programs enlarged impulse, linking people from all across India. Initially, broadcasts were limited to only once a day, but later expanded to twice a day, in English and Hindustani. Large groups would gather in villages and cities around a radio receiver to listen to the broadcast, which boldly criticized royal rule and wide-open Britain's spoils of India.

Within the radio broadcasts, Usha Mehta interspersed reports of local uprisings with pre-recorded speeches by Mahatma Gandhi and other revered leaders. Despite constantly relocating their broadcasting base, the organizers of Congress Radio were eventually arrested, abruptly ending their courageous venture. After independence, Usha Mehta's invaluable contributions to the freedom struggle through the clandestine radio earned her India's second-highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan.

The book's annexure, titled College Radio, vividly captures the remarkable bravery of young college students who defied the world's largest empire. It provides a compelling account of their audacity and determination in adversity. Furthermore, the book's appendix presents a treasure trove of valuable collections, including police reports and court records.

This book is a historical document of a group of passionate young patriotic fighters who operated the Congress Radio, passionately propagating the dispatch of freedom and spreading vital information about the struggle against the oppressive regime of the British government. Within a brief period, they made history and transmitted trustworthy news to the Indian people, instilling assurance among them and unsettling the British authorities.

A re-look into the workings of the Congress Radio is enlightening and invigorating. It breathes fresh life into the epitomes of freedom and dedication, offering a respite from our troubled and despondent times. This book is recommended for anyone eager to explore the untold tales of bravery, resilience, and the unwavering spirit of those who tirelessly fought for India's freedom, as well as the intriguing, lesser-known stories from India's captivating broadcasting history.

Notes

[i] In India, radio broadcasting began in 1923 with the Radio Club of Bombay, followed by the Calcutta Radio Club set up in the same year. Both went bankrupt after a few years. Nevertheless, it was not until 1936 that the Indian State Broadcasting Services (established in 1930) became the All India Radio (AIR) or Akashvani.

[ii] Professor Thangamani served in the Department of History at Madras Christian College, Chennai, and his doctoral research has been developed into this book.

References

- Asa Briggs., Peter Burke (2005). *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Awasthy, G.C. (1965) *Broadcasting in India*. Allied Publishers Private Limited.
- Baruah, U.L. (1983). *This is All India Radio: A Handbook of Radio Broadcasting in India*. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India
- Chatterji PC (1991). *Broadcasting in India*. Sage.
- Mehra Masani (1985). *Broadcasting and the People*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.
- Murthy, Nadig Krishna (1966). *Indian Journalism, Origin, Growth and Development of Indian Journalism, From Asoka to Nehru*. Prasaraanga, University of Mysore.

Robin Jeffrey (2000). India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics, and the Indian-language Press, 1977-99. London: Hurst and Company.

Sadasivan. D. (1974). The Growth of Public Opinion in the Madras Presidency. Madras: University of Madras.

Thangamani.Pon. (2000). History of Broadcasting in India, with special reference to Tamilnadu 1924-1954. Chennai: Ponniah Pathippagam.

Venkatachalapathy. A. R. (2015). The Province of the Book: Scholar, Scribes, and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu. Permanent Black.

Notes on the Contributor

Dr S Arulselvan is Professor at the Department of Electronic Media and Mass Communication, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India. He specialises in political communication and culture studies.



BOOK REVIEW

New materialist / Posthuman feminism

Thejaswini. J. C

Hannah Stark (2017). *Feminist theory after Deleuze*. Bloomsbury. New York.

Deleuzian concepts are not particularistic, therefore they present both challenges as well as possibilities. While their ability to operate on the plane of immanence is often seen as a potential lens for various situations, arranging the arguments systematically remains a challenge due to the rhizomatic nature of Deleuze's thoughts. *Feminist Theory After Deleuze* (Stark, 2017) attempts to address this challenge by providing explanations for his concepts from a feminist point of view.

In addition to the book's objective of elucidating Deleuzian philosophy through the lens of feminism, it also serves as a basic reader of Deleuzian concepts. The introductory chapter discusses the core idea of the book and provides a detailed overview of subsequent chapters. The chapter titles, which are also Deleuzian concepts, serve as points of departure to think through Deleuze. Each chapter clearly defines the applicability of the particular concept when used in feminist politics. The book adopts the Deleuzian perspective, which views problems in general and the issue of gender in particular, not as limitations or constraints, but as generative forces. Consequently, feminist struggles and issues are perceived as generative, producing new ways of thinking.

The first chapter, titled 'Thought', questions the traditional patriarchal attempts to perceive thinking as a non-feminine activity. It highlights the absence of feminist issues in intellectual discourse for a significant period and attributes this to the perception of thinking as a male act (Braidotti, 1991). The chapter uncovers the historical struggles that women have faced in participating in intellectual discourses and posits the necessity to use Deleuze in this regard, as thought to Deleuze is non-hierarchic. In addition, the chapter details Deleuzian call to move beyond Cartesian logic, which sees men as rational beings who think and discuss, while women are reduced to material bodies. Further, the author places celebrated liberal humanism in an antithetical stance, arguing that, like other philosophical positions of its time, liberal humanism has failed to attend the issues of women, as it stresses the essential human, which re-emphasises the hierarchies in thinking. Deleuzian rhizomatic thinking, in contrast to arborescent thinking follows no system or order. It liberates the act of thinking from the phallogocentric approach, and ensures an inclusive space for thinking.

