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# The network society, power and the print media in post-apartheid South Africa: the case of media contestation in Durban for environmental justice

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## Abstract

Although post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed constraints on press freedom by the ruling party, there is limited understanding of how media discourse is contested and constructed by diverse social actors. This article is interested in the extent to which various social actors in the Durban network society, such as civil society, corporations and the state, shape public information and perception in their own interests regarding environmental discourse. Empirical evidence presents viewpoints from key social actors and a local case study. The article compares the urban regional and case study analyses, and highlights the complex relationship between various social actors and the numerous avenues used to shape public information and perception. While corporations causing pollution mainly serve as barriers to civil society using the media effectively to highlight environmental injustices (e.g. through corporate media sponsorships, media intimidation), this is further complicated by limitations within civil society and media outlets to influence media discourse (e.g. limited financial/human resources, individualized leadership, media remuneration issues). Alongside these limitations, and the power of government and corporations, the influence of media discourse and perceptions regarding industrial risks are also dependent upon successful horizontal and vertical networking between civil society actors.

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civil society, corporations, Durban, environmental justice, network society, power, print media

The media are normally an integral force in a democracy. They are required to watch over parliament, government and the judiciary, to investigate whether corporate and financial interests respect the law, to raise concerns about environmental pollution and to engage in conflict prevention and resolution (Barnett, 2003; Botma, 2011; Reljic, 2004). One would therefore think that the post-apartheid South African media would critically scrutinize the activities of the state and corporations in a way that was previously impossible because of authoritarian restrictions (Barnett, 2003). Unfortunately, the responsibilities of the media operating in the new democracy have been understood differently by various players such as civil society, corporations and government, regarding whether the media should serve the 'public' or other interests (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005), with multiple social actors competing for control over media power to shape discourse (Duncan, 2003). For example, the African National Congress's (ANC) engagement with economic globalization during the transition has resulted in some levels of control of the print media, rather than its expected opening up (Duncan, 2003; Jacobs, 2002,). Globalization of the media has had the effect of constraining the independent status of media to the detriment of local opinions, since a globalized media system is not grounded within a local democratic context (Phiri and Powers, 2001). The government may therefore clash with the media (and civil society) over sensitive issues that have been made public, while media outlets and civil society may also object to media restrictions imposed by the state (Reljic, 2004). According to Barnett (2003), there is also the question of whether the post-apartheid media has provided new opportunities for innovative forms of political action by various social actors.

Although the South African media has provided significant opportunities for marginalized political actors to exert influence and assert their presence in the public realm (Barnett, 2003), the ruling elite (and corporations) more commonly regard the media as an enemy to be constrained, limited and co-opted (Daniels, 2012). A case in point has been the ANC's proposed Protection of Information Bill and Media Appeals Tribunal, which instigated fiery debate among civil society, journalists and media scholars on the one hand, and government officials and corporations on the other. These signal a potential reversal of press freedom since the bill makes it a criminal offence to publish classified information considered to affect the national interest (Yin, 2011). For example, on 23 January 2012, civil society and community organizations in Durban challenged governmental restrictions on how people make information on air pollution publicly available, and the criminalizing of such actions via the Protection of Information Bill. They noted that community organizations that conduct independent monitoring of air quality by polluters such as Engen, Shell and ArcelorMittal, and that advise the public via media releases of the results of such analyses, faced a R5m fine and/or five years' imprisonment for a first conviction of this offence. They would also be held liable for any loss or damage as a result of the offence (Centre for

Environmental Rights, 2012). Similarly, in 2011 journalists drew up a declaration against the Protection of Information Bill, stating that it was a threat to their constitutional rights of access to information and freedom of expression. Journalists stated their dedication to serving the public interest by helping to hold those with power to account, and continuing in the duty to report on issues highlighted by whistleblowers who helped the media expose wrongdoing in the public interest (Times Live, 2011). According to the Safundi (*Journal of South African and American Studies*) (2013), the bill profoundly limits the media's capacity to expose corruption, and the state has been engaging in intimidation of journalists in a variety of ways, from arbitrary imprisonment to wasteful lawsuits. It is then understandable why South Africa has dropped down the World Press Freedom Index from 31st in 2005, to 43rd in 2007, and now to 52nd in 2013, although the country did move up to position 42nd in 2014. Unfortunately, the media tribunal handling complaints against the media is also not accountable to the public, but to parliament, with the majority of members belonging to the ANC (Yin, 2011).

