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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

New empires and new servitudes will be explored in the 3/2012 issue of Media Development. With rampant globalization, what kinds of empires are being built and who are their unwitting slaves?
In 2003 and 2005 the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) created expectations among civil society organisations that the principle of communication for all would at long last figure on the agenda of UN agencies and those governments genuinely concerned with advancing democracy and social justice. While significant steps were taken, civil society’s post-WSIS statement on 18 December 2005 was still titled “Much more could have been achieved”.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly will review progress towards meeting both the WSIS targets and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since WSIS 2005, the technological world has changed yet again. Among other agencies UNESCO has been focusing on technology as a means to further human development, based on four key principles: freedom of expression; universal access to information and knowledge; respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; and high-quality education for all.

However, while the Internet has spurred incredible innovation and brought numerous economic and social benefits, there are still many issues to be addressed related to its technical management, to access, and to censorship. Meanwhile, social media platforms have generated much excitement and controversy, raising political and ethical questions to which there are no easy answers.

Against this background, contributors to this issue of Media Development were asked to outline today’s needs in terms of access to information and knowledge, to identify achievements and deficits since the WSIS from the perspective of stakeholders in different regions, and to make key recommendations for 2015.

It was also in 2005 that UNESCO published its World Report “Towards Knowledge Societies”. It called for three sets of initiatives as the pillars on which genuine knowledge societies for all can be built.

The first was better enhancement of the value of existing forms of knowledge in order to narrow the knowledge divide:

“All societies possess a rich range of knowledge and make use, in their daily lives, of various levels and types of knowledge that they produce and pass on using a wide variety of means, practices and tools. They are a base on which the capacities necessary for their development can sooner or later be built. One of the main stakes in the new phase of globalization that is changing the planet is to hold on to existing capacities.”

The second was more participatory knowledge societies:

“Raising awareness of the wealth of available knowledge requires a mobilization of all players in society. It should not be limited to identifying what today is conventionally known as ‘local or indigenous knowledge’ or ‘traditional knowledge’ in order to increase their value or preserve them. Knowledge societies will not really be worthy of the name unless the greatest possible number of individuals can become knowledge producers rather than mere consumers of already available knowledge.”

The third was better integration of knowledge policies:

“The diversity of areas in which the changes that make it possible to diagnose the rise of knowledge societies has been observed can create a certain amount of confusion that will only be dispelled by a better integration of knowledge policies and by a clarification of the end goals underpinning the very idea of the ‘knowledge society’.”

The report concluded with ten recommendations:

1. Invest more in quality education for all to ensure equal opportunity.
2. Increase places of community access to information and communication technologies.
3. Widen the contents available for universal access to knowledge.
4. Develop collaboratories: towards better scientific knowledge sharing.
5. Share environmental know-
ledge for sustainable development.


8. Intensify the creation of partnerships for digital solidarity.

9. Increase women’s contribution to knowledge societies.

10. Measure knowledge: towards knowledge society indicators?

Education; community access; broader content; sharing scientific knowledge; sharing environmental knowledge; linguistic diversity; knowledge certification; digital solidarity; gender equality; knowledge indicators. To a certain extent, this sounds like an agenda for WSIS 2015. What has changed? What remains to be done?

But, as the civil society declaration “Much more could have been achieved” emphasized, technological solutions “must not eclipse the human being as the subject of communication and development. Our humanity rests in our capacity to communicate with each other and to create community.”

Equally importantly, it points out that:

“In an age of economic globalization and commodification of knowledge, the ethics and values of justice, equity, participation and sustainability are imperative... Communication rights and justice are about making human communities as technology’s home and human relationships as technology’s heart.”

WACC’s own position is unequivocal. It works with all those denied the right to communicate because of status, identity, or gender, advocating full access to information and communication and promoting open and diverse media.

WACC will be looking to WSIS+10 for inspiration and clear leadership in the struggle for inclusive information and knowledge societies.

Reference
“Much more could have been achieved”, Civil Society Statement on the World Summit on the Information Society, 18 December 2005.

WSIS+10: Continuing the march of fools?

Cees J. Hamelink

The late American historian, Barbara Tuchman, argued in one of her books that human history can be described as a march of fools. This foolishness is particularly demonstrated in the unwillingness to learn from history. Human beings repeat the same mistakes throughout history and find it impossible to change course. Therefore, the most challenging issue for WSIS+10 is whether its participants will insist on repeating their unproductive earlier actions.

The key issue for the World Summit was the question whether this meeting – different from earlier UN meetings – could become a genuine tripartite forum where states, commercial entities and citizens at large would contribute on equal footing to global decision-making on information issues. Certainly given the summit’s focus on the information society a broad participatory democratic forum did seem to make a great deal of sense.

Although one could admit that civil society representatives did play a role in the preparatory meetings and although this was a unique opportunity for civil society organisations to get together and discuss information society topics, the summit never amounted to a genuine democratic decision-making forum.

Democratic reform of UN decision-making
For WSIS+10 the most pressing challenge seems to me a democratic reform of the UN decision-making machinery in the fields of information and communication. Democratic governance structures that make common deliberation and decision-making possible should not be asking too much given worldwide recognition of the Arab Spring sentiments.
Sorely missing in the 2003 and 2005 parts of the WSIS was a serious and structural analysis of the political and economic context in which current informational developments take place. Questions of control and power were not really addressed and they should be in 2015.

Many of the laudable proposals and action plans were repeats of earlier commitments that the UN General Assembly had adopted but never implemented. It is seriously time for the UN to engage in critical reflection on its loss of credibility with the persistent gaps between statements and actions. The 2015 meeting provides the international community with a unique chance to reflect on its unwillingness to implement what it preaches.

**From information societies to communicative societies**

On the important issue of the “digital divide” it was never questioned whether this can at all be resolved within the dominant development paradigm. There was no critical discussion about the key international agreements that hamper the achievement of such goals as universal access. There was no serious discussion about what precisely an information society represents and how its potential benefits and risks are distributed across different societal parties.

In this context a major discussion should take place on the need for a conceptual change. In other words: how can the international community move from an information society discourse to a focus upon information societies – and from there to (what we really need) “communicative societies”. Such a progressive movement would imply the need for the 2015 gathering to address the desired shape of future interactions between societies and ICTechnologies. This would require the design of creative scenarios for the year 2050.

Such scenarios would have to recognize that the globalization of communicative societies is deeply hampered by the worldwide persistence of national(ist) frameworks. This challenges the global community to explore how current political frameworks can be de-nationalized.

**The principle of a shared humanity**

It is obvious that the 2015 summit should take an unequivocal human rights approach. With the proviso, however, that today’s unreflective and cavalier embrace of human rights principles across political and business circles might fail to see what the costs of implementing these principles are. The principles are abstractions that tend to clash with the realities of human nature. The principle of a shared humanity suggests that we ought to see the other as a bearer of fundamental human values. In reality, most of the time, we prefer our own tribe over others, and feel most comfortable with our group’s own cultural identity.

Universalism is the humanist expectation and national tribalism is the psychological reality. We need to realize that the incredibly difficult task ahead is to give a genuinely concrete meaning to what are often useless abstractions in real-life situations. At stake in future communicative societies will be – in the present context of gross inequalities – the equal distribution of resources, power and dignity. It is unrealistic to expect the WSIS+10 to achieve this, but putting this challenge on its political agenda would be a promising start.

**Reference**


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Strategic practices
to advance
communication
for all

Charlotte Ryan

As have prior technological innovations – radio and television – the Internet’s expansion has fuelled hopes that “Communication for all” will become a 21st century reality. The 2003 and 2005 World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS) reinforced a tantalizing vision of internet governance in which global communication systems could offer universal access; freedom of expression; and respect for ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. Operating on such a foundation, knowledge could become accessible to all, reducing the vast inequalities between education haves and have-nots so destructive in knowledge societies.

As in the past, these technological advances are accompanied by pitched battles to control global communication systems. Transnational corporations work to privatize emerging technologies and shape international policies to serve corporate interests. Some coercive states control or monitor internet traffic. Even when freedom of expression has not been curtailed, both government and corporate entities often violate citizen privacy. In short, the potential of new technologies to advance communication democracy is not ensured.

Communication as a core democratic right is becoming recognized as a standard plank in social justice agendas (Frey and Carragee, 2007; 2012) and a growing number of civil society organizations and movement-building organizations work to advance communication for all (see for instance, www.centreforcommunicationrights.org). Current social movement organizations demonstrate enormous creativity in orchestrating blends of communication modes to transmit their challenges to the global economy (www.occupythenation.com, www.occupationalist.org). They and organizers focusing more directly on Internet policy (www.centerformediajustice.org) deserve global plaudits for their tireless efforts to defend and extend communication democracy.

That said, cost-effective ways to advance communication justice routinely are dismissed or ignored because they are not “cash-cows” that benefit existing institutional arrangements. Consider for instance, this recent proposal by a digital scholar to advance high quality education for all via universal library access. A tiny annual fee charged to eight institutions with endowments of over one billion dollars each could fund universal access to the bursting libraries of the university-rich state of Massachusetts. Gallagher forwarded this proposal to a leading library scholar who had called (in principle) for universal access to the bursting libraries of the university-rich state of Massachusetts. Gallagher forwarded this proposal to a leading library scholar who had called (in principle) for universal access to information. Faced with a small charge to his own institution, one of the wealthiest in the world, the scholar fell silent.

At the close of this decade, Internet access for all remains a possibility but is not assured. Moreover, we should not equate access with equitable opportunities to communicate. Let me give another example. In recent years, larger areas of Mexico have gained web access, but cost remains prohibitive. Moreover, most web content is in English, not Spanish, and the implied audience is often the U.S. consumer. Even debates over immigration from Mexico to the U.S. are framed almost exclusively in terms of U.S. interests narrowly conceived (Ryan et al., 2010). We thus continue to face the question: “How can we create the public will, the mass support to establish communication for all?”

In a historic period defined by a media logic (Atheide, 2004: 294), it is not surprising that communication evidences power conflict. Nor should we be surprised that an ingenious proposal like Gallagher’s and/or legitimate grievances posted online by individuals go unaddressed. “Power,” says Hannah Arendt, “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (Arendt, 1969: 44). In the same vein, communication power
corresponds to the ability not just to express an individual opinion but to organize and disseminate collective perspectives and calls to action. It is not enough to speak truth to power; we need to lend power to the truth. This process requires movement building generally, and creation of replicable strategic communication practices specifically.

