

the views of those who consider it a cultural experience. Although only 26, she has been a journalist for four years and has already won three prizes in Portugal. She wants to use her prize-money to travel in order to highlight other harsh realities.

The jury of the Natali Prize 2003 gave special mention not only to the two runner-ups for each section but also to a good number of other journalists who were not selected but whose work was highly commended.

In presenting the awards, the vice president of the European Commission, Neil Kinnock, praised the acquisition of the freedom of expression, by now well-established in Europe, although, he pointed out, “even in the midst of our democracies, terrorists, criminals and thugs have tried to silence journalists using intimidation and murder”. To extend liberty, he added, we must

assure freedom of the press everywhere, although more than a third of the world’s population lives in countries where there is no press freedom.

“This is why I invite everyone to celebrate with me just one of the many examples of the irrepressibility of those who struggle to sustain press freedom,” he concluded. “Last month the Daily News was closed in Zimbabwe. Within days another newspaper called Friends of the Daily News went on line”.

The prizegiving ceremony was preceded by a discussion on “Human rights and Globalisation” moderated by Aidan White, the general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which manages the Natali Prize on behalf of the European Commission. ■

“Journalists are like unnoticed stones”

The meaning of the “Natali Prize for journalism: excellence in reporting human rights, democracy and development”

An intense debate over the ethics of journalism prizes took place among some journalists who participated in the 2002 Natali Prize for human rights reporting. It is an important debate which might make media workers reflect on situations in which one risks not only one’s career but also one’s life reporting on human rights.

Maria Laura Franciosi

One of the winners of the 2002 prize, the Brazilian Mauri Konig, says that he was almost “garroted”, hit with over 100 blows and left for dead after being attacked by three men from the National Police of Paraguay. An inquest was opened but nobody was sent to prison. Mauri, 36, a journalist for O Estado do Parana, had conducted for over five months a vast enquiry into the kidnapping of children in the poor frontier area between Paraguay and Brazil to be used in Paraguayan barracks to beef up the numbers of the military and work as slaves, for sex or other purposes. Many had died.

Another journalist, the young Ghanaian Raymond Archer, was forced to relocate as the police pursued him after he had exposed the activities (including torture) of an illegal unit of the police. In the end, his interviews with the victims were widely publicised and the police had to change their tactics. Archer, 26, who won the prize for Africa and the overall Natali Prize gold medal in 2002 for a series of articles on a scandal surrounding the deportation of immigrants from Sweden to Ghana, decided to use the prize-money to set up the Ghana Centre for Public Integrity (GCPI)¹. Recently, he has won an award as the best investigative journalist from the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA) and has become

the youngest news editor in Ghana and perhaps in the whole of Africa. A similar thing happened with the winner of the Asia section of the 2002 Natali prize, Asha Krishankumar, an Indian journalist who described the desperate plight of Indian weavers. She devoted her prize

to the creation of a trust to provide for the education of poor weavers and has now been selected for an Award in International Journalism by the Columbia School of Journalism and Reuters. This could set a trend.

On-line debate on the ethics of journalism prizes

The on-line debate over the meaning of a journalism prize for human rights was initiated by a questionnaire sent to the IFJ by some final year students in journalism at Rhodes University in South Africa.

The answers were numerous. Ann-Christina Hansen, coordinator on behalf of the IFJ for the Natali Prize, opened the debate by emphasising that this is among the most prestigious journalism awards, especially in the developing world. "Apart from rewarding and hopefully promoting journalistic excellence, the prize-money can have very positive effects not only for the individual winners but also for other journalists". Another advantage of awarding a prestigious prize to a controversial journalist is that it "can raise awareness of specific human rights abuses and send a strong political signal to those who commit them". In this respect, she quotes the decision of the 2002 jury to award the Natali Prize for the Middle East to Maher Chmaytelli for a series of articles on Syria's cultural policy. His reports led to the closing down of the Agence France Presse (AFP) office in Damascus and the stripping of all press accreditation from Chmaytelli who was then asked to leave the country.

"The moral value of the award exceeds by far the financial prize", observes Chmaytelli. The prize "can be a springboard to continue in the struggle for democracy and human rights".

The debate on whether the prize should be only in cash, as it is now, or transformed into payment for skills training, workshops, fellowships and travel bursaries is open. The prize-money could also be used to help journalists in developing countries who struggle with limited resources. One of the projects coming out of Raymond Archer's undertaking is a network to help locate unused or obsolescent but still working PCs in the developed world that could be transferred to Africa to be used by media workers lacking resources.

This is how Raymond Archer summarizes what the prize has meant for him: "a recognition of hard work and an inspiration to do better". He goes to particular lengths to explain that the monetary award raises no ethical questions whether it comes in cash, training or some other form. "I cannot see how this kind of award could compromise the integrity of any journalist. I rather think that this is an inspiration for me as a young journalist to climb to higher heights". Archer clarifies what is a "gift". In law, he explains, an offer without conditions can be considered a gift. And so if a company or an institution sponsors (in this case the European Commission) an award with no strings attached to it, "this is a gift that cannot become a compromise".

Those unnoticed stones

This is why, concludes Ann-Christina Hansen, "prizes like the Natali one have been created: to become a showcase of excellence, dedication and commitment to the

values we all cherish". No doubt the difficult conditions under which journalists have to work in many parts of the world contribute to the corruption and corruptibility of the media. But prizes are only prizes and should not supplant the duty of unions to struggle for things such as better conditions and remuneration. The main object of the prize, insists Hansen, is "to give a political signal". The prize must be given for a job well done.

Above all, says IFJ secretary general Aidan White, speaking at the 2002 award ceremony, "the Natali prize represents a great opportunity for renewing journalism in the world" and to give a clear indication of the role of the media in human rights reporting. Chris Warren, president of the British National Union of Journalists (NUJ), remarks that, to create a climate suitable for the defence of the rights of the journalists who report on human rights abuses, one should give technical assistance to independent media and encourage dialogue and tolerance in order to unearth, as the entries to the Natali Prize do, "those unnoticed stones". Journalists, he explained, "are like stones that you don't notice when you walk but that can make you trip when you think you are walking on a safe road".

About the Natali Prize

The annual Natali Prize for Journalism was launched in 1992 by the Development directorate of the European Commission to reward "articles addressing democracy or human rights as vital aspects of development". It was awarded in 1992, 1993 and 1994, then relaunched in 1998 in cooperation with the IFJ which is now responsible for its management. Until 2001, two prizes of €10.000 were awarded each year: to a journalist from a developing country and to one from the European Union.

In 2002, the European Commission expanded the programme to award five Natali Prizes: for Europe (including the enlargement countries); Africa; Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; North Africa and the Middle East. In addition, a gold medal was awarded to the overall winner.

The prize takes its name from a former vice president of the European Commission, the Italian Lorenzo Natali, who from 1976 to 1989 worked for the European Commission in different capacities, lastly under president Jacques Delors, as vice president responsible for development cooperation. Among the 243 entries for the 2002 prize from 80 countries many dealt with abuses against children, but many (especially from Africa) also dealt with fraud; in Asia and the Pacific attention was focused on the appalling conditions of workers, on poverty and on prostitution whilst the articles from the Arab world dealt above all with press freedom. The articles from Europe generally dealt with abuses of human rights happening somewhere else. The main link between Europe and the developing countries over human rights abuses reporting is immigration, which gives journalists the opportunity to delve into the conditions in the migrants' countries of origin. ■

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