

# Safeguarding human rights : opportunities and challenges for NGOs involved in the democratisation of communication

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## **Safeguarding Human Rights: Opportunities and Challenges for NGOs involved in the Democratisation of Communication**

*'In Germany, the Nazis first came for the communists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for trade unionists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Catholic. Then they came for me...and by that time, there was no one to speak up for anyone' (Martin Niemoeller, Pastor, German Evangelical Lutheran Church)*

In a sense this quotation sums up the very real dilemmas that exist in the relationship between communication and human rights. The right to hold opinions, speak up and speak for underlies the philosophy of Article 19, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). But the UDHR and similar human rights documents do not often recognise the fact that 'speaking' takes place in context and that it is, as such, not only a moral imperative, but also a political act. It is fundamentally based on choices, options, priorities and interests. A close friend of mine who works with a human rights NGO in India, the People's Union for Civil Liberties, has spent a good part of his time this year working on a petition aimed at getting a reprieve for those accused in the assassination of the late prime minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. The position that he has taken on this issue illustrates the option of adopting a moral stance on capital punishment. It is clearly against the view that favours an eye for an eye. The stance that he has taken goes against the grain of received political discourse. It illustrates the point that any given action/stance on human rights is value based, linked to particular understandings of the world, to notions of right and wrong and to understandings of the consequences of transgressing the bounds of 'moral society'. Human rights speak, in other words, is constrained by each of our locations in a social universe in which knowledge and power are intimately related. This whole is maintained by rules, spoken and unspoken.

The safeguarding of human rights in these given circumstances is not an easy option because there are any number of caveats, loop holes and political-economic pressures that are frequently invoked resulting in the derailment of principles and the dilution of international and national laws and agreements. This reality is best exemplified by the fact that Western democracies, who are among the most vociferous supporters of human rights standards, are often selective in their support for human



rights and often make it a condition for trade and aid. There is also a sense in which the business of human rights today is a kind of fashion. As the English barrister Geoffrey Robertson (1999: xx) has pointed out in the preface to his book *Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*, "...In a world where virtue is no longer its own reward, there are plenty of human rights prizes, many funded by corporations exposed for exploiting the poor, awarded to dinner jacketed lawyers, journalists and politicians who have never had to risk their careers in a course perceived by national authorities as subversive. The UN cheapens the human rights cause by recruiting voguish but vapid models and pop stars as 'goodwill ambassadors' while transnational corporations make it more expensive by hiring accountants to produce 'ethical auditing' reports...to show that the good business they do in Third World countries is business that is good." He adds that while "...it would be churlish to decry the fashionability of human rights", it would also be "premature to think that...the struggle to have them enforced...has in any sense been won." However, in spite of the politics, compromises and the general air of cynicism, we cannot but continue to build a world system based on human responsibilities for human rights.

This presentation will address the issue of safeguarding human rights from the perspective of NGOs. I will not pretend to speak on behalf of all NGOs. My comments will be based on the observations that I have made while working for a specific NGO, i.e. the WACC. This paper deals with the following issues: the politics of mediated human rights, the relationships between mediated human rights agendas and NGO priorities, new technologies and human rights, and the need for effective strategies for NGOs in the context of safeguarding human rights. The paper takes the view that human rights can never be an either/or sort of issue, but that it must include as its remit the diverse causes of human suffering. It argues that both NGOs and the media not only need to redouble their efforts to protect human rights but that they also need to play a role in extending that universe so that it becomes more inclusive.

### **Human Rights Reporting: Mediated Particulars**

How does one safeguard human rights in a mediated world? This is a relevant but difficult question that does not lend itself to easy answers. While the media rank among the central definers of reality, they are not the only definers of reality. The educational system and religion along with the family also play a role in providing us with frames of reference. All these institutions are influenced by society and in turn influence society. However, it can be argued that in the context of our times, the media do play a pre-eminent role in defining public agendas. To most of



us the media are a prime source of information about human rights as much as it is about all things relevant and irrelevant. How we understand and respond to human rights stories in both a political and moral sense is conditioned to some extent by the stories we hear, see and read in the media. All media impose a certain dominant representation of the facts regarding any given human rights story, stories that are to some extent framed to elicit a limited range of responses.

