

to develop conflict resolution strategies in the country. Dan Gardner of the Ottawa Citizen described journalists as storytellers in search of stories with a “dramatic arc” containing a rising action, climax, and resolution with clear-cut heroes and villains. Colombia’s deep complexities defy this approach, however, and the lack of an easy narrative distracts journalists from the country.

### *The Canadian Angle*

Kelly McParland, Foreign News Editor at the National Post, added that violence in Colombia is nothing new. He underlined that reporters have to find a new angle and that the story has to connect with Canadians in order to be sold to editors. With the obvious exception of the United States, few countries in the Americas are of intrinsic interest to Canadian editors and producers. The one exception could be Mexico due to its participation in NAFTA and its proximity to Canada.

Jiménez concurred that the only stories that do get covered are ones with a strong Canadian angle, which is regrettable because the Canadian angle often blots out the complex realities facing the countries in question. An example was the recent kidnapping of Canadian Norbert Reinhart by FARC guerrillas, as news stories focused on Reinhart and largely ignored Colombian politics. Foreign-based journalists also suffer from the obsession with a Canadian angle, as they are often out of touch with their target audience and unable to succeed in pitching regional stories.

Another concern expressed related to the problem of journalists who often do little more than follow the government’s agenda in their coverage. For example, Plan Colombia got little attention in the media until US President Bill Clinton flew to Cartagena. Immediately, the papers followed the story for a week before dropping it. Furthermore, whenever Colombia merits coverage, journalists disregard context and the history surrounding the event. “We only care about the last 24 hours,” Gardner said, “the media do history terribly.” A further complication has been the increasing costs of living in the countries of the hemisphere, which has decreased the number of stringers or correspondents based in the region.

Participants agreed that the quantity and quality of the United States’ coverage of the Americas far surpasses Canadian coverage. The reasons go beyond proximity, and are largely based on simple demographics. Whereas 12 per cent of the United States’ population is of Hispanic origin, in Canada fewer than 300,000 people are of Hispanic origin, making up only one per cent of Canada’s population. Simply, Canada lacks cultural, linguistic, geographical and social ties with the Americas, and some even questioned whether Canada considered itself part of the hemisphere.