# ONLINE

**A CPMS Peer Reviewed Journal on**
**Journalism, Media and Communication Studies**

**Editor**

**Mahmudul Hoque Moni**



**Centre for Practical Multimedia Studies (CPMS)**

## Foreword

---

Centre for Practical Multimedia Studies (CPMS) is an organization formed by some current and former students of the University of Dhaka. The objective of this organization is to encourage multimedia researches on Journalism, Media and Communication. The organization also wills to produce Mobile journalists (MoJo) for national and international media.

**ONLINE** is a peer reviewed journal more concerning of the practical grounds of Journalism, Media and Communication. The journal aims to provide studies and scholarly articles from different parts of the world. This is in fact the first international peer reviewed journal on this focus published from Bangladesh. The pdf format of this journal can be downloaded free of cost from CPMS website. Hopefully that will increase the number of beneficiaries across the world.

On Behalf of CPMS, I would like to take the opportunity to give my vote of gratitude to the peers of this very first issue for their hard work. I also convey my appreciation to those who have been associated with CPMS from beginning to present and to those who wished us success all the way. I would also like to acknowledge the priceless advices from Dr. Fahmidul Huq, Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Dr. Ahaduzzaman Mohammad Ali, Dr. Kristin Skare Orgeret and Ms. Shabnam Azim.

Regards,

Mahmudul Hoque Moni
Editor to this Journal
And,
Chief Executive
Centre for Practical Multimedia Studies (CPMS)

## CONTRIBUTORS OF THIS ISSUE

- Dr. Kristin Skare Orgeret
  Associate Professor
  Department of Journalism, Media and Communication Studies
  Oslo University College, Norway
  E-mail: Kristin.Orgeret@jbi.hio.no
  Website: http://www.kristinskareorgeret.wordpress.com


- Rainer Ebert
  Moral Philosopher
  Philosophy Doctoral Student
  Department of Philosophy
  Rice University, Houston, Texas 77005
  United States of America
  E-mail: rainerebert@googlemail.com
  Website: http://www.rainerebert.com


- Md. Harisur Rahman
  Research Officer
  ICDDR'B, Bangladesh
  E-mail: haris238@yahoo.com
  Website: http://mdharisurrahman.weebly.com


- Mahmudul Hoque Moni
  Independent Filmmaker and Photographer
  Social Activist
  Dhaka, Bangladesh
  E-mail: mhmoni24@yahoo.com
  Website: http://www.mhmoni.com

## *Table of Content*

**Free expression and dilemmas of universalism: Four countries and a conference: Negotiating conflicting rights**

*Dr. Kristin Skare Orgeret*

At a conference on Media, Extremism and Freedom of Expression in Jakarta, Indonesia in February 2011, some 40 journalists from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Norway and Pakistan shared experiences and discussed, sometimes in a heated manner, issues linked to freedom of expression. The topic of blasphemy laws was central at the conference, as it has been in the public spheres of the four countries the last years. The following quotes are taken from the Norwegian debate:

> Norway needs anti-blasphemy regulations to protect minorities against derisive and hateful expression. The point is not to restrict freedom of speech but to give it direction so that weak groups do not feel insulted or mocked. If we do nothing the differences within Norwegian society will increase in the future. (Abid Q Raja in Dagsavisen, 31.01.2006).

> The development of freedom of expression as a human right has primarily grown out of a Western political and philosophical tradition. But this does not make these principles invalid elsewhere …Freedom of speech is not a right that exists in order to create peace and consensus in society. This means that we must also tolerate utterances that many will find deeply offensive and wounding. This is particularly the case with what many call blasphemy. (Ronning, 2009, p.18)

Between these two quotes I have found my subject for this article, which is their tension and their connection: the negotiation of conflicting rights. The right to freedom of speech and expression is closely related to other rights, and may be limited when conflicting with other rights. Napoleon Bonaparte is known to have said that – *A people which is able to say everything becomes able to do everything*[1]. Most journalists, editors and scholars in the four different countries agree that there has to be limits to free speech, it is where to draw the line that is the challenging and interesting question. The tension between free speech and other rights is at the heart of our discussions here.

The current article will hence develop this issue and discuss the dilemmas of universalism in relation to freedom of expression in an exploratory manner. In doing so, it will refer to political philosophers, democratic thinkers and contemporary scholars. Excerpts from interventions as well as quotes from some of the journalists participating at the above mentioned conference in Jakarta will also be included.

---

[1]http://www.dictionaryquotes.com/quotations/quotes-6758.php

## A universal right?

Freedom of expression is often regarded as an integral and universal concept in modern liberal democracies. Freedom of expression is frequently seen as *the* most important right as it provides the basis of other human rights. The right is inserted in Article 19 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

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

The notions of freedom of speech were developed under The Enlightenment period in the 18th century. Influential philosophers of England and France stressed the importance of the individual with each person having a right to speak freely and participate in government. Freedom of belief would have little meaning if thoughts could not be freely expressed and shared. A central thinker was Voltaire (François Marie Arouet), with the often quoted statement "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it". An interesting detail here is that although the quote is widely attributed to Voltaire, it cannot be found in his writings. According to Evelyn Beatrice Hall (1906), the closest one gets is in a letter of 6 February 1770 to abbot le Riche where Voltaire said "Monsieur l'abbé, I detest what you write, but I would give my life for you to continue writing it"[2].

Another Enlightenment thinker, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) is often mentioned as one of the central thinkers on the issue of freedom of expression. Mill's analysis of the affirmative effects of freedom of speech for the discovery of truth has been the starting point for many thinkers in this field (see e.g. O'Rourke 2001). Mills' reasoning is based on the idea that we have to acknowledge the possibility that other opinions may be true, and even if they are not true we need them to keep the true opinions alive. Furthermore we need 'wrong' opinions to in order to improve our own merely partial truths. If everyone is free to express their thoughts it will result in the enhancement of human intellectual powers and in turns benefits the common good. Hence Mill provides us with an understanding of the dangerous conformity of a society: Even if we are right, the truth may decline into superficial dogma if not challenged.

Ironically, during this very period of Enlightenment, when many political philosophers began to defend the principles of universalism and equality, some of the same individuals still defended the legitimacy of colonialism and imperialism. The work of enlightenment anti-imperialists such as Denis Diderot and Immanuel Kant reflects the struggle between universalistic concepts such

---

[2] "Monsieur l'abbé, je déteste ce que vous écrivez, mais je donnerai ma vie pour que vous puissiez continuer à écrire".

as human rights and the realities of cultural pluralism. Diderot's solution is noteworthy here as he proposed to identify particularity as the universal human trait. In other words, he emphasized that human beings all share similar desires to create practical rules of conduct that allow particular ways of life to flourish without themselves creating harsh injustices and cruelties (Muthu 2003, p.77).

The right to freedom of speech and expression is closely related to other rights, and may be limited when conflicting with other rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966[3]. In art 20, part 2 it proposes seven restrictions to freedom of speech: Reputation of others; Rights of others; National security; Public order; Public moral; Public health; and Hate Speech.

**Hate speech**
Many would argue that when criticism and denigration cross the line to hate speech, the right to freedom of speech must be curbed.  A classical example of hate speech is how the radio station *Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines* (RTLM) played a crucial role in the Rwandan genocide from April to July 1994. During this short period of time a nation-wide extermination campaign led by the Rwandan government against the Tutsi ethnic minority population resulted in at least 500 000 Tutsi civilian deaths. The radio station promoted racist propaganda against the Tutsis and explicitly called for their extermination. RTLM notoriously swept up the Hutu's to start a "final war" to "exterminate the cockroaches".  Investigating the impact of propaganda on participation in this violent conflict in Rwanda, David Yanagizawa (2010) shows how the RTLM broadcasts explained an increase in violence that amounted to more than 45.000 Tutsi deaths, about 9% of the total deaths of the genocide.

Arguably, the hate speech element might be the factor on the list of restrictions to freedom of speech where there is most universal agreement on the need for limitations. The growth of new digital communication technologies and Internet has raised important concerns as some argue the Internet represents a new and powerful tool to hate mongers and extremists, or to what has come to be called "cyber hate" (Levin, 2002) or "cyber-racism" (Daniels, 2009). Even with laws against intimidating speech, the anonymity of the Internet at times makes it difficult to track down and prosecute perpetrators of threatening messages.

**Internet and social media**
The universal advancement of digital communication technologies is hence central here as it raises discussions related to freedom of expression and where to draw the line. The role of Internet and social media as carriers of freedom of expression has been highlighted, not least

---

[3] As of December 2010, the Covenant had 72 signatories and 167 parties

during the first months of 2011, as the world has witnessed a series of uprisings in oppressive dictatorships in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Discussions of the political impact of Internet and social media often focus on the power of mass protests to topple governments. It can be argued that new communication technologies real potential lies in supporting civil society and the public sphere:

> As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action. (Shirky, 2011, p.28)

Whereas the spread of the new communication technologies is becoming increasingly universal[4], the individual states' reactions to the increased potential of the citizens to be more publicly vocal have taken particular forms. Processes of censoring online content critical of government or content that is seen challenging dominant norms have reached high levels, but that has also censorship circumvention techniques able to challenge Internet censorship of dissident content (see e.g. Al-Saqaf 2010). There is clearly a need for more empirical research on how processes of negotiating the role of social media as a potential tool of freedom of expression take place in different local settings. The impact of the new technologies on authoritarianism is also part of this discussion and further research should consider how the new technologies may both be part of liberation struggles and at the same time boost some regimes' attempts at surveillance, propaganda and censorship. How certain regimes find it very positive that circumvention tools like Tor are used in some authoritarian settings to bypass censorship, while at the same time being critical against Wikileaks affecting their own power base are interesting aspects of this discussion.