Having said that, it would seem that television, because of its ubiquity plays a primary role in the interpretation and mediation of human rights. Human rights stories reported on television rarely go beyond the reporting of the factual and the pursuit of the verifiable. In other words, one can say that television is ill-equipped to deal with the full story because of the nature of the medium and its location within a specific political economy of production. One could also argue that the emotional response made by viewers to some stories compensates for the fact that the politics of reception rarely provokes expressions of righteous anger or moral guilt. We have become, thanks to the media's unceasing pursuit of bad news, adept at absorbing, filtering and making news palatable. In other words we have become desensitized.

Television reception is a grammar that we learn. Television imposes a certain distance between the event and the viewer. And news proximity often defines the nature of the response to events. To most viewers in say a small city in Southern India, images from Rwanda and Kosovo, as much as those of caste clashes in Central India, were in all probability merely seen, not digested, and were perhaps dismissed with a fatalistic shrug and/or by switching to another channel. On the other hand it is possible that a story that is locally relevant, may elicit a range of responses at odds with the preferred interpretation. One can also argue that television, at least occasionally massages, as it were, our own attitudes to human rights. But in general, it provides a limited take on what are often complex stories. The French intellectual Baudrillard's (1994:67) remarks on 'catastrophe' as content from the South can also be used as an analogy to describe the way in which stories on human rights are appropriated and used by global networks. "The South" as he says "is a natural producer of raw materials, the latest of which is catastrophe. The North, for its part, specialises in the reprocessing of raw materials and hence also in the reprocessing of catastrophe."

Human rights reporting is, in other words, complicated at the best of times. Any given media text reflects many layers of overlapping interests and may illustrate the position on human rights taken by that particular



media channel. In other words the text might well reveal a lot more. Let me deal briefly with a concrete example of such a ‘revelation’ by asking you to turn your kind attention to an editorial that I came across in *The Guardian*, a daily newspaper in the UK with pretensions to a liberal-left agenda. It is entitled “Howard’s Way: East Timor has made waves for Australia” although after reading it you might be forgiven for wanting to change it to “Orientalism Revisited: History Lessons for a Wayward Continent” or even plain “Rule Britannia” in the best traditions of British tabloid journalism. It is illustrative of the international politics of human rights reporting. The editorial is on events in East Timor, more specifically of the British intervention as part of the peacekeeping force in restoring human rights in East Timor. But its sub-texts are no less revealing - the larger lessons for Australia for cosyng up to Asian despots and their Asian values, a reminder of the duty of Australians to the Queen, to their heritage and roots, and so on. Let me pick out some of the choice phrases used. “164 British soldiers might change the course of history”, “the possibility” that these actions will crucially sway the decision on “whether to retain the Queen as head of state”, the “racist criticism of some of Australia’s ‘Asian allies’” who “have given Australia a sharp reminder of who, when the chips are down, their true friends are”, a “crisis that had reaffirmed some home truths” that “Australia was not an Asian nation...but a western nation in Asia”, policy based on “our values” meaning extension of “trade and other links but not at the expense of basic principles such as democracy and human rights” and so on.

You can savour the hidden nuances of Imperial angst in this editorial in your own good time but let me briefly deal with some of the larger lessons of this story to the communication of human rights. That the human rights of the East Timorese have been compromised along with that of the Tibetans and the Kashmiris is no longer a matter for debate. But surely these are not merely examples of intransigent nations and their medieval minds. Surely the human rights of the East Timorese cannot be de-linked from US foreign policy, and/or the economic interests of British Aerospace as much as from an analysis of the colonial aspirations of Indonesia? What is conveyed through an international news item on East Timor – the plain fact of suffering conveyed through images with a minimum of text? Or stories of suffering, its history, its causes in all its embarrassing starkness? What, in other words, is the intent of such stories? How do such stories reinforce and tally with NGO responses to such events?



It would seem from the above story that human rights reporting is as much about what is said as it is about what is left unsaid. Consider, for example the deafening media silence on Iraq. There is, by the few accounts that have been filed, a catastrophe in the making of epic proportions in that country – thousands of children dying because of lack of medicines, born with deformities, a massive rise in the incidence of cancers as a result of the presence of depleted uranium in the environment and the food cycle, and so on. While we should be grateful for every story reported in the media on human rights, why is it that some stories are reported and not others? The absence of such stories in the world's media points to the fact that human rights reporting is not by any stretch of the imagination interest-free. The inability of the world's media to see the larger picture of human rights is a tacit acknowledgement that not every life is precious and worthy of being safeguarded. Representation like speaking is always a political act. It needs to be analysed within a context in which meanings are linked to real interests, political, economic, civilisational.

