

Media Diversity Institute

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The Reporting Diversity Manual
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Reporting Diversity Manual

By David Tuller

Foreword by John Owen

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Reporting Diversity Manual

8	John Owen	Foreword by
		1.
8		Introduction
		2
8		General tips on reporting diversity
8		Tips for finding sources
8		Tips on interviewing people from other groups
		3
8		Ethnicity section
		Case studies
8		Gypsies attack military police forces with axes
8		'Gypsy' raiders plunder the West
8		Overnight guest goes for the knife
8		Being Armenian is a crime in Turkey
8		While 'negotiations' are held in Chuburkhinji, Georgians are buried alive in Ochamchire
8		The Karabakh Liberation Organization protests against Armenians' visit to our country
8		ԷՅ ԵՐԿ՝ Ա՛ն՛ն՛ Գ՛ն՛ Թ՛Ե՛ Է՛ձ՛՝ յ՛Ա
		4.
8		Religion section
		Case studies
8		What can alternative military service give to Azerbaijan
8		Need to create a special centre

8 _____ Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia are supported by Armenian lobby in US Congress

8 _____ Ճնչն Երևանի Երկրորդ Կոնգրեսի

5

8 _____ **Gender section**

Case studies

8 _____ Street women are carriers of various venereal diseases

8 _____ Zviadist women attack 'Burdjanadze-Democrats'

8 _____ We will spend the next 8th of March with our families

6

8 _____ **Physical and mental disabilities section**

Case studies

8 _____ The disabled complain

8 _____ Roasted nuts

8 _____ This case requires care

8 _____ The number of AIDS patients is on the rise in Azerbaijan

8 _____ Wheelchair in theatre

7.

8 _____ **Socially disadvantaged groups section**

Case studies

8 _____ Beggars at parliament gate

8

8 _____ **Elderly and pensioner section**

Case studies

8 _____ Half a vote for the 60+

9.

8 _____ **Refugees and internally displaced persons section**

Case studies

8 _____ Displaced persons will be provided with legal assistance

8	Anti-Armenian games with the help of Armenians
8	The police deny the fact of eviction of Kists and Chechen Refugees
	10
8	Sexual orientation section
	Case studies
8	Tragicomedy with a new structure
8	Lesbian's rejection led to a massacre
8	Why did bi-sexual Jaba Bodjgua 'warm' to Boris Tshipuria?
8	The wonder of the week
	11.
8	Political opposition and dissidents section
	Case studies
8	There is no need for the opposition to hold assemblies
8	My enemy's enemy is my friend?
	12
8	Photographs and images section
	13
8	Training modules
	14
8	Glossary
	15
8	South Caucasus Chapter of the Reporting Diversity Network
	16
8	About the Media Diversity Institute

Foreword

Foreword

If you want some indication of what challenges lie ahead for the Media Diversity Institute, all you need to do is sample the press on any given day. Consider these stories gleaned from British newspapers and the International Herald Tribune on a summer day:

" In Amsterdam a new study showed an 'intolerance trend' in the Netherlands toward gays. This is in a country that was the first to allow gays to marry;

" Britain's Daily Mail headlined 'Mosque Stormed by Hamza Hate Mob' and noted their connection to the jailed cleric 'HOOK-HANDED HAMZA' (who is missing one hand) and his links to terrorist groups;

" Italy's best-selling newspaper Corriere della Sera published an openly anti-Islamic 126-page book by celebrated Italian writer Oriana Fallaci;

" British columnist Darcus Howe writing in The Guardian about 'Turning on Each Other: Who you calling a Nigger?' Howe laments the violent confrontations between West Indians and Somalis and West Indians and Pakistanis.

How stories like these get assigned, written and edited are central to the mission of the Media Diversity Institute. Its founding director, Milica Pesic, believes that journalists have a responsibility well beyond getting the facts right in their stories. Their words are potential lethal weapons that, when launched, can inflict lasting damage on communities, individuals, and society at large. And as these few examples picked at random illustrate, dubious standards are being set by journalists at some of the most influential newspapers - publications that those working in media in struggling democracies are likely to look to as models to emulate. It makes the work of the MDI even more difficult as Pesic argues passionately that with proper training and re-training, a new breed of enlightened and responsible journalists can turn hateful communities into productive and tolerant democracies.

To help journalists reflect on their reporting about diversity, the MDI has produced this 'Reporting Diversity Manual'. It is a disturbing collection of bad, often irresponsible and vicious stories that can be used as case studies about how newspapers have served so badly their readers. If the editors who were responsible for these stories were medical doctors, their licenses would be revoked.

But this Manual also gives journalists-and anyone interested in how to improve journalism-constructive advice about how to avoid making these mistakes. Every working journalist ought to keep this manual close by and ask himself or herself whether the story he or she has just written or edited met these diversity standards.

Beyond the practical guidelines of how to report on issues related to diversity is a matter of mindset. Where I wholeheartedly agree with Milica Pesic is that reporting on diversity is not a problem to be overcome, a millstone hanging around the neck of beleaguered editors and reporters. Smart, savvy editors will

recognise that a poorly served or neglected part of the population can be added to the ranks of new readers. 'Diversity sells' is a sign that ought to be plastered all over newsrooms.

Finally, journalists have a vested interest in contributing to a world that turns its back on hatred and bigotry. They can exercise what the great American writer and columnist Walter Lippmann called the 'searchlight role.' They can beam their journalistic light on stories that inspire rather than demoralise.

The International Herald Tribune's Roger Cohen writing in his 'globalist column' spotlighted how Germany and Poland, historically bitter enemies, had reconciled: "If Poles and Germany can reconcile, so can Israelis and Palestinians," Cohen writes.

"Above all, accept that agonising history cannot be undone but it can be overcome by looking together to the future."

John Owen is former chief news editor of CBC television news, founding director of the European Centre of the Freedom Forum, and visiting professor of journalism at City University, London.

1. Introduction

Introduction

In 2003 I was a trainer at a workshop on media and ethnic minorities, attended by a group of journalists from the South Caucasus. One of my colleagues, a Georgian, saw the event as just 'yet another seminar'. As he explained it, given the political turmoil in his country at that time, the topic was of only marginal interest to the media.

But he wrote to me recently saying that times have changed: South Ossetia and Abkhazia have become the major focuses of the political agenda in Georgia. "Now," he wrote, "media outlets try to address issues of ethnic minorities, and living with them in post-conflict reality."

"Ethnic minorities were," he said, "completely passive during the local and parliamentary elections. They just do not associate themselves with this country, and they are almost never part of the news agenda, unless things are at the point of conflict."

At a Media Diversity Institute event in Baku, a media analyst sketched out a similar situation in his country: minority issues are not covered unless there is a specific reason. He recommended to gathered journalists: "It's like dealing with a medical problem, you should just do your best not to do any damage."

Similarly, Armenia, according to the Council of Europe's findings, still needs to do more for ethnic minorities in the fields of education, access to the media, and use of minority languages.

To live with minorities - and let them live - in a post-conflict reality is an issue MDI has tried to address in the South Caucasus. Most of the people we have been in touch with, whether members of the mainstream or a minority population, would not agree with my Georgian colleague for the simple reason that they do not delve further than the surface. On the surface there may well be 'more serious questions' than the issue of ethnic minorities, let alone other categories of marginalized and vulnerable groups. As in South-East Europe, ethnic minorities may only become an issue when a conflict arises.

Many of us who experienced life under Communism believed, perhaps naively, that the fall of the Berlin Wall would ensure respect for individuals - and for their right to be themselves. We believed that fear and prejudice based on ethnic, political, religious and other differences would somehow give way to a new and welcome era of tolerance and compassion.

Compared to the communist era, the situation in the Balkans, and more generally across Eastern Europe and much of the former Soviet Union, has improved in the past few years. But severe human rights violations and ethnic rivalries still exist. Discrimination and intolerance based on religion, gender, social status, age, physical and emotional disability, sexual orientation, and other characteristics threaten the stability of some of the post-communist regions and provide fertile ground to those who seek to promote extremism.

MDI's work in the South Caucasus to date demonstrates that media outlets frequently include almost no information to help their audience understand the rights, traditions, and needs of the different minority groups living among them. Instead, journalists all too often offer negative or at best superficial coverage which contributes greatly to suspicion and fear.

This problem is obviously not limited to regions in transition. In recent years, journalists and media decision-makers in Great Britain, the United States and other countries in the West have grappled with the issue of how to improve their coverage of all sorts of minority groups. Right now a vivid debate is going on in the UK: more diversity or more Britishness? In Canada the so-called 'Canadian particularism' - the preservation of sub-national group loyalties - is being challenged. In the Netherlands, the question is whether immigrants share Dutch values.

While much progress has been made in the so-called West, examples of ethnic stereotypes, insulting language, and one-sided reporting can still be found without looking too hard. Yet the stakes are higher for countries still pursuing the difficult path to democracy. For the essence of the democratic project itself assumes the full inclusion and integration of all peoples into the life of the nation. The media represent a powerful social resource that can - and must - be mobilised to assist in this process of reconciliation. When journalists pursue their mission with goodwill and an open mind, they can play a major role in transforming relations between various ethnic, religious and other community groups in emerging democratic societies.

Recognising this potential, the Media Diversity Institute has developed and implemented a regional Reporting Diversity (RD) training programme seeking to promote and institutionalise the highest standards of professional journalism through training strategies and practical reporting initiatives, as well as to mobilize the power of the media in support of deeper public understanding of diversity, minority communities, and human rights.

We believe that fair, accurate, sympathetic and in-depth reporting is vital in promoting this understanding, confronting prejudice and challenging radical political agendas. In fact, there is an essential link between developing democratic institutions and respecting diversity. No society is truly homogeneous, and the transition to democracy cannot be accomplished without recognition of that fact. If a key function of journalism is to reflect the needs and aspirations of all members of society, then journalists must find ways and techniques to do just that - not simply as a matter of fairness but as a step towards offering everyone the opportunity to share in the responsibilities and rewards of citizenship.

This emphasis on reporting diversity is not just a question of excellent journalism. It is also prudent business practice. By increasing the inclusiveness of coverage, media organisations will be able to break out of the narrow confines of the segmented markets in which most currently find themselves. They will discover they can greatly strengthen their connections with an untapped potential audience, especially among those who have not generally felt their lives and perspectives to be respected or well represented by newspapers and broadcast outlets.

Despite our differences, we are all members of the communities in which we live and work. We all want to live in peace and contribute to our societies. We all want to be able to feed our families and educate our children. And we must learn to treat our astonishing diversity as a source of strength and hope, of enrichment and curiosity - not as an excuse for violence and a cause for despair.

As journalists, we have a unique opportunity to facilitate the process of reconciliation. We possess the ability to help all members of our communities express their needs and desires. We have the power to help eliminate stereotypes and misrepresentations of ethnic, racial and religious minorities within our societies. And we have the authority to shape the discussion and define the areas of common ground through accurate, unbiased reporting.

This manual is just part of our comprehensive programme to help emerging societies better deal with questions of diversity and 'otherness'. Its prime goal is to enable journalists to improve their reporting on minority groups, inter-ethnic relations and basic human rights. The manual can also be used by editors and owners of media organisations, who bear ultimate responsibility for how such issues are covered.

Since the creation of the Reporting Diversity programme, we have produced eight versions of this RD Manual for various countries, as well as an English-language international edition, in cooperation with our partner organisations. The current manual builds on our experience thus far by setting out case-studies and a systematic methodology for RD training, for both reporters and media decision-makers. We hope you will find it useful and user-friendly. Please feel free to copy and share any of MDI's material in this manual - the more use that is made of it the better. We ask that when using our material, please mention that it came from us. Thanks!

Milica Pesic
Director
Media Diversity Institute
2004

2 General tips on reporting diversity

General tips on reporting diversity

One of the most important tasks that journalists face is to write about people who are unlike themselves in fundamental ways. Whether a source is of another ethnicity, religious faith, sexual orientation, social class, or economic status, the role of the journalist is often to convey accurately that person's perspective, ideas or worldview - even when the differences are profound.

In areas like the South Caucasus, where social and ethnic divisions have ripped apart the fabric of numerous communities, achieving that goal can be particularly elusive. It is not, however, impossible. And if journalists wish to facilitate healing and reconciliation within their societies, it is essential that they do their utmost to promote understanding and tolerance - rather than fear and distrust - of difference.

Tips for finding sources

Some strategies relate mainly to specific groups or types of difference. But the following suggestions apply across the board:

- ★ When you write a story about an ethnic, social, religious or other minority, it is extremely important to interview representatives of that group and include their perspectives in the piece. Otherwise, they are the 'objects' of the article rather than the 'subjects'. No article should criticise an entire group of people without offering members of that group an opportunity to present its own point of view and respond to accusations.

- ★ Be careful in your use of words and expressions. Words have a great power to hurt as well as to heal. Careless use of language can increase ethnic and social tensions, even if that is not what you mean to do. Be aware of how members of a minority prefer to be called in the language in which you are writing. [Non-Caucasus text deleted here]

- ★ As you gather material, try to recognise any biases or prejudices you may have. Of course you will have your own opinions, but part of the role of journalism is to question your own and society's preconceived ideas. Many of the beliefs held by one group about another are based not on facts but on stereotypes, although often the stereotypes include an element of truth. For example, some gay men are effeminate (as are some straight men) but most are not.

★ Be careful when you use phrases like "as everyone knows" or "it is evident that." This sort of expression is usually the way journalists introduce their own biases or those of their own social group, and whatever it is that "everyone knows" is as likely to be false or based on prejudice as it is to reflect a real understanding of the facts of a particular situation.

★ Most situations involving conflicts between social groups are complicated. Both sides generally have legitimate complaints and perspectives, and presenting those perspectives fairly and accurately is an important part of the journalist's role. Try not to present difficult social questions in black-and-white terms.

★ Including people of different backgrounds is not just a question of fairness and balance it is important for the media from a business perspective as well. Many media outlets limit their potential audience by presenting only the perspective of a single group. If they make an effort to expand coverage to highlight other communities, they can also expand their audience at the same time.

★ Take care to provide some context for the events you are covering. Ethnic, religious and other social struggles do not arise out of nothing. Usually there is a long history of conflict, with each side differing widely in its interpretations of the past. Before you can fairly present the material, you must understand what has come before and then you must decide how much of the past you need to include for readers to grasp the essential points.

★ Find unusual ways to write about the issues. Spend a whole day with a homeless person, a lesbian or a refugee to understand what their lives are really like. What are their hopes and fears? Do they conform to your stereotypes or not? If a social group objects to the use of a particular word to describe its members, explore the history of that word. What associations and ideas does it communicate when it is used? Why do people object to it? Why do members of another social group continue to use it?

★ Cultivate sources in other communities. Find people who are willing to keep you informed about what members of their social groups are thinking about, talking about, worrying about. Make contact with non-governmental organisations that represent these communities and ask them what aspects of their lives have not yet been covered. Ask them to keep in touch with you about political, social, economic and other developments that you might not otherwise hear about.

★ Be sceptical. Check facts. You should not accept at face value everything that you hear, whether it comes from a member of your own or another community. Remember that everybody you talk to or interview has a point of view and a particular interest. You need to take their perspective into consideration, but you need to balance it with what you hear from others and what you can observe on your own.

★ Do not treat ethnic and other minorities as monolithic. Even though it may look from the outside as if all members of a community have a single perspective, life is never so simple. When one group views another as acting as a solid entity, it can greatly exacerbate tensions by feeding the perception that others are to be feared. Talk to as many people as possible within other social groups and present a range of views in as nuanced and clear a manner as possible.

★ Many people have strong negative feelings about different social groups. Just because some authorities, politicians, clerics, and others may use offensive terms and expressions when discussing minorities, this does not mean you are required, as a journalist, to include this sort of insulting language in your material. If necessary, paraphrase their words. If you decide to quote them directly, you should mention that members of the minority being discussed consider such language to be insulting and inflammatory.

Tips on interviewing people from other groups

★ Be sensitive and thoughtful. Understand that people who are different from you may be scared about talking to a journalist, even if it is not the first time they have done so. To put them at ease, you might start off the conversation with 'small talk' - about their families, their work life, hobbies, and so on. This will help them feel comfortable. It will let them know that you view them as more than just a representative of a minority, that you recognise that they have other aspects of their lives.

★ Make sure you understand any conditions they may have placed on the interview. Clarify whether or not they mind having their name used. Or perhaps they do not mind using a first name, but would prefer that you not mention their last name, their town, or other details that might identify them. Accept their requests and do not try to persuade them otherwise.

★ If you have a choice of where to interview them, decide on a place where they feel comfortable. It is often best to interview people in their own environment - their apartment or office, for example - because that is where they feel most relaxed. It also helps you to understand their perspective because you can experience them in their normal surroundings, and they may reveal things they would not in a more formal or unfamiliar setting.

★ Let them tell you their story in their own way. If they want to start with what happened five or 10 years ago, let them, even if it seems to you that it is not exactly relevant to what you want to know. Try to schedule enough time with them so you do not have to pressure them to get quickly to the point. People often feel more relaxed about discussing something close to their hearts when they have the free-

dom to speak at length.

- ★ Write up a list of questions beforehand, but use it as a general guide rather than something you have to stick to strictly. As you ask your questions, you should listen carefully to what they say, so that you are open to other approaches. Be flexible. If you are too attached to your own ideas of what the interview should be about, you may not recognise those moments when your sources mention important but subtle aspects of the problem that you have not been aware of previously.

- ★ No matter how different they are from you, do not preach to them about how they should live their lives. If you approach them with a judgmental attitude, they are likely to sense that immediately and will probably not feel comfortable talking to you or trust you to use the information sensitively. They understand their situation much better than you do - which is why you are interested in interviewing them.

- ★ Try to acknowledge to yourself any biases or prejudices you have about the minority they belong to - and then try to put those ideas aside when interviewing people and preparing your story. If you have a stereotyped perspective of the people you are writing about but do not recognise it, you are likely to demonstrate that bias in both your questions and your writing.

- ★ Remember that your sources are experts. An expert is not just a doctor or scientist. Your sources are experts on their own lives. Do not assume that you know what they will tell you, because then you won't be open for any surprises. You want them to describe their lives and experience to you - and your job is to convey that to your audience.

- ★ At the end of the conversation, ask if they know any other people who might be willing to be interviewed. This can be an important method of finding other sources for this or future articles. Of course, the more sensitive you are while interviewing them, the more likely they are to feel comfortable referring you to someone else.

- ★ Above all, be careful how you use the information. When someone agrees to talk to you, they are doing you a great favour. When you write about them, do so with care and compassion. It is easy to frighten members of your audience when you report about people from a different background by using stereotypes, inflammatory or derogatory language, unverified information, and other biased material. Your role, however, is to help your audience understand other people and empathise with rather than fear them.

3. Ethnicity

Ethnicity

Ethnic divisions have clearly played a highly destructive role in recent wars and conflicts around the world, such as in South East Europe. While religious and other factors there also fuelled tensions, it was the perception of people as 'other' due to their ethnicity that generated the most violent and aggressive passions - which, in turn, led to the devastating Balkans tragedies of the 1990s. A similar situation exists in the South Caucasus, just look at Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Adjara.

Unfortunately, journalists and their media organisations have frequently found themselves placed in an extremely delicate and sometimes impossible position. As members of a particular ethnic community, they have found it difficult to maintain a stance of journalistic objectivity, often because of overwhelming political and social pressures. Instead, they have often viewed their role as defenders of the interests of their specific ethnic group rather than as observers seeking to understand the full complexities of the situation at hand.

The coverage has often reflected this bias by painting rival ethnic groups as uniformly bloodthirsty, evil, and completely to blame for the conflict. Journalists have routinely perpetuated negative stereotypes, ignored root social and political causes of the conflicts, made no efforts to interview anyone who does not share the majority point of view, and failed to place events in a context that would encourage a broader understanding.

To help journalists hope to play a role in fostering reconciliation and respect for ethnic differences, here are some critical suggestions:

- ★ Never write a story without interviewing people who have a range of positions on the debate. Any material developed solely from one perspective is inherently biased. If your sources criticise an entire ethnic group, representatives of that group should be offered an opportunity to respond to the charges. Otherwise, the journalist simply becomes a propaganda mouthpiece for one side.

- ★ Pay close attention to your choice of words and expressions. Avoid derogatory phrases commonly used to refer to people of other ethnicities. If you quote people who use such expressions, consider paraphrasing them instead of citing them directly. This can be a sensitive area, because some words may be offensive in one language but not in another, so it is part of your job as a journalist to understand the nuances. If you are not sure whether an expression is considered derogatory, ask the people being talked about how they feel about it.

★ Develop sources in ethnic communities other than your own. Call up NGOs (non-governmental organisations) representing their interests and ask to meet with them. Ask them about their concerns, hopes, traditions, and fears. Spend time at cultural and social institutions where they gather - community centres, schools, theatres, wherever - and talk to as many people as you can. Immersing yourself in their milieu, however uncomfortable it may be at first, is the best way to develop a real understanding of their perspective.

★ Look inside yourself so you can recognise any prejudices you yourself may have. Everyone has preconceived notions, whether conscious or not, about members of other social groups. While this is completely understandable, the most effective and accurate reporting depends upon the ability to acknowledge these biases and put them aside. That is the only way to really hear what people are telling you about their lives and feelings.

★ Make sure you place events and situations in context rather than just focusing on who attacked whom yesterday. Nothing happens out of the blue. When ethnic disputes and conflicts erupt, journalists frequently treat each incident as if it has taken place in isolation. But both sides usually have their own interpretations of how matters have arrived at the current moment. In order to present material fairly, you should understand this history and include enough background so that the audience recognises the real complexities.

★ Talk to people on both sides other than those who present themselves as leaders. Often, men, women and children on the ground have a far different view of what is going on than those who presume to speak or act for the entire group. What is it they really want? Ask them if the strategies being pursued in their name are, in their view, the most effective ways to achieve their goals.

★ Focus not just on the visible and obvious effects of ethnic fighting but on the less apparent consequences as well. What kind of long-lasting psychological traumas are taking place? What is the consequence of the conflict in the social and economic spheres? What are the implications for the future of what is taking place today?

★ In your reporting from both sides, try to determine where there is common ground - and then highlight those elements. It is easy to find people willing to demonise those from another ethnic group. But a reporter who digs a little more deeply and asks probing questions may find that, in fact, the goals professed by those on both sides of the divide may not be as different as the people themselves believe.

★ Try focusing on the emotions of non-combatants as well as the actual events on the ground. We are all human, after all, and it is often easier for members of one social group to empathise with the fears and pain of civilians on the other side

than with the inflammatory or aggressive statements of generals and politicians. Most people can empathise with the death of a child or parent, with the loss of a home or of a sense of hope.

★ Do not assume that each side has a monolithic reality and that everybody is of one mind. Every community will have dissenters from the majority position. Some people may be afraid to express themselves for fear of reprisals from neighbours, politicians or others. But you should always be aware that other factions exist even in seemingly cohesive societies - and you should make a concerted effort to find them and present their perspective.

★ Try to describe events accurately and cite the sources of your information instead of relying on inflammatory adjectives like 'brutal', 'inhuman', and 'barbaric'. Journalists often fall back on such expressions as a way of demonising one side and, whether intentionally or not, goading the other side to perpetuate the cycle of violence. In doing so, they are generally fulfilling the goals and disseminating the views of just one party to the conflict.

★ Remember to be sceptical. Do not let yourself be used or manipulated by those on either side of the conflict. Check every fact to the fullest extent possible. If you cannot be totally sure whether something is accurate, either do not include the information or attribute it to your source rather than presenting it as the truth. When evaluating what you hear, take into account the source's reliability in the past. Provide the audience with as much detail as possible about your informants and their motivations so that people can judge for themselves how reliable they might be.

★ Ignore appeals from authorities and others demanding that you demonstrate what they deem sufficient "loyalty" or "ethnic solidarity." Your role should not be to perpetuate racist stereotypes, act as a cheerleader for one side, or disseminate unconfirmed rumours that could promote extremist actions. Your loyalty and solidarity belong to your audience, for whom you are supposed to be gathering the most thorough and accurate information possible.

★ Many people have strong negative feelings about those from other ethnic groups just because some authorities, politicians, clerics, and others may use offensive terms and expressions when discussing them does not mean you are required, as a journalist, to include this sort of insulting language in your material. If necessary, paraphrase their words. If you decide to quote them directly, you should mention that members of the group being discussed consider such language to be insulting and inflammatory.

Case studies

The case studies included in the following sections offer an analysis of articles gathered by the Media Diversity Institute from the South Caucasus, Europe and the United States. The articles are accompanied by commentaries that highlight examples of effective and problematic journalistic practices and suggest approaches or guidelines for improving reporting on diversity.

The events described in this article are extremely unclear, with much of the confusion caused by its reliance on stereotypes of the Roma as a thieving and vengeful people. No effort was apparently made to talk to any of the Roma involved or to provide any background on the situation, such as existing ethnic tensions and any aggressive actions taken by the other side.

Gypsies attack military police forces with axes

To describe an event as resembling a revolution is highly inflammatory, especially since the incident involved several dozen Roma, not hundreds or thousands. The phrase is designed to spread fear, not to enlighten readers about what really happened.

Mass fighting, resembling a revolution, took place in the forests near Botevgrad on Tuesday evening.

About 50 to 60 gypsies, armed with axes, attacked forestry guards and military police at 8.30 p.m. when they realised that their friends and relatives were being caught and arrested for illegally cutting down and stealing trees.

When the military police forces appeared at the site of the incident, they tried to deter the Roma men by firing into the air. The latter, however, not only did not halt their activity but simply started slashing the tires of the police car right in front of the officers' eyes.

The headline immediately creates the frightening image of Roma men running around with hatchets, apparently attacking police without provocation. The truth, undoubtedly, is far more complex.

Did everyone have an axe? The story implies that they did. If so, you would have thought that some of the authorities would have been killed, or at least seriously injured. Since the journalist does not mention any injuries, it might be that the incident was far less serious and dangerous than portrayed. The motivation for the Roma action is also confusing. Who exactly was arrested? What exactly did they do? What law did they break? Where were they taken? Were they being held in custody? How did the other Roma suddenly realize, as a group, that this was happening?

Does this mean they did not attack the authorities but merely attacked their cars? Did the officers just stand around and watch as their tires were being slashed? How did the incident end?

This could be true, but it sounds like an oversimplification of a complex situation. Did all 26 really submit their resignations? Did the journalist really hear from all 26 that the reason for their resignations was fear of a Roma desire for revenge, or was that merely an assumption or second-hand information that should be attributed to specific source? Was there an actual threat, or was their fear based on stereotypes of Roma? Why has the journalist not sought out comment from any of the employees and from the Roma as well? Without it, the story has too many holes in it for it to be considered an authoritative account of the incident.

Now panic has stricken the town's forestry staff, with all 26 employees submitting their letters of resignation. They say they all fear the Roma men will seek revenge.