Roland Robertson (1992) argued that globalisation is the *universalisation of particularism* and the *particularisation of the universal*. In discussions of freedom of speech, these tensions are apparent. Both the universal declaration of freedom of speech and the universal restrictions listed above are translated into national contexts in wide variations of manners. Limitations to freedom of speech may follow the 'harm principle' or the 'offense principle' for example in the case of (child) pornography; hate speech or religious defamation.

---

[4]The digital divide both between regions and countries, as well inside nations, should not be ignored here, but as internet increasingly becomes accessible on mobile phones, large new segments of people will enter the digital sphere.

**Particular national responses to restrictions – the example of blasphemy laws**

To illustrate how the universal manifests itself in different local settings, let us look into the four countries in focus here and their national take on the subject of religious defamation and blasphemy laws.

**Norway** has a so-called slumbering blasphemy law (paragraph 142 in the penal code). The freedom of expression commission proposed to repeal the law in 1999, but the proposal was not acknowledged by the government. In 2009 the non-active law was suggested replaced by a new effective law against blasphemy, but this proposition met a lot of opposition in the Norwegian public sphere and was eventually withdrawn. The general opposition would argue that religious criticism is an important part of a democracy and that conflicts are better solved through debate and dialogue, not by suppression. There was also a common fear that blasphemy laws may be dangerous if misused by anti-democratic forces. At the same time many would argue that having the right to offend does not necessarily mean that you have to make use of this right at all times.

> One can argue against any kind of absolutism: against absolute rule, against absolute monarchs, against absolute power, and against absolute freedom of speech. The right to not be offended is a crucial one. (Sturmberg-Muller 2011)

There also seems to be an increased awareness about the fact that language is an act – in the way it interferes with reality and is not only a representation of reality. The relationship to discussions around freedom of speech is clear: we do not only publish our opinions, we may be doing something with those words such as categorizing certain groups. Speech acts may have different meanings and different effects in different settings.

**Indonesia**, being the largest Muslim country, and the third largest democracy in the world, prohibits blasphemy by its criminal code in article 156 (a). The penalty for violating 156 a) is a maximum of 5 years imprisonment. The Jakarta conference was held soon after three members of the Muslim Ahmadiyya sect had been killed and a series of violent attacks on Christian churches and a Muslim school accused for teaching the Shia school of thought. Indonesia has been urged to retract its blasphemy laws and provide greater protection to religious minorities – including Christians and the Muslim Ahmadiyya sect – in order to protect the country's reputation as one of the world's most progressive and tolerant Muslim-majority countries. The state of Indonesia is secular and one of country's laws allows somewhat surprisingly perhaps, pornography. Ade Armando from Universitas Indonesia, who also participated at the conference, took part in the preparations for the new law on pornography. His argument in favour of the right to publish pornography was straight forward: we are Muslims, but not an Islamic state. Head of News in Indonesian Metro TV, Devianti Fardiz, added:

We live in a country with large variations and this can for instance been witnessed in the way we dress. Some want to cover themselves up totally, whereas in certain parts of Indonesia the men will wear nothing but a case covering their most intimate parts.

**Bangladesh.** Despite its Muslim state religion, Bangladesh uses a secular penal code, which dates from 1860—the time of the British occupation. The penal code discourages blasphemy by section 295A that states that "any person who has a 'deliberate' or 'malicious' intention of hurting religious sentiments is liable to face imprisonment". This article of the penal code was enforced against controversial and now exiled feminist and writer Taslima Nasreen who fled the country in 1994. Nasreen wrote a series of newspaper columns and gave interviews where she allegedly called for revision of the Qur'an to ensure women's rights. In 2002 Home Ministry declared the publication, sale and distribution of volume 2 of Nasreen's autobiography 'Utal Hawa' (Wild Wind), illegal. Another example is the controversial author Dr. Humayun Azad, lecturer of Bengali language and literature at the University of Dhaka. Azad published a wide range of books, among them *Naari* (women) in 1992, often referred to as the first comprehensive feminist book in Bengali. *Naari* is highly critical of the male-chauvinistic attitude of religion towards women and attracted negative reaction from the conservatives. The book was banned in 1995; however the ban was lifted five years later, following a legal battle that Azad won in the Bangladeshi High Court. In 2003 Humayun Azad published *Pak Sar Jamin Sad Bad*, a political satire exposing the politics and ideology of Islamic fundamentalists. This book was also met by a lot of criticism and it was demanded that it should be banned and that the Blasphemy Act should be introduced on the author. In February 2004, Professor Humayun Azad became victim of an assassination attempt near Dhaka University campus during the annual book fair. He died in Germany six months later.

The largest Islamic party in Bangladesh, Jamat has argued in favour of introducing stricter blasphemy laws. On May 30, 2010 the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) blocked the social networking site Facebook for posting caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed and offensive images of the country's leaders. The BTRC had directed internet data service handlers Mango Telecom and Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd to find a way to block what they referred to as "antisocial contents" posted by Facebookers. But the two companies failed to fix the problem, which prompted the government to block the entire site (Dhaka Mirror, 30 May 2010). The delegates to the Jakarta conference told how the blocking was met with harsh disapproval and demonstrations organized by students and lecturers at Dhaka University criticizing the government's move and arguing for freedom of expression. Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury said the blocking of Facebook is by no means beneficial. "Information should be free flowing. When that is hampered, people would only find more interest in finding ways to bypass it" (The Daily Star, May 30, 2010). And indeed, many Facebook users accessed the site through proxy servers with different IP addresses, challenging the government's control

of information[5]. The limitations to free speech feed into the discussions about censorship, when governments suppress speech or other communication for one reason or another. Lately in Bangladesh, there is also an increased pressure on the Government to repeal the Section 377 of the Bangladeshi Criminal Code, often used to criminalize homosexuality (see e. Ebert and Moni 2011). The discussions about where to draw the line, both in terms of religious issues and freedom of speech seem vibrant and alive in Bangladesh today.

**Pakistan** stood out as more different than the three other countries represented at the Jakarta conference with the strictest anti-blasphemy laws among countries with a Muslim majority. Paragraph 295 of Pakistan's Criminal code states that *"Defiling the Quran merits imprisonment for life. Defaming Muhammad merits death with or without a fine".* Pakistan's blasphemy laws were introduced by former dictator Zia ul Haq in the 1980s, and have been used largely against religious minorities and opponents of the government. Several of those who have been acquitted of blasphemy charges have gone on to be killed by vigilantes.

The controversial blasphemy laws were also a central element in the discussions at the conference. Pakistan's blasphemy law has attracted particular attention since a Christian woman Asia Bibi, in 2010 was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death, and the following murder of Salmaan Taseer, the Governor of Punjab by his own bodyguard in January 2011 in protest at his stand against the blasphemy laws. The governor was one of the few high-profile politicians in Pakistan to speak out against the harsh blasphemy laws and against the death sentence to Asia Bibi.

The discussions were influenced by the fact that Pakistan is a far more difficult country for journalists to work in than the three other participating countries. Hamid Mir from Geo TV, told how 18 Pakistani journalists were killed and 327 wounded only in 2010. Several of the journalists described a situation of self-censorship and fear. In the current situation any critical remark may be translated to blasphemy and although Pakistan's Supreme Court has never sentenced anybody to death under the blasphemy laws, groups and individuals are often willing to kill at their own discretion. This results in a situation where fear rules and the media to a large degree are silenced. The gravity of the situation was emphasized when the only Christian minister in the Pakistani government Shabbaz Bhatti was shot and killed just after the Jakarta conference. Bhatti had also urged reforming the blasphemy laws that impose the death penalty for insulting Islam.

By looking into the four countries' different particular takes on religious defamation and blasphemy laws we clearly see how the line between freedom of speech and other rights is drawn differently in various local contexts. The discussions showed how there might not be one given

---

[5]http://www.dhakamobile.com/off-topic-zone/26243-facebook-temporarily-blocked-access-bangladesh.html

answer to where to draw the line, but that this might vary with space and time. The need for continuous negotiations and meetings between actors from different backgrounds and experiences was emphasized.

**To give the extreme a voice?**
To what degree one should allow extremists voice themselves was another central topic of discussion at the Jakarta conference. Here the views were divided even within the national groups of delegates. "A small faux pas may lead to serious religious conflicts", said Hamid Mir emphasizing the need to take the specific particular context into consideration when discussing universal notions of freedom of expression. Together with some of his colleagues from Pakistan he asked for a "code of practice" rather than a "code of conduct" for journalists in order to create understanding and reconciliation in ethnic and religious conflicts.