NGOs involved in human rights related work and as members of civil society are, to some extent, in a better position to enlarge the debate on human rights, to mobilise public opinion, to educate the public and to lobby for change precisely because such aims are generic to most if not all of these institutions. However NGOs, like the media, are not neutral institutions. NGOs occupy prime space in the landscape of human rights and as a result they are not immune to pressures that stem from their own location in the international political economy of human rights and/or pressures from mediated agendas.

The story on East Timor that has been alluded to is illustrative of the salience of and the way in which a particular epistemology of human rights and interpretative frameworks are kept in the public eye by global media. I would argue that the mission of media NGOs that are involved in protecting and extending the communicative basis of human rights is also, to some extent, coloured and affected by this dominant episteme since public agendas are liable to be shaped by that which is present in the media. Let me try and explain that last statement. The world's dominant understanding of human rights is linked to its violation, to specific, explicit instances of its violation. Ask any middle class person anywhere about the nature of human rights and he or she would respond by referring to terms such as 'abuse', 'violence', 'torture', 'brutality', 'death squads', 'summary justice', 'imprisonment', 'custodial deaths' often linked to the use of force by the army, police and para-military forces to silence, subdue and cow people into submission. No doubt all



these terms are often used to illustrate the gross violations of human rights. They describe the use of unlawful and excessive force to intimidate, persuade, silence. These are in a sense key words that distinguish human rights reporting in the media and consequentially our own understanding of what human rights is from what it is not.

Most of us in this room will probably concur with the view that Pol Pot, Pinochet (although Mrs Thatcher would think otherwise) and Baby Doc Duvalier each have a dubious record with respect to human rights. This shared view exists because it is mediated public knowledge. We know about fundamentalists, paedophiles, manic generals, and serial abusers because they have been exposed. The liberal media does play an important and vital role in highlighting human rights failings and shortcomings, whether it be of an international kind involving correspondences between the military regime in Nigeria and multinational corporations such as Shell, or local shortcomings – such as that of custodial deaths of black inmates in UK prisons or aboriginal detainees in Australian prisons.

The WACC project portfolio includes numerous human rights media projects – for instance video projects for education and lobbying by Karen groups living on the Thai border, a film about the late Chilean musician Victor Jara, radio projects in Rwanda meant to counter ethnic broadcasting, net-training for women who live in the context of fundamentalist politics such as in Chad, and so on. All these projects are linked to cases of suffering, immediate, identifiable and public. We are all aware of the terrible happenings that took place in Rwanda. We are aware of the effects of Female Genital Mutilation(FGM) on the lives of women in parts of Africa and Asia. It is public knowledge because of the fact that it was extensively reported by the world's media. However, and in spite of the importance of such reports, one could argue that such reports rather unwittingly lead to the making of an identifiable, legitimate public corpus of knowledge on human rights. Consequentially, all that is not reported and therefore not in the public eye or those stories that have been categorised differently tend to fall outside of the purview of human rights.

### **The Media and Human Rights: Enlarging its Scope**

My immediate interest however is related to issues related to human rights that are not public knowledge, that are difficult to connect with precisely because the links have not been made, people have not been mobilised and educated, or because the issues have been categorised



differently, pigeon-holed by the media, academy and policy-makers. And of the consequences of this for our own understanding of these issues.

Let me try and provide some illustrations. The globalisation of poverty is an unfortunate but real consequence of economic globalisation. The Asian economic crisis, as we are only too aware, has merely accentuated the growth of poverty in this region. We are all aware of the dire warnings on global poverty that have been communicated in and through the 1999 UNDP Human Development Report. And yet, we rather doggedly refuse to see the connections between systems, structures and poverty. The growing impact of the WTO's remit on local conditions and life chances is often seen as a trade issue by the media, when what is at stake is the very survivability of local ecological and life systems. Shouldn't issues related to poverty, the growing gaps between the rich and the poor, the corporate expendability of all those who cannot take part in the market, the steady withdrawal of public support for the poor resulting in the bare survival of millions of people against considerable odds also be considered within the purview of human rights? The fact remains that more people die from the steady consequences of immiseration and pauperisation than as victims of direct violence inflicted by the state or the armed forces.