24 Hours, Sofia, Bulgaria,
29 August 2002

The headline, which ran across the top of the newspaper's front page, states as a fact something that is suspected but not yet proven. It sounds like a Roma gang or gangs could be perpetrating these robberies, but apparently no one has even been caught, much less charged with a crime. And the use of inflammatory and excessive terms like 'raider' and 'plunder' only serve to fan further prejudice against the Roma, most of whom presumably are not engaging in such activities.

'Gypsy' raiders plunder west

A gang of eastern European origin, who confuse their victims by speaking incomprehensibly while making fake purchases, have run off with tens of thousands of euro in a series of raids across the west and midlands over the past month.

Their latest target on Thursday last was Brickens Post Offices near Claremorris where the gang, used a baby to distract a shop assistant before procuring the keys of a safe and stealing a large sum of money.

The gang, which included two males and four or five women, are described as olive skinned and dressed in clothes which would suggest they are eastern European, possibly Romany gypsies.

During the Brickens raid, the women lured the shop assistant from her position behind the counter pretended [sic] they were looking for food for a baby one of them was carrying.

The money was found to be missing after the group had departed.

The gang has used similar tactics in a number of other raids in recent months. Their victims included an elderly shopkeeper in east Mayo whose bedroom was raided on June 11th, polling day, while she endeavoured to "serve them".

The victim, who is in her eighties, told the Connaught Telegraph: "There were five women in the group. They were all babbling away pointing to things on the shelves. They were asking for drinking chocolate. It was very intimidating. I tried to tell them I would only serve them one at a time".

This makes it sound like they are speaking incomprehensibly as a diversion or robbery tactic. But if they are of foreign origin, of course their language would not be comprehensible to someone who did not speak it.

Again, this is stating as fact what is only suspected. It is critical that journalists clearly distinguish between the two.

According to whom? When recounting a crime, it is always important to state the source. Is this an eye-witness account? Is it a police account?

What kind of clothes is the journalist talking about? It is crucial to be specific. This is the only point in the entire article where material is presented to support what is stated in the first paragraph as fact - that the alleged burglars are eastern European. Note also that while the headline identified the alleged burglars as 'gypsy', here we discover that this is not a fact, merely a possibility. This is the only place in the article where the ethnic identity of the alleged burglars is presented as just an inference, not as a fact.

Again, what is the source of this information?

The shopkeeper only discovered that a sum of money had been stolen some time later when she went to her bedroom to get money to pay a supplier.

Gardai¹ say there have been a series of similar raids throughout the west and midlands in recent months as well a failed attempt to steal money at The Neale, near Ballinrobe.

One senior officer, who is involved in the investigation, said yesterday (Tuesday): "I would go as far as to say these gangs have become a menace".

Supt Ken Brennan, head of the Swinford Garda District, said Gardai were pursuing a definite line of enquiry into the spate of incidents.

Supt Brennan said he believed there were a number of gangs operating in the region.

"These crimes are widespread. Although there is no violence or any firearms involved these crimes are still despicable and cause immense trauma for the victims", he added.

Suddenly, it seems, there is not just one gang, but several. Are they all allegedly Roma gangs? Or is the journalist mixing together a lot of burglaries that might have nothing in common except that they are burglaries? The article seems to lump them all together and so creates the impression that the Roma are responsible for all the incidents. Perhaps they are, the journalist has assembled insufficient evidence to come to such a conclusion.

*The Connaught Telegraph, Castlebar,
County Mayo, Ireland, 7 July 2004*

¹ The Gardai are the Irish police.

This is a good example of when identifying someone's ethnicity does little to further the goal of adequately informing the public. That the alleged attacker is Hungarian would not seem to have much bearing on what actually happened. Perhaps it does, but the journalist would have to provide more information to prove the case. As it is, the article's main effect would be to inflame emotions against foreigners in general and Hungarians in particular.

Overnight guest goes for the knife

FLORIDSDORF - 50 year old Peter F. from Floridsdorf made a dangerous acquaintance at the suburban train station on Franz-Jonas square. He invited a Hungarian, Peter N, 28, to his place. During the Saturday night there was a fight and the Hungarian stabbed his host. He managed to escape to his neighbour's. The Hungarian was arrested in the apartment.

*Kurier, Vienna, Austria,
18 May 2004*

This headline goes beyond the facts. Without a trial or an actual confession, we have no idea what really happened. Perhaps Peter F. actually attacked his guest, and the guest was simply defending himself. We have no idea what the cause of the fight was, or of the sequence of events. We are also never told who provided the information to the journalist. Peter F.? The police?

Another unresolved question is whether or not the journalist meant to imply that a homosexual liaison was taking place. If either the police or Peter F. is charging that there was, that should be made explicit. If it is only unproven innuendo on the journalist's part, it might be unfair. Perhaps the older man was simply trying to help someone down on his luck. Perhaps he offered to help him find work. We have no idea because the short article tells us next to nothing.

This story tackles what is clearly an important and emotional issue, the treatment of Armenians in Turkey. However, the headline is a little misleading. It takes a quote from the story, which is in the form of a question, and changes it into a statement while removing the quotation marks. In this way, it transforms it into a declaration of fact rather than a rhetorical concept expressed by one individual. Clearly, the fact is that being Armenian is not literally a crime in Turkey. But to Caroline Jamgeuz, it feels like a crime - and that difference gets lost in the headline. While this may seem like an extremely picky point, the truth is that many people will just read the headline and could come away with a genuine misinterpretation. The facts are troubling enough. It is not necessary to over-dramatize or exaggerate them.

Being Armenian is a crime in Turkey

Continuing his coverage of the issue of the violation of ethnic minority rights in Turkey, Harut Sasunian, Director and Publisher of the 'California Courier' newspaper, wrote in his September 4 column:

It is a fact that minorities in Turkey, including Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Jews and Kurds, are not only deprived of their basic civil rights, but live in such fear that they dare not speak out about their oppressed conditions. A group of Turkish activists who have committed themselves to human rights protection live in the same fear too and put their own lives at risk by daring to expose the violations and persecutions. Despite the promises given by the Turkish government to meet the requirements for membership to the European Union, many of these Turkish activists are now in jail.

It happens very seldom that a member of a minority is imprudent enough to denounce harassment that he or she is suffering. One such courageous soul is Caroline Jamgeuz, an Armenian pharmacist in Bahcesaray, in the region of Van, who despite her Turkified name, is still persecuted by the Turkish government because of her Armenian origin.

Caroline Jamgeuz told the Turkish press that government officials had persecuted her for years because of her Armenian ancestry.

Before settling in Bahcesaray, she had been moving from town to town to escape from accusations that she was a member of illegal organizations. She was even put in prison.

Since this newspaper is apparently reproducing an article from another newspaper, it would be useful to have some facts about the other publication to help readers judge the information. Where in California is it published, assuming it is, in fact, published there. Where does Sasunian get his information? Did he interview this woman himself? Or is he receiving second- or even third-hand information?

Is it strictly because of her Armenian ancestry or because of her political activity, as the next sentence suggests? Both are unjustified, but they are not the same thing, and the journalist should not assume that they are.

"In Turkey, anyone who is not a Turk is constantly harassed. And if you happen to be an Armenian, you do not have the right to live at all," she said and continued: "I have been moving throughout the country for years. But I was always persecuted because of my Armenian heritage. In Bahcesaray where I opened a pharmacy the persecutions did not stop. Most of the military officers serving in this area are affiliated with 'Milli Hareket' party. Their Commanders warn the villagers and other officials: 'If you buy medicine from Caroline's pharmacy, we will take away your weapons and shoot you.' Despite the fact that I have a license from the government to sell medicine, no one dares to buy any medicine from my pharmacy. My customers are constantly threatened. They even throw obstacles in my way and prevent new shipments of medicines from reaching my pharmacy."

She told the journalists that while working in Kars, she was accused of being a member of the PKK¹ and imprisoned for 3.5 months.

She had moved to Kars to escape from harassment in Istanbul. After being released from jail she lived in Erzeroum and Erzinchan (Yerznka) where she was again put in jail for 3.5 months.

She recalled that when she ran a pharmacy in Istanbul two police cars were always patrolling 24 hours a day in front of her store. She was accused of being a member of a terrorist organization. In the end, they succeeded in driving Caroline into bankruptcy.

She ended her tragic story by asking: "Is being an Armenian a crime in Turkey?"

Taking into consideration the brutal nature of the Turkish regime, Caroline Jamgeuz's real troubles may just be beginning, since she has dared to speak out about the violation of her rights. European and American human rights organizations as well as western governments are obliged to carefully monitor her situation to guarantee her safety.

These are strong charges, but even assuming they are true, Turkish officials should be given a chance to respond. Whatever terrible things she might have experienced, clearly it is not the case that Armenians do not have the right to live in Turkey at all, since many do in fact live in Turkey. And the story of her persecution is also very confusing. What, exactly, happened? How did she set up the pharmacy in the first place? If they were harassing her so much, why did she have any customers at all? Did the military really threaten to shoot anyone who bought medicines from her? What do the Turks say about her accusations? The journalist does no favour to his cause by omitting details that would make sense of the story.

How did this happen? Was it true? If not, on what grounds was she imprisoned?

For what, exactly?

While she was in which city?

Which organizations? Which governments? From which source has the journalist taken this information? Has it been verified by the organizations said to be monitoring her?

¹ An outlawed Kurdish group.

Eighty-eight years after the Genocide the Turkish government is not just denying the facts of the past, but it continues the policy of Taleat's¹ promise not to leave a single Armenian in Turkey.

AZG newspaper,
Yerevan, Armenia, 13 September 2003

◀ This is clearly an exaggerated claim. No matter what happened during the genocide period, it is clear that Turkey today is not exterminating Armenians, however discriminatory its policies may be. Moreover, the journalist does not provide any information, whether official or unofficial, on how many Armenians are actually still in Turkey today. It would be helpful for the reader to know, given the premise of the article.

¹ Taleat is the Turkish minister, who planned and implemented the genocide of Armenians in Turkey on 1915.

This is a highly biased article that can serve only to inflame already existing tensions rather than inform anybody about what is actually taking place in the region. Without citing any legitimate sources, the article essentially portrays Abkhazians as uniformly vicious and brutal persecutors and treacherous negotiators while absolving Georgians of any blame for any aspect of the ongoing tensions. Obviously, that is one perspective of the conflict, but certainly not the only one. The article also repeatedly presents horrific accusations as 'fact' without making any effort to document their authenticity or accuracy.

While 'negotiations' are held in Chuburkhinji, Georgians are buried alive in Ochamchire

On the territory of Abkhazia, murders of Georgians continue, although, at the meetings in Chuburkhinji, almost every Thursday it is stressed that there is peace there and that Georgians there are enjoying their lives.

Members of the Georgian investigative group are strongly expressing their positions, but unfortunately for us, no one is paying attention to them. Last Thursday, at the regular meeting in Chuburkhinji, the Georgian side emphatically brought up two issues. The first concerned five Georgians who were taken hostage, although it turned out that there were actually six. The man who found out about the sixth hostage was head of the Commission on Hostage Exchange and Finding Missing People Vladimir Doborjginidze.

Everything started as follows: on August 4, 2003, at the edge of the village of Tagiloni in the Gali district, some unidentified persons blew up a Gazelle Minibus. Six Abkhazian border guards were killed during this incident. The Abkhazian reaction soon followed as expected. They blamed the explosion on Georgian partisans.

At first, the Abkhazians burned down the house of the brothers Kiria at the border between Chuburkhinji and Tagiloni, where they thought Georgian partisans had taken shelter, and then took the brothers hostage. At the same time they burned down houses of people who were absolutely innocent, beat up innocent people and scared the whole village.

By putting the word negotiations in quotation marks, the journalist is immediately signalling the perspective that the other side - the Abkhaz side, in other words - is not engaged in a good-faith effort to solve the problems between the two peoples. This perspective that the conflict is a black-and-white situation is reinforced by including in the headline the unproven charge of brutal behaviour by the Abkhazians - a charge clearly designed to horrify any Georgian reader.

◀ Who is saying that murders of Georgians continue? What, exactly, is the evidence for this charge?

◀ Is he the source of all the information in the article? If not, who is? This is never made clear.

◀ Who, exactly, blamed the Georgians? It would be good to quote someone here - an official, a villager, anybody at all. And it would be useful, as well, to cite the Georgian response. Does the journalist believe that partisans were not responsible? The issue of who did this is completely ignored, as if it has no relevance to the situation.

◀ According to whom? And how does the journalist know who is innocent and who is not? This information is completely unattributed, and we are asked to take the journalist's description of the events on faith.

Along with the brothers Kiria, they took hostages - three locals from the village of Chuburkhinji: Jokola Khardziani, Lifter Arkania, and Nodar Lepsaia. For three months, members of the Georgian Investigation group sought information about the case. At first, the Abkhazians totally denied that the abduction had taken place, but then blamed ordinary criminals for the case.

The truth is, however, that Georgians from Chuburkhinji were arrested by Gali's so-called militia.

Last Thursday, at a quadrilateral meeting, the Georgian side demanded discussion of the issue and told the parties that this would become the theme of a meeting on a wider scale. At the same time, the Georgian side accused the United Nations Mission in the conflict zone and CIS peacekeepers of inaction. The same evening, the Commission on Hostage Exchange and Finding Missing People moved the corpses of Murtaz Kiria and Jokola Khardziani from Abkhaz territory directly to the Enguri bridge. Another active head of the organization, Vladimir Doborjginindze, brought another person who was held hostage on the territory of Abkhazia, Tbilisi resident Nugzar Kurtsidze, who fled the city to avoid repaying debts and in a search for freedom appeared on the territory of Abkhazia. Information was spread that in August, in the village of Chuburkhinji in the Gali district, all hostages who were held there were executed brutally. (Khardziani and Kiria, whose corpses were brought to Enguri bridge, were among those hostages). A reliable source on the Abkhaz side is also sure that, in the Ochamchire district, separatists threw innocent Georgian boys alive into a specially dug well. Presumably, their arms and legs were tied and they were tortured very heavily, thrown into the well and then buried inside.

The fate of the brother of Murtaz Kiria, Lepsaia and Arkania is still unclear. There is no doubt that they are no longer alive.

In any case, everyone prefers to keep silent about it. Quadrilateral negotiations are reaching a deadlock. Nothing is being done at

◀ It would help here to quote some Abkhazian officials about their position on the matter.

◀ According to whom?

◀ By whom? What is the source of this information? Rumours should not be spread as fact by the media.

Again, what is the origin of this information? If this 'reliable source' cannot be named, the journalist should at least inform us of how the source came to be in possession of this information. On what basis does the journalist determine that the source is, in fact, reliable? The accusation is also very vague. How many boys is the journalist referring to? How old? What happened beforehand that led to this atrocity? How does the journalist know that they were tortured and tied up? If the source of this information is reliable, does that mean that the sources for earlier information in the article were not reliable?

◀ These two sentences contradict each other. If their fate is unclear, how can there be no doubt that they are alive?

these negotiations besides the fact that the Georgian side is expressing indignation about existing outrageous facts, and the Abkhaz side is defending itself and blaming Georgian partisans for everything that is happening.

The defenders of the Abkhaz side at the Chuburkhinji meetings are the representatives of the UN mission and CIS peacekeeping forces.

During the regular meeting last Thursday, the Georgian side strongly raised another issue, which is no less important and concerns the so-called tax increase at Abkhaz customs.

Abkhaz in fact forbade Georgians to visit their private land and their houses on 'their territory' when they introduced new tariffs at their so-called customs. An inhabitant of Abkhazia, the Gali district in particular, needed 100 Russian roubles to pay for crossing the border and going through so-called customs (we are talking only about a single passage through customs). No one will be able to pay this amount, because it is possible that a single member of a family would need to pass through customs several times in a day, to say nothing about several members of a family. According to representatives of the Georgian side, this is one of the tricks the Abkhaz side is using in order to hinder the return of the Georgian people to Abkhazia. According to the Abkhaz, this step will help to decrease the number of Georgians who move into Abkhaz territory in order to spy and pass on information. It is difficult to believe that agents will be hindered by this because people in this line of work will get money for this purpose from those who order it anyway.

And, lastly, this step will have a negative influence on those ordinary people who need to visit their houses. This is the only way they can support themselves and their families, who are, unfortunately, refugees.

The Georgian side will again raise this and other crucial and necessary issues at a meeting in Chuburkhinji next Thursday. As they note themselves, they will not give it up until the problem is fully solved. Although, it is difficult to believe that anything will be solved in Chuburkhinji, at least to our advantage.

*Tavisupali Gazeti, Tbilisi, Georgia,
28 October - 3 November 2003*

Does the journalist believe that partisans bear any of the blame for the tensions? It would appear not. The perspective seems to be that even if the partisans have participated in the conflict, their role is not worth examining as having played a part in making the situation as bad as it is.

Again, what is the source of this information? The Georgian side in the negotiations appears to be using the sympathy of its compatriots among the journalists to disseminate only its side of the conflict and discussions. Moreover, the journalist appears to be hearing the Abkhazian perspective only from the Georgian side. Perhaps the Abkhaz have a more nuanced explanation for their behaviour. The journalist should have made an effort to talk to them to find out.

Again, this claim seems to absolve the Georgian side for any responsibility for the dispute. The journalist is not denying that spying is taking place, just dismissing as baseless the Abkhazian concern about it. Also, who are the Abkhaz who are commenting on this issue? The journalist needs to source this Abkhaz viewpoint.

This final sentence, and the use of the word 'our,' underlines again the fact that this piece was written solely from one rather than diverse perspectives. The litany of accusations would undoubtedly reinforce the pre-existing prejudices of a Georgian audience. But the journalist's bias is so clear that other readers would have a hard time believing in the objectivity of the account. The horrific charges would have been better examined as the basis for a solid journalistic investigation rather than a piece like to further inflame an already tense situation.

This report is an example of the kind of heated rhetoric that inflames rather than calms disputes. The journalist essentially takes the side of the KLO [Karabakh Liberation Organization] against the government without seeking direct comment from either. The use of the terms 'aggressor' and 'terrorist' to refer to Armenia and Armenians, while reflecting widely held beliefs in Azerbaijan, also serves only to validate those beliefs. In any event, the government certainly should have the right to respond to such charges.

The Karabakh Liberation Organization protests against Armenians' visit to our country

The Karabakh Liberation Organization has protested against the invitation of a delegation from aggressor Armenia to attend the meeting of the council of foreign ministers of member countries of the Black Sea Cooperation Organization. The meeting is scheduled to be held in Baku on 31 October 2003.

The KLO [Karabakh Liberation Organization] said that with this action, the government had humiliated the spirits of our martyrs, created conditions for establishing friendly and fraternal relations with terrorist Armenians, and by this, delivered a sentence of oblivion to our occupied territories. The Karabakh Liberation Organization believes that these kinds of actions run counter to the interests of the Azerbaijan people.

The KLO demanded that the government immediately order the Foreign Ministry to take immediate and resolute measures to prevent the Armenian delegation's visit to Baku. Otherwise, the organization stressed, responsibility for possible events lies with the mentioned ministry.

These are serious charges that deserve a response from the government. That none was apparently sought makes it clear that the report is endorsing the KLO perspective. That may be the intent, but that approach to news does little to resolve or address the situation. The journalist should not be acting simply as a mouthpiece for the KLO.

This implied threat of violence is wielded here as a kind of blackmail. The KLO should reserve the right to peaceful protest but, should take responsibility for its own behaviour if it is suggesting that people engage in violent behaviour.

*Azadliq newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
28 October 2003*

4. Religion

Religion

Religious differences have arguably led to as much conflict around the world, as ethnic prejudice. In fact, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two because warring ethnic groups are, as often as not, members of different religions. In Kosovo, for example, are the tensions between Serbs and Albanians based on ethnicity or religion? Separating the two is tricky at best. Undoubtedly, the answer is that both factors play a role. A similar question could be applied to Nagorno-Karabakh.

The same can be said, as well, of anti-Semitism. Hatred of Jews clearly has both ethnic and religious components. Jews are often viewed as members of an alien race who are defined by certain physical and personality stereotypes, such as hooked noses and an ability to earn money in questionable ways. At the same time, anti-Semites have always mocked Judaism as a religion and spread false rumours about the faith's religious practices and beliefs, such as the notion that Jews seek Christian babies to sacrifice.

The situation in the South Caucasus, like many post-conflict situations has become more complicated in recent years with respect to religion. Not only are formerly closed societies struggling to maintain a sense of mutual understanding between members of religious groups long-established in the region, but missionaries arriving from the West and seeking to convert people to other spiritual traditions have further complicated the picture.

The following are some suggestions on covering religion in a way that helps promote tolerance rather than conflict:

- ★ To identify gaps in coverage, look back at how your media outlet has addressed questions of religious difference in your city or region. Has there been any material including the perspective of those who do not belong to the dominant religion? When other religions have been written about, has the presentation been fair and balanced, or has it perpetuated stereotypes that may have little to do with reality?
- ★ When writing about religion, pay close attention to the language you use to describe other people. You may not consider some words derogatory, but they may be offensive to the members of the group you are writing about. If you are not certain whether or not a word is insulting be sure to check before you use it.
- ★ Take the time to find out about newer religions in your region. Spend a day with Mormon missionaries or with Jehovah's Witnesses. Observe their interactions with the people they speak to and try to convert. You do not have to share their beliefs to report about them accurately and with a sense of understanding and empathy.

★ Write about the laws governing religion in your region. Does the state offer privileges to the dominant faith and discriminate against others? If all religions are supposed to be treated equally under the law, do the authorities actually behave in that way, or do they still favour their own spiritual tradition?

★ Be careful not simply to repeat common stereotypes about people of other religions. When it comes to religion, many self-styled 'experts' will say whatever they like about other spiritual traditions without feeling a need to back up their statements with facts. Because journalists often share those prejudices, they may need to remind themselves that their job is to challenge such statements, not accept them without question.

★ Find out if any universities in your area have religious studies departments. If so, cultivate the professors there as potential sources. If they have a genuine expertise in more than one spiritual tradition, they may be particularly well suited to answering difficult questions about inter-faith relationships.

★ Beware of sources who base their arguments on religious topics solely on quotations from the Bible, the Koran, or other sacred texts. Legitimate differences in interpretations of words written many centuries ago always exist - which is why there are so many Christian denominations, for example, or radically varying Islamic traditions. If a politician seeks to use a religious text as the foundation for public policy, find out how others interpret the same text - and ask the politician tough questions about it.

★ Address religious questions in the context of other social, political and economic developments or trends. If unemployment among members of a particular religious group is high, for example, it may reflect hard times in their traditional line of business rather than laziness. If a new religion seems to be attracting many followers, explore what it might be offering people that they feel they currently lack.

★ Write articles exploring whether the standard stereotypes reflect reality - and if they do, why that might be. For example, it is true that some Jews historically worked as money-lenders specifically because other professions were closed to them, a situation that could certainly have reinforced the impression that they were greedy or at least clever with money.

★ Write about the holidays of other religious traditions the same way you cover your own. Attend a Passover Seder, a Chanukah service or a bar mitzvah, for example. Spend the day with Muslims who are fasting during Ramadan.

★ Do not treat one member of a religious group as representative of all of them. Just because one Buddhist meditates facing the sun does not mean that all of them do. Each person is an individual and should be allowed to express individual opinions and ideas. Everyone may approach their faith in a slightly different way.

* When interviewing people of different faiths, do not assume that their lives begin and end with their religion. Ask them questions about other topics as well. Just as you probably have needs, concerns, problems and joys that have nothing to do with your faith, so do they. Ask them about their families, interests, professions and other aspects of their lives. You do not need to include everything, of course, but it will help you gain a greater understanding of their perspective.

This article is ostensibly about alternative military service. But the journalist uses the issue to vent his rage against a number of social groups, not least of them members of non-traditional religions. He also does not offer those he criticizes any opportunity to counter these arguments.

What can alternative military service give to Azerbaijan?

New religious sects, careless youngsters, more sources for bribery and opportunities for enemies

Nobody denies that Azerbaijan is living through a sensitive period. For reasons that do not depend on us we stand on the centre of controversial geopolitical processes of the region. Since obtaining our independence, we have never neglected our security.

Along with the lands remaining under occupation we also ought to prevent threats from other aspects. Everybody knows how tense are energy-related issues. We also realize the necessity of ensuring security of food and environment.

Armenia does not back off from its stand. In addition, it interrupts negotiation processes. All of this points to increasing probability of an outbreak of war. Therefore, Azerbaijan has to meet certain requirements.

That is why the proliferation of talks on alternative military service gives pause for thought. If the humanity of this law is put on one end of a set of scales and the problems our country faces on the other, balance will not be achieved. It is obvious that a number of questions arise. Do we need alternative military service at this stage of our history?

Alternative military service gives a citizen a chance to carry a different service for a certain amount of money. Let us say, that if somebody does not wish to carry out regular military service for religious, ideological or any other reasons, then he is offered an alternative military service. He is given a job, as well as some privileges, upon such condition that this service is connected to the army. When considering how these religious sects and scroungers behave in Azerbaijan, we should think about implications this privilege can cause.

◀ The journalist uses what he perceives to be the country's dire situation as a rationale for attacking people of other religions. In this way, he tries to justify his prejudices by making them appear to be a reasonable response to realities.

◀ The journalist is clearly biased against people of other religious persuasions who do not share his perspective on the war with Armenia and rejects any spiritual claim that it is wrong to engage in war because the warring parties are 'brothers'. But clearly sincere people can have a legitimate difference of opinion on that issue. It does not make them bad citizens.

It has frequently been reported in the media that Christian religious missionaries conduct their propaganda in the front line regions and call on people not to engage in war. They raise thousands of excuses and explanations to prove that we are 'brothers'.

Moreover, attitudes of the members of those sects towards Azerbaijan, cause worries too. Even if those missionaries may be Azeris, they think as aliens, they do not accept notions of motherland and nation.

They express this openly. They emphasize individuality over and over again. Krishna, Adventists, Baptists and others are far from the notion of serving the country.

Wouldn't adopting alternative military service mean creating opportunities for the spread of these parasites amongst society? No doubt that is the case.

Muslim sects do no little harm to society either. Will an Azerbaijani, 'captured' by Wahhabi ideology, serve in 'the army of the unfaithful'? The majority of them will not. If we note the speed at which Wahhabism is spreading, then we will come to the conclusion that thousands of youngsters will end up loafing in alternative military service.

In addition, this will encourage other youngsters to pursue this path as well. It is not a secret that many are waiting for this chance.

Since alternative service implies provision of people with jobs, this would seem to be 'spreading' a sense of indifference at all levels of society. Instead of reforming them, we end up throwing these people into various social networks and thereby create favourable opportunities for their growth. Unfortunately, we do this with our own hands.