Strategic communication acknowledges that individuals marginalized by inequalities of power in social, political and other institutions have little influence over mass communication systems. At best, marginalized individuals can position themselves to maximize their power within existing media structures. Rarely can an individual manage to expand communication equity for marginalized groups more broadly. Efforts to establish communication for all, therefore, generally presuppose one or more collective actors working in concert – sharing grievances, world view, analysis, identity and resources.

To advance communication for all, we begin by asking, “How can we strengthen marginalized groups’ ability to challenge not only adverse social outcomes, but to challenge communication inequalities that obscure and perpetuate those adverse outcomes?” Individuals rarely mount communication challenges; the undocumented worker denied health benefits does not disseminate a media advisory, nor does a laid off worker call a press conference; a collective actor must be formed through which individuals affected by inequalities of power can dialog, build relations and develop strategy. Collective actors – community-based organizations, social movements, etc. – link private troubles to broader analyses of social problems. Social problems are seen as rooted not in individual or community deficits – cultures of poverty – but in systematic inequalities that silence marginalized groups.

Critical to challenging cultures of silence are strategic communication practices that unify a collective actor internally and facilitate sharing its oppositional message externally. The basic idea is simple: if dominant institutions maintain control over communication systems re routine practices and systems, then democracy-seeking actors such as social movements must create alternative organizational routines that challenge those communication systems. For every practice that reinforces communication inequality, we must re-imagine a practice or set of practices that focuses our strengths and meagre resources (strategy) on establishing communication practices that create a new and more equitable social order. In doing so, these alternative practices shift power toward the marginalized (Couldey, 2003).

Case: Homeless activists and allied advocates defeat cuts in affordable housing
As the Rhode Island state legislative opened its 2010 session, this tiny US state faced a $219 million deficit. An additional $427 million shortfall loomed for the 2011 fiscal year. In response, Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri (Republican) slashed the state’s already under-funded social safety net, removing all funding from the Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP), the state’s leading affordable housing initiative.

“Efforts to establish communication for all, therefore, generally presuppose one or more collective actors working in concert – sharing grievances, world view, analysis, identity and resources.”

Unlike other programs, NOP survived after an intensive four-month campaign by the Rhode Island Coalition for Homeless (RICH) whose 70+ member organizations launched a pitched organizing campaign led by 24 member organizations via a working group that planned and led the campaign. (www.rihomeless.org). The campaign’s success was unprecedented given the fiscal crisis in the United States. Eighteen core participants – organizers, advocates, social-service providers, student allies, researchers, lobbyists, and homeless activists – reviewed the campaign’s legislative, grassroots organizing, and communication work. They attributed the success to tightly meshed political and communication strategies.

Secondly, building on existing strategic communication practices listed above, the campaign was able to shift facilely between online and offline communication modes. We summarize both lessons below and in the Table on page 8.
Strategic Communication Practices

Describing “strategic practice” (as a conceptual paradigm) and strategic practices (as specific routines) (www.strategicpractice.org), movement theorists at the Grassroots Policy Project (Ryan, 2011; Hinson and Healey, 2011) have identified these recurring practices of effective U.S. movements:

- Collective articulation of shared worldview;
- Clear decision-making routines;
- Maintenance of infrastructure;
- Systematic mapping of existing power relations;
- Planning courses of action to maximize movement resources (strategy);
- Collaborative learning to reflect on and refine all of the above.

To apply this generic approach to communication practice, I define strategic communication practices as replicable organizational routines that increase collective actors’ ability to extend a movement’s symbolic power. The successful NOP campaign illustrates the value of such strategic communication practices. Indeed, in the absence of such practices, RICH would not have been able to undertake such a complex and labour-intensive communication plan.

The last strategic practice, collaborative reflection, is particularly important. For movements to grow and accrue knowledge, they need systematic routines that allow them to reflect on experience, debate implications to arrive at shared insights. They need ways to store that learning and to transfer it to new generations. Without such practices, social movements limit their ability to expand and evolve. Increasingly, social movement organizations fashion themselves as learning organizations (Senge et al., 1994) precisely to facilitate recurring cycles of dialog, action, and reflection.

Blended communication modes

Reviewing the work undertaken by the Rhode Island Organizers clarifies why it takes a social movement – as contrasted with an aggrieved individual – to champion the right to affordable housing. The amount of work involved is staggering: the four-month campaign constantly mixed and matched these communication approaches with communication choice driven by political priorities; the goal was to maximize dialog with audiences identified as strategically important after campaign leaders mapped the political context (Barndt, 1989).

Communicators shifted fluidly and frequently from one communication mode to another depending on audience targeted. Communication mode included face-face conversation, movement newsletters and listservs, traditional and well as digital media. Cell phones, for instance, were very central for participation of homeless constituents. To reach strategic audiences, communication modes included the following:

**Online/social media:** Facebook and Twitter (videos); petition letters, mobilize attendance at organized events, etc. Use RICH website for action alerts, email petition, and general education. (Ex: video posted online by Johnson and Wales University marketing students highlighting the devastating impact of family homelessness).

**Letter writing campaigns and canvassing:** Letter-writing campaign produced 2,000 letters to key legislators. Letters solicited via listservs, public events, and door-door canvassing. Voters were encouraged to make calls to local legislators; the website provided key points to include in conversations with legislators.

**Lobbying and advocacy:** Multi-media strategy included posting NOP updates on the widely read blog www.rifuture.org, emails, phone calls, letters, visits by constituents and service providers, research reports and meetings. Supporters wore green stickers with the slogan ‘Save NOP’. RI legislators received testimonies weekly from individual constituents experiencing homelessness.

**Grassroots events:** RICH organized a series of events that provided ongoing news hooks and local angles. These included an Annual Luncheon, a ‘Birthday Bash’ at the State House; release of reports with new statistics on homelessness. Most dramatically, a Tent Tour travelled through Rhode Island to illustrate that Rhode Islanders throughout the state faced homelessness. Events also created opportunities for local volunteers and activists.

**Constituent involvement:** Through RICH’s Constituent Advisory Committee and the Rhode Island Homeless Advocacy Project, constituents participated in planning and organizing campaign, and acted as spokespersons.

**Media outreach:** NOP events generated broadcast media and local print coverage as well as sto-
ries in Rhode Island’s newspaper of record, \textit{The Providence Journal}. \textit{The Journal} also published an editorial that urged legislators to restore NOP.\textsuperscript{4}

Conclusion

“There is nothing natural about the ability to organize successfully,” cautions social movement scholar William Gamson (1975: 57). Nor is there anything natural about the ability to communicate successfully. In a society of asymmetric power, the powerful easily tap established communication systems; this buttresses their efforts to make rules, allocate resources, steer technological development, and garner publics’ attention. Conversely, groups operating on lean side of asymmetric power arrangements labour – often from scratch – to build basic communication capacity. Just as effective organizers in political arenas must test and replicate effective strategies, so too organizers for communication justice must test effective communication strategies that can be translated into replicable practices.

There are good reasons why communication theorists insist that it takes a social movement – as contrasted with an aggrieved individual – to raise an issue. Building social movements that share effective and sustainable communication practices is essential for achieving communication for all. \hfill \blacksquare

Notes

1. \url{http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher/MassDigitalLibrary.htm}
2. We caution against mechanical replication; different social
contexts demand and support distinct social practices.

3. Organizers speak of constituencies; their communication counterparts refer to audiences. Here, we use constituency if the focus is political participation and audience if the focus shifts to communication. When citizens become active communicators, they stop being audiences and become message producers.


References

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L’autocratie financière et son clergé médiatique

Samir Amin

J’ai emprunté ce titre à une phrase que j’ai entendu prononcée au colloque du Mouvement Politique d’Éducation Populaire (M’PEP) organisé en octobre 2011. Je pense que l’idée qu’elle exprime valait la peine d’être développée.

Un parallèle saisissant me paraît en effet s’imposer entre notre monde d’aujourd’hui et l’état de la France à la veille de 1789. Alors le pouvoir décisif était celui de l’aristocratie foncière (la noblesse, rangée derrière son Roi). Aujourd’hui c’est celui de la « ploutocratie » financière aux postes de commande dans le capitalisme des monopoles généralisés. Ce pouvoir était servi par une « noblesse de robe » – une bourgeoisie drapée dans les habits de l’aristocratie.

Aujourd’hui le pouvoir des monopoles est servi par une « classe politique » constituée de véritables débiteurs (y compris au sens financier banal du terme), où se retrouvent associés les politiciens de la droite classique et de la gauche électorale. A son tour le pouvoir politique aristocratique/monarchiste de l’Ancien Régime était soutenu par un clergé (catholique en France) dont la fonction était de lui donner l’apparence de légitimité par le développement d’une rhétorique casuistique appropriée.

Aujourd’hui les médias sont chargés de cette fonction. Et la casuistique qu’ils développent pour y parvenir et donner l’apparence de légitimité au pouvoir dominant en place est caractéristique des méthodes traditionnelles mises en œuvre par les clergés religieux.

Cet article développe cette analyse concernant le « clergé médiatique » contemporain. La question de la « noblesse de robe » que la classe politique d’aujourd’hui représente pourrait faire l’objet d’un traitement parallèle.
Un regard rapide sur la réalité du monde, à toutes ses époques, révèlerait la coexistence de pouvoirs multiples. Par exemple dans notre monde moderne le pouvoir économique des grandes entreprises et les pouvoirs politiques – législatifs exécutif, judiciaire – exercés dans un cadre institutionnel défini, « démocratique » ou non. Par exemple les pouvoirs que les idéologies et les croyances (religieuses entre autre) exercent sur les peuples. Par exemple enfin le pouvoir des médias qui diffusent les informations, les sélectionnent, les commentent.

La reconnaissance de cette pluralité relève de la banalité extrême. Car la vraie question qui doit être posée est la suivante : comment ces pouvoirs, dans leur diversité, s’organisent pour se compléter dans leurs effets de construction du tissu social, ou au contraire entrent en conflit sur ce terrain. Bien entendu la réponse à cette question ne peut être que concrète, c’est-à-dire concerner une société de donnée à un moment donné de son histoire. Les réflexions qui suivent concernent l’articulation entre les pouvoirs médiatiques et les autres dimensions des pouvoirs sociaux dans le capitalisme contemporain.

