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IN THE NEXT ISSUE
‘Reporting Science’ is the working title of the 3/2008 issue of Media Development.
How do the mass media cover scientific developments? What responsibility do journalists have for encouraging public debate about ethical questions? What are the professional standards among journalists when it comes to reporting science?
Haiti’s country profile on the BBC News website (February 2008) states that radio is the most important medium of information in the country, where access to the press is limited by low levels of literacy. Haiti has 250 private radio stations, with around 50 FM broadcasters in the capital, Port-au-Prince. Yet, ‘self-censorship is common, with journalists trying to avoid offending commercial sponsors or politicians.’

In an address at Columbia University, New York, titled ‘War by Media’ (14 April 2006), journalist John Pilger characterizes this state of affairs as ‘censorship by omission, the product of a parallel world of unspoken truth and public myths and lies: in other words censorship by journalism, which today has become war by journalism.’

Censorship by omission is a two-edged sword. Journalists inside the country fail to report truthfully and, therefore, to gain the trust of ordinary people. The lives of Haitian journalists are at risk in a culture of violence and impunity. But the knock-on effect is that journalists outside the country – those not subject to different forms of ownership and control – fail to alert public opinion to the destabilization and aggression taking place. Consequently, no one really knows what is going on.

Studying coverage of Haiti in 2005-06 by three leading mainstream U.S. newspapers – The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and USA Today – FAIR (the U.S-based media watch group) found that ‘98.6% of the pieces related to Haiti ignored the role of state-sponsored violence and persecution. The few that did mention them provided a few isolated examples, usually working to discredit the documented incidents as partisan political allegations.’

Maybe not much has changed. A recent piece in The New York Times by Marc Lacey titled ‘Haiti’s poverty stirs nostalgia for old ghosts’ (23 March 2008), while sympathetic to the plight of Haiti’s downtrodden, implies that Haitians are solely responsible for the country’s present condition. There is not one mention of foreign interference.

Such coverage contradicts the basic tenets of what is known as peace journalism, whose larger role, beyond that of constructive conflict reporting, is to help prevent and to moderate social and political injustice. The way such issues are reported, misreported, or not reported, colours public perception of rights and wrongs, solutions and obstacles: witness the ongoing confusions over Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia.

Inside Haiti there are, nevertheless, signs of hope as ordinary people struggle to change their future. In rural Haiti, discrimination and violence against women are widespread. Despite intensive efforts, information on the rights of women is still scarce and it is rare to find women participating in decision-making processes.

WACC is supporting the women’s network Rezo Fanm Radyo Kominotè Ayisyen (REFRAKA) in a project that strengthens the role of women in managing and operating community radio stations, one of Haiti’s most important means of social communication. A significant number of women have already been trained to produce and present programmes aimed at changing the prejudices that perpetuate gender stereotypes and violence against women.

Elsewhere, a project run by Sosyetè Animasyon Kominikasyon Sosyal (SAKS) is training members of community radio stations, grassroots organisations, women’s organisations, local authorities and community leaders in practical aspects of individual rights.

What Haiti lacks is trust: trust that it can, and has the right to, determine its own future; trust in itself; trust in its neighbours; trust in its media. Yet, ‘Truthfulness is a necessary condition for trust. Only when we are able to trust one another, trust the mass media, and trust our leaders, can we really “live together”, and live in peace, in our communities, countries and continents.’

Notes
Haiti: Creating and maintaining a ‘failed’ state

James Winter

In a remarkable prophecy, leading figures in the Haitian opposition told the Washington Post at the time of President Jean Bertrand Aristide’s inauguration in Haiti in early 2001 that either there should be another U.S. invasion, or: ‘the CIA should train and equip Haitian officers exiled in the neighbouring Dominican Republic so they could stage a comeback themselves.’1 In subsequent years, what was portrayed in the mainstream press as a human rights crisis in Haiti, has in fact been a ‘low-level war’ between elements of the former armed forces and the elected government which disbanded them,2 involving the Haitian elite, the opposition Democratic Convergence and the Group of 184, and the international community, primarily the U.S.

The involvement of the Canadian government in the 2004 coup against Aristide, has been well documented. Paul Martin’s Canadian government convened a meeting in Meech Lake, in January 2003, of the ‘Ottawa Initiative on Haiti.’ It was organized by Denis Paradis, Minister responsible for the Francophonie, and Secretary of State for Latin America. Otto Reich, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State was there, French Government officials, the president of the Organization of American States, and others, but no Haitian government officials.

In an interview in 2004, Paradis said, ‘The idea of having this Ottawa meeting was to kind of find ways to help the Haitian people. So we didn’t invite there either the opposition or the ruling party...’3 After the meetings were held, Paradis confided to L’Actualité magazine in Quebec that the meeting consensus was that ‘Aristide should go,’ along with a ‘Kosovo-model’ trusteeship over Haiti, a military occupation and the return of the Haitian military, ‘might be necessary.’ It’s quite clear, then, why Aristide’s democratically-elected government was not invited to this planning session: they were planning to get rid of him.

In 2003, the International Monetary Fund imposed a ‘flexible price system in fuel,’ which triggered an inflationary spiral. The Haitian gourde was devalued. Petroleum prices increased by about 130% in January-February 2003, contributing to a 40% increase in consumer prices in 2002-03. Despite this increase in the cost of living the IMF demanded a wage freeze to control inflationary pressures. It pressured the government to lower public sector salaries, including teachers and health workers. The IMF also demanded the phasing out of the statutory minimum wage of approximately 25 cents an hour, in favour of ‘Labour market flexibility,’ intended to attract foreign investors.

The daily minimum wage was $3.00 in 1994, declining to about $1.50-$1.75 (depending on the gourde-dollar exchange rate) in 2004.4 Haiti’s abysmally low wages, part of the IMF-World Bank ‘cheap labour’ policy framework since the 1980s, were viewed as a way to improve the standard of living, by ‘attracting foreign investment.’5

In 2003, Aristide supported a virtual doubling of the minimum wage from 36 gourdes/day to 70/day—from about $1 to $2 Canadian. According to University of Toronto professor Leslie Jermyn, this provided a direct threat to the profits of local sub-contractors in the Export Processing Zones, like American citizen Andy Apaid, and corporate clients such as Gildan Activewear of Montreal.6

With foreign aid and loans to his country cut off, precipitating an economic crisis, by April 2003, the now desperate Aristide called
for France to reimburse the historic 90 million francs paid as compensation for the loss of colonial property in the form of slaves. With interest, he said this now came to $21 billion (US). This request endeared him to neither France nor the U.S.

Interest rates skyrocketed. In the northern and eastern parts of Haiti, the hike in fuel prices led to a virtual paralysis of transportation and public services including water and electricity. The collapse of the economy spearheaded by the IMF boosted the popularity of the opposition, which accused Aristide of ‘economic mismanagement’. The leaders of the Democratic Convergence, including Andy Apaid – who actually owns the sweatshops – are the main perpetrators of the low wage economy.7

Mercenaries put on the pressure

By late 2003, as predicted – or requested – by the Democratic Convergence in 2001, well-armed ‘insurgents’ or ‘rebels’, really mercenaries, largely ex-military, were crossing into Haiti and raiding police stations. Their top military leader was Guy Philippe, who was in the army which was disbanded in the 1990s, and later received training in Ecuador from U.S. Special Forces. He later became the chief of police in the city of Cap-Haitien.

In 2000, Philippe was discovered plotting a coup against Aristide, and fled the country. In December 2001, he led two dozen people in a heavily-armed assault on the presidential palace, killing two policemen.8 Also leading these thugs was Louis-Jodel Chamblain, a convicted drug dealer, who was convicted of the murder of Guy Mallory, the justice minister in Haiti, and the murder of Haitian businessman Antoine Izmery, in 1993.

A long-standing embargo on importing weapons into Haiti, enforced by the U.S., left the Haitian police poorly equipped to handle attacks by better-equipped soldiers. The U.S. Military and Coast Guard transported armaments and other supplies to the ‘rebels’ in the Dominican Republic. Soon, they were crossing over into Haiti, driving SUVs. They began

Journalists holding a banner demanding justice for the murder of former Radio Haiti Inter owner Jean Dominique. He was shot to death on 3 April 2000 on his way into the station to host his daily morning news show. Photo: Daniel Morel/Wozo Productions.
shooting local police, who fled, allowing the rebels to take over some towns. The attacks began late in 2003, and continued into 2004.

**Aristide appeals to the international community**

By February, 2004, these mercenaries were threatening the capital of Port-au-Prince. Threatening, but they really didn’t stand a chance without more help, despite the arms and supplies, the vehicles and clothing from their military and civilian sponsors. The simple reason for this was Aristide’s popularity with the people. Recall that he was elected in 2000 with 92% of the vote. In the end, treachery did him in.

As the democratically-elected president, Aristide appealed to the international community and even the United Nations, for support, in putting down this insurrection, this attempted coup d’etat, in February 2004. All that was really necessary was for the U.S. to withdraw its support for the coupsters, and/or for someone to send in a few dozen real soldiers. In other words, a phone call.

But the U.S., France, and Canada demurred. They insisted that Aristide must negotiate with the opposition, and make more concessions to them, to find a ‘power sharing arrangement.’ The Globe and Mail reported five days before the coup that Aristide ‘agreed to the peace plan’ but ‘his political opponents have stalled, insisting that only his resignation can guarantee peace.’

Aristide’s personal security was provided by the Steele Foundation of San Francisco, an executive-protection firm which uses former U.S. Special Forces members. Steele’s other clients include U.S.-installed Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai. Following the attempted coup by Guy Philippe and others in December 2001, Aristide increased his security to 60 men, but since then the numbers had dwindled to 19. After all, they were expensive, costing between $6-$9 million (US) annually, and Haiti was in dire economic straits.

But now, according to a report in the Miami Herald, Aristide called Steele and asked for more men, who were supposed to arrive on February 29. Reportedly, Aristide made two requests: first for a small group of 25 men to bolster his own security, and secondly for a larger contingent – complete with a $1 million (US) weapons package – to engage the rebels. Unknown to him, the U.S. Embassy in Haiti intervened, contacted Steele and told them to delay their flight to Haiti, which they did, until after the coup d’état.

**What they say happened**

There are at least two versions of what happened next: but only one has any credibility. According to the U.S. Administration, Aristide contacted the U.S. Embassy and asked for assistance in leaving the country. He gave them a letter of resignation, and they drove him to the airport, and gave him a lift to the Central African Republic. This, after they warned him that Guy Philippe’s rebels could attack at any time, and they could not guarantee his safety.

The reaction on the part of the mainstream media is telling: some, not all of them, mentioned Aristide’s allegations and then ran the denials by Colin Powell and others in the U.S. Administration. After this, they simply let the whole thing drop. The Globe and Mail simply reported Aristide’s resignation, faced with ‘armed revolt, popular protest and intense pressure from the United States and France…”

Two weeks later, The Globe’s Paul Knox was simply referring to the events as ‘the overthrow’ of Aristide, although by this time he allowed himself to shed crocodile tears over the Canadian government’s lack of support for ‘a legitimate president under siege by a band of outlaws.’ Far too little, and far too late. Especially for a reporter who, just ten days before the coup had condemned a ‘defiant’ Aristide, based on a personal interview, with the usual ‘denials’ of malicious rumour and innuendo.

Knox wrote that Aristide rejected the idea that he had ‘become hooked on power,’ and denied that he ‘funnels weapons to loyalists’ in order to ‘kill dissidents’. So, Knox has Aristide as a power-hungry weapons dealer, who imagines his opponents are engineering a coup! The Montreal Gazette reported that, ‘Aristide was removed suddenly, and unceremoniously, from the country by U.S. forces, his hated regime in tatters and the country a bank-
rupt, crumbling mess.15
A democratically-elected president was abducted in the middle of the night by the American military and flown off to the Central African Republic, and his protests were greeted with denials, a yawn, and a return to business-as-usual.16 In Canada, afterwards, the reporting centred on Canada’s international peacekeeping role of stabilization, training police and restoring ‘order’ in Haiti.17

What really happened
Barthélémy Valbrun Jr., director of security services at the National Palace, was a Swede, recommended to Aristide by the Clinton Administration. Later it turned out that he was in the hire of the CIA. In the final days, Valbrun was bought off, as were many of the Haitian security members who guarded Aristide. When the local people noticed the diminished security, they surrounded Aristide’s residence themselves, in their thousands. On February 28, 2004, Valbrun led a number of American soldiers into Aristide’s residence. Although there were thousands of Aristide supporters outside, they allowed these men through because they knew Valbrun.

Inside, Aristide was in discussions with several foreign diplomats. Once inside, the U.S. military put all of the Haitians, including Aristide, in handcuffs. They told him there would be much killing, thousands of Haitians including himself and his family, if he did not resign. He refused. This standoff went on for hours, from the afternoon until midnight. Aristide went on his balcony and urged the people surrounding his home to go to their own homes, that everything was okay, as he was instructed to do.

In the early hours of the next morning, February 29, an American Embassy official, Louis Moreno, assured Aristide that he was being taken to a press conference, and instead he was taken to the airport, where he and his (Haitian-American) wife Mildred and the Steele Foundation escort were all put on a U.S. plane and at gunpoint, flown out of the country, first to Antigua, and eventually on to the Central African Republic. Aristide had no idea where he was going, until he arrived. Once there, he was kept in comfort but as a virtual prisoner. He obtained a cell phone from someone and began making calls to U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters, his close friend Randall Robinson, a lawyer and founder of TransAfrica, and others.18 Canadian troops reportedly secured the airport, while the Americans kidnapped Aristide.

Since that time, Haiti has been an occupied country, a protectorate of the U.S., whose bidding is enforced by the UN Mission for Stabilization in Haiti, known by the acronym of MINUSTA. The day of Aristide’s kidnapping, the U.S. named and installed Supreme Court Chief Justice Boniface Alexandre as interim president of Haiti, replacing Jean-Bertrand Aristide in ‘a transitional government’. Vice-President Yvon Neptune has since said that he was not even present when Alexandre was made president. (Normally, as Americans know, the vice-president assumes power in the absence of the president). Neptune also said Aristide was forced out of office. The U.S. next parachuted in Gerard Latortue, an expatriate Haitian and Miami TV talk show host, as the prime minister, and three days later, on March 12, Neptune was tossed out of the government.

In the meantime, the Haitian police and the UN forces, and gangs in the hire of the local business elite have been murdering Lavalas members and supporters and the Haitian poor generally, with impunity. There has been a concerted campaign to eliminate Lavalas and Aristide supporters, to keep the populace in its place, and prevent the people from attempting to govern themselves. Some of the massacres, captured in photos and on film, have been brutal. Many of them involve teenage youths, but also women, mothers, children and even babies: for example in the Cité Soleil area, in ‘Operation Iron Fist,’ on July 6 and 13, 2005.19 Some estimate that 11,000 people have been killed since the 2004 coup.

The U.S., Canada, the IMF, World Bank and others were so joyous over the restoration of their brand of ‘democracy’ that they re instituted funding, foreign aid and loans in the hundreds of millions of dollars. In Fall 2004, Paul Martin made the first visit by a Canadian
Prime Minister to Haïti, to bestow cash and his blessings on the murderous Latortue regime.

2006 elections: defeat in victory

After four election dates were scheduled for fall, 2005, and cancelled numerous times, they were finally held on February 7, 2006. Aristide would have won handily, but he was in South Africa. The preferred Fanmi Lavalas candidate, father Gérard Jean-Juste, was in jail on trumped-up charges of murdering journalist Jacques Roche, although he was out of the country at the time. When party members went to register him they were told that he had to register in person, so he could not be a candidate. The entire election was full of such machinations and farce. Lavalas threatened to boycott the election, but in the end many voted for former president René Préval, who ran for the Lespwa party.

Although the election was partially funded and supervised by Jean Pierre Kingsley, Canada’s chief electoral officer and Elections Canada, it was nothing short of a disaster. Canada and seven other countries established the International Mission for Monitoring Haitian Elections (IMMHE) in June, 2005. Still, there were numerous serious irregularities, including a refusal by organizers to put any polling booths in the poor district of Cité Soleil, a centre for Lavalas support and home for perhaps 600,000 people.

Despite all obstacles, the Haitian people voted, and early returns saw Préval running away with the election. If he garnered 50% plus one vote, this would mean no runoff election between the top two candidates. Ballot boxes were consigned to the dump before being counted. Now, Préval’s lead was said to be just under 50%, meaning a runoff election. Negotiations followed, and it was clear that Préval would not be able to win without making concessions to the Americans. Whatever happened behind closed doors, they emerged with a deal: blank ballots would be included in the total calculations, which meant everyone’s percentage went up and Préval won with 51.2%.

More than a year later, the deal seems to be that the U.S. Embassy and MINUSTA are running the country. The killings continue. In February 2007, the Canadian government announced a further $10 million in ‘aid’ money going to train Haitian police: apparently training them, in part, to kill civilians. Aristide is still in South Africa. Gildan Activewear, of Montreal, announced in March 2007 it was closing its two remaining textile plants in Montreal, plus two plants in Mexico and one in New York, eliminating 1800 jobs. CBC reported, ‘The Montreal-based company is shifting production to Central America and the Caribbean.’

The Haitian people continue the struggle they thought they had won with their independence from slavery in 1804.

The above is an excerpt from the chapter, ‘Global Village or Global Pillage?’ in James Winter, Lies the Media Tell Us, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 2007.

Notes
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Aristide himself said that 25 agents were expected, but that the Steele Foundation told him that the U.S. Embassy blocked them from coming. He also said there were 19 Steele agents with him on the plane to the Central African Republic. This was contained in a
Haiti’s media coup

Isabel Macdonald

The 2004 coup d’état in Haiti was, in no small part, executed through the media. While technically completed in the wee hours of February 29, 2004 by the US government, with diplomatic and military support from Canada and France, just as armed bands of ex-soldiers were threatening to invade the capital, the coup would likely not have been possible without the media.

In an interview in December 2005, Guy Philippe, the commander of the armed destabilization that helped topple President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was explicit about how central media had been to the movement’s success in forcing out Haiti’s elected president:

“The international media, the media leaders helped us a lot. And thanks to them we were able to overthrow the dictator. And without them I don’t think that we could have.’

While Philippe was speaking specifically about the international media, the point is perhaps even more relevant to the Haitian commercial media, given that many radio stations actively participated in the campaign of psychological warfare waged by Aristide’s opponents. The anti-Aristide movement boasted among its leaders a significant number of prominent Haitian commercial media owners and journalists, and was treated to virtually non-stop promotional coverage on many major radio stations in Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince.

This media-facilitated toppling of a popular elected government raises troubling questions about the US and Canadian governments’ media development programs, for many of the key players in the psychological warfare campaign that overthrew Aristide were linked to US
and Canadian government financed programs to ‘promote democracy’ and foster ‘professional journalism.’