A news feature in one of the English broadsheets on the deaths of a few hundred people in Warangal District in the state of Andhra Pradesh as a direct consequence of crop failure points to the kind of human rights issues that needs to become part of the agenda of global media. In that report the Indian scientist-activist Vandana Shiva(1999: 5) pointed out the consequences of the turn to cotton mono-culture, the conversion of "... Warangal from a mixed farming system based on millets, pulses and oil seeds to a mono-culture of hybrid cotton" that has resulted in "more than 500 suicides" ... "in one district alone" in the year 1998. She adds that "Thirteen more (suicides) were reported this year because of the failure of the cotton seed." This story was routinely dealt with by some media in India although in terms of international exposure I am fairly certain that it must have received the bare minimum of column space if at all. Similarly one can make a case that AIDS be treated as a human rights rather than merely a human interest or health issue given the fact that the toll that it has taken can be related to the lack of political and economic will to confront it as a priority concern. The issue has only belatedly been given the importance it deserved as a research priority. Slow death does not make good copy. One of the problems with respect to this larger landscape of human rights is that it reminds us that complexity is a fact of life. Complexity however, is not a favourite word



in the context of reporting or mediating stories. In a media context dominated in many instances by the strength of the image, all that lies beyond the image might as well not exist.

### **Media Agendas and Human Rights NGOs**

This culture of reporting and non-reporting in turn affects the nature and objectives of NGOs on the ground that the media play an important role in creating demand for services. If one were to look around in any part of the world today, there are a great variety of NGOs who deal with internationally recognised developmental concerns. For example, Human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International are primarily involved in dealing with cases related to the explicit violation of human rights. Index on Censorship and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange Clearing House (IFEX) are involved in informing the world of attacks against freedom of expression, in particular those against journalists. These NGOs are often specific and sectoral in their work. There are numerous others, for instance NGOs who work on issues related to the environment, indigenous people, women, refugees, population, nutrition, health, human rights, specific segments of labour – for instance fisher folk, rag pickers and so on. These specific concerns have been adopted as the bread and butter of a variety of NGOs whose interests vary from the charitable to the radical. More often than not, sectors that have attained critical mass are backed by specific UN agencies, government departments and networks.

However, the process of attaining critical mass in any given area is a protracted one. A human rights related concern becomes legitimate when it is backed up by public opinion and the media. It is also dependent on the relative salience and presence of the issue among concerned lobbies in the West who account for a large chunk of the funding for human rights projects located in the South. This has its own pitfalls. A little over twenty years ago, the more radical rural-based NGO outfits in India had portfolios that dealt with issues related to rural poverty in all its complexity. Today there are very few of these groups around as funders increasingly link funding to designated areas and sectoral concerns. I am not saying that such trends are wholly negative. There is a very good case to continue sectoral support. But not at the expense of integrated projects that are involved in multi-sectoral approaches to human rights and human development. Sectoral approaches, backed by sectoral constituencies tend to perpetuate essentialist myths. It is often the case that sectoralists ignore the need for broad, multi-sectoral alliances. So it boils down typically to Dalit versus non-Dalit interests, men versus women, environmentalism in terms of conservation per se and not as a



people/nature issue and so on. A thousand different projects on the environment in any given country do not necessarily have to lead to qualitative changes or sustainability over the long run. They may create greater awareness on a given issue but the inability to stress the integrated nature of development often results in attenuated solutions.

### **Human Rights, NGOs and Cyberspace**

I would like to turn now to the use of cyberspace by NGOs in the safeguarding of human rights. Cyberspace, the home of the new media, is an exciting domain and there any number of examples from around the world of people and organisations who have tapped its potential in the pursuit of human rights. There is for example a story of a woman from Chad who had attended a WACC workshop on the use of e-mail for networking that was held in Francophone Africa. When she returned home after the workshop she was informed that a *fatwa* had been issued against her by the local mullahs for her stand against FGM. She used her new found skills to alert the women who had attended the workshop, who in turn alerted the global women's networks who in turn deluged the office of the President of Chad with e-mails and faxes. This pressure forced him to act on the mullahs who, consequently had to revoke the *fatwa*. Human rights NGOs use the gifts of cyberspace in a variety of ways – the use of e-mail-based alert systems, networking, encryption training for those at risk and living in government controlled environments, the use of e-mail in campaigning, and so on. There are any number of stories from Belgrade to Indonesia of how concerned groups, particularly students, have used new media to alert the world to goings on in their country that needed urgent international action.