Finally, we have to stress another fact. We are all aware that many people place their children in schools by various means in order to keep them away from the military service. They pay bribes, spend money, but prevent their children from serving in the army. That happens for a number of reasons, which we are not going to

Clearly, the use of 'thousands' is an exaggeration here. Also, the journalist should cite some specific arguments that the Christians make to prove their point.

Why should everyone have to accept the journalist's notions of motherland and nation? People have the right to adopt whatever religious faith they want, and if they come to a different understanding of those terms, that should be their right.

Again, people of one religious tradition should not have a monopoly on defining what it means to serve the country. Others have a right to their own opinions and their own definition of how they would like to serve their country.

Again, the article is presented as an essay on alternative military service, but the journalist is just using that topic to vent his rage at those he views as illegitimate.

At least the journalist is not prejudiced solely against non-Muslim faiths. People have the right to adopt whatever religious faith they want. Again, an article presented as an essay on alternative military service, is being used by the journalist to vent his rage at those he views as illegitimate.

Whatever the reasons Wahhabism may be gaining popularity in Azerbaijan, it seems absurd to blame alternative military service for the problem.

specify. But if you visit universities, especially private ones, you will witness how many students are wasting their time there, merely to evade service. This is especially widespread in the branches of Russian high schools. Some parents even consider service evasion as something prestigious. As soon as the law on alternative military service is in force, those scroungers will move in another direction. They will start putting their children into alternative military service. They will do this in order to create the image of their children doing service, while saving their sons' 4-5 years that they waste in the halls of schools.

The most dangerous group interested in the alternative service is children of those scroungers. They will 'shoot two rabbits with one bullet' - their parents will manage to send them to military service (the alternative one), and will also be able to employ them. The realities of Azerbaijan will certainly allow this.

So, what does the alternative military service give Azerbaijan? First of all, it offers religious missionaries more incentive to further destroy our society.

They will certainly utilize this opportunity. Secondly, it provides foreign groups more opportunities to lessen the military mood of our youngsters, and strengthen the sense of indifference in society. They have various channels of influence, and they will get even more active. Thirdly, some parents (scroungers) will acquire extra possibilities for their sons' evasions of military service. Simultaneously, some will get extra chances for bribes. They, in turn, will suck people's blood like leeches.

Probably, from the perspective of democracy, alternative military service has some advantages as well. But now for Azerbaijan, it is a path leading to a precipice. Let us not forget that even very good ideas can cause lots of bad things if not implemented in a timely fashion. Since we know this, why should we beat our heads against stones?!

◀ *MDI editor note: Potentially libellous sentence removed from the text at this point.*

◀ It remains unclear how religious missionaries destroy society, other than offering citizens the opportunity to consider another point of view.

Olaylar newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
22 June 2004

This short article is typical of many stories in regional media in its negative attitudes toward members of religious traditions that are new to the country. The word 'sect' is not derogatory in some languages, but it certainly is in the original Armenian. To consider adherents of one religion, sect members (in a negative sense), while maintaining that those who maintain the dominant faith are 'normal' is, of course, discriminatory. There is nothing about one set of religious beliefs that make it any more objectively true or valid than another set; atheists, after all, would say that all believers are deluding themselves. And after all, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses and members of other small Protestant denominations have long been part of the American religious landscape. Some people may find them odd and their beliefs unusual, but that is not the same thing as considering them incompetent to make their own religious choices, which articles about sects - or cults - inevitably appear to assume.

Need to create a special centre This article manages to insult two entire

"A mental rehabilitation centre has been established in Moscow for former sect members. According to data I possess, it is extremely difficult to return former Pentecostals to a normal life - this requires continuous efforts. We do not have such a centre, but there is a need to create one, as mentally deformed former sect members are numerous in Armenia, no matter which sect they used to belong to.

This is a problem that the state and the church should probably solve together, because not only the efforts of doctors and psychologists but also priests are needed to bring such people back to orderly life." - This is the strong belief expressed by clergymen Ghevond Mayilyan.

*Hayots Ashkharh newspaper, Yerevan, Armenia,
20 September, 2003*

◀ What exactly would such a centre do? What would be the program? Would it be something people would be forced to attend, or only for those who want to leave the sect they are in?

◀ This statement suggests that only a return to the dominant religion can be considered a normal or orderly life. This clergyman may believe that, but the newspaper appears to be endorsing this view by presenting his statement without any other perspective. Perhaps it would be illuminating to actually talk to 'sect' members and find out what it is they gain from their membership in other religious groups.

◀ It is understandable but self-serving that a priest would call for priests to be involved in 'rescuing' those who have left the fold. But it might serve the interests of readers to examine this as evidence of the church's concern and anxiety about losing its dominant social position - in other words, as a matter of power as much as of theology.

This article manages to insult two entire religious traditions without interviewing anyone from either of them. The source of the alleged information is also very unclear. It seems that most of the information came from the police, but even that remains murky since the journalist does not directly state who provided the material for the article. The presence of other religious perspectives is obviously a troubling development for many in the region, but news accounts such as this do nothing to further mutual understanding and respect for differences.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia are supported by Armenian lobby in US Congress

This headline is not supported in any way by the information in the story. The journalist mentions nothing about the Armenian lobby or U.S. Congress.

Police in Gori found interesting evidence in one of the Jehovah's Witnesses houses, where along with the illegal literature they were able to discover maps of Georgia where all the Georgian Orthodox churches were marked. In this portfolio they also found the approximate dates for the raid and destruction of these churches. Another map was also found in Gori which represented the picture of the poorest rural population in Georgia, their number per countryside and their names.

Later in an interview with the Jehovah's Witnesses, the purpose of these mysterious maps was revealed. Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia were assigned by one of the head offices in the United States to attract as many members to the sect as possible in Georgia. "It will be hard for you to work in big cities and settlements but don't give up. Work with the Georgian countryside, where people are in deep social and economic need. In each such town start working with a member from a well-known family and name, who afterwards will work themselves in order to spread the faith."

What is the connection between Jehovah's Witnesses and Wahhabism?

Today theologians see a big threat from non-traditional religious beliefs like Jehovah's Witnesses and Wahhabism.

They both are governed by closed special agencies.

Is Jehovah's Witnesses literature actually illegal under Georgian law? What exactly is the criminal offence it represents? Or is calling it illegal an exaggeration based on police accusations?

Is all this based on a police report? If so, the journalist should explicitly state the name and position of the person who revealed the information. Otherwise, we might assume it is just a second- or third-hand account that amounts to little more than a rumour.

Does this refer to a police interview with Jehovah's Witnesses from the house where the material was discovered? It is not completely clear.

What is this quote taken from? A memo? A letter? The quote has no context. And who provided it to the journalist? Again, was it the police? We need to know so we can judge how reliable it is. Even if it is legitimate, the journalist implies that there is something inherently sinister about a religious organization advising its missionaries that their job is to convert people. But that is what missionaries are supposed to do.

'Traditional', of course, is a relative concept. These are only non-traditional in societies where they have not been around before. They are belief systems of long standing in the parts of the world where they are widespread.

This remark is extremely unclear. What does it mean? What are these special agencies? Would the Vatican, or the Russian orthodox hierarchy, also qualify as 'closed special agencies'?

These religions became active 10 years ago and soon covered the whole globe.

If ten years ago 100% of the world population, including in the United States, thought of Jehovah's Witnesses as an unserious group of people, now only 70% of population share a similar point of view.

Jehovah's Witnesses, which emerged from a Christian background, and Wahhabism, which has Muslim roots, are new religions created by closed special agencies.

Both of them are created to involve large masses of people and are characterized by a high level of aggression. Jehovah's Witnesses are considered to be the main violators of the criminal code in the whole world as they use violence in order to reach their goals. The criminal code also regulates their violent actions to enter citizens' houses in order to spread illegal literature.

Regarding Wahhabism, its supporters claim that this is a religion that brings people closer to the initial bases of the Koran, which have been forgotten in Muslim society right now. Wahhabis consider Muslims to be 'bad believers'. Wahhabis are against Khans or the possession of any property or money. They persuade each believer that their faith is universal. A Khan or a Sheikh is not considered higher than a faithful Wahhabi. Wahhabism also simplifies old Muslim family traditions. For example, if in a traditional Muslim family the youngest wife cannot go to bed until the whole family is asleep, Wahhabism claims that the wife is responsible only to her husband. As for the man, Wahhabism conveys the idea that power is possible only through individual bravery and weapons. The closed types of special agencies (that govern the sect) try to make sure that each Wahhabi has enough money and weapons. They are called for every day to engage in violence, blood and fighting. The hero of the battlefield is given the title 'braveheart' and is granted a life after earth and great life on the earth.

Again, these traditions have been around for far longer than 10 years ago. It is true that the countries of the former Soviet Union became better acquainted with competing faiths in recent years.

These statistics are offered without any information that would allow us to judge their accuracy. It is unclear what 'unserious' means in this context, but it is inaccurate to say that they have not been taken seriously in the United States, even if they have not had a large following.

Again, 'new' is a relative term. Both have been around for more than a century.

These charges are not backed up with any evidence. In what way do they violate criminal codes? And what kind of violent action is the journalist referring to? The most common activity is knocking on people's doors and talking to them. If they are engaged in actually breaking into people's homes, the journalist should present some evidence to that effect.

What is the source of this information on Wahhabism? From the police? From an expert on religion? From personal knowledge? And much of what the journalist says is characteristic of Wahhabism does not sound particularly subversive. Most religions teach believers that the faith is universal, the one truth. Most tell believers of a great life after death. The allegations about weapons and violence are not backed up by any evidence other than the journalist's word, which is not sufficient for such accusations.

In the Caucasus region both of these religions have become active in the past 7 - 10 years. These sects work cooperatively and their main aim is to take over the control of the region.

If Jehovah's Witnesses are extremely active in Georgia, Wahhabism has become active in Pankisi Gorge and Abkhazia. The main goal of the closed agencies of this type, from Saudi Arabia, is to possess the world's oil.

Who will take control over the Caucasus?

Both sects are acting actively in the Caucasus in order to take religious control over the population, and at this point they don't create obstacles for each other. If the Masons' main goal was to control the elite like politicians, scientists and artists, the main goal of Wahhabism and Jehovah's Witnesses is to control the wide range of the masses.

Sectants members consider that these religions will soon become as popular as Protestantism and Catholicism became popular in Europe. In a lot of countries in Western Europe, Protestantism was considered to be sect for a long period of time but is now considered a state religion.

So what will be the obstacle to proclaiming Wahhabism or Jehovah's Witnesses as a state religion in Georgia in 50 years?

Georgian Times, Tbilisi, Georgia,
22-29 August 2002

Where is the evidence that they are coordinating their efforts. What does the journalist mean that they plan to 'take control' of the region. Politically? or just religiously?

Is the journalist saying that Saudi Arabia has sent its citizens to convert locals to Wahhabism so that Saudi Arabia can control the oil trade? Where is the evidence for this accusation?

Is this goal different from that of any other religion, including orthodoxy?

Is that a bad thing? Why is one religion better or worse than another as a state religion? The journalist makes no explanation, as if it is self-evident that the religious status quo is undeniably the best.

Again, what would be wrong with allowing people to choose the religious tradition they feel most comfortable with. If they convert to some other tradition, that clearly means that orthodoxy is not serving their spiritual and emotional requirements and needs to examine why that is so instead of laying blame on other traditions.

5. Gender

Gender

As societies in the South Caucasus have changed in the past 10 years, so have the roles of women. But to judge from some of the recent magazines and other publications targeting women, you would think their only interests have to do with clothes, cosmetics, decorating and cooking. Certainly after the deprivations they - and everyone else - suffered until the past decade, it is understandable that the availability of a range of goods to choose from should be appealing, but many women undoubtedly have a much broader range of interests.

If a woman is not portrayed as a goddess of domesticity and fashion, she is most likely to appear in the media as a prostitute or a victim in some other way. Again, while prostitution and trafficking in women are serious problems, it is important to cover women's lives in all their diversity, the way men's lives are. Here are some tips to help you do that:

- ★ Women should not appear only in stories specifically about women's problems or issues. Make sure to include women as sources whenever possible. If you are writing about an artistic trend, find a woman artist or two to comment on it. If you are writing about a political debate in your city or region, try to find a woman politician to quote. The point is not to include women in an artificial way but to at least be aware of the value of offering them an opportunity to voice their perspective on a broad range of issues.

- ★ Review the list of regular sources and contacts that you routinely call when developing ideas and writing stories. If the list is completely or predominantly comprised of men, take conscious steps to broaden it. Although men tend to be over-represented in many areas of academia, business, politics and cultural life, it may be easier than you think to identify women who can serve your needs just as well.

- ★ When you include women, describe them the same way you would describe men. If you do not generally describe the clothes or hairstyle of a businessman, do not discuss the clothes and hairstyle of a businesswoman, unless it is somehow relevant to the story. Avoid vague words like 'feminine,' which carry a lot of associations and can be interpreted differently by everyone. Use specific details to explain what you mean. Does she walk gracefully? Speak softly?

- ★ Be careful not to make assumptions in your stories about women's proper role. Journalists often share society's stereotypes about women and men and reinforce them even without meaning to. Not all women are interested in fashion and cooking. Many women are deeply involved in a society's most pressing political and social problems. Some women start and run highly successful businesses. Seek out women whose lives run counter to the common perception of who women are and should be.

★ Meet with members of women's organisations and ask them about their concerns. There may be issues they consider important that neither you nor your editors are aware of. Encourage them to call you when they think they have something newsworthy to discuss. But do not take what they say as the final word, and do not assume that all women's organisations will tell you the same things. Others are likely to have different opinions, and your material should take those ideas into account as well.

★ Consider writing stories about issues - such as domestic violence and sexual harassment - that have been widely covered in the West but have not received a lot of attention in post-Communist societies. These are both extremely serious problems that have generally been ignored or downplayed by the legal system as well as the media. Domestic violence is often considered a private family matter rather than a crime, even when it results in serious injuries. Explore how it is treated in your city or region. Does the law protect women from being beaten by their husbands or spouses? How do the police and other authorities respond? Are there shelters where women and children can seek help?

★ Sexual harassment in the workplace is another issue that has received a great deal of attention in the West. While some people trivialise the issue, the fact is that women in all societies are sometimes confronted with demands for sexual favours from male co-workers and supervisors in exchange for promotions and pay-rises or under the threat of being dismissed. Sometimes the harassment takes the form not of a direct request for sex but of vulgar, derogatory, or taunting sexual language being directed toward the woman, a situation that can make the workplace a highly unpleasant place to be. Again, find out what the laws are in your region. How big a problem is it? How are women fighting it?

★ The issue of prostitution is a major one when it comes to media portrayals of women. It is obviously important to cover the topic, but in doing so it is also critical to try to suspend judgement of women for whom this may be the only way to make a living. Even if a woman has chosen prostitution and not been forced into it, try to understand the world from her perspective. And make an effort to look beyond the stereotypes. Not all prostitutes are drug addicts. Not all are terrible mothers.

★ In some countries, prostitutes have adopted the term 'sex worker' as a less derogatory way of referring to themselves. Ask them why they prefer that phrase and write an article about what the change means. Are prostitutes, or sex workers, trying to create their own organisations and associations? Are they advocating for better health care for themselves or seeking to disseminate information about how to protect themselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases?

★ Trafficking of women has also become a major issue in recent years. Explore the situation in your region. Where are the women coming from? How are they being lured from their home countries, and how are they being forced to stay? Talk to non-governmental organisations working on the issue and ask them to connect you with women who find themselves in that kind of situation.

One of the most common ways that women are portrayed in media in the region is as prostitutes. Here they are portrayed not just as prostitutes but as carriers of disease and, in that sense, a threat to the rest of the population. Obviously, newspapers and other media should examine the question of prostitution in society, but it should be just one of numerous ways in which women are covered, not the primary one. And it is irresponsible to report on them without at least making an effort to talk to some prostitutes, or organizations that represent them or address women's rights. Otherwise, they become scapegoats for social problems - in this case, HIV and AIDS.

Street women are carriers of various venereal diseases

The Russian cities of St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg hold 'leading' positions in the CIS¹ on the extent of the spread of AIDS among indecent women.

This comes from a large-scale poll conducted among people with AIDS, and those infected with this virus, from four Russian cities and two CIS countries ('MedNews').

According to Qalina Fedotova, the head of the group that conducted the poll, questionnaires were distributed to women engaged in indecency in the Russian cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Tomsk as well as in Moldova and Azerbaijan. They were AIDS-tested, and the answers given, along with results of the examinations, were analyzed.

St. Petersburg 'leads' the poll on the spread of AIDS virus among indecent women. It was revealed that 48% of women involved in prostitution have the deadly virus. This figure is 13% in Azerbaijan and 28% in Moldova.

Women often become prostitutes because they have no other way to earn money. This does not make them any more 'indecent' than other people. If a woman has children to feed and no way to feed them, perhaps it would be more 'indecent' of her not to turn to prostitution if the alternative is to watch her kids starve. The use of the word 'indecent' here is a value judgement by the journalist which does not add anything to the article.

In the previous sentence, the journalist refers to AIDS, and here to the AIDS virus. These are two different things. Many people are infected with HIV - the AIDS virus - but do not have AIDS. It remains unclear from this article whether the poll was measuring HIV infection or actual cases of AIDS.

*Elchi newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
8 May 2004*

¹ Commonwealth of Independent States.

This article essentially portrays women as unstable and aggressive. While the article does not specifically accuse women overall as politically suspect, it certainly treats this particular group as a batch of crazy people with incomprehensible views. Even if their views are extreme, it would have been useful to hear, in their words, why they believe what it is they believe.

Zviadist women attack 'Burdjanadze-Democrats'

Pre-election bloodshed has already started. The Bolnisi incident marked the beginning of this activity. Another fight took place a few days after this bloody skirmish, this time in Tbilisi.

Elections were again the reason for the conflict. The most significant and interesting aspect of this later skirmish was the fact that, this time, men and women confronted each other. Naturally, they represented different political interests.

This time the scuffle and blows followed the nomination of an MP candidate in the Isani district of the capital. The nominee of the 'Burdjanadze-Democrats' bloc in this district is David Chinchadze, who was a member of the 1999-2003 Parliament representing the Traditionalists.

His nomination was to have been presented at a ceremony in the district authorities' office. Several hundred people came to the ceremony to see and listen to Chinchadze. Most were men. Unexpectedly for Chinchadze's representatives and supporters, several dozen women gathered in front of the building. According to witnesses, it was clear from one look at these women that they were not well-wishers.

Don't get any bad impressions from that. These women simply came to wreck the ceremony, nothing more.

The women burst towards the men and engaged them in political arguments. People that live in Georgia tend to get very emotional about politics, and one word said about a politician is enough to trigger a debate with anyone. Chinchadze's supporters believed they could resist this temptation even while flirting with the ladies in the meantime. But heated debates ensued. This was where the men made their

What connection does the earlier fight have to the current one? It might be useful to describe it briefly to help provide some context for the current incident.

Why 'naturally'? Is the journalist suggesting that women and men will always have opposing perspectives?

This is a very dismissive statement. How did they look? What facial expressions did they have? Some details would help paint the scene.

The sarcasm of the journalist when talking about the women protestors further conveys the sense that nothing they could possibly say would be worth listening to. If they are so angry, they must have some point to make. Unfortunately, we never learn what it is.

mistake. The second they engaged in political debates, the ladies began their inhuman screaming. During this screaming, it became clear that the women were supporters of ex-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

This group of women has quite a lot of experience engaging in scuffles. During the last ten years, they have regularly come to blows, sometimes with paramilitary groups and sometimes with special police units.

Therefore, it was also not difficult for them to overcome the resistance of Chinchadze's supporters. The men held back at first, but when the women started to pinch them lightly, the men were forced to use profanities.

The opponents did not leave this unanswered. Women here are quite skilled at using dirty words.

In the end, Chinchadze's nomination ceremony was cancelled. Listening to the screaming, the men began to leave the battlefield and the supporters of the ex-president followed them, uttering occasional cries that this country will be saved only when Gamsakhurdia comes back.

The Burdjanadze-Democrats did not pay a lot of attention to this incident. They were raising the issue of frightened men, so how could they say out loud that a few women scared their supporters?

In Chinchadze's election headquarters speculation continues about whose interests the women were serving when they hindered Chinchadze's meeting with voters. There are two more candidates besides Chinchadze in Isani, though the Zviadist women are fans of neither Gia Karkarashvili's nor Vladimir Bakradze. Thus, the idea that they were acting in the interests of the opposing candidates can be ruled out. It looks like these women were just volunteers and that they provoked this incident just for the sake of releasing political tension.

Judging by their temper and tone of voice, they will organize similar actions elsewhere as well. They just need to know beforehand where and when other nominations are taking place.

Akhali Taoba newspaper, Tbilisi, Georgia,
1 October 2003

This clearly portrays the women as behaving like animals and connects that behaviour with their political beliefs. This simplistic association does not shed any light on what the political debate is about. Since they are supporters of Gamsakhurdia, who died more than a decade ago, that provides a good hook on which to hang some context. What did they like about Gamsakhurdia? What do they think he would be good for the country now? The reporter never makes an effort to answer these questions.

◀ Does the fact that they have staged such protests before make their political perspective illegitimate? Have they always been the ones who caused the fights?

Were all the women pinching all the men? Or did just one start pinching? Who is the source for this charge?

◀ It remains unclear whether the reporter was actually on the scene.

◀ The men are portrayed as having been 'forced' by the women's behaviour to use profanities. But here the journalists means to insult women by citing their 'skill' at cursing. Why is it somehow natural for the men to resort to 'dirty words' but not the women?

◀ How were they raising the issue of frightened men? Who, exactly, were they accusing of being frightened?

◀ This again dismisses the idea that they might be motivated by strongly held political beliefs. Just because the journalist does not agree with those beliefs does not mean the women have no right to express them.

This article fulfils one of the basic requirements of journalism in presenting two conflicting points of view about an important subject: the role women should play in society and political life. By giving Ruzan Khachatryan the opportunity to respond to the president's remarks, the journalist presents readers with an opportunity to judge for themselves which of the two perspectives they prefer. However, it would have been a good idea to allow the president, or more likely someone from his office, a chance to offer more substantive rebuttal of the points she makes, especially the charge that his administration is undermining the constitution and has no legitimacy. If no one from his office was willing to answer, the article could have noted that so that the readers would know that at least a response was sought.

We will spend the next 8th of March with our families

Also, it would be useful to have some background on the March 8th meeting. Who organized it? How many people attended? What, exactly, did they do? What kinds of demands did they make? Was this a one-off event or part of a series of demonstrations organized by the same groups? ▶

Again, her statement is very articulate, but it would have been useful to have some greater context for it. In other words, more details about the meeting on March 8th and its political implications would have helped the reader to grasp its significance and meaning.

During the president's meeting with students at Yerevan State University, in reply to a question about his attitude towards the fact that women had organized a protest meeting on 8th of March, Robert Kocharian noted: "In our mind, the 8th of March is a celebration of feminine warmth, tenderness and family. Personally, I don't understand why they would organize such an aggressive meeting on this day."

We asked Ruzan Khachatryan, the media relations representative of the 'Ardarutyun' union and a participant at the March 8th meeting, to share with our readers her views about the president's comment. "An interesting observation can be made," she noted. "Mr. Kocharian has become exceptionally frank these days, which is doing him a lot of harm. Or perhaps he doesn't understand the meaning of his statement about 'why they would organize such an aggressive meeting on this day.' A question naturally springs to one's mind - what day would be good for 'aggressive meetings'? Maybe he can tell us. And he is more than mistaken in thinking that only women who lack warm family ties were out there for the meeting. Because that day we had women who were worried not only about their families, but also their country and their people. We also want to convince Mr. Kocharian that we will spend the next 8th of March with our families, because constitutional law will be re-established in Armenia and a legitimate government will be formed."

*Iravunq newspaper, Yerevan, Armenia,
12 March 2004*

When, exactly, did this meeting take place? What was the occasion for it?

Was the journalist at the meeting between the president and the students? If so, how did the students respond to the president's comment? Did they ask follow-up questions? His statement is clearly an expression of a stereotypical view of women's roles. Did he elaborate at all on why he thought the meeting was aggressive? If so, that should have been included. If the journalist was not present, it would be important to indicate the source of the quote - an official transcript or a government spokesman, for example - so the reader can feel reasonably confident that the statement is an accurate reflection of what the president actually said.

6. Physical and mental disabilities

Physical and mental disabilities

Pople with disabilities - whether physical or mental - are frequently ignored by the media. When they are not ignored, they are usually written about as people to be either mocked or pitied. Reporters often discuss their problems and issues with doctors, government authorities and others without ever talking to disabled people themselves, so they have little idea what those affected are feeling and thinking about their own situation.

This may have something to do with the fact that it can be hard to find people with disabilities to interview. People with schizophrenia, retardation and other mental and emotional difficulties have long been hidden away, either at home or in institutions, because their families have been ashamed of them or have wanted to protect them from social discrimination. The same is true for people missing limbs or suffering from cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and other physical handicaps, especially since society has made little effort to accommodate their needs in education, the workplace and the physical infrastructure, such as streets and public buildings.

Another difficulty is that people with some forms of disability are frequently also members of other social groups viewed negatively by the larger society. Although anyone can become infected with HIV and AIDS, drug addicts, prostitutes and homosexuals - who generally are not accepted as valuable members of society--are frequently viewed as having the greatest risk.

Here are some things to keep in mind when covering people with disabilities:

- ★ First, make sure to cover them. And when you cover them, make sure to actually talk to them. What others tell you about them - even if they speak of them sympathetically - should be just the starting point for your material. You should make contact with disabled people themselves and ask them if what other people have told you corresponds to how they themselves view their situation. If there is a contradiction in what you hear, you can go back to the doctors or others who perceive themselves as experts and question them again.

- ★ Do not cover disabled people only in the context of their disabilities. Disabled people have interests, careers, and families like everyone else. If you come across people who have attained success as artists, politicians, or professionals in spite of having a disability, that might make a good story. Spend some time with them to find out how they overcame any difficulties on the path to success. Ask them what advice they might have for others in similar situations.

- ★ Be careful with language. Every language has its own set of words - some insulting, some not - to describe people with disabilities. You may think that a particular word or expression is not hurtful, but you are not the best judge. If people with that disability tells you that they prefer to be referred to in some other way, you should seriously consider their request.

★ One important aspect of journalistic coverage of people with disabilities is the issue of access. Write a story about whether or not society is making an effort to allow people with disabilities to participate in important social activities. If it is not, why not? Is it a question of money, lack of political will, deeply entrenched prejudice, or some other reason? What kind of education and professional opportunities are open - or closed - to disabled people?

★ Explore the issue of whether, and how, people with disabilities are forming groups or working with other non-governmental organisations to promote their rights. In many countries in Eastern Europe, for example, people with HIV and AIDS have created their own associations, both to find a way to support one another and to pressure the government and society to acknowledge their needs. In some areas, people with mental and physical disabilities, and their families, are demanding greater access to effective treatment. Find out what is going on in your region.