Not all delegates agreed that extremists should be allowed media coverage. Several journalists from all the participating countries warned that extremists might hijack the attention in religious conflicts and inflame somebody to violent actions. Some participants meant that extremists' views should be exposed and met by accountable counter arguments whereas other journalists meant the best solution was to kill the extremist views by silence.

A common trait for all the four countries in focus here is that the last years' developments have resulted in heated debates about where to draw the limits of free speech. Because, most people agree that freedom of expression should not be totally unconditional. It is *where* to draw the line that is the challenging and interesting question, which feeds into all debates on freedom of expression in one way or another. Today, quite a lot of scholars argue that specific conditions must be considered when discussing freedom of speech, such as the issue of power distribution. Is it a vulnerable minority or a powerful majority that is offended?

We should also be aware of the fact that in our globalized world, mediated messages travel quickly and are decoded in a wide range of various particular situations.

> Expressions 'let loose' in the global sphere are likely to have different effects when appearing in a well established democracy with tradition for discussion, in comparison to appearing in states in which public expressions are most often strategic politics, not intended for discussion, but for direction. (Schaumburg-Muller 2010)

An excellent illustration of this, was given by Norwegian journalist Fredrik Græsvik at the Jakarta conference. Græsvik explained how he had almost been killed in June 2008 when visiting a *madrasa* in Peshawar at the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan, as one of the boys there received a picture through MMS on his mobile phone of what was considered a highly offending cartoon of Prophet Muhammed, published by Norwegian newspaper *Adressavisen*.

"Does Norwegian editors try to get me killed?" was his somewhat rhetoric question. We live in a world where the advancement of new communication technologies often is related to universal ideas of the right to information – where news may cross the continents unhindered and with the speed of light. Just a few weeks after the Jakarta conference the relationship between blasphemy and modern communication technology was once again highlighted as a controversial US evangelical preacher oversaw the burning of the Koran in a small Florida church and the news spread to the world. The event resulted in violent demonstrations in Northern Afghanistan where, among others, 12 UN workers were killed.

**The notion of responsibility**
Hence, in the negotiation of conflicting rights, the need to contextualize arises. In many of the contributions at the conference, the need to stress how we should be very careful in making universal generalisations from single cases developed, and a rather conditional perspective grew out of the discussions. Most participants wanted the general definitions to be universal, while at the same time being increasingly confronted with the need to be conditional – to link the arguments to a specific context, to a certain time and place. Out of the multifaceted and at times contradictory discussions one notion seemed to grow: the notion of responsibility. Writing in South Africa during the heydays of the repressive system of apartheid, Nadine Gordimer became sensitive to the importance of responsibility:

> Responsibility is what awaits outside the Eden of creativity. I should never have dreamt that this most solitary and deeply marvellous of secrets – the urge *to make* with words – would become a vocation for which the world, and that lifetime lodger, conscionable self-awareness, would claim the right to call me and all my kind to account. The creative act is not pure. History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it.

> The writer is *held responsible*: and the verbal phrase is ominously accurate, for the writer not only has laid upon him responsibility for various interpretations of the consequences of his work, he is 'held' before he begins by the claims of different concepts of morality – artistic, , linguistic, ideological, national, political, religious – asserted upon him. (Gordimer 1984, p.3)

In the words of Gordimer, with language the writer, in our case the journalist, "enters the commonalty of society, the world of other beings who are not writers" (1984, p. 4).This can be seen as being closely related to the social significance of journalists and the role of media in different settings.  "What right has society to impose responsibility upon writers and what right has the writer to resist? "Nadine Gordimer asked in 1984. This article has shown that these questions are as relevant and as universal ever, the answers will depend on the particular conditions of the journalist or writer we ask.

The discussions surrounding freedom of expression have increased fiercely the last decade. As many of the above examples remind us there are no simple or ready-made 'one size fits all' solutions, as even most freedom of expression advocates would agree that there has to be limits to free speech. This article has attempted to show how restrictions to the universal declaration of freedom of speech are translated into four national contexts in very different manners. It is clearly *where* to draw the line between freedom of speech and other rights that is the thought-provoking question.

## References

Al-Saqaf, Walid (2010). 'Internet Censorship Challenged'. In C. Strand (Ed.) *Increasing transparency and fighting corruption through ICT*, Spider ICT4D Series No. 3 (pp. 71-93). Stockholm Universitetsservice.

Daniels, Jessie (2009). Cloaked websites: propaganda, cyber-racism and epistemology in the digital era *New Media & Society*, August 2009 11: 659-683.

Ebert, Rainer and Moni, Mahmudul Hoque (2011). 'Local LGBT Community Calls for Repeal of Section 377' in *The Weekend Independent*. April 8, 2011.

Gordimer, Nadine (1984). *The Essential Gesture: Writers and Responsibility.* The Tammer Lectures on Human Values. Delivered at the University of Michigan, October 12, 1984.

Hall, Evelyn Beatrice (1906). *The Friends of Voltaire.* London, Smith.

Levin, Brian (2002). A Legal and Historical Analysis of Extremists' Use of Computer Networks in America, *American Behavioral Scientist*, February 2002 vol. 45 no. 6, 958-988

Muthu, Sankar (2003). *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

O'Rourke, K.C. (2001). *John Stuart Mill and Freedom of Expression: The Genesis of a Theory.* Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought.

Robertson, Roland (1992). *Globalisation: Social theory and global culture.* London: Sage.

Rønning, Helge (2009). 'The Contemporary Challenge to the Concept of Human Rights' in Kierulf, A. and Rønning H. (eds) *Freedom of Speech Abridged?* University of Gothenburg, Nordicom.

Schaumburg-Muller (2011). Freedom of Speech and the derision of groups. Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on *Democracy as Idea and Practice.* University of Oslo, 14 January 2011.

Shirky, Clay (2011). 'The Political Power of Social Media' in *Foreign Affairs.* Vol.90, nr.1, pp.28-41.

Yanagizawa, David (2010).'Propaganda and Conflict: Theory and Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide'. Retrieved from http://people.su.se/~daya0852/, 6 March 2011.

**Acronyms**

**BTRC**  Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission
**ICCPR**  International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
**MMS** Multimedia Messaging Service
**RTLM**  *Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines*

# On What a Good Argument Is, in Science and Elsewhere

*Rainer Ebert*

> *"Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.*
> *Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many.*
> *Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books.*
> *Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.*
> *Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations.*
> *But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason*
> *and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."*
> (Siddhārtha Gautama Buddha)

[**Abstract.** This article investigates what constitutes good reason, in particular in scientific communication. I will start out with a general description of what scientists do and will identify the good argument as an integral part of all science. Employing some simple examples, I will then move on to derive some necessary conditions for the goodness of an argument. Along the way, I will introduce various basic concepts in logic and briefly talk about the nature of human knowledge. I will conclude by relating my discussion of good reasoning in science to critical thinking in general and explain why I believe that critical thinking is at the heart of a well-functioning liberal democracy.]

Universities and other research institutions around the world are inhabited by a peculiar group of people, working in fields as diverse as astrobiology, moral philosophy and superstring theory. What are the conditions under which life on a planet is possible? Do fish have moral rights? Does the gravitino exist? In their quest to answer these questions scientists run computer simulations, think and conduct experiments. While the questions of science are as numerous as rivers in Bangladesh, our expectation towards scientists of all traits is really one. We expect them to ultimately uncover what is the *fact of the matter*. We want to *know* how the world works. \e want to know what is true (and what is not).[1] The ultimate goal of scientific inquiry is ***truth*** – the truth about how life comes about, the truth about the moral status of non-human animals, the truth about nature's most elementary constituents. In their effort to uncover the truth, scientists discuss their findings with their peers, publish articles in professional journals and books, attend

---

[1] For the purpose of this paper, I will assume a rather simple theory of truth that I will state rather vaguely. I will assume that there is an objective world and that what we believe is true *if and only if* it corresponds to the *facts* – to the way things actually are "out there". In other words, "p" is true *if and only if* p, e.g., "Curzon Hall is red" is true *if and only if* Curzon Hall is red. Since it is assumed that there is only one world we all are part of and have access to, there is also only *one* truth that does not vary across cultures or eras. The reader who wants to learn more about the philosophy of truth finds an excellent introduction in Blackburn (2007). For a more in-depth treatment of central issues in the theory of truth, I recommend Blackburn & Simmons (1999), which is a collection of writings by key authors in the field.

conferences and give talks. They *communicate* with each other. Science essentially is a collaborative endeavor. Biologists interested in (the possibility of) life on other planets need to talk to astrophysicists about the physical conditions in these foreign worlds. Moral philosophers concerned with our treatment of non-human animals arguably need to understand the biology of pain. Theoretical particle physicists need to deal with the experimental findings of their colleagues working at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) near Geneva. Progress in science requires truth, or what is currently best supported (and thus most reasonably believed to be true), to be communicated within the scientific community. The intent of this communication is not merely to report the truth but rather to persuade others to believe it. Only if truth is believed, and there are good reasons to believe it, it becomes **knowledge**.[2] When scientists publish professional articles (give talks, publish books), they thereby want to share their new-found knowledge with the scientific community. An article that serves this purpose, hence, has to provide *good reasons* to believe that the author's findings are an instance of scientific knowledge. Understanding what exactly counts as a good reason to believe is the key to understanding scientific communication. Before I attempt to give an answer to the question of what constitutes such a good reason, I shall say a word or two on the objects of scientific belief – propositions.