According to Duncan (2003) the ANC has not crafted measures within its media policy to promote diversity. Its preoccupation is with serving its neoliberal agenda and corporate partnerships in defence of bureaucratic political power. For Durban specifically, post-apartheid economic and planning policies and related Spatial Development Initiatives aim to situate South Africa within the global economy, with areas such as South Durban identified as a Spatial Development Zone for industrial expansion (Scott, 2003). During the Apartheid era, and since 1994, South Durban has continued to be heavily industrialized and one of the most polluted areas in southern Africa (Nriagu et al., 1999). Environmental and community activists have explicitly pursued a strategy of gaining media attention for their concerns surrounding industrial pollution in the area. They have used the media to 'shame' industries and to apply pressure on local, provincial and national political and policy elites (Barnett, 2003). Peak media coverage of pollution and health impacts in South Durban was in September 2000, with investigative news stories in Durban's leading daily paper, *The Mercury*. The 'Poison in Our Air' series of stories, by journalist Tony Carnie, provided unprecedented coverage of local community concerns over industrial risks (Barnett and Svendsen, 2002). However, although groups within civil society have turned their attention to the media as a sphere of political action, corporations have also erected media barriers against such reporting to disguise malpractice (Leonard, 2009). Although media coverage in South Durban has been visible due to its importance as a hub of national economic growth (Barnett and Svendsen, 2002), there is generally limited understanding of how media discourse is contested and constructed by diverse social actors, especially surrounding environmental justice struggles. An understanding of the policy economy and the collusion of corporations in restricting the media is also crucial to unravelling how power and ideology is perpetuated or subverted (Krabill, 2001).

While not ignoring the importance of broadcast and social media, this article focuses mainly on print media as this is the largest section of media in South Africa (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). The print media is also more easily accessible than broadcasting media for vulnerable communities to highlight local concerns (although it is acknowledged that there is still a need to broaden the availability of newspapers to under-served areas). As the ANC's communications policy document (ANC,

2012) highlights, the broadcast media has been constrained in its ability to respond to the needs of the people – especially the rural and urban poor. However, there are about 100 authentic community-run newspapers around the country, mostly in urban areas, ranging from regular weekly papers to sporadic newsletters distributed by hand (Hadland, 2007). A total of about 940 million copies of commercial, local and community newspapers per annum circulate in South Africa. Provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal account for about 72% of the newspapers circulating nationally, and 69% of the total newspaper readership – a total of 6.6 million people (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). According to Duncan (2003) some of the most cutting-edge journalism appears in the commercial print media. It is hoped that the focus on print media will serve to open up debate about competition for power over the media system in its entirety on the part of various social actors, and about environmental justice.

Before proceeding, it is important to highlight that the print media is currently unevenly controlled and dominated. According to the ANC communication policy document (ANC, 2012) and Hadland (2007), the print sector is still dominated by four big players, namely Naspers (international multimedia group), Avusa (a South Africa media and entertainment company), Caxton (a South African printing and publishing company) and the Independent Group (which owns 14 newspaper groups in South Africa). These companies dominate the market for printing, distribution and advertising, resulting in anti-competitive behaviour, with a number of small commercial and alternative community print media facing the challenge of sustainability. However, Botma (2011) and Barnett (2003) also note that the alternative press weakened at the end of apartheid, with the ANC failing to maintain and strengthen a popular media voice at the grassroots. Some of the dominant print media players have links with multinational corporations with a history of corporate pollution. For example, Naspers' website reveals one of its directors also serving on boards of companies such as ArcelorMittal (previously known as Iscor). Within the new democratic disposition, the Steel Valley residents in Vanderbylpark claim that the industrial giant continues (as it did during apartheid) to pollute their water, degrade their environment and impose health impacts on their families (Dempster, 2002; SimplyGreen, 2011). For example, 40% of a 100 residents who previously underwent medical tests had traces of cadmium in their blood. Children suffered learning problems, chronic fatigue, memory loss and lung ailments (Macleod and Groenewald, 2005). Unfortunately, legal attempts by the local community to hold Iscor accountable were unsuccessful in 2003 due to the power of Iscor to inhibit campaigning actions (Cock, 2004). Corporations linked with media conglomerates question media reporting on industrial risks and the power relations thereof.