★ Make sure you know what you are talking about. If you are writing about people with HIV, for example, make sure you understand the difference between being infected with HIV and having AIDS. Make sure you understand how HIV is transmitted - and how it is not transmitted. Journalists have a wonderful opportunity to inform people, but they also have a great responsibility not to misinform them.

★ There is a difference, for a journalist, between feeling empathy for people with disabilities and pitying them. If you feel empathy, it means you respect them as individuals because you have spoken with them, spent time with them, observed their lives firsthand. Pity is often tinged with a condescending attitude that you, or others, know better than they do what they need. If you have formed opinions about the people with disabilities based on what people other than the disabled say about them, you are more likely to feel pity and are not yet prepared to write about their issues.

★ Because the disabled people are often hidden from society, it can be difficult to find people to talk to. The best approach to start is to contact groups and NGOs that represent them. Talk to the organisers to develop a general understanding of their concerns, and ask them to put you in touch with some of their members. You should also make sure to talk to others not involved with the group, who may have a different perspective or may offer more forthright or straightforward thoughts and opinions.

★ It is often true that stereotypes have an element of truth. There may be many beggars or homeless people among those without limbs - but that is most likely because society does not offer them any other choices. Drug addicts may have a higher rate of HIV - but that may be because they do not understand how to protect themselves from infection or do not have access to clean needles. The reasons for the association often have deep roots in society's problems, and blaming the people themselves is not the role of the journalist.

This article, while presenting the perspective of the physically disabled, also makes them appear to be ungrateful for the help they are being offered. This impression is reinforced by the story's headline, which focuses solely on the fact that they complained. The overall impression the article creates is that they are greedy whiners out to get whatever they can from a society that is more than willing to help them. The article also descends into describing a political brawl between the mayor of Artik and local disabled people and ultimately does little to shed light on the actual plight confronting these tremendous difficulties in their lives.

The disabled complain

The 'Astghik' union for the disabled has carried out its first event, on the theme of "Let's protect the rights of the disabled and support them." Astghik president, Levon Nersissyan, received 240 wheelchairs, each costing \$150, from the 'Wheelchair Fund, an American organization, to distribute in different regions and communities of RA¹ and Nagorno-Karabakh. The first person to respond to this offer was the mayor of Artik, Hmajak Abrahamyan, and so 17 residents of Artik were the first to get the new wheelchairs.

To facilitate the work with the disabled and to support them financially, Levon Nersissyan offered to establish a local parents' organization for disabled children. When the parents gathered to elect the president of their organization, H. Abrahamyan readily introduced to them the most appropriate candidate for that position, Narine Zakaryan. No matter how sincerely this inexperienced 20-year-old girl tried to tell them that she couldn't use a computer, that she had done German at school not English, the mayor went on persuading the naive daughter of his best friend, a member of the town's council, that "it is nothing, you can do it, you know how to use a computer a little bit, you will learn it completely in a couple of months."

When it came to distributing the wheelchairs, the parents of the disabled children who gathered in front of the Artik City Hall started to complain about the sizes and inconvenience of the wheelchairs and asked for the \$150 instead.

However, the president of Astghik modestly introduced the activity of the organization, explained that they couldn't give out cash, as

◀ The journalist is clearly being critical of the mayor, but still needs to pursue the facts of the matter. Why does the mayor have any role at all in choosing the president? Did anyone present, including the journalist, ask him why the daughter of his friend should take on that role? If so, that should be included. If not, why not?

◀ How legitimate were their complaints? How many people gathered? How many complained? Did anyone like the wheelchairs? If the complaints were valid, it would make them appear less like money-grubbing ingrates. The way this is written, it creates the impression that they do not deserve anything at all.

¹ The Republic of Armenia

they had received wheelchairs and assembled them here. When the name of Arayik Pampalyan was read out from the list of people to receive wheelchairs, the disabled child's mother not only refused to receive the wheelchair, but declared in a loud voice that while organizations like this are really doing their best to help them, the mayor does not support the disabled in any way, that he insults and turns them away. "I want nothing to do with your disabled, he tells me. I don't care about this!"

A bit later an argument broke out between the mayor and the widow. One of them was shouting: "Nobody helped me here, my disabled child is starving, 3600 dram pension per month is all we live on", the other was responding: "You are lying, shame on you, how many times I helped you. Everything was done orally, I didn't keep the applications."

Unfortunately we didn't manage to persuade the disabled child to exchange his old wheelchair for a new one.

"I am thankful to the charity, but I don't want this present. I want money instead of the wheelchair, to buy food and a house."

Seeing the curiosity that this issue raises, the mayor offered to pay the rent for the house, 5,000 drams, but then, enraged by the aggressive attitude of the widow, he refused to keep his promise. Finally a 'brilliant' idea came to H. Abrahamyan and he offered: "Well, let's register you in the program called 'Benefit in substitution for work', I will arrange things so that you won't have to go to work but will get 1,000 drams per day." The disabled child was afraid that the miracle wouldn't take place and the mayor wouldn't keep his promise. Nevertheless, the Astghik union for disabled accomplished its mission in Artik.

*Aravot newspaper, Yerevan, Armenia,
17 June 2004*

It would help if the journalist could determine the truth or accuracy of the accusation. Otherwise it just becomes a shouting match between two people, and the readers have no idea which one to believe.

This sounds like the journalist was actively involved in trying to persuade the child to take the wheelchair. Is that the case? If so, does that mean the journalist felt that the request for money instead of the equipment was not justified? Was the journalist convinced that the new wheelchairs were acceptable? And should the journalist have played a role in the situation while reporting on it?

This last sentence is confusing. In what way did the union accomplish its mission? Did it manage to distribute the other 239 wheelchairs? If so, what was the attitude of the other participants? By focusing solely on this dispute between the mayor and the one family, the journalist has deprived readers of the opportunity to learn more about the overall event and about the reactions of others, which might be more characteristic of the response.

This story concerns an incident of extremely insensitive language used in a headline for a story about a fire in a psychiatric facility. The headline - "Roasted Nuts" - not only played on stereotypes about those suffering from mental illness but was also technically inaccurate, since no one was injured in the blaze.

Roasted nuts Publisher apologises for headline

The publisher of a city tabloid apologised in print Tuesday for a headline on the paper's story about a recent fire at a psychiatric facility.

The Trentonian's story on a July 9 fire that damaged an administration building at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital appeared under the headline "Roasted Nuts." There were no patients in the building and no one was injured. In a signed editorial, publisher David B. Bonfield called it a "crude, thoughtless headline that cruelly made light of mental illness. In the bargain, it was inaccurate."

Bonfield noted that readers of the 47,526-circulation daily had flooded the publication with complaint calls and letters to the editor.

"This newspaper has always prided itself in standing up for the powerless against the powerful - a style that won it a Pulitzer Prize in some fisticuffs over New Jersey political corruption. It should have come as no surprise to us, then, when our readers stood up for the powerless - against us - and let us have it. And we had it coming. Every blow," Bonfield wrote.

He said the newspaper would "try to make amends not just by being more sensitive to the plight of the mentally ill but by becoming an aggressive advocate for their interests."

The headline's writer, Tony Persichilli, already had apologised in the paper the day after the headline was published. The columnist and copy editor wrote that the headline was inaccurate and insensitive and he took full responsibility.

But the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill said last week Persichilli's apology was inadequate, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported. The group said the headline was "one of the worst examples of institutional prejudice and discrimination in recent memory" and called for "affirmative, remedial actions."

In apologising for the incident, the publisher recognised how insulting the language used was and quickly responded to complaints from both readers and organisations representing the mental disabled. His action is evidence that media organisations do at times respond to pressure from the public and that it is important to try to hold them accountable for their lapses in judgement.

Drawing attention to an incident of this type can, in the end, prove beneficial to all parties. It can force the media organisation to become more responsible in reporting on diversity-related issues, which in turn helps the public to receive less biased information about important social issues.

Non-governmental organisations can and should play a key role in documenting insensitive coverage, pressuring news operations and encouraging the public to pay attention to such issues. Reporters and editors need to recognise that such groups can be a source of invaluable input and advice concerning coverage of minority communities of all kinds.

The Associated Press, Trenton, New Jersey,
United States, 23 July 2002

This article attempts to present an innovative effort to integrate disabled children into regular classrooms in a relatively sympathetic and objective way. It presents both positive and negative aspects of the problem. What would have made the piece much more compelling would have been to include interviews or comments from those most affected - namely, parents of children with disabilities, whether emotional or physical, as well as the children themselves. Many reporters may not realize that it is possible, in fact, to have informative conversations with even extremely disabled individuals, who might very well offer a unique and unexpected perspective. Moreover, it would also have been a good idea to include more comments from parents of children who are not disabled, as well as the kids themselves, to gauge their reaction to the idea.

In addition, the journalist does not make a clear distinction between various categories of disabled children. Mentally disturbed is not the same thing as mentally disabled, and a child with a minor physical disability or motor skills problems has a totally different set of problems. If Georgian society treats all such children in a similar manner, the journalist should make that point.

This case requires care

During recent times, talks have intensified about integrated teaching, which envisages tutoring disabled or mentally ill children together with healthy kids. Reportedly, such methods have been already used abroad for a long time. It is noteworthy that in many foreign countries friendship among the children with different intellectual abilities starts not in classrooms, but with nature - on the sites of experimental school farms.

Somehow in Georgia we decided to simplify the solution of this problem.

It will be interesting to see to what extent this novelty will be effective in Georgia; will it be possible for children with different intellectual abilities to adapt to each other? Those attending Archangel Michael Curative-Pedagogic School do not resemble ordinary children and the reason is simple, they have no ability of logical thought, and no perception of the things they don't see with their own eyes.

Ms.Lali Tsertsvadze, one of the teachers of the above mentioned school, told us that overseas, only children who are mildly mentally retarded could study together with healthy kids.

In this regard, in Georgia first of all we should prepare society and then teachers for this novelty. Otherwise, children suffering from cerebral palsy, or mild physical paralysis and sitting in wheelchairs, might be dispirited even more if brought to traditional schools. This might be caused not only by mockery, but also by sad glances. Between the age of 3 to 7 children

◀ What is the source of this information? It might be true in some places but seems doubtful that it is the norm for school integration in the West.

◀ What exactly is their disability? Is it mental retardation, or some form of extreme learning disability? When talking of such disabilities, it is best to be as specific as possible.

◀ This comment is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the reality 'overseas.' The journalist should ask the teacher to be more specific about what she means and should not necessarily accept what she says on faith.

learn to imitate each other. Therefore, handicapped or mentally disabled kids should be adapted to communicate with normal peers during this very age. It should also be mentioned that in many cases the parents are making mistakes, when they lock up their sick child.

Such unprotected ones are in more need to communicate with the society. Maia Khundadze teacher in the above mentioned school has already tried such integration. She tried to integrate her child with her mentally disabled students. Truly, at first the child got scared of the new acquaintances' different manner of behaviour and increased emotionality, but now they get along very well.

Davit Zurabashvili, the director of Mikheil Asatiani Psychiatric Institute, told us that mental retardation differs in terms of degree or depth. Their integration with healthy children without adequate education program and psychiatrist's consent is unjustifiable. Zurabashvili considers it feasible to integrate not mentally retarded youths, but those with physical handicaps in the process of integrated education. Mentally retarded children need much more time to cope with new material, which may cause the teaching process to slow down for ordinary students. A certain balance should also be maintained in schools: for instance, one physically or mentally handicapped child per 10 healthy kids.

Levan Chikvanaia, the director of the Scientific-Research Institute of Pedagogy, sees both positive and negative aspects in the integrated teaching of students. He considers that it is possible to teach the children with minor impediments (stuttering, limping) together with healthy peers, but at the same time he advises teachers to be very careful, as the sick, suffering from psychic complexes, might bring dissonance to the class. And finally, the integrated method of teaching will probably facilitate development of tolerance among the youths, but another issue also needs to be thought about: our healthy children do not 'kill' themselves with studying, and will it be possible to provide them with full-fledged education while studying with mentally disabled youth?

*Epoka newspaper, Tbilisi, Georgia,
21 January 2003*

◀ Does the journalist have any statistics or information on how often parents do not let their disabled children interact with others or lock them up? Is this a widespread problem in Georgia?

◀ It would be interesting for the journalist to talk with the teacher's child.

◀ Does the Georgian system normally separate children who stutter or happen to have a limp from other children in the classroom?

◀ This final comment appears to be the journalist's warning that this might not be a good idea. But if so-called 'healthy' children are not studying properly, is it fair to blame the disabled for that problem, as this statement appears to do?

This is a relatively sober account of the current situation with HIV/AIDS in Azerbaijan that discusses the situation without trading in negative stereotypes. However, while it presents up-to-date statistics, it does not include any interviews with HIV-positive people, which would have helped to humanize the story.

The number of AIDS patients is on the rise in Azerbaijan This problem is taking on a threatening scale

The world is on the threshold of an AIDS pandemic - at least this is what experts forecast. In their opinion, in the near future the number of HIV-positives might increase from 40 million to 100 million people. These are very startling figures. Incidentally, our country is not an exception, for experts have noted a trend towards the spread of the disease here.

In accordance with the data of the National anti-AIDS centre, 573 HIV-positives were registered in the country as of 1 October 2003. To compare, we will give the July figures - there were 556 patients. Even this 'minor' increase can have irreversible consequences and become an impossible burden on Azerbaijan.

Out of the overall number of HIV infected people, 551 are Azerbaijani nationals, and 22 are foreigners. A total of 273 of them live in Baku, the others live in the districts. The majority of the HIV-positives are men (77 per cent), and the rest are women and children. The average age of the patients is between 20 and 39.

According to the tragic statistics, 45 people have died of this horrible disease and 44 are about to die.

As of today, seven families have been registered in the country in which both the parents and the children are infected. In 24 families, only the husband and the wife are infected, in 88 families only the husband and in eight only the wife.

It is alarming that 265 of patients examined, i.e. 48 per cent of the total number, are migrant workers who were infected abroad, in particular in Russia.

◀ Is this really an increase in the number of people infected or just in the number of people tested and identified? The answer can play a big difference in how to interpret the significance of the figures.

◀ This is a range of ages, not an 'average.' An average is a single number.

◀ Why is that more alarming than if they had been infected in Azerbaijan? Both situations would seem to be alarming.

The director of the National Anti-AIDS centre and national coordinator and secretary of the State Commission for AIDS Prevention, Habil Aliyev, said that it would be desirable if everyone who had arrived from abroad and was going to get married first underwent a medical check-up.

At the same time, intensive work to prevent and fight AIDS is under way in the country. For instance, under Health Minister Ali Insanov's resolution No 155 of 2 December 2002, "On setting up round-the-clock anonymous services for diagnosing HIV in all towns and districts of the country", such services have been set up and are operational. Everybody has the opportunity to receive a check-up in the area in which they live. "We urge all citizens of the country who use drugs or belong to sexual minorities, who do not trust their partners, or who suffered from venereal diseases in the past five to 10 years to undergo check-ups in their own interests," Aliyev said.

At the same time, Aliyev said that many were reluctant to undergo 'checks' for subjective reasons. This is linked to traditions and to a fear of society, which, they believe, can "peck a person to death".

This is obviously the only and major reason for the lack of precise information on the number of cases, and the fact that AIDS/HIV preventive measures are ineffective.

Aliyev said that the UNO held a special AIDS session in 2001. As a result of the work done, a programme was adopted to stop this disease from spreading. Azerbaijan has joined this programme.

"The centre is appealing to the new president of the country, Ilham Aliyev. The government should pay attention to the current problem, which has the potential to spread on a threatening scale," Aliyev concluded.

*Zerkalo newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
31 October 2003*

What are the implications of this? Does this mean that the person would not be allowed to get married, or just that it would be good so as to teach them how to prevent transmission? What is the rationale for limiting the check-ups to people about to get married? Is that based on the assumption that people who return from abroad but are not getting married are not going to have any sex? If so, this is very likely to be an incorrect assumption.

How anonymous are these services really? Does the journalist just accept the government's word for it that anonymity will be preserved? Are only those in the above-listed risk groups advised to get tested, or everyone? Has the journalist checked whether such services are really in place? And beyond testing, what services are being offered? What is the incentive for people to get checked in the first place, especially if treatment options are limited or non-existent?

To call these 'subjective' reasons suggests that people are reacting from irrational motives. But clearly these are real causes for concern, as is the question of what benefits people will receive if they find out they are, in fact, positive.

Nothing described here suggests that the government is doing anything to create incentives for people to get tested.

Is it the only reason or the major reason? The two are not the same.

If this is the United Nations, the name of the organization should be written in full on the first reference. The initials can be used in later references.

What is the programme? What are its elements? In what way is Azerbaijan participating? How much money is being spent on the programme? The government can join a program without actually doing anything to implement it. What matters is action and implementation, not what the government claims to be doing.

What, exactly, would they like him to do? It would be useful to list some specifics here about what measures would help fight the problem.

This is a sympathetic and well-meaning article about disabled people. But in an important respect, it reinforces the invisibility of disabled people that it also criticizes. This is a common problem in articles addressing issues related to social minorities, especially ones that have been hidden from view. People, including journalists, are so used to not paying attention to them that they fail to even talk to them when writing about them. In this article, the disabled become the objects rather than the subjects of the story. Perhaps Sadixov, the spokesman, is disabled, but the journalist never tells us. If he is, it would be interesting to hear his own particular story - how he felt about whatever disability he has, how he overcame it or dealt with it in his own life, and how he came to be an activist.

Wheelchair in theatre

This is not nonsense, but a sign of civilization

During 'developed socialism', people did not notice a person in a wheelchair, on crutches or with an artificial limb. Not because the scene could spoil their mood, but because a person in a wheelchair was something ordinary. Disabled people could hardly keep pace with the Soviet people who were striding towards a bright communist future. On the other hand, we could hardly see disabled people in the streets and public places and therefore, naively believed that there were not many of them.

However, rare movies and documentaries that reached us from the other side of the 'iron curtain' showed that 'they' had loads of disabled people. They were in the streets, in public transport, in shops - in brief, everywhere. We, still living in our conditions, had to believe that we lived much better than 'they'.

However, Perestroika and the events that followed it turned everything upside down. Disabled people came out from 'underground'. It appeared that it was us, not them, who had this problem, it was us, not them, who did not want to think in a civilized manner but rather thought like cave-men. This enabled us at last to see the people in need and help them.

Nowadays, there are over 25,000 handicapped people in Azerbaijan.

The chairman of the city board of the Society, Asgar Sadixov, said that the organization was set up in 1989 and was fourth in the USSR after Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

When providing a statistic like this, the source should be cited. Where does this figure come from: the government, the disabled themselves, and who, exactly, does it include? Is it people with both physical and mental disabilities, or just physical disabilities?

What is the full name of this society? If it is the Society of Disabled Persons, which is referred to below, the full name should be used in the first reference.

There had been only two societies - of the blind and the deaf - in the republic before that.

Disabled people at the time had full benefits, which were abolished in 1996.

They then felt for the first time the tragedy of real life, although they were striving for that real life not less (sometimes even more) than healthy people.

There are a total of 17 organizations of disabled people in the country. The major goal of the Society is to tackle problems of handicapped people.

The idea that disabled people are a burden for society is very much debatable. Many of those who were neglected by blind fate have found their place in life, which only lends support to the necessity of paying more attention to their education. By helping disabled people from childhood on, we offer them an opportunity to adapt to society and give the same back to it as any other person.

Disabled people, despite their physical disabilities, want to get a quality education. They are invested with this right (under the constitution). However, in practice they face a host of problems and obstacles.

Sadixov said: "There was a case when a young man came to the city from Qazax District for several years in a row and could not enter Baku State University. He had good marks in all subjects, but the guy got 'unsatisfactory' for writing. After he appealed to the Society of Disabled Persons, it emerged that he had a congenital defect of his arm and had problems with holding a pen in his hand. The society decided to help him: it sent a letter to the Education Ministry, which made the decision to let him repeat the test. Tahir Damirciyev was enrolled in the university. He is now a teacher at a school in the Suraxani district and the chairman of the district society of disabled persons. But he still had problems: he was dismissed for being physically handicapped, and Tahir had to turn to court to be reinstated."

◀ What benefits is this referring to? How and why were they abolished?

◀ What exactly does the constitution guarantee them? In what ways are these guarantees not fulfilled?

◀ This is a compelling story. it would have been better had the journalist actually spoken to Tahir directly rather than relaying this account second-hand.

Sadixov said that there were many cases when handicapped people were denied jobs, and had to appeal to courts to restore their legal rights.

Under a resolution of the Milli Maclis¹ of 25 August 1992, "disabled persons have social, economic, civil and labour rights like healthy citizens of the country."

Each of them, Sadixov said, have in addition a whole host of social problems, the kind that even healthy people can have difficulty dealing with. Officials at different levels can hardly deal with people in wheelchairs for the enormous burden of everyday problems, priority tasks and never ending work. "It is clear that they are up to their ears in work. But if disabled persons say in a weak voice that they need a house, a wheelchair, not to mention special transport, we have to help them. They say that we have other problems to deal with, and this pretext has become the formula of our relations."

Throughout the history of the Azerbaijani Society of Disabled Persons, Sadixov said, only once were they asked for advice - during the reconstruction of the Philharmonic Hall. Facilities for disabled people were provided in the concert hall, the cloakroom, the WC, etc. "A person in a wheelchair in the theatre is a sign of civilized relations."

Sadixov recalled that Hacibala Abutalibov, who then was the chief executive of the Suraxani district, had several times held weeks devoted to the issues of disabled persons. Heads of the enterprises that employed handicapped people gave them bonuses, raised their ranks and improved their working conditions.

But there is nothing like that today.

Under the law, Sadixov said, disabled persons of the first and second groups² are to receive an additional 25 per cent of their salaries, and of the third group 15-20 per cent.

For example? Again, it would have been better to actually speak to some of these people rather than just hearing about them from someone else, even a spokesman for them.

What exactly were these facilities: wider aisles, hand-grips in the toilets? Some details would provide a clearer picture.

On what basis? Just because they were disabled?
When did this take place: in Soviet times, five years ago? It would be helpful to know.

1 The Milli Maclis is Azerbaijan's parliament.

2 In Azerbaijan, following the practise in the former Soviet Union, people with disabilities are categorised into groups depending on how severe their disabilities are. They receive different levels of assistance based on what group they belong to.

"However, there was a case in the Xatai district when disabled persons working at schools could not get a pay rise. Only having gone through bureaucratic procedures, could they achieve justice."

The building that hosts the city board of the Azerbaijani Society of Disabled Persons, which covers the 11 districts of the city, is in a lamentable state. It is under the authority of the executive authorities of the Sabayil district. However, neither numerous letters, nor complaints have helped.

Sadixov said that neither businessmen nor state agencies were in a hurry to help handicapped people. "The International Day of Disabled People is celebrated on 3 December. As a rule, people remember us only on this day. District chief executives invite five or six people from district societies to lunch. Sometimes they give them 20,000-30,000 manat each. This is where attention to this stratum of society on the part of state agencies ends. But we want them to remember us both before and after that date..." Sadixov concluded.

*Zerkalo newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
31 October 2003*

7. Socially disadvantaged groups

Socially disadvantaged groups

In Communist societies, socially disadvantaged groups such as drug addicts, prisoners, the homeless, and the unemployed either did not officially exist or were viewed as enemies of the state. As a result, their lives, concerns and problems were not considered of interest and remained unexplored by the media - as if coverage would somehow have endowed them with legitimacy and generated unwarranted sympathy for their plight.

Since then, however, it has become clear that ignoring the presence of such groups does a disservice to society. Every society that previously believed itself immune to the social ills associated with capitalism has discovered that wilful ignorance does little to make complex problems disappear. In fact, the presence of vast and growing numbers of disadvantaged citizens has suggested just the opposite: that to pretend something does not exist only makes matters worse in the end.

Here are some ways to improve coverage of socially disadvantaged groups:

- ★ Identify which disadvantaged groups are common in your city or region. Do you have a particular problem with unemployment because of factory closings nearby? Is there an especially large number of homeless people because of conflict-related destruction of property or some other reason? How about veterans of regional wars? Drug addicts? Then examine how - or even whether - your media outlet has covered these groups, evaluate the material, and determine what gaps remain.
- ★ Make sure to interview unemployed people, drug addicts, war participants and others about whom you are writing. Members of disadvantaged groups tend to appear in the media, if they do at all, in connection with crime and, more often than not, are not even interviewed. Generally, law enforcement officials and other 'experts' are allowed to present their perspective without challenge. And because journalists often share these stereotypes, they may simply transmit them to the readers without qualification.
- ★ Make contact with non-governmental organisations whose mission is to help the unemployed, drug addicts, the homeless and other members of socially disadvantaged groups. Develop these people as reliable sources. Encourage them to call you with story ideas. Ask them what are the most important issues they are working on. Request that they arrange for you to spend time with members of the groups for whom they are advocating.
- ★ When you interview the unemployed, drug addicts and others; do not limit your questions to those topics. Try to gain a full understanding of their lives, to find something they feel passionately about. Ask them about interests, hobbies, family members, pets - anything that might allow you to empathise with their situation and

not view them solely through the prism of their shortcomings or disadvantages. Make an effort to convey who they are as real people, with rich histories and complex inner lives, rather than simply as a representative of a socially deprived group.

- ★ Place social troubles in context. If drug addiction has become a major problem recently, explore the factors that have led to that. Economic collapse? Greater availability of narcotics? If unemployment is on the rise, try to figure out why. Are local factories closing? Has there been a drop in exports? If you are writing about ex-convicts who commit crimes again, explore how easy or difficult it is for former prisoners to find jobs. It always helps readers understand other people's situation if they are presented with a complete picture of events.

- ★ Profile a member of one of these groups who has done something difficult or extraordinary. Has someone who has not been able to find employment in one field managed to switch gears completely and become a success in another area? Has someone kicked drug addiction and gone on to create an organisation to help others in the same situation? Has a former prisoner fully reformed and achieved recognition as an artist?

- ★ While it is critical to spend time with the people you are writing about, that does not mean you need to accept everything they say at face value. You will undoubtedly hear lots of depressing stories from them, but unless you confirm the truth of each one you should make it clear in your story that you are attributing the information to your sources. For example, if a drug addict tells you he only shoots up once a week, you should report that he says he shoots up only once a week, since you cannot know for sure whether or not that is true. If an unemployed person says she has been rejected for 10 jobs, you should report that she says she has been rejected for 10 jobs, not that she actually has been.

This article about beggars outside Parliament offers a mixed portrait. Unlike many such articles that present a completely negative impression, this one at least includes information from the beggars themselves. In doing so, it makes their plight at least understandable to the readers. It is easy to understand an unemployed mother begging in order to have enough money to care adequately for her children. It also portrays differences among the beggars themselves rather than criticizing them all uniformly.