A **proposition** is the meaning of a declarative sentence token. A *declarative sentence* is a complete and grammatically well-formed sentence in any language that makes a claim. Declarative sentences are sometimes also called **statements**. Here are some examples:

> The world's population of Royal Bengal tigers on January 16, 2011 was 1,847.
> Chittagong is the capital of Bangladesh.
> The Oriental Magpie Robin (*Doyel*) is warm-blooded.

On the other hand, "Open the window, please!", for example, is an *imperative sentence* and not a declarative sentence insofar it commands rather than making a claim.

Propositions are **truthbearers**; they have the property of being either true or false. Among the propositions meant by the above statements, the second one is false and the third one is true. Whether or not the first one is true, nobody knows. However, it is either true or false, and nothing else.

---

[2] Plato seems to have suggested this definition of knowledge as justified true belief in *Theaetetus* 201. It has been popular among professional philosophers until the 1960s, when American philosopher Edmund L. Gettier revolutionized epistemology by providing striking counterexamples against this traditional definition, cf. Gettier (1963). I will not go into this important debate here and refer the interested reader to Audi (2011) or any other recent introduction to epistemology instead.

Consider the above statement about the Oriental Magpie Robin. What reasons could you possibly have to believe that the proposition associated with it, say p, is true? You may have measured the body temperature of a sufficiently large number of Oriental Magpie Robins in environments with varying temperatures and found that they keep it at a roughly constant level. Your true belief that p (is true) would then be epistemologically justified, and an instance of knowledge. On the other hand, having been told that p by a friend is usually not a particularly good reason to believe that p (unless you have a good reason to believe that nearly everything he or she says is true). After all, he or she might be mistaken, or lying. Things are different in case your friend also tells you that the Oriental Magpie Robin is a bird and that all birds are warm-blooded. If you believe that what he told you is true, you have a good reason to believe that p. Your friend provided you with an *argument*. In its so-called **standard form**, the argument runs as follows:

> The Oriental Magpie Robin is a bird.
> All birds are warm-blooded.
> Therefore, the Oriental Magpie Robin is warm-blooded.

Insofar the truth of the propositions meant by the first two lines establishes the truth of the proposition meant by the last line, this is a good argument.

In general, an **argument** is a set of propositions $P = \{p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n, c\}$ – one of which is the **conclusion** (c) whereas the others are the so-called **premises** $(p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n)$ –, whose elements $p_1, p_2, \ldots$ and $p_n$ taken together are meant to provide a rational justification for accepting the truth of c.[3] A *good* argument that is recognized as such provides rational people with a good reason to believe that its conclusion is true. Note that good arguments can be rhetorically ineffective and bad arguments can be rhetorically effective. Good arguments are good not because they actually successfully persuade some or even most people, but because they successfully establish truth (or a conclusion that is most likely true). What does this mean for the elements of **P**? Which conditions do they have to fulfill to make **P** a good argument? I will approach this question by considering some *bad* arguments. I will describe what goes wrong in each of these examples and thereby extract some necessary conditions for the goodness of an argument. I start with a slight variation of the argument above.

> $(p_1)$      All dolphins are birds.
> $(p_2)$      All birds are warm-blooded.
> $(c)$      Therefore, all dolphins are warm-blooded.

---

[3] Sometimes an argument is said to have more than one conclusion. By separately combining each of these conclusions with all premises, it is always possible to divide up such an argument into several arguments that each have just one conclusion, and then what is said in this paper applies.

Here, $\mathbf{P} = \{p_1, p_2, c\}$. If you knew, or believed to know, that $p_1$ and $p_2$ are true, it would be irrational not to assert the truth of c. As a matter of fact, c is true. Nevertheless the above argument is a bad argument. Since $p_1$ is false, it cannot be part of a good reason for a rational person to believe that c. An argument is good only if its premises are all true. So, assume the following argument fulfills this necessary condition on its premises.

($p_1$)     If it is raining in Gulshan, Kemal Atatürk Avenue is wet.
($p_2$)     Kemal Atatürk Avenue is wet.
(c)        Therefore, it is raining in Gulshan.

Further assume it is, in fact, raining in Gulshan. Does $\{p_1, p_2, c\}$ provide a rational justification for accepting the truth of c? No; at times $p_1$ and $p_2$ are true and c is false. For example, Kemal Atatürk Avenue might be wet because Dhaka City Corporation decided to clean it using large amounts of water. To make the problem with this argument more clear, consider the following *structurally identical* argument:

($p_1$)     If all human beings are male, Mohammad Zillur Rahman is male.
($p_2$)     Mohammad Zillur Rahman is male.
(c)        Therefore, all human beings are male.

While $p_1$ and $p_2$ are obviously true, c is obviously false. The premises are not logically related to the conclusion in such a way that the truth of the former guarantees (or strongly suggests) the truth of the latter. Something goes wrong while moving from the premises to the conclusion. $\{p_1, p_2, c\}$, hence, cannot be a good reason to believe that c. The *logical structure* of this and the previous argument is defective. In order to isolate this logical structure, replace all sub-statements contained in $p_1$, $p_2$ and c by *sentence letters*. Let "It is raining in Gulshan" and "All human beings are male" be A and "Kemal Atatürk Avenue is wet" and "Mohammad Zillur Rahman is male" be B, respectively. We then recognize the last two arguments as instances of the following argument pattern: If A, (then) B. B. Therefore, A. This pattern is called the *logical form* of the last two arguments. Note that, besides the sentence letters A and B, the pattern of the first premises only contains the *logical connective* "if ___, (then) ___". Logical connectives connect two[4] or more sentences in such a way that the truth-value (*true* or *false*) of the resulting sentence *only* depends on the respective truth-values of the original sentences.[5] In dealing with the logical structure of arguments, we concern ourselves only with the truth-values of containing

---

[4] Technically speaking, the *negation* is also a logical connective, even though it only has one operand. It combines with a single sentence to produce a more complex sentence having the opposite truth-value as the original.

[5] Speaking of a sentence as having a truth-value is shorthand for saying that its meaning, which is a proposition, has a truth-value. Strictly speaking, sentences are mere strings of symbols respecting certain syntactic rules and are as such neither true nor false; only propositions are.

sentences and not with any of their other properties. The argument involving Mohammad Zillur Rahman shows that the logical form presented above is not a good tool to establish truth. There is at least one instance of this form which has true premises and a false conclusion. That is, there is a *counterexample*.

An argument **P** = {$p_1$, $p_2$, …, $p_n$, c} is ***deductively valid** if and only if* there is no counterexample to its logical form. In other words, an argument is deductively valid *if and only if* the conclusion is necessarily true, if all premises are true. One says the premises **entail** the conclusion, in symbols: $p_1$, $p_2$, …, $p_n$ ||- c.

Here are some familiar argument patterns, or *argument types*, whose instances are all deductively valid:

| | |
|---|---|
| If A, then B. A. Therefore, B. | (*Modus Ponens*) |
| If A, then B. Non-B. Therefore, non-A. | (*Modus Tollens*) |
| If A, then B. If B, then C. Therefore, if A, then C. | (*Hypothetical Syllogism*) |
| A or B. Non-A. Therefore, B. | (*Disjunctive Syllogism*) |

Is deductive validity a necessary condition for the goodness of an argument? While many good arguments are deductively valid, we often, in day-to-day life and science alike, accept arguments as good, even though they are not deductively valid. Here is an example:

| | |
|---|---|
| ($p_1$) | All Oriental Magpie Robins observed so far were black and white. |
| ($p_2$) | Mahmuda is an Oriental Magpie Robin. |
| (c) | Mahmuda is black and white. |

The joint truth of the premises is not sufficient for the truth of the conclusion, i.e. c does not logically follow from $p_1$ and $p_2$. Mahmuda may well not be black and white. Hence, the argument is not deductively valid. Nevertheless, the above argument is certainly a good argument insofar it makes c very likely to be true.

We call an argument **P** = {$p_1$, $p_2$, …, $p_n$, c} ***inductively valid** if and only if* the conclusion is most probably true, if all premises are true.

Arguably, all good arguments are either deductively or inductively valid, whereby the former ones are better than the latter ones in the sense that they *guarantee* the truth of their conclusions, given the truth of their premises. An argument is **sound** *if and only if* it is valid and all of its premises are true. Soundness, however, is not sufficient for an argument to be good.

| | |
|---|---|
| (p) | Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh. |
| (c) | Therefore, Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh. |

The premise of this argument is true and entails the conclusion, i.e. this argument is sound. However, it is a bad argument since it does not provide any *independent* reasons to believe that its conclusion is true. Arguments like this are said to *beg the question*. Begging the question is a **logical fallacy**. In general, an argument that commits this fallacy has a conclusion that is already explicitly contained in one or more of its premises.[6] In contrast to a good argument, such an argument is not *informative*.

