

THE IMAGE OF THE POOR AS THE "ENEMY":

A STUDY OF JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN BRAZIL *

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INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the benefits of modernization have failed to reach 80 percent of the people. The overwhelming majority of Brazilians suffers the negative effects of a dependent industrialization, which has brought high levels of inflation, unemployment, illiteracy, and infant mortality, together with precarious sanitation systems as well as serious problems in the areas of nutrition and health. Ironically, these 80 percent are labeled "marginals", because in their search for survival threaten

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the welfare of minute middle and upper classes, who do enjoy the benefits of modernization. These so called "marginals" have become the "stars" of crime sections in national newspapers, which describe their horrendous actions in great detail. They rob, kidnap, murder, and attack middle class neighborhoods. There is a clear impression that the Brazilian civil war has begun, and that the poor is the "enemy". Ex-president Sarney declared that there are more people killed every day in Rio de Janeiro, than in Beirute.

Youth suffers the most. Eighty four percent of those between 0 and 18 years of age, a total of more than 60 million, have never had any access to proper levels of nutrition, decent clothing, and sanitary facilities. About 25 million belong to families with monthly incomes below US\$100. In the cities, 33 percent of children between 7 and 14 are illiterate, and in the countryside, 48 percent. Seven million children have been abandoned by their parents and live in abject poverty. Roughly 5,5 million suffer some kind of physical violence. Three million have been prostituted by adults. Only between January 1987 and July 1988, 435 children were murdered in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro ("Seminário..." 1989).

Contrasting with this misery, maximum security sky scrapers are built to protect the privileged few. No wonder, when U. S. multinationals plan to introduce new products in the Brazilian market, they take into account only 20 percent of the total population of 145 million. They are the ones who can afford the products advertised on television (Pietrocolla 1987, pp. 46-47). The remaining 116 million people do not seem to exist for commercial purposes. However, their presence can not be ignored: the media increases the coverage of social conflict, and the police, the level of repression. Wealthier sectors search

for protection and move to exclusive buildings guarded by policemen, dogs and all kinds of electronic gadgetry.

The idea of studying the image of the poor among Brazilian middle classes appeared within this context. The authors first met during the 1988 convention of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), which took place in a glamorous hotel in Rio. Whenever we were about to leave the hotel, we were advised to be careful with our watches, and never carry expensive cameras or more than the absolute necessary amount of cash. And there was also the suggestion that we should not remain in the city until late at night, because street children and poor people were dangerous.

So it seemed, that in Rio the enemy was the poor. Therefore, we could not help asking the question: Would Brazilian middle sectors see the poor as an enemy?

THEORY

The Image of the Enemy

The psychological process involving the image of the enemy has long concerned social scientists, because it usually precedes aggressive behavior. In other words, violent actions seem to follow the creation of mental pictures of potential aggressors. So, in order to approach human behavior—be it moved by hatred or love, or simply indifference—it is important to examine how certain images are created in the human mind.

The description of the enemy image is an important step forward, both in the study of public opinion and in the

comprehension of the actual political situation. It would be logical to suppose that a person with a negatively colored enemy image could be more aggressive towards his imaginary enemy and could be more inclined to violent acts. Also an enemy image, as a particular case of a stereotype, enables us to penetrate into the psychology of public opinion, national relations and personality. So the development of the problem seems equally important both practically and scientifically (Melnikova & Shirkov, 1990).

What is the enemy image and how could it be understood as a psychological phenomenon? The enemy image is the commonly held, stereotyped, dehumanized image of the outgroup. The enemy image provides a focus for externalization of fears and threats. In addition a lot of undesirable cognitions and emotions are projected onto the enemy (Wahlstroem 1989, p. 4). We attempt to exorcise our own bad spirits by projecting them on others. We usually manage to punish others for our own sins. Society thus needs criminals and enemies, because we have yet to learn the full wisdom of the saying "We have met the enemy and he is us" (or "Know yourself"). The enemy is always the other, and he or she is feared (Reardon 1985, p. 7). There are several psychological characteristics pertaining to those holding enemy images-for example-the suspicion of anything originating from the other side, the identification of the other side with everything that one's own side views as evil, the belief that anything which harms the other side must benefit us, and vice-versa (Senghaas-Knobloch 1990).