In light of the above, this article draws on Castells' (1997, 2000, 2004) theory of a 'network society' and power in networks (Castells, 2011), in which contestation over developmental and media processes is increasingly shaped not only by government but also by other interest groups who are 'in the network' (i.e. business, civil society interests). As Castells (2007) notes, there is an interplay between communication and power relationships in the network society, with the media becoming the social space where power is played out. The aim is not to engage in detailed debate on the network society and unfolding power structures but to examine its basic premises to support debate on media contestation for environmental justice. The article mainly focuses on contestation

of media power to influence environmental discourse in Durban. This comprises to some extent how civil society organizers influence the media, as well as the economic, political and media powers that may work against the mobilization of civil society to voice environmental justice concerns. The complex relationships between civil society, corporations, the state and the media in a network society are explored. This article is interested in the extent to which various social actors in the network seek to shape public information and perceptions in their own interests.

Within the network society, concerns over corporate malpractice at the grassroots can become flexibly decentralized by using media structures to advance local concerns. Here again, though, disparities in power and influence shape agendas for change. The media may push for alternative donor agendas (e.g. those of the corporations) as opposed to those of the grassroots. At the same time corporations may also intervene in national, provincial and local media spaces to influence discourse and power in their favour. Although the South African government still plays a role in shaping the mass media in a network society (Barnett, 1999), especially by expressing its demand for a media that is more efficient at delivering on the state's agenda (Hadland, 2007; Jacobs, 2002; Wasserman and de Beer, 2005; Yin, 2011), the centrality of corporations during the transition resulted in the restructuring of media stakeholders, producing an elite consensus based on the ideology of neoliberalism (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005).

For this article, two conceptual frameworks for civil society are used: local civil society (e.g. local leaders, grassroots) living within the affected region, and external civil society (e.g. non-governmental organizations – NGOs, media, academics) who do not necessarily reside in the affected region but who may provide support to local social actors (Leonard and Pelling, 2010). This article first examines literature on the network society and media power, and how various social actors seek to shape public information, including relations between the media, community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil society, to influence media power. The methodology will then be outlined, before presenting empirical results at the urban regional level and local case study (the Mondi incinerator campaign in South Durban) to illuminate more general theoretical arguments about power structures and the numerous avenues through which they seek to shape public information and perception. The article will finally engage in discussions and conclusions.

## **The network society and media power**

The concept of power has received limited attention in mass media (Cho, 2006), despite the power relationships defined within the space of communication (Castells, 2007). According to Castells (2011), processes of power making can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, the network society is characterized by communication flows and power relations between diverse social actors who increasingly shape the communication field and may impose their will on other social actors. This relates to 'networking power' by dominant groups (e.g. corporations) over those collectives or individuals who are excluded or under-represented in networks (e.g. local communities). Thus, power may operate by processes of exclusion/inclusion. Arsenault and Castells (2008) note how corporate actors can negotiate the power dynamics of communication

in the network society to serve their overarching business goals. This can lead to democratic deficits, such as inequalities of access, representation and ideological power (Carroll and Hackett, 2006).

Castells (2000) notes that the network society is the social structure made of nodes (e.g. composed of individuals, organizations or movements), which may or may not be united due to certain characteristics (e.g. values, ideas, visions). Castells (2011) also notes that the space of flows within the network society consists of the infrastructure of the network (e.g. print media) through which the nodes interact. Power may also result from the ability to control the connecting points (i.e. nodes) between various strategic networks by certain tactics (Arsenault and Castells, 2008). Jo and Kim (2004) provide an example of large corporations in South Korea that use their public relations departments to maintain regular communication channels and personal networks with members of the media to avoid unfavourable coverage of their business malpractice or connections with authoritarian government. Cho (2006) suggests that regular contact between reporters and sources helps to establish personal relationships, which may also lead to avoidance of harmful information about those who have become friends. Hamann and Acutt (2003) note that this may involve offering monetary gifts to journalists as bribes. Within the network society, corporations may seek to define the problem at hand as they see it and identify the relevant nodes to solve their problems, as these are crucial for determining power outcomes.