Un mot encore concernant le pouvoir médiatique. Une littérature abondante s’emploie à analyser, parmi les qualifications diverses de l’être humain celle de son caractère d’homo communicans. On tend par là que le volume et l’intensité des informations auxquels l’homme moderne a accès, sans commune mesure dit-on avec ce qu’ils étaient dans le passé, auraient véritablement transformé l’individu et la société. C’est peut être aller un peu vite car, depuis les origines, l’être humain se définit précisément par l’usage de la parole, moyen de communication par excellence.

Il reste que l’affirmation de ces propositions concernant le volume et l’intensité de l’information est par elle même correcte et qu’elle donne de ce fait aux médias qui sont à son origine une puissance et une responsabilité, morale, politique et sociale décuplées. Mais cette constatation n’élude pas la question fondamentale posée : comment s’articule ce pouvoir avec les autres.

**Le pouvoir médiatique dans le capitalisme contemporain, mythe et réalités**

Le pouvoir médiatique, pas plus que les autres, n’est pas – n’a jamais été, ne peut pas être – « indépendant ». Je n’entends certainement pas par là qu’il est « aux ordres », l’exécutif d’un autre pouvoir (politique, religieux ou économique). Non le pouvoir médiatique peut être – et même est – largement autonome. J’entends par là qu’il est soumis dans son fonctionnement à l’autonomie de la logique qui est la sienne, et qui est distincte des logiques de reproduction des autres pouvoirs. C’était le cas des modes de fonctionnement du clergé catholique dans la France de l’Ancien Régime, comme de tous les autres clergés religieux de l’époque. C’est aujourd’hui le cas des modes de fonctionnement du nouveau clergé médiatique.

Cette autonomie des médias se manifeste également par ses règles propres de déontologie. Et dans ce sens, s’il existe des médias « aux ordres », il en existe tout également qui ne le sont pas. Néanmoins cette autonomie – vantée par l’idéal démocratique sinon toujours sa pratique – n’est pas synonyme d’indépendance, qui est un concept absolu, alors que l’autonomie implique l’articulation (l’interdépendance) entre les différents pouvoirs, dont le médiatique. La question de cette articulation reste donc centrale, incontournable.

Or je prétends que dans le capitalisme contemporain (celui dans lequel nous vivons tous depuis, disons, une quarantaine d’années) un pouvoir suprême tend à s’imposer à tous les autres, qu’il subordonne en les articulant aux exigences de son propre déploiement. Je parle bien entendu d’une tendance – forte – et non d’un état de fait accompli. Car les résistances au déploiement de cette tendance sont puissantes et peut être même se renforcent-elles au fil du temps.

Le pouvoir suprême auquel je fais référence ici est celui des « monopoles généralisés, mondialisés et financiarisés ». Je renverrai le lecteur pour plus de précision concernant chacune de ces qualifications à mon ouvrage récent (*La crise, sortir de la crise du capitalisme ou sortir du capitalisme en crise*, Le Temps des Cerises 2008 ).

Pour faire court je dirai qu’il s’agit d’un pouvoir économique et que ce pouvoir est le produit d’une évolution qui a conduit à une centralisation extrême de la propriété et de la gestion du capital, sans commune mesure avec ce qu’elle était encore il y a un demi siècle. Ces monopoles (ou oligopoles si vous voulez) contrôlent directement ou indirectement l’ensemble des systèmes productifs (et cela est nouveau) et cela non pas seulement à l’échelle...
des centres capitalistes traditionnels dominants (les pays « les plus développés », rassemblés dans la triade États-Unis/Europe/Japon) mais tout également à l’échelle mondiale. Certes ici cette tendance – qui se concrétise par des stratégies d’action économique et politique – se heurte à la résistance des pays émergents (la Chine et quelques autres).

Cette transformation qualitative a réduit l’espace d’autonomie relative dont bénéficiait traditionnellement le pouvoir politique dans la triade concernée (laquelle autonomie donnait son sens et sa portée à la « démocratie bourgeoise », les visions de la vie, les idées courantes, les « consensus » voire même les conceptions religieuses, en un mot « l’air du temps »).

Autrement dit ce qui est en construction ce n’est pas comme on le dit vulgairement « une économie de marché », mais bel et bien une « société de marché ».

Dans ce cadre les médias – tout comme le politique – voient les espaces de leur autonomie relative rognés. Sans devenir nécessairement des instruments « aux ordres », ils se trouvent invités (et contraints) à remplir des fonctions utiles et nécessaires pour assurer le succès du déploiement du pouvoir suprême des monopoles généralisés.

Nous ne vivons donc pas un moment d’avancées démocratiques mais au contraire nous assistons à sa défiguration et au recul de la démocratie. Le citoyen capable d’appréhender la réalité est soumis à un bombardement qui le dépolitise or il n’y a pas de démocratie sans citoyens politisés, de ce fait capables d’imagination créatrice, de production d’alternatives cohérentes et différentes.

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On pourrait multiplier les exemples de cette casuistique, qui permet de présenter un juge criminel (celui qui en Lybie avait condamné à mort les infirmières bulgares) comme un champion de la démocratie ; de placer au devant de la scène du front « démocratique » arabe le sultan de Qatar et le Roi d’Arabie Séoudite. Pourrait-on imaginer une farce plus accomplie !

Exemple de la casuistique du clergé médiatique : la question des interventions (militaires, humanitaires, pressions économiques etc.) des puissances impérialistes dans les affaires des pays du Sud. Il est interdit d’ouvrir le débat sur les objectifs réels de ces interventions, comme l’accès aux ressources naturelles des pays en question, ou l’établissement de bases militaires. Il faut accepter à l’avance que les motifs invoqués par les puissances sont les seules raisons de leurs interventions. S’agissant de « pouvoirs démocratiques » il faut les croire sur parole : les « démocrates » ne mentent pas ! Il faut accepter de croire – ou faire semblant de croire – que ces interventions sont décidées par la
« communauté internationale », étant entendu qu’il est interdit de rappeler que celle-ci n’est représen-
tée par personne d’autre que l’ambassadeur des
Etats Unis, suivi dans les minutes qui suivent par
deux de ses alliés subalternes de l’Union Europé-
enne/Otan, parfois soutenu par quelques comparses,
come le Qatar ! Il faut croire, ou faire semblant
de croire, que les objectifs réels de l’intervention
sont ceux dans lesquels se drapent les intervention-
nistes : libérer un peuple d’une dictature sanglante,
promouvoir la démocratie, venir en aide « humani-
taire » aux victimes de la répression.

Les médias acceptent d’emblée de se situer dans
ce cadre d’ « analyse » (en fait de non analyse de la
réalité). On acceptera alors de discuter pour savoir
si les objectifs proclamés ont été atteints ou pas, s’il
y a eu « bavures », si des obstacles « imprévus » ont
empêché d’atteindre les objectifs. Belle casuistique
qui évite de porter le débat sur son terrain réel :
quels sont les objectifs véritables de ces interven-
tions.

Des médias travaillant à la re-politisation des citoy-
ens, sont nécessaires

Dans la Révolution française des représentants du
« bas clergé » s’étaient désolidarisés des hiérarchies
débitrices de l’aristocratie de l’époque pour con-
tribuer à la construction du nouveau citoyen doté
de capacité de pensée critique réelle. Un proces-
sus analogue se dessine peut être dans les médias
contemporains. Sans doute les militants du renou-
veau des médias authentiquement démocratiques
sont-ils confrontés à la concurrence inégale des
« grands médias », bénéficiaires de moyens finan-
ciers fabuleux. On ne peut donc ici que saluer – et
soutenir – les contributions de cette minorité.

Un pouvoir médiatique honorable conçoit sa re-
ponsabilité comme celle de citoyens indépendants
et politisés, contribuant par là même à la construc-
tion de ce que j’ai appelé, avec les collègues du Fo-
rum Mondial des Alternatives, la convergence des
luttes dans le respect de leur diversité. Il ne s’agit
pas de substituer à une pensée unique – celle qui
s’emploie à légitimer les pratiques des monopoles
généralisés – une « autre pensée unique ». Il ne
s’agit pas non plus de « juxtaposer » des pensées
et des projets divers qualifiés d’emblée d’également
légitimes. Il s’agit, par un travail patient et con-
tinu, de contribuer au développement de la pensée
critique, capable de ce fait, de donner un sens aux
luttes sociales et politiques qui s’inscrivent dans la
diversité des espirits et des êtres humains, pris dans
deur individualité et dans les collectifs
ils créent par leurs luttes.

La diversité en question ne concerne pas exclu-
sivement le choix des champs de bataille, forcément
spécifiques. Elle concerne tout autant l’appréciation
des instruments de la théorie sociale proposée pour
l’approfondissement de l’analyse du monde réel.
Elle concerne aussi le sens donné par les uns et les
autres à la perspective d’émancipation recherchée.

Alors et alors seulement les médias peuvent ac-
quérir un pouvoir responsable qui doit leur être re-
connu dans la recherche et la définition des objectifs
immédiats des luttes et dans celle de la perspective
à plus long terme dans lesquelles celles-ci veulent
s’inscrire.

Samir Amin (né en 1931). Économiste néomarxiste égyptien,
théoricien de l’école de la dépendance, il enseigne l’économie à
l’Université de Poitiers, et de Paris en France, et à l’Université
de Dakar, au Sénégal. Directeur du Forum du Tiers-Monde,
parmi ses nombreuses publications figurent : Le Développe-
ment inégal (1973), La Déconnexion (1986), Eurocentrisme
Hacia sociedades bien informadas y mejor comunicadas

Nelsy Lizarazo

Están en curso varias revoluciones científico-técnicas: la robótica, biotecnología, nanotecnología, neurociencia, nuevos materiales y tecnología de la información. Sin embargo, la revolución en torno a la tecnología de la información difiere críticamente de las otras, porque las demás dependen de ella para sus avances. Hasta el proyecto genoma (del mundo de la biología moderna) no sería posible sin los avances en la tecnología de la información. Además, su lógica digital penetra y transforma todos los medios y formas de comunicación.