The Formation of the Enemy Image

The formation of enemy images is characterized by dualistic thinking, which induces people to view different kinds

of morals, values, ideologies and religions as "right" or "wrong," and people as "good" or "bad." The enemy image is connected with an outgroup. Allport's (1954) well-known description of the formation of ingroups and outgroups in socio-psychological and individual reality is central to the understanding of such process. The enemy image represents the view that the ingroup feels threatened by an outgroup. "The enemy is first of all perceived as alien," as Mellville (1988, p. 32) expresses it. But not all strange "others" or unknowns are perceived as enemies. If the stranger of "the other" is seen as threatening the religious, political, ethnical and ideological values that are important to one's own identity, he or she may be perceived as an enemy. Our nationalistic identity is often connected with the legitimation of being right, "our values are sacred."

Dehumanizing the enemy legitimizes violence. This involves the removal of all human facets. It can be observed in various forms in military training and in the arousal of nations against their enemies. The more human beings are dehumanized, relegated to a sub-human category, or perceived as aliens, the easier it is to treat them with extreme cruelty (Wahlstroem 1989, p. 5). Due to this process of dehumanization, we deny the enemy his human rights.

The enemy image provides a focus for projections, therefore, it has a scapegoat function. In the words of Keen (1986, pp. 10-11), "We are driven to fabricate an enemy as a scapegoat to bear the burden of our denied enmity. From the unconscious residue of our hostility, we create a target; from our private demons, we conjure a public enemy."

According to psychoanalysis, modern societies and cultures demand a high degree of frustration of direct needs. This generates considerable potential for aggressive attitudes,

which may be directed at suitable enemy objects in the form of political aggression. Enemy images then, function to stabilize the sense of self-esteem and social self-image, as well as to enable socially sanctioned intentions of aggression.

Learning theory views enemy images as orientations in which negative valuations of others are habitually being made. Such images are learned and habituated. This process takes place, according to the "instrumental learning" model, through reinforcement by negative judgements and valuations, as they are associated with corresponding expectations. The habituating process is reinforced or stimulated by experiences associated with psychological benefit, such as lowering of anxiety and reduction of self-doubt (Senghaas-Knobloch 1990, p. 4-5). Within this context, the mass media and propaganda play an important role in the creation of enemy images. In many countries there is a legalized propaganda (brainwashing) system with the sole purpose of reinforcing or creating specific enemy images.

Holt (1987) asked a group of New York University students: "What does it mean to say that a country is an enemy of the United States?" The most common answer was "They hold values, ideas, or beliefs, which oppose ours," which was given by 20 percent of the sample. Seven percent said that an enemy is anti-democratic, four percent that he is a communist, and four percent that he opposes the American ideals. Others (11 percent) said that the enemy is a non-specific threat or danger. There were also mentions (seven percent) to preparations for war against the United States or the storage of nuclear weapons. The rest of the sample gave a variety of other definitions.

A survey done among 375 Finnish youth, showed that those who believed Finland had enemies were more likely to think that their country needed to possess more weapons. In general, the results of this study indicate that the image of the enemy in an important psychological antecedent in the stock piling of armaments followed by war (Wahlstroem 1987).