‘Democracy promotion’ and media under Aristide (2000-2004)

The US-led ‘democracy promotion’ agenda was institutionalized with the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a congressionally-chartered quasi-private organization with four core grantee organizations, and historically many of its activities targeted the media in nations in which it intervenes (Robinson, 1996: 5, 104).

This form of political intervention aims to foster political systems that hold regular elections, while prioritizing transnational business interests (such as privatization and deregulation of public services and industry) above the political demands of domestic populations. Such interventions had long been underway in Haiti as a means of stemming the power of the popular Lavalas movement that swept Aristide into power in Haiti’s first democratic election in 1990.

When Aristide was re-elected to office in 2000, the US and Canada cut aid to the Haitian government, channelling it instead to ‘civil society’ organizations opposed to Aristide under the rubric of ‘democracy promotion’ programs (CIDA, 2004: 9; USAID; Fenton, 2005).

One of these democracy programs with a specific communications component was conducted by one of the NED’s core grantees, the International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2002-4, which trained Aristide’s opponents in a hotel in the Dominican Republic (Bogdanich and Nordberg, 2006: A1). Meanwhile, other US and Canadian government funded democracy programs specifically focused on journalist training.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded a Canadian NGO, Réseau Liberté, which conducted trainings for journalists through workshops organized in collaboration with Haitian partners. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the Haiti Media Assistance and Civic Education Program (or RAMAK, its Creole acronym) program conducted by Creative Associates International (CAII) to train over 80 Haitian journalists and build a rural network of community radio organizations in Haiti.

These journalist training programs emphasized the dominant professional values prized in US and Canadian newsrooms (most notably, objectivity in reporting) as well as a formal liberal democracy and commercial values (particularly in the RAMAK project, which emphasized fundraising and expensive equipment).

The media and the coup

The US and Canadian governments’ support for non-Lavalas NGOs and ‘civil society’ coincided with the rise of an elite led movement calling for Aristide’s ouster, which went by the name ‘Group of 184’. Led by a wealthy American sweatshop owner, Andy Apaid, whose company is the main subcontractor in Haiti for the Montreal-based garment manufacturing corporation Gildan Activewear, in late 2003, the Group of 184 began staging sizable demonstrations against Aristide. Kenneth Saltman identifies RAMAK as one of the groups in this movement against Aristide (2006: 46).

Many of the groups that made up the Group of 184 were supported financially by US and Canadian democracy enhancement programs, and many of these groups’ leaders received training in communications from the Group of 184. Leaders from the Group of 184-affiliated student organization Federation des Étudiants de l’Université d’État d’Haïti (FEUH) told me that they participated repeatedly in the IRI training sessions, and, as one student leader put it, used ‘all of their tools’, to mount civic education projects focusing on ‘anti-Aristide issues.’

FEUH spokesperson Lucien Joseph told me that these sessions helped FEUH to efficiently target their communications efforts; for instance, learning about polling enabled them to identify and contact youth ‘who are not in agreement to explain our strategies’, for example, ‘those who were not in agreement with our opposition to the government.’ In the IRI sessions, the FEUH participants learned how to mount an organization, as well as acquiring
skills in fundraising, doing interviews, conducting press conferences, public speaking and publicity.

The trainers included American professors, State Department officials and Republican Party technicians specializing in statistics, polls and communications. FEUH leader Herve Saintilus, who boasted that he was a regular radio and TV personality during the movement against Aristide, and had done several interviews for international TV stations, reported that he had learned how to do interviews for broadcast media at the IRI sessions in DR.

Most of the Group of 184’s communications activities focused on publicizing alleged abuses under Aristide’s government. The Group of 184 sought to cast light on ‘what was really happening’ in terms of ‘assassinations and corruption,’ according to journalist and Group of 184 Steering Committee member Michel Soukar. Similarly, FEUH’s communications strategies focused on denouncing the ‘irresponsibility of the Lavalassian power’, and ‘state terrorism’, as well as ‘vulgarizing human rights abuses under Aristide,’ according to one FEUH leader.

The international media were a particular target of these communications activities for, as the spokesperson for Philippe’s armed destabilization campaign, Winter Etienne, told me in an interview, ‘to fight Aristide, we needed the media, including the international media.’ According to Evans Paul, a spokesman for the coalition of political opposition parties, the opposition to Aristide had ‘needed to convince the international community that there was an enormous’ movement.

Under the leadership of advertising company director Michelle Gehe, the Group of 184’s Public Relations Committee publicized their events through radio and TV interviews, and through advertising in all of the media organizations. Arguably the greatest resource that the non-official anti-Aristide sources had possession of was Haiti’s privately owned airwaves. The largest Haitian commercial media owners’ association, Association Natioane des Médias Haïtiens (ANMH), a long-time partner of Réseau Liberté’s journalism training activities, was formally a member of the Group of 184.

According to its co-founder Richard Widmaier, this association was forged in the 1990s to protect the ‘independent media’ from ‘assaults’ by the government, such as requirements that they pay outstanding taxes. In the lead-up to the coup, the ANMH, which hold weekly meetings amongst Port-au-Prince’s media owners, acted as a space of ‘coordination, decision making, enabling the different commercial media outlets to forge agreements’ and enabling a ‘very strong impact on public opinion’, according to the executive director of the station Radio Vision 2000, Leopold Berlanger.

ANMH Vice President Anne Marie Issa, the owner and director of Radio Signal FM, who also sits on the 184’s steering committee and communications committee, explained in an interview: ‘It was our own way as the media to combat the dictatorship.’

She explained that the ANMH media owners ‘made it [their] job to cover all the demonstrations’ against Aristide. Moreover, many of the anti-Aristide demonstration organizers report that they were able to advertise their events for free on these stations, and many of the 184-affiliated media organizations had a policy of refraining from identifying the anti-Aristide demonstrators’ numbers (particularly if they were not impressive).

As another ANMH media owner, Sony Bastien of Radio Kiskeya, explained, ‘we always support the pro-democracy demonstrations’, and ‘sometimes we advance fantastical numbers because we don’t want the public to draw the wrong conclusion’.

In contrast, many of the Haitian commercial media organizations did not cover the pro-Lavalas demonstrations that were taking place around the same time, and which were, according to independent journalist Kevin Pina, often much larger in size. (In fact, in the lead-up to the coup, they instituted an ANMH-wide ban on the president of Haiti from speaking on the public airwaves altogether!).

When the ANMH stations did provide coverage of pro-Lavalas events, Lavalas-affiliated organizers were still denied meaningful media access. Radio Signal FM continued to report on Lavalas events, however, as Michel Soukar, a journalist at Radio Signal FM, explained, the
goal of the news organization’s journalists was ‘to be there at the chimere’s demonstrations because they had to inform the population that there was a risk… Aristide’s partisans are known to be violent and we described their violence—that’s all’.

As was the case with the anti-Aristide demonstrations, the strength of the armed destabilization was exaggerated by the Haitian opposition-controlled private media. The owner of the Cap Haitien anti-Lavalas station Radio Maxima, Jean-Robert Lalanne, who provided several weapons to the armed anti-Aristide bands, and claims to have fought at their side, boasts that he and the other ‘rebels’ used a number of tricks to mislead the international journalists into thinking that the armed bands were more numerous than they were in reality.

He told me that he had an advantage in being a journalist, because he understood how to manipulate other journalists. In response to the question about why so much of the media coverage during the armed destabilization or ‘rebellion’ (as it was known in much of the Haitian and international media) had failed to identify how few the rebels were, Radio Kiskeya’s Sony Bastien stated that they had not really known, and, moreover, they had frankly not cared to expose the rebels’ small numbers because ‘they wanted Aristide to go’. Bastien describes the ‘rebellion’ in exactly the same terms as Winter Etienne, as a campaign of ‘psychological warfare’.

In the midst of a wave of violence against pro-Lavalas journalists wrought by the coup in early 2004, RAMAK beneficiaries stole a pro-Lavalas radio station called RTK from Lavalas activists and journalists, according to the station’s former manager, ex Lavalas official Moïse Jean Charles (interviewed in Pina, 2007). Charles’ life and those of many other journalists were threatened by the anti-Lavalas forces that took over their station.4

After the US government forcibly removed Aristide from office, some of the key players linked to the US and Canadian funded ‘democracy promotion’ and journalism professionalism programs joined the unelected government that assumed power with the coup. RAMAK’s director of training, Danielle St. Lot, became the Interim Minister of Commerce in the coup government. Meanwhile, ANMH Vice President Anne Marie Issa took a position representing the business community on the coup government’s advisory council, known as the Council of the Wise.

Meanwhile, the ANMH was selected as one of the main partners in a two million dollar CIDA ‘media support’ program in Haiti, carried out by Réseau Liberté and another CIDA funded NGO, Alternatives. This project built on the CIDA-funded work of Réseau Liberté in previous years in Haiti, to train Haitian journalists in ‘fair and balanced reporting’, and offer institutional reinforcement for the principal school of journalism in Haiti (CIDA, 2005).

In February 2006, two years after the coup d’état the ANMH helped facilitate, one of the Canadian trainers for Réseau Liberté, Guy Filion, who is a journalist from CBC/Radio-Canada, told me that he saw the Group 184’s commercial media owners’ association as being as people who were ‘neutral’ and ‘journalistic’… ‘as much as it can be said in this country.’

The coup d’état facilitated by the actors connected with US and Canadian government media development programs was accomplished through widespread violations of the very principles that the programs claim to promote: objectivity, impartiality, individual rights, the rule of law and respect for formal democracy and private property.

Yet if these programs appear unsuccessful by the yardstick of their stated goals of promoting the basic civic rights associated with a liberal democracy, the coup that overthrew Aristide represented a major boon for the neoliberal agenda of privatization to which democracy enhancement is a corollary (Saltman, 2006: 49).

It also undoubtedly furthered democracy enhancement’s historical goal of countering radical populist movements—by replacing a popular elected leader with a regime that proceeded to wage a brutal war of repression on Haiti’s grassroots movements.

Notes
1. ‘Democracy promotion’ has been institutionalized more
recently in Canada, through the 1988 federal legislation which created the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD) (Schmitz, 2004: 17).

2. These core grantees are the International Republican Institute, the Center for International Private Enterprise, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the AFL-CIO’s Free Trade Union Institute.


4. In RAMAK’s annual report, the incident is acknowledged, though it is described somewhat more euphemistically; according to the report, RAMAK beneficiaries had ‘isolated Jean Charles from the radio station management’ (Creative Associates International, 2004: 7).

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Baboukèt la tonbe! – The muzzle has fallen!

Jane Regan

Radio played an important role in the resistance to Haiti’s brutal three-year coup d’etat (1991-94). Not surprisingly, the post-coup period saw a flowering of the popular and community radio movement, with over two dozen stations springing up in just a few years. But the stations did not end up playing the mobilizing role their founders had imagined. Instead, many became little more than educational radios at best, run by small cliques. A number even spawned candidates and became allied with the ruling political party. Before a decade was up, over half had become clients of a U.S. government-funded agency. What happened to the vibrant radio movement and the grassroots organizations that founded them? And how are the stations faring today? What can be learned?!

The history of the democratic struggle in Haiti is intimately bound up with the struggle for freedom of speech. When Jean-Claude ‘Baby Doc’ Duvalier fled the country in 1986, ending the 29-year-long dictatorship, one of the slogans most often heard and scrawled on walls was ‘Baboukèt la tonbe!’ meaning ‘The muzzle has fallen!’ – in Creole, the language all Haitians speak, not French, the language of the former colonizers spoken by less than a quarter of the population.
Radio has a long history in Haiti, a country whose illiteracy rate still hovers around 45%. The few newspapers are almost all in French; and the largest paper prints only 20,000 copies, in country of 8 million. In contrast, some 92% of Haitians have access to a radio and listeners spend at least two hours a day tuned in (Drogue, 2008).

U.S. Marines set up the first radio station, broadcasting propaganda during the first U.S. occupation (1915-1934). In the years that followed, those struggling for social change seized the tool with enthusiasm. During the Duvalier dictatorship a few brave commercial and church-related radio stations played major roles broadcasting news, metaphor-laden radio plays, and ‘musique engagée’ or ‘committed’ music of struggle. The stations helped the country’s democratic movement coalesce and contributed to the valorization of Haitian Creole, which finally was recognized as an official language in 1987.

In 1990, after four years of tumult and violence, Haitians voted in what is generally considered the country’s first free elections. As their president, they chose a last-minute candidate, fiery liberation theology-oriented Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Seven months later he was overthrown in a brutal coup d’état led by army officers connected with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. For three years, soldiers and paramilitary henchmen terrorized journalists, grassroots group members, and anyone who had advocated social and economic justice. Between 2,000 and 3,000 people were killed and thousands more terrified into silence or chased into exile.

Once again, radio was a principal means of political communication, mobilization and resistance. When they dared, commercial stations broadcast news, although sometimes at fatal cost. Across the border in the Dominican Republic, the Catholic church-related Radio Enriquillo, whose signal reached much of Haiti, broke new ground with special anti-coup news programs in Haitian Creole. When the Dominican government outlawed newscasts in Creole, they sang the news. In the capital, several tiny clandestine radios took to the airwaves with news, musique engagée and ‘resistance’ messages.

The trauma of the dictatorships and the role radio had played throughout the century contributed to what some have called an almost mythical appreciation for the power of free speech. Added to this was the fact that, even after Aristide returned to Haiti in 1994, there were still few aspects in Haitian political life which could be called democratic. But there was freedom of speech, and its existence almost eclipsed the lack of other democratic freedoms.

The new freedom of speech is at once the imposition of Creole as an official language, the phenomenon of popular radios, the expression of the peasant world long repressed and excluded from the political scene. The freed word is the crystallization of the end of censorship and socio-cultural exclusion [...] The power to denounce everything and anything and to criticize any maneuver judged suspect is considered to be the heart of democratic activity (Jean and Maesshalck, 1999: 171-172).

The flowering of radio in the post-coup era

The muzzle was torn away again. In the years following the coup – from 1995 to 2000 – no fewer than 30 ‘community’ and/or ‘popular’ radios were launched, nearly all of them in tiny hamlets and towns, some of which previously did not even have access to radio signals from the capital.

Peasant organizations, youth groups, community groups, women’s associations and unions got together and got on the air, announcing that they were going to be the ‘voice of the voiceless’ and motors for change. Many had names like ‘Voice of the Peasant Radio,’ ‘People’s Liberation Radio,’ ‘Rebel,’ ‘Voice of the People Radio,’ ‘Wozo’ and ‘Tenite’ radios (Wozo is a bamboo plant that, even in violent storms, ‘bends but does not break’ according to the Haitian proverb, while Tenite is a grass which withstands brutal sun and heat and always grows back.) Founding organizations said their radios would be part of a struggle for ‘total, complete change,’ for ‘another kind of society,’ for ‘justice.’

Foreign and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), along with UNESCO, moved quickly to help get the radios set up. In some
cases, the NGOs went so far as to go into the field and hand-picked communities and organizations which would receive the aid.

One of the key players was the Sosyete Animasyon Kominikasyon Sosyal (SAKS), the Society for the Animation of Social Communication.3 Between 1994 and 2000, this small NGO helped launch almost two dozen stations. Other NGOs and churches helped found another dozen. At least $200,000 and probably more like $400,000 in foreign funding poured in from sources like the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), UNESCO and smaller Canadian, U.S. and British government agencies and NGOs.

Because of this sudden availability of resources, some private local radios suddenly ‘communitized’ themselves. Perhaps they learned about and agreed with the vision and mission of community and popular radios, as preached by the NGOs in the capital, or perhaps the funding, training and equipment opportunities were the attraction (Chanel, 2001: 9-10).

These stations assisted by SAKS all claimed to be ‘popular’ or ‘community’ stations, but in reality they came in all stripes: one had a flag emblazoned with a red hammer and sickle, another ten were aided by the anarchist Radio Free Berkeley in the U.S., some were run by the local priest or pastor, others by the local and regional peasant associations.

Fragile beginnings
While grassroots groups’ drive to set up the radios was certainly real, many, if not most, lacked the organizational, ideological and perhaps even the political capacity to do so. The principle problem was the fact that most of the groups were popular organizations in name only. In reality they were collections of like-minded people usually dominated by one or several leaders, without much participation or democratic discourse. Writing about the popular and other grassroots organizations in the late 1990s, two researchers at a Haitian NGO
explained the main problem:

‘The organizations revolved around the leaders who made all of the decisions, sometimes acting like real ayatollahs. This phenomenon had the effect of marginalizing the other members...’ (Jean and Maesschalck, 1999: 83)

Another analyst noted that, while dynamic and effervescent, popular organizations, with ‘spontaneity, [their] amorphous nature and [their] organizational weakness’ were ‘a potential danger for the construction of democracy. Anyone may create “his” PO [popular organization] and use it for his personal use or for political manipulation’ (Smarth, 1997: 102-126).

Many organizations also lacked ideological and political discipline. Members wanted ‘change,’ but programs were often little more than a collection of slogans. Some analysts have gone so far as to say Haiti’s popular organizations had lost their ideological way as early as 1990, when Aristide became a candidate. Many of the grassroots groups felt they had to choose between supporting his candidacy or continuing their more radical struggles for land reform, social and economic justice (René, 2003: 136).

By the mid-1990s, external factors had also taken their toll. Repression prior to and during the 1991-94 coup had eliminated or scared away members, and in some localities, the radios themselves were targeted. Following the coup, some organizations and their leaders also fell victim to political party or government clientelism. The reigning Lavalas party and other, smaller parties recruited heavily amongst the grassroots organizations. Members became candidates, employees or operatives.

Finally, the economic factor cannot be overlooked. The poorest country in the hemisphere, Haiti’s economic and social indicators declined steadily throughout the 1990s, with the cost of living going up and the economic outlook ever bleaker. Unemployment hovered between 60 to 70% during the late 1990s and, according to the World Bank, two-thirds of Haiti’s rural residents lived below the absolute poverty line.

The local and foreign NGOs, for their part, also fell short. Either they lacked the proper theoretical understanding of what factors are key to the success of community and/or popular media ventures, or, in their verve, decided to skip such factors. The strength and authenticity of founding organizations and the importance of community participation were two elements evidently not stressed.

Father Pedro Rouquoy of Radio Enriquillo remembered a meeting with members of the Aristide government in exile in 1992 or 1993:

‘We talked a lot about the roles community radios can play... I said, “Look, we should make it so that all community organizations in Haiti can set up a little radio.” And I remember that there was a big discussion in Washington and some said, “But they won’t be able to manage them! It will be disorganized!” But I said, “That’s not what’s important now. It’s important for everyone in Haiti, all the community organizations, to get a little radio station. Let’s organize that, and afterwards we’ll see how we can organize them, how we can coordinate them.’