Beggars at parliament gate

Gevorik is still the best

In contrast to the USA and many other countries, in Armenia no one is aware of the exact amount of money people have, nor is it clear who owns more than the rest.

However, there is a belief deeply rooted in the society that the most well-to-do among us are high-ranking officials, prominent entrepreneurs and political figures. In Armenia, a group of people specialize in getting money from these persons. High-ranking officials, prominent deputies, entrepreneurs, political figures are available to these people during the National Assembly's (NA) three-day sessions as they enter and exit the building. Yesterday, during the regular three-day session of the National Assembly, there were only four such beggars at the NA's Demirchian entrance. The famous 'HSH¹ Gevorik' stood to one side. His experience in getting money from state officials and political figures is great - he has been practicing it since the days HSH was in power.

Unlike the rest, Gevorik focuses exclusively on political figures and celebrities, i.e. he takes money only from famous persons. He hates other beggars crowded at the NA entrance and the latter respond with hatred in their turn.

This hatred is well-founded. "I know the potential money-givers when I see them. I approach only the givers, leaving the non-givers alone, whereas these beggars ask for money from any person with a tie on. The non-givers

This is a strange statement. It is not self-evident that people in the U.S. and other countries know exactly how much money people have. On what basis is the journalist making this claim?

Is he really famous? What, exactly, does the journalist mean by that? Is he famous just among the other beggars, or among the politicians as well? Was he well-known as a political activist? Is he really the most effective beggar, or is that just his own boasting? Some context would be useful here.

¹ The 'HSH' is a political party, the 'Armenian National Movement'.

enter the building, complain and order the police to disperse the crowd: it does not matter who the beggars are who disturbed them", Gevorik explains, declaring that he will now ask the policemen to disperse the rest.

Gevorik is reluctant to discuss his income. However, he states that the others get \$100 USD on each day of the three-day session. "You must be getting 200?" To this question of mine Gevorik responds with a sarcastic grin, "If that is all I get, why should I come here at all?"

Other beggars say that these figures are just tales. A resident of Norashen village of Artashat, Gyulnara Poghosian says that her two sons are handicapped and she provides food and medication for them and their children by begging. "If I got such a large sum of money why should I have a debt at a drugstore amounting to 24,000 AMD", Mrs. Gyuli says. Despite this, she expresses satisfaction with the deputies who have always helped her. "Each in his own way. Someone takes the money out of his pocket, puts aside his 5,000 AMD notes and gives a thousand, another puts aside his 1,000 AMD notes and gives a hundred", she says. However, she mentions cases when the deputies gave large sums. "For example, the deputy from our constituency Manvel Ghazarian gave so much money last December that it supported us for three months. On the New Year's Day, I told my grandchildren to pray to Jesus for uncle Manvel before the meal" Mrs. Gyuli says.

Another beggar, living in Nor Nork, tells how Ruben Hairapetian once gave three beggars 10,000 AMD each. "If others give much money, they always suggest sharing it among the beggars, thus provoking disputes," the beggar says. He compares the former and current NA, saying that though there were less wealthy people in the former NA, they gave more money.

In general the beggars are afraid to disclose the names of those refusing to give them any money. "If they refuse to give money let them not stand in the way. If we complain, they will complain about us as well", the beggars say.

◀ The journalist has used a very familiar form of the woman's name. In English, it would be as if he had interviewed an Elizabeth Smith, and then went on to call her Mrs Liz. In the Armenian original, the could be patronizing.

◀ This is an effective and touching portrayal. Clearly, the reader is meant to feel sympathetic toward Mrs. Gyuli and understand her reasons for begging. She is not portrayed as just a parasite. The detail about the local deputy is a nice touch.

◀ Do they all say this in unison like a choir? It is best to put quotations around a single person's statement, not to attribute a quote to more than one person.

It is the police that they fear most and - strange as it is - they are afraid of Gevorik. Occasionally, the policemen try to disperse the crowd of beggars at the Demirchian entry to the National Assembly. In contrast to the police, Gevorik does it by scaring the beggars. They say if Gevorik does not come to NA entrance, the number of beggars grows that day since there is not a single beggar who managed to avoid a kick from Gevorik. They desperately shrug their shoulders in response to our question why the police do not punish him for that. They know that, unlike them, Gevorik gets dollars and has sponsors among the authorities and the police.

The beggars almost never ask money from the opposition. "We know they do not have any money", the beggars say. They fear discussing their political preferences lest it should influence the mood of the deputies giving money and also those refusing to give. By the way, yesterday we questioned several beggars in the streets of Yerevan if any of them ever got a 10,000 AMD note. "They are reluctant to give 10 AMD to say nothing of 10,000. The largest sum they ever gave was 500 AMD", one of the beggars said. Another beggar was lucky enough to get 1,000 AMD several times but he did not even dream of a 10,000 AMD note.

*Haikakan Zhamanak newspaper, Yerevan, Armenia,
11 May 2004*

8. Elderly and pensioner

Elderly and pensioner

Many older people in post-Communist societies have found themselves in desperate situations. Whereas their pensions used to be sufficient to ensure them at least a basic level of survival, social and economic changes have forced many of them to seek ways of earning enough extra money just to feed themselves. Inflation has so outstripped their ability to purchase goods and services that they often have to resort to begging on the streets.

Although their plight is well-known, journalists rarely focus on them. When seniors do appear in media reports, it is almost always in the person of a babushka, stooped over and dressed in a torn shawl, complaining about how things are not the way they used to be. It is rare that elderly people are portrayed as accomplished, attractive, fighting for their rights, or anything but passive victims of circumstances.

Here are a few tips on creating a more diverse image of the elderly:

- ★ Find out if there are any organisations involved with helping seniors in your city or region. Talk to them about the issues confronting the elderly. Visit a community centre or a park frequented by the elderly. Ask them about what kinds of issues they face. You may think you know all about what the elderly are facing. But if you spend some time examining the issue, you may be surprised at what you learn.
- ★ Financial concerns are important, of course, but they are not the only aspect to explore. For example, you might choose to focus on what health issues the elderly face. What illnesses are widespread among them, and where can they receive health care? How are they treated at clinics and hospitals? Do economic problems contribute to poor diet and nutrition?
- ★ Relationships between the elderly and their children and grandchildren have changed dramatically in the past decade. Many young people have moved away in search of a better life, leaving their parents behind. In some cases, families have been separated by war or are struggling with disability or death suffered in the upheavals of recent years. Write a story exploring these issues. How have the economic and social changes affected family dynamics?
- ★ Spend a day with one or more elderly people begging on the street and write about it. How do other people react? How do the seniors themselves feel about what they are doing? How much do they collect in a day? How do they intend to spend it? How do they decide which corner or location to select?

★ Do the same with an elderly man or woman selling something - chocolate, perfume, whatever - on the street. Explore the economics of the situation. Where do they get the goods? How much do they have to pay? How much do they earn? What problems do they encounter with the authorities?

★ Profile elderly people doing extraordinary things. Is there a well-known actor in your area who continues to work past retirement age? How about any lawyers, doctors, or other professionals? Find seniors, well-known or not, who have interesting hobbies or unusual skills, or who are engaged in sports or some other form of physical activity. Does pursuing a special interest help them feel young and stay engaged in life?

★ Write an article exploring the issue of 'ageism'. The concept, which refers to prejudice or discrimination against older people, has become increasingly recognised in the West as a major problem confronting seniors in many aspects of their lives. Is there a comparable understanding in your region? Do older people face discrimination in, for example, the workplace, or in other areas of their lives?

Half a vote for the 60+

Liberal Alliance delegates Vesna Perovic and Labud Sljukic have proposed that people over 60 should only have "half a vote" at a referendum on Montenegro's future. The Podgorica media report today that the LA delegates said that 20 and 60 year-olds cannot carry the same weight in decisions on Montenegro's future.

What is the rationale for granting 20-year-olds a greater say? Is it just because they have a longer life ahead of them? Should 20-year-olds also have a greater say than 40-year-olds? How about 50-year-olds? Do the proponents of this plan believe that 80-year-olds should have no vote at all?

Danas/Beta, Belgrade,
20 December 2000

9. Refugees and internally displaced persons

Refugees and internally displaced persons

The conflicts and disputes in the South Caucasus over the past decade have created a wave of refugees. Some have crossed borders and live in terrible conditions in other countries; others are internally displaced persons who simply no longer have homes - and independent lives - of their own. Many have managed to keep their families together, but others have lost parents, spouses, and children, either through attacks on civilians, disease, or, in the least traumatic manner, immigration.

Inevitably, the existence of so many internally displaced persons and refugees has led to enormous social, economic and political pressures in the regions where they have ended up. In many places, long-time residents - themselves struggling to adjust to life under new and often harsh conditions - have not welcomed their presence. Politicians often seek to bolster their popularity by promoting resentment against them among the local population.

Journalists can play an important role in helping to ease rather than exacerbate tensions. Here are some ways to do that:

- ★ Make an assessment of how your media outlet has addressed the issue of refugees in order to identify gaps in coverage. Do they only appear in stories about crime, for example? Or have you included material about ways in which they are trying to help themselves, ways in which they are seeking to improve their lives? Have you written stories in which politicians or local residents complain about the problems associated with refugees without allowing them an opportunity to respond?

- ★ Much of the coverage of refugees inevitably focuses on crime. It may be true that crime is a problem, but it is important to address the context when you write about it. What is the situation with unemployment among the refugees? What traumas have they suffered? How many children do they have to feed? This does not mean you have to find excuses for criminal activity, but you should attempt to describe some of the desperation with which they are forced to live.

- ★ Spend some time in a refugee camp or squatters' area in your region and talk to as many people as you can. Write an article describing what you see. What are the conditions like? What kind of homes are people living in? What about running water? Are their children able to attend school of any kind? What kind of food is available?

★ Make contact with non-governmental organisations, whether local or international, that work with or represent the interests of refugees. Find out what they are doing to help out. Ask them what are the major issues currently facing refugees in your area. Ask them to arrange for you to spend a day with a family so you really understand what their life is like.

★ Find one or more refugees who have managed to work their way out of their difficulties. How did they manage to find employment? A home? Food? Educational possibilities for their children? Ask them how they overcame their circumstances and if they have any advice for other families.

★ Write a profile of a refugee who is devoting himself to improving the life of others in the same situation. Has someone organised a school on-site? If so, spend a day in the classroom and describe it. Is there someone who is helping refugees find jobs? Is anyone helping them locate relatives they may have lost track of in the chaos of war and upheaval?

★ Write a story about the psychological and other health issues confronting refugees as they seek to reintegrate into society. Ask doctors how many of them are suffering from post-traumatic stress and other emotional difficulties. Are there diseases that are particularly widespread among refugees, and what steps are officials taking - or not - to address the problem?

This article treats displaced persons with some of the respect and sympathy they deserve. Unlike so many articles, it also discusses positive steps being taken to actually improve the situation rather than just venting hostility and complaints. Even so, however, it does not offer many specifics about the situation of displaced persons in Azerbaijan. Nor does it give many details about the training project, such as how much is being spent and what the reaction has been among the displaced persons. And because it includes no interviews with any of them, the reader does not get a true picture of what their lives are like in the first place.

Displaced persons will be provided with legal assistance

The Union of Young Lawyers of Azerbaijan is implementing a project called "Legal training for displaced persons"

Mankind entered the 21st century at the peak of its scientific and technological progress. But today, like throughout the Middle Ages, people are still talking about the 'plague'. This disease, which affects the moral sphere, still exists and cannot be cured. This medical term nowadays can be used to describe an aggregate of viruses of terrorism, nationalism, and racial and religious intolerance that affect human society. It is intolerance that provokes anger, revenge and puts into operation the horrible military machine, makes people become soldiers or war victims, deprives them of the right to live, of a roof above their heads and means of subsistence. Terror victims view themselves as useless and separated from society. This is the lot of refugees.

One of the global problems facing the world community at the beginning of the third millennium is the problem of refugees and displaced persons. Unfortunately, our country is still a world leader in terms of the number of refugees. To recap, in Azerbaijan today there are over a million refugees from Armenia and displaced persons from the country's occupied territories.

The government has means that can, and must, be used to fight this plague of the 21st century. To that end, it only has to listen to the people who plead for help, to start to feel sympathy for them. Of course, one can help financially, one can even help them find a place under the sun. But nevertheless, the plea for help remains a voice in the wilderness. Those who deny that this is the case in our society are simply liars.

While this opening paragraph is a bit overblown in its rhetoric, it does place the blame for the world's problems squarely on 'intolerance', which is probably as good a place as any. And in doing so, it does not appear that the journalist is taking the side of one ethnic or religious group over another. She is just taking the side of 'tolerance'.

It would be useful for the journalist to state, specifically, what the government should do, and then get a response from the government as to why it is not doing whatever that is. Should it set up programs? Build housing? Find them jobs? What?

The lion's share of responsibility for the outcome of the fight against the contemporary plague lies with education.

The lion's share of responsibility for the outcome of the fight against the contemporary plague lies with education.

For instance, many displaced persons, whose rights were infringed many times, are absolutely unaware of their rights. In this connection, the Union of Young Lawyers of Azerbaijan launched a project entitled "Legal training for displaced persons" in early October of this year. The project is being implemented with the financial support of the Dutch Refugee Council. Its major goal is to render assistance to hundreds of thousands of displaced persons, who are deprived of legal assistance, so that they can themselves defend their rights.

The press secretary of the Union of Young Lawyers, Nigar Malikova, said that the project was to be completed within three months. Experts at the union have already held a number of training courses at refugee settlements within the framework of the project.

On the whole, Malikova said, the training is being held on the basis of documents of the United Nations, which include conventions and treaties on defending the rights of refugees and displaced persons.

During the training, the refugees also familiarized themselves with existing Azerbaijani laws regulating the rights of this category of people: these are the right to appropriate living standards, the right to education, the right to receive information about close relatives, the right to free medical assistance, to have identification documents, to protection from forced migration, to free entry and departure, etc.

However, Malikova said, as a rule, government bodies do not provide displaced persons with all the available information on their rights, benefits, etc. As for the project, its first phase has already finished.

This is a debatable claim. Of course, it helps for refugees and internally displaced persons to know their rights. But knowing one's rights is not the same as being able to obtain them. It may just mean becoming even more aware of how much your rights are being ignored.

This is where it would be good to explain in much greater detail what this program is about. What exactly is it? How does it educate displaced persons: through workshops and seminars, through an advertising campaign? How much money is being spent on this? What are the legal avenues available to displaced persons, anyway?

How long are these courses? What topics are included? If there are so many refugees, how can the entire project be completed within three months? What kind of follow-up will there be? What is the reaction among the displaced persons? Perhaps the journalist should attend one of the seminars and report on it?

What did the first phase consist of? Is this the three months referred to above, or is there a second phase? The details of the project are confusing.

Zerkalo newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
24 October 2003

This journalist apparently feels that any Armenians who would return to their homes in Azerbaijan are betraying their countrymen and countrywomen. He also appears to believe that criticizing the Armenian government is unacceptable. Rather than examining the substance of what they have said, the article just attacks the two Armenians for their supposed lack of patriotism. What, exactly, did they say at the press conference? How accurate are their criticisms? It would be helpful to know. Instead, the journalist simply insults the two men.

Anti-Armenian games with the help of Armenians

The Azerbaijan press these days is full of reports about the press conference that Armenian immigrants Roman Taryan and Arthur Apresyan organized in Baku. The mass media of our neighbouring country constantly cover this topic with unconcealed pleasure. And it is natural, two Armenians have come to Baku just to criticize their homeland. Roman Taryan and Arthur Apresyan are real people who emigrated from Baku, and lived in Armenia for more than 10 years.

The head of the Migration and Refugee Agency attached to the Armenian government, Gagik Yeganyan, informed us about this. Roman Taryan lived in Yerevan, in Koryun 23, and worked at a store. According to Gagik Yeganyan, many resentful refugees have turned to his agency enraged by the actions of the homeland traitors. By the way, Roman Taryan's former wife, Aida, also came to the agency. She mentioned that his actions made her realize that she was right to divorce him, she was only sorry that her two children had his last name.

Without even deep analysis it is clear that this is the handiwork of our neighbours. The aim is to compromise Armenia once again, as if we are buried in corruption and lawlessness, and Azerbaijan is so democratic that it is even ready to accept tormented Armenians in Baku. Unfortunately the international community is misled this time with the help of our compatriots who probably have been promised something by Azerbaijan authorities.

Did the journalist talk directly to Aida, or is this just information relayed to him by Yeganyan? Second-hand information, especially second-hand information that someone uses to bolster their own point, cannot be considered reliable. If the journalist did not hear this from the wife, it should not have been included.

They may or may not have been promised something, but the journalist should make a good-faith effort to examine the Armenians' statements and determine if they are true or not. Simply criticizing the two men and the Azerbaijani government without evidence does nothing to shed light on the situation.

This is one of the regular Azerbaijan games, it is clear without even deep analysis. All we need is to ask a couple of logical questions and try to receive answers. The first and main question: "How could Armenians ever reach Baku?" It is clear that without the help of Azerbaijani authorities they wouldn't be able to do that. Just remember the recent Azerbaijani hysteria when Armenians were going to take part in military training within the framework of the "Partnership for the sake of peace" NATO program.

It is obvious that these two have gone to Baku to complain about the hard social conditions of refugees in Armenia, especially if we take into account that in Azerbaijan the refugees live in tents, under the open sky. They obviously complained to the wrong address. Our compatriots also raised political issues. They said that they hated Robert Kocharian and thought that Stepan Demirchian should be the president of the country.

It is clear why they don't like Robert Kocharian in Azerbaijan, but let's note that his compatriots do an ill turn for Stepan Demirchyan.

What do Roman Taryan and Arthur Apresyan expect? They somehow hope that after so much fuss they could at least find refuge in a prosperous country. But maybe our compatriots intend to stay in Baku, if they are treated so well there. At the Migration and Refugee Agency of Armenia, in their personal files Apresyan and Taryan said they had lost four-room apartments in Baku.

Probably they hope to seek the return of what they lost. But it wouldn't hurt them to remain cautious, since the hazard of being brutally killed will always remain.

*AZG newspaper, Yerevan, Armenia,
16 April 2004*

Are Armenians not supposed to criticize the country's president? Does that, in and of itself, make someone unpatriotic?

Is the information in people's personal files available to anyone who ask. Just because someone behaves in a manner that others do not like does not mean that their personal information should be available to anyone. The journalist should indicate how he knows this information. Did he receive it from Yeganyan, the head of the agency? Is the agency in the habit of telling journalists what information is in people's personal, and presumably confidential, files?

This warning makes it sound as if the journalist is actually hoping someone will murder them. Whatever the journalist's personal feelings about the situation, it is inflammatory and unethical for him to make such suggestions.

This short article offers the chief of police a chance to defend himself but does not present the opposing side with the same opportunity. Rather than starting with the central claim being debated - that the police acted inappropriately toward the refugees - both the headline and the first paragraph focus on the chief's denial, which serves to emphasize his statements at the expense of those who have supposedly been mistreated.

The police deny the fact of eviction of Kists and Chechen Refugees

The chief of Kakheti District Police, Zurab Tushuri, categorically denies the claims by non-governmental organizations that illegal acts were committed by police against members of the Kist population and Chechen Refugees living in the Pankisi Gorge.

It is noteworthy that the population itself also accuses the police of committing these acts, moreover, some of the representatives are participating in hunger strikes in protest against these acts committed by police.

Tushuri is sure that the claim by the NGO sector and the population itself doesn't make sense because, if such acts really took place, then they could look for help from some authorities before starting their hunger strike, be it from some government authority or institution.

"Within the last six months there have been only six refugees imprisoned. Within the last two weeks there were two cases of car theft, and it would have been impossible to conduct investigations without police doing searches in the gorge," claims the head of the Kakheti District Police.

He doesn't deny conducting such special operations in the Pankisi Gorge, but at the same time he points out the fact that police are acting legally and therefore that the claims by the NGO sector and population are unjustifiable.

What illegal acts are being referred to here? The headline mentions the eviction of refugees, but it remains unclear just what the charges are.

It would have been good, at this or some other point, to include some quotes or information from those making the accusations. That would help to balance the piece by countering the chief's statements with those of the people who claim to be being mistreated. Otherwise, they remain invisible and it is harder for the reader to understand their point of view.

This argument is not very convincing. It is not entirely reasonable to expect people who are being mistreated by one government authority to go to another government authority to complain. Moreover, perhaps they did, and no action was taken in response. The journalist appears to accept Tushuri's statement at face value.

Again, it would be helpful to include details about how, specifically, the refugees say they have been mistreated, and what, specifically, the police forces did or did not do.

Media News (news agency) article printed by 24 hours daily newspaper, Tbilisi, Georgia, 11 May, 2004

10. Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation

Sexual minorities in the South Caucasus countries have become more visible in recent years. Some have organised associations -- forcing journalists to address the complex issues raised by people with non-traditional sexual orientations - gays, lesbians and bisexuals. But many reporters and media organisations still routinely treat such individuals as freaks and social outcasts not deserving of compassion, understanding and basic human rights.

Here are some tips when covering sexual minorities:

- ★ Pay careful attention to the question of language. Many reports use derogatory words like "pederast" and "pervert" to describe sexual minorities. Each language has its specificities, but in English, for example, "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" are neutral terms that do not carry negative associations. Look for neutral terms in your own language.
- ★ Transvestites and transsexuals are not the same thing. Transvestites are people who prefer to dress in clothes traditionally used by the opposite gender. Transsexuals are people whose bodies do not conform to their sense of gender identity in other words, anatomical males who view themselves as female, and anatomical females who view themselves as male. Transsexuals may or may not choose to undergo costly and painful surgery to physically change their sex.
- ★ When writing about sexual minorities, it is very important to make sure you actually talk to some of them as you prepare your piece. Gays, lesbians and others have hopes, dreams, and fears just like everybody else. They have careers and interests and families just like everyone else. Do not assume you know what their lives are like or who they are without talking to any of them about it.
- ★ Many people have strong feelings about sexual minorities. Just because some authorities, politicians, clerics and others may use offensive terms and expressions when discussing gays and lesbians does not mean you are required, as a journalist, to include this sort of insulting language in your material. If necessary, paraphrase their words. If you decide to quote them directly, you should mention that sexual minorities consider such language to be insulting and inflammatory.
- ★ You should not accept without question the opinion of doctors and researchers who argue that sexual minorities are likely to recruit children, spread HIV intentionally or act in other ways harmful to society. If someone tells you, for example, that 50% of gay men molest young boys, ask them for very specific information

about where they found that statistic. People who call themselves experts often use this kind of misinformation or distort studies in an effort to influence public opinion against sexual minorities.

★ Many stories on sexual minorities often focus on crime, especially attacks on or murders of people with non-traditional sexual orientations. These stories often treat the victims as the criminals, as if they are to blame for being attacked because they are different from other people. It is important to remember in these cases that the criminals are the attackers, not those who are attacked. Often journalists just report without question the opinions of the authorities, who themselves share the view that the victims somehow deserved to be attacked.

★ Because sexual minorities are often hidden from society, it can be difficult to find people to talk to. The best approach to start is to contact groups and NGOs that represent them. Talk to the organisers to develop a general understanding of their concerns, and ask them if they can help to put you in touch with other members of their groups. Also try to talk to others not involved in the groups, who may have a different perspective or may offer more forthright or straightforward thoughts and opinions.

★ Do not believe all the stereotypes you may hear about gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities. Many people believe, for example, that gay men can be easily divided into 'actives' and 'passives', with the passive ones being those who appear effeminate. That sounds good in theory, but sexual roles tend to be more complicated and nuanced in the real world. It is also not true that all gay men are artistic, that all lesbians either hate men or want to be men, or that men who dress like women are automatically homosexual.

This article essentially blames John Elvis for his own killing on the basis of his alleged homosexuality. It presents no evidence, other than rumours, for the charge that he molested young children. The article also confuses homosexuality with paedophilia. The two, while in some cases related, are essentially different phenomena. So is the charge that Elvis was gay, or that he was a paedophile, or both?

Tragicomedy with a new structure

When your servant wrote these sentences, it had been two years two months and 19 days since this tragicomedy had begun.

I would not have come back to this topic had the US Embassy not issued a very serious disclaimer on February 19th.

To make it clearer, I need to go back. In November 30, 2000, a representative of the International Republican Institute of the US, J. Elvis, was killed in Baku. 36 stab wounds were counted on the corpse.

There were also unused condoms found next to him. Nobody would have been killed that way unless he insulted the oriental mentality.

In fact, this incident in the Old City was a warning to the US. At that time, we observed the behaviour of the ruling elite and opposition and offered an analysis called 'Local children of the US in the context of John Elvis' in 'Sharg' newspaper (31 December 2000). It was our position that, as we do not have a law on sexual minorities, the parents of under-aged children raped by him, and the victims themselves, should conduct their justice over him. As we do not live with illusions, we still do not expect such justice in absentia from the ruling elite and opposition. That is because they desperately need US support to gain power and maintain it. Unfortunately, the public approached this as an issue of European indecency and a sex affair. It was not even surprising to us. If the president of the country is indecent himself, then it is not surprising that his country's representative should be a sexual minority.

Yet, the children of USA in our country found a more decent term (people with non-traditional sexual orientation). I would like to remind you that B. Clinton had sexual contacts with his employee in the most honourable room

◀ What sort of disclaimer is the journalist referring to here? What, exactly, did the embassy say?

Even without providing any evidence, this statement suggests that the victim of the killing was in fact to blame for his own death. The notion that only someone who 'insulted the oriental mentality' would receive such a ghastly death is hard to accept at face value. It also presumes that there is one 'oriental mentality' that everyone agrees on. Should anyone who violates any aspect of that mentality be stabbed 36 times? That seems a bit extreme but is essentially what the author is saying.

◀ This statement makes a connection between President Clinton's behaviour and the fact that a US citizen is allegedly gay. But what does one have to do with the other? Is the author suggesting that no Azeri politicians have had any extra-marital affairs? That sexual indiscretions are solely something done just by Americans and other Westerners? That is hardly a credible idea.

of the country. A state spending \$42 million USD to disclose this betrayal reflects not only the situation with the rule of law, but also the moral crisis. We also have people aspiring to come to power whose secretaries are pregnant.

At that time, US Congressman XXX¹ demonstrated sexual empathy to J. Elvis, and even insulted and threatened our state.

Our government-opposition system left him without an answer. It is now becoming clear from interviews with 10 witnesses that the youngsters of the Old City have already been subject to moral-psychological terror for already two years and three months. More than 1,000 youngsters, including girls, have been interrogated because of this homosexual who got his deserved punishment of 36 knife wounds for his actions.