Silverstein (1985), based on experimental psychology, observed that people tend to expect more hostile actions from enemies than from non-enemies. As threatening events take place, with no obvious source, almost naturally people tend to blame the enemy. To illustrate such tendency Silverstone (1985) described an experiment carried out among white American students by Allport & Postman in 1947. In an experimental game of telephone-one student describing what he/she had seen to the next who passed on the information to the next and so on-the picture of a white man threatening a black man with a razor was the essence of the message. After half the chain, the razor moved to the hands of the black man, who then became the aggressor. This version was the one told by the last person in the chain. Thus, the victim (who in the original story was different from the researched group) was transformed into the aggressor. The conclusion was that at some point in the chain one of the students forgot who had the weapon, and only remembered that there was a fight between a black and a white man. This student then relied on an enemy image to conclude that it was the black man who perpetrated the hostile act.

Another experiment showed white and black people pushing somebody. In the questionnaire, which was given to the students after they saw the film, most answered that the

blacks hit the victim much harder than the whites. The sample was constituted mostly by white students, who considered that the behavior of the blacks was due to their aggressive tendencies, whereas the whites behaved aggressively due to the circumstances, thus their action was justifiable. Usually, aggressive behavior when coming from a different group is viewed as more serious than when it is performed by people who are similar to those in the researched group (Silverstein 1985).

When people explain their own behavior, they tend to emphasize the preponderant role of context. But as they examine the behavior of others, they invoke inclinations related to personal characteristics. We started the war because it was imposed upon us, but our enemies make the war because they are aggressive, hostile, malignant, etc. (Silverstein 1987).

In sum, human beings seem to hold a clear image of the enemy. Tendencies which are different from those perceived in our own group, or which we do not want it to have, are reserved for the enemy. All those evil inclinations which we may have, but do not accept, we attach to him, including the predisposition to violence.

This study examines the perceptions Brazilian middle classes have of the poor. In order to perpetuate the tremendous social inequities, and see the income disparities as justifiable, perhaps Brazilian elites have now a mental picture of the indigent as their worst foe. So we work with the hypothesis that, indeed, the poor are considered as the enemy of wealthier sectors within Brazilian society.

METHOD

Background

Brazil is the eighth largest economy in the West. With a land mass of approximately the size of continental United States, and half its population, Brazil's industry has become increasingly competitive in international markets. So much so, that the U. S. has threatened to retaliate against protectionist measures taken unilaterally by Brazil to protect its newly born computer industry.

Once a country entirely dependent on U. S. imports of all sorts, ranging from food stuffs to television programs, now Brazil finds itself in the position of being a major exporter of not only industrial products, but of high quality television programs to North America, Europe, and several Third World nations. Changes in the Brazilian economy have been dramatic during the past 40 years, but U. S. influence persists, and outside prime time television hours, most television programming is still imported from the U. S. Also most of Brazilian industry is controlled by North American multinational corporations, which send profits back to the headquarters, contributing little to the betterment of living conditions in Brazil.

During the first four months of 1989 multinationals repatriated a total of US\$1.6 billion (Degenszejn 1989, p. B-2). And in an almost insane attempt to pay its enormous foreign debt the country has sent abroad an yearly average of US\$14 billion. These remittances do not contribute to the welfare of the population. On the contrary, sending abroad precious resources constitutes a serious crime, which is more harshly perpetrated against the weakest sectors of society. Between

1983 and 1988 the annual per capita income in Brazil dropped 22.47 percent (from US\$1,473 to US\$1,142) ("Consumo..." 1989, p. 11).

In order to maintain the buying power of the elites, income has to be concentrated. Income concentration has a further deteriorating effect on the living conditions of the majority of the population. Thus violent clashes between the poor and the wealthy are becoming part of the daily life of Brazilians. The wealthiest 10 percent hold more than half of the total income in the country, while only 12 percent is distributed among the poorest half. Inflation rates are now well above 1,000 percent a year (Oliveira 1989).

Thus Brazil presents the contradictory situation of being an industrialized and a Third World nation at the same time. It enjoys a highly sophisticated mass media system composed of four major television networks, two domestic communication satellites, sleekly produced regional and national magazines and newspapers, and a variety of FM and AM radio stations (Oliveira, in press). Yet Brazilian media mirror that of the U. S., in most cases it emphasizes a life style that can only be afforded by 20 percent of the total population.