Despite the power of corporations and government within the network society, the media can act as channels for dialogue and interaction between citizens, creating awareness, solidarity and joint action to influence power (Forzley, 2003). There is a need for the media to incorporate the concerns of citizens about injustices they have encountered (Vatikiotis, 2005). Enzensberger (1974, in Vatikiotis, 2005) distinguishes between the '*repressive use of media*' (i.e. centrally controlled, one-way information flows) and '*emancipatory use of media*' (i.e. decentralized, collectively produced, promoting collective mobilization). In essence, the latter rejects the bureaucratization of media structures that prevents the media from assisting in social improvements and democratic change. Although relations between corporations and the media may work to influence power and hide environmental risks within the network, according to Barnett and Svendsen (2002) another important aspect of coverage of environmental issues is the quality of relationships between journalists, communities, activists and NGOs to also influence power. Thus, a central characteristic of the network society is that both the dynamics of domination and resistance to domination rely on network formation and network strategies of offence and defence for power control, either by forming separate networks and/or reforming existing networks (Castells, 2011). Thus it is useful to distinguish between democratization through the media to promote democratic goals and democratization of the media themselves (Carroll and Hackett, 2006).

Latakogomo (2012) notes that '*campaign journalism*' is an instrument that community newspapers can use effectively to bring them closer to communities they serve. Campaign journalism is when a newspaper or journalist takes up a community issue and follows it through with a desired objective. This can make a newspaper a critical part of democratic processes in the network. Keane (1998) notes that freedom of communication is impossible without networks of variously sized non-state (and non-corporate) communication

media. These media networks enable groups and individuals to define and express their various social identities. As Beck (1992) notes, the media creates opportunities to influence and has the power to define social problems and priorities. Dominant groups in the political system are confronted by cooperatively organized antagonists, with the 'definition-making power' of media-directed publicity (i.e. counter-power), which can essentially change the agenda of politics and power relations in networks.

## Methodology

Civil society and media challenges, including corporate influence over media reporting on industrial risks, were examined over several months as part of the author's larger PhD study (Leonard, 2009) in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The larger study examined civil society at the urban regional scale and its ability to perceive industrial risks and push grass-roots concerns towards local and provincial government and industry. The Mondi incinerator campaign explored in this article (which is one of three case studies covered in the larger study) was a civil society action aimed at halting further air pollution. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from social actors (i.e. local CBOs, community leaders/ representatives, external NGOs, academics, public legal institutions, independent consultants, faith-based organizations, international civil society actors, industry and government). A total of 46 interviews were conducted at the urban regional scale, with this article also drawing on 13 interviews for the Mondi campaign. Data collection did not necessarily aim to gather the views of those directly affected, but rather the views of key social actors in these specific events. For the data analysis, grounded theory and open coding were employed to identify themes. Common themes that emerged are examined below, although there are links and overlaps between the various themes. Results are first presented at the urban regional scale (i.e. social networking, resource imbalances and corporate intimidation of the media) before moving onto the Mondi campaign (i.e. social networking for media outreach, resources, Mondi intimidation of media structures). The results presented exemplify the tensions that work against the mobilization of media reporting on environmental injustices within the network society.

## Results: systemic analysis

### *Social networking: civil society / corporations and media relations*

There were limited links between civil society and the media addressing industrial risks. Within Durban, only a handful of civil society organizations (CSOs) utilized the media. Groups such as national environmental justice NGO groundWork (gW), the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) CBO and NGO Earth Life Africa (ELA) used the media on a continuous basis, and developed relationships with journalists. With gW, the media contacted gW as a form of campaign journalism, and gW also sent press releases to the media. The media also used gW to access grassroots actors (Interview, Sizwe Khanyile, 2007). SDCEA also networked with the media effectively, and both gW and SDCEA put the media in touch with the grassroots. According to Tony Carnie (Interview, 2007), environmental journalist for *The Mercury* newspaper:



SDCEA and gW, not just in South Durban, but with other areas of the province ... they ... point to issues, which need media scrutiny. While there is communication with the CBOs and NGOs, there is also direct communication with grassroots people in their home ...