There is a critical challenge to NGOs involved in human rights work in a cyber world. The challenge is the following: There is a sense in which we live in a world that is dominated by the dictum “Anything is possible”, a dictum that has been fuelled by the spectacular interventions made by information-based processes at every level of society and human endeavour. Cyberspace as the last frontier beyond which there are no worlds left to conquer is no longer a dream that is limited to science fiction enthusiasts. We all live that world. This myth of progress guaranteed by technology ties in well with the aspirational vision of NGOs, particularly as it is related to its role in the context of global social movements. NGOs are, of course, the backbone and nerve centres of such movements. Alberto Melucci (1996: 188), an expert on social movements defines these movements as “...the bearers of the hidden potential for change; they are sensors for forming social needs and they announce new possibilities for the rest of society.” These possibilities



include, in an age of cyberspace, opportunities for forms of “transborder participatory democracy”, a world in which nature and culture live in a symbiotic relationship, where planetary consciousness reigns supreme and the values of simplicity and conviviality replace the obsession with efficiency and profit and global citizenship dispenses the need for nation states.

Another enthusiast, Richard Falk (1993: 39) is equally ecstatic about the potential of social movements “...it is identified as globalisation from below and consists of an array of transnational global forces animated by the environmental concerns, human rights, hostility to patriarchy, and a vision of human community based on the unity of diverse cultures seeking an end to poverty, oppression, humiliation and collective violence.” This utopian vision of social movements aligned to the vision of the new media has a potent hold on some people. Stefanik (1993:272) concludes that this symbiosis has led to “..a revolution of consciousness. Electronic linkages among social movements around the world reveal universal values of simplicity and co-operation, respect for Mother Earth, and concerns for generations.” He goes on to add that “..computer networking tools...are already helping to cultivate a planetary consciousness in millions of people around the world.”

This sort of enthusiasm might precisely be the problem. The creation of planetary consciousness does not necessarily equate with societal change. UNDP statistics on global poverty seem to suggest that the gaps between the rich and poor are continuing to grow in spite of the many interventions made by generations of technologies over the last few decades. I remember reading an article in one of the issues of *Cultural Survival Quarterly* on the use of the internet by indigenous networks in Latin America. It lamented the fact that while electronic networking helped create world-wide sympathy for the plight of indigenous communities, their local situation had remained the same. In other words, the story reminds us of both the possibilities of the new media in the context of networking, co-ordination and campaigning and its limitations, specifically that it is not an all-sufficient substitute for the real sweat and blood struggles that need to be waged for change to result. The challenge for NGOs is to be realistic and pragmatic about building another world within the context of this world with its pressures, illusions and promises of liberation, to use technology but not succumb to its logic, to recognise that wisdom as the fruit of experience is the sum of our encounters with reality out there rather than the result of mediated knowledge.



## **Safeguarding Human Right: NGO Strategies**

The need for pragmatism does not imply that we merely rely on the art of the possible to deal with the given routines of ordering our world. I would like to think that to be pragmatic is to treat the facts of history systematically, in context and in the light of circumstances. In other words, in the context of human rights, the cultivation of such an attitude helps us to consider the 'what ought to be' in place of the 'what is'. It centres dynamism at the core of human rights. It helps us deal with the many pieces of the framework within which 'speaking' occurs. Pragmatism implies that NGOs get involved in the areas that presently do not fall under the purview of 'official' human rights. This, I agree, is easier said than done. Let me sketch out the briefest of possible strategies for NGOs in the business of dealing with communications and human rights.

**Education:** In the light of what I have tried to communicate, the need for education is absolutely central to the understanding of an integrated approach to human rights. NGOs involved in communication as a human rights issue do need to educate their constituencies that human rights is not about disparate issues that can be pared down to many essentials but that rather it is about all that affects the life chances of a person or community. NGOs may also need to create a new vocabulary that communicates the need and worth of extensive approaches to human rights, to clarify the interfaces between technology and human rights so that we are able to understand the differences between what can be done through the mediation of technology and human mediation and to make low-intensity human rights crisis worthy of media attention. A related concern is the need for human rights education to address the continuities between victims and aggressors – education in that Freirean, Gandhian sense.