To sum up, *an argument is a good argument only if its premises are all true, it is deductively or inductively valid and it is informative*.[7] Depending on whether a good argument is deductively or inductively valid, its conclusion is true or most probably true, respectively.

Before moving on to say a bit about the role of good arguments in our lives outside science, I will address a lingering worry many readers will have at this point. A good argument is persuasive only if it is recognized as such. Others will not be persuaded by what you believe is a good argument if they believe that some of its premises are false. For this reason (and others), some people think you have to assure your communication partner that your premises are true. Notice that this presupposes that you yourself are certain about the truth of your premises. While there may be some statements, like one plus two equals three, about which you cannot be mistaken, humans are fallible about most subject matters. For example, we have plenty of evidence that the earth (approximately) is a spheroid. But it is possible to imagine that scientists one day in future will have gathered enough evidence to make it reasonable to believe that the earth is flat after all. People who believe that the earth is flat (e.g., the members of the infamous *Flat Earth Society*) make a different kind of mistake than people who believe that one plus two equals four. It is extremely hard to imagine that scientists will ever gather such evidence, but it is still *possible*. We cannot be *absolutely* certain that the earth is a spheroid. Therefore, we cannot assure others (in the strictest sense) that our empirical premises are true. Arguably, the same can be said about other kinds of premises. Still, we have little doubt that the earth is a spheroid, the Oriental Magpie Robin is a bird and all birds are warm-blooded; we know that these statements

---

[6] It is interesting to note that in every deductively valid argument the conclusion is implicit in the premises. How could it emerge from them otherwise? Now arguments of the form "A and B; therefore, B", for example, are presumably not informative, while arguments of the form "If A, then B; A; therefore, B" are. Where is the relevant difference between these two logical forms? This question becomes more confusing when you note that the latter example can be rewritten as "Non-A or B; A; therefore, B", and now seems more on a par with the former regarding its informativeness.

[7] Much more could be said about truth, validity, soundness, logical fallacies and related themes of argumentation theory. However, I hope that I said enough to get the reader interested and recommend Copi, Cohen & McMahon (2010) as an introductory book for further study.

are true (if they are true).[8] We, hence, find the first exemplary argument in this paper persuasive. We further expect every rational person who, like us, knows that its premises are true and is presented with this argument to assert its conclusion, i.e. that the Oriental Magpie Robin is warm-blooded. A reasonable requirement on the premises of a good argument that is meant to carry persuasive power, hence, seems to be that they are plausible. If, on the other hand, any premise is weak in the sense that it is epistemologically neutral or worse, and its falsity would make the conclusion false, the argument is not persuasive. Authors of scientific papers, in particular of those that deal with empirical research, make some of their premises plausible by explaining their experimental methods, data and data analysis techniques. They give their interpretation of the data and explain why they believe this interpretation is appropriate in the context given. Other premises are plausible by themselves, for example because they are mathematical theorems or insofar they are a known consequence of a widely accepted scientific theory – like the time dilation formula in relativistic physics. In fact, they might be so plausible that they are not even explicitly stated – they are understood in the present scientific context. If all premises of a research paper, implicit and explicit, are plausible to (a significant number of) the author's peers and its conclusions are supported by good arguments, then it is persuasive and can fulfill its purpose in scientific communication.

The systematic study of the principles of good argumentation, a fundamental element in scientific communication as we have seen above, is called *logic*. Logic, however, not only lays the foundation for all sciences but touches on every aspect of our lives. Like the scientist, we need to understand the logical relation between ideas to solve our day-to-day problems. When we make decisions, we have to weigh reasons to act this or that way against each other. At our workplaces, we are expected to find effective means for performing our tasks, to prioritize them in a reasonable way, to use accurate and clear language etc.

Most importantly, the well-functioning of a liberal democracy essentially depends on the well-developed reasoning skills of its citizens. It is vital for such a community that its members are able to think critically about political and social issues that affect them and others. Whether they read a newspaper or hear their political, religious and civil leaders speak on TV or elsewhere, citizens need to be able to identify bad reasoning and evaluate arguments. While the premises and conclusions in public discourse often are very different from what scientists professionally

---

[8] Suppose you have a lottery ticket and the odds that you will lose are a billion to one. It is, hence, extremely unlikely that you will win. Nevertheless you presumably would not say that you know your ticket will lose. Otherwise, why would you have bought it in the first place? No matter how insignificant, as long as there is *any chance at all* that you will hit the jackpot, it seems wrong for you to say that you know your ticket will lose. Why then do we claim to know that the earth is a spheroid? More about this and related puzzles in epistemology can be found in Hawthorne (2004).

talk about, the logical forms of arguments in both realms are the same. Part of what we learn when we study scientific reasoning, hence, has a direct application in public life; here is one:

A familiar example for a recurring theme in public life is religion. Imagine you wind up in a conversation with a Christian friend who presents you with the following argument:

> "Never has a book been subjected to such pitiless search for error as the Holy Bible. Both reverent and agnostic critics have ploughed and harrowed its passages; but through it all God's word has stood supreme […]. This is proof […] that here we have a revelation from God; for […] if God reveals himself to man […], he will preserve a record of that revelation in order that men who follow may know his way and will."[9]

Before we can evaluate this passage from a logical point of view (using our tools developed above), we have to identify the argument contained therein and put it into its standard form. "This is proof that" indicates that the directly following statement, namely that "here we have a revelation from God", is a conclusion. In order to make explicit what "here" is referring to and to minimize the number of sentence letters we will need to write down the logical form of the overall argument, we rephrase the conclusion as "God reveals himself in the Bible" (c). The word "proof" further indicates that your communication partner claims that he gave a striking argument, i.e. a deductively valid good argument, for this conclusion. What are the premises of this argument? Eliminating irrelevant statements and rephrasing what is left, we find the following two: "If God reveals himself in the Bible, God preserves a record of that revelation"[10] ($p_1$); "God preserves a record of his revelation" ($p_2$). We now have all we need to write down the argument in its standard form:

$(p_1)$    If God reveals himself in the Bible, God preserves a record of that revelation.
$(p_2)$    God preserves a record of his revelation.
$(c)$    God reveals himself in the Bible.

Replacing the statement in c by the sentence letter A and the statement in $p_2$ by B, we recognize this argument as an instance of the following familiar argument pattern: If A, (then) B. B. Therefore, A. Since a counterexample to this pattern was given above, the argument your Christian friend presented to you is not valid. She gave you a bad argument and it would, hence, be irrational to accept (c) on its basis only.

---

[9] Howard Pospesel found this example on page 49 in Straton (1941), cf. Pospesel (1999, p. 16).

[10] The fact that this is a premise is indicated by the word "for" prior to it in the passage above.

This was an instance of ***critical thinking***, the rational evaluation of our own and others' opinions and beliefs.[11] We live in a pluralistic and increasingly globalized environment, in which different cultures and traditions, different beliefs and values meet. Critical thinking helps us to keep our minds open in this challenging environment and enables us act thoughtfully. It stands for a strategy that offers us hope in "a world in which prejudices are assumed as premises, and loose reasonings pass current and are unchallenged until they beget some unpalatable conclusion."[12] Besides love, only reason has the power to overcome prejudice. In a society, in which standards of reason are not held in high esteem, the opinion of the loudest or the most powerful will be unreflectively accepted. The result is a dangerous conformity that is poisonous to a lively democracy. Therefore, *the study of philosophy and of logic in particular is of great value to all of us.*[13]

## ***References***

Audi, R. (2011). *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. New York: Routledge.

Barnet, S. & Bedau, H. (2010). *Current Issues and Enduring Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking and Argument, with Readings*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Blackburn, S. & Simmons, K. (1999). *Truth*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Blackburn, S. (2007). *Truth: A Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Copi, I. M., Cohen, C. & McMahon, K. (2010). *Introduction to Logic*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Fullerton, G. S. (1921). *An Introduction to Philosophy*. London: Macmillan.

Gettier, E. L. (1963). Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? *Analysis*, 23, 121-123.

---

[11] Barnet & Bedau (2010) provides a thorough introduction to critical thinking and applies the presented theory to controversies in contemporary society.

[12] Fullerton (1921), p. 264.

[13] For an excellent and accessible introduction to philosophy, I recommend Rosenberg (1995).

Hawthorne, J. (2004). *Knowledge and Lotteries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Plato. *Theaetetus*.

Pospesel, H. (1999). *Introduction to Logic: Propositional Logic*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Rosenberg, J. F. (1995). *The Practice of Philosophy: Handbook for Beginners*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Straton, H. H. (1941). *Baptists: Their Message and Mission*. Philadelphia: The Judson Press.

# 'Cultural Imperialism' and Its Possible Effects on Global Communication

*Md. Harisur Rahman*

## Introduction

The Issue of "cultural imperialism" has been in the center of polemics for quite a long time. From the rejectionist's approach, one group maintains that cultural imperialism is one way flow of cultural domination from west to east or from center to periphery or even from global to local. However, when juxtaposed with alternative of this position, the stance becomes far less attractive. This alternative provides a more comprehensive understanding, not only because of its ability to address the shortcomings of the opposing argument, but also because of its hair-splitting, thought provoking and encompassing interpretation, which include multiculturalism, cultural diversity and even counter cultural hegemony. This paper attempts to define cultural imperialism through different theoretical perspectives; followed by a critical analysis of the possible nexus of global communication and cultural imperialism.