The second chapter contains one of the most important concepts of Deleuze, which also appears in the chapter titled 'Becoming'. It delves into Deleuzian fascination with movement and ruptures, providing detailed explanations of related concepts such as molar, molecular, majoritarian and minoritarian. Deleuzian perception of molar identities is configured as stable, organised and territorialised identities that are adapted with normative conditioning. On the other hand molecular identities are the rupture towards the unstable. The chapter delineates why becoming-molecular or becoming-minoritarian operates differently within female and male bodies, as becoming minoritarian also involves undermining power. Deleuzian contributions to the concept of becoming are relevant for gender studies, in this regard, as they aid in the exploration of power relations. Becoming, in the context of gender, does not imply a transition from one molar entrance to the other, rather it is about the undoing of historical inscriptions. The author anticipates that the concept of becoming-woman, which has no connection with the historic category of women, will enable us to think beyond the static and to negate the idea of essentialism.

The third chapter departs from and revolves around the concept of 'desire'. It begins by highlighting an interesting yet paradoxical connection between women and desire. On one hand, women receive constant reminders about what they should desire, while on the other hand, they are perceived and treated as objects of desire. The chapter narrates the historical evolvement of the concept of desire in the field of psychology and negates the psychoanalysis approaches since it perceives desire as a lack. Deleuzian understanding of desire is rooted in socio-economic conditions rather than emerging solely from interiority. Such an understanding goes beyond the reproductive drive and liberates desire from patriarchy. Desire to Deleuze is neither about a lack nor an attempt to limit the body, instead is a generative force, thus the author argues, it aids women in the process of becoming-woman, and thereby becoming-minoritarian.

Chapter four is titled 'Bodies', which is one of the most significant concepts in feminist discourse. However, Deleuze's idea of the body differs from the one in a conventional view. His effort to rescue the body from the Cartesian logic itself negates the phallogentric approach towards the body. Revisiting the arguments in the first chapter, the author asserts that Cartesian logic tends to create binaries and hierarchies, associating mind and thereby rationality with men and body with women. Further, the sex-gender distinction in Anglo-American feminism, which is widely used to understand sexual differences, is challenged in the chapter. Instead lived experience is posited as the centre of the issue. Deleuzian rejection of the body as a site of social code inscription, and his reception of embodied experiences aligns with this argument. The chapter concludes with an argument that the understanding of the body in terms of differences and capacities, instead of what it is, helps not only feminism but disability studies as well (Shildrick, 2004). Quoting Shildrick and Hicky-Moody, the author establishes the necessity of understanding the body not merely as a field of sexual/reproductive desires, but as a site of production and potentials. The adoption of this position, the author argues, helps anyone to understand the process of becoming, becoming-minoritarian.

The organisation of chapters in the book is commendable, not for touching every key concept of Deleuze or explaining them, but for drawing an effective connection from one chapter to the other. The fifth chapter, 'Difference' in the same way connects to all four previous chapters and explains the significance of Deleuzian difference in feminist inquiries. In this chapter, the author clarifies that Deleuze cannot be used for identity politics, as he is often misunderstood. His notion of difference does not revolve around oppositional understanding or identity. This perspective diverges from the Anglo-American arguments of erasure of difference.

The sixth and final chapter of the book establishes the significance of politics for feminism. The author begins the chapter by arguing that when it comes to concerns related to sex, gender and sexuality, power cannot be overlooked and therefore politics becomes relevant. However, in this context, politics is not limited to ideology alone, rather it encompasses the power dynamics that spread over structures and people. Deleuzian notion of politics neither centres around human subject nor adheres to identity politics, instead, it offers alternative ways of thinking beyond the politics of recognition. Recognition is problematic in feminism as it covers plurality and difference (Stark, 2017). However, the author does not negate the feminist movements that strive for recognition and representation, but is concerned that the by-product will be macro categories such as 'women' and 'human'. Deleuzian ontology aligns with these arguments, as it does not completely negate the representation paradigm, but rather places it on a secondary level.

References

- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity.
- Hickey-Moody, Anna. 2009. *Unimaginable Bodies: Intellectual Disability, Performance and Becomings*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Shildrick, M. (2004). Queering Performativity: Disability after Deleuze. *SCAN: e-J. of Media Arts*, 1.
- Stark, H. (2017). *Feminist Theory after Deleuze*, Bloomsbury Academic.

Notes on the Contributor

Thejaswini. J. C, Ph.D. is presently Assistant Professor in the Department of Media & Communication at MIT-World Peace University, Pune, India. Her areas of research focus include digital art and affect studies, and affect and feminist materialism.