Those who were ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of power started licking the boots of the US, and said that they did not want to damage their relations with that state. Back then we asked, "since when are inter-state relationships determined by a sexual minority who never leave night bars?"

It is also true that only US politicized this crime and brought it to the level of inter-state relations. Our politicians have always been implementers of foreigners' will. Then, we appealed to the nation, "why did Azerbaijan's opposition keep silent about this sexual minority?" We understood that "it was a kind of standing to attention before the USA." These are the people who aspire to manage our future. They already sold our state to the great, and now want to sell our culture. Nevertheless, if we managed to do this², that means we managed to put them in their place and will be able to do this in future.

In what way did this congressman demonstrate sexual empathy to Elvis. In what way did he threaten Azerbaijan? It would be useful for the author to provide details here.

Again, what exactly did Elvis do? Did he molest children? Or was he just gay? How does the author know that 1,000 youngsters have been interrogated in the investigation? Has he heard that from the police? Has he talked to 1,000 kids who have been interrogated? It seems unlikely that so many children have actually been questioned about this case. If it is, in fact, true, then the author should cite the source for the information.

Is going to bars a crime? On what basis is the author making the charge that Elvis spent all his time in bars?

1 NOTE: The journalist included a congressman's name, but MDI research could not identify any representative by that name, and therefore in the version of the article reproduced in this book, the name has been deleted.

2 Note: the killing of Elvis is implied here.

One of the local children¹ then warned that J. Elvis's homosexuality should not be mentioned as it can "damage the reputation of the US in the South Caucasus..." We think that the USA does not have a reputation, but power... That particular child referring to one of our officials, who gave information on the incident, states that the official is "in favour of US losing in the strategic competition between Russia and US"... We decided to think that they are 'children and they like to play strategic politics games. Let them play.'" Since then, they are still playing.

But recently, a new thread in this tragic comedy has emerged. We were told that the US will no longer provide us assistance unless we find John's real killer.

Those who still want to come to power got their writers to decorate the headlines and were happy that our state would no longer receive assistance because of a homosexual. You may be shocked, how all these people can be loyal to John Elvis? However, the US Embassy disappointed them by denying this information. The government also kept silent... As regards ourselves, we always stress that being dependant on aid - which we should reject - means that the nation can not take a position. Spit on aid that has a 'blue'² as its condition. As always, the bosses pushed their spokespeople forward, and kept silent themselves. What did the spokespeople do and say? They did not even check the information. In order to make a living, they do not get out of their embassies. It seems like we should draft a law on 'sexual minorities' as soon as possible, so that our citizens can act within a legal frame.

◀ Who said this? Is it an official statement from the U.S. government?

◀ What exactly is the current state of the law on sexual minorities? The author states that there is no law. Does he mean that homosexuality is legal at this point? Or what? What kind of law is he looking for?
◀ Does he want to outlaw sexual minorities?

1 Note: here the journalist is using the phrase 'one of the local children' to mean an American.

2 'Blue' is a term used in Azerbaijan, and other countries of the former Soviet Union, to mean gay. It is sometime used in a derogatory sense.

They are fed up with illegitimacy and loopholes in laws. They can even open a sexual minorities club named after John Elvis. The bosses could not give any new thesis to their spokespeople. They spoke of how the US protects rights of its citizens... But, then why you are indifferent to the moral-psychological terror of more than 1,000 youngsters from the Old City? We know that you become lambs when listening to the US. Those who produce scandals called it 'an international scandal'. One of them, who lost (better to say 'sold') his position to grants and foreign trips, spoke even more disastrously... Well, enough of this. I recall the scene when they were saying good bye to J. Elvis's coffin. Those were very sad moments. When I watched it, I came to the conclusion that if we do not say good bye to these people nationwide, then this shame will last for a long time - they have one or two terms in office in the best case.

*Olaylar newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
27 February 2003.*

This headline is an excellent example of how unconscious biases can result in statements that distort reality. The phrase essentially blames the woman for her own death and those of her mother and children, since it indicates that her rejection of a man's advances "led to" the slayings. The truth is that the man's violent nature, not anything the woman did, "led to" murder. A woman, lesbian or not, obviously has the right to turn down a man without having to fear being slaughtered. The headline further implies, without stating directly, that the reason she turned him down was precisely because she was a lesbian rather than that she simply had no desire to sleep with him.

Lesbian's rejection led to a massacre

Victim's sex adventures

A drunken killer massacred a family of four after his sexual advances were rejected by a lesbian mother, a court was told yesterday.

Scrap metal dealer David Morris bludgeoned divorcee Mandy Power to death with an iron pole, the jury heard.

He then did the same to her daughters Katie, 10, and eight-year old Emily, and her invalid mother Doris Dawson, 80, to ensure no witnesses were left alive.

Patrick Harrington QC, prosecuting, told Swansea Crown Court the attacks were so ferocious that each of the victim's skull was crushed and Mrs. Power had 38 separate injuries. "This was not simply murder, this was a massacre," he added.

"In each case, their heads were smashed with such force that massive bone damage was done to each of them."

"It happened to the invalid grandmother, Doris Dawson, even as she lay in bed."

Mr. Harrington said Morris, 39, was waiting when 34-year-old Mrs. Power returned home with her children after baby-sitting for her sister in June 1999. He exploded in a "violent rage" when she spurned his advances, the barrister said.

He claimed Morris then cleaned himself up in the bathroom before starting five separate fires at the house in Clydach, South Wales, to destroy evidence.

The newspaper compounds the problem with this headline accompanying a sidebar providing details of the woman's life. Stressing the "sex adventures" angle might attract additional readers but again suggests that the woman has essentially been punished for having a good time. The article indicates, however, that she was also a loving mother involved in a stable relationship and was not, in fact, currently interested in additional "sex adventures."

- ◀ In covering the trial, the journalist is expected to relay to readers the points made by counsel and witnesses, even if those points are biased or mistaken. In this case, however, there is a subtle difference between a murder taking place after a rejection, as the first sentence of the article states, and the headline's implication that the rejection somehow caused the massacre.

If the victim's sexual orientation is going to be mentioned right at the start of the story, the journalist should make some effort to indicate what role it played in the murder. Otherwise, it comes across as just a racy detail that adds nothing to the reader's understanding of the story.

- ◀ 'Invalid' is an archaic word that is considered insulting because it conveys an impression of weakness or impotence. It is fine to refer to someone as 'disabled' or as having a disability.

Morris is also accused of desecrating Mrs. Power's body, which was found by fire-fighters after her home was set alight.

Jurors were told that, shortly before her death, Mrs Power had begun a lesbian relationship of "frightening" intensity with Alison Lewis, a 32-year-old former policewoman.

Mr. Harrington acknowledged that the "false finger of suspicion" had originally pointed towards Mrs. Power's lesbian lover and her husband, a police inspector.

Mrs. Lewis and husband Steven, who is still in the force, were arrested in June 2000. Their homes, cars and clothes were thoroughly searched as a result of what counsel described as "rationally based but unfounded suspicions".

Morris did not become the main focus of the inquiry until March 2001. He repeatedly lied while being questioned by police and gave differing accounts of his movements on the night of the murders, it was claimed.

But forensic experts discovered that fragments of paint on a gold chain found at Mrs. Power's house matched paint in Morris's kitchen.

Mr. Harrington said Morris initially denied owning the chain but, shortly before the trial, admitted it probably was his.

Jurors also heard that, on the day after the murders, Morris told a friend he had been having a relationship with Mrs. Powers and had left a chain in the house. He persuaded the friend to buy him a replacement.

Morris, of Craig-cefn-parc, Swansea Valley, denies four counts of murder and the trial, expected to last 14 weeks, continues.

Given existing prejudice against people whose sexual orientation differs, it is not surprising that the police would focus their suspicions on the lesbian aspect of their lives, as if some inevitable connection exists between homosexuality and murder.

◀ If the counsel explained what the "rationally based" suspicions were actually based on other than bias, it would be useful to include it in the article.

Metro newspaper, London, Great Britain,
23 April 2002

This article treats sexual minorities as a manifestation of the craziness or insanity of modern life and the breakdown of traditions. That is one perspective, certainly, but not the only one. The article presents the singer interviewed as if he is a freak rather than engaging him in an actual discussion of his feelings and beliefs as an openly gay man.

Why did bi-sexual Jaba Bodjgua 'warm' to Boris Tsipuria?

Why is the drag singer Jaba Bodjgua a 'picky' person?

If something concrete always derives from something general, then we can say it this way: first the world went totally crazy and then our country went berserk. Lack of inhibitions and chaos beset everything. Part of society forgets the past. Forgets the traditions followed by Georgia for years. However surprising it might be, a big part of society is involved in so-called non-traditional sex.

Free sex became so prevalent that everyone became desensitized. When such disinterest rules over everything, a man has no interest in a woman, nor a woman in a man. This provides fertile ground for a person to get interested in non-traditional sex. The spread of homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals is an example of this.

The person I am going to tell you about is a popular singer in the Turkish capital Ankara named Jaba Bodjgua.

- I was born in Senaki. At present, I am working in the Turkish capital Ankara, where I enjoy big popularity. I have also made several albums.

- Jaba, make an assessment of your physical features...

- I am very sexy (crazy boy, as some of my friends call me). I have had many cosmetic surgery operations all over my body - the only thing left is my sexual organ. I have also made my buttocks smaller.

- Jaba, according to reports, you were going to marry at club 'Neo'. But today you are single. What happened, why did you change your mind?

This headline appears to promise a scandalous reason for Tsipuria's appeal to Bodjgua, although it turns out that Bodjgua admires his colleague from an artistic rather than a sexual perspective.

Why should it be surprising that many people choose to pursue alternatives once social constraints are loosened? Non-traditional orientations are here confused with unrestrained sex. Just because someone is gay, lesbian, bisexual or whatever does not mean they are having any more sex than anyone else.

Again, this associates the greater openness of sexual minorities with the loss of sexual restraint, as if sexual minorities did not exist before. The author does not seem to realize that this behaviour always existed - the main difference now is that people are more open about talking about it.

How old is Jaba? What kind of music does he sing? Unless he is very popular in Georgia and the readers already know all about him, it would be useful to provide some basic background on him. Is he actually a transsexual? It would appear so from this article, but it is not really clear. The journalist should understand the difference between transsexuals, transvestites and homosexuals, but appears to confuse them in this case. Homosexuals are attracted to members of the same sex. Transvestites like to dress like members of the opposite sex. Transsexuals want to be members of the opposite sex. Many transvestites and transsexuals consider themselves to be heterosexual.

- I am a very 'picky' person. I did not like my fianc? that day, and changed my mind.

Jaba Bodjgua, or 'crazy boy', has been participating for three days in an international festival called 'Song of Samegrelo' in the Khobi district. Many guests were invited to this event and Jaba Bodjgua came from Turkey.

- Jaba, how would you assess this series of events?

- I really 'warmed' to the director of this event, Boris Tsipuria. Everything at this event was done in a very interesting and beautiful way. The scene, which was arranged fantastically, was well suited to my sexual manners and dress. And Batoni Borya, among all these things, is the best.

- Are you attracted to Borya as a man, or you think highly of him as an artist?

- As a man, Borya is attractive to people older than me. I mean, I appreciate him as an artist.

- And your family does not forbid you such behaviour?

- I grew up in a modern family, so I have no problems. Why are you surprised? This indicates your low level.

- Have you ever thought of getting married again?

- I haven't thought about it yet. But if someone appears in my life who attracts me, it is possible.

- By the way, you have a very sexy butt.

- I know. When I had my butt operated on, I had it insured.

- Are you planning to hold a solo-concert in Tbilisi?

- I am planning to hold a solo-concert in Tbilisi, which will be very scandalous.

- What does 'scandalous' mean?

- I will be in extremely good shape, in bright clothes. In one word, very sexy, and I will call the concert 'Sex symbol'.

Georgian is a gender-specific language. In his question to Jaba Bodjgua - a man - the journalist uses a form of the Georgian verb 'to marry' that is used to address women. This would be considered offensive in normal circumstances. The fact that the Georgian word used for 'fianc?' makes clear that this person is a man, does not justify addressing Jaba Bodjgua as if he is a women.

◀ Which behaviour is that? He has not talked about any specific behaviour.

◀ Who was he married to? What happened? Was it a man or a woman? It would be useful to have been told.

**- What can you say about your friend
Sasha Somkhishvili?**

- Sasha is not my friend, he is my girlfriend.

P.S. After all of this, Jaba Bodjgua is really a 'picky person'. He is a 'crazy man' with soft, pleasant manners. As he notes himself, sexual organs and a beard are all that's between him and becoming a real woman. Surprisingly, he attracts many women as well. There is no limit to my wonder. I can only say the following words: "It is funny, if not sad."

◀ What does this exchange mean? What is their relationship?

*Tavisupali Gazeti newspaper, Tbilisi, Georgia,
21-27 October 2003*

Stories condemning homosexuality in Biblical terms are common. But rarely do they actually examine some of the arguments that many liberal Christian and Jewish theologians have made to contradict the traditional perspective or explain why it is time to re-examine that view. While someone may disagree with these arguments, simply ignoring them and citing the Bible as absolute support is only going to persuade those who already agree with that point of view.

From the newspaper's 'The wonder of the week' column

On the 5th of August the Bishops' conclave made a more than astonishing decision to appoint an open homosexual, Jim Robertson, as the bishop of New Hampshire.

But this is still not the whole story. This cleric (excuse me for using this expression) had attended the Summit of Bishops with his partner Mark Andrew and even announced: "This is not only the realization of my dream, but also a sign from God." One can just wonder how an institution called Christian could allow itself to act in such a way, when homosexuality is considered as one of the biggest and the most reprehensible sins in the Bible - the number one book of Christians.

*Iravunq newspaper, Yerevan, Armenia,
8 August 2004*

This gives no indication what denomination is being discussed here. And undoubtedly many Armenians have no idea where, exactly, New Hampshire is located, or any other details about the state. These sorts of details are ◀ important because they give stories depth and context.

◀ This sarcastic statement clearly signals the journalist's attitude toward the decision. Of course, it is much easier to be sarcastic than to actually think about the issue and examine the changing beliefs and rationale that went along with it.

Homosexuality is considered a sin but so are many other aspects of life that people do not pay attention to today. And many modern theologians place the ◀ Bible's statements on homosexuality in the context of the historical era in which the books were written rather than taking them as dictates for the current age. Moreover, since the Bible mentions sex between men but not between two women, one logical conclusion might be that lesbianism is okay in the eyes of God. But that is not a position apparently supported by those people who like to quote the Bible to justify their attitudes towards homosexuality and gays. None of these issues are explored by the journalist.

11. Political opposition and dissidents

Political opposition and dissidents

One of the major struggles of post-Communist countries has been to find a way to accommodate a diversity of political views and accept the expression of divergent perspectives as a normal and natural element of civic society. Some have proved more successful in making that transition than others and have taken strenuous steps to level the playing field for opposition parties and others whose opinions may not conform to the majority.

In many countries and regions, however, the process remains incomplete. Even as they profess a willingness to tolerate other viewpoints, local and national governments frequently continue to erect legal, political and economic obstacles to make it more difficult for citizens in opposition to have their voices heard. At times, people who disagree with the orientation of those in power are treated as disloyal or even traitorous, and may be unfairly charged with criminal activity.

Journalists and media outlets sometimes acquiesce in this suppression of opposing views, for a variety of reasons. They themselves may be under significant pressure from both authorities and business interests. Or the journalists may genuinely believe that one or the other side in their society's ongoing debate is illegitimate and does not deserve the right to present its arguments. Often media outlets come down on the government's side, although journalists representing opposition forces may also try to bar publication of the official version of events.

Allowing access to all participants in a debate is - or should be - one of the key roles of the press in any society. Here are a few ways to ensure this happens:

- ★ Identify gaps in your media outlet's coverage by reviewing the archives. Have you focused exclusively on one political party or quoted only people who hold just one point of view? Have opposition leaders, and others who challenge the authorities, been given an opportunity to respond to charges made against them? Have dissenting voices been completely ignored?

- ★ Make sure not to limit coverage of important issues to the perspective of the majority or of the authorities. If the government takes action or makes pronouncements, find people who disagree with the policies being proposed or pursued. This could be other politicians, but it could also be academics, representatives of non-governmental organisations, business people, or passers-by on the street.

- ★ Cultivate sources among opposition leaders. Make contact with them and arrange an informational meeting to discuss their concerns, opinions, beliefs and ideas. Do not promise that you will always include their perspective but encourage them to call you when something of note happens and they wish to comment.

- ★ When the government proposes a new law or regulation, analyse it carefully. Figure out who it helps and who it hurts - and then make sure to call a representative of the groups of people it will hurt. Do not accept the authorities' arguments justifying their policies at face value.
- ★ Do not describe people who oppose the government as "dissidents" or as engaging in "dissident thinking." Remember that in a pluralistic society, a diversity of views and political positions is a normal state of affairs. People who disagree, however fiercely, with government policy should not be relegated to a special category for exercising a basic human right. They are simply people who disagree with those in charge.
- ★ Do not exaggerate differences between the positions held by various individuals or parties. Often people themselves, especially politicians, will overstate their case just to score points with the public or to make themselves appear courageous. When writing about sensitive issues in which differences of opinion exist, make sure you characterise the various positions accurately and avoid inflammatory rhetoric.
- ★ Opposition leaders or others who disagree with the government can be as dogmatic and authoritarian as those in power. Just because they oppose the current authorities does not mean that they would behave completely differently once in power. Challenge them to move beyond anti-government slogans and explain their programme. As a journalist, you should be sceptical of the claims of those on all sides of a societal debate or issue.

This article declares bluntly that opposition rallies are a bad idea and repeats Aliyev's charge, without providing any evidence, that the general public is not in favour of them. On what basis is Aliyev making this claim? Are there any polls to back him up? It is clearly a self-serving argument that the article is only too happy to repeat.

There is no need for the opposition to hold assemblies Saiddin Aliyev: "Public opinion is against it"

Efforts of the opposition to confuse the public by holding assemblies is not viewed unambiguously. MP Saiddin Aliyev stated that there is no need for the opposition to hold meetings because political parties can express their views to the public via the press.

It is not correct to do everything at meetings. S. Aliyev thinks that the public is negative about such meetings: "It would be better if the opposition was active on the issues of Nagorno Karabakh. They should instead suggest to international organisations options for solutions to the conflict."

Olaylar newspaper, Baku, Azerbaijan,
27 May 2004

In what way does holding rallies confuse the public? This is accepted as a fact without any supporting documentation.

This is an interesting and ironic statement, given that this article would have been a good place to offer the opposition an opportunity to counter his argument. If the press is so available to the government's political opponents, why are their voices absent from this particular piece? It seems self-evident that they should have been offered an opportunity to comment.

This statement of Aliyev's implies that it is not possible to have meetings as well as get involved in the territorial issues. But one activity should not preclude the other. Again, there is nothing wrong with reporting Aliyev's charges, but it is inappropriate to have him criticize opponents and not provide them with a venue to respond.

This article uses a limited definition of patriotism to accuse political opponents of traitorous behaviour. The writer appears to believe that being a patriot means supporting the government, so that criticism of the current administration is equated with betraying the country. And the article further inflames the situation by suggesting that the opposition politicians are acting in the interests of Armenia's great enemy, Azerbaijan - a statement guaranteed to alarm and outrage many of the newspaper's readers and immediately prejudice them against Geghamian and Kocharian.

My enemy's enemy is my friend?

The Old World, Europe, has a rich history with abundant pages of heroes and traitors. They chose one way or the other for the sake of realizing their goals - all the steps taken were towards this purpose, qualifying them either as heroes or traitors. A thousand people enter the Old World every day, and a thousand deeds and works are started again and again every day. Today, the wheel of history is turning to bring us the story of the failed mission (which is quite unwisely being portrayed in an heroic spirit) of two Armenian opposition representatives in the Council of Europe. However, these persons still have the opportunity to prove that they have not placed their personal interests above those of the people and the country. For this purpose, one needs to have the courage to publicly admit one's mistake and state that the venture of bringing a guy from overseas failed this time as well. Only this time it is extremely difficult for Artashes Geghamian and Shavarsh Kocharian to get rid of the stigma of water-mill operators in league with the Turks and Azerbaijanis¹ - the title they earned after promoting the case against their own country at the recent session of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly, in particular winning the regular support of the Azerbaijani delegation.

There is a saying, "My enemy's enemy is my friend". It is what Artashes Geghamian, Shavarsh Kocharian (the Armenian radical

Opposing a country's leaders or the actions they take is not the same thing as being unpatriotic or in some way disloyal to the country itself

Suggesting that the opposition politicians are working in concert with Azerbaijan is an unfounded and mean-spirited insult designed to undermine their legitimacy. If the journalist presented evidence that this was the

¹ The phrase 'water-mill operators' is a reference to an Armenian saying, 'to pour water into somebody else's mill', which means doing something that gives advantage to someone else instead of yourself.

opposition representatives) and the Azerbaijani delegation did in Strasburg: their interests keep coinciding whether they like it or not.

To attain its goal - overthrowing the legitimate authorities of the country - the radical opposition is using and experimenting with various options: illegal rallies and anti-constitutional activity; public disorder; disinformation to the public and the international community.

Moreover, the latter method has a very practical mode of application: as chairman of 'National Unity', Artashes Geghamian admits that they provide videotapes to foreign diplomatic missions in Armenia.

Apparently, the opposition representatives also took a few samples with them to Strasburg. However, it was found out by the Council of Europe that they are so-called 'pirate versions' and do not have a proper license. Thus, Mr. A. Geghamian and Mr. Sh. Kocharian failed to carry out their treacherous mission of defaming their own country and the people, being forced to turn to other methods. The latter have not yielded the results anticipated by the opposition, as the CoE Parliamentary Assembly resolution showed.

However, their activity became a permanent stigma for themselves: the leader of the 'National Unity' party has no right to introduce divisions into society. Europe understood that and blocked the way for this option. It only remains for Artashes Geghamian, Shavarsh Kocharian and radical opposition leaders in general to also understand that the service of traitors, no matter how eagerly accepted, is still met with laughter behind their backs. This is at a minimum, but traitors are never forgiven by both those making use of their service, irrespective of their democratic views, and especially by their own people. The meeting ceremony of our delegation, returning from Strasburg at the end of the previous week, testifies to the latter. Armenian youth met Shavarsh

case, it might be an issue to explore - if the opposition candidates were given a chance to respond to the charge. But building a case solely on the basis that both oppose the Armenian government is very unfair.

What exactly makes the rallies illegal? What kind of anti-constitutional activity did they engage in? The article should specify. Otherwise, it is impossible for people to judge the accuracy of the statements. And if the actions are illegal and anti-constitutional, readers should have more information so they can decide if they agree that the actions should be banned. Again, what kind of public disorder or disinformation is involved? The article should specify, giving concrete examples, otherwise this is mere hearsay.

Videotapes of what, exactly? What kind of activity is the journalist taking about here? And whatever it is, what is so bad about it? It is very sloppy journalism to make this kind of charge without a full explanation.

Again, in what way were they being treacherous? Simply by presenting material critical of the government?

It is unclear what other methods are being referred to here. And the journalist should also explain what the resolution in question is. Perhaps some readers know the whole story, but undoubtedly many - if not most - do not.

Kocharian and Artashes Geghamian with "Shame on you, traitors", "Artashes Geghamian... President of Azerbaijan" and other posters with similar slogans...

PS: Yesterday, at a press conference organized on Press Freedom Day, to which the proponents of freedom of expression did not invite 'Hayastani Hanrapetutiun' (I wonder if Mr. Geghamian publicized this information abroad), Artashes Geghamian once again admitted that he works as a foreign informer. "Every three months our cameramen regularly shoot everything, and send this footage to the ambassadors of all CoE member countries".

Opposition activists constantly assert that freedom of expression is in danger and they are deprived of airtime. In this case who are 'our cameramen' if the 'National Unity' itself (as far as it is known) has no registered media outlet? The basis of the scheme becomes clear at once: the opposition equips a person who is not a journalist with a camera, plots a scheme and later announces all over Europe that journalists' rights are violated in Armenia. However, can a cameraman of the party be viewed as a journalist?

Mr. Geghamian also admitted at yesterday's press conference that he and the opposition are financed by entrepreneurs having certain expectations, "who organize meetings for us in Moscow, London, Vienna". He left the saddest part for the end: "They are Armenians by origin but are very patriotic." That is, A. Geghamian's statement comes to say that if a person is Armenian, he/she is not a patriot; however, if he provides funding, he is a great patriot.

Given all this, it is not surprising that Mr. Geghamian should happily declare that the oil reserves of Azerbaijan are increasing. By the way, the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, declared that Azerbaijan has never had any oil, thus raising the ire of Azerbaijani political figures... and maybe that of Mr. Geghamian and Mr. Kocharian as well?

*Hayastani Hanrapetutiun newspaper,
Yerevan, Armenia, 4 May 2004*

◀ Just because some citizens accuse opposition leaders of being traitors does not, of course, make it true.

◀ Again, what is being shot? and if whatever it is, is so readily available to an opposition member, it can not be much of a secret. So sending the material to foreign nationals cannot be much of a betrayal of anything.

◀ The same question could be asked of the author of this article. Should someone so clearly in favour of the ruling regime be called a journalist? In any case, the writer is engaging in supposition: is this how the video material is actually being collected?

◀ The journalist's perspective is just as arbitrary: if someone supports the government, he is a patriot, and if not, he is not.

◀ Again, this attempt to link the opposition members closely to Azerbaijan is just one more way to prejudice the readers against them.

12 Photography and images

Photography and images

In many ways, the pictures that accompany a story play as crucial a role in transmitting information as the words themselves. Whether it is a newspaper photograph or a video image, visual elements can deliver powerful and often emotional messages to readers and viewers. Those messages are not always apparent even to those selecting the images, who may themselves be unaware of the subliminal or unconscious impact.

When deciding how to illustrate a story, it is important to keep in mind that the images may remain with the readers or viewers for a long time. They may not even read the text, or may notice no more than the headline or photo caption. So it is critical that you select images that genuinely reflect the spirit of the material rather than contradict or undermine what you hope to convey.

Here are some suggestions for how to do that:

- ★ Make sure the image corresponds to the essence of the story. Sometimes the most powerful photograph or video clip has only tangential relevance to what the piece is about. A picture of a hungry-looking refugee begging, for example, might evoke sympathy in some and disgust in others, but it is probably not appropriate for an article about asylum-seekers organising to demand better living conditions.
- ★ The journalist and the photographer should discuss the story beforehand and, if possible, work as a team. At many newspapers, journalists and photographers pay little attention to each other and forget that their responsibilities, while distinct, are intimately linked. Writers should recognise that more people will read a well-illustrated story. Photographers should understand that a compelling text provides a crucial context for their images.
- ★ It is best if the journalist who has written or produced the piece has some say in which photos or images get used, or at least is informed of the selection. Reporters are generally the ones who are closest to the story, and including photos without consulting them means running the risk of distorting the meaning or intent of a story.
- ★ Does the caption accurately reflect or describe the photograph? It is always a good idea to include a caption to place the illustration in the proper context unless you are convinced that it is completely self-explanatory. However, make sure that the journalist who has written the article has read and approved the caption to minimize the possibility of mistakes.