## Champions of Multiple Modernity and Counter Cultural Hegemony

Socio-cultural opponent such as Partha Chatterjee (1992) argues that in post-colonialist world, America and Europe are shown as the actual creators of modernity and the 'Third World' is shown as the perpetuate consumer of those modernity and culture. Against uni-linear Western modernity, theorists such as Appadurai (1991) places "Alternative Modernities"; Hannerz (1989), "Multiple Modernities"; Watts (1992), "Re-Working Modernity"; Bhabha (1994) "Hybrid"; Gupta (1998), "Hybridities"; Larkin (1997), "Parallel Modernities" and Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (1999) "Regional Morderities" (all are cited in Rahman's work. 2004). All of them have emphasized on multi-linear modernity and non-western diversity.

According to Inda and Rosaldo (2002, P. 21-22), "three general points spring from the discussion of reverse cultural flows. The first is that the process of globalization is much too complex to be thought of merely as a westernizing affair. For it involves not just the circulation of western subjects and objects but also dissemination of non-western cultural forms. Globalization, in other words cannot be conceived solely as a matter of one way, Western imperialism. It must be understood a process of mutual, if uneven infiltration: with the West permeating the rest and the vice versa."

"The second and the related point is that process of globalization cannot be thought of merely as of a homogenizing affair. For it is also, on some level, about heterogenization. It is about the differentiation of the world. Or, more precisely, it is about the differentiation of the west. The idea here is simply that the primary effect of the peripherialization of the core, or of the reverse traffic in culture, has been to turn the space into dense sites of cultural heterogeneity. The final point is that the result of all this back and forth movement, from the west to rest and vice versa

the familiar lines between "here" and "there", center and periphery and west and non-west have to some extend become blurred. This is to say, insofar as the Third World is in the first and the first world is in the third, it has become difficult to specify with any certitude where one entity begins and the other one ends. Where for example, does one draw the boundaries of Mexico when so many of "its people" live in the US? Or where does one draw the boundaries of the US when "its capital" ahs such a strong presence in the Mexico?"

> "The third, and last, problem with cultural imperialism scenario is that it neglects those circuits of culture that circumvent the west-those which serve primarily to link the countries of the periphery with one another. These circuits can sometimes be more important and influential in shaping local milieus than those that connect the first world to the third. So, it is a major mistake to exclude them from the analysis of globalization" (Inda and Rosaldo, 2002, p.21-22).

From empirical research findings it can be assumed that local form of modernity is not exclusively the new addition of western modernity; or non-western culture is not the perpetual consumer of western modernity rather the sense of modernity can work differently given the non-western socio-economic context. In a context of regional sphere of modernity, the concept of western modernity is being contested, negotiated, and rejected by non-western culture. It is the non-western people who actually decide what should be accepted through which process and what should be rejected. This is completely their own choice not the west who defines their choice.

This proposition can be found appropriate in popular culture as well. The popularity of Hindi cinema, for example, in Bangladesh can be cited here. Research findings showed that it was not the Hollywood cinema which attracts Bangladeshi cinema viewers rather Bollywood cinema which actually occupies the imagination of the nation. Why is this happening despite two different languages namely Hindi and Bengali and their respective culture as well? It was also found that, most of the Hindi cinema is made for all types of audience in India and the producers of this cinema provide such a mould in the cinema, which actually transcends language and cultural boundaries. Most interesting part is one 'Third World' country's cultural traits are similar to another 'Third World' country's cultural traits. Story of a Hindi cinema reflects more or less the same reality of another 'least developed' country Bangladesh's culture such as same love affairs, marriage, post marital complexities, familial bond and so on. (Rahman, 2004).

The tune of Hindi song is so strong that the Islamic song in Bangladesh changes its tune over time; be it hymn of Allah or Prophet Mohammad. From urban supermarket to remote rural tea stall people from every walk of life listen to Hindi song all the time and all big celebrations. A marriage is incomplete without listening to a Hindi song and dancing with the tune. A homebound bus from Dhaka to a remote district plays nothing but Hindi audio all through its journey. It does not matter whether one does understand the meaning of the language but can

sing the Hindi song with its original tune and it becomes a matter of pride to know the Hindi song and keeping all updated news about Bollywood and latest movies and hit songs and information regarding one's beloved actor and actress. This is nothing but everyday phenomenon and experience to keep abreast with the Hindi movies and cultural activities (Rahman, 2004).

Not only in the 'Third World' countries, is Bollywood movie roaming all over the globe from Asia to America and from Africa to Europe. Diaspora Indians are around the world and cosmopolitan cities such as New York, London or Toronto are getting melting pot of Hindi cinema festival. Storyline is also getting cosmopolitan and hybrid culture is getting space in the movie. Diaspora Indian movies such "Bend it Like Beckham", "Bride and Prejudice" or "Monsoon Wedding" may have English name but are not the copycat of Hollywood cinema rather they have their own styles of representations which is very much Indian. Producers are thinking about global and local cultural mélange to get more audience and language is also getting Hinglish (Hindi+English). Here this globalization does not means to give up or to sacrifice Indian norms, values and culture rather at best it reorganizes and reshapes cultural expressions from within its boundary and limit.

Like Oscar, Bollywood arranges big event in a global stage to provide awards to best actors through IFA, Film Fair Awards, Zee Cine Awards. Global big entertainment company is now heading towards India for investment in the movie industry. Moreover, big star from Bollywood such as Amitav Bacchan or Sharukh Khan often brags to the media in different awards giving ceremonies that they are sensing and projecting, within few days if not years, Indian cinema and Indian culture will rule the world. They also say that they produce more than 1200 movies in Mumbai alone which is more than double of Hollywood's number and they have more than 12,000 cinema halls across the country; every day more than 20 million cinema goers enjoy movie in India alone.

**Culture and communication nexus**
Despite national and international controls and regulations on media, the paradigm shift that occurred towards deregulation and privatization, coupled with the new 'communications revolution' based on computers and telecommunications and internet, has made global communication more fluid and diverse. Global interaction, common interests, common concern are taking nation states in one platform along with socio-economic interaction takes culture and communication to the fore. McQuail (2005) here summarizes the effects of globalization on culture. McQuail (2005) says,

> "because of globalization the synchronization of culture is happening, at the same time he suspects of undermining national, regional and local cultures are taking place. Globalization commodifies cultural symbols and increase multiculturalism. It causes cultural hybridization and

evolution of cultural forms and rises a global 'media culture' or deterritorializes culture" (pp 258-268).

No doubt, these all necessarily will happen through either mass communication or interpersonal communication around the world. Most of the McQuail's propositions seem to me valid but when it comes to the synchronization of culture and the absence of national, regional or local culture, these seem to me McQuail's hasty generalization, filled with overarching assumption and deficiency of information.

Cultural contacts among different societies are happening through worlds market, global migration or commodity and labor. Products are flowing from one corner to another along with intercultural communication. Political economy of culture is very important aspect to understand global communication. Flow of goods needs global or barrier free market and multinational and transnational corporations along with global intermediaries such as World Bank, IMF and other agencies are there to pave the way for economic communication among different countries and societies.

Showing 'local culture' in the global media, making folk song global, cannot take place without 'global' 'local' interaction. Political economy makes culture and communication more global and interactive. Simply, if we take example such as Valentine's Day or Mother or Father Day; these are recently imported Western celebrations to be involved with global economic dimension in the name of cultural assimilation or homogenization. Here global communication becomes the same all over the world with the expression of love and affection, though these were all there even before the concept got introduced in our society. What the capitalism has done here is through global communication, it has mixed mother's love with commodity; it has blackmailed us emotionally to make profit out of it. So whatever the expressions of culture are; whether it is negative or positive; 'global' or 'local'; it has to make a nexus with communication.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be reiterated that given the diversity of political, socio-economic context, cultural issues have always been treated as the moot point of global debate. This is because other aspects of globalization or of localization determined by the expression of culture. No doubt, culture will influence and will have diverse effects on global communication in the coming days. It is nothing but global market and political economy are intervening to make people associated and interacted more than ever before through direct and indirect communications among different society and culture. But the debate continues raising queries; will there be one culture all over the world? Will the world be homogenized or fragmented through cultural communication? But, before going into that debate we have to ask questions in reflexive manner-do we all see everything around us with similar eyes? Do all human think similarly? Again, I have no simple answer because I don't believe in outright rejection of Western culture as imperialist culture in the contemporary world. So, to go back to my starting point of this article,

one thing I can assume, global economic turmoil is ephemeral, but cultural turmoil, arguments and counter arguments are persistent and never-ending. And that is why the concept of 'cultural Imperialism' is indeed a useful concept to describe global communication.

### *References*
Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The Location of Culture. New York: Routledge.

Chatterjee, P.(1992).The Nation and its Fragments. Oxford University Press, New Delhi pp.3-13.