The fact that the idea of the radio stations came ‘from above’ is not necessarily fatal, but ‘founding’ organizations need to be empowered from the outset. In this particular case, three years out the station was run by ‘a group of young people from town’ and the peasant organization, which was still limping along in 2002, had been completely excluded.

The decision to rush in with equipment and funding also took its toll. The most impoverished country in the hemisphere, for decades dependent on both foreign assistance and remittances from the diaspora, Haiti is afflicted with what many researchers call a ‘culture of dependency’ (Birns: 2005). The manner in which many of the radio stations were set up fed right into this culture. As Chateaudegat noted in 1997, the stations he visited had ‘a state of mind of dependence’ and had decided that NGO funding was the only way to keep their doors open (Chateaudegat, 1997: 36).

The manner in which many stations were ‘implanted’ also had a negative effect on their
surrounding populations. In many localities, people said their meager contributions were not needed because, they concluded, the stations obviously had access to ‘pwojè’ (‘projects,’ meaning grants). They saw the stations suddenly appear, with new equipment and with visits from foreigners or NGO people from the capital. In all four of the case study radios, stations got only a small portion – 20% at most – of their revenues from the area.

Lessons learned
By 2002, seven of the 30 stations born between 1994 and 2000 were off the air. Most of the rest were run as private radio stations; the founding organizations had withered to a small group of people – most of them men – involved in the station.

In an overwhelming number of stations, the only community participation came in the form of announcements. In many Haitian localities, the stations are most appreciated because they serve as a ‘telephone’ – people could come in with messages about a funeral or a cock fight or a stolen goat, and the radio host would read it on the air.

The foundering of the radios came as no surprise, since the democratic movement was also at perhaps its lowest point since under the Duvalier dictatorship. A member of one radio station said ‘the popular struggle has been broken’ and continued:

‘That has consequences for radios which were tools of that struggle, which were supposed to represent the demands of the masses. We were supposed to accompany the movement, but if the movement is dead, what is our role?’

The most successful social movement media projects are always connected to social movement organizations, as many researchers have repeatedly pointed out. As the organizations weakened and even disappeared, so too, did the ‘popular’ or ‘community’ aspects of the radio stations.

The programming on most stations reflected this ratcheting back. They played mostly music, along with educational series on human rights, women’s rights, and other issues supplied by NGOs and agencies from the capital. Some had local news once or several times a week and a few also had talk shows. These local radios were certainly listened to, but survey respondents complained about that they were not invited to participate, and that there was not enough local news. Still, they were almost universally proud they had ‘their own’ radio, which broadcast at least some programming in their language, Creole.

By 2002, however, the financial situations of 18 of the surviving stations had driven them to sign contracts with a U.S. government-funded institution which promised new equipment and training in exchange for the stations’ bartering away their autonomy and original, more radical orientation. Analysts at SAKS and other NGOs considered this to be a major blow and a sign that something had gone very wrong.

If funders and NGOs like SAKS had taken a harder look at the organizations backing the radios, they might have spent time helping them democratize themselves and become (re-)rooted in their communities, whether geographic, political or otherwise. Likewise, if they had made a bigger difference between lending solidarity and creating dependency, perhaps the stations would have not been as quick to seize only external assistance and funding, no matter the source.

Moving forward
The experience of Haiti’s explosion of community and popular radio stations – especially the manner in which they were established – illustrates a great deal. The health – political, financial, organizational, and related to community participation – of a community or popular radio station is intrinsically linked to the health of its parent organization. And participation, a vital element of any organization, no matter the ideological orientation it chooses, cannot be pushed to the side without consequences being felt.

In addition the delicate balance between internal and community dynamism and indigenous participation and support on the one hand, and external intervention with training, funding and equipment on the other, must be
protected. Organizations and projects in historically exploited and impoverished communities or countries will need solidarity from those with greater means for years to come. But if and when that solidarity is tinged with paternalism and/or encouraged dependency, it can be deadly.

A half-decade later, many of the original 30 radios are on the air, partly because of equipment and assistance from RAMAK. But, according to a recent study (Reyneld, 2008), only a handful could be considered truly ‘community’ and perhaps none ‘popular,’ and most remain dependent on grants from organizations in the capital. Thus, even if the future of the stations as fixtures in their localities is not entirely in jeopardy, the positive social role they might play – beyond relaying programming produced in the capital – is not assured.

Today, SAKS, at least, is in the midst of making a concerted effort to encourage radios to cultivate more community participation. At the same time, there are signs that at least some of the organizations in Haiti’s democratic movement are attempting to ‘redynamize themselves at the political and organizational level’ (Reyneld, 2008: 8). Perhaps the dialectical relationship between the radios and their parent organizations can help in this process, enabling the organizations to build themselves up again at the same time as they open their doors to their neighbors, Haiti’s ‘voiceless.’ ■

Notes

1. This article is drawn in large part from my field work – focusing on about two dozen radios with four case study stations, and my thesis – ‘Baboukèt la tonbe! (The muzzle has fallen!): The contribution of Haiti’s popular and community radios to the country’s democratic and popular movement (1995-2002)’ – written in 2004 in fulfillment of a Masters of Philosophy in Communications Studies for the University of the West Indies Caribbean Institute of Media and Communications.

2. While these two labels were used interchangeably in Haiti in the mid-1990s, by 2000 or so, a ‘popular’ radio had come to mean a station run by one or several popular organizations which consider themselves part of the democratic movement advocating structural and therefore sometimes radical social, economic and political change. A ‘community’ radio was a station run by (a) less radical organization(s), with a less radical and overtly political mandate. These terms will be used here.

3. The author was a member of SAKS’ Board of Directors (1997-2003) and also a part-time staffer (1998-99 and 2002).

4. Each radio had to agree to play a series on civic education, distribute civic education materials, establish a board of directors that would include a broad representation of ‘members of civil society’ who would be ‘guardians of the community’s goods,’ the new equipment which remained property of the U.S. funded group until after September, 2004. The group was called RAMAK – Rasanbleman Medya pou Aksyon Kominotè (Grouping of Media for Community Actions) and was part of U.S. AID’s ‘democracy enhancement’ work in Haiti. See Robinson (1996) and Regan (1994) for more on Washington’s ‘democracy enhancement’ work.

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Haïti : quand l’impunité censure

par Pierre-Négaud Dupénord et Ary Régis

En Haïti, la liberté expression, et son corollaire, la liberté de la presse, ont été pendant longtemps objets de baïonnette et de censure. Mais c’est sous la dictature des Duvalier (1957-86) que la presse haïtienne a connu les martyres les plus rudes. Les cas de torture, d’enlèvement, de disparition, d’assassinat et d’exil de journalistes étaient toujours à la une de l’actualité. Des responsables de Radio et de Télévision étaient forcés de tirer leur révérence sous peine d’être taxés de « communistes » ou de « subversifs ». A l’état actuel des choses, sans se faire d’illusion, on peut admettre que bien des choses ont changé. Du moins, on est en face d’un État plus ou moins tolérant qui compte tout de même sur ses propres structures de régulation et des médias et de contrôle de l’information, que lui confère la Constitution en vigueur.

Si l’on considère la censure comme la surveillance, l’examen et le contrôle par un gouvernement ou un régime politique des moyens publics d’expression, tels que les journaux, la radio, la télévision et autres médias ou comme toutes formes d’atteinte à la liberté d’expression, avant et/ou après leur diffusion, on peut dire qu’aujourd’hui en Haïti, la censure de type politique n’est pas trop effective dans la mesure où l’État et ses différentes instances à travers leurs bureaux de communication et d’information établissent de meilleurs rapports avec la presse comme ça n’a jamais été le cas.

Un autre signe c’est bien l’existence de tant d’espaces d’opinion dans un grand nombre de médias dans lesquels les journalistes et leurs invités s’expriment librement sur toute sorte de questions, généralement contre le gouvernement en place, sans aucune crainte d’être inquiétés par le pouvoir politique actuel.

La censure d’une autre façon…

Mais à coté de la censure politique (limitation par un gouvernement de la liberté d’expression) il y a la censure indirecte, non officielle mais exercée sous forme de pression, en particulier économique; d’où l’existence des phénomènes d’autocensure entendue comme la mise en œuvre par la personne d’une censure qu’elle s’applique à elle-même, phénomènes qui, en Haïti, dépendent aussi de facteurs économiques.

En effet, les acteurs économiques nourrissent deux types de rapport avec la presse en Haïti, un rapport de type professionnel qui lie leurs bureaux de communication et d’information à la presse, et un rapport de commandite, étant dans la majorité des cas les principales sources de revenus des médias privés et même ceux dit d’État, exception faite pour les radios communautaires.

… venant de l’intérieur

Tous les journalistes interviewés dans le cadre de cet article admettent l’existence d’un certain type de censure. Suivant leurs propos, dans l’exercice de leur profession il existe un type de censure interne, c’est-à-dire, une censure provenant du media même pour lequel ils travaillent. C’est le cas d’une journaliste d’une station de radio privée de la capitale qui affirme être souvent l’objet de contrainte de la part de son directeur de la salle des nouvelles l’empêchant de diffuser une information, parce que le media n’a aucun intérêt dans cette information.

Selon elle, « il y a certaine information, tout dépend de qui est concerné, de qui est condamné ou de qui est en cause, ça arrive parfois que le patron du media ordonne de diffuser plus vite que possible l’information. Dans d’autres cas, il peut ordonner d’attendre un certain temps, attendre que d’autres medias la dif-
fusent avant de la diffuser ».

L’exemple patent c’est le cas où un journaliste peut être l’objet de rappel de la part de la direction du média, pour avoir réalisé un reportage sur le reportage d’une manifestation de réclamation des clients d’une compagnie de téléphonie cellulaire, victimes d’une mesure arbitraire et abusive. Ce qu’un journaliste de la Télé d’État, confirme en affirmant pour sa part que « les journalistes sont surtout censurés dans les médias privés que dans les médias d’État en Haïti à l’heure actuelle, parce qu’il y a des intérêts qui sont liés à des individus ou à des groupes d’individus dans la société qu’il faudra toucher avec tact pour éviter d’être dans l’embarras ».

A coté du fait que les journalistes haïtiens subissent certaines fois la censure du media dans lequel ils travaillent, il y a aussi le fait que ces derniers ne sont pas bien rémunérés et ne disposent pas de moyens pour mener à bien leur travail en toute objectivité et professionnalisme. Les médias haïtiens4 en général, tant au niveau des médias privés qu’au niveau de ceux dits d’État, ne prennent pas en charge leurs journalistes. S’ils le font, ils ne le font que rarement, ce qui fait que très souvent les journalistes sont au frais des institutions ou entreprises qui les invitent à couvrir un événement.

A ce stade là, les journalistes sont exposés à la corruption, aux pots de vin et de proposition de tout genre. « Ça m’arrive très souvent, déclare un journaliste de l’un des deux plus importants quotidiens du pays, d’accepter des conditionnements ou des frais relatifs à mon déplacement, mon hébergement de la part d’une institution, pour aller couvrir un événement parce qu’en général le media pour lequel je travaille ne m’en donne pas … »

Indirecte et économique
Dans de telles conditions, il paraît difficile pour un journaliste de garder le bon profil, c’est pourquoi pas mal de journalistes font du micro ou du stylo leur gagne pain, pour répéter le journaliste de service public, « le micro n’est pas leur métier, mais leur commerce ». Pourtant, nombreux sont ceux qui malgré tout restent honnêtes et fidèles à l’éthique de la profession.

Par ailleurs, s’il existe une sorte de censure dans la presse en Haïti, elle est de type indirect et économique. Elle est de type indirect dans le cas où les journalistes peuvent parfois avoir peur de divulguer une information qui pourrait leur attirer les foudres du pouvoir politique ou de ses sympathisants. Elle est de type économique dans la mesure où les journalistes
ont parfois tendance à ne pas écrire un article ou un reportage pouvant nuire aux intérêts des actionnaires. Dans ce cas ils développent une tendance à délivrer des points de vue com- plaisants sur ces actionnaires ou ces commandi- taires.

**Auto infligée**

En effet, selon certains journalistes interviewés, en Haïti à l’heure actuelle, les journalistes ne sont pas la proie d’une censure directe et dure. Certains d’entre eux avouent pratiquer l’autocensure car, disent-ils, « il y a certaines infor- mations qui pourraient porter atteinte à la sta- bilité du pays, à la bonne marche de la société… ou qui pourraient nuire à la stabilité de mon pays ». Mais l’autocensure, selon eux, surgit aussi parce que les journalistes sont sou- vent conditionnés, et généralement de façon subtile, par le media pour lequel ils travaillent.

Car, affirment-ils, « C’est l’ambiance qui vous dit ce qu’il faut et ne faut pas dire… ». Et cette ambiance peut dépasser le cadre restreint de la station et participer de l’ambiance générale de la société, perçue à partir une cer- taine analyse de la société et le constat des intérêts économico-politiques en jeu.

**Par instinct de conservation**

Quoiqu’il n’y ait pas aujourd’hui en Haïti un pouvoir autoritaire et antidémocratique, les journalistes restent perplexes et sceptiques quant à la notion de liberté de la presse. De même ils affirment être prudent et modérés par rapport à ce qui mérite d’être dit et ce qui ne le mérite pas. « La majorité des journalistes sont censurés par la direction des médias ou ils travaillent. Pour avoir une formation universitaire et professionnelle, je fais partie des journalistes qui sont guidés par l’éthique. C’est pourquoi je ne suis pas toujours bien vu dans certains médias », déclare un journaliste d’une station de radio privée. « J’ai décidé de pratiquer l’autocensure… pour me protéger. Mais contre qui ou contre quoi ?


Ce sont autant de signes qui montrent qu’il y a de quoi, pour les journalistes, de se pro- téger. D’autant plus que jusqu’ici aucune enquête sur ces cas d’assassinats ou d’exil n’a abouti, il va sans dire que l’impunité bat con- tinuellement son plein. Le cas emblématique de Jean Dominique, conseiller politique du prési- dent, non encore résolu après 8 ans d’enquêtes judiciaires, est là pour le rappeler à tous ceux qui voudraient l’oublier. Un cas dans lequel se trouvent entremêlés tant de fils conducteurs liés à tant d’intérêts puissants et pour lequel tant de gens ont été menacées ou tués. Le cinéaste mili- tant Jonathan Deeme a su le montrer dans son film The Agronomist, sur la vie de la mort du journaliste assassiné.

**Une forme de résistance ?**

Comme toujours, les journalistes haïtiens ont toujours su lutter, résister et se libérer de l’arbi- traire, des contraintes que leur infligent les acteurs sociopolitiques et même économiques de la société. Par leur capacité de créativité, ils ont su s’organiser en différentes associations, telles que, l’Association des Journalistes Haïtiens (AJH), SOS-Journalistes, pour défendre et protéger leurs droits, en cas d’abus de pouvoir, d’atteinte à la liberté d’expression, de menaces et d’attaques physiques ou verbales.

Somme toute, il pourrait paraître désoblig- eant de dire qu’actuellement les journalistes en Haïti sont ouvertement exposés aux pressions.
et menaces de type politique comme ça a toujours été le cas. Toutefois, on ne peut pas dire qu’il n’y a pas de censure, elle est plutôt subtile. Les journalistes ne sont pas ouvertement exposés, mais ils ne sont pas aussi à l’abri de cette impunité qui n’en finit pas et qui n’épargne personne.

D’où, l’auto-censure est cela même qui permet au journaliste haïtien d’échapper aux griffes de l’impunité régnante pour pouvoir continuer à informer la population et lui donner un espace où elle peut s’exprimer… Mais cette auto-censure, n’est-ce pas un obstacle à la recherche de la vérité et de la liberté d’expression ?

Notes
1. Entre autres, le Conseil National de Télécommunications (CONATEL), chargé de délivrer les licences de fonctionnement des médias ; le Ministère de l’intérieur et des collectivités territoriales, responsable de l’autorisation de fonctionnement de toutes entreprises médiatiques ; et le Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, chargé de la promotion de la culture haïtienne et de la gestion des médias d’Etat.
2. Les médias communautaires, survenus au moment du coup d’Etat militaire de 1991 ne sont pas encore reconnus dans la loi en vigueur sur la communication.

Vers un journalisme citoyen en Haïti

Rachelle Élien et Frantz Délice

Depuis quelques années, avec les possibilités qu’offrent les outils de communication, spécifiquement l’internet à travers les sites web, les blogs, les fora, une nouvelle approche connue sous le nom de journalisme citoyen a vu le jour dans le monde. Le journalisme citoyen est un questionnement des pratiques des médias traditionnels. Il permet aux citoyens ordinaires de changer de statut de simples consommateurs à celui d’émetteur, faisant d’eux des médias.

Le journalisme citoyen se base sur l’information de proximité en se concentrant sur des faits ignorés par les médias existants ou délaissés par les institutions locales. Une telle approche peut-elle prendre corps dans la société haïtienne d’aujourd’hui ?

Pour répondre à cette question, nous n’entendons pas présenter un exposé théorique sur cette question. Nous avons choisi d’interroger certains acteurs jouissant d’un certain crédit dans le milieu journalistique haïtien en vue de poser des jalons pour un journalisme citoyen. Nous voulons inscrire notre réflexion dans la conjoncture actuelle d’Haïti.

Quelques éléments de diagnostic de la presse haïtienne

Dans un éditorial à la Revue Internationale des Femmes Haïtiennes, ANAYIZZ, Beaudelaine Pierre rédactrice en chef, fait une analyse de la pratique du journalisme en Haïti. Elle affirme que la moitié des journalistes haïtiens le sont devenus après un séminaire d’un ou de trois mois, et non après un passage à la Faculté des
Sciences Humaines, la seule structure universitaire dispensant une formation en communication sociale et journalisme.

Monsieur Gotson Pierre, Président du groupe Média Alternatif, souligne que ce problème se pose avec acuité. Il ajoute que beaucoup de journalistes sont mal formés ou bénéficient d’une formation au rabais. Ce problème s’est aggravé selon lui, avec l’arrivée de «micro écoles de journalistes», n’ayant ni statut ni programme répondant aux besoins de transformation sociale.

Madame Beaudelaine Pierre déclare que le journalisme tel qu’il est pratiqué de nos jours, doit être vu comme une profession de transition pour la majorité, et constitue un passage intéressant en attendant de trouver mieux. La question du salaire demeure un point délicat dans la vie du professionnel en journalisme. Elle précise qu’aucune loi sur le salaire minimum n’est votée pour protéger les journalistes.

Ainsi selon elle, les journalistes touchent peu et sont souvent contraints d’accepter les conditions déplorables dans lesquelles ils évoluent. Monsieur Gotson Pierre affirme aussi que les revendications salariales ne sauraient être examinées en dehors de la réalité globale que vit le pays. Ce problème est inacceptable et peut avoir des conséquences néfastes sur le respect de l’éthique journalistique.