★ Be wary of including photos that only serve to reinforce stereotypes. Such images tend to be boring and provide little in the way of new or enlightening information. Everybody has seen hundreds of photos of prostitutes displaying themselves on street corners. A far more interesting choice would be one that would show her in some other context or an unexpected situation - attending university classes, for example, or cooking dinner for her children.

★ Do not alter photographs in ways except to improve the quality of the image or obscure the face of someone who should not be identified. It is extremely easy these days to manipulate visual images technologically - for example, by removing certain people or placing two individuals closer together. But to do so fundamentally distorts the journalistic imperative to convey information accurately and honestly.

★ Be careful with images of extreme violence or other graphic displays. It can be important to use them to illustrate certain kinds of material - about wartime atrocities, for example - or to drive home a point about discrimination or social injustice. But there can be a fine line between effective journalism and exploitation. If the illustration only upsets people and does not force them to think at the same time, it is probably best to reconsider your selection.

13. Training modules

Training modules

A training session on reporting diversity can be as short as a couple of hours or as long as several days or even a week. It may be presented as part of a longer journalism course or as a stand-alone seminar. Since the content and structure will depend upon the particular needs of the journalists who participate, it is impossible to offer hard and fast rules on how to proceed.

However, the modular approach offered here allows trainers to pick and choose the elements that will work best for the particular audience. The questions raised in each module can be discussed in brief or at length, but a good rule of thumb is to allow approximately half a day to explore fully the issues addressed in a given module.

In framing your discussions, try to use the broadest selection of examples possible, including material written by the participants, articles from recent copies of regional newspapers, and case studies from this manual, if appropriate to the subject at hand. Remember, too, that the modules are designed to build on each other, with each one helping to foster the understanding and awareness needed to explore these complex journalistic problems.

The following guidelines should also help.

- 1) For a half-day seminar, focus on Module One
- 2) For a full-day seminar, focus on Modules One and Two
- 3) For a two-day seminar, focus on the Modules One through Four
- 4) For seminars longer than two days, try to work with all of the modules.

Whether the seminar is a half-day or a week, encourage all participants to develop an individual action plan that will help sustain their own commitment to reporting diversity.

PRE-SEMINAR PREPARATION

Pre-workshop assignments for participants

The seminar leader should request that each seminar participant provide the following information at least four weeks before the start of the seminar. The materials should be sent to the seminar leader for review and packaging.

Each participant should send the following:

- ★ Five editions of the participant's newspaper.
- ★ An example of a story found in each participant's newspaper (print journalists) or (for broadcast journalists) from a radio or television broadcast that the participant considers to be a well reported, well written, and balanced story.
- ★ An example of a story in the participant's newspaper or from a radio or television broadcast that the participant considers to be an example of a lack of diversity in reporting, writing, and editing.

Each participant should provide the following data:

- ★ The various ethnic groups in the coverage area and estimated population figures.
- ★ Estimated percent of the population that is under 25, between 25 and 40, between 41 and 60, and over 60.
- ★ Estimated percentage of women in the coverage area.

Pre-workshop evaluation by the seminar leader

Prior to the opening of the seminar the leader should carefully review the newspapers and broadcasts provided by the seminar participants and the demographic information. The leader should evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the material. The seminar leader should look for specific examples of inappropriate use of language that would be considered offensive to a segment of the population; look for examples of stereotypes within stories. The leader should review the materials provided by each participant from the viewpoint of a reader from the coverage area of the newspaper of each participant.

Examples of the types of strengths and weaknesses the seminar leader should be looking for are the following:

1. Specific ethnic or racial groups are covered as problems within the community, which is reflected in the language within the stories or the tone of the story. The newspaper provides coverage of disputes involving various racial or ethnic groups, but there is no coverage of those same ethnic groups in positive, productive, and contributory processes within their communities or the overall community.
2. Over the course of the week's coverage, crime stories that are reported are primarily involving perpetrators from one ethnic or racial group. Descriptions of crime suspects are all from one racial or ethnic group and are very generic rather than being specific. Example: "Dark male, 5'8" tall and 200 pounds" rather than a description that included clothing, shoes, etc.

3. Inconsistent editing. Do the stories that are reported in the newspaper, or in radio and television broadcasts, use language that is offensive or stereotypical to a certain ethnic group, older people, people with disabilities, or women?

4. Poor local coverage. Do the newspaper, or the radio or television broadcasts, consistently include new stories about local events that are inclusive of various racial or ethnic groups, older people, people with disabilities, or women?

5. Inadequate coverage of ethnic communities. Do the newspaper, or the radio or television broadcasts, provide coverage of specific ethnic groups or religious minorities? If there is coverage does it include use of clichés, stereotypes, or offensive characterisations of those groups?

6. No inclusion of ethnic community members in regular coverage. Do the newspaper, or the radio or television broadcasts, provide coverage of business men and women, doctors, attorneys, and professors as sources in stories who are members of various ethnic, religious, or racial groups? Are they consulted regarding topics that are not related to their race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation? Are women used as sources on stories about all elements of life in the community?

An example: A story focuses on doctors at a local hospital who are discussing the health needs of pregnant women and the importance of prenatal care. Are there doctors quoted who are either women or members of religious or ethnic minority groups?

7. Not enough women, minorities, and 'others' in images that run in the newspaper. Do the newspaper and the radio

and television broadcasts provide photos of people who are members of minority groups in routine coverage? Women, older people, or people with disabilities?

An example: Are pictures used in the story about the doctors who are advocating better prenatal care? Who was chosen to be photographed? Male or female; a doctor from an ethnic group? What about a doctor who is disabled?

The seminar leader should organise the materials pulled from participants' news examples and use them as examples for the modules that follow. If it is not possible to complete the pre-seminar evaluation of samples forwarded by participants, each module provides additional materials that can be used as examples.

The seminar leader should develop a mechanism for collecting materials for use in the seminar process and use those examples for future seminars as needed .

8. No sense of historical context in stories where race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation are elements of the story.

Does the newspaper, radio, or television news organisation provide an accurate historical context in stories where ethnicity, race, or religious affiliation are relevant to the story? If so, whose history? How do we determine whether the historical context is accurate and appropriate?

Materials provided by the participants, together with the reader's analysis, will provide essential material for the leader's interventions and group discussions during the workshop or training.

Module 1: HISTORY VERSUS DIVERSITY

Goal

Provide an opportunity to discuss the history of exclusion within our communities and the impact that exclusion has had on the development of our communities. By briefly looking back, each participant should be able to engage in building a new model of inclusion within their work in the media.

Principle

The news media has the opportunity to shape the discussion and define the areas of common ground through accurate, unbiased reporting. The result: All segments of our society will participate in easing real and perceived isolation that has been a historical reality for many groups.

The media's role in the continued conflicts within a community, a state, or a nation has been the focus of studies and suggestions for change for decades. Whether the discussion is related to new immigrants or to ethnic groups that have long been a part of the national landscape, journalists have a role to play in providing residents with a sense of what the shifts in populations or the influence of long standing minority cultures means to the development of the nation as it stands today or as it will be in the future.

Every nation has one or more groups that are not considered part of the mainstream. In the United Kingdom, immigrants from the former British colonies of Africa, the Caribbean, or South Asia have for decades complained of exclusion, stereotyping, and hatred from whites. For most of the former colonies of European nations, there has been a negative reaction when citizens from the colonies have moved to the land with which, because of historical circumstance, they share a language. Immigrants from former colonies have discovered, much to their dismay, that having a language in common does not necessarily mean a welcoming attitude.

In many other countries in Europe, the presence of immigrant populations has brought forth misconceptions and mistrust that are often not understood or addressed until major conflict occurs. Meanwhile, in other nations the divisions of culture have existed for hundreds of years without redress.

Reporters, just like the rest of the populace, are often caught off guard, unable to gather the historical perspective to promote community understanding and tolerance. Rather, journalists have been accused of fueling conflicts and hatred, and of exacerbating divisions in communities because we have not been able to provide true historical perspective as we cover the news.

The societal history of exclusion has taken its toll across the world. There is no state that has been left untouched by the conflicts that arise from differences that exist, or that we perceive as existing and making us different from our neighbours.

Today, many members of our community may not know why historical exclusion began; however, all know that exclusion is an integral part of the fabric of community life. Those who are in the minority are, or consider themselves to be, invisible. Sooner or later, those who are excluded will become frustrated, will demand inclusion, and their demands may engender a reaction that leads to more intolerance, bias, further exclusion, or violent conflict.

The news media have a pivotal role in easing the tension created by historical exclusion. The news media provide an opportunity for all people to participate through the free flow of information, a safe place for debate and, while the debates rage, the opportunity to be included in coverage of the community on matters that

are central to day-to-day life. In fact, the first step is the inclusion of all groups in day-to-day coverage of social issues such as health and welfare, community economics, education, and family life.

It is the coverage of everyday life with an eye to including everyone that provides journalists with the rare opportunity to build a diverse community process without relying on partisanship.

Journalists are to be or to become the recorders of life in our communities. They have the opportunity to move throughout the community gathering information, gathering facts that they can knit together into stories of the lives of the people who make up society. Journalists, without being partisan, can create a public space for discussion that leads to common ground within diverse communities.

Example: A newspaper journalist develops a series of stories about economic strife in a major city. The reporter works hard to find sources from various ethnic, racial, or religious groups, older residents, and women who are struggling economically. By carefully choosing the sources to be used, the journalist has taken a step toward creating a common group as readers who have the opportunity to see that they share experiences with people they believed irreconcilably different.

Note to the seminar leader

- ★ Provide other examples of stories that may have provided an opportunity to view this type of inclusive coverage from the newspapers or broadcast examples provided by the participants prior to the seminar.

- ★ Ask the participants to brainstorm on how stories could have been more inclusive. What would the reporter do to expand the coverage with an eye to diversity?

- ★ The first discussion should be with the entire group. As the participants provide their feedback, the seminar leader should begin to ask questions of the participants regarding their experiences with specific groups in the context of the example being used to spark discussion.

A few examples of the questions to be asked of the participants

- ★ Have you had the experience of working on a story with people from a different ethnic, religious or racial background? What was the hardest part of the experience? What was the reaction from the person or persons who were your sources?

- ★ Were you able to use the information that you gathered, in a story? Was the story specifically about the ethnic or racial group only? Would the story have been more effective if the scope were expanded to discuss the realities of economics across racial or ethnic lines?

Next, the leader should provide a second example that the participants will discuss in small groups of three or four. Each small group should develop a coverage plan to improve the story's inclusiveness.

The seminar leader should then ask each small group to develop at least three conclusions related to diversity gleaned from the discussion in this module. The 'Lessons Learned' are recorded and posted on the seminar room walls.

The seminar leader must make it clear to the journalists that this exercise shows that the inclusion process will help journalists in their role as writers of history while providing an opportunity for a balanced, comprehensive, and inclusive view of the community to the news media's consumers.

Based upon the notes, each participant should be able to state one action step that they will use to add a new historical context in their coverage. Each participant should be very specific about the next step. The seminar leader should seek specifics that can be taken home and used by each participant. A form for action steps is available at the end of this manual.

Module 2: WHAT IS NEWS?

Goal

Defining what is news with diversity in mind.

Principle

Diversity and the voices of minority members of the community enrich and enliven the coverage of the community as a whole.

Everybody has a story, but not every story is news! To determine what is news, we must start with the question: "What is news?"

The seminar leader should ask: What is your definition of news?

Note to the seminar leader

★ Each participant should be asked to define what news is, in writing, on paper provided for the exercise. Once everyone has written their definitions, the participants should each read out their answers while the seminar leader records.

★ The recording of the definitions can be done on large pieces of paper which are posted throughout the room so that the definitions can be clearly seen as the participants complete this exercise. The names of the participants do not have to be attached to the definitions.

As this exercise will show, many of us have to struggle with to define 'what is news'. Why? Because there are many layers to the definition. Each of us brings our own historical perspective to defining whether certain events constitute news that should be reported to readers and viewers.

The staples of journalism, those definitions that tend to be most common, are:

★ Inform the public about current events that reporters, and editors determine relevant to our readers.

★ Provide official information from numerous sources to the community.

★ Cover what reporters and editors deem to be important information which must be provided to our readers.

Note to the seminar leader

★ Ask the participants: "What are some of the new elements that should be included in the definition of news now that we are defining the importance of diversity and inclusion in our coverage?"

Each of us defines news based upon our personal life experiences. A journalist who is raising a child with disabilities will view related stories as more news worthy than someone who has not experienced life with a person with disabilities. A person who is caring for an elderly relative will define certain topics related to the elderly as more newsworthy than someone who is not caring for an older person.

The seminar leader should ask: How do our personal experiences impact our definition of news? What new elements would be added to the definition of news based upon personal experiences, ethnicity, age, race, religious affiliation, and gender? The discussion can be a large group discussion or you can break the group into smaller groups. Each group should designate someone to take notes and report the responses back to the entire group at the end of the discussion.

The following statements can be used to help draw participants into a discussion regarding the definition of news in a diverse society where that diversity becomes an element of how we provide information to our communities. News is:

- ★ Not just covering people who are traditional news-makers or are the most prominent businessmen. An example of opportunities for news stories here would be small businessmen and women who are helping to employ people, adding to the economy, providing innovation in the workplace.
- ★ Personal, so that people can relate to the news.
- ★ A means to understand our communities, and the rights, obligations, and capacities of our members.
- ★ News is relevant.

The seminar leader should ask: What did they discuss with their families last night; what did they talk about over coffee or breakfast or lunch yesterday? What were the things that left an important impression upon them as they went about their normal activities as a member of the community - not as they went about their duties as a journalist?

Ask the participants what they think the last statement ('News is relevant') means and how it fits into their understanding of the role of a journalist in the diverse and ever changing world, region, nation, and community where they work. What values are inherent in this last definition of news?

Note to the seminar leader

Encourage argument, questioning, and challenging statements. The leader should begin to verbally edit and sharpen the statements based upon the discussion. The following statements

can be used to help draw participants into a discussion regarding the definition of news in a diverse society where that diversity becomes an element of how we provide information to our communities:

- ★ Civil liberties should be enjoyed by all people and not just one portion of the community
- ★ Justice is for all.

The seminar leader should ask: How do these values present themselves in your community? Are the values that are shared by all for all? Are some groups excluded and can that exclusion be inferred from reading, listening or viewing the area news media?

Note to the seminar leader

The seminar leader should engage the participants in a further discussion about relevance. Relevance to whom? Will the relevance issue be different if the reader is a woman, a woman over 65, or a woman from a specific ethnic background? Encourage a lively discussion about the challenge and opportunity of defining relevance as more layers of diversity are added to the definition of the reader to whom relevance is directed.

The seminar leader should be able to make the following points in recapping the discussion regarding what is news:

- ★ The definitions of news should encompass relevance of the news to people's lives.
- ★ Relevance is difficult to define because there are so many types of people with so many definitions of their own sense of relevance as they consume the information provided to them by the media.

Questions to ask the participants: Is the search for relevance to the widest range of readers more appropriate than defining news based

upon the leaders and those who represent the status quo? What are the risks to the newspaper, the journalist - if any - of focusing on relevance rather than maintaining the status quo or the old order in our delivery of information?

Questions to ask the participants: If relevance is the focus, how do we handle the fact that what is relevant to you may not be relevant to me? How do we get both perspectives on relevance into our stories?

More definitions of news to consider

★ Those events - large and small - that tell us how we live, where we live, explain our times, and help us continue our human history with knowledge, tolerance and open inquiry.

★ That information deemed important by the individual, the group, or the community.

★ Anything that affects a person. Isn't it true that if something affects you, it is news for you? It is something you want to know about whether the impact on you is emotional, financial or physical. Whether this news actually becomes a story in the newspaper is based upon the priorities set each day and at each newspaper.

★ When determining what is news, you are building into the newspaper process everybody's individual prejudices. When you start down that road then you are going to end up with a much more fractionalised approach to news. Everybody is going to have their own agenda and definition of news.

★ A much broader and inclusive view of what is news is needed.

Question for participants: What would you define as a broader and more inclusive view of what is news within your work and your newspaper, radio, or television organisation?

To get the discussion moving, the seminar leader can ask:

★ What about the impact of diversified staffs: age, gender, ethnic groups, religious backgrounds, sexual orientation? Since it seems that news is defined by the people who work in the newspapers, the news will by that definition be more diverse if the staff is diverse.

★ What people are talking about? Since news appears to be what people are talking about, staff inside the newspaper must be able to find out what people are talking about. We must bring news from our neighbours, the coffee shop, the lunch place, and help determine whether there is more to the issues the public talks about that we are missing in our news pages.

Seminar leader's wrap up

As we can see from the discussion on the issue of what is news, each journalist comes at the issue from a different angle. Each participant will give a different definition of what is news and each of us will respond differently to the issues and questions raised throughout this exercise.

Each of us must consider whether our definition of news matches the definition of news set by our newspapers, radio, or television organizations. If it is not the same, what do we do daily to bridge the gap? Compromise? How can we take the issue of diversity and make it work for each of the stories we work on? How do we move the issue of inclusion and diversity past ourselves as individuals and begin changing the news culture within our organizations? Our communities?

Module 3: WHAT IS DIVERSITY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Goal

To define journalistic opportunities that will lead to more diverse coverage.

Principle

Despite our differences - ethnic, political, age, gender, religious, or economic - we are all members of the communities in which we live and work; we all wish to be considered members of the greater community.

It is the common threads of our lives that diversity coverage is designed to address. Doing so engenders understanding, tolerance, and a cohesive community structure with room for debate, disagreement, and even discord with an underlying value of respect for the differences among individuals, groups, and communities.

If people do not see themselves in the media, they will not come to see themselves as a part of the community in which they live. If journalists are to cover the entire community, they must develop ways to ensure that all members of the community are reflected in the coverage.

For example, recent history shows that the reporting of government policy without providing room for diverse voices to be heard regarding those policies has fed racism, sectarianism, and ethnic hatred in many nations.

Seminar leader asks: What are the critical issues of diversity that you believe are not covered by the news media?

The seminar leader should write all responses on large sheets of paper in a place that all participants can see.

Note to the seminar leader

It can be expected that the responses will include such topics as the history of ethnic strife within a region; the politics of ethnic strife or racial difference; the politics of ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance.

The seminar leader can ask the group to provide recent examples of how the media have helped to strengthen or weaken communities through their coverage. Examples may be local or from Rwanda, the Near East, Canada, Europe, etc. In addition, the seminar leader should probe for specifics regarding the reporting that contributed, ultimately, to strife and warfare. The seminar leader should also make the point that the historical connection to the conflicts provides a backdrop that is difficult to overcome if the media's only recourse are stories about the strife, its history, and the politics of both the conflict and any efforts toward reconciliation.

First, we must step back from the clashes and conflicts and take a look at everyday life. The seminar leader must reach back to the previous module and remind the participants that strong diversity coverage begins with the coverage of everyday life. We are looking for ways to include all people in regular, everyday coverage in the most basic way. For example, if people begin to read names that are identifiably from non-majority ethnic groups - names of women, names of persons who are from different racial or religious groups - they will begin to feel that they are a part of the national dialogue and debate.

Journalists should expand their use of sources from various groups. The credibility of the news media will grow as the readers and viewers recognize that there is an interest in including the views and experiences of all segments of the community.

Many newspapers and broadcast organizations, whether in Europe, Africa, Asia, or the Americas, have for decades served primarily as the arm of reporting what the government has decided and how those decisions will be carried out. In the model of inclusive, diversity journalism, the government statement takes a back seat to telling the story of how government policy and practice has an impact on various members of the community. The journalist works to allow voices from the community to tell the story of government action or inaction.

Once those voices from within the community are heard, we enhance our ability to include larger numbers of people in the debate; the media becomes a forum for the debate that may, over time, allow society to solve its problems in the interest of all its members.

Note to the seminar leader

It must be clear that engendering change does not mean orchestrating change. Journalism is not a crusade. The media provide a place where diverse voices can be heard.

To start, the seminar leader should ask the participants to provide a list of subjects that reflect everyday life. Examples to help elicit discussion:

- ★ Health
- ★ Education
- ★ Personal finance
- ★ Children and their development
- ★ Religion or faith.

The seminar leader should have examples of news stories from some of these categories to give to the participants. Using those articles as the basis of analysis, discuss how the stories could have been expanded to include more elements of society - by age, ethnic group, disability, gender.

Example: A story on prenatal health care. Are there any doctors who are from minority or ethnic groups? Are there women who are doctors as well as patients? Are there any religious issues that need to be considered when discussing prenatal care? Who could have been used to create a sense of inclusion in a story on this topic? How would you locate those diverse sources?

Note to the seminar leader

Begin a discussion with participants about the demographic information each participant provided prior to the start of the seminar or demographic information you have developed and will use to set the basis for your discussions of diversity within a specific community.

Hypothetical questions to be considered to stimulate discussion - Question 1:

★ If 30% of the population in your community is made up of women between 25 years of age and 40 years of age, what possible impact might that fact have on coverage?

A few ideas to help stimulate discussion of this question: These are women who are of childbearing age. They will be interested in matters of health and education as well as information regarding parenting strategies. They will be interested in developing government policies related to health, education and welfare and will want to know how those policies will affect their every day lives.

Seminar leader asks: Are there any other subjects that they might be interested in? Note that this segment of the population's interests will shift once they are no longer of childbearing age. Once they pass childbearing age, what might they be interested in? The seminar leader should suggest that the participants use their own lives as benchmarks for discussion along the following lines.

Are these subjects covered in your newspaper, radio or television broadcasts? How frequently and how would you evaluate the quality of the coverage? What would you do to add content to your news reports that would meet the information needs of this particular group? By considering the information needs of this group are you also providing information of interest to men?

Bear in mind that deciding areas of interest for particular groups does not necessarily mean that others will be excluded.

Ask the seminar participants their views of the last statement. How can coverage of particular group also benefit others not in that group? Do any of the participants have story ideas or concepts that would validate the statement? Ask the participants to provide concrete examples to illustrate the concept.

Hypothetical questions to be considered to stimulate discussion - Question 2:

★ If 20% of your community population is over 65 years of age: What possible impact might this fact have on coverage?

A few ideas to help stimulate discussion of this question: Travel and leisure activity; personal finances (making ends meet after one is no longer working); planning for retirement; health concerns. What other information about this group would be helpful in your efforts to provide coverage of interest to this group of people? Do they travel? Does the travel focus on particular areas of the country or neighboring countries? Does the travel depend upon the ethnic background of the people in this category? Does it depend upon the economic status of the people in this category?

As above, ask the seminar participants their views of the last statement. How can coverage of a particular group also benefit members of

other groups? Can participants provide story ideas or concepts that would validate the statement? Work with participants to develop concrete examples to illustrate the concept.

Hypothetical questions to be considered to stimulate discussion - Question 3:

★ If the demographics indicate that 30% of the people in the area are under 25 years of age: What possible impact might this statistic have on coverage?

A few ideas to help stimulate discussion of this question: The Arts (particularly music); personal finances; health and well being. What other information about the interests of this group might be necessary to determine whether there are areas of coverage that the newspaper should be aware of or should consider increasing? Sports and leisure activities? Relationships? Does your newspaper cover these topics?

Explore the same issues as above regarding the benefits to all groups of increasing coverage of those now visible.

The leader should use examples from the review of participants' newspapers and broadcast samples to expand on the focus of this module. The questions can be very specific as related to the ethnicity, age and gender issues within any country or region where the seminar is held.

Workshop exercise

The participants are divided into groups of four. Each participant takes the newspaper, radio or television broadcast of another participant and reviews the news product to ask questions about representation of key constituents based upon demographic information shared amongst participants. As the participants ask each other questions about the diversity of their

audience and the news product, an informal demographic profile is provided based upon what is said. Each participant should take notes during the discussion for reporting back to the entire group.

The participants are looking for:

- * Anecdotal demographic profile.
- * What information is not known that would help determine whether the newspaper is covering all segments of the community.

The results of the review and the small group discussion are presented to the entire workshop. Notes should be taken regarding areas needing improvement to increase diversity coverage for discussion during a later module.

Module 4: SPECIAL DISCUSSION POINTS ON LANGUAGE

Goal

To develop a sense of the use of language to avoid racial and ethnic stereotyping.

Principle

Our words have the power to encourage our communities to read our newspapers, listen and view our broadcasts, and believe us. Those same words can perpetuate negative community perceptions about different groups and leave the news media with the appearance of bias and unfairness in our reporting and writing. It is important to consider why certain words just do not work.

Note to the seminar leader

The seminar leader should initiate a discussion using examples from the newspaper articles or radio and television broadcasts provided by the participants. In the case of print examples, photocopy the stories that you will use so that each participant can read and follow the discussion. Broadcast stories should be played for the group.

Most news media do not set out to create stereotypes or division. However, journalists often fail to use language effectively in an effort to eliminate group stereotypes or intolerance. Assuming that today's news media is interested in avoiding the damage caused by the inappropriate use of language, the primary rule for journalists is: *follow the rules of precision for writing that will allow language to be used in its purest form.*

The words we choose are critical in our quest for diversity in media content. The first challenge is to present members of different ethnic and racial groups fairly and accurately by carefully choosing our words, and avoiding stereotypes and clichés that can be seen as slurs.

Some news organizations have launched committees to fix the 'problems' of misuse and misidentification. Others have made issues of language an integral part of their development of rules and regulations related to style.

However, most journalists seldom have the opportunity to sit back and think about why they choose the words they use. The pressure of the clock, space constraints and the ultimate flow of the story often rule our choices. Seldom is there time to debate the best word for the job.

Now that the news media acknowledge the depth of society's diversity, and as we explore the impact that diversity has or should have on our work as journalists, we are forced to take a second look at the words we use.

In fact, the only rationale for examining what we call people and how we describe places is the attempt to report accurately on all segments of our communities and, while doing so, to use the right words for the job. When we carefully look at our use and misuse of language, we are not catering to the politically correct. Rather we are crafting our work using all of the rules and resources available to us.

Using the Dictionary

The first step in the examination of our use and misuse of words is simple: use a dictionary. The book is a resource we can reintroduce to our daily work as we grapple with ways to represent accurately and fairly the nuances of our communities.

The dictionary is also a tool that journalists can use to improve word control while eliminating the perceptions we create of our nation, our communities and their people - and ourselves.

Times change. Meanings change. The dictionary can remind us of that fact, remind us of the origins of the words we use, and help us to choose the right ones for the stories we write.

