

Newsletter from the Nordic Africa Institute

December 2008

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Comment by Carin Norberg

"How do media interface with the governing of African Public Space?"



How do media interface with the Governing of African Public Space? This was the subject of a panel, which I moderated at the recent CODESRIA General Assembly in Yaoundé in early December 2008. Of the three papers presented two discussed the role of media in the recent Kenyan election and one the media performance in the run-up to Zimbabwe's national elections 2008.

The papers were not only topical, they all raised issues of general concern about the media

by way of analyzing how it impacted on the outcome of these two contested election results. One paper discussed the ethnic discourse used by media before and after elections in Kenya. Arguing that the “mega-ethnicity “seen in 2007 was of a larger scale than had been seen in any previous elections it analyzed the usage of language to depict oneself and the “others”. It was noted that modern campaign machines such as songs, advertisements and SMS allow for a much more brutal language than conventional newspapers.

The second paper on Kenya discussed the role of media as both an arena and actor in the public sphere. It was argued that in Kenya the media played an active role in fuelling the conflict between the contending parties. Rather than presenting a balanced view of particular events the newspapers used the language of battle to recreate conflict and drama. It was also noted that not only did journalists align themselves with particular political arguments, they also allowed themselves to become manipulated by politicians.

The paper on Zimbabwe discussed the dichotomous nature of media outreach in the Zimbabwean society with different distinct sites for formation and communication of public opinion. Trying to answer the question if Zimbabweans are talking on each other from different platforms the paper reflected on policy implications for media structure and content.

The notion that urban and rural populations in Zimbabwe are divided media-wise resulting in different voting patterns was however contested in the following discussion. Reference was made to radio, internet and mobile telephones which today are presenting countervailing public space. “People are subjects also in the rural areas” as one participant said.

In the summary I noted the central role played by media in today’s political contestation and raise the question whether media should be entrusted to regulate itself or not. As we have seen this question has recently been set to a test in Kenya.

CODESRIA, or the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, gathered a record number of over 500 social scientists from Africa and abroad for its 12th General Assembly in Yaoundé, Cameroon. We at the Nordic Africa Institute join in welcoming the new Executive Secretary, Dr. Ebrima Sall, a former research coordinator at NAI and most recently Research Director of CODESRIA, and the new President of the Council Professor Sam Moyo of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Zimbabwe. On a personal note I am happy to report that in 2009 we expect to receive Dr. Ebrima Sall and outgoing Executive Secretary Professor Adebayo Olukoshi in Uppsala for discussions about the future cooperation between NAI and CODESRIA.

Carin Norberg

Director of the Nordic Africa Institute

China and India in Africa - opportunities and challenges

The international conference "China and India in Africa - New Strategic Encounters" was held at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, on 22 - 23 September 2008. Read a report from the conference [here](#).

From "Brand Aid" to "Youth and Hope" - Nordic Africa Days 2008

This year's Nordic Africa Days were held in Copenhagen in October. Read a report from the conference [here](#). Keynote speaker Jenni Williams from Zimbabwe spoke to a packed auditorium on the opening day. Read a report of her speech [here](#).

Gothenburg Book Fair 2008

The Nordic Africa Institute was a participant in the Gothenburg book fair in September 2008. Read a report from the fair [here](#).

African cities: The challenge of poverty and the provision of water

A workshop in October 2008 discussed water provision issues in African cities. Read about the workshop [here](#).

Prevention of genocide - A utopia?'

Genocide prevention and the responsibility to protect (R2P) were discussed during an intensive afternoon at a conference in December co-arranged by The Nordic Africa Institute and Living History Forum. Read about the conference [here](#) (in Swedish only).


"Three months up north" - Guest Writer Tolu Ogunlesi bids farewell

Nordic Africa Institute Guest Writer Tolu Ogunlesi of Nigeria bid farewell to the Nordic region after three intensive months. Read his reflections [here](#).

Travel scholarships - deadline 15 January 2009

Some 30–40 scholars associated with Nordic universities, colleges and research institutions are sponsored annually for research trips to Africa. Next application deadline 15 January. Read

more about travel scholarships [here](#).



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