

MEDIA AS A MEDIATOR OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

The media exert a great influence, not only on what we believe, but equally on the way we act, so social responsibility in this area is extremely high. Elucidating the intercultural issues represents a challenge for actual media. On one hand, existing ethical norms, increasing ethical requirements in journalism, on the other hand the necessity of marketing media products creates situations where media hardly deal with its role of mediator in intercultural communication. Starting from the specificities of intercultural communication in the Republic of Moldova, we tried to identify the modalities of media coverage of this phenomenon in both successful experiences and existing deficiencies in order to elucidate its role in optimizing communicational processes in the society.

Keywords: *intercultural communication, mass media, media ethics, conflict mediation.*

Considered to be “vital centre of public life”, the media plays a crucial role in society nowadays, becoming a growing and essential power that exerts a powerful influence on the segments of society. Intercultural communication is a challenge of the globalization era, and its reflection in mass media brings risks and greater social responsibility. On the one hand, existence of ethical standards, increasing ethical requirements in journalism, on the other hand needs in marketing media products creates situations where media hardly deal with its role of mediator in intercultural communication.

The phrase mass-media contains the Latin word *media*, the plural form of the noun *medium* (intermediate, transmitter, middle, environment – physical or spiritual), in the broadest sense, “*medium*” means the channel through which the message covers the distance between the sender and receiver, or even the distance between source and recipient. Thus the role of intermediary or mediator of social communication is an intrinsic part of the media. It is a term that defines the media, and involves creating a symbolic space in

which meanings are communicated beyond the constraints of face-to-face communication which are very important for the development of public, institutional and private life.

Mediation represents a dialectical process, where the institutionalized media is involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life. Roger Silverstone determines that mediation refers to making media and what we do with the media. This definition implies in the mediation process both producers and consumers of media products. Readers, viewers and audiences make part of the mediation process because they are receptive, being influenced by things they see on the TV screens and things they hear from reporters¹.

In conventional terms, mediation refers to the alternative dispute resolution process in which a neutral party helps to negotiate an agreement between the two parties to the dispute.

In mediation related to the media, the role of “third” party is a key concept that explains the role of the media in intercultural communication. Certainly the press as a commercial institution has benefited from coverage of conflict and would rather contribute to their maintenance and escalation than peace-making. In chasing of viewership, as Pierre Bourdieu mentions in his book *On Television* day by day media makes concessions to narrow vision on politics, by the reserved treatment of the author of xenophobic and racist speeches and acts². Bursts of xenophobia and nationalism that could be seen in Turkey and Greece and the former Yugoslavia, France, and elsewhere precisely reside in the possibility of exploitation the provided opportunities, primary passions, currently by the modern means of communication³. For example, the same things happened, in the

1987-1991 years, in Moldova, the media contributed to the polarization of citizens behaviour along ethnic lines. One part of the citizens were overwhelmed by providing them opportunities freely express opinions, stifled over the years, reacted very emotionally regarding the refuse to form their native language. Another part of citizens extrapolated the intentions of the first category beyond than phobias generated reciprocal aggression. Thus, following the logic based on the principle: action – reaction reached an advanced state of ethnic conflict that degenerated into violent actions of the Transnistrian war⁴.

However, journalism has unique experience in mediating and resolving serious disputes with well pronounced intercultural dimension. On 14 November 1977, the CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite conducted separate interviews with Egyptian President Anvar Sadat and Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin, which led directly to Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem. In 1985, Ted Koppel hosted the first formal conversation between representatives of the African National Congress and supporters of the apartheid system in South Africa in a series of programs on ABC Nightline. These cases serve as a symbolic example of contemporary journalism, when the social responsibility of media is increasing.

Peacemaking potential of journalism's ability to facilitate intercultural communication was set off in 2001 on UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the Convention of 2005 on the protection and promotion of diversity of cultural expressions. The new paradigm of dialogue among civilizations has led to a global agenda in which communication has become an overriding principle in relations between civilizations, cultures and peoples.

Using information and communication is essential to provide space of different cultures to express themselves freely, in accordance with its own rules, is critical in promoting mutual understanding between peoples and between cultures. The media have the ability to facilitate intercultural dialogue. We consider this a new function of mass media. Challenging common attitudes and perceptions about preconceived many "others" in our world, media exceed preset images and remove the ignorance that gives rise

to mistrust and suspicion, thus promoting tolerance and acceptance of differences and valuing diversity as a source of understanding. Of course, diversity can be a source of division, intolerance and even violence, but the free, pluralistic and professional media offers space for non-violent negotiation of these differences. By staging public dialogue attended by various interest groups, the media must play a direct role in the search for areas of agreement and compromise⁵.