Cuando hablamos de “biochips”, redes electrónicas y cambios de naturaleza virtual, inmaterial y digital (Castells 1996; Cebrián 1998), nos referimos a cambios que no pertenecen al industrialismo sino que forjan ‘otra’ época histórica. Bajo su racionalidad instrumental, todo es reducido a procesos de acceso, consumo, procesamiento, producción, venta y compra de información.¹

Este breve documento describe, de modo sintético, algunos desafíos que desde nuestro quehacer radiofónico y nuestra opción como radios populares y educativas, se evidencian de modo cada vez más claro. Aun así, son también campos de múltiples interrogantes y búsquedas, en un momento histórico de cambio de época y, por tanto, un momento histórico en el que un cambio civilizatorio aparece como posible... en varias direcciones, una de ellas, la que se impondría desde la lógica del desarrollo acelerado y extensivo de las tecnologías de información y comunicación, lógica a la que alude el texto citado líneas arriba y que, por sí misma, es insuficiente para lograr la aspiración de sociedades bien informadas y mejor comunicadas.

Tecnologías al servicio del ejercicio del derecho a la comunicación

El amplio desarrollo que han tenido las denominadas tecnologías de información y comunicación, es un dato de la realidad. Para el caso de América Latina y Caribe, múltiples experiencias de centros dotados con infraestructura suficiente y conexión a internet en comunidades alejadas, pueden contarse por cientos. Inversiones enormes que incluyeron internet satelital, también.

Con demasiada frecuencia, a lo largo y ancho del continente, el entusiasmo inicial de donantes y comunidades fue dando paso a otro dato de realidad: estas inversiones, sin planes de capacitación que permitan la apropiación y uso pertinente de las tecnologías instaladas y sin planes claros de sostenibilidad social, institucional y económica, pierden utilidad y sobre todo sentido muy rápidamente.

Un tercer dato de realidad, especialmente en algunos países del continente, son los esfuerzos de los Estados por dotar de conectividad y acceso a bajo costo a las regiones más apartadas de cada territorio nacional e incluso, los más recientes acuerdos, en el marco de la UNASUR, por invertir en tecnologías que faciliten los procesos de integración en la región. Este dato opera en simultáneo con otro: el avance de la empresa privada y el negocio de las telecomunicaciones en la región.

Desde nuestro punto de vista, todas estas dinámicas son tendencias que continuarán avanzando. La cuestión relevante para nuestra acción y para la acción de los decisores de políticas públicas es, evidentemente, el sentido del que es necesario dotar a estas dinámicas. Es el sentido lo que nos corresponde identificar para intentar incidir en las decisiones estratégicas que se toman y, como resulta casi evidente, un sentido clave es la garantía del ejercicio del derecho a la comunicación.

Desconcentración de medios al servicio de la pluralidad de voces

En sintonía con la lucha por el derecho a la comunicación y bajo la premisa de que el ejercicio pleno de este derecho supone, necesariamente, el acceso
a los instrumentos para su ejercicio, la tendencia a proponer y lograr nuevos marcos normativos para la comunicación en América Latina y Caribe, se fortalece.

En estos nuevos marcos normativos, vigentes ya en algunos países de la región, la redistribución equitativa de las frecuencias del espectro radioeléctrico, tanto analógicas como digitales, es un objetivo central. Esta redistribución equitativa entre los sectores público, privado y comunitario de la comunicación tiene múltiples consecuencias en términos de democratización de la comunicación, de la información y de las propias democracias en nuestro continente.

Múltiples relatos de múltiples voces, en múltiples frecuencias sustituirán, con el tiempo y por supuesto, la activa participación ciudadana, al único y monopólico discurso, que circula por muchas frecuencias bajo la propiedad de un solo dueño... más aún, las frecuencias, como corresponde, no tendrán dueño, porque son de tod@s. Tendrán, como corresponde, administradores, concesionarios.

Múltiples alternativas de información, de fuentes, de análisis, opinión. Más posibilidades para que cada ciudadan@ elija, construya opinión y criterios propios, a partir de comprensiones más amplias y complejas del contexto local y global.

Finalmente, amplio uso y seguramente desarrollo de tecnologías de información y comunicación, articuladas a nuevos usos y procesos.

**Lugares de construcción de conocimiento**

En el caso específico de las prácticas radiofónicas populares que dan identidad y vida a ALER, el acceso a tecnologías de información y comunicación, el uso cada vez más extendido de redes sociales y plataformas multimedia ha significado el acceso a múltiples fuentes de información. Esto, de modo básico y también insuficiente.

Desde la perspectiva de nuestra opción por una comunicación crítica, contextualizada y capaz de evidenciar la complejidad de la realidad, en lugar de frivolarizarla con frases hechas, lugares comunes y generalidades, el desafío de nuestros medios, es decir, de nuestras radios y nuestras televisoras comunitarias es, al parecer, constituirse ellas mismas en espacios de conocimiento “alternativo y calificado”, fortalecer una identidad que las define como lugares de referencia para las comunidades y, en este caso, lugares que referencian con información y conocimiento pertinente, ubicado en el contexto, situado localmente. Radios que potencien procesos de información, pero más que eso, procesos de comunicación, de construcción de nuevos relatos que disputen poder al relato único alrededor del cual, históricamente, han girado los grandes medios de comunicación.

Nota final: una demanda urgente y necesaria para enfrentar los desafíos arriba planteados es la inversión en investigación y desarrollo de nuevas tecnologías de información y comunicación así como el desarrollo de estrategias de apropiación y adaptación de tecnologías generadas en otras regiones, tecnologías situadas.

Otros futuros relevantes son posibles. Como no todo que es posible es necesariamente relevante, nosotros debemos imaginar, negociar y construir otro futuro más relevante para todas las formas y modos de vida, y, por lo tanto, para nuestras comunidades y sociedades. Sin embargo, no hay escenario neutral. Un escenario refleja necesariamente una visión de mundo que influencia el imaginario de sus seguidores, condicionando sus decisiones y acciones a partir de una percepción del futuro deseado.

Ningún escenario es una tendencia natural; emerge de la percepción, decisiones y acciones de ciertos grupos de actores, cuya forma de ser, sentir, pensar, hacer y hablar es convergente en cuanto a los valores, creencias, intereses y compromisos que mueven sus iniciativas hacia el futuro que les interesa. Así, si una tendencia es socialmente construida podría ser también socialmente transformada.4

**Notas**

1. De Souza Silva, José. *Hacia el Día después del Desarrollo: descolonizar la educación y la comunicación para construir comunidades felices con modos de vida sostenibles*. Documento ALER-Proceso 2020, Documento impreso).

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Sociedad de la información: Con derechos y sin exclusiones

Dafne Sabanes Plou

Diez años atrás comenzábamos los preparativos para participar en una discusión a la cual las organizaciones sociales de comunicación no habían sido plenamente invitadas. La Cumbre Mundial de la Sociedad de la Información (CMSI) que iba a celebrar su primera fase en Ginebra, Suiza, en 2003, parecía encaminada a ser una discusión técnica entre grandes organismos internacionales con fuerte presencia gubernamental y de las empresas privadas de la comunicación y de la tecnología de la información y la comunicación. Si bien la CMSI se planteaba como una gran reunión multisectorial y se señalaba como favorable esta participación de gobiernos, empresas y organizaciones sociales en los debates, no se esperaban en principio los fuertes lobbies por parte de la sociedad civil que suelen estar presentes en las conferencias internacionales convocadas por Naciones Unidas.

Pero como era de esperar, las organizaciones sociales dedicadas a construir una comunicación democrática, participativa y alternativa a la concentración mediática de las corporaciones de la comunicación se unieron con decenas de periodistas, comunicadores y comunicadoras militantes por una comunicación abierta, sin censuras y de libre flujo también en el ciberespacio para intervenir en el debate y en las resoluciones de la CMSI. Llevaban como premisa que son las personas, los pueblos y sus intereses y derechos los que deben primar en la sociedad de la información y no la tecnología.

La presencia y la organización de las entidades y activistas de sociedad civil fueron creciendo a medida que se acercaba la celebración de la Cumbre. En el seno del caucus de la sociedad civil se dieron discusiones profundas porque estaba claro que la construcción de la sociedad de la información no podía ni debía quedar en manos de concepciones tecnocráticas ni de intereses empresariales donde primara el lucro. Era fundamental poner sobre la mesa de discusiones los derechos a la comunicación y al acceso al conocimiento como pilares de esta nueva dimensión de la sociedad actual, poniendo en el centro a las personas.

La declaración de la sociedad civil en la CMSI, “Construir sociedades de la información que atiendan a las necesidades humanas”,1 fue un aporte sustancial para que se incluyeran recomendaciones en los documentos finales de ambas fases. El objetivo fue que se tuviera en cuenta la creación de políticas públicas para promover y lograr en pocos años la inclusión digital de la mayoría de la población mundial, sin discriminaciones de ninguna índole y con equidad en materia de acceso a los recursos y a sus beneficios.

Mirando hacia atrás, se ha avanzado mucho en el desarrollo de la sociedad de la información en estos últimos diez años. Pero si bien ya son unas dos mil millones de personas las que se conectan habitualmente a Internet por medio de múltiples y variados dispositivos tecnológicos, todavía falta mucho para cumplir cabalmente con algunas de las principales preocupaciones que planteó la sociedad civil en Ginebra.

Por un lado, estamos lejos de implementar la concepción de una sociedad de la información en la cual la comunicación sea considerada como “un proceso social esencial, una necesidad humana básica y el fundamento de toda organización social. Todos y todas, en cualquier lugar y en todo momento, deberíamos tener la oportunidad de participar en los procesos de comunicación y nadie debería ser excluido de sus beneficios”, tal como lo plantea la citada declaración.

Por otro, la carrera de las empresas de tecnología de la información y la comunicación por lanzar al mercado novedosos dispositivos tecnológicos casi
a diario deja en segundo plano la discusión sobre la importancia de tener en cuenta una visión de la tecnología, desde su diseño hasta su despliegue y aplicación, que resulte “favorable a la sociedad en su conjunto”. En su declaración, la sociedad civil señalaba claramente que “no hay ninguna tecnología neutra respecto a su impacto social y, por consiguiente, la posibilidad del llamado principio ‘de neutralidad tecnológica’ en los procesos fundamentales de toma de decisiones resulta una falacia”.