Grassroots actors rarely took the initiative to reflectively contact the media, although respondents felt this had improved after 2002 (Interview, Rehana Dada, 2007, freelance journalist). Grassroots in South Durban were most active in networking and communicating with the media. As local South Durban newspaper editor of *The Rising Sun* Valene Govender (Interview, 2007) noted, most of the stories come from grassroots calling the media, amounting to about 15 calls a day. However, besides South Durban, grassroots generally did not access the media to highlight industrial risks (Interview, Dada, 2007). This was mainly because South Durban as highlighted is a major industrial development zone. More needed to be done to network with grassroots to gain access and communicate effectively with the media.

Besides some media contacting NGO gW, there were few examples of the media generally taking the initiative to contact grassroots actors for 'campaign journalism' on environmental justice issues. This may be an outcome of the small number of black journalists who can support grassroots to highlight industrial risks. As Carnie (Interview, 2007) further noted:

as black journalists gained experience ... they have left [the media] due to remuneration issues ... people ... either [move] into government communications or industry communications...

This movement of black journalists to government and industry has weakened contacts with grassroots and civil society actors. This lack of social integration with at-risk groups was compounded by a lack of understanding of environmental justice issues among journalists (Interview, Dada, 2007) and possibly also by increasing concentration in media ownership (Interview, Carnie, 2007). As Dada (Interview, 2007) noted, civil society needed to invest some energy in developing the quality of relationships with journalists interested in environmental justice issues who could assist in addressing environmental concerns.

Unfortunately, continual media coverage of industrial risks in South Durban has seen industry (i.e. Engen and Mondi) become less responsive towards civil society. As Mondi environmental manager, Glads Naylor (Interview, 2007) noted, the company communicates with journalists and newspapers, but out of the public eye. According to Alan Munn (Interview, 2007), sustainable business manager, Engen:

the media in this country ... aren't interested in the facts. They actually want to destroy industry ... so our approach ... is that we actually don't take on SDCEA and the public ... the newspapers have got nothing to report because they can't actually report on half a fight ... so our approach is we just ignore.... I learnt the technique of avoiding TV interviews as a technique of not responding. People aren't interested, so there isn't a discussion or a fight. If it does get aired, it's only five seconds as opposed to two minutes ...

The statement suggests that the South Durban community has used the media to put pressure on industry, which has caused some corporations to become less responsive to local

concerns. However media attention to pollution issues did to some extent result in improved local government enforcement (Interview, Carnie, 2007). As one local government official (eThekweni Municipality, Senior Environmental Officer, Rajesh Hooblall, interview, 2007) noted:

without that kind of media, without that kind of dialogue we would still be ... saying routine inspection, this factory is found to be satisfactory ...

### *Resource imbalances and corporate intimidation of the media*

There was an imbalance between civil society and corporations commanding differential resources for media coverage influencing power relations. There was a lack of civil society financial and human resources to work on increased media coverage to challenge industry on environmental risks. This was also due to the unattractiveness – as stories – of long-term pollution events or those without dramatic imagery fail to get adequate attention (Interview, Colvin, 2007). Corporations, on the other hand, had strong financial and public relations resources to influence media. The imbalance between civil society and corporations' influence over the media within the Durban network society was noted by former ELA Durban campaigner, Muna Lakhani (Interview, 2007):

we [civil society] don't have money for full page adverts like ... industry does, we don't have the money for public relations people, we don't have the money for doing the spin that industry is very good at, [but] the media with varying levels of success and commitment is a critical way in which to raise awareness about stuff ...

The print media was also described as being weak in placing pressure on industry because of the power of corporations to silence, intimidate or threaten local or regional journalists or outlets. According to Carnie (Interview, 2007):

Say a company like Engen, [or] Mondi ... if ... [the article is] not perceived well ... instead of coming to the journalists to register their protests, it's a kind of leap[ing] frog ... protest to the editor to say, we [are] wounded, Carnie is biased and he's one-sided and he doesn't give us a chance to respond properly. When that doesn't work, the leap[ing] ... goes further, to head office in Johannesburg ...