The risks of intercultural communication in media are largely related to respect one of the fundamental human freedoms – freedom of speech. One of the main difficulties in promoting freedom of expression, and often met obstacles in the way of tolerance and understanding is the tension when speech offends or challenges another culture or identity. The case of "Danish cartoons" (2005) is an example and a source of much debate over this type of power. In September 2012, the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo published cartoons representing the Prophet Muhammad, causing a wave of protests in the Arab world.

Supporting the freedom of expression in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual understanding in its turn require mutual respect for cultural diversity, religious beliefs and religious symbols. Thus, the media can emphasize the differences or contribute to a better understanding of the other, of its history in order to improve intercultural communication.

Canadian journalist Ross believe that conflict mediation is an extension of the functions of contemporary journalism. It works as a communication channel that counteract misperceptions, analyze conflict, identify interests, suspend disbelief etc. Journalism follows in this case international standards of ethics, such as accuracy, impartiality or balance, and social responsibility⁶.

The potential for mediation of intercultural communication in the media can be valued in different ways, we tried to identify:

- Facilitating mediation by neutral intervention from the 3rd side, separately interviewing the parties, they have received the information once its distribution through the general public.

- By listening the parties, providing the link between opposing parties and giving them the opportunity to see each other, not as evil forces, but as actors with their own strategies and generally contributing to civilized behaviour in communication. Thus journalist is unwittingly drawn into the role of mediator, being a watchdog of integrity of the communication process. We can follow on Moldovan TV channel – *Jurnal TV*, *Publika TV* guests representing national and religious minorities, who exposed their positions by ensuring them the freedom of expression.
- Arranging the favorable conditions of communication. Mediation requires time and place that lead to effective communication. Standard rule is to give to each party equal place in the studio and on the screen, and the mediator (journalist) – to be fair to the actors of communication. Talk shows on television from Moldova largely follow this rule, such as *Fabrica*-on *Publika TV* station, *In the mirror* on EU-TV, *Triangle* – on ALT TV, *Replica* – on Prime. At the same time on the TV show *Good Evening* from the public channel Moldova 1, the guests are seated in armchairs, but is also a sofa for special guests and experts. Sometimes we witness the discussion between representatives of different political parties, social groups with the contradictory views when some of them are sitting on the sofa and shows degenerate into violent exchange of replicas.
- Journalists create conditions to promote participation and communication. Television can create the conditions for dialogue through teleconferencing, telephone interventions etc. even when it is physically impossible. The same ability to provide safe and equitable space for any number of participants to debate by placing them on the pages of a newspaper or broadcast time has written press and the radio. Media creates bridges of communication even when the actual mediation and official contacts become impossible.
- An essential problem of implementing the mediation function of media is to define

intercultural communication in neutral terms. This refers to the journalist titles in newspapers and in the news etc. Content analysis of 4 reference newspapers in Moldova in the months August to September 2012 show that part of the articles with intercultural theme carries a conflicts, spread stereotypes and prejudice with ethnic character. That titles are suggestive: *Nastuplenie storonnicov vozrojdenia natsizma* (The offensive of supporters of revival of Nazismo – *Nezavisimaya Moldova*⁷; *Hoteat li russkie voini?* (Do Russians want war?) *Mămăligă popușoi,/ Maldavan durak bolșoi!* (Moldovan is a big fool) – *Timpul*⁸; *Russkie i țigane soșlisi stenca na stencu* (Russian and tsigane came together wall to wall) – *Komsomolıscaia Pravda v Moldove*⁹; *Rusofilia lovește omenia* (Russophiles strikes humanity) – *Jurnal de Chișinău*¹⁰. However, the news on the new television channels as *Publika*, *Journal TV* abound in the titles, wich carries conflicts. We can mention that the press from the Republic of Moldova has not yet realized fully the role of mediator in intercultural communication, being under pressure from market realities.

Certainly, the mediation process through the media has its own specific. The key difference of this mediation is the public nature of communication compared to the private nature in the case of classical mediation. So the actors of communication bear public responsibility for claims made. If ultimate goal of mediation is the solving of a dispute, in journalism mediation lead only to a better information of the public and to an extensive and detailed presentation of the positions of the parties. If the ultimate goal of mediation is to resolve a dispute, then journalistic mediation only lead to a better information to public and a more extensive and detailed positions of the parties.

However, traditionalists in journalism believe that reporters should not risk their objectivity taking care about practical results regarding their stories or taking part in designing solutions. However, newspapers have actively sought solutions to community conflicts were among Pulitzer winners (ex. The Akron Beacon Journal's Race Relations Project in 1994).

The media can contribute to an effective intercultural communication through approaching existing problems, giving support to the parties in achieving a greater degree of clarity about themselves and a greater degree of responsibility to each other by focusing on the communication between the parties. The emphasis on the role of mediator of media is based on the potential impact on the audience and is a guideline for a proper and responsible journalism in the era of globalization.

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