En este sentido, la idea de construir una sociedad de la información y la comunicación en la cual las tecnologías se conciban y apliquen de manera participativa ha quedado ahogada por las ya conocidas “fuerzas del mercado” que han hecho de las nuevas tecnologías objetos de deseo consumista, con dispositivos y plataformas que marcan status social y alimentan el espejismo de inclusión en la sociedad de la información y el conocimiento que por el momento pocos alcanzan.

América Latina: consumo, pocos cuestionamientos y brechas

De acuerdo con las estadísticas que brinda puntualmente Internet Stats,2 la población con conexión a Internet ha crecido sustancialmente, y en el caso de Sudamérica, supera a la media mundial. En once años, de 2000 a 2011, el crecimiento de usuarios y usuarias de Internet en la región subió 1205%.

De los 400 millones de habitantes en los países de América del Sur, el 43% es usuario de Internet, ante una media mundial de 32%, mientras en que Centroamérica y México, de 155 millones de habitantes, el uso de Internet alcanza al 27,5% de la población. Pero también es interesante conocer las cifras de usos de teléfonos móviles en esta parte del mundo: en Sudamérica ya existen 370 millones de suscriptores de estos servicios, o sea que casi el 92% de la población cuenta con teléfono celular en su bolsillo. No figuran estadísticas de cuántos de estos teléfonos tienen conexión a Internet, pero con precios más accesibles, los teléfonos que acceden a estos servicios ya comienzan a ser parte del uso habitual de las clases medias y altas.

Siguiendo con las estadísticas, las redes sociales tienen también una penetración importante en América Latina, que se ha convertido en una de las regiones del mundo donde el entusiasmo por el uso de plataformas como Facebook parece imparable. Ya no son sólo los adolescentes y jóvenes los que utilizan este servicio, sino que los adultos también han encontrado allí espacio para sus relaciones sociales. Incluso muchas personas comienzan a utilizar Internet abriendo primero una cuenta en Facebook y recién después de un tiempo quizás recurrir a los servicios del correo electrónico. Tomando en cuenta las estadísticas de Internet Stats, el 25,8% la población de América del Sur usa Facebook, mientras que en Centroamérica y México, el porcentaje es casi similar, un 24,7% de penetración. Podría decirse que prácticamente todas las personas que se conectan en este último grupo de países tienen una cuenta abierta en Facebook.

Pero si bien a la región no le va mal en materia de crecimiento en el uso de Internet, es considerada más una región “consumidora” que “productora” de bienes y servicios de tecnología de la información y de la comunicación. Lo mismo ocurre en materia de producción de contenidos. En cuanto a la industria, países como Argentina, Uruguay, Chile y Colombia ya exportan bienes tecnológicos, incluyendo software, y comienzan a ver los frutos en sus balanzas comerciales.

No obstante las brechas en materia de conectividad y acceso a los beneficios que brinda el uso habitual de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación siguen siendo notorias al interior de los países latinoamericanos. Basta alejarse de las...
grandes ciudades para constatar que la existencia de conectividad por banda ancha es muy baja y que las señales de telefonía móvil no siempre son estables y muchas veces resultan inalcanzables. Como se ha señalado en innumerables documentos de gobiernos, de organizaciones de la sociedad civil e incluso empresas, se debe brindar conexión a Internet eficiente y de calidad, a precios asequibles para la población, y con contenidos relevantes.

¿Se está logrando esto en la región? Falta mucho para ello y si bien la política de una computadora por niño y adolescente en las escuelas públicas de varios países es una iniciativa que abre puertas y posibilidades con igualdad de oportunidades y equidad a cientos de miles de alumnos y alumnas que de otra manera no podrían tener en sus manos una computadora, la falta de conexiones de calidad que funcionen a lo largo y a lo ancho de los países resulta en una traba que impide avances educativos que hoy resultan insoslayables.

En otro orden, si bien en la región no han habido casos flagrantes de censura de contenidos ni se ha denunciado que haya intervención de los gobiernos espiando o controlando la actividad o la opinión de sus ciudadanos y ciudadanas en Internet, es cierto que en general existe un uso acrítico de las tecnologías. Salvo los debates que pueden darse en el ámbito universitario o en círculos periodísticos o de organizaciones especializadas en el tema, en general es poca o nula la discusión a nivel público sobre el desarrollo de Internet en manos de empresas comerciales ávidas por contar con nuestros datos e información privada para engrosar sus ganancias.

El uso tan popular y sin cuestionamientos de plataformas como Facebook o servicios como los de Google son sólo una muestra de que falta dar este debate hasta en los propios medios de comunicación tradicionales. Las secciones especializadas de diarios y revistas, los programas dedicados a temas de tecnología de la información y la comunicación en radio y televisión suenan más a iniciativas de relaciones públicas o de venta encubierta de las empresas y grandes corporaciones que a una reflexión seria sobre hacia dónde va la producción de tanta tecnología descartable a poco de su aparición en góndolas y vidrieras. Ni hablar de la discusión que se merece el manejo de la información que producimos tantos usuarios y usuarias, la privacidad de los datos personales, la comunicación segura y sin filtraciones en Internet, la comercialización entre empresas de bases de datos con información de clientes, entre otros.

Que las empresas decidan qué información nuestra dejarán visible por los años venideros en Internet y cuáles son las normas a las que debemos atenernos cuando utilizamos determinada plataforma, que se presente como “abierta” pero en realidad no lo es, atenta contra concepciones fundamentales expresadas desde hace muchos años en nuestros derechos a la comunicación.

Volviendo a lo expresado en la declaración de la sociedad civil en 2003, “la información y el conocimiento se están transformando cada vez más en recursos privados que pueden ser controlados, vendidos y comprados, como si se tratará de simples mercancías y no de elementos fundamentales de la organización y el desarrollo social. Así pues, reconocemos la urgencia de buscar soluciones a estas contradicciones, ya que se trata de los principales desafíos que se plantean a las sociedades de la información y la comunicación”. Es hora que en América Latina se dé este debate respetando el derecho al ejercicio de una ciudadanía activa y comprometida también en el ciberespacio.

Procesos regionales y temas críticos
A partir de 2005, y como resultado de la primera fase de la CMSI, los gobiernos de América Latina y el Caribe comenzaron a trabajar juntos en un plan continental de la sociedad de la información denominado Plan eLAC.3 Iniciándose con una conferencia en Río de Janeiro ese mismo año, ya se han celebrado tres conferencias continentales con la participación de los gobiernos de toda la región y en cada una de ellas se aprobaron planes de trabajo conocidos como Plan eLAC. Desde entonces, se han realizado algunos esfuerzos conjuntos para lograr un desarrollo equitativo y mancomunado de la sociedad de la información en la región en diversas áreas (educación, salud, gobierno electrónico, gobernanza de Internet, teletrabajo, desechos tecnológicos, entre otros). La secretaría técnica del proceso eLAC está en manos de la Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL).

Cada Plan eLAC se impone el alcance de determinadas metas de desarrollo tecnológico, sobre todo referidas a acceso y conectividad, aunque falta mucho para que se llegue a consensos sobre proto-
colos comunes para incentivar y medir los avances y planificar nuevos desarrollos y políticas de tecnología de la información y de la comunicación con una mirada en común. Tampoco se ha dado en este ámbito ningún debate sustancial sobre los contenidos que se producen en la región y circulan en Internet ni sobre el funcionamiento de los numerosos servicios y plataformas que siendo de iniciativa comercial y privada ejercen determinados controles sobre la comunicación electrónica, que ya se han señalado en este artículo.

En el ámbito de la sociedad civil y de las comunidades técnica y académica, desde 2008 se realizan conferencias latinoamericanas y caribeñas en preparación al Foro de Gobernanza de Internet (FGI), que es parte del mecanismo de seguimiento de la CMSI desde 2006. El FGI, que se celebra anualmente, tiene como característica la participación multisectorial (gobiernos, sociedad civil y empresas) en debates abiertos, sin llegar a la discusión de resoluciones ni de recomendaciones pero con la certeza de que aquellos temas que surjan con relevancia en su seno serán tomados por otros organismos internacionales que efectivamente pueden tomar decisiones sobre los mismos. En los pre-FGI en la región las discusiones y aportes permiten ir construyendo consensos entre las organizaciones de la sociedad civil ante los temas que más preocupan.

En el último FGI surgió con fuerza la necesidad de discutir la cuestión de los derechos humanos en Internet dadas las numerosas violaciones a los derechos a la libertad de expresión, de opinión, de asociación con fines ciudadanos y pacíficos y otros derechos que un grupo importante de gobiernos cometen en Internet a diario. Basta hacer un recorrido por el sitio de Reporteros sin Fronteras para constatar que no sólo existen países que bloquean sitios e información, sino que también realizan una vigilancia minuciosa utilizando tecnologías de punta principalmente de opositores políticos, periodistas y activistas sociales con fines de control, censura, persecución y encarcelamiento.

Además, el tema de la libertad de expresión en Internet fue analizado minuciosamente por el relator especial de Naciones Unidas Frank La Rue en su informe presentado en 2011. También fue tratado en la última sesión de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Naciones Unidas, en Ginebra, en febrero de 2012.

¿Se puede construir una sociedad de la información sin derechos humanos? No, sin duda. Pero el peligro está en que si no circula información sobre el tema, si no existen cuestionamientos, si no se crea conciencia crítica sobre los usos de la tecnología para la libertad y el desarrollo, denunciando y haciendo frente a cualquier violación de derechos humanos que se cometan tanto en Internet como utilizando tecnologías de la información y la comunicación, se estarán cercenando derechos fundamentales.

Así como la ciudadanía mundial hace diez años demandó la democratización del acceso a las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación ahora exige que se respeten sus derechos también en el ciberespacio. Sin duda, una tema candente que continuará abierto y requiere de nuestra atención y compromiso militantes.

Notas
1. Declaración de la Sociedad Civil, CMSI, Ginebra, 2003
2. Estadísticas mundiales sobre el uso de Internet, América del Sur
3. Sitio sobre los temas de sociedad de la información y las conferencias eLAC de la CEPAL
4. Foro de Gobernanza de Internet
5. Reporteros sin Fronteras
6. Informe de Frank La Rue, 2011, sólo en inglés

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Communicative citizens and public policy

William F. Birdsall

Since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005, the global communication environment continues to be characterized by a powerful dynamic encompassing rapid technological innovation along with greater participation and sophistication among users of communication devices throughout the world. While it cannot be predicted where this technological dynamic is heading, its impact accentuates the political, economic, and cultural forces generating change around the world.