As it happens with most areas of social and economic development, access to education in Brazil is limited. The total of illiterate and semi-illiterate reach the staggering figure of 88 percent of the population, and only four percent ever reach the university ("O Drama..." 1983, p. 86). Due to the reduced openings at the university level, access is confined to those with above-average high school grades. Again, most who are able to make it into higher education are those who could afford expensive private high-school. In sum, those who are now in the

university belong to middle and upper classes. So this study was conducted among these students, as an attempt to verify the image they hold of the others, the poor.

Data Collection

The research was carried out among 100 randomly selected journalism students of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (PUC-MG). The University is located in the third largest city in the nation, Belo Horizonte, with a population of roughly three million inhabitants. PUC-MG is the second largest university in the state, and is among the most important institutions of higher education in the country. And within PUC-MG, the students of journalism are an elite by themselves, because journalism is one of the most popular courses in the institution, thus the entrance exam to the department is highly competitive. They are among the few who have the possibility of one day occupying important positions in the Brazilian media. They would then be able to influence public opinion at a national level.

The views of these students, as well as the image they hold of the destituted majority, are of great value if one wants to understand what is the general attitude among the middle sectors of Brazilian society.

Questionnaire

Working with the hypothesis that the middle class perceives the poor as an enemy, we designed a number of

questions, which after a pre-test were joined into an interview schedule. There were open ended as well as closed questions. The open ended items referred to the perceived causes of poverty, approximate number of poor people, and knowledge of institutions that help the poor. The other questions were statements about the poor which the students should react to in the form of a Likert scale where the minimum level of agreement was one (I totally disagree) and the maximum was five (I totally agree). The statements reflected three major levels of concern.

The first dealt with general matters such as the seriousness of the problem, role of government and society, extent to which the individual was worried about poverty, and his(her) availability/willingness to help the poor.

The second part of the questionnaire referred to how the poor were perceived by these students. Statements reflecting stereotypical ideas about the poor (lazy, bad, dangerous, criminals) were presented. In addition, options concerning possible actions to deal with the problem (more jobs, income distribution, police and jail) were stated.

The final section included items related to the students' opinions on how the issue was treated by the Brazilian mass media. These questions dealt specifically with the quantity and quality of programs dealing with the poor. And there were also questions about demographic variables such as age, family income, family size, place of origin (Belo Horizonte or interior of state) and gender.

RESULTS

The sample presented an average age of 20.7, with an average of five persons per family. The mean family income

per month was US\$670. Sixty three percent of the respondents were women, and 81 percent said they were full time students. Fifty three percent were from Belo Horizonte, and the others from the interior of Minas Gerais state.

Of the major perceived causes of poverty, government inefficiency and income concentration were cited the most. The former appeared in 75 percent of the open ended answers, and the latter in 52 percent. The question on the percentage of Brazilians, who the respondents think can be considered as being poor, yielded an average answer of 68 percent.

We established that 80 percent could be set as a mark for a high level of agreement or disagreement with any of the statements in the questionnaire. The items that reached or exceeded that mark are shown on tables 1 and 2. In order to simplify the presentation in table form, abbreviations were used, so "TD" means totally disagree, "D" disagree, "N" does not agree or disagree, "A" agree, "TA" means totally agree, and "NA," no answer.

Table 1. Statements with High Levels of Agreement

	TD	D	N	A	TA	NA
Street children are a serious problem in Brazil	00	00	02	20	78	00
Society should do more for these children	02	03	05	43	47	00
The excess of wealth of a few in Brazil is responsible for the excessive poverty of most	02	06	08	45	39	00

Table 2. Statements with High Levels of Disagreement

	TD	D	N	A	TA	NA
Government is doing all it can to take care of this problem	56	41	03	00	00	00
The place for street children is in jail	66	26	05	00	02	01
We should not worry about poverty because it has always existed in human societies	68	22	05	01	02	02
Only God can solve the poverty problem in Brazil	70	16	04	04	02	01
Poor people are generally bad	47	37	12	01	01	02
We need more police to take care of the poor	34	46	13	07	00	00

Table 3 shows the results concerning statements with stereotypical portrayals of the poor and the various degrees of agreement/disagreement. These coefficients give an idea of the image these students hold of the poor.