Local community newspapers were also threatened with the loss of corporate advertising and funding if negative stories were printed. This limited exposure of industrial risk impacting on local communities. As Govender (Interview, 2007), editor of local community newspaper *The Rising Sun* noted for South Durban:

our bigger clients include Engen ... SAPREF and Mondi. Now, I don't know if you know how community papers work? That our alliance will actually lie with the client, because our livelihood is money from advertising because we [are] free.... We have to shield them to an extent because our job is to protect ourselves.... An example of one that we had to leave out was a Mondi incident ... someone passed away and the family contacted us.... [I]nitially I would have attacked that story, but he [my boss] told me this is why I can't.... Mondi phoned

our boss and said, 'if you run that story I am pulling out all the advertising' ... and even now, we know there are certain things that we can't run, but we have to put it forward, so Mondi is immediately on the phone ...

However, despite media challengers, civil society in South Durban did successfully use the media to put pressure on industry. As Carnie (Interview, 2007) noted:

South Durban is a good example where civil society has put the issue of industrial risks ... firmly on the agenda.... [I]t has been strong in focusing initially on the two petrol refineries and Mondi paper mill ... through synergies with the media ... raising the profile of health issues and elevating it from a sort of a smells-and-nuisances problem to the lives of people and children and workers.... Durban has acted as an example, a case study for ... reducing pollution in other industrial hotspots ...

The tactic of using the media has helped in campaigns to reduce risk. As Brij Maharaj, Head of the Department of Geography at the University of KwaZulu-Natal noted, when a story hits front page, there is often some kind of immediate response (Interview, 2007). Epidemiologist Mark Colvin, former manager at the Centre for Aids Development and Relations (CADRE) also acknowledged the support of journalists like Carnie for 'campaign journalism' in reporting on excess cancer cases in South Durban, as well as publishing on other environmental incidents around the country. This has had the impact of increasing industry responsiveness in certain cases.

### **Case study: Mondi incinerator campaign**

In 2002, Mondi Paper proposed constructing a 'multi-fuel boiler' (MFB) in South Durban to burn industrial waste. Waste such as wood bark, sawdust, de-inking sludge, materials containing heavy metals and chemicals such as arsenic, mercury, cyanide and lead were to be incinerated. The community argued that the use of the terminology 'MFB' covered up what was actually a polluting incinerator (Interview, Farhida Khan, 2007, SDCEA Administrator and Air Quality Assistant). Health effects of incineration include transferring toxic metals into the human bloodstream by inhalation, deposition and absorption (Lee et al., 2004) and producing cancer-causing toxins (i.e. dioxins and furans) putting human health and the environment at risk (Adel, 2004). The community strongly opposed the incinerator due to health concerns. Despite a legal success in challenging the provincial government and Mondi over the proposal, the campaign failed to halt the installation of the incinerator. The provincial government granted Mondi permission for construction after the company submitted a second application for the proposed installation.

### *Social networking for media outreach*

There was limited networking between local leaders to engage in joint media actions. This was partially due to some changed and individualized leaderships within South Durban moving into government structures during the transition, which influenced how new leaders interacted together. This had seen local leaders within the Merebank Residents Association (MRA) and SDCEA not work collectively for media consensus

and directed publicity to challenge Mondi on its controversial MFB. Unfortunately, co-option of the MRA by Mondi also influenced the organization engaging in any media awareness surrounding the MFB. The MRA was part funded by Mondi and this is thought to have influenced how the leader engaged with other local leaders around media publicity. The MRA leadership also met secretly with Mondi without the knowledge of the SDCEA leader (and its steering committee leaders) and this also undermined collective action between leaders. By providing funding to the MRA, Mondi influenced local power relations preventing media consensus and coherent leadership. As SDCEA leader Desmond D'Sa (Interview, 2007) noted:

The problem [of MRA and SDCEA leaders not working together] surfaced because the MRA leadership ... during the Mondi campaign worked and had discussions behind the [backs of the] SDCEA leadership with the management of Mondi and was given funding.... [T]hey [MRA] received R110,000 during the time.... I suspected they were negotiating with Mondi management behind our backs and [Mondi] wanted SDCEA to look bad in the Merebank community ...

According to director of gW Bobby Peek (Interview, 2007), Mondi funding acquired by the MRA limited the CBO in placing media pressure on industry:

is it safe for any organization in South Durban challenging industries, to accept the very same money from those industries ... you just going to run a risk, a public risk ... and a risk when you what to put pressure on the company. So you take R80,000 from Mondi every year, and suddenly you don't like what Mondi does, how are you going to put pressure on them, if Mondi is your only funder ...?