In response to a barrage of technological and social change, governments, the private sector, and citizens are constantly challenged to formulate and assess alternative communication policies. In this dynamic context the WSIS can be seen as a remnant of the 20th century, the conclusion of an era rather than the beginning of a new one.

The WSIS gave special emphasis to information and communication technologies (ICT) for developing countries. However, how much contribution ICT makes to development remains unclear, a problem compounded by the lack of consensus on what is the most effective development strategy. For example, the United Nations Development Programme alone embraces three strategies: the right to development, the Human Rights Based Approach, and the capabilities approach. Thus, the idea that there is a trajectory from “developing” to “developed” in ICT and nations is an anachronism.

To illustrate the point, a recent survey of over 8,000 workers worldwide conducted by Dell Inc. and Intel Corp. found workers in “developing” countries have greater exposure to innovative ICT than those in “developed” countries. Such findings reinforce the concern expressed by Canadian corporate chief information officers that countries from the developing world are leading the information revolution. There is, then, neither an agreed upon development strategy nor an absolute state of ICT development. All countries are in a continual state of “developing”.

Canada and communications

Canada is an example of a supposedly technologically developed country that can be more accurately characterized as in a “developing” state when it comes to coping with the contemporary turbulence in communications. Thus, it is hoped a brief examination of Canada’s experience provides some insight relevant to other nations who are in various developing phases.

As a nation of about 35 million people distributed over a wide geographical area, communication technology has always played a central role in Canadian nation-building public policy. Communication is a part of the Canadian cultural ethos, resulting in a school of internationally recognized communication thinkers, Marshall McLuhan being only the most notorious. Corporations such as Nortel and Research in Motion (RIM) have been world class ICT innovators.

The Internet is an integral part of the lives of the over 80% of Canadians connected to it; they are among the heaviest users in the world of YouTube, Wikipedia, and Facebook. They are early adopters of innovations; analysis predict Canada, which has more personal computers than people, is following the same trend in the ownership of tablets such as the iPad. In short, Canada is a sophisticated communicative nation.

However, while Canadians have a high profile in cyberspace, there are indications their status is at risk. Canada ranked tenth of 178 nations in the International Telecommunications Union’s (ITU) Digital Access Index in 2002. According to the ITU’s 2010 Information and Communication Technology Index, Canada’s ranking slid to twenty-sixth. In the World Economic Forum’s Network Readiness Index, a measure of the extent to which over 130 countries exploit ICT, Canada’s rank dropped from seventh in 2009-10 to eighth in 2010-11 due to a
decline in individual usage of ICT. Canada is also lagging in ICT innovation: Nortel is out of business and RIM is being overtaken by its competitors.

Finally, there is a lack of a coherent national communications policy beyond the current government’s Digital Economy Strategy, a strategy focused solely on economic objectives. This policy reflects the outmoded 1990s premises of the popular concept of the information society: ICT is the inevitable force for all change; all content and communication are conceived as commodities whose production and distribution should be determined by the market; Internet development and control should be undertaken solely by the private sector; processes of democratic deliberation are a drag on economic development. Whatever validity there is to these premises has been compromised by their transformation into a dogmatically applied ideology of information technology.

Canada illustrates that even where communications policy has been a high priority throughout its history, a country can be characterized as in a perpetual developing state due to the continuing policy challenges arising out of the dynamic global communication environment.

Public policy challenges
The range of policy issues challenging Canadians include: finding the appropriate balance between economic development objectives and the public good on the Internet; insuring that access to information and freedom of expression are free from corporate or government manipulation and constraints; establishing a balance between the intellectual property rights of creators and of seekers of content; ensuring the availability of Canadian digital content on the Internet; sustaining the unique cultural needs of Indigenous, linguistic, and ethnic communities; balancing personal privacy with government efforts to deal with cybercrime, terrorism, and child pornography; limiting the gathering of users’ traffic patterns on the Internet by major corporate service providers whose objective is to manipulate access to information; insuring Internet charges and caps do not limit citizen access to the Internet; meeting the demand of expanding new wireless services for more airwaves (spectrum) currently dominated by traditional broadcasting services.

These challenges are conceived by the government as disparate public policy issues to be dealt with independently by a plethora of government agencies – a national Department of Communications was abolished in the 1990s – including the Prime Minister’s Office, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Industry Canada, the Intellectual Property Office, the Competition Bureau, the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Information Commissioner, and the Privacy Commissioner. This diffuse approach to communication policy ignores the interrelatedness of all facets of communication: access to information, freedom of expression, privacy, intellectual property, cultural identity, literacy, access to technology, and so forth.

Finally, there is the issue to what extent citizens should participate in policy formulation and evaluation. For decades the Canadian government, regardless of governing political party, has undertaken communications policy advisory processes overwhelmingly dominated by government, private sector, special interest, and academic participants. Two recent examples demonstrate how this practice continues. On March 23-24, 2011, the CRTC held a forum on “Shaping Regulatory Approaches for the Future.” All of the 70+ invited attendees were the usual senior public servants, policy experts, and private sector interests.

From May 10 to July 13, 2010, the government invited online responses to its Digital Economy Strategy. Submissions were to focus on a set of government selected themes: digital skills, digital content, digital infrastructure, expanding the ICT industry, and digital innovation. Of the over 2,000 submissions, about 30 were from individuals; the remainder were from professional associations, special interest groups, NGOs, and media and other high tech private sector corporations. As in the past the highly structured consultation was limited to the usual well-organized stakeholders.

However, while the Canadian government follows traditional policy processes, a counter phenomenon is developing: a growing communicative consciousness among Canadians with disruptive political consequences.

Communicative consciousness
By the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century social media are intensifying the commu-
cative consciousness of Canadians. For the first time in their lives many people are encountering such issues as freedom of expression, copyright, access to information, and privacy through their living experience as citizens, social beings, market actors, and cultural consumers on the Internet. As a result, individual citizens increasingly question to what extent technological innovations and public policy impact on their capability to communicate. Their effort to gain greater self-sufficiency over their communicative experience is resulting in a diminishing deference to traditional gatekeepers of communication channels and in a greater questioning of government communication policy.

That communicative Canadians are transforming the political context of communication was vividly illustrated by their response to a CRTC ruling made in January 2011. The CRTC announced that major Internet service providers, of which there are only two, could impose an extra charge on smaller Internet providers who use their networks and exceed a certain usage cap. The smaller providers claimed the extra charge, called user based billing, would make it impossible for them to offer unlimited access plans to their customers thereby denying people Internet access. There was also an immediate online flood of objections to the ruling sent by Canadians to the government. Surprised by the public backlash and realizing its political implications, the government immediately announced that if the CRTC did not change its ruling the Cabinet would overturn it.

The example of the negative response to the CRTC ruling is a warning to the government that connected Canadians are not going to continue the passive role previously assigned to them in policy making processes. Their political activism is a clear indication of the increasing sensitivity of Canadians to changes in policy and their desire to be heard. A 2012 survey of a representative sample of Canadians by Nanos Research asked what one piece of advice they would give to each of the political parties to generate a higher level of support. The leading suggestion to the governing party was that it should “Communicate with people.”

As the government learned, through social media thousands of people can be quickly mobilized within hours to convey their opposition or support for a policy. As well, a successful strategy in one political sphere can be quickly adapted to another. For example, as people compete for bandwidth there are calls to “Occupy the Downlink.”

Canadians, then, are not only more aware of their communicative experience but that it is a shared experience with others. This connectedness not only enhances an individual’s communicative consciousness but it is a foundation for collective political action.

From ICT to CIT

Since the WSIS, the Canadian experience, which presumably is not entirely unique, suggests that future international initiatives relating to ICT and development should pursue the following considerations. There is a need for a new conceptual framework of ICT and development as an ongoing “developing” process characteristic of all countries rather than a set of targets implying some end state of development. This new framework should recognize that: the information society is giving way to the communicative society; information and communication technology (ICT) is giving way to communication and information technology (CIT); ICT for economic development is giving way to CIT for human development; information as a commodity is giving way to communication as central to individual self-fulfillment and social cohesion; the politically passive information seeking citizen is giving way to the politically active communicative seeking citizen.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that any global forum devoted to CIT and development must be a dialogic space that shifts the focus from CIT and economic development to a broader context of a developing communicative society.

What form should such a dialogic process take? The dialogue must include the participation of the citizens who are currently creating the emerging communicative society.

The successful online protests generated in a matter of days involving millions of people to the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA) legislation in the United States demonstrated large numbers of people can be mobilized to focus on complex communication issues through the use of CIT. (It was also an historic shift in the battle between the traditional media giants and the ascending high tech giants who mobilized
the public over the Web.)

In contrast to the traditional gathering involving representatives of an amorphous “civil society” a CIT based global forum could be devised to maximize citizen participation. An online adaptation of the Danish Board of Technology consensus conference assessment process might serve as a methodological model of a methodology that encompasses widespread citizen participation (see http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?survey=16&language=uk).

What would be the agenda of such a dialogic process? Citizens are becoming increasingly aware how major corporations in the high tech industries and governments are growing more adept at controlling access to and manipulating the use of the Internet. The Internet’s aura as a Utopian democratic space fades while awareness increases that development is not a technocratic but a political challenge.

Consequently, a fundamental focus of the dialogue’s agenda should be: who will control the Internet? This question is an axis running through every policy issue surrounding the Internet and communication—privacy, intellectual property, access to information, and so forth. Whatever the format and agenda, it is anticipated the dialogic process will never end.

Conclusion
This article calls for a re-conceptualization of development, of ICT, of the concept of the information society, of citizen participation, and of communication policy planning processes. These are longer term objectives. Meanwhile, policy challenges must be addressed in the short term. Confronted with a steady stream of policy changes and an abundance of policy players, how is the individual citizen to evaluate the extent to which any particular policy will enhance or limit her or his capability to communicate?

It is neither expected nor necessary that citizens be transformed into communication gurus but it may be constructive to consider providing a straightforward, concise set of questions they can pose to themselves to assist in their own evaluation of policy alternatives based on their personal needs and values, in short, a citizen’s communication policy checklist.