Table 3. Statements Containing Stereotypical Images

	TD	D	N	A	TA	NA
The poor are generally lazy	33	42	16	04	03	02
People from the slums are dangerous	12	31	37	14	04	02
I am afraid of street children	10	21	28	36	05	00
Street children will become criminals	02	15	33	35	13	02

The degree of availability/willingness to help the poor as well as the level of involvement with the problem were gauged through a number of items which are displayed in table 4.

Table 4. Degree of Involvement with the Poverty Problem

	DT	D	N	A	TA	NA
The situation of the poor personally affects me	04	10	23	40	22	01
I feel good trying to help the poor	01	04	27	49	16	03
It is everybody's responsibility to try to help the poor	02	07	16	47	27	01
My children (or the children of my friends) are allowed to play with the poor	03	12	31	32	13	09
I feel guilty when I don't help the poor	16	31	25	23	04	01
I always give them something when they ask for help	01	31	42	23	03	00

The perception of the mass media and the way they deal with poverty is shown by table 5. The studied dimensions refer to the perceived amount of materials on the issue, and the opinion respondents hold of the quality of media coverage.

Table 5. Perceptions of Media Coverage

	TD	D	N	A	TA	NA
Poverty in Brazil is seldom discussed on television	00	21	19	43	15	02
Newspapers and television should tell more about the problems of the poor	00	06	15	52	26	01
The image of the poor presented on television news is accurate	22	47	28	02	00	01

Pearson correlation coefficients between major variables were also estimated and displayed in table 6. The selected variables dealt with stereotypical perceptions (table 3), degree of indifference toward the poor (item 3 of table 2),

family income and violent responses to the issue (items 2 and 6 of table 2). By means of simplification we used the following abbreviations:

dangerous (dang) = People from the slums are dangerous

fear (fear) = I am afraid of street children

criminals (crmi) = Street children will become criminals

bad (bad) = The poor are generally bad

lazy (lazy) = The poor are generally lazy

no-worry (nwor) = We should not worry about the problem of poverty because it has always existed in human society

income (inco) = Family income

jail (jail) = The place for street children is jail

police (poli) = More policemen are needed to take care of the poor.

Table 6. Correlation Between Major Variables

	dang	fear	crmi	bad	lazy	nwor	inco	jail	poli
dang	1,00								
fear	*0,27	1,00							
crmi	*0,32	*0,27	1,00						
bad	0,13	0,16	0,16	1,00					
lazy	0,22	0,23	*0,33	*0,38	1,00				
nwor	0,14	0,23	0,26	*0,40	*0,47	1,00			
inco	0,03	*0,27	0,18	0,15	0,05	0,12	1,00		
jail	-0,05	0,18	0,14	*0,31	0,25	*0,30	-0,20	1,00	
poli	0,16	0,20	0,18	*0,45	*0,45	*0,59	0,12	0,26	1,00

*Significant at $p < 0,05$

DISCUSSION

From the 100 respondents, all but two adopt a neutral position agree that street children are a serious problem in Brazil. Therefore, there seems to be no doubt among the researched group that the problem does exist. Moreover, among 90 percent, there is the awareness that society could do more to solve this question. And 84 percent agree that the present situation springs from discrepancies between excessive wealth, on one end, and extreme poverty on the other.

Nobody in the sample believes government is doing all it can to alleviate the problem. Only two believe that the place for street children is in jail. And the majority (90 respondents) see the need for concern, while only six think the issue can only be resolved with the help of God. Likewise just seven students would have poverty dealt with by the police. An equal number of respondents believe that the poor are lazy, while only two see the poor as bad.