There was limited engagement between civil society and the media in addressing residential concerns against the Mondi incinerator proposal. However, the SDCEA did to an extent engage in media actions to communicate with local, provincial and national governments to highlight concerns surrounding the Mondi proposal. As Peek (Interview, 2007) noted:

They [SDCEA] did so [engaged with government] on a 'protest level'. Participation and communication remember is not only about formal meeting processes, it is about ... media.... This is ... participation and communication, because ... government gets to hear the views of leaders and the people ...

## Resources

During the Mondi campaign the grassroots, SDCEA and external civil society had limited resources (i.e. human, technical) to engage together and form partnerships. However, the inter-organizational component of collaboration between SDCEA with external civil society (i.e. gW, the Legal Resources Centre – LRC, and local university academics) and international civil society (i.e. the Global Anti-Incineration Alliance – GAIA) contributed to resource procurement for the local community, which also resulted in the organizational empowerment of the SDCEA. GAIA provided media resources to help engage

local and global civil societies together. As former GAIA international coordinator Manny Colanzo noted:

Another tool ... is our access to media contacts, particularly at the regional and international relationships. If there is ability for a local issue to be magnified as an international one, using the power of the media, and GAIA can help with that.... I remember doing a press release with groundWork and the SDCEA ... which was released locally and also published internationally through our website and regional reach contacts.... We have lots of information ideas that community groups can access ... so GAIA is able to fill in that gap, by making our resources ... available to the grassroots ... (Interview, 2007)

As well as some media resources, LRC legal resources were also employed against the provincial government's decision to allow Mondi to construct the MFB without following the proper procedure. Despite a court victory for the community, the provincial government eventually granted Mondi approval for construction after the company submitted a similar application for the project. However, the grassroots and SDCEA were able to engage in media action to bring attention to the Mondi proposal and that government had not followed due process. According to Colanzo (Interview, 2007), noting the importance of media solidarity for outreach:

it just makes a local issue a global one, a global struggle, an international one. It helps in amplifying the voice of the community people ... this gives strength to the local groups, especially if they are in the front line of the campaign ...

### *Mondi intimidation of media structures*

The pressure exerted by local and external civil society led Mondi to try to intimidate newspapers into not printing civil society articles that accused Mondi of installing a polluting 'incinerator'. Journalist Carnie (Interview, 2007) expressed the pressure experienced by *The Mercury* newspaper from Mondi:

There was quite a lot of tension. There was very direct pressure from John Barton [previous Chief Executive Officer of Mondi].... I had a different editor [then], and ... he was getting pressure from Mondi directly and ... they [Mondi] went to Joburg ... to the powers ... our MD [Managing Director]... that was Graham King at the time. They were putting the squeeze on the MDs, editors, and they were desperate to remove the stigma of incineration, and eventually a directive came from the MD, and this happens to be that ... in stories it should not be referred to as incineration. That was shocking ... that was a direct result of pressure. He [MD] should be managing a company; he's got no business interfering in the editorial issues that is solely the decision of the editor. In the early part of the debate ... the way I would handle it ... I would refer to, when quoting SDCEA or groundWork, refer to incineration, but then the company would say it is not an incinerator ...

However, the effectiveness of civil society in using the media to place pressure on Mondi can be seen in the limited success Mondi had in using the media to influence grassroots actors. Mondi pressured the media to constrain information flows to local residents (and citizens in KwaZulu-Natal) to suppress action against the corporation. The following

statement by Glads Naylor (Interview, 2007), Mondi environmental manager, reflected the silencing of the media by Mondi from reporting civil society concerns:

Mondi has communicated with the journalists and newspapers concerned, and there certainly have been a number of reports that have been incorrect around this issue [Mondi proposal] ... the communication has been done with the journalist and the newspapers concerned and out of the public eye ... a way that Mondi has chosen to deal with media ...

Despite the power of Mondi to influence media reporting, local and external civil society and GAIA engaged in definition-making counter-power, with media-directed publicity to try to apply pressure on Mondi and the government to halt the proposed MFB. SDCEA effectively utilized the local and national media, as well as international media contacts via GAIA.

