

THE POWER OF PROPAGANDA AND THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION ¹

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Beyond the recent conspiracy theories, on a planetary scale, the icon of philanthropist Bill Gates corresponds to the image of generosity. The optimistic and positive language with which he encloses problems and hurries to administer solutions is an advanced form of magic used to enchant his global audience, and even himself.

Clearly, Bill and Melinda believe that aid storytelling needs to be improved with more success stories and telling progress in some areas of development. It's not for nothing that their philanthropy blog is called 'Impatient Optimists'².

This skilful, symbolic construct is one of the areas of investment that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation manages most carefully, funding international newspapers such as NBC Universal, Al Jazeera, BBC, Viacom, to name but the most famous. Less known to the public, is the function of the Gates couple as a behind-the-scenes influencer of international magazines and media, something certainly not secondary³.

Clearly, the public cannot fully grasp the collaborations that the Gates Foundation has consolidated with the media and the press through its advocacy and policy programs⁴, and above all, they do not see any trace of them although they are influential and substantial.

The Foundation does not spare resources devoted to the world of information: almost a billion dollars are allocated to forage this powerful consensus machine, which moves in unison with field programmes (health, agriculture, education) and educational and scientific research initiatives. The two scholars Alanna Shaik and Laura Freschi gave an effective representation of this when they wrote that we are in a situation where we might find ourselves "reading a story about a Gates-funded health project, written up in a newspaper that gets its health coverage underwritten by Gates, reported by a journalist who attended a Gates-funded journalism training program, citing data collected and analysed by

¹ Extracted from: Dentico N., *Ricchi e buoni? Le trame oscure del filantropocapitalismo* (2020), Editrice Missionaria Italiana, ISBN: 978-88-307-2433-4, <https://www.emi.it/ricchi-e-buoni>

² Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "Impatient Optimist" website, <http://www.impatientoptimists.org/>

³ Doughton S. and Heim K.: "Does Gates Funding of Media Taint Objectivity? ." *The Seattle Times*. Last modified February 23, 2011. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/does-gates-funding-of-media-taint-objectivity/>

⁴ "What We Do." Last modified January 1, 2001. <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/what-we-do>

scientists with grants from Gates."⁵

In particular, the Foundation is interested in promoting partnerships with journalists and newspapers on global health and development agenda issues. The Guardian in English, El Pais in Spanish, National Public Radio and Public Broadcasting Service in America, the African Media Initiative: these are just some of the newspapers and media that have most focused their editorial choices on international issues on the priorities on which the Foundation operates, and which act as a sounding board for Seattle's activities.

An interesting case is the disbursement of \$1 million to Harvard University for the Nieman Fellowship, on the Global Health Reportage, and the HIV Prevention Reporting Fellowship Fund in Sub-Saharan Africa⁶. The type of funding allocated to the press is associated with an impact award.

The flagship initiative, "Innovation in Development Reporting" (IDR), defines the grid for reading reality and the transformative horizon towards which to set the project to be funded. Including the need for specific and measurable objectives to be achieved through media action (article, radio report, video, social media, etc..), according to the perspective of the so-called solution journalism⁷, also funded by the Gates Foundation, which aims to catalyse the media focus towards activities that solve problems, with the intention of depolarizing public dialogue and relaunching the Western version of human progress.

So far IDR has funded 185 projects⁸. The result has been a marked increase in the focus on global poverty and public health issues. The narrative threads of this journalistic production generally follow the priorities and the cognitive approach of the Gates Foundation, which generally leads to positive publicity. While journalism, especially in the wake of the wave against racism that rightly pervades the world, would need more diversity and less white supremacy, the Gates Foundation's strategy is, on the contrary, focused on investing in the training of new generations of journalists, particularly in Africa.

The pervasiveness of Gates in journalistic production, increasingly in crisis, is a phenomenon which, because of its problematic nature and conflict of interest, has repeatedly attracted the attention of the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) observatory⁹.

⁵ Shaikh A. and Freschi L., "Gates: A benevolent dictator for public health?", 8 September 2011, <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/gates-a-benevolent-dictator-for-public-health/>

⁶ Bunce M., (2016) 'Foundations, philanthropy and international journalism', in Townded J., Muller D., Lance Keeble R., (edt.), *Beyond Clickbait and Commerce: The Ethics Possibilities and Challenges of Not-For-Profit Media*, in *The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, Vol. 13, N.2/3 2016, pp. 6-15.

⁷ "Solutions Journalism Network." *Wikipedia*, May 5, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Solutions_Journalism_Network&oldid=955083732

⁸ "Showcase Projects." *Innovation*. <https://innovation.journalismgrants.org/>

⁹ "FAIR" FAIR. <https://fair.org>