Sixty two out of the 100 hundred students believe that the situation of the poor affects them personally, 65 feel good when they help the underprivileged, 74 believe it is everybody's responsibility to help them and 45 would allow their children to play with the poor. Twenty six say they always help the indigents when asked for assistance, and 27 even feel guilty when they do not cooperate with the poor.

In general, the results do not show a consistent stereotypical image of the poor among the majority of the researched group. So we cannot say that our initial hypothesis that Brazilian middle sectors see the poor as an enemy was

confirmed. At least among this sample this does not seem to be the case. But fear is present in the minds of 41 percent of the respondents. They agree with the statement regarding fear of street children. And 47 percent think these children will become criminals, while 18 percent agree that people from the slums are dangerous.

Although fear is not present among the majority, it appears in a substantial part of the sample and is positively correlated with family income ($r = 0,27$; $p < 0,05$). So the larger the family pay-check the greater seems to be the possibility that the individual would feel threatened by the poor. In fact, one would expect that within a context of social unrest, the wealthier persons would have more reasons to fear for their possessions.

Concerning the use of violence to deal with the issue only seven agree that police has a role to play in such circumstances. However, the correlation between the use of force (poli) with stereotypical ideas (bad and lazy) as well as with indifference (nwor) was respectively $r = 0.45$, $r = 0.45$, $r = 0.59$ (all significant at $p < 0.05$). Just a few agree with the image of bad (2), lazy (7), and demonstrate indifference (3), but they seem to be the ones who would agree with violent measures to deal with the problem. It, therefore, seems clear that individuals who do hold a stereotypical view of the poor are precisely those who could accept aggressive actions against the impoverished. This is supported by Silverstein's (1985, 1987) findings which suggest that the enemy is seen as different and dangerous, thus violence against him could be more easily justifiable.

It is also important to note that these future journalists, in general, are not satisfied with the way the media has dealt with the issue. Sixty two percent thinks that poverty

is rarely discussed on television and 67 percent would like to see more about it on television and in the newspapers, while 69 percent of the respondents believe the situation has not been treated with accuracy.

This view of the Brazilian media may be explained by their commercial nature. Television and newspapers are mostly supported by multinational advertising and government propaganda. It may not be in the best interest of U. S. corporations and government officials to present to the Brazilian public opinion the real causes of inequality. If the media were to probe deeply into the problem, foreign and local businesses and industry, as well as politicians would be shown as holding great responsibility for income concentration and the constant deterioration of the living conditions in the past decade. If such information were to appear in the evening news, industry and commerce would very likely withdraw their financial support. This may then explain why the issue is rarely dealt with by the major channels of mass communication. And when treated at all, it is presented in a misleading manner so that the real culprits never appear.

Overall this study did not show that the poor are seen as enemies among the researched students. On the contrary, only seven respondents indicated they had stereotypical images of the poor. But two clear tendencies must be highlighted, (a) the relationship between income and fear was significant; and (b) the association between stereotypical images and the use of violence, that is, those who held an image of the poor as bad and lazy would agree with the use of force against them.

We must also note that this is an extremely sensitive issue, and that despite the attention to the wording of the

statements and to all procedures involved in the study, some respondents may not have been totally honest in their answers. This is an inborn limitation of this kind of research, which can only be compensated with replications among different groups. So we hope that this would encourage other researchers with similar interests to conduct surveys concerning the image the rich hold of the poor.

Also, the sample of this study was limited to journalism students, therefore the conclusions cannot be generalized for all middle class sectors of Brazilian society. However, the results may reflect the images held by a significant part of those who already are in important positions within the Brazilian mass media system. Hence the importance of such a study, because realistic approaches to the poverty issue, may in the future have a chance to be broadcast to the rest of the Brazilian population. In short, if those who are not satisfied with the present situation are able to achieve decision making posts, there may be an increased public concern with poverty, and with the image of the poor, as well.

NOTE

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