## Discussion and conclusion

The transition to democracy has not necessarily resulted in media freedom to champion environmental justice. The results presented exemplify the tensions between diverse social actors on reporting environmental issues in the print media. Both the systemic study and the case study highlighted the power of corporations causing pollution in influencing local civil society and media reporting on environmental injustices within the Durban network society. The systemic analysis revealed Mondi threatening community newspapers with withdrawing corporate advertising sponsorship if certain stories were printed. Although the case study highlighted pressure placed by local and external civil society on Mondi (i.e. counter media power), the corporation tried to intimidate regional newspapers into not printing articles accusing it of installing a polluting 'incinerator'. Overall, Mondi pressurized the local and national media to constrain information flows to local residents (and citizens in KwaZulu-Natal) to suppress negative reactions against the company. This may signal a crisis of media structures to effectively support grassroots concerns in post-apartheid South Africa.

Although counter-power (and campaign journalism) can assist in redefining media power relations in favour of those affected by industrial risks, such processes do not easily manifest, as suggested by Beck (1992). Corporations can also engage in counter-power to strongly influence media outcomes. As Holzer and Sorensen (2003) note, industry can also engage in counter-power to shape the perceptions of risk. The case analysis revealed how Mondi provided funding to local CBO's influencing their joint media actions and affecting the coherence of local civil society actions to raise the profile of industrial risks. Both the systemic analysis and the case analysis also highlighted how media coverage of industrial risks resulted in South Durban industry becoming less responsive towards addressing civil society concerns. This may suggest that media attention focusing on corporations causing industrial risks may not necessarily be effective in catalysing environmental improvements. There is a need for industry to also view the media as expressions of local concerns requiring engagement. However, it would still be important for civil society to use the media to highlight industrial risks and catalyse corporations to change operational behaviour if necessary. As has been shown in the

systemic analysis, despite inadequate local civil society actions that lacked coherence, media coverage of industrial pollution in South Durban has attracted attention to local concerns, and influenced power in the form of local government to take action against corporations causing pollution.

However, local civil society actions influencing media power was not only constrained due to corporate counter-power to shape media reporting, there were also limitations within local/external civil society and media outlets to support grassroots concerns. Within Durban only a few organized civil society groups (gW, ELA and SDCEA) networked with the media. Both the systemic and the case analysis revealed limited financial and human resources within local/external civil society for increasing media coverage of industrial risks. The case study also highlighted changed and individualized leaderships within South Durban during the transition, which influenced how new leaders interacted for media consensus-building (and with the grassroots). The systemic analysis highlighted concerns over corporate media sponsorship influencing media engagement with grassroots communities exposed to environmental injustices. Vulnerable communities have not been given the opportunity to fully engage with local media outlets to support local concerns highlighting industrial risks. The transition to democracy has not resulted in strengthening the institutional architecture of civil society engaging coherently for media consensus to champion environmental justice. Although the systemic analysis revealed corporations having strong financial and public relations resources to influence the media, the case study did reveal solidarity between CSOs (i.e. SDCEA, gW, GAIA) contributing to resource procurement for the local community. Thus media outreach against industrial risks is also dependent upon successful horizontal and vertical networking between CSOs to support grassroots concerns.

There were also limited numbers of people of colour incorporated into media structures to support grassroots concerns. Systemic analysis revealed the movement of black journalists to government and industry due to remuneration issues, which weakened interactions with grassroots and civil society actors to strongly influence media reporting on industrial risks. This lack of social integration with at-risk groups was compounded by a lack of understanding of environmental justice issues among journalists. Local and external civil society needed to spend more time developing relationships with journalist to influence media reporting on industrial risks. This also suggests a need for more black journalists, especially from affected areas, who may have more direct experiences of the challenges grassroots face against environmental injustices. There is a need for media structures to become more participatory (i.e. emancipatory use of media) and to collectively produce material with local communities. However, for this to happen will not only require more community engagement with media structures, but also increased remuneration packages for media outlets that are on par with government and industry communication departments to retain black journalists who can support grassroots concerns and influence media power. A vision of media democracy can only be realized if the distance between corporations and media outlets is maintained and local communities empowered.

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