Gupta, A. (1998). Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hannerz, U. (1989). Notes on the Global Ecumene. Public Culture, 1 (2) Spring: 66-75.

Herman, E. and Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Huntington, P. S. (1993). *The Clash of Civilization. In "Foreign Affairs*", vol. 72, n 3 pp.22-49

Inda X. J and Rosaldo, R. (2002). (Eds.), The Anthropology of Globalization. A Reader. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p.21-22.

Larkin, B. (1997). *"Indian Film and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernity"* in Jonathan Xavier and Renato Rosaldo (eds) The Anthropology of Globalization (Malden, MA Blackwell, 2002), pp. 350-378.

McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass Communication Theory*, Sage Publications. pp 258-268.

Rahman, H.M. (2004). *Reconceptualizing Modernity: Indian Cinema Bangladeshi Viewers*- Unpublished Thesis done for Anthropology Masters Program at the Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Sivaramakrishnan, K and Agrawal, A. (1999). Regional Modernities in Stories and Practices of Development. Paper Presented at South Asia Anthropology Group Meeting in SOAS, Representation and Practices of Development, 16th- 17th September. Unpublished M. Litt. Dissertation, University of Strathclyde.

**Voice for Social Changes in Creative Documentary: Better Understanding for Better Feeling**

*Mahmudul Hoque Moni*

Documentary film is often defined as 'a non-fiction film about real events and people often avoiding traditional narrative structures' (Corrigan, 2007) whereas many have agreed that non-fictions cannot be called 'film'. In-fact the term 'non-fiction' is a vague one (Hossain, 2009). Since John Grierson, the founder of classic British Documentary movement in 1930s has termed this kind of a film as 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Juel, 2006), film scholars have made valiant attempts to find an appropriate definition of 'documentary film'. But it is now fair to state that they have failed to provide a definition that could satisfy theorists as well as practitioners. Juel (2006) states: 'A film is not a mere representation, but a willed presentation of something made by someone in a specific way and for someone. The phrase "representation of reality" is utterly mistaken as a definition of documentary, because the idea of film as mirroring is a false one and a very misleading ideal. Also the term "reality" is confusing: it may have the straightforward positive connotations of facing reality and seeing things as they really are, but often enough it is interpreted by students in theoretical discussions as just filming "normally" in an "objective" way without being creative or manipulative.' Many terms that demand explanations, come into the discussion whenever we talk about defining a documentary film. "The emergence of the documentary as a recognized cinematic genre in the 1920's inherited the trust of the audience in the veracity of the image as an authentic representation of the real. Today, we are much more skeptical, even with documentaries. Audience trust, once lost is gone forever so a documentary, in this day and age, must always provide credible information and sources to put a suspicious audience at ease" (Das, 2007). But, we now have to accept the fact that it is better not to try to define it but to differentiate it with its unique properties as well as to understand what it is. The film critic Christian Metz has written 'A film is difficult to explain as it is easy to understand. That will make the more important things less difficult.

**What is Creative Documentary?**
The term 'documentary' is derived from a Latin word 'docre' that means to record something. Documentary is the record of something that would have happened whether someone was there to film it or not (Menand, 9th August, 2004). When we call something a 'documentary' we actually mean something that has no current news value at present but is being recorded in celluloid in order to interpret the reality and possibly to create a context. What is creative documentary then? This term is originated few decades back in Europe, I presume, to separate a documentary film from TV reportage. With the advancement of technologies television reporters started to make video reports that to some extent look like documentary film. On the other hand, some under skilled filmmakers made films that looked like TV reports. But, only looking like doesn't make things same. The concept of 'creative documentary' seems to be able to provide

the solution. It successfully separates the efforts of a filmmaker and a TV reporter. I shall discuss on this issue in later part of this paper.

What makes a documentary creative? What makes it separate from a general one? A creative documentary filmmaker attempts to put more creative elements into his or her film to make the storytelling much more interesting and interpretive. S/he will use the reality elements and his or her imagination not only to match for a sound aesthetic but also to achieve a uniqueness of the storytelling. But, still it is hard to find a distinct line between these two practices of same field. Goran Radovanovic, a Serbian filmmaker who has produced some international award winning creative documentaries told in an interview: 'If we speak about do-called "a creative documentary"-some essentials are coming out: personal view on the reality and subjective/artistic recreating the reality!' (Rocha, 2009). A creative filmmaker keeps the reality in his or her film with all possible ways of 'creative treatment' to achieve his or her goal. A program may depict actual events (it may, for example, be a record of street parade or a birthday party), but unless it treat these events in a creative way, it will not be considered a (creative) documentary (Australian Broadcasting Authority, December 2004). In Representing Reality Bill Nichols (Mamber & Thacker, 2001) offers this about our perceptions of documentary film: "One fundamental expectation of documentary is that its sounds and images bear an indexical relation to the historical world. As viewers we expect that what occurred in front of the camera has undergone little or no modification in order to be recorded on film and magnetic tape." Thus any documentary has obligation to the truth but creative ones in addition of that have a few layers of stories to not only formulate a creative storytelling but also to challenge the existing social status-co.

**Properties of a Creative Documentary**
Creative documenting process deals with a set of aesthetics that makes up for 'creative treatment'. Renowned Bangladeshi Filmmaker Tanvir Mokammel called film as the integrated practice of prominent 'seven arts' (Mokammel, 1998). These seven arts are photography, architecture, literature, drama, painting, acting and technology. A creative documentary has few more things as raw materials that include reality, truth, re-construction, and representation. All creative producers have to deal with two basic things. Firstly, what is the objective of the film? Is it to bring about changes how we see certain things around us or to make the audience think about the things represented in the film? Many may ask that where the commercial objective is. But as a creative documentary producer/filmmaker one doesn't think of profit though he or she will be happy to receive some. Secondly, how you are going to formulate the storytelling so that maximum credibility can be achieved. Form is more important than formula. "There are no recipes in documentary films. Every subject and issue is specific and is showcased on film in its own appropriate manner. Form and the layout in which a subject is showcased in a film are important as they add value to the film, but there is no one tried and tested way to do this" (Das, 2007). This is where 'the creative treatment' matters. Creative treatment helps touch the emotion

of the audience and make it more look tike film than some newsreels. The director or the editor arranges the raw materials along with creative in-puts to rule over the 'hearts and minds' of the audience.

Radovanovic (2009) adds, 'documentary filmmaking for me is the artistic manipulation of the reality! I do not want to show the "real tears"! I want to recreate them! Even if they don't exist in so called "reality"' (Rocha, 2009). Robert Flaherty, supposed to be the father of the documentary film told, 'Sometimes you have to lie to tell the truth' (Hossain, 2009). It means the documentary filmmakers are even allowed to trick the audience to rule their 'hearts and minds'. Many film scholars have argued that it is very important for a documentary producer/filmmaker to understand where s/he positions herself or himself in the film. It is his or her obligation to make audience understand what he or she is narrating the story for. Creative producer/filmmaker makes it very apparent to the audience whatever creative way he or she treats or reconstructs the reality. But, above all it must bear the 'documentary value'. One may create beautiful aesthetics on and out of the given reality, but s/he cannot rule the audience unless s/he has a credible and logical context. We do care or not it is spot on that every successful documentary film has its own social or political context upon which it gets its 'documentary value'. That is where the perfect marriage between the *creative* and the *documentation* is necessary to deliver a sound creative documentary.

Alternative narrative, reconstruction of reality, evidence, emotions, creativity, actuality, and context are some of the considerations that count under a creative documentary. 'Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth…the quality of my artistic capability is to tell the story…the character in 'the reality' and the character in the film is not the same one…and, archival material is always a part of contextualization' Radovanovic says (Rocha, 2009). In a word, creative documentary is the world of exercising someone's ultimate subjective mind with visual arts.

**What Separates 'Creative' Documentary from TV Reportage?**
Noémie Mendelle, renowned French documentary producer and director in a workshop in Dhaka articulates: 'documentary film is always subjective'[14]. This is where a documentary basically differs with TV reportage that is justified mostly with objectivity. Question may arise: what about narrative TV reports? Nancy Graham Holm defines narrative journalism as 'reportage that doesn't pretend to be objective but does try to be fair' (Holm, 2006). She adds, "'Report for meaning' is what narrative journalists say". She also discovers that the exercise of subjectivity in

---

[14] Bangladesh Documentary council, British Council and Scottish Documentary Institute jointly organized a 7-days workshop on 'Documentary Filmmaking' in March 2010. I was one of the participants. While giving lecture, Noémie Mendelle, one of instructors gave the statement.

TV reports was actually originated from documentary filmmaking. She asserts, "Purists claim a documentary must challenge the smug assumptions of the existing establishment and disrupt the status quo… Apparently, documentaries come in all sizes and shapes. It was the application of documentary making to television news journalism, however, that introduced a concept loaded with rules. *Objectivity was assumed. Objectivity was demanded*. This severely separated the traditional point-of-view documentary from the journalistic one" (Holm, 2006). The term 'creative documentary' was coined due to cope up with the exercise of documentary canons in TV reports. Even, in Bangladesh, many TV reporters while reporting in-depth on a particular issue having little current news value have claimed themselves as documentary makers. But the professional and independent documentary filmmakers have refused to accept that and, came up with the concept of 'creative documentary' to hold their distinct identities in the society. Holm indicated two approaches of documentary filmmaking (especially for TV): one is conventional and another is journalistic. The advocates of creative documentary might just be unhappy with this classification. They might argue that journalists are not supposed to be practicing of the 'creative aesthetics' of filming a documentary. If someone is so-doing, he or she should understand the difference between a documentary film and reportage for his own sake of professional identity.