Continuant sa réflexion, Monsieur Pierre tire la sonnette d’alarme sur les dangers qui guettent les médias haïtiens. Premièrement, il dénote la concentration de plusieurs types de médias entre les mains d’une seule personne. Ensuite, il craint la mainmise des secteurs financiers sur les médias, résultant du pullulement de ces derniers, n’augurant pas un travail de qualité. Cette crainte est aussi liée au coût exorbitant pour la détention de la licence d’utili-


Au lendemain du départ du dictateur Jean-Claude Duvalier, les thématiques de l’information médiatique tournaient autour de la question agraire, des secteurs sociaux tels les paysans. Aujourd’hui, la question sociale est presque évacuée dans les thématiques. D’une thématique de proximité dans les années 80, l’information médiatique s’est internationalisée, voire même ONGéisée, ce qui démontre sa mise sous tutelle.

Une étude faite durant la période 2003-05 par Vario Sérant, Rédacteur en chef à Télé Haïti et membre du groupe de réflexion sur la liberté de la presse (GRALIP), illustre bien cette réalité. Cette recherche a permis de constater que le choix des thèmes (d’actualité) et du champ de couverture (informationnelle) privilégié par les stations de radio se situe dans le cadre de la reproduction de certains réflexes et de certaine routine. Le thème politique supplante largement les autres pans de la réalité du pays. Les thèmes (santé, éducation, environnement) gagnent des gallons en fonction des aléas de la conjoncture et des sollicitations faites aux médias.

Certsains journalistes sont inconscients du changement survenu dans les thématiques informationnelles. Ils sont emballés et pris dans la spirale quotidienne. Ils ne cherchent pas à comprendre la réalité et sont dépourvus d’outils pour l’analyser. En plus, ils sont parfois privés de connaissance, de moyens financiers, d’esprit critique et d’idéologie pour pouvoir apprécier et agir sur les réalités de l’heure. Ainsi, ils sont confinés dans un journalisme de conférence de presse.

**Une compréhension du journalisme citoyen**

Monsieur Gotson Pierre voit dans le journalisme citoyen l’utilisation par le citoyen de son droit à la communication. Monsieur Pierre propose une autre façon d’atteindre ce concept en tenant compte de la spécificité haïtienne : le journaliste citoyen est une personne qui pratique le métier avec un esprit citoyen. C’est un professionnel du journalisme, en pleine connaissance de toute la déontologie du métier et des règles d’éthique, mais qui choisit de contribuer au progrès citoyen au niveau de la société. Cette déclaration prend le contre pied de la conception présentant le journaliste comme un professionnel au dessus de la mêlée, un être désincarné dont les problèmes qu’il pose ne le concernent pas en toute objectivité.

Monsieur Pierre ajoute que le journaliste citoyen vu dans la situation haïtienne ne se considère pas comme un pur observateur, éloigné et indifféré qui ne fait qu’observer ; le journaliste observe certes mais en même temps il partage une série de préoccupations dites citoyennes. En ce sens, il doit être proactif et traquer l’information pour mettre en lumière les questions d’intérêt général.

Le président du groupe Media Alternatif, indique aussi que le journaliste doit être préoccupé par les questions environnementales, le dossier de la maltraitance des enfants, le problème des personnes vulnérables telles que les paysannes, les ouvrières. Le journaliste citoyen fait un travail total, il présente l’information sans l’altérer mais explore aussi avec les secteurs citoyens des pistes de solution pouvant aider la société à faire face à ses différents problèmes. Solutions dont les retombées lui seront également profitables, affirme Monsieur Pierre en conceptualisant ce qu’on appelle journaliste citoyen.

En plus d’être préoccupé, le journaliste citoyen fonctionne en toute indépendance. Monsieur Pierre voit dans la notion d’indépendance une autonomie de pensée pouvant permettre au journaliste d’être sensible au fait que les secteurs sociaux doivent avoir une meilleure place dans la distribution de la parole dans les...
medias du pays (Haïti). Cela ne veut pas dire qu’il est un instrument de ces secteurs. Il les accompagne dans leur lutte sociale mais il n’est pas leur valet. En ce sens, il garde toute son autonomie de pensée, de réflexion et conserve sa capacité critique.

Le journaliste Jonas Laurince, ancien étudiant à la Faculté des Sciences Humaines, mène une étude sur l’utilisation de la parole et la construction de l’opinion publique sur le web en Haïti. Il souligne dans le cadre de son travail que le journaliste citoyen est en pleine évolution surtout aux États-Unis. Il ajoute que beaucoup de citoyens utilisent les blogs pour prendre la parole. Ce pour diffuser des informations occultées par les grands groupes d’information. Cependant, dans le cas d’Haïti, il craint une certaine dérive car les haïtiens ont trop de revendications à faire valoir.

De son côté, Tom Dumond, journaliste à SIGNAL FM, une radio de la capitale, pense que le journaliste peut jouer un rôle de citoyen dans sa façon de traiter l’information en tenant compte de la vie quotidienne de la population. Le journaliste citoyen mettra l’emphase sur les problèmes portant sur l’avenir, voire le devenir même de la société. Celui-ci fera partie prenante de la construction sociale. Par ce concept, le journaliste haïtien est invité à faire un travail de citoyen dans sa communauté, a-t-il fait remarquer.

Le professeur Hérold Toussaint, fondateur et responsable du Collectif des universitaires Citoyens (CUCI) précise que le journaliste citoyen est avant tout un universitaire citoyen ayant pour devoir d’aider le camp de la raison quand celle-ci est sévèrement menacée en temps de crise. Cette opinion peut servir de guide aux journalistes, surtout ceux d’Haïti pour leur aider à faire face à la conjoncture actuelle. Car nous assistons à un repli des institutions, des organisations meneuses de luttes et de combat pour le bien de la collectivité après les récents soulèvements en Haïti.

Rappelons que ces soulèvements ont conduit à la mise en place d’un gouvernement de transition en 2004 pour aboutir à celui au pouvoir suite aux élections de 2006. Aucune contestation constructive et réelle de la part des élites politiques et intellectuelles, qui habituellement montent au créneau, n’a été enregistrée. Certes, il faut souligner que quelques manifestations de basse intensité ont été organisées par des groupes populaires, d’associations étudiantines, d’organisations de la société civile.

En ce sens, nous pouvons donc souligner, un certain calme apparent, annonciateur de désastre à venir dans le monde sociopolitique et associatif. Ce calme n’est autre que le résultat de la stratégie du gouvernement Préval /Alexis à travers la mise sur pied d’un pouvoir pluriel réunissant plusieurs forces vives et mouvements politiques du pays.

Toutefois, monsieur Hérold Jean François, patron de l’une des radios de la capitale, pense que la situation de la presse haïtienne n’est pas comparable à celle des presses européennes spécifiquement celle de la France. Monsieur Jean François affirme que la presse haïtienne n’est pas aussi décriée, et cette notion (journalisme citoyen) ne marche pas avec notre réalité puisque le citoyen n’existe pas en Haïti à cause de l’absence d’acte civil le prouvant. Donc, en ce qui concerne le développement d’un tel journalisme en Haïti, il pense que c’est impossible d’y arriver. Plusieurs raisons ont été évoquées: le non accès aux Nouvelles Technologies de l’Information et de la Communication (NTIC), le taux d’analphabétisme élevé, le problème de l’énergie électrique, la problématique de la formation professionnelle, et de l’éducation de base des citoyens.

De plus, M. Jean François présente la presse haïtienne comme une presse démocratique. Selon lui, la presse est ouverte à tout un chacun car elle met déjà à leur disposition des espaces d’expression et permet une diversité d’opinions. Il n’y a pas lieu à ce que les citoyens prennent de telles initiatives pour remplacer ou évoluer à côté ou en parallèle avec la presse. Le directeur de Radio ibo ajoute qu’il n’existe pas d’hostilité entre les citoyens et la presse dans la réalité haïtienne d’aujourd’hui.

A l’heure actuelle où une grande partie de la population vit au dessous du seuil de la pauvreté et sans accès aux services sociaux de base, sans logements, comment peuvent-elles créer des réseaux de solidarité et des foyers de résistance pour contrer un système enfermé dans la violence, la corruption, l’anarchie, l’injustice,
l’impunité, les discriminations et inégalités sociales ? Parler de réseaux de solidarité requiert une vision nouvelle fondée sur une construction plurielle et solide.

Cette construction que nous évoquons ne saurait être l’apanage d’aucune catégorie sociale, politique ou institutions se réclamant le droit de tout détenir. Néanmoins, pour arriver à fonder solide ment des liens, les citoyens doivent être engagés à débattre dans l’espace public; à analyser et transmettre des informations en toute indépendance.

Possibilité d’une pratique
Le journalisme citoyen, en dépit de la méfiance des citoyens dans les institutions garant de la démocratie comme les médias, peut émerger en Haïti à travers des foyers de résistance déjà existants. Nous croyons qu’il aidera les citoyens à poser des actions patriotiques inclusives tenant compte des couches les plus vulnérables et marginalisées de la société. Aussi, une telle pratique favorisera l’éclosion d’une nouvelle société fondée sur la bonne gouvernance, la démocratie et tournée vers le progrès. Ce, en vue de contrer la violence, la corruption, l’anarchie, l’injustice et l’impunité. Ceci, dans le but de renouer avec les valeurs intrinsèques de développement humain comme la tolérance, la solidarité, le civisme, la reconnaissance de l’autre, la participation citoyenne active des hommes et des femmes à la vie sociale.

Le journalisme citoyen ne prendra racine chez nous que dans la mesure où les journalistes accepteront de se former de plus en plus ; les responsables de médias devront, de leur côté, contribuer aussi à faire évoluer le métier sans vouloir mettre seulement l’accent sur la question de profit. Les journalistes sont obligés de créer des structures viables pour défendre leur cause en face des associations de patrons de médias. Ces regroupements de journalistes se ferra en tenant compte des normes éthiques et freiner la dérives con-
UN troops accused of human rights violations in Haiti

Maria Luisa Mendonça

In October 2007 the UN Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) through 15 October 2008. The Brazilian Government is responsible for coordinating the MINUSTAH forces that include approximately 9,000 troops. Yet there is very little discussion in Brazil about the country’s role in the occupation of Haiti, and especially, about the accusations levelled against the UN troops for their participation in human rights violations.

One of the cases documented by Haitian human rights organizations was that of the massacre that took place on 22 December 2006 in the Cité Soleil area of Port-au-Prince, following a protest by some 10,000 people who demanded the return of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the withdrawal of foreign military forces. According to reports by local residents and video footage recorded by the Haiti Information Project, the UN forces attacked the community and killed about 30 people, including women and children.

In response to the criticism by human rights organizations that denounced those killings, MINUSTAH justified its actions by claiming that it was combating gangs in Cité Soleil. However, the images shot by Haiti Information
Project show that UN troops shot unarmed civilians from helicopters. Inter Press Service, which covered the conditions in the area immediately following the attack, reported finding high-calibre bullet holes in many homes. HIP director Kevin Pina accused MINUSTAH of participating together with the Haitian National Police in summary executions and arbitrary arrests. He concluded, ‘In this context, it is hard to continue seeing the UN mission as an independent and neutral force in the country.’

Camille Chalmers, a Haiti University professor and member of the Haitian Platform for Social Movement Integration, explained in an interview with journalist Claudia Korol of the Adital Agency: ‘MINUSTAH tried to build legitimacy by saying that it is fighting criminals. But many people realize that the only things that can truly reduce the lack of safety are public policies and social services. Unfortunately, what we have is a violent military apparatus.’

Another violent military operation occurred in July 2005, when an estimated 22,000 bullet holes were found after an operation by MINUSTAH in Cité Soleil. Reports by HIP cited accounts by residents that the wounded and dead were found inside their own homes. These accounts charge that soldiers shot at people indiscriminately, which had devastating effects in a neighbourhood where housing conditions are extremely precarious.

These accounts also charged that MINUSTAH did not allow the Red Cross to enter the area – a violation of the Geneva Convention. U.S. Government confidential documents, obtained by human rights organizations through the Freedom of Information Act, show that the American Embassy knew that the UN troops planned an attack on Cité Soleil. Local community organizations believe that the goal of the military was to prevent a demonstration commemorating ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s birthday, which was on July 15.

**Catalogue of violations**

A report by Project Censored estimates that more than 1,000 members of Lavalas, a loose organization that groups supporters of Aristide, were arrested and about 8,000 people killed during the ‘interim government’ that ran the country from 2004 to 2006, following the coup against Aristide on 29 February 2004.

Camille Chalmers characterizes this action as an ‘intervention led by the governments of the United States and France.’ He further explains that ‘solidarity with the people of Haiti means helping to rebuild the country and find answers to the most pressing social problems, and the military presence does not help. The goals of security and human rights have not been met. On the contrary, we believe that the presence of MINUSTAH constitutes a violation of the Haitian people’s right to self-determination.’

On 2 February 2007 UN troops conducted another operation in Cité Soleil that resulted in the deaths of two young women who were sleeping in their homes. On 7 February various demonstrations took place in the country, and on 9 February there was another military attack, which was denounced by local organizations such as the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti.

On 30 October 2007, the kidnapping of Dr Maryse Narcisse, who is a member of the national leadership of Lavalas and worked with health and education social programs in Haiti, was made public. Another member of Lavalas, the psychologist and human rights activist Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, disappeared on 12 August. Local organizations accuse the UN troops of generating public instability and attacking those who defend democracy and human rights.

The Brazilian Bar Association (Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil, OAB) led an observation mission to Haiti in late June 2007 and concluded that MINUSTAH plays a ‘violent’ and ‘repressive’ role that cannot be characterized as ‘humanitarian action’. Anderson Bussinger Carvalho, the lawyer responsible for the report, called for the withdrawal of Brazilian troops from Haiti. ‘I have concluded that the presence of Brazilian troops is not humanitarian. It is a strictly military mission. Haiti has a history of military occupations and Brazil ends up playing a role in this history,’ said Carvalho in an interview with the newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo.*
The role played by Latin American countries in Haiti today is similar to the one played by the multilateral forces that stayed in the Dominican Republic following the invasion by the United States in 1965. The Dominican Republic suffered under a long military dictatorship that lasted until 1961 when long-time dictator Rafael Trujillo died.

In 1962 Juan Bosch was elected president but was deposed by a military coup after seven months in power. In April 1965, a series of widespread demonstrations demanded the return of ex-president Juan Bosch. It was during that time that U.S. President Lyndon Johnson ordered a military invasion of the Dominican Republic by 20,000 marines. A few weeks after the invasion, the Organization of American States sent in the Inter-American Peace Force of 1,129 soldiers. During that period, while Brazil was under a military dictatorship, the role of Brazilian troops in the Dominican Republic was similar to the one they play in Haiti today.

According to the North American writer Norman Solomon, writing in his book *War Made Easy*:

‘In retrospect, the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic foreshadowed a series of U.S. military actions in the Western hemisphere and beyond. Covert intervention by the CIA in Latin America was as constant as the seasons, the overwhelming arrival of so many U.S. troops in the small country was a kind of political and media prototype for a pair of lightning strike invasions in the 1980s – Grenada and Panama – as well as, in more complicated ways, the relatively limited military interventions in Haiti during the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations.

In each case, the man living in the White House found ways to set the media agenda for public approval to affirm the kind of desire expressed by Lyndon Johnson to Assistant Secretary of State Mann: “We’re going to have to really set up that government down there and run it and stabilize it some way or other.”’

The experience of Brazilian troops in Haiti was described by soldier Tailon Ruppenthal in his book *A Brazilian Soldier in Haiti* (Globo Publishing). He was 20 years old in 2004 when he took part in the UN mission for six months. ‘Even today, more than two years since I got back to Brazil and left the Army, I can’t forget what I saw there. Once when I was on foot patrol, I saw something far away that looked like a pig that had been completely burnt. As I got closer, I started to shake and almost lost control before a horrifying sight: it wasn’t a pig, but a child around three years old,’ recounts Ruppenthal in his book.

In another part of the book Ruppenthal describes what happened during a visit from then UN Secretary Koffi Annan: ‘The shooting was petrifying. There were bullets flying everywhere. You couldn’t tell from where in the slum the bullets were coming and so the soldiers started to shoot blindly, setting off the biggest barrage of bullets that I experienced in the peace mission. The whole situation was out of control, and within one or two minutes bullets were flying from every direction.’

When Ruppenthal returned to Brazil his behaviour changed. ‘I was very aggressive and started to drink a lot. My mom noticed how much I had changed, and we found a doctor who diagnosed post-traumatic syndrome. I would need to receive psychological help. We approached the Army, but they refused to help me, claiming that they examined me upon my return and found nothing wrong with me.’ He sums up, ‘And I just would like to remind everyone that we are losing the real war: against poverty ... Only the fight against poverty will bring peace. When will they see that?’

Unfortunately, Ruppenthal’s opinion and the many criticisms of the negative role the UN troops play in Haiti are not taken into account by the Brazilian government. The Brazilian government’s policy in relation to Haiti serves to legitimize a coup d’état and strengthen U.S. interests in the region.


Maria Luisa Mendonça is a journalist and coordinates the Network on Social Justice and Human Rights in Brazil.
Changing the educational landscape in Haiti

Tequila Minsky

When the Haitian organization FOKAL – an acronym, which translates as Foundation for Knowledge with Liberty – began in 1995, it addressed the educational needs of Haiti’s youth. Changing the school system was too daunting, so FOKAL created vest-pocket libraries in poor, non-served Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods.

In the first two years, there were 15 community libraries offering not just books, but clean, well-lit havens from the crowded crumbling streets, quiet places to do homework. Twelve years on, there is a web of 35 FOKAL-supported libraries in Haiti: in the countryside, the secondary cities and in poor Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods. These libraries differ from those in the three other Haitian library systems including the national libraries in that they are initiated and sustained by associations within the community.

The libraries in the FOKAL web have 5,000 books and for a southern Haitian town like Chardonnières, with a population of 21,300 and five primary schools and two high schools, the community library is a valuable resource for the youth and the town alike. Chardonnières is seven hours west and then north by broken roads from Port-au-Prince; the drive passes through eleven rivers.

The town’s one library opened only six years ago, housed in a rehabilitated building that had been previously abandoned by the nearby Catholic Church. Diaspora living in Boston provided the original financing but two years after it opened, interest and support drifted away; FOKAL then began to sustain it.

‘When the Chardonnières library opened in 2001, the people in the town weren’t used to the idea of a library,’ remembers Ernest Pierre-Louis, founder and director of the Chardonnières library. Pierre-Louis, organized activities: theatre, dance, and debates, to draw people in and then would introduce the collection of books. He elaborated, ‘At the beginning, some visited out of curiosity but it took programming events to really attract and help them understand how they can use the library.’