A related but important task is the education of donors. In a context in which 'partnership' is the preferred form of relationship between a donor and a client, there are more possibilities for two-way communication flows and hence for education to be seen as a two-way process. There are a number of prevailing policy myths that need to be challenged, for instance that human rights in Japan or Australia cannot be supported because these are first world countries who are assumed to have the required mechanisms in place to deal with human rights; that sectoral issues that may make sense in traditionally democratic environments may not be adequate in contexts in which life is still resolutely relational; that the impetus to opt for short-term, result-oriented approaches does



not necessarily square with the time-frame of integrated approaches; the value of integrated approaches along with sectoral ones, and so on.

**Integration:** Integrated projects do have the potential to deal with human rights issues as they affect people living in the context of diverse pressures from different sources. WACC supports a number of key community radio networks in Haiti. One of them, the Centre for Research and Action for Development (CRAD), is involved in an extensive development programme that includes areas such as education, health, legal aid and agriculture. The community radio stations that they have set up are each managed by representatives belonging to particular local platforms such as women's issues, agriculture and so on. The net result of this approach is that the human rights objectives of the community radio stations, i.e. support of the right to communicate, is not divorced from the right to land, the right to accountable public services, the right to education and so on. Admittedly, these kinds of institutions are increasingly rare. It is a reflection of funding interests and priorities. They do, however point to another way of dealing with human rights concerns.

**Advocacy:** A critical concern in our increasingly wired world is to balance mediated forms of advocacy with other types of advocacy. To take the example of Greenpeace. They have on a number of occasions opted for direct action on key environmental issues – the telegenic confrontations between their boats and French warships in the Pacific, the Brentspar episode in the North Sea and others. They have often deluged an offending MNC, such as Shell, with faxes, e-mails and media blitzes. This continues to be a part of Greenpeace's strategy. However the ever present danger in this is that 'publicity' occupies centre stage and determines the conditions of practice resulting in sound-bite solutions to complex problems. In other words, human rights NGOs need to balance the manner in which they make strategic uses of the media along with the more difficult, daily, long-term, on-the-ground efforts directed towards the creation of an environment that is supportive of human rights.

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### **Howard's way: East Timor has made waves for Australia**

The despatch of British Gurkhas has undoubtedly helped quell the violence in East Timor. By all accounts, they are performing a difficult task in exemplary fashion. Their deployment as part of the Australian-led international intervention force has also redeemed, to a limited extent "the government's deeply flawed" Indonesia policy. But few could have imagined that the arrival in Dili of a mere 164 British soldiers might change the course of history. Yet there is a very real possibility that Australians, who decide on November 6 whether to retain the Queen as head of state or become a republic, will be crucially swayed by Britain's swift support for their troops. Polls were already predicting a close referendum result. Now the dangers inherent in the operation, Indonesia's enmity, and the ugly, racist criticism emanating from some Asian "allies" have given Australians a sharp reminder of who, when the chips are down, their true friends are.

The possible rout of republicanism is not the only unexpected ramification of the Timor emergency in Australia. Prime Minister John Howard, a conservative monarchist, told parliament last week that the crisis had reaffirmed some awkward "home truths". Australia was not an Asian nation, as some of his predecessors had contended, but a western nation in Asia, he said. Its policy "must be based on a clear sense of the national interest and on our values." This meant maintaining trade and other regional links, but not at the expense of basic principles, such as

democracy and human rights. As the leading regional power, by default, in the Timor crisis, “we have got on with the job of being ourselves.”

The “Howard Doctrine” represents perhaps the biggest shift in Australia's debate about its identity and role since the days of Gough Whitlam almost 30 years ago. In Mr Howard's views on the need to re-emphasise ties with the US and Europe, Asian leaders claim to detect a reviving colonialism. “We don't want to see any country appointing itself protector of this region,” the Malaysian deputy prime minister said. In truth, Canberra does not seek such a role - but if a more confident Australia is now reassessing its compromises with “Asian values” Asian countries which prevaricated, ducked, and appeased throughout the Timor crisis have only themselves to blame. They waited for someone else to tackle their problem. Luckily for them, Australia. (and the Gurkhas) obliged.

**(The Guardian, Sept. 29, 1999, p.25)**