The questions are suggested by norms and recommendations found in internationally adopted documents including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression. The norms reflected in the questions are: the universality of communication; recognition of national context; the need for a balance of the economic, social, and cultural aspects of communication; acknowledgement of cultural diversity; communication as a positive right; the need for citizen participation; interrelatedness of the components of communication.

Clearly, individuals may give a higher priority to some questions than others depending on their personal values and context, indeed, not all questions will be relevant in all instances and it is not a definitive list.

Citizens Communicative Policy Checklist
(1) Does the policy enhance my capability to communicate?
(2) Does the policy reflect the nation’s distinctive communication traditions and rights important to me?
(3) Does the policy maintain a balance between economic and non-commercial needs so that my capability to communicate is not compromised?
(4) Does the policy protect the communicative capabilities of my distinct (ethnic, linguistic, cultural) community?
(5) Does the policy insure all citizens will have the resources to communicate?
(6) To what extent can I participate in the formulation and adoption of the policy?
(7) Does the policy compromise any other facet of communication including my freedom of expression, privacy, access to information, intellectual freedom, and cultural identity?

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Using the Internet to save the Internet

Reilly Yeo

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.” Following Fitzgerald’s maxim is increasingly key to moving towards communication for all in our current context: one needs to be able to balance a firm grasp of the real with an equally firm grasp of the possible.

When it comes to media in the current context, the real is a compelling invitation to apathy or powerlessness. In Canada, big telecom companies exert great control over both the market and the decision-making process. Their 94% share of the high-speed Internet market can make it very easy to feel hopeless about the prospects for the open Internet – the Internet where people are empowered to decide which practices flourish, without interference from gatekeepers.

The reality that Big Telecom is also Big Media means both that the incentives for them to prioritize their own media content, and shut out the community-created content that has made the Internet such a powerful driver of social change, are too great, and that they could easily carry the political and economic weight to do it with impunity.

Encouraging people to grasp the possible in this context isn’t easy, especially since it means encouraging them to engage with a distant bureaucracy in the form of the Canadian Radiotelevision and Telecommunications Commission (the CRTC), the regulator of telecommunications in Canada. Convincing people to take on the regulator means that you have to get them to either care about democracy if they don’t care about it, or get them to understand that places like the CRTC are sites where democracy either happens, or doesn’t happen.

And the more sites where democracy doesn’t happen, the more undemocratic our society is. A flourishing democracy – where people are empowered to decide – should be both the principle goal and the key lever in any media reform effort.

Fortunately, sometimes the key architects of our current reality also make its absurdity so apparent that people are willing to stand up and protest. The CRTC did just that in 2011, through a decision to allow Big Telecom to sell their wholesale Internet service to smaller competitors using usage-based billing.

This was a very technical decision, but the important point is that it served to make the Internet that these independent providers have to buy much more expensive than it used to be, potentially driving them out of business and killing off the small 6% competition that challenges Big Telecom to provide fair and open service. Because Big Telecom company Bell was the one pushing this decision, it essentially looked like the CRTC was giving Bell the ability to dictate prices market-wide.

Online protest success
OpenMedia.ca responded by launching a petition at www.stopthemeter.ca. This petition tapped into a well-spring of anger in Canada about the telecommunications market: within a few months, two hundred thousand Canadians had signed it. Suddenly, all the mainstream media outlets were reporting on this unprecedented example of “clicktivism” – Canadians taking a moment to join together and express their outrage at the reality of Big Telecom control of our media system.

The impact this had on the decision-making process was enormous. Suddenly, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper was ordering his government to review the decision, and the Industry Minister Tony Clement tweeted about sending the CRTC “back to the drawing board”. So on 8 February 2012, the CRTC – of its own initiative, it insisted – announced a review of the usage-based billing decision.

This countered the conventional wisdom that online petitions don’t work. Ordinary Canadians
moved politics. We demonstrated something about online activism – that it can matter. It can change policy. That in itself is significant: it’s possible to use the Internet to save the Internet, as we saw again at the beginning of 2012 with the Internet blackouts to protest SOPA.

The CRTC review represented yet another opportunity to demonstrate the possibilities of Internet activism. In prior hearings, OpenMedia.ca had engaged several thousand Canadians to submit comments – this already represented an unprecedented feat in citizen engagement with regulatory bureaucracy. With this review, the organization was able to inspire over 100,000 people to submit comments. This surpassed even our wildest expectations. We initially had a system set up to fax the CRTC when a comment was submitted, and we had to shut it off because of the tremendous volume of paper waste this system was producing.

The hearings themselves were also another opportunity to demonstrate the possibility for humanizing regulation. OpenMedia.ca’s Executive Director, Steve Anderson, was invited to participate, and he began by reading one of the comments that was submitted through our organization:

“I am a disabled father of 7 and [a] metered internet is unfair for parents of multiple children of school age. They all use the internet as a learning tool and it is mandatory for some of the classes. I have 7 children and get a disability cheque of 13 hundred dollars a month. I’m barely scraping by as it is. Please stop the metered internet from happening as lower income families will suffer and our children will suffer.”

It’s unusual that a regulatory hearing forces regulators to confront the reality of the impacts their decisions can have. Showing this reality – making it clear at every possible juncture – is key to re-humanizing these decision-making processes that have contributed to a media system that no longer serves human needs first.

The outcome of the hearing that saw the CRTC placed under the lens of public scrutiny in a new way was encouraging. They reversed their previous decision, and put in a place a model for wholesale access that we think has the potential to be fair (a process to determine exactly what rates will be used under that model still needs to be completed, and Canadians will need to continue to raise their voices to ensure the final decision serves us).

We also finally saw the CRTC question Bell, and stop taking their claims about their own tenuous profitability seriously. Most importantly, we saw a new generation of media activists engage in the process, and have that first exhilarating experience of reimagining their own involvement in the society around them. Mark Coatsworth, a small business owner who made an in-person submission to the CRTC written in a “near hallucinatory state after a 14-hour day” had this to say about the experience:

“These current hearings have been encouraging, and commissioners seemed to be giving the Bell team a particularly hard time. But the corporate lobby is persistent and always comes up with new ways to take us to the cleaners. But the biggest thing this experience has taught me is that regular Canadians have the power to stop them. This is democracy, and we all have a right to show up and make ourselves heard. If Big Telecom wins this fight, it will be partly the result of our own failure to stand up to them.”

**Interactivism works!**

Mark’s actions make the full spectrum of Internet activism apparent. This activism is sometimes dismissed as “clicktivism,” or worse “slacktivism.” But the new generation of media activists does far more than click: they prepare formal submissions to government, they call reporters and pressure them to cover media justice stories, they write letters to the editor themselves, they get out on the street for rallies and petition drives, they make broadcast-
quality videos that alert tens of thousands of other people to the issues, they use social media to give crucial input to our campaigns, and to connect with each other and create a pro-Internet community.

One of our Facebook community members picked up on this question of slacktivism, saying a better term would be interactivism – this term was then immediately picked up and used by the community. Interactivity is a much more defining feature of open, online organizing than passivity. One hundred thousand people choosing to interact with something as unsexy as the CRTC is potentially transformative in reimagining 21st democracy in a way that we urgently need to do.

The role of the open Internet cannot be overstated in all of this: it allows us to bring people together in mass groups in order to get the attention of decision-makers. That megaphone makes all the other types of activism possible, and is a huge potential boon to democracy.

But the open Internet does even more than that: it demonstrates that people are willing to get together and devote their time and energy to things without the immediate promise of profit, as they do every day by contributing to Wikipedia, or Drupal, or Mozilla, or the interactivist movements springing up all over the world. It is in this way that the open Internet reminds us what is possible: an interactive, responsive democracy that serves human needs for community and connection first. ■

Note
1. See: http://torontoist.com/2011/07/mark_coatsworth_at_the_crtc_public_hearings_on_ubb/

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Effective media strengthen good governance and respect for human rights

Rachel Pulfer

It’s early in the morning on a steaming hot West African day. A truck speeds along a potholed highway leading out of a broken city. Amputee football teams play games on crutches amidst burned-out buildings that still bear the pockmarked scars of decades of civil war. A team of Liberian journalists has just left Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. They are headed north to Nimba County, one of the counties on the border with Côte d’Ivoire. Their plan: to investigate workers’ rights in an iron ore mine, about to come on stream.

In recent months, the mine has been a subject of much local commentary. It has been lionized by Liberia’s technocrat class as a harbinger of future prosperity. The level of proposed investment, US$1.5 billion, is indeed staggering for a country recovering from 14 of debilitating civil war. What remains unclear is what the mine investment currently means – for the average Liberian.

In the truck along with the reporters are a couple of trainers with Journalists for Human Rights, an international media development organization based in Toronto, Canada. The trainers helped coordinate the trip, which itself was paid for by JHR’s project there with the Liberia Media Centre, its local implementing partner, called Good Governance Through Strengthened Media in Liberia and funded by the Department for International Development.
in the United Kingdom.

The topic under discussion: how to ensure the stories the journalists file are in keeping with JHR’s concept of “rights media” – media that foreground human rights issues faced by the poor and marginalized, and hold responsible authorities to account to protect those rights. Rights media are the most important of several training tools that Journalists for Human Rights uses in its training methodology.

For more than 10 years, Journalists for Human Rights has sent international journalists to sub-Saharan Africa to work with their local counterparts in places from Sierra Leone to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The goal is to mentor a form of journalism in countries at the bottom of the Human Development Index that builds the local media’s capacity to tell tough stories that mainstream human rights awareness in culturally and locally appropriate language.

In so doing, the organization teaches journalists both what their rights are, and how to exercise them fully, ensuring legal rights to free expression are in active use in countries where they otherwise might remain rights on paper only.

Pairing stronger media practice with greater human rights awareness

Developed over many years of project delivery, in consultation with journalists across Africa, JHR’s training methodology, and in particular the concept of rights media, has helped give voice to hundreds of thousands of marginalized citizens across sub-Saharan Africa. Beneficiaries range from underpaid miners in Liberia to hospital workers without water in Malawi, disabled groups in Sierra Leone to those living in Sodom and Gomorrah, Ghana’s most notorious slum.

Working with the media has long been recognized by international development practitioners as one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways to catalyze change in developing countries. What makes the concept of rights media particularly powerful is its ability to pair stronger media practice with greater human rights awareness. Right after its first meeting in Geneva in 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) stated as its primary goal to promote a genuine, people-centred and universally accessible environment for access to knowledge and information across the globe in the years leading up to 2015. Civil society critiques, such as that published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation after the Tunis summit in 2005, have indicated that strengthening human rights awareness and enforcement, and providing financial support to ensure that process happens, is critical to ensuring ultimate WSIS goals are met.