At times in Haiti, the teacher is the only one with a class textbook or worse yet, the prime reference material is the teacher’s high school notes. Pierre-Louis said, ‘Students sometimes come by and ask if I will order a textbook.’

Three hours south of Chardonnières is Haiti’s fourth largest city, Les Cayes, where on a dusty street, a FOKAL-supported library is housed in a former movie theatre. Though in dire need of a paint job, this boxy one-story
building is a sanctuary of two clean book-filled rooms including a research section and a children’s corner. Started by local educators, the Les Cayes library also has a large community room perfect for public cultural events as well as children’s group activities.

FOKAL libraries are free for all to visit. There is a very nominal ‘membership’ fee to borrow books and receive a laminated library card, which entitles the reader to take out up to three books for eight days.

The organization’s support includes a small budget for staff salaries, books and supplies. It purchases newly published books in Haiti and one copy goes to each library, FOKAL’s way to support Haitian writers. A CD and DVD player, a TV monitor and multi-media materials such as history, poetry and music CDs, DVDs, and videos, are standard equipment.

FOKAL trains personnel in how to manage the collection, categorize books in a simplified Dewey Decimal system, and run the lending system. Staff learn how to talk to those who use the library and how to recognize books the visitors want. They learn how to develop related programme activities. Since 2005, 88 library staff have been trained.

Elizabeth Pierre-Louis, director of the FOKAL’s library program (no relation to the director of the Chardonnières library) knows the importance of outreach and long-range programming. ‘That’s when you see people getting interested in the books and even expanding their interests,’ she explains. Themes of study with accompanying materials are part of outreach activities.

Last year’s theme was Jacques Roumain, author of Masters of the Dew. Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Haiti’s most famous novelist (June 4, 1907), FOKAL produced a series of 10 posters highlighting his life and works.

The libraries are also the centre for other related activities like theatre groups and debate programs. One library organizes a book fair, another, nature and historical walks. A summer day-programme began in the Les Cayes library and Port-au-Prince’s Monique Calixte Library after parents in the summer started dropping off their children in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon.

FOKAL’s web of libraries stretch from poor zones of Port-au-Prince to Cape Haitien, Les Cayes and Jeremie. Functioning as centres of culture, they allow for different types of education, a departure from the formality of school. By providing access to books and changing technologies they nurture a love for learning and expand opportunities and options for the youth in this struggling nation.

Friends of FOKAL is the U.S.-based arm of the organization. For more info: (+1) 212-548-0332. http://www.fokal-usa.org/aboutfokal.htm

Both photos: Tequila Minsky.
Perfiles de la censura y la autocensura en República Dominicana

Por Espacio de Comunicación Insular

El debate suscitado en torno a la libertad de prensa en nuestro país al iniciar el 2008, que incluso ha sido tomado como tema de campaña en la presente coyuntura electoral, nos llama a la reflexión acerca de si desde el Gobierno y otros grupos de poder se intenta controlar el ejercicio periodístico, violentando los derechos a la libre expresión y a la libertad de prensa que deben primar en todo Estado de Derecho.

El periodista argentino Ricardo Trotti, subdirector ejecutivo de la Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (SIP), se refiere a la censura y a la autocensura como prácticas que toman rostro en la ‘persecución de los gobiernos, amenazas de los políticos, intimidación a través de nuevas legislaciones, acoso judicial y encarcelamiento, secuestros por parte de los terroristas, asesinatos cometidos por los narcotraficantes, atentados dinamiteros y agresiones perpetradas por desconocidos’, en procura de un ‘apagón informativo’.

Mientras define la censura como las ‘formas de presión’ mediante la violencia o leyes restrictivas a la libre expresión, entiende la autocensura como una ‘consecuencia psicológica y lógica de la violencia’, como ‘un mecanismo de autodefensa’ del periodista, que ‘deja de ejercer la libertad de expresión para defender la seguridad personal, el puesto de trabajo o, en caso de los medios, la supervivencia’.

Otros pensadores se refieren a la censura como un tipo de violencia no física ni emocional, sino intelectual, y consideran la propaganda, la manipulación de los medios de comunicación, las relaciones públicas o la desinformación como nuevos métodos para suprimir perspectivas o ideas.

En el país, antes de transcurrir los dos primeros meses del año en curso, desde diferentes sectores se alegó presiones provenientes de estamentos de Poder, tratando de impedir la libertad de prensa. Referimos los casos más connotados.

El periodista Quiterio Cedeño, presidente de la Asociación Dominicana de Prensa Turística (Adompretur), acusó al ministro de Turismo, Félix Jiménez, de presionar a la Asociación Nacional de Hoteles y Restaurantes (Asonahores), con la que el comunicador mantiene un contrato de servicios, por sus críticas a la gestión de Jiménez. En una carta que el funcionario envió a Asonahores en diciembre pasado dice que el comunicador mantiene reiterados ‘ataques, retractaciones y censuras públicas’ a las acciones de la cartera, por lo que le inquiere que precise ‘si los conceptos por él emitidos responden al criterio de todos o de la mayoría de sus miembros’.

Otro caso es el de la periodista Nuria Piera, quien calificó como ‘un enfrentamiento entre el poder y la prensa’ las pretensiones del fiscal del Distrito Nacional, José Manuel Hernández Peguero, de impedir que ella continúe las investigaciones acerca de si fue regular o no el procedimiento para la extradición de un canadiense acusado de narcotráfico. Hernández acusó a Piera de procurar ‘intimidar al Ministerio Público con informaciones periodísticas divorciadas de la realidad’.

Esta misma comunicadora también fue emplazada por la ministra de Educación, Ligia Amada Melo, a retractarse de cuestionamientos formulados sobre los recursos utilizados por la funcionaria para la construcción de una casa veraniega en el municipio de Jarabacoa. ‘He apoderado a un equipo de abogados a fin de que estudie y recomiende las acciones legales a tomar, salvo que la señora Nuria Piera proceda a la rectificación de las informaciones que ofrece’. 
ció al público, en el plazo de 72 horas’, expone la funcionaria en un espacio pagado publicado el 13 de febrero pasado.

Otro caso al que haremos referencia es el del ex director del periódico Listín Diario, el periodista Miguel Franjul, quien abrió un cuarto expediente al alegar que renunció a la posición ejecutiva por las ‘presiones del Gobierno’ a la familia que ostenta la propiedad de la editora, entre las que citó el retiro de la publicidad oficial.

Este último es un caso más complejo. Listín Diario fue incautado por el Banco Central en el 2003 cuando Ramón Báez Figueroa fue acusado de fraude en el Banco Intercontinental (Baninter). Entonces se dijo que la editora fue adquirida por el banquero con recursos provenientes del lavado de activos. Una sentencia devolvió provisionalmente el medio a la familia Báez, y previo a la sentencia que condenó al imputado en finales de 2007, el diario fue excluido de forma definitiva del expediente.

A propósito del caso anterior, resulta oportuno recrear la participación de Guillermo Moreno, abogado y catedrático universitario, en el seminario internacional sobre Riesgos y Ética en el Periodismo, realizado en el país el año pasado. En el cónclave (auspiciado por la SIP y el Centro para la Libertad de Expresión en República Dominicana, Moreno propuso la creación de mecanismos que permitan desligar al periodismo de los intereses particulares, regulando la distribución de propaganda oficial en los medios y diferenciando la línea informativa de la inversión privada.

En ese mismo escenario, el jurista Juan Miguel Castillo Pantaleón señaló que la obediencia a los intereses de grupos de poder, la simpatía personal ante los temas, la dependencia a los salarios y la corrupción son factores que afectan el ejercicio periodístico en el país.

Otro espacio para reflexionar sobre el respeto al ejercicio periodístico fue propiciado por la Cátedra de Comunicación, Democracia y Gobernabilidad de la UNESCO, que el año pasado celebró en la Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra las ‘Jornadas latinoamericanas sobre tecnología de la información y la comunicación: nuevas posibilidades y desafíos para la libertad de Expresión’.

Allí, la periodista colombiana Ana María Miralles Castellano se refirió a la censura empresarial, y a cómo las empresas de comunicaciones sobreponen la libertad de empresa a la libertad de expresión. Las acusó de privatizar las informaciones: ‘Debemos recordar que la información es un bien público al cual todos tenemos derecho y acceso’.

El tema de la censura y la autocensura es recurrente. En 1997, la periodista dominicana Ana Mitila Lora, al participar en una conferencia internacional sobre Realidades y Desafíos en América Latina, efectuada en Venezuela, planteó que en el periodismo dominicano el problema ético está vinculado a la pobreza, que degenera en autocensura. Expuso que el periodista para vivir decentemente necesita varios empleos, lo que se revierte en que no sea capaz de decir toda la verdad de un caso a fin de no afectar a sus empleadores o clientes.

Una década más tarde la realidad no es diferente, a pesar de que la libertad de expresión está contenida en el artículo 8 de la Constitución Dominicana: ‘Toda persona podrá, sin sujeción a censura previa, emitir libremente su pensamiento’. Ese derecho también está protegido por la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos en su artículo 19, y por la Convención Americana sobre Derechos Humanos, que en su artículo 13 consagra el respeto pleno a la libertad de pensamiento y de expresión, y a buscar, recibir y difundir informaciones e ideas de toda índole, sin consideraciones de fronteras.

Amén de los ya citados, haremos referencia a otros casos en donde ha habido acusaciones de violentar la libertad de prensa:

La SIP, en su resolución de 2007, planteó que en República Dominicana la colocación de la publicidad oficial es utilizada como instrumento ‘para privilegiar o castigar a los medios de comunicación y para influir en las decisiones editoriales y políticas informativas, constituyéndose en actos de corrupción’.

En 2006, el periodista Adolfo Salomón fue despedido luego de que el secretario de las Fuerzas Armadas de entonces enviara una carta al medio quejándose porque el comunicador formuló al cardenal dominicano una pregunta sobre la homosexualidad en la Iglesia Católica,
durante un homenaje que esa institución le hiciera al prelado católico.

- En 2004, el entonces vicepresidente para RD y Haití de la Comisión de Libertad de Prensa de la SIP, Víctor Manuel Tejada, condenó un anuncio hecho por el entonces vocero del gobierno, Roberto Rodríguez de Marchena, de que administrarían las informaciones oficiales para no preocupar a la ciudadanía con noticias ‘inoportunas’ y evitar ‘el malestar que producen entre los dominicanos las impertinencias y el escándalo’.

- En 2004 fue asesinado en Azua el periodista Juan Andújar al salir de la emisora en donde tenía un programa de radio. De su muerte fue acusado y posteriormente condenado Vladimir Pujols, el líder de una banda que se dedicaba al tráfico de drogas bajo el amparo de policías de puesto en esa provincia. En el mismo incidente resultó mutilado el también periodista Jorge Luis Sención.

- En 2003 se produjo el apresamiento del periodista Marino Zapete luego de publicar detalles de la mansión que se construía en Jarabacoa el presidente de entonces, Hipólito Mejía.

- En 2003, los locutores Horacio Emilio Lemoine y Carlos Martínez, quienes hicieron una encuesta electoral en una emisora de Monte Cristi que fue calificada de irrespetuosa hacia el Presidente, fueron apresados.

- En 2002, el periodista Fausto Rosario Adames, director del diario Clave Digital y del semanario Clave, publicó en la página electrónica del movimiento Participación Ciudadana lo siguiente: ‘No hay un director de periódico que se haya escapado a las duras palabras de Hipólito Mejía. El único que no estaba en su lista era Álvarez Vega (Bienvenido), y acaba de ser incluido. Osvaldo Santana, Bernardo Vega, Cuchito Álvarez, Radhamés Gómez Pepín y Rafael Molina Morillo han recibido el látigo verbal del presidente’. (Mejía acusó a Álvarez Vega de utilizar una encuesta como chantaje contra el gobierno).

La prensa y la inmigración haitiana

La censura y la autocensura también asoman cuando se aborda alguna temática vinculada al vecino Haití, país que compartió la isla con República Dominicana. En los medios a esos temas se les suele dar un trato maniqueo, y a los comunicadores y comunicadoras se les ubica como pro-haitianos si abogan por el respeto a sus derechos (que es simplemente defender los derechos humanos), o de ‘patriotas’ si se colocan en la fila de los detractores de Haití.

Uno de los temas que más polarización genera es el de la nacionalidad. En abril de 2007, la periodista dominicana Sara Pérez, residente en Alemania y columnista de El Nacional, publicó un amplio artículo defendiendo a la dominicana Sonia Pierre, a quien entonces se le pretendió despojar de su nacionalidad en represalia por sus sistemáticas denuncias, a través del Movimiento de Mujeres Dominicano - Haitianas (MUDHA), de la violación a los derechos de la población dominicana de ascendencia haitiana, labor por la que fue reconocida en 2006 con el Premio de Derechos Humanos RFK Memorial Foundation.

‘Sonia, en ejercicio de su libertad de expresión y de su derecho a criticar políticas de su país y de cualquier otro, en el escenario que elija, ha denunciado la violación de derechos humanos contra la población dominicana de origen haitiano en RD... En la iniciativa de reprender a Sonia convergen los fundamentalismos de la Fuerza Nacional Progresista, (FNP) y las indolencias de un gobierno que carece de voluntad para sortear los desafíos dominico-haitianos.’, escribió Pérez.

En alusión a los comentarios de Pérez, la también periodista Soraida Araujo, quien reside en París, comentó lo siguiente: ‘Pocos son los periodistas dominicanos decididos a ver el problema dominico-haitiano con ojos críticos y distanciados. O mejor dicho: creo que la mayoría tiene miedo y lo peor es que más que de miedo se trata de autocensura; una autocensura que a largo plazo podría asfixiar la diversidad de opinión, elemento fundamental para la existencia de una prensa plural y edificante’.

Ese tema, junto con el de la inmigración haitiana, provoca frecuentes y encendidos debates en la prensa nacional. Por ejemplo, en noviembre de 2006 los diarios dominicanos recogieron los siguientes comentarios del
entonces embajador estadounidense Hans Hertell: ‘Tengo la esperanza de que las relaciones con el Gobierno de Haití continuarán fortaleciéndose, y que siempre estarán basadas en el respeto mutuo de la soberanía… Sería muy deseable que para el 2011 las autoridades dominicanas hayan establecido una solución a los problemas administrativos de emisión de los certificados de nacimiento de hijos de extranjeros nacidos en territorio dominicano’.

También fue procurada por la prensa una reacción a esos juicios. ‘Los temas de nacionalidad y de migración han sido de la estricta competencia de la soberanía de un país, tanto así que nuestra Constitución dice que el Congreso de la República es el que establece la política migratoria’, expuso el presidente de la Junta Central Electoral, Julio César Castaños Guzmán, organismo que tiene bajo su responsabilidad las oficinillas donde se expiden las actas de nacimiento. Añadió que ese organismo hará cumplir la ley en lo relativo a la no declaración de hijos de residentes ilegales en el territorio dominicano.

Las citas a las que hemos hecho alusión son, apenas, el botón de muestra. En este tenor, resultan interesantes las conclusiones de un estudio sobre las tendencias de las informaciones publicadas en los cinco principales diarios dominicanos (Listín Diario, El Caribe, El Nacional, Hoy y Diario Libre) con respecto a dicha temática en el período comprendido entre 2004 y 2007.

Aunque la investigación abarcó la prensa de ambos países para nuestro propósito sólo reseñaremos la parte dominicana, que fue realizada por el Espacio de Comunicación Insular (Espacinsular). El estudio forma parte del proyecto ‘Promoción de una mejor comunicación sobre los migrantes en República Dominicana’, que ejecuta el Grupo de Ayuda a Repatriados y Refugiados (GARR) con el apoyo de la organización belga Volens.

‘La prensa dominicana aborda el tema de los/as inmigrantes haitiano/as destacando principalmente los temas conflictivos y una imagen negativa de éstas personas’, refiere el estudio. Indica que es recurrente presentar esta migración como ‘invasión pacífica con serias amenazas a la soberanía nacional, la cultura y las costumbres del pueblo dominicano’.

‘Es evidente que en los últimos años, diversos sectores han arreciado, a través de la prensa, una constante campaña contra la presencia de migrantes haitianos/as en la República Dominicana, atribuyéndole el desplazamiento de la mano de obra local en sectores claves de la economía criolla, la transmisión de enfermedades y una cultura distinta a la nacional’, refiere. De igual manera, sostiene que los medios de comunicación invisibilizan los aportes de esta población al desarrollo de la economía dominicana.

En el estudio se propone organizar procesos de sensibilización con ejecutivos y ejecutivas de medios, periodistas y otros actores para que en los contenidos noticiosos se promueva utilizar un lenguaje no discriminatorio ni excluyente, y que tienda a mejorar las relaciones entre ambas naciones.

Además, promover un mayor intercambio entre periodistas de la isla y acuerdos de cooperación entre los gremios periodísticos con el fin de fortalecer los vínculos e impulsar alternativas que permitan un mejor abordaje de la temática, así como crear canales de comunicación que permitan el intercambio de informaciones sobre la realidad económica, social y política de ambas sociedades.

Por último, impulsar la coordinación de los medios alternativos de la isla, con el fin de fortalecerlos y aumentar su incidencia en la opinión pública de ambos países, para colocar en la agenda pública temas que contribuyan a fortalecer las relaciones binacionales.
Victor Jara’s songs of struggle and hope

Anita Krajnc

The revolutionary songs of Victor Jara, one of the founders of Nueva Canción (the New Chilean song movement), continue to reverberate with new generations of Chileans. In the post-Pinochet era of democracy, many recording groups with very different musical styles are reviving Victor Jara’s music and most of all his lyrics.

Chilean singer Francesca Ancarola, who released a beautiful tribute album in 2007 called Loquen: Tributo a Victor Jara says: ‘It seems to me since that time [the 1989 lifting of the ban in Chile on spreading Victor Jara’s music] that with each new generation, even those who did not directly experience dictatorial repression, his legacy grows ever stronger, stronger even than in previous generations.’

Joan Jara, Victor’s widow, said in an interview that she was encouraged by the selection of Victor Jara as one of the ten most important historical figures in Chile in a national television contest last year following the format of the BBC’s contest. Also worth mentioning, Salvador Allende was the only Chilean president voted into the top ten.

Few artists in history have their works revived decade after decade (examples include the plays of Oscar Wilde or Bertolt Brecht). The tragic irony in Victor Jara’s case is that he was brutally murdered at the very prime of his musical career at the age of 40.

A day after the US backed military coup in September 11, 1973, Victor Jara was herded into the Chile Stadium along with 5,000 others. A few days later, after being tortured and his face and hands terribly disfigured, he was shot dead with 44 bullets and, after Allende, was the most famous victim of Pinochet’s right-wing dictatorship.