An in-depth TV report meets the current news value as well as tries to dig out something that interprets the present situation. There is no place for manipulation. It is like a fly on the wall (Juel, 2006). Even in a narrative report can be fair but has to show both sides of the coin. But a documentary film has to have a 'voice of democracy' (Aziz, 2005) which is independent of any debate on its fairness. It is rather taken to be granted as 'highly subjective or personal matter' (Juel, 2006) where the producer/director promises the audience 'raising a question' with visual arts. Using sign, metaphors and sound for creating different layers of stories are some of the means of doing that. Creative documentary is dominated by creative ways of telling stories where a TV report is dominated by information maintaining basics of journalism: what, when, where, who, how etc. Documentary filmmaker is committed to its subject while a TV reporter is committed more to his or her job. A TV reporter never persuades his or her audience but a filmmaker does. TV reporter has little knowledge about his or her audience but a creative producer has to have enough. Documentaries have characters that talk and perform for the filmmaker, but a TV reporter talks and performs for the subject he or she is reporting for. "Many generally assume that 'creativity' is a modern invention in documentary but highly poetic and almost rap-like ending of the classic film Night Mail (1936) as well as the meta-filmic approach Dziga Vertov's Man With a Movie Camera (1929) do not support that" (Juel, 2006). So, it can be easily appreciated that the 'creativity' or 'creative documentary' has been underlined in order to differentiate the job of a documentary filmmaker with that of a modern TV reporter.

## Creative Documentary for Social Change

It is obvious that creative documentary has emerged as one of the most influential media all over the world. In past, documentary films used to be lost in the crowd of factious mainstream films. But with the rapid growth of television and internet media we have come to a time when creative documentaries have earned a special room for practices. Over the years not only its distribution has grown up but also its audience has increased tremendously. In America and Europe, documentary films have been brought into theatres. Documentary film festivals are taking place round the year round the globe. Nobody now can dare to deny the impact of a documentary film over an audience or over a society. One Michael Moor has created a lot of noise in the United States! Angela J. Aguayo founded:

> Yet, the most interesting facet of documentary at the turn of the 21$^{st}$ century is non-fiction film and video pragmatics. Study of non-fiction film and video as a pragmatic art is to investigate the rhetorical process of documentary to perform various social tasks. However, there is a paucity of research that attempts to understand documentary film history as an instrumental rhetorical text, which means conceptualizing documentary film as a force of social change. Theoretically, there is much left to be studied concerning the speaker (filmmaker)-text (documentary)-audience dynamic of documentary film. By studying this rhetorical relationship, scholars may come closer to understanding of the civic, social and political functions of documentary film. (Aguayo, 2005)

Discourses are the end products of media and it is fair to state that these discourses changes the society may be not drastically but certainly faster than we feel. Culture is the skeleton of a society and media brings flesh for it. Art, literature, language, thought, norm, custom all are encoded in and depicted through media. It is fair to state that film is the integrated practice of all these cultural elements that contribute to changes in a society. In 1920s a number of Soviet filmmakers created ideology for a nation and brought about some revolutionary changes in the society. Philip Simpson (Simpson, 2001) states about the practice of those soviet filmmakers to change the society: "for Eisenstein, film could achieve what all the arts aimed for: to construct, to reflect reality, and above all consciousness and feelings of men".

*Roktakto Prantor (2010),* a creative documentary by Palash Rasul shows how the Pakistani armies have violated human rights by committing genocides during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. The film was exhibited in an international and a national film festival in Dhaka few months back. It has earned fair bit of applauds from the audience as well as from the critics. After watching this film, many people were moved and started to reenergize the movement of 'Punishment for War Criminals' in Bangladesh. If a national TV telecasts this documentary, I am sure this new generation will hate the cruelty of a war. This is what, a documentary is capable of. Angela J. Aguayo also states:

> The manner in which activist documentary film is conceptualized in theoretical literature or in film reviews, primarily qualifies the term "activist" with the intentions of the film maker and his

or her ideological commitments outside of filmmaking. There is, however, another tendency to label documentary film as "activist" based on content. If the film mediates as political or moral controversy, the inclination is to label it "activist." Some documentary films articulate the experience of a marginalized group, which is a legitimate cultural need. However, such labels are fruitless if the film does not actually intervene in a larger public space to create active political agents that will extend and execute the political work initiated by documentary film. It is not enough for documentary film to "be" activist; it must help in creating the space for activism and invested in producing material and cultural change. By studying activist documentary films, it is my intention to develop an instrumental rhetorical theory that better explains the process of social change. (Aguayo, 2005)

Now, if we look for the goal of documentary filmmakers and then analyze that, we shall realize that they all want to bring about changes in the society. They want to change 'how we see' something. And, to me that must have brought and will certainly bring about changes in the society.

**Other Side of the Coin**
Critics like Wolfgang Achtner argue that in reality television documentaries, filmmakers, editors, and other personnel involved in the making of the documentaries are basically fooling themselves into thinking they are documentary filmmakers and editors, and are making documentary films. The filmmakers could, and did, record events as they happened, and because they filmed real people, and not actors, doing real things in a real situation, it was almost inevitable that they began to think of nonfiction filmmaking as documenting reality (Latson, 2003). Post modern theories have lost faith in the documentary images due to some valid reasons. The manipulation of the reality in the name of making documentary video or photography has sometimes gone practiced too far to achieve the credibility. "An independent filmmaker is a campaigner for unusual view. He or she can play the role of a catalyst while exploring the reality. He or she is independent of the influence of the sponsor that wants to use a documentary for its own hidden sake. The voice of the independent filmmaker is actually the 'voice of democracy'" (Aziz, 2005).

For last few decades, the exercise of 'NGO documentary' and 'corporate documentary' has questioned that 'voice of democracy'. These documentaries are nothing but some 'propaganda' elements. Television media have been used for it. Very often we see in international media like Discovery that a documentary is being broadcasted on the 'arms and army' of certain state. Can we explain what this kind of a documentary worth for?

**End Note**
This paper tried to make a better understanding about what is a creative documentary and how does it work. Despite some debates we need to realize the value of a documentary and its significant role in bringing about social changes. Documentary filmmakers tend to think alike but

look same thing differently. The approaches are similar in nature but not the applied methods. We have to make some room for those dreamers who want to build a better world by taking us through the current one. Let's feel for their 'voice'. Though only feeling the voice would not make us 'activist' in a way but at least we can help raising democratic voice for those who dream about a better world for most of us as well as make us dream too.

## *References*

Aguayo, A. J. (2005). *University of Texus.* Retrieved May 12, 2011, from webspace of University of Texus: https://webspace.utexas.edu

Australian Broadcasting Authority. (December 2004). *Documentary Guideline: Interpretation of Documentary for Australian Content Standard.* Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Authority.

Aziz, Z. (2005, March). Documentary Film: Context Bangladesh. *Documenting Bangladesh* (1), pp. 9-18.

Corrigan, T. J. (2007). *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (6th ed.). New Delhi: Dorling Kindersely.

Das, T. (2007). *How To Write A Documentary Script.* Retrieved May 16, 2011, from UNESCO: http://opentraining.unesco-ci.org

Holm, N. G. (2006). Narrative Journalism: Subjectivity, No Longer a Dirty Word. (R. Raskin, Ed.) *POV: A Danish Journal of Film Studies* (22), 49-59.

Hossain, M. (2009, April). Truth and False in Documentary Film. (Z. Khan, Ed.) *Documenting Bangladesh* (3), p. 53.

Juel, H. (2006). Defining Documentary Film. (R. Raskin, Ed.) *POV: A Danish Journal of Film Studies* (22), 9.

Latson, C. (2003, December 3). *Chris Latson.* Retrieved April 28, 2011, from A Chris Latson Website: www.chrislatson.com

Menand, L. (9th August, 2004). *Nannok and Me.* Newyork: The New Yorker (Online Version).

Mokammel, T. (1998). Cholochittre Nondontotto (Aesthetics in Cinema). In J. I. Kochi (Ed.), *Film Appreciation* (pp. 75-84). Dhaka: Bishwa Shahitya Kendra.

Rocha, J. D. (2009, December). "Art is a lie that makes us relaize the truth": An interview with

Goran Radovanovic. *Doc On-line* . University of Beira Interior: www.doc.ubi.pt.

Simpson, P. (2001). *Critical Dictionery of Film and Television Theory.* (R. F. Simpson, Ed.) London: Routledge.

Stephen Mamber, E. T. (2001, December 12). *New Media Documentary: Explorations in the Changing Form, Theory and Practice of Documentary*. Retrieved April 30, 2011, from A Gunthar Harwig Website: http://www.gunthar.com