

Dewesternising media

by Maria Way

In 2004 a group of people from the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) at the University of Westminster (London) started to talk about the possibility of a conference that would take a step into a different direction – Africa.

In view of the situation in Zimbabwe, the first conference focused on the Media in Zimbabwe and was held in 2005. So successful was this conference that CAMRI decided to begin a series of conferences and events and so we met again in March this year to debate “The Media and Social Change in Africa”.

Presenters and participants came from many countries in Africa, the US, Canada and Europe. As well as academics, there were publishers, broadcasters and journalists and representatives of NGOs, the BBC and government departments. There was an extraordinarily wide range of themes: African film and broadcasting; media coverage of the Aids crisis (both in and outside Africa); music and literature; media training and professional practice; textual and visual analysis; freedom of speech and human rights.

As might be expected, the same comments came up again and again. There was particular emphasis on the tendency of Western media only to consider Africa in terms of political, ecological or humanitarian crises and disasters. Other recurring topics were the urban/rural divide and also the tendency to infantilise the African in media reporting.

Some presenters brought attention to problematics that are often ignored in the West, such as the poor pay and resource poverty of African journalists. The good news came in papers that demonstrated the success of media that have become indigenised – such as “Nollywood”, the Nigerian film industry, and

innovative radio programming which, as a result of cheaper and more useable technologies, is becoming increasingly important as a medium.

Those who participated at the conference were an interesting mix of people who were seeking information in regard to this new, developing, exciting academic field of study, together with those already working, researching or studying the area from a variety of angles.

Since the team was told repeatedly that this conference was both timely and successful, it has agreed to host another conference in 2007. Its likely title is: “The Media and Democracy in Africa”. Selected papers from the 2006 conference will, it is hoped, be published in an edited book for which a publisher is being sought. CAMRI also announced that it would be bringing a new journal to birth: *The Journal of African Media Studies*. The first issue of this journal will be published in September 2006 and will contain some of the papers from the 2006 conference. ■

- For more information about the *Journal of African Media Studies*, or about future conferences and events in this African Media series, contact Dr Winston Mano by mail at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, School of Media, Arts and Design, the Harrow Campus of the University of Westminster, Harrow, Middx. HA1 3TP, or by email on manow@wmin.ac.uk.
- The next CAMRI conference “Internationalising Media Studies” will be on the 15th and 16th September in London. To attend contact Dr Mano or Professor Daya Thussu (thussud@wmin.ac.uk).

World's editors to meet in Cape Town

The 60th World Newspaper Congress and the 14th World Editors' Forum will be held for the first time in Africa from 3 – 6 June 2007, in Cape Town. The annual summit of the world's press will be hosted by the Newspaper Association of South Africa. Issues to be addressed will include challenges to press freedom, the impact of electronic media on newspaper sales and new technologies that will shape the newspaper of the future.

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