An example of the changing meanings of words

Ghetto: In the 1960s, dictionary definitions described the ghetto as a place where the law forced a group of people to live within a restricted area of a city, and specifically referred to the pogroms in Europe. Today, a second definition has been added. It allows this word to be used to describe a quarter or section of a city in which members of a minority group live because of social, economic or legal pressure. Key facts included in this secondary definition change the earlier definition that required government action to create a ghetto.

What do reporters and editors have to know before they can use this word?

- 1) that only a minority group lives in the area in question, and
- 2) that they live there because of social, economic or legal pressure.

There are indeed places in cities across the world that could be called a ghetto, but journalists must be very careful that all of the facts required to meet the definition's test are present. Once again, the word cannot be used as a catch phrase for any areas of a town that do not seem to fit a middle-class housing standard. Moreover, in most cases, journalists should use the opportunity to be specific and name the area or neighbourhood where the story's action occurs.

Barrio: This word has the same fact-based specific meaning. According to the dictionary, *barrio* is a Spanish-speaking quarter or neighborhood in a city or town. With the dictionary as the guide, we learn that we cannot use *barrio* as

a synonym for ghetto. Moreover, there is no indication that economic, social or legal pressure created the district or neighbourhood. The word applies only to specific neighborhoods that are Spanish-speaking. A *barrio* is not a ghetto. It is not a slum. It is a place where Spanish speakers live.

Note to the seminar leader

Ask the participants to provide words from their language that can be discussed. The seminar leader should have a few words ready for discussion. Where possible have the participants use the dictionary to review the precise meaning of the words you are discussing. At times this exercise can be very revealing. Where the popular meanings are not accurate, and you find the words are being misused, ask the participants what they believe the impact of the misuse is or has been? Who is most affected by the misuse?

Specifics versus labels

Barrio and *ghetto* are just a couple of examples of words we often misuse or misapply. Better writing and reporting would describe accurately the places, conditions and economics that are at

play in stories rather than resorting to the labels that often confuse and stereotype because of our misuse of the language.

Journalists must be aware that many of the people we interview for stories are not tuned in to the dictionary and precise definitions. They may not be attuned to the fact that ethnicity is not a distinguishing factor on matters of achievement or income. Or that specific ethnic groups are not synonyms for the poor, criminals, under-educated or overeducated, the unassimilated or the disenfranchised.

Educate readers and sources

How many journalists have written stories about senior citizens and called them "elderly", but did not ask the ages of the people interviewed? Again, look up the meaning of the words: "Elderly" and "aged" apply to people who are older than 65.

What about a news service story that called a man a "cripple" without describing what his specific condition was? Again look up the meaning. The definition is very specific and applies only to a small percentage of people who are considered disabled.

Distinctions without differences? No, they are distinctions that divide journalists from the people we serve. They are the distinctions that continue to polarise our society.

As we head into the 21st Century, we are left with a great responsibility to make sure the polarisation does not continue and widen simply because we were too busy, too lazy or too indifferent to look up a few words in the dictionary.

A few additional tips

★ Be careful when using adjectives and adverbs. These words are descriptors which can and do perpetuate stereotypes. Journalists are reporters and not describers. We provide the readers, listeners and viewers with the facts so that they can come to their own conclusions about the appropriate descriptors to use in the situation. Our function is not to tell the community what they should believe. Our function is to provide the community with unbiased facts that will allow each member of our community to make decisions about how they will live their lives and participate in the benefits and burdens of membership in our communities.

★ Be vigilant to avoid loaded terms or phrases that will create a sense of disenfranchisement from those who are members of the groups most affected. Do we describe a source as a swarthy, dark figure in attempt to create a tone and not realise that the tone we create is stereotypical? We must think about the average reader, listener and viewer with every word and phrase we choose. Are we communicating what we intended? Are we reinforcing stereotypes of specific groups without intending or even realising it?

Our words have the power to encourage members of our communities - one person at a time - to read our newspapers, listen and watch our broadcasts and believe the information we provide each day. When we use loaded phrases, clichés and jargon we risk losing any trust that has been developed between the community and the media.

The words we choose can perpetuate community perceptions that the media are still as biased toward certain segments of society as the newspapers, radio and television organisation of previous generations, or previous political regimes. Our words when read or heard recreate the experiences of earlier times - times when social, political, economic and legal dynamics created pockets of hatred, fear, division and conflict. With each recreation we move further back into the historical context rather than allowing our communities to move forward toward becoming societies that value the freedom of expression and diverse opinion upon which democratic media depend.

Note to the seminar leader

★ Define what is a stereotype. Ask participants to discuss the stereotypes that exist for their ethnic, racial or religious group which they identify with. Ask the participants to communicate how they feel when they see a stereotype that is related to their racial or ethnic group in a newspaper article or radio or television news report.

★ Use samples from the newspapers provided by seminar participants to discuss the use of language in the quest for diversity. How could the language in these stories have been changed to avoid or eliminate the stereotypes?

The following points should be made:

★ Avoid words or phrases that do not present a clear picture.

Example: In a nation where religious freedom is being re-established, a description of minority religious organizations such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and Protestants as sects is both inaccurate and creates a fuzzy picture for the community of what is the dynamic between the "mainstream organizations", i.e. Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox organizations.

The seminar leader should at this point request that someone in the group read the definition of the word "sect" and a discussion should follow regarding why this word would have a negative impact for those members of the religious groups which were lumped into that category.

★ Avoid descriptions of people that tend to prove or disprove a stereotype.

★ Use words that accurately describe older people, without being patronizing or demeaning.

★ Avoid using words that stereotype older people. Examples: feeble, decrepit, and crippled.

★ Avoid descriptions of women based upon who they are married to. Women in our stories must be allowed to stand alone. Do not identify them as the wives of men but rather provide them with their own identity.

★ Avoid geographic or historical inaccuracy in language.

★ Use specifics and avoid labels. Example: In a crime story the suspect is described as a dark skinned male between 20 and 30 years of age. Press for more detail from the police. What was he wearing; where was he seen escaping; what did his hair look like?

The authorities will not provide specifics unless the journalist asks the questions. And our specific questions assist in providing the community with an adequate description of a suspect rather than a generic description that could be used to describe 50 percent of the population of a certain ethnic or racial group. And what if there are no specifics? Consider whether the description serves any purpose if it will not assist the authorities in apprehending a criminal.

Module 5 - QUESTIONS REGARDING ETHNICITY

The following questions and answers are presented for use in discussion with the group. Focus the discussion around specific examples from the experiences of the participants. The answers provided below are to be considered a beginning and not the end. Allow the participants enough time to debate whether ethnic or racial identification was appropriate in the stories you are using as examples. The participants will raise issues that the leader must be prepared to actively engage, question or develop as they are made in order to assist the entire group to have a meaningful discussion. At the end of the discussion, the seminar leader should recap the conclusions of the group.

The notes from these sessions should be preserved to continue to expand on the questions and answers on the issue of ethnicity and reporting in the region.

Note to the seminar leader

Crime stories are often the best to use as the basis for discussion of ethnicity and reporting. These may be the easiest examples to find in participant newspapers.

Question: When is race or ethnicity relevant?

Answer: Generally, race or ethnicity are not relevant in a story unless ethnicity is the factor that is at the core of the story. In stories involving politics, social action or social conditions, ethnicity is not automatically relevant. Writers should be careful not to let their word choices let the reader infer that ethnicity is an issue.

Example: In large cities, one ethnic group may own particular kinds of small stores or business establishments. Those stores often become targets of vandalism and hatred on the part of other groups. Even so, in reporting a specific vandalism, a reporter should not assume

that it is ethnically motivated. At first glance, ethnicity may be key. However, a closer look and good sourcing in the neighbourhood may indicate other causes of the violence, including interpersonal relationships among people who reside in a particular neighbourhood. Under these circumstances, ethnicity is a minor factor and reporting should not lead the reader to believe that members of a different group are out to destroy or harm members of another group.

Note to the seminar leader: Ask the group to discuss how they can determine whether race is central here or is a case of the haves versus the have-nots? Or is it simply a criminal element run amok? How can the story accurately reflect the situation? Ask, would this person be identified by ethnicity if he or she were of the majority group? If the answer is no there should be a serious consideration of whether ethnicity is relevant to the story. The seminar leader should find examples of the identification of persons by their ethnic group which leads to a conclusion that the story is about an ethnic or racial situation.

Question: When relevant, how should race or ethnicity be handled?

Answer: If race or ethnicity is relevant, journalists should be cautious in writing the story. Journalists should test these issues with their colleagues to expand the conversation, test the story premise, ensure that they are not projecting an ethnic angle on to the story when none exists.

Note to the seminar leader:

★ Take a second look at the examples used earlier. How could the story have been written to eliminate any negative tone which is apparent to the reader or to change the emphasis of the issue of ethnicity to match the true angle of the story?

★ If you have examples where ethnicity was appropriately communicated in a story, use this example to walk through the differences between a story where the ethnic or racial issue was handled appropriately versus stories in which the element of race or ethnicity has been presented in an inappropriate manner.

Question: Who decides whether there is a racial or ethnic angle?

Answer: Journalists should not assume the burden of deciding whether an incident has ethnic or racial overtones. The facts of the story should speak for themselves. Often a government source will tell the journalist that race or ethnicity are elements of the story. Official statements can be tested by talking with representatives from the communities involved. Develop sources across racial and ethnic lines and at least there will always be multiple points of view on this question in your story if officials maintain that an incident or an issue has a racial or ethnic angle. Challenge the same officials with questions that probe why they have determined there is an ethnic issue at play.

Example: Police label gang warfare as ethnic warfare. Once the reporter asks why, she finds the police have concluded that the warfare is ethnic because one gang is from one ethnic group and another gang is from another ethnic group. But in fact, the warfare was triggered by a turf war over lucrative illegal drug trade on the streets of your city. The war had to do with territory based on economics versus ethnic strife. Might there be an ethnic element in this story? Possibly. However, it is not necessarily the most important reason for the conflict and therefore caution should be used in determining what importance the reporter will ascribe to ethnic issues in his story.

Question: What should people be called?

Answer: One way to deal with this issue is to ask the source - the person you are quoting or referring to - how he or she prefers to be described and that can be accomplished by simply asking. However, it is the general rule that only where ethnicity of a source is relevant to the subject of the story should it be used in the story. Remember, a picture tells more than a thousand words. Often the ethnic identity of sources can be communicated effectively through the use of pictures in newspapers and television. Where possible, why not show your source as the real person he or she is instead of indirectly characterising her?

Note to the seminar leader: Descriptions of the source should be as specific as possible. Simply stating that someone is from Asia does not provide any relevant information about the person once the racial identity is determined relevant. Be specific. Generalisations promote stereotyping. Good journalism is specific about everything - ethnicity included. What country in Asia is the person from?

Question: What about immigrants?

Answer: The same rule applies. Avoid lumping all immigrants into classes. For example: Africans, Asians. The reader or viewer receives more information if you provide specific details about where the person is from. A person from America could be from Canada, the United States or Latin America. The reader learns nothing when we say that the person in the story is from Asia; more important to the story is the country that the person is from. Tell the reader the nation, state or the city where relevant. Africa is a large continent. Tell the reader what nation the person is from. The critical rule: provide the reader or viewer with specific information.

Module 6 DEVELOPING SOURCES

Goal

To assist programme participants in developing new and diverse sources

Principle

Diversity in sources in news stories will by its nature create a more diverse news report.

Changing the way we find and use sources in our news reporting is a task that requires a great deal of conscious action on the part of a reporter. Each reporter who is interested in creating more voices in his or her stories must begin developing the bank of sources with each contact made within the community. Casual meetings of people can provide opportunities to meet that doctor or lawyer who may be able to provide a different perspective to a routine story. Casual meetings may provide an opportunity to add the names and numbers of academics who are respected and may be from different ethnic groups. Every contact with an interesting person becomes an opportunity to expand your source list beyond the government sources that have been the mainstay of news reporters for decades. The best reporters have the most extensive network of diverse sources.

Note to the seminar leader

Choose four stories from the participants' examples or from your reading or viewing that can be used to discuss expanding the base of sources for news stories. Ask the participants to read each story and break into small groups. Ask the participants to rate the stories for their diversity of sources or voices. Are the only people quoted men? Are the only people quoted members of the government? Are the only people quoted from the majority group even though there may be other perspectives on the issue from other racial or ethnic groups?

Points to consider

★ Beware of unbalanced stories that appear. Minority issues do not require comment from the majority; Jewish issues do not require comment from anti-Semites. Nor do gay and lesbian issues require comment from homophobic elements. The mechanical "balancing" of sources actually can open the door to biased reporting by increasing the opportunity to use stereotypes, clichés and prejudiced voices.

*Be careful when describing living arrangements between adults. In many countries it is not relevant that a man and woman do not have a marriage certificate or that two men or two women are a couple and live together. If it must be mentioned, do not moralise or use coy, cute labels. Many journalists use "companion" or "close friend" to describe these long-term relationships or living arrangements. The key: do not assume; ask the subject of the story how he or she would characterise the relationship.

Note to the seminar leader

Review the stories again. Ask each participant to make a list of other categories of people who could be contacted to add perspective to the story. Complete the same exercise with the remaining three stories. Ask the participants to discuss how they would identify sources to expand the perspectives in the stories.

Module 7 - IMAGES

Goal

To assist programme participants in developing new and diverse sources

Principle

Diversity in sources in news stories will by its nature create a more diverse news report.

One of the first places that journalists can provide an opportunity for members of all racial, ethnic and religious groups to identify with the content of the newspaper, magazine, or television broadcasts is through the use of pictures.

Note to the seminar leader

Ask the seminar participants what kinds of pictures of minorities - if any - are included in the newspaper or television news broadcasts. Do minorities serve as news anchors as well as field reporters? Are women pictured in stories where women can be used as the image for the story, or is the news photography or video predominantly male? The seminar leader should pull examples from the newspaper and video samples provided by the participants or examples that the leader has found and feels would be excellent to illustrate the lack of diversity in the news images we project.

★ As you show the examples to the group, ask them to brainstorm other ways the stories could have been illustrated with an eye to diversity rather than simply using the same male government sources and showing their photos or video clips.

★ Ask the participants to review stories and artwork that accompany crime stories. Crime stories are frequently more graphic. Also find video or still photographs of news broadcasts from war zones or zones of civil unrest. Do these pictures and videos provide a slanted view of the unrest or fighting? Are the video images, par-

ticularly, used to provide a point of view? Is this or should this be the journalist's goal? How can presenting a point of view be avoided in stories that have a strong political or historical context that has traditionally excluded all views but the government's view?

Pictures - both still and video - must reflect the news. But there are no rules as to who must be included in the pictures to reflect the news. Except for the breaking news events, the spot news stories, there are often choices.

Note to the seminar leader

Review the newspapers and video provided by the participants and go over the pictures that are available. Discuss whether there were other opportunities to provide a more diverse picture of the event than was used by the newspaper or television station? Discuss the stories that are chosen from the video clips provided. Might there have been other opportunities to illustrate the story that would have provided a more diverse view of events?

When there is a major event, photographers can look for opportunities to capture the diversity of the crowds rather than focusing the lens eye on those who represent the sameness of the majority.

Example: In a recent election story, the photographer photographed a voting place with a woman monitoring the polls and a woman voting. The photographer knew that this scene in a male-

dominated society would not have been recorded in the past. The photographer's picture signals a new day. The photographer probably could have gone to another polling place or could have shot a similar picture with men and walked away. The photographer in this case captured change, and readers or viewers will be affected in some way by the change represented in the image. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader or viewer will begin to sense a shift in the community and in the role of women in that community.

Note to the seminar leader

Again, look for examples of pictures that provide a sense of subtle change within the community. Are there any in the newspapers or broadcast materials provided before the seminar? Are there any pictures that the seminar participants would question could have been taken with others creating diversity without changing the news event?

One of the goals in examining images for diversity is to make it possible for some of our readers and viewers to say: "Thanks for letting me see myself in your newspaper or television broadcast. Thanks for letting me be a part of this community as you, the news media, define our community through the news you report each day."

Note to the seminar leader

At this point, the seminar leader should stress that the images used are a matter of choice by the persons within the news media who are making the decisions about what images should be printed or prepared for broadcast.

How must the decision-making change if there is to be an increase in diverse images in the newspaper or in the television news broadcasts? Go back and look at some of the footage

and newspaper photographs reviewed earlier in this module. Where are the other choices that could have been made? When should that choice have been made, and who makes the choices? The leader should engage the group in discussion about viewing the scene of a story and making the choices at the point that the artwork is being planned and shot by the photographer/reporter or camera person.

Diversity in the art work used by the news media also includes the decision making when one picture is chosen over another for a story. Each person responsible for taking and choosing art should begin to ask what is the best way to illustrate this story while drawing in as many readers as possible.

Note to the seminar leader

Choose two or three stories without pictures from local or national newspapers that would lend themselves to a brainstorming session about the kind of art-work that best illustrates the story while keeping the diversity principles in mind. Write down the suggestions for each story on large sheets of paper that should be visible to the participants. Once the process has been completed, suggest to the participants that they use the process for stories in which they are responsible for the artwork. How would each participant include such a process as part of their news organisation?

Editorial commentary: cartoons

Editorial cartoons pose a special challenge. Editorial cartoons are meant to be irreverent and, at times, to present the extremes of political views or social discordance.

These cartoons often trade heavily on stereotypes of minority groups.

But editorial cartoons, though in a different league, are not immune from evaluation, particularly when the cartoons tend to perpetuate stereotypes that divide the community or reinforce hatred and distrust. The remedy here is the constant debate and vigilance of journalists and news organizations.

Note to the seminar leader

★ Find samples of editorial cartoons and make copies available to the participants. Ask whether there is anything in any of the cartoons that would be offensive to the participants; to someone from another racial, ethnic or religious group? The final question: Do the participants believe that the offensiveness - even the threat of offence - was a "price worth paying" for the message that was conveyed by the cartoon? Use the participants' response as a benchmark for determining whether editorial commentary in the form of cartoons is so offensive as to be threatening to any segment of the population.

★ Begin a discussion regarding the difference between the editorial cartoon and the news photography that accompanies news stories in print or on television. What are the different standards applied to both? Does the public understand that difference? What would be the participants' view of what should be done if an offensive cartoon were printed? What if there was a complaint from the community? What if everyone knew it was offensive and there were no complaints? Would the fact that there were no complaints be a sign of a problem between the community and the media, one which the media would have to work to overcome?

THE INDIVIDUAL ACTION PLAN

The 'Individual Action Plan' is the key to helping journalists take home with them what they have been discussing, analysing, and learning about during a reporting diversity training programme. It is a device to encourage the participants to commit actively to changing what they do every day as professionals. Moreover, because journalists can commit not only to individual acts, but to working with their colleagues, news organizations, and professional associations and unions, the Individual Action Plan (IAP) can also be a mechanism to influence other individuals and institutions as well.

The leader should adapt the IAP form printed on the following page, adding to or replacing questions as needed, and distribute the IAP at the beginning of the workshop or seminar so that each participant has this outcome in mind throughout the programme. The IAP should be discussed by the group before it is filled in by individuals, and the leader should encourage each participant to be as specific as possible about the goals he or she is setting, the means to be employed, and the timetable to be followed. It is suggested that a six-month time frame be used for the IAP, but this is at the discretion of the leader and the group, which should revise the IAP form until group members become comfortable with the commitments it asks them to make. After the IAPs are filled in at the last session, the leader should suggest that each participant share his or her Action Plan with the group.

The leader should make notes on each one to assist in the follow-up discussed below. Ideally, there will be follow-up by the leader at the agreed-upon IAP deadline. Because the commitment to journalism that is sensitive to diversity issues is often personally and institutionally difficult, this follow-up timetable provides an opportunity to review the material covered in the original discussions, encourage further discussion, and reinforce the original diversity goals. In the best circumstances, such follow-up will be institutionalised in the form of follow-on workshops, publications, and other forms of on-the-job training and support.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION PLAN FORM

Remember the mission

To strengthen the credibility and value of newspaper, radio and television news coverage as vehicles for community understanding and tolerance.

Remember the key objectives:

- ★ Increase diversity of voices and images in all news coverage
- ★ Strengthen connections with readers, listeners, viewers and potential readers, listeners and viewers
- ★ Expand readership, or the listening and viewing audience, to a greater segment of the community
- ★ Foster team work and communication within your news organisation.

The individual action plan is one of the most important steps in beginning to meet the challenge of applying what you have explored during this programme. Each participant should take home a concrete plan of action that you will use as you return to your daily duties as a journalist.

Please take a minute and consider the ways that you can concretely begin to work toward increasing the diversity of voices and images in your work, eliminating stereotypes, employing language carefully and, in general, being sensitive to the diversity issues you have discussed during this programme.

Next, write a short description of the actions you will take to meet some of the objectives established at the outset of this programme. Consider your plan a six-month plan; at each six-month interval you will review your progress, add another goal as you continue to move toward creating news media that values and encourage community understanding and tolerance. Action Plans are affirmative statements that focus on a specific task that you believe you will be interested in committing to once the programme ends. The Action Plan should be considered your personal plan to work toward achieving some of what is described in the mission statement above. It is important to set goals that you know you will be able to attain and sustain for six months or more.

A few examples follow. Use additional space to expand or change the models or to develop an action statement that will work for you.

1. I will discuss the principles of diversity with another journalist where I work and share the materials developed during the training. I will do this by

2. I will use language more precisely and monitor my work to eliminate slurs, clichés and other loaded terms that may be or are offensive to one group or another. I will do this by

3. I will share my successful strategies for a more precise use of language with other journalists. I will do this by

4. I will organise a training session for other staff members to discuss the principles of diversity as they apply to

5. I will monitor the images presented in our newspaper or television broadcasts and make suggestions or plan my news gathering to provide opportunities for diverse images - women, the elderly, people of different racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds - in my news reports. I will begin by

NOTE: The suggestions are just samples of possible action plans. Draft your own statements using the suggestions above as models. Be concrete. Be specific. Be realistic. No matter how simple, remember that if each of us takes a step to increasing the diversity of voices within our news media we come closer to creating a vehicle for community understanding and tolerance over time.

14. Glossary

Glossary

AGEISM: Prejudice or discrimination based on someone's age or on stereotypes about older people.

ANTI-SEMITISM: Prejudice or discrimination against Jews based on negative ideas about their religious practices and beliefs or on ethnic stereotypes.

BIGOTRY: An obstinate and unreasoning attachment to one's own opinions, way of life and belief system, with narrow-minded intolerance of or prejudice against opposing perspectives and those who espouse them.

CLASSISM: Prejudice or discrimination based on socio-economic class.

DISABILITY: A physical or mental impairment that hinders or prevents someone from performing certain activities or negatively impacts intellectual functioning.

DISCRIMINATION: The denial of justice and fair treatment to members of other cultures, ethnic communities and social groups in a host of arenas, including employment, housing, political rights and public accommodations.

DIVERSITY: The presence, among both individuals and groups of people, of qualities and characteristics that differ from one another, whether these are primary dimensions that are not generally subject to personal choice (age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) or secondary dimensions that are (educational background, geographic location, marital status, religious beliefs, etc.).

EQUALITY: The condition of having or being accorded the same dignity, rank, or privileges as others.

ETHNOCENTRISM: The practice of consciously or unconsciously judging other ethnic groups by the values, standards and criteria of one's own and ignoring alternative perspectives or approaches.

HATE INCIDENT: An assault, harassment or some other aggressive and hostile act targeting the person or property of someone based on his or her race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or other group identity.

HETEROSEXISM: The practice of consciously or unconsciously viewing and treating homosexuality and bisexuality as inherently and unquestionably inferior to heterosexuality.

HOMOPHOBIA: A fear of or contempt for people who are, or who are thought to be, gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

MULTICULTURALISM: The practice of acknowledging and respecting the broad spectrum of cultures, religions, ethnic communities and other groups that coexist within a society.

PREJUDICE: An irrational suspicion or hatred of an entire category of people; an adverse judgement or opinion about others based solely or largely on their status as members of a specific ethnic, religious or other social group.

RACISM: Prejudice or discrimination based on the conviction that some ethnic groups are innately superior to others in intelligence, moral character, belief systems, way of life or other qualities.

SCAPEGOATING: The act of blaming an entire category of people, or individuals perceived as members of that group, for social, economic and other problems that in reality arise from complex and multiple sources.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: The direction of a person's sexual interest toward members of the same, opposite, or both sexes.

STEREOTYPE: A broad generalisation about an entire group of people that ignores or overlooks the possibility of individual differences or variations.

TOLERANCE: An acceptance of and open-mindedness toward the practices, attitudes and beliefs of other cultures, ethnic communities and social groups.

XENOPHOBIA: A deep antipathy to, fear of or contempt for foreigners or people from other cultures or ethnic groups

South Caucasus Chapter of the Reporting Diversity Network

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Arzu Abdullayeva - Chairperson
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Baku Press Club - Baku
Arif Aliyev - Director
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Black Sea Press Association - Tbilisi
Aliona Imedashvili - Director
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Liberty Institute - Tbilisi
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Yerevan Press Club - Yerevan
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For contact details for any of the Reporting Diversity Network partners, please contact MDI.

About the Media Diversity Institute

The London-based Media Diversity Institute is a non-profit, non-partisan organisation which promotes conflict resolution through diversity reporting in developing societies.

The institute's Reporting Diversity Network (RDN), brings together journalists, news organisations, media assistance centres, journalism schools and others in a collaborative effort to mobilise the power of the news media in support of a deeper public understanding of diversity, minority communities, inter-group conflict, and human rights. The RDN promotes the highest standards of professional journalism as they relate to coverage of minorities, diversity, and inter-ethnic relations, and develops the tools, training vehicles and practical reporting initiatives required to implement those standards.

Fair, accurate, sympathetic and in-depth reporting is vital in promoting understanding between different groups. The media has all too often been used as a weapon, promoting prejudice and discrimination. MDI aims to change that and turn media into a tool for strengthening human rights and democracy.

We do this primarily through education, training and co-operation with:

- ★ practicing journalists;
- ★ journalism professors and academics;
- ★ media owners and decision-makers;
- ★ media, human rights and minority organisations.

Our comprehensive approach, dealing with the issue of diversity from all angles, is the institute's unique characteristic. We train journalists and media managers in best practice; we teach minority organisations how to communicate with the media; we work on strengthening minority media and we work with the journalism professors who will train future generations of journalists.

MDI activities are divided into nine main areas:

1. diversity awareness training for journalists and media decision-makers
2. practical diversity training and professional development for mid-career journalists
3. diversity reporting news production initiatives, including team-reporting and news agency projects
4. diversity curriculum development, in cooperation with journalism faculties
5. media and public relations training for minority groups
6. projects designed to promote reconciliation through the media
7. production of diversity handbooks, resource manuals and training manuals
8. post-conflict professional development for journalists, with a special emphasis on Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Reporting Diversity Manual

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