Victor Jara’s ‘revolutionary songs’

The shock and outrage of a renowned musician being tortured and assassinated and his music banned by the Pinochet dictatorship led to dozens of tribute albums and concerts around the world, including albums by exiled Quilapayún and Inti-Illumani, two Nueva Canción groups which worked closely with Victor Jara. Upon her return to Chile, Joan Jara helped organize the first Victor Jara festival in Chile under the dictatorship in 1985.

She opened Espiral, an independent dance centre, which re-created the grassroots organizing approach of the Ballet Popular in the early 1970s. It debuted with a show choreographed to Victor Jara’s music. In her memoirs, Victor: An Unfinished Song, she describes how the dance troupe ‘gave performances in poblaciones [shanty towns], in soup kitchens, mothers’ centres, churches and all those places where people were trying to maintain community organizations that enabled them to live and keep hope alive’ (Jara, 1983: 257).

Joan Jara said, in the interview, that they started with Victor’s instrumental pieces because these were not censorable, just as in the first year after the military coup in 1973 socially conscious musicians began to play his instrumental songs. Next Espiral included his love songs including ‘On my way to work,’ ‘Te Recuerdo Amanda’ and also his earlier songs from 50s and early 60s.

Many Chilean artists began to record Jara’s songs following Chile’s return to democracy in 1990. In 1998 a beautiful, folksy compilation album featured Victor Jara’s contemporaries, including Isabel Para, Leon Gieco, Patricio Manns, Quilapayún, Los Jaivas, and Cuban troubadour Silvio Rodríguez. In 2001, Los Prisioneros, one of Chile’s best-known rock groups, and Los Bunkers as well as bands from Argentina, Spain and Brazil performed his well-known songs in a compilation rock tribute album.

Jara’s actual recordings enjoyed an interna-
tional revival in 2002-2003 when his remixed and remastered recordings were reissued in an eight CD box set by the local division of AOL Time Warner. His sheet music was also republished in 2002. The decline of the music industry has since hurt the spread of world music.

Victor Jara songs are still present though. The Foundation constantly gets requests to record Victor Jara in very different styles, including hip-hop. Joan Jara said although ‘musically it is not very near but they use the same text.’ She says that last year ‘a very sensitive academic/classical style rendition was done by a symphonic orchestra and choir of 100 from the city of Concepcion.’

Also in 2007, Francesca Ancarola recorded Loquen, a tribute album containing many of Victor Jara’s most powerful topical songs that have a timeless and universal relevance, especially ‘The Right to Live in Peace’—a song written for the Vietnamese—‘Canto Libre’ and ‘Manifiesto,’ the latter two songs defining ‘revolutionary songs’ as making ordinary people the protagonist and placing them at the forefront of history. In the liner notes, Ancarola observes: ‘his beautiful songs [are] profoundly rooted in Chile’s letters and musical idiom’ and that his ‘art emerges inexorably from his humble origin in a country marked by class differences.’

One of the things that make Victor Jara’s songs so deeply attractive to current generations of Chileans is that he was being honest with his own roots, explains Joan Jara. Victor was not going to other countries to imitate progressive songs elsewhere. He valued the people and land of Chile and identified with the realities and struggles faced by the majority. In Manifiesto, what was to become his farewell song written in August of 1973, he writes:

My song is not for fleeting praise
nor to gain foreign fame,
it is for this narrow country
to the very depths of the earth.

‘Partly because his work was born out of his life, it is tremendously authentic,’ says Joan Jara. ‘It is not commercial and not aiming at being fashionable. The context in which he was living happened to be the 1960s and 70s. It was a time of tremendous construction and hope, and hope is very important. Young people latch onto that. Victor Jara gives them hope that they can make a difference.’

Claudio Saldivia, a Toronto musician and impresario, says that what draws him to Victor Jara is ‘his musical talent and then when you look at lyrics… they are strongly political, very direct, and spoken very clearly. There is no beating around the bush. Also, there is a spirituality to his songs.’

Saldivia cites the poignant example of ‘Preguntas por Puerto Montt’ (‘Questions about the Massacre of Puerto Montt’) which describes what really happened in the massacre of 300 peasants who were squatting on land in the southern town of Puerto Montt. In the lyrics, Jara names Perez Zujovic, the Home Secretary who was responsible for ordering police to shoot:

He died without knowing why
They riddled his chest with bullets,
Struggling for the right
To a place to exist on earth

... You must answer
Mr. Perez Zujovic!
Why were defenseless people confronted with guns?
Mr. Perez, your conscience
is buried in a coffin
and your hands cannot be washed
by all the rains of the south.

The right-wing media suppressed the story of the massacre, so Victor Jara detailed the story in his lyrics and named who was responsible and needed to be brought to justice.

Another reason for Victor Jara’s enduring legacy among young people, according to Saldivia, is that he was open to experimenting with different musical styles. For example, he collaborated with Los Blops, a popular rock group, on the song ‘The Right to Live in Peace.’ The song was written for the people of Vietnam and applies with equal power today to peoples facing foreign military occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, the West Bank and
Gaza, and elsewhere.

Indo-China is the place on the far side of the wide sea where they blow up flowers with genocide and napalm. The moon is an explosion which fuses all the outcry the right to live in peace.

Uncle Ho, our song is the fire of pure love, dove of the dovecote, olive of the olive tree. It is the universal song a chain which will bring victory to a right to live in peace.

Songs such as these against aggressive and expansionist foreign policy resonate with people of the current generation.

Another example of Jara connecting with student radicals is ‘Movil Oil Special’, a song on which he collaborated with Quilapayún and which appeared on Jara’s album Pongo en tus Manos Abiertas (Into your open hands). The title of the song is a pun on the multinational oil company operating in Chile as well as the name of the local riot control units called Grupo Móvil, which relied on American training and equipment. The lyrics refer to the Chilean right-wing ruling elite as ‘the mummies and the dinosaurs’ and the music breaks off in the middle of the song as the sounds of vibrant student chants enter and then the discordant noise of tear gas grenades rains down to disperse the students.

The song ends with a call to action:

We are the reformists, the revolutionaries, the anti-imperialists, of the University.

In his classic book What is art? Leo Tolstoy regarded true art as emphasizing naturalism, authenticity, truthfulness, sincerity, and ethics and showing acts of kindness and revealing a sense of community among peasants. There is a genuine realism, compassion and sincerity in Victor Jara’s lyrics and music. He presents a very authentic vision of peasant life, never clichés. ‘This makes Victor Jara’s songs somehow universal in the sense that they are about particular people, real people, real situations,’ Joan Jara said in the interview.

Tolstoy’s insights help us understand why Victor Jara’s lyrics remain so captivating more than three decades later. Tolstoy challenged the idea that ‘the life of working people is poor in subject-matter’ and argued that their lives are far more interesting than those of the upper classes because of their varied work experiences, their struggles with economic realities and how that affects family life, ‘their migrations, the intercourse with [their] employers, overseers, and companions and with men[&women] of other religions and other nationalities..., his[her] pride in self-suppression and service to others, his[her] pleasures of refreshment...’

Victor Jara’s songs give expression to the distinctive perspectives of peasants and workers and the many facets and richness of their lives, work, joys, struggles for justice, witticisms, and hopes.

The Victor Jara Foundation

Victor Jara’s continued popularity also has a lot to do with the work of the Victor Jara Foundation [supported by WACC in 2005], set up by Joan Jara to act as ‘the centre of his memory, his work, his values, which otherwise would be buried in the past.’ Young people are always dropping by and there are visitors from around the world.

Just as Victor Jara’s songs tried to capture a true portrait of the rich and varied lives of workers, peasants, and indigenous peoples, the Victor Jara Foundation tries ‘to ensure that Victor always be real, and not to make a myth of him. To recognize that he was an ordinary man, a talented man, a man very committed to social change. Through the work of the Foundation over the years we rescued him from just being a poster, a raised fist. People need an example of people making a difference in this much more difficult situation at the present. Hope is an important word.’

The Foundation is striving to give his life
and values meaning in many creative and tangible ways. An enormous traveling street exhibition is making its way around the world. On September 2006, the exhibit was inaugurated by President Bachelet and appeared on the streets opposite the Palace in six modules, 50 metres long. The exhibit has already traveled around Argentina last year and this year it will appear in Bolivia and Cuba and Spain soon. Joan Jara said it's ‘a reflection of how Victor is present in many countries.’ The exhibit has illustrations of Victor Jara’s time, values, and music, and his quotes. There activities for the public to participate in such as dance, music, and as well local artists are invited to come and perform.

People around the world are also learning about the life of Victor Jara from the continued popularity of Joan’s memoirs entitled Victor: An Unfinished Song. She said it was difficult to write the book, but it is surprising how the book has a life of its own and a lasting influence; it will always be there. This beautifully written and heartfelt book was recently published in Japan and China and has been translated into 14 languages and a publisher from South Korea has expressed interest.

Transforming the book into a film is still under discussion in Hollywood. There also was a recently feature-length documentary of Jara’s life called The Right to Live in Peace and John Pilger’s first big screen documentary called The War on Democracy covers the re-emergence of democratic movements across Latin America as well as Jara’s life and music.

**The socially engaged artist**

Arnold Hauser argues in The Social History of Art that Leo Tolstoy’s influence can be attributed even more to his social engagement than his great works of art. In the same way, Victor Jara resonates by the example he offers of social commitment in his music and heightened to a much greater degree by his political activism.

Rodrigo Barreda, a founder and artistic director of the Salvador Allende Arts Festival for Peace in Toronto explains how the exiled Chilean left look to Victor Jara’s example as they try to reconstruct their own identity: ‘how he dealt with social realities, his commitment to political struggle, and also his sacrifice—his detention, torture and assassination. He was a great artist, but he was also a militant—a member of the central committee of the Communist Youth in 1960s, and then was a passionate supporter of Allende’s Popular Unity.’

Barreda continues: ‘It is very easy to say he’s a member of Latin American culture, but Victor Jara was also close to other organizations. He belonged to the muralist movement in particular the Ramona Parra muralist brigade and didn’t have any problem aligning himself publicly with communist youth.’

Barreda gives numerous examples of the radicalization of Victor Jara in the 1960s: his confrontation with right; his involvement in the student movement; his denunciation of the massacre of Puerto Montt; his identification with liberation theology which is beautifully articulated in his song ‘La Plegaria a un Labrador’; the song he wrote for Torres, the guerrilla fighter in Columbia; the songs he dedicated to the Mexican revolution of 1910 in which there was a militant uprising of the peasantry; and finally, Jara’s push for a left-wing and more realistic analysis in adapting Marxist theory to the Latin American reality.

Barreda says we can see how radical Victor
Jara’s view of revolution is by his non-European vision of Marxism based on the 1910 Mexican Revolution. In the European view, the unity of the working class not peasantry was fundamental to social change, but in Latin America the Mexican, Cuban, and Nicaraguan experiences suggest that the peasantry was leading the revolution:

‘The main problem is not being true to what we say we believe in. Victor Jara helps us. Until the end you can be creative in constructing alternatives to social problems people confront. You can even witness this in his last poem, which he wrote in the national stadium. His words matched his practice, which is hard.’

That is why Barreda’s group worked to name a laneway in Toronto after Victor Jara instead of other Chilean figures. ‘It is because we believe Victor Jara is closer to our reality as artists.’ Barreda as part of the Latin American Canadian Arts Project (LACAP), the group organizing the Salvador Allende Arts Festival for Peace, was instrumental in getting the city of Toronto to name a ‘Victor Jara Lane.’ The lane project also entails painting a mural of Jara in the area and setting up a resource centre at the Shaw/Davenport public library of books, CDs, records, cassettes, docs and other resources by and about Victor Jara.

Many of the problems, since Victor Jara’s times, have not changed. Joan Jara in her book wrote that you have to fight for the truth particularly when the media and government tell lies. In the 1960s and 70s the left had created its own record label, its own press, and murals to counter the right-wing controlled media. She poignantly notes that it was a time when ‘the whole people had learned to sing’ and the Popular Unity platform included a measure which would provide government support for popular arts programs and a new cultural agency.

Today, with the major media all in hands of corporate control, there is a terrible battle. Joan Jara says that is why someone like Michael Moore and Al Gore are so important because they can reach out to a large audience. She noted that ‘here in Chile, we have a situation that is quite like in the 1970s. That is why the internet is a sort of lifeline’ and grassroots organizing and popular art, in which art is for everyone, remain part of the solution.

Victor Jara’s music and activism offer current generations an ideal of a non-compromising, truthful, warm, engaged and inspiring artist. His legacy of an activist musician is still making its way around the world. Victor Jara will always be a symbol of resistance and hope, and more.

In 2005 WACC funded a project to digitalize the archives of the Victor Jara Foundation.

Notes
1. With Ballet Popular, the ‘aim was to extend the enjoyment of watching dance to the widest possible public, as a prelude to their active participation in the actual experience of dancing.’ Jara, J. (1983). Victor: An Unfinished Song. London: Bloomsbury, p. 132.
3. Victor Jara’s last poem written in the stadium days before he was murdered documents the conditions of the political prisoners:

   "How much humanity exposed to hunger, cold, panic, pain, moral pressure, terror and insanity?"

   "One dead, another beaten as I could never have believed a human being could be beaten."

   "...What horror the face of fascism creates! They carry out their plans with knife-like precision."

   Even amidst the horror and atrocities, Jara offered comfort and songs to his fellow inmates and resistance and hope in his last poem:

   "But suddenly my conscience awakes and I see that this tide has no heartbeat, only the pulse of machines"

   "The blood of our President, our compañero, will strike with more strength than bombs and machine guns!"

   "So will our fist strike again!"

Anita Krajnc is a Toronto media democracy activist and writer. She is currently working on a book on protest art and independent media.
Does media reform make a difference?

Mauri Elbel

For more than two decades, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) has been a dedicated media watch group, fighting media bias and censorship. But has the reform group’s persistent criticism made a difference in today’s mainstream media environment in the U.S.? This article looks at FAIR’s objectives, accomplishments and shortcomings in the context of new social movement theories to reflect on how far the media reform organisation has come and how far it still must go to achieve positive social change.

‘A popular Government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.’

(James Madison, 1822)

There is no doubt the pillars on which a democratic free press was built are crumbling. In fact, it seems the United States media are in a crisis (Nichols and McChesney, 2005; Newman and Scott, 2005; McChesney, 2005) and its free press system is failing (McChesney, 2005: 9). Not only are the U.S. news media dominated by a handful of powerful media giants, but their corporate goals are geared more toward gaining profits than serving the public interest or promoting cultural diversity.

Americans have found themselves immersed in a ‘horror’ war led by an ‘absurd’ president (Nichols and McChesney, 2005: 9). While the current administration has managed to finagle its propagandistic messages through the media, the country’s citizens have been deprived of the diverse viewpoints and unbiased information that enable democratic debates inherent in a free press system. Americans are undergoing what Nichols and McChesney (2005: 9) call a ‘Madisonian moment’ – the prologue to tragedy or farce. They say the current crises were paved by a media system that does not operate as the Constitution intended.

Democracy in America is increasingly being threatened by lack of media regulation, the declining quality of journalism and the strong presence of media bias. Diversity of ownership is essential because it protects democracy in various ways – it eliminates abuse of power within the public sphere, creates more decision makers and watchdogs and promotes principles of the fourth estate (Baker, 2007: 194-195).

The hope of resolving this crisis lies within the media reform movement – the groups and activists who are standing up against the corruption and cynicism embedded in today’s mass media system.

Although the battle is uphill and will no doubt be a difficult struggle, it is far from hopeless. McChesney (2005: 19) argues that scores of media reform campaigns have formed over recent years on a local, national and even global scale. The number of citizens speaking out against corporate media and fighting for democracy is increasing each day – they are demanding alternatives to the few corporate choices they are being fed. Against the desires of powerful media giants, independent radio stations are emerging around the country, the Internet is becoming a forum for activism and people are opening their eyes to media bias and censorship (Hart, 2005: 61).

From recently established non-for-profit organisations such as Free Press and MediaChannel to grassroots public interest groups like Youth Media Council, San Francisco’s Alliance, Philadelphia’s Media Tank, Seattle’s Reclaim the Media, and Independent Media Centres stationed across the nation, media reform groups are spanning the
United States.

FAIR has been critiquing media bias and censorship, assuming an unwavering media watchdog role in the U.S. since 1986 (FAIR, 2007a). The group, founded by Jeff Cohen, was formed to context the increasing concentration of U.S. media at a time when the industry was taking a sharp turn to the right (Cohen, 1987). Today, FAIR continues to work with activists and journalists to advocate First Amendment rights by promoting diversity and criticising media practices that ignore opposing or minority viewpoints. FAIR is a progressive, anti-censorship organisation that has spent the past 20-plus years exposing neglected news stories on socially important issues that are often overlooked by the mainstream media.

Ultimately, the group believes structural reform is the key to breaking through the cluster of media giants, creating independent media and promoting diverse sources of news and information. Corporate ownership, advertising influence and sensationalism are just a few of the evils FAIR struggles against. Recognising the need for independent media, FAIR publishes *Extra!*, a bimonthly media criticism magazine, and *CounterSpin*, its weekly radio program aired on more than 125 non-commercial stations throughout North America.

Independent media are crucial to the media reform movement because they break stories and content often ignored by mainstream media and further solidify the movement itself (Nichols and McChesney, 2005: 185).

Uniquely, 80% of FAIR’s revenue is generated from subscriptions and community contributions with none of its funding coming from corporations, advertising or government grants (FAIR, 2007b). While FAIR’s struggle is situated within a national context, the reform group capitalises on the network society and information technologies to interact and connect with others, and it often covers issues with a global impact such as the War in Iraq, Burma, immigration and the environment.

Viewing FAIR in a theoretical framework
In developing a theoretical framework for FAIR, I will rely on various theorists who have contributed to the vast literature of social movement theory. FAIR’s media reform initiatives fit within the context of a new social movement. Instead of focusing on one particular theory, I will draw on several interpretations developed by new social movement theorists. While this analysis is by no means comprehensive, theories from Jurgen Habermas, Alberto Melucci and interpretations from Carroll and Hackett (2006) are helpful in an attempt to theorise FAIR’s media reform initiatives and practices.

Habermas believes the conflicts within new social movements emerge at the ‘seam between system and life-world’. He claims the new resistance movements are reacting to the ‘colonization of the life world’ and contain an ideological depiction of an ‘enemy’ (Habermas, 1981: 36-37). Basically, he is discussing the way in which bureaucratic systems infringe upon the quality of life in a society. In this context, FAIR’s struggle can be seen as a goal, not to destroy the entire media system, but to make it more accountable and democratic in its policies.

FAIR’s struggle is against mass media commercialisation, media bias, and the continued disregard for dissenting and minority viewpoints. Cohen (1987) writes, ‘The villain we see is not a person or a group, but a historical trend: the concentration of the U.S. media in fewer and fewer corporate hands.’ Habermas’ theory seems to be particularly insightful to analyse FAIR because of its emphasis on democratic components. Habermas (1981: 33) discusses the thematic shift from ‘old politics’ to ‘new politics’ – finding support among younger, more educated, middle class society revolting against issues that hinder equality, human rights, quality of life, individual self-realisation and participation.

FAIR is critical in the struggle for communication rights, democratising media, promoting cultural diversity and creating social change within the U.S. media system. Individuals are united by similar concerns and interests, recognise their self-worth and contribute to reversing the flawed structure of commercialised media. FAIR focuses on participation rather than the top-down approach evident in old social movements, and this can be seen within its opera-
tional structure. FAIR’s staff members operate as a collective group, contributing to the overall decision-making within the organisation (FAIR, 2007b).

Carroll and Hackett (2006) analyse democratic media activism (DMA) in the realm of new social movement theory. The researchers view DMA as one of the main driving forces of media democratisation in civil society – an attempt to change media content, institutions and practices as well as communication policies to promote democracy, subjectivity, and wider participation within society (Carroll and Hackett, 2006: 84; Hackett 2000, 64). FAIR believes the media reform movement is about people seeing themselves as active participants rather than passive consumers. The progressive group urges the public to become media activists, and it provides interactive tools featuring media contact lists, media activism kits and links to other activism groups through their Web site (FAIR, 2007c).

Carroll and Hackett (2006: 85) view DMA as an emerging movement, recognising that most groups are relatively new, with origins in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. They conceptualise activism in the context of three concentric circles, which I will use as a framework to analyse FAIR. The centre circle is represented by FAIR’s founders and staff, made up of groups with media industry experience such as journalists or media workers who are cognisant of the flaws existing within commercialised media.

The second circle consists of subordinate groups – the politicians, lobbyists and activists who work with FAIR – with views that conflict with the current social order. The outer circle consists of those who may not see communication policy and practice as a central concern but gravitate around certain issues perceived as anti-democratic or threatening. In this case, activists may collaborate with FAIR to mobilise against issues that threaten local media access, represent racist comments or ignore minority viewpoints.

As a main theorist of new social movements, Melucci focuses on the construction of ‘collective identity’ – a participatory, interactive process (Carroll and Hackett, 2006: 93). Melucci believes contemporary struggles revolve around social and collective identities and are no longer concerned with production of material resources that can be seen within old social movements. Carroll and Hackett (2006: 93) argue that Melucci’s perspective on the construction of identity relates to the current status of media activism, which sometimes lacks a collective identity. But as Melucci claims, social movements distinguish themselves by posing ‘symbolic challenges’ to complex codes in society – and this, Carroll and Hackett argue is what places DMAs on the cutting edge of the movement.

Carroll and Hackett (2006: 95) state, ‘... media activism contests not only the “codes” of communication but the entire complex of social relations and practices through which the codes are produced and disseminated; and this contestation is matched by the construction of democratic alternatives.’ Melucci insists that new social movements be viewed not as ‘unitary empirical objects’, but instead, as ongoing social constructions – the success of the movement is a result of ongoing efforts (Buechler, 1995: 446). Melucci seems to view new social movements as inclusive struggles against dominant codes that go against human rights and a better quality of life, which is evident within FAIR’s struggle.

**FAIR’s ongoing efforts**

FAIR has devoted itself to studying media criticism and bias over the past two decades, and many of its studies still serve as models in the field today. Over the years, FAIR has published reports on everything from distorted war coverage to the heavily biased – or completely ignored – issues of poverty and immigration. These studies are obvious proof of why alternative media and reform efforts promoting a free, democratic press are so critical – perhaps even more so today. In 1989, FAIR examined 40 months of *Nightline*’s programming and found that it overwhelmingly featured conservative elites – with 80% comprised of U.S. government officials, corporate representatives or professionals and only 5% representing public interest groups (Hart, 2005: 52). While this report was widely featured throughout media
outlets, even warranting an apology from ABC, these same biases still resonate in mainstream media today.

Twelve years later, FAIR analysed ABC, NBC and CBS evening news for one year and found 92% of all sources were white, 85% were male, 75% were Republican and 25% were Democrat (Hart, 2005: 52). Racial imbalances were even more disturbing with only 7% of the sources consisting of African-Americans and less than 1% representing Latinos, Arab-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans (Hart, 2005: 52). These are just a few in the myriad of FAIR’s studies demonstrating how mainstream media continues to promote viewpoints of the elite and powerful while simultaneously limiting minority and opposing voices that remain virtually unheard to the millions of Americans consuming the news.

During the NAFTA debate in the 1990s, FAIR examined sources in the New York Times and The Washington Post during a four-month period. Not one labour union representative was quoted and public interest sources made up only 7% while 51% of the sources were U.S. government officials who were overwhelmingly pro-NAFTA (Hart, 2005: 53). During the 1993 discourse about changing the healthcare system in the U.S., FAIR’s study showed that the mainstream media complied with the political elite to successfully spin the debate away from the voices of the popular (Hart, 2005: 54). This biased coverage could be considered a factor behind the Western nation’s deplorable healthcare system today.

A more current example can be seen in the coverage of the Iraq invasion in 2003 when the media’s sources were dominated by pro-war U.S. government officials. Out of the 393 sources appearing in the news debates during the two-week period leading up to the war, only three were anti-war (Hart, 2005: 55). And in March 2003, when President Bush held a news conference launching the controversial war, not a single probing question was asked by Washington’s elite press corps – resulting in many Americans who now claim there would not be a war if the media had done its job properly (Nichols and McChesney, 2005: 5).

FAIR has also worked to fight hate speech that still disgracefully weaves its way into the media’s rhetoric. In 1996, FAIR documented racist comments on a Disney-owned talk show radio program. Not only did the report prompt Disney to publish its policy regarding on-air racial slurs and fire its racially-skewed host, but it raised the issue that hateful conduct is not appropriate public discourse (Hart, 2005: 60).

In recent years, FAIR has published ‘Fear & Favor: How Power Shapes the News’, an annual report compiling the way owners, advertisers and the U.S. government influence news content (Hart, 2005: 56). The report exposes the pressures media owners place on journalists to cover certain stories while ignoring others, and it also reveals how commercialisation further blurs the thinning line between news and advertorial sponsorship.

Has FAIR made a difference?

It is hard to say whether or not FAIR has made a difference when it comes to achieving positive social change in the nation’s current media environment. While the media reform group strives toward reversing the concentration of media ownership as well as addressing other important issues such as global media governance, media democratisation and communication rights, it seems they have a long way to go. In order to take back the media and achieve progressive social change, McChesney argues the system it feeds upon must be altered.

McChesney says that the heart of the media crisis lies in the fact that U.S. media policies were made in the ‘most corrupt manner imaginable’ – with powerful corporations and politicians making deals behind closed doors (2005: 12). He says that the only way to reverse the current system to better serve the public interest is to alter the governing structure of the media through policy changes (McChesney: 2005: 11).

While FAIR recognises the importance of structural reform, it seems that so far its media reform initiatives have been unable to successfully penetrate the political system that continues to deregulate media policies. FAIR’s studies offer further proof that the mainstream media are digressing rather than improving on their
blatantly flawed and biased coverage – especially evidenced by FOX News’ unabashed reporting of the Bush administration’s slanted messages. While it is clear undemocratic practices are deeply entrenched in America’s current media system, it is also apparent that FAIR’s work has been successful at bringing these problems to light.

While the media reform group has been able to demonstrate the problems existing within the mass media to the portion of the population who have heard or read about them, there are limits to what those criticisms can do. McChesney and Nichols (2005: 179) point out that criticism only demonstrates that these problems are ‘hard-wired’ into the system, potentially ostracising media criticism groups as ‘ineffectual bellyachers’ without any changes to offer. Additionally, while campaigns like FAIR criticise media bias, they are not completely participatory as defined within the context of new social movements. Only those who possess the skills and opportunities to write journalistically have the ability to be active media participants (Martin, 1998: 32).

Martin further points out that while FAIR promotes ‘fairness and accuracy’ and urges a grassroots approach to reform, the group seems to lack any larger program to replace undemocratic media structure (1998: 10). While the U.S.-based watchdog group works toward reversing media imbalance, their presence is still widely unknown among the general population. Research indicates the most visited news Web sites are owned by the largest media giants that still overwhelmingly dominate the independent media (Nichols and McChesney, 2005: 182). Unfortunately, the average American is more likely to flip on CNN or Fox News for their daily news consumption than to log on to FAIR’s Web site.

To begin to formulate a future direction for FAIR, I look to Bill Moyers’ recommendations. He suggests heeding Tom Paine’s examples and Danny Schechter’s advice by reaching out to regular citizens and engaging the mainstream (Moyers, 2005: xx-xxi). It is not the people who are reading about media reform and participating in these initiatives who are the problem – it is the population at large that remains unaware. ‘We must reach the audience that’s not here – carry the fight to radio talk shows, local television, and the letters columns of our newspapers’, Moyers (2005: xx) states.

Media reform has the potential to unite all sectors of America because it is an issue that affects peoples’ lives equally. But groups like FAIR need to find their way out of the esoteric circles of media academics, activists and policy makers and back into the mainstream, where the power of the people and their unheard voices lie.

To some extent, FAIR has been successful in this regard. FAIR spokespersons actively engage in outreach work, discussing and debating media issues on U.S. television and radio programs as well as national, alternative and overseas newspapers. However, if FAIR and other media reform groups truly want to break through the powerful mainstream media, they need to find better ways to reach those who remain unaware and underrepresented.

References
Hackett, R. (2000), ‘Taking back the media: notes on the


From many people’s perspective, the motives for the closure of RCTV’s open broadcasting1 on terrestrial television were clearly political and the question of public service was used as an alibi to affect public opinion.

The ministers for Telecommunications and Information in 2007, Jesse Chacon and William Lara respectively, placed the issue of public service at the top of the agenda in order to supersede the announced closure of RCTV. This isn’t a minor issue, however, since technically we are talking about a signal with nationwide coverage whose franchise had been managed by the same group for more than half a century.

This government proposal (which nominally incorporated the RETELVE Project dating back to 2000) caused a great deal of controversy and public outcry. Many journalists and media reformers believed that the closure was motivated by a desire to silence critical voices and to control the narrative of the Venezuelan government.

The closure of RCTV was a significant event in the history of Venezuelan media, as it marked a turning point in the country’s media landscape. It highlighted the tension between the government and the media, and raised important questions about the role of the media in a democracy.
to the 1970s which sought to create a public television channel run by the government) is in reality a political manoeuvre to divert public attention: it was essential to close RCTV in order to increase government hegemony in the media.

We are among those Venezuelans who, for many years, have called the management of national television broadcasting into question. The punishment of RCTV without placing the management of other government stations such as VTV, Vive and ANTV in the debate, together with the political realignment of the private stations Venevision and Televen (which is a substantial part of the media problem) provide evidence of a clear government strategy which could hardly supply much needed quality television.

Repeated government declarations that a public television channel would be created must be given their due weight. People speak as if it were the first time that the government of President Chavez has controlled a radio or television station when, in reality, various frequencies have been under government authority for many years and there has never been even one attempt to pilot a service dedicated to the public.

Like previous ministers, in 2007 Chacon and Lara had the opportunity from an administrative standpoint – given their positions as ministers in those areas – to transform the state television channel, VTV, or Venezuela National Radio into public services. So why didn't they?

A study by the Instituto de Investigaciones de la Comunicación of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (Institute of Media Research at the Central University of Venezuela) (ININCO-UCV) ascertained that more than 70% of a day’s regular programming on VTV, the principal state channel before the 27 May 2007, consisted of information-opinion bias, propaganda partisan to the government and the repetition of presidential speeches. Is this what should be understood as public service?

In Spain, in parallel with what is happening in Venezuela, Rodríguez Zapatero’s attainment to power during the era of Chavez took on a corresponding and thorough overhaul of the management of state radio and television with the aim of genuinely converting it into a model of public service. In all Spanish documents, the requisite plurality in content and defence of diversity as critical points of freedom of expression – rightly – stand out.

The hour of TEVES
Despite the fact that President Chavez had announced the suspension of RCTV’s licence with six months’ notice, it was only 15 days before its closure that citizens knew what would come in its place. It wasn’t a campaign of intrigue but of improvisation. Finally, government logic prevailed and it was placed under State control. On the 14 May 2007, with presidential decree 38.682, the Fundación Televisora Venezolana Social (TEVES) was born and went on air two weeks later.

TEVES is a non-profit government foundation. The executive branch of government contributes funding and it comes under the Ministry of Information and Communication. Five of its seven board members are named by the executive and are exempt from dismissal. With little time to implement a project without a solid professional team, TEVES went on air nationwide on the 28 May 2007.²

Its failure has been so notorious that President Chavez himself has admitted that the channel isn’t even watched by government supporters. According to the survey company AGV, the viewing audience is between four and five percent. When RCTV used the same frequency the audience was around 40%.

In this context, a question lingers among many Venezuelans where more than a handful are advocates of the Bolivarian process: was all this scandal engendered in the country just for this? The shutting down of RCTV’s open signal provoked many months of public debate, substantial state resources to ‘justify’ it, inside and outside the country, without diminishing international condemnation or local unease, as well as subjecting the Venezuelan population to one of the most contentious debates of recent years.

It was sold as a purely administrative act when in reality we were witnessing a clear political retaliation against the editorial line of RCTV. The unprecedented public statements of Gustavo Cisneros to explain the position of his
channel Venevisión in the month of July in The New York Times corroborate what is indubitably already known: the issue of franchises was above all a political one.

It has been the chronicle of failure foretold. Any television proposal, above all one that is aimed at public service, should avoid improvisation. In this case, although the government had already long decided on the closure of RCTV, and to see that we only have to refer to the declarations of President Chavez, it was just a few days before the closure that the new proposal was implemented.

A station that from its beginning features political bias and which excludes a part of the country cannot be considered a public service. Following an initial study of TEVES carried out by Gustavo Hernandez, director of the Instituto de Investigaciones de la Comunicación (ININCO-UCV), which analyzed three days of the new channel's programming, what stood out was that 60% of the productions were foreign, a finding which contradicts the Ley de Responsabilidad Social (Law of Social Responsibility).

Neither did programming comply with guidelines to include various hours of independent national producers. Around 15% of transmissions are openly dedicated to government propaganda. The researcher attested that a message stating the need to direct the country towards socialism of the 21st Century (the proposal of President Chavez) appeared up to 50 times a day.

On the other hand, in the campaign prior to the referendum of the 2 December 2007, a group of media observers from the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) and the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB) revealed an enormous information imbalance: the political actors of the opposition were completely invisible; it was as if they didn’t exist for the news programs of TEVES.

In other countries – and Chile is a good example so as not to go as far as Europe – certain consensuses exist. The first is that public service television should rightly be the most democratic and the least partisan. There is also significant agreement on the necessity for it to contribute definitively to entertainment, trying to overcome the triviality that reigns on commercial screens, making genuine productions that connect with audiences. None of this, sadly, has characterized the birth of TEVES.

Another example of presidential hegemony

Looking at the context of Venezuelan media, one cannot leave the issue of national radio and television cadenas to one side. Since President Chavez assumed power in 1999, he began to pervert the system of the cadena. For those who do not live in Venezuela, is should be explained that the cadena is a name for a system, ratified by law, which grants the executive branch of government an absolute discretionary use of the radio wavelength spectrum. For the duration of the cadena, none of the 26 million inhabitants of the country are able to receive different messages on their radio or television sets, unless they have a subscription to a private service through which they can seek refuge in foreign television.

It is worth commenting that in Venezuela, decisive professional baseball games have been interrupted and climactic episodes of soap operas have been postponed because President Chavez has decided at the last minute that his words must be heard by the whole country.

Before President Chavez reached power, the use of cadenas was limited to significant national dates, to addresses that had weight in the country’s public policies or due to significant government decisions. Thanks to the matrix of government opinion, cadenas began to be justified as a response to the media battle with private networks. As such, the program ‘Alo Presidente!’ has become a type of semicadena, given the high number of government stations that transmit it simultaneously.

Between the 2 February 1999, the day that he assumed power, and 26 May 2007, President Chavez has given 1542 cadenas. This means one every two days. According to which timetable? Simply, whatever one suits the State. In total they come to 922 hours and 43 minutes. This is the equivalent of 38 days (and nights) of absolute communicational monologue in the last eight years in Venezuela.

The program ‘Alo Presidente’, the kind of semicadena that pro-government media sub-
scribe to on Sundays, amounts to (also up to
the 26 May) a total of 1006 hours. This is
equivalent to 41 days and nights.

Effectively the State has the authority to
administer and manage the radio wavelength
spectrum, but this is a common good. Its exces-
sive use, and in many cases its conversion into
a tool of political bias, ends up distorting the
role of the government in the management of
the media. A complete contradiction given that
what it should be is a public service.

Notes
1. RCTV returned to the cable and satellite network on
16 July, under the figure of RCTV with operations
from the United States. However two weeks later its
stay was under debate, the National
Telecommunications Commission didn’t recognize its
status as an international medium such as CNN or the
Warner Channel and the authorities requested that
RCTV register as a national producer, consequently
obligated to comply with, among other things, presi-
dential cadenas.
2. Regarding this aspect there is a judicial decision pend-
ing. The Constitutional Court of the Supreme Court of
Justice decided on the 25 May that the transmission
equipment should provide a public service and were
passed on to be used by TEVES, being protected by
the Armed Forces, RCTV has received no financial
compensation and neither was a lapse established for
this forced “loan”.
3. The study forms a part of edition 138 of the magazine
Comunicación which the Centro Gumilla edits
www.gumilla.org.ve

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Reality and peace

Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann

A distorted picture of reality is very
often a decisive factor on the road from
peace to conflict and war. For that rea-
son propaganda has very often been
used to distort the worldview of people
in order to prepare for the next war.

Thousands of journalists have been mis-
used to spread false descriptions of the
world – others were only too willing to
play a role in this process of warfare with
words. The role of Radio Mille Collines in
Rwanda before the outbreak of the wave of
massacres in 1994 in spreading hatred and
propagating genocide is a sad example of this
type of irresponsible journalism.

It is easy to say that journalists and media
should enable people to see our present world
realistically. But it demands that journalists are
able to analyze complex social processes and to
communicate the results in a way that is neither
over-simplified nor so complicated that the
audience will not grasp what is going on in
their local community and in the world.

Yet responsible and courageous journalism is
indispensable for peace in a community and for
peaceful relations between nations.

Communication contributes to peace if it strug-
gles day after day for an adequate way to
enable people to know and understand what is
going on locally and globally.

Brave and competent journalists committed
to searching for the truth and to sharing it with
their audiences are a formidable peace-force.

But that explains as well why so many journal-
ists are killed in fulfilling their task of sharing
with readers, listeners and viewers what is rea-
ly going on in their town or country. Such jour-
nalists challenge the status quo and those who
enjoy the fruits of the status quo.

Of course, a lot depends on how reality is
presented and interpreted in media. Sensationalist coverage of events, even if all the facts in a given article are correct, can increase tensions and conflict. This is especially true after tragic events like a massacre when it can easily contribute to counter-attacks by members of the ethnic or national group to whom the massacred belonged.

Some governments tend to censor coverage of violent conflicts in the name of national security and national unity. But with access to international media even in remote areas such events cannot be hidden and rumors can contribute much more to new violence than sensitive coverage of what really happened.

In the long run, the most important task of journalists in the process of avoiding violent conflicts and building peace may be a thorough analysis of the actual social and economic situation of a community and a country and the naming of those politicians, companies etc. who bear responsibility for problems and crises.

There is more than enough evidence that incompetent and irresponsible governments and companies that exploit the natural riches of a country by bribing politicians or even paying militant groups who control an area where gold or diamonds are found have created economic and social situations that lead directly to violence and war.

Journalism for peace is very often a journalism that unmasks the causes of poverty and marginalization. But to unmask the incompetence of a government and to prove that it is corrupt demands a lot of courage.

Such journalists are often the successors of the Old Testament prophets who took every risk to say that injustice is injustice and exploitation is exploitation. These journalists desperately need solidarity in their own country and internationally. To provide this solidarity is an important contribution towards the creation of a more peaceful world.
Berlinale 2008

Cinematic images seared into the retina continue to linger long after a festival closes. I am left haunted by the image of the Butah dance, performed as a rite of passage towards the realm of the dead in Cherry Blossoms-Hanami (Doris Dörrie, Germany 2008), but also carrying with me, in a pendant to this one, children’s faces full of wonder in The Song of Sparrows (Majid Majidi, Iran 2008).

In between these images of juvenile innocence and maturity came a whole series of impressions of the flow of life with its challenges, defeats and victories. This year’s Berlinale offered an extraordinary arena for visions of human nature: visions ranging from the gloomiest in There will be blood (Paul Thomas Anderson: Silver Bear- Best Director, USA 2007), on the first day of the competition, to a scene of hope and trust in its powers of regeneration in Ballast (Lance Hammer, USA 2008), the film that had the last word.

The Golden Bear and the Jury Grand Prix

With Costa Gavras as the president of Festival Jury this year, it was no surprise that two of the most politicized films received the Golden Bear and the Jury Grand Prix Silver Bear: Jose Padilha’s The Elite Squad (Brasil 2007) and Errol Morris’s Standard Operating Procedure (USA 2008). By confronting the viewer with extreme violence and unorthodox intimidation methods respectively these films challenge the assumption that under certain circumstances basic rights to life and dignity have to be suspended.

Padilha’s gloomy feature film seems to offer no alternative to the two law-and-order forces that are in charge of the Brazilian favelas (slums): the corrupted, ineffectual police and BOPE, the elite squad, famous for their integrity, and trained to eliminate the drug dealers without hesitation. In spite of the story being rendered from the perspective of BOPE captain Nascimento (Wagner Moura), who experiences emotional difficulties in coping with the requirements of his job, there is a thin line between reflecting on violence and celebrating it. Ironically, it is the Pope’s visit that is taken as a pretext for enforcing order at human lives’ cost.

Morris’s documentary creates a context for the incriminatory pictures taken at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by giving a voice to five of the American MPs involved in the abuses. In their accounts and the conclusions of the investigations instances of gratuitous humiliation and torture are presented as ‘standard operating procedure’. The common denominator of the two films is the degree of dehumanization that the system requires as a condition for functioning and the powerlessness of the individuals to reform it.

The awards of the Ecumenical Jury

The Ecumenical Jury took account of the unusually wide exploration of human nature this year, awarding prizes to thematically related films. In so doing, we devoted special attention to the difficulties of reconciliation within a social body wounded by crimes and dislocation.

Awards to the feature films Il y a longtemps que je t’aime (Philippe Claudel, France/Germany 2008) in the main competition and Boy A (John Crowley, United Kingdom 2007) in the Panorama section, reflected the powerful way that these films opened questions about social retribution and the rehabilitation of those who have committed crimes against their fellow man.

In a similar fashion, the documentary Corridor #8 (Boris Despodov, Bulgaria 2008) that took the Jury’s award in the Forum sec-
tion, narrated stories of people torn asunder by national boundaries and resentments, and included the issue of social retribution.

The films presented contrasts in their treatment of these issues. While *Il y a longtemps que je t’aime* developed positively the capability of our inner resources to overcome a case of euthanasia prosecuted as murder, and society’s sustained efforts to achieve reconciliation, *Boy A* offered viewers the shadowed side of the moon: in spite of legal mechanisms promising to protect the safety of children convicted for murder, we are presented with a vision of society lacking the understanding and forgiveness necessary to readmit those who have done it harm.

In essence the two films presented two opposite types of human solidarity – one generously working towards a redemptive end, kindling a spiritual rebirth, and the other undermining the attempts of the individual to achieve closure on his crime, so that the only form of liberation remaining seems to be suicide. Both visions reinforced a message that without some form of love wounds can never properly heal.

Both winning pictures were notable for their achievement in presenting complex human situations realistically. *Il y a longtemps que je t’aime* offered a meditation on the metaphor of prison, not in terms of loss of freedom but rather that of separation: when the physical walls of the prison collapse what are the invisible chains that still hold one a prisoner? For the protagonist, Juliette (Kristin Scott Thomas) it is her devastating traumatic experience. Having killed her dying son, her soul has recoiled upon itself and become isolated in an ardent desire for expiation. This is, however, merely a starting point, and the slow process of reconnecting with the outside world progresses with the support of close friends and family members, dispelling the initial uneasiness and suspicion.

The introspective quality of this debut feature film is indebted to its director, Philippe Claudel, who draws from his own experience...
of the crude reality of prison as a teacher. The characters that populate the film are rich and authentic and the snippets of information convincingly recreate a setting for Juliette’s inner drama. At first, soul-numbed, Juliette impassively records the presence of others, but then, step-by-step, she begins to interact with them, bonding herself to the reality around her.

Her sister Lea (Elsa Zylberstein) offers the stability and tranquility of family life, supported initially with reluctance by her husband Luc and with constant attention by her two adopted daughters. Juliette’s subjective reality is then intersected briefly but significantly by Michel, Lea’s colleague, the parole officer who finally commits suicide, and the mute presence of Luc’s scholarly father and various other figures who water her with sympathy. We gradually find out how her crime was traumatic for her whole family in short episodes or revelatory remarks. This world around her, mostly benevolent, but not lacking in distrust and insensitivity, plays a decisive role in Juliette’s recovery.

The viewer is confronted not only with the mystery that envelops Juliette’s crime but with her mysterious sense of absence. Like the smoke of the cigarette impassively enveloping her figure in the first scene she appears merely a shadow of her former self. As the action progresses she gradually returns to life and we see Kristin Scott Thomas whole persona, in a remarkable performance, gain in luminosity and beauty. Juliette’s final sentence ‘I am here’ marks her victoriously getting out of her inner prison and is her first affirmation of being fully present in this world. The fleeting image of an angel is captured by the camera in the museum she is visiting with Michel. It is a deft touch, announcing a moment of redemption and adding a spiritual dimension to her reconciliation with herself and the people that love her.

Boy A

Such a gilded approach to reconciliation is spurned by John Crowley in Boy A. The mainly benevolent middle class milieu is replaced with

Still from Boy A, directed by John Crowley, (United Kingdom 2007).
a hostile working class one; the stability of a family context with the fragility status of a changed identity; the self assurance of a fully formed personality with the timid awkwardness of the young man who spent half his life in a reeducation house; a killing arguably motivated as putting an end to a future suffering with a cruelly carried our murder; the maturity of a woman in control of her reactions with the impetuous unpredictability of a young man capable of heroic deeds while easily losing control.

As in Il y a longtemps que je t’aime the environment is the main factor in the development of the protagonist. In a medium in which vendetta is stimulated by the media, excessively dwelling on the crime in news, lying about one’s real identity is the safest way of social reintegration. The protagonist, known under the assumed name of Jack Burridge, has undergone a process of repentance during his long years of social isolation but his spiritual rebirth is overshadowed by the fact that, living in a potential hostile environment, he can’t reveal anything of his past to the people that trust and love him.

There is an ironic twist to his story when, having saved the life of a child, he is turned into a hero overnight by the same media that demonized him. However, this moment of glory is short as the truth of his identity is maliciously revealed.

The director shrewdly contrasts the closed spaces, using small apertures with rays of light filtered in, with wide open ones, recreating the feeling of imprisonment that the protagonist experiences even when out of goal. The only two moments when he appears in the open are pivotal: first when he saves the life of the young girl and risks being uncovered, and second climatically when his real identity is discovered and he feels at last liberated.

Corridor #8
Documentaries offer a different forum for expression of cinematic ideas: unlike the feature films there is a chance to play with characters in their natural state. In Boris Despodov’s documentary Corridor #8 we see a failed infrastructure project transformed into a metaphor for human separation. The Corridor #8 project, inaugurated in 1997 by the European Union, was supposed to connect the Black and Adriatic Seas, passing through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania. From Bourgas in Albania to Durres in Albania the camera captures people’s dreams of prosperity and better communication among three countries, but also their suspicions about their neighbours and their distrust that such an enterprise will ever be completed.

Those expecting a touch of Balkanism have not be disappointed. In spite of the promises of the numerous delegations sent to assess the project, nothing of any consequence has ever happened. In a well tempered ironic tone the documentary reveals absurd and delightful situations. In one scene, at Gyueshevo, in the rail tunnel that should have connected Bulgaria and Macedonia, left unfinished by the Germans in 1941, the villagers grow mushrooms and store cheese.

More sombre notes are sounded when people tell their stories of family separation as a result of the three countries having closed their borders. Among the last accounts, one of the most disturbing involves an Albanian family embroiled in a blood feud choosing total isolation in order to save their lives. The road from heart to heart can sometimes be as difficult to achieve as the ghostly Corridor #8.

In Love We Trust
Zuo You/In Love We Trust was awarded a Silver Bear for best screenplay (Wang Xiaoshuai, China 2008) and a Commendation by the Ecumenical Jury. The Chinese title in translation is ‘Left Right’, the opening words of the film, representing the instructions that Mei Zhu (Liu Weiwei), an estate agent, gives to the driver and her clients when showing them around. They are emblematic for this woman’s later determination to save her daughter, Hehe (Zhang Chuqian), suffering from leukemia, at any cost. As none of the parents, now divorced and remarried, are compatible with Hehe, the only solution is to conceive a sibling that could ensure a spine transplant.

This poses major problems to their present marriages but in the end each decision is taken
with the sick daughter in mind. Could the English title, *In love we trust*, be the expression of this solidarity and love? Even if apparently it seems to be the case, the moral issue behind this film has to do with viewing this second child as a means to an end. What seems reasonable and right from one perspective appears less justifiable from another perspective. But we shouldn’t ignore the meek character of Lao Xie (Cheng Kaisheng), Mei’s husband, who saves the situation by a genuine love that embraces Hehe as well as the unborn child.

The other films in the main competition that captured the Ecumenical Jury’s attention were *Lake Tahoe* (Fernando Eimbcke, Mexico 2008) for the way it presented children’s struggle to come to terms with the grief of losing a parent, *Cherry Blossom-Hanami* (Doris Dorrie, Germany 2008) for its meditation on the meaning of life and death and the gap between generations, *Song of Sparrows* (Majid Majidi, Iran 2008) for upholding family values, *Restless* (Amos Kollek, Israel/Germany/Canada/France/Belgium 2008) for its moving father-son reconciliation process, *Ballast* (Lance Hammer, USA 2008) for its trust in the regenerative powers of life.

The deeply humane film of Eran Riklis *Lemon Tree* (Israel/Germany/France 2008) won the Audience Award for best film in the Panorama section. Set on the Israel-West bank border, it is the story of a Palestinian widow, Salma Zidane (outstandingly performed by Hiam Abbass) fighting in various courts the decision of the Israeli authorities to uproot her lemon grove. The grove, inherited by Salma from her father, is declared a security risk for the Defence Minister, who owns a mansion next to it. The increasing sympathy that the wife of the minister has for the plight of her neighbour turns the film into a celebration of women’s strength and resilience but also a testimony to their political powerlessness.

Report by Alina Birzache, member of the Ecumenical Jury.
Culturas de Transparencia. Derecho Humano a la Información.

El debate sobre el rol de la comunicación y el lugar que los medios ocupan en los procesos de construcción de ciudadanía y afirmación de la democracia en América Latina sigue siendo un tema clave y relevante. En primer lugar, porque nuestras democracias tienen aun evidentes grietas, notables debilidades y desencuentros ciudadanos.

Segundo, porque los medios juegan un rol clave en la construcción de las agendas públicas; tercero, porque no es posible hoy entender el desarrollo sin considerar las lógicas de la participación ciudadana, lo cual implica un comprensión comunicacional de la cultura democrática.

En cuarto lugar, porque nuestras democracias en América Latina no han logrado establecer una conexión real del interés público y las demandas ciudadanas con la implementación de las políticas públicas y el impulso de proyectos de desarrollo.

En este contexto, Carlos Camacho hace una excelente contribución, a través de su libro culturas de transparencia, permitiéndonos no solo valorar la importancia de la comunicación en la construcción de la democracia y la apuesta por el desarrollo, sino también pensar tema de la defensa de los derechos ciudadanos a partir de reafirmar el derecho a la comunicación y la información.

El trabajo de Camacho en este libro tiene la virtud de proporcionarnos una prolija sistematización y construcción teórica sobre los temas ligados a la comunicación ciudadana y el desarrollo, así como información documentada de la manera como se ha venido abordando este tema desde la legislación, los acuerdos políticos planteados universalmente, y su incidencia en el contexto Americano y Boliviano.

El libro consta de seis capítulos –Todos los Derechos Humanos para Todos, El Derecho Humano a la Información, El Reconocimiento del Derecho a la Información en las Américas, El Derecho del Público a Saber es el Derecho a Vivir, La Ciudadanía comunicativa, y El Derecho a la Información en Bolivia: Hazaña inconclusa.

Tiene un valor adicional: constituye la continuidad de un proceso de producción teórica e investigación profusa que Carlos Camacho ha venido desarrollando en todos estos años en Bolivia. La anterior investigación sobre las radios populares y su papel mediador en la construcción de las ciudadanías locales en Bolivia es un texto requeridos en varios espacios académicos latinoamericanos.

Me gustaría destacar tres aportes que Camacho hace en este ilustrativo libro. Primero, el coloca con mucho acierto la importancia de pensar la construcción de la llamada ‘sociedad de la información’ desde la perspectiva de una ciudadanía comunicativa, lo cual supone asumir la lucha por el derecho a la información y la comunicación no solo como una batalla por el empoderamiento de los medios alternativos, sino fundamentalmente como la creación de condiciones reales para que los ciudadanos y ciudadanas tengan la posibilidad de participar, dialogar, fiscalizar, opinar, consensuar y disentir en el ámbito de esfera pública.

Esto replantea nuestro enfoque de la defensa sobre los derechos de la información, porque incorpora no solo la reivindicación del acceso al uso y la producción de los medios o el flujo informativo plural y democrático, sino también otros elementos del ejercicio ciudadano de este derecho, como son, ‘la participación ciudadana, deliberación pública y control social, en el marco de gestación de espacios públicos democráticos.’ Esto es lo que el llama la construcción discursiva de la opinión, que supone
un ejercicio ciudadano de la deliberación pública.

Segundo, Camacho le otorga un valor importante al ámbito local como un espacio más viable y posible en términos de generar cambios para la creación de culturas comunicacionales democráticas en el campo del ‘derecho humano de la información y la comunicación’. Efectivamente, en muchas localidades en los países del tercer mundo se vienen dando procesos esperanzadores en donde los ciudadanos y ciudadanas están incidiendo significativamente a nivel de Estado en términos de crear y legitimar espacios para construir una democracia participativa y deliberativa.

Como menciona Camacho, las experiencias de participación ciudadana en los procesos de descentralización, fiscalización, rendición de cuentas a nivel municipal y regional en nuestros países nos hablan de nuevos caminos que podrían significar verdaderos ‘laboratorios democráticos’ para extenderlos a los ámbitos nacionales. Desde esta perspectiva, lo local es un espacio estratégico porque es posible conectar las demandas y lógicas políticas con las experiencias cotidianas de la gente. En el mundo local el poder se puede construir entre la negociación y el reconocimiento de la pluralidad.

Tercero, Camacho pone de relieve la importancia de la información como requisito indispensable para que la participación ciudadana no devenga en una suerte de ‘participacionismo’, sino en un proceso que suponga incidencias políticas efectivas y verdadera participación en la toma de decisiones en la administración de la cosa pública. Esto supone no solo tener los espacios y medios suficientes para el acceso a la información, sino el fortalecimiento de las capacidades de los ciudadanos para producir, acceder y leer la información.

Estas son condiciones claves para construir lo que Camacho llama ‘el poder ciudadano’, que supone una ciudadanía informada, reflexiva, crítica, dialogante, inclusiva y generadora de propuestas. En suma, de lo que se trata es de ‘ejercer y formar una ciudadanía de manera activa y responsable’.

Estoy seguro que el libro de Carlos Camacho le provocará estas muchas otras reflexiones y desafíos para repensar la democracia en un contexto como el latinoamericano en donde el derecho a la información y la comunicación aun esta en construcción, y cuya responsabilidad recae no solo en la autoridades políticas, sino también en los comunicadores y en los propios ciudadanos y ciudadanas.

Las elaboraciones conceptuales, la documentación sobre los instrumentos legales y la lectura del contexto de este libro son una insumo valioso para seguir no solo reflexionando sino impulsando experiencia que hagan posible construir una ciudadanía comunicativa en nuestros países, en nuestras comunidades.

Rolando Pérez, Boulder, USA.

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Love to Share

A newly published booklet titled Love to Share deals with the rights of creative artists, including authors, musicians and communities, and the wish of faith-based groups to share the cultural and spiritual riches produced by their creativity.

In his forward, WACC’s General Secretary, Randy Naylor, says that “WACC is delighted to participate in the publication of this booklet because it believes that accessing and sharing information and knowledge resources lies at the heart of equitable intellectual property rights, respect for the moral rights and integrity of created works of genuine plurality”.

The aim of the publication is to raise awareness among churches and wider audiences about intellectual property as it relates to liturgical and Christian resources and their use; and to promote a culture of sharing that protects the individual creators/authors and encourages Christian communities and their publishing houses worldwide to act in a fair and just way.

The booklet is available on the WCC website: http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=5685