Given JHR’s experiences with rights media training, we believe a media development policy that promotes rights media, as well as financial support for initiatives of the kind currently under way in Liberia, can and should be a critical element of the coming discussion of WSIS’s ongoing interpretation of its mandates from the Geneva and Tunis meetings in 2003 and 2005 respectively. But more on that in a moment.

Grassroots investigative journalism

Back in the car, the talk is all about reporting strategy. Affable and low-key, JHR trainer Aaron Leaf turns to the pair of journalists sitting next to him in the back seat, Nat Bayjay and Boimah J. V. Boimah, of FrontPageAfrica and New Democrat newspapers, respectively. “Who are you planning on speaking to first?” he asks.

“The plan,” Boimah replies, “is as follows: talk to the workers on the mine-site first, the foremen second.” If they get the opportunity while at the mine, he goes on, they will also talk with the top brass, namely the chief operating officer and his financial officer, but they will talk with them last.

“Why that strategy?” prompts Leaf (who, to some extent, already knows the answers, as he’s been working on this trip with the two print reporters for weeks.) “Because we want to make sure we know exactly what the workers are experiencing first, before we ask management to explain how these conditions came to be,” says Bayjay.

Both workers and management will be quoted for balance. The team also plans to include the government’s view, when they get back to the city. And, as in all journalistic exercises, the entire story depends on the facts the reporters gather. If it turns out the workers are being treated as well as company literature indicates, Boimah and Bayjay’s stories might end up joining the chorus of voices lauding the investment as a beacon of hope for the country’s economic future.

The trip plays out pretty much as planned. In a
first foray, the journalists interview workers on the mine-site and on the side of the road. The majority are on sub-contract, on call, at the (locally legal) minimum wage of US$3 a day. Some of them have been working for months without a break.

The Liberians' sub-contracted status means they have no access to the company schools, housing or hospital on display in the company's promotional material. Health and safety standards are minimal. One of the workers is wearing open-toed jelly shoes; another is without a hard hat.

The journalists move on to a previously scheduled meeting with the foreman of the site, who introduces them to some Ghanaian engineers. Unlike the Liberians, the Ghanaians have contracts of up to a year. They are being paid up to $4000 a month for their work, and they do have access to the various perks of being a direct employee of the mine.

Lastly, the mine's chief operating officer takes the journalists on a tour of the mine itself. As we stand by a large pile of red earth, surveying the valley below, the mine's chief operating officer takes questions about why so many of the Liberian workers are on sub-contract, and why their wages, in particular, are so low. “They are unskilled labour,” he says. “And besides, what we’re paying them is entirely legal by Liberian law.”

As the group turns to head back down the mountain, the COO turns to one of the JHR trainers, as if in passing. “We have had a few fatalities on the mine-site,” he says, quietly. “In other sub-Saharan African countries, that would have been grounds for severe repercussions; I could have been fired. But not here. Not in Liberia.”

The power of rights media
Once the journalists return from the trip, the stories come out in quick succession. Nat Bayjay’s is the first, published May 25, 2011. That story links the Liberian workers’ poor pay and unsafe working conditions to legislation then pending on the books in the Liberian House: a proposal to more than double the minimum wage, from US$3 to US$6.40 a day.

Other stories come out later that week, ensuring the focus for that news cycle remains squarely on the issue of how mine management treats Liberian workers. On May 30, the Liberian union at the mine threatens strike action. (Given the mine is scheduled to re-open in mid-June, the timing is particularly difficult for mine management.)

Meanwhile, the Liberian House and Senate engage in a furious debate over the minimum wage. By July 20 – barely two months later – the pending legislation is passed. From that point on, Liberian workers would have to be paid US$6.40 a day. In other words, the level of pay the workers received when JHR’s trainers coordinated that trip would no longer be legal.

That is the power of rights media.
In the case of the Nimba County mine, we know this outcome to be a direct result of JHR/LMC’s intervention. That is because the JHR-mentored reporters were the only Liberian journalists to have actually gone to the mine-site and conducted a fact-based investigation of the issue. It is also because rights media require powerful stories about human rights issues to be linked to local policy and legislation that should either protect the right in question, or improve the lot of the disaffected party under discussion.

That’s not the end of the story, either. Currently, a JHR trainer based at the University of Liberia, Canadian radio journalist Bonnie Allen, is working with local journalism professors on curriculum development. The goal is to ensure that, among hundreds of other examples, Bayjay’s and Boimah’s work forms the basis of a case study approach to journalism education in the country. As such, Liberian journalism students learn from case-study examples of best Liberian journalistic practice, thus institutionalizing the teaching of rights media to Liberian journalists – long after JHR has left the country.

Over 10 years of operations, JHR has now worked in 17 sub-Saharan African countries. The organization has trained over 3,000 journalists to...
produce engaging, relevant, high quality journalism of the kind that foregrounds human rights issues and holds appropriate authorities to account for their actions.

Along the way there have been plenty of difficulties, but the goal has remained constant. As in the case above, the results, in which stories catalyze furious local public discussion that eventually leads to better local legislation protecting the rights in question, have been enormously gratifying.

How does this all fit in with the World Summit on the Information Society’s mandate?

Following the meeting of the WSIS in Tunis in 2005, a declaration summarizing conference progress was issued, the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.10 Immediately afterwards civil society representatives observing the conference published a blistering critique. Entitled Much More Could Have Been Achieved,11 it pointed out that the summit had failed to define mechanisms and actions that would actively promote and protect human rights in the global information society.

“Post-WSIS,” the document argued, “there is an urgent need to strengthen the means of human rights enforcement; to ensure the embedding of human rights proofing in national legislation and practices; to strengthen education and awareness-raising in the area of rights-based development; to transform human rights standards into ICT policy recommendations; and to mainstream ICT issues into the global and regional human rights monitoring systems – in sum: to move from declarations and commitments into action.”12

As the Liberian mine story demonstrates, there is no simpler way to strengthen human rights enforcement, national legislation and practice than through leveraging the power of local media. Local media stories that point out the yawning gap between the rights that citizens of poor countries are supposed to enjoy, and the reality, or, as in this case, the gap between the rights said countries have signed on to in international treaties, and the way their constitution has interpreted said rights, do much to create a local public culture of greater expectations on authorities to honour their international commitments and do the right thing by their citizens.

What’s more, in JHR’s experience, there is no faster or more streamlined way to raise awareness of human rights than foregrounding rights in engaging pieces of journalism written or voiced through culturally appropriate and locally accessible channels, such as local newspapers and community radio.

In short, moving from declarations and commitments, from debate over human rights in theory to public enforcement in action, is what rights media is all about. Given that, efforts by delegates at the coming conference in May 2012 to ensure rights media becomes a key element of the toolkit employed by WSIS to further WSIS goals would, we believe, be time well spent.

The concept of rights media was developed by JHR staff members Carissa MacLennan and Nikki Whaites over several years of project delivery in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Through 2008 and 2009, Whaites and MacLennan pulled together groups of local journalists in both places to discuss what the criteria of a good human rights story should be – those likely to ensure that local media enabled the widest possible range of people to have their voices heard, and in so doing participate to the greatest extent possible in the local version of WSIS’s “information society.”

The answers helped define a set of criteria about what “rights media” were, as well as a reporting strategy to ensure “rights media” could be easily taught, produced and identified anywhere in Africa. These criteria break down in the following way.

As illustrated by Bayjay’s and Boimah’s pieces, rights media stories are participatory, in that all sides of a rights issue should be explored in the piece, and all relevant voices consulted and quoted. The story also gives relevant authorities or responsible individuals an opportunity to account for their actions in a given situation. The language used to describe the issue is neutral, clear and accessible – not incendiary or inflammatory.

Being locally accessible, the story is empowering for a marginalized or affected audience. Hearing their cause on local radio or seeing it in print lends gravitas to the disaffected group’s argument; meanwhile, the reporter is mentored on how to provide options to help the affected group make more informed choices about how best to demand their rights.

Lastly, but most importantly for this discussion, the story includes a legal component: a link to a law or piece of legislation showing how the country’s
legislation or constitution defends the human right under discussion in the story. In so doing, the story serves either to highlight the gap between legal protection and practice, or point, as in the mine story, to a better law that will do a better job of protecting the right in question.13

Through years of experience, JHR believes this approach to media development helps to build a healthy media sector, a necessary and vital component of all international development efforts. Without a thriving local journalism sector, there can be no effective democracy, and no clear means of communication between citizens and their governments.14

Good governance and respect for human rights depend on effective media that have the ability to create and inspire real change. By informing local populations of their legal rights in given situations where human rights violations occur on a daily basis, rights media helps catalyze genuinely local solutions to local human rights problems.

Given JHR’s success leveraging the power of local media to strengthen both a public culture of respect for human rights, while ensuring human rights laws are actually enforced, we believe WSIS delegates should consider rights media as a driving concept of policy action. This, along with greater financial support for media development activities that promote rights media, would be an excellent way to ensure some of the lacunae of the Tunis process are addressed.

What’s more, given the need to also strengthen education and awareness raising in the area of rights based development, WSIS might wish to consider supporting, in particular, those activities that both stress stronger media through training activities, and stress curriculum and education development initiatives to continue the training once international projects are over, in addition to activities that lobby for stronger laws and greater press freedom.

Such action would help ensure the strengthened press freedom laws that result courtesy lobbying work undertaken by press freedom organizations such as Article 19 is able to live and thrive via a public culture of reporting in a media sector that understands, uses and defends its right to free expression.

These are not the only points where support for JHR’s concept of rights media could be of use to WSIS. The civil society document also faulted the 2005 Tunis declaration for “not offering support for developing diversity in the media sector” and for “not providing mechanisms to avoid a growing concentration and uniformity of content.”15

Given community and grass-roots media “empower people for independent and creative participation in knowledge building and information-sharing,” the document argues, “they represent the prime means for large parts of the world population to participate in the information society.”16

JHR’s approach is specifically designed to build capacity for community media and grass-roots media initiatives. Projects combine reporting trips like the one described in the Liberian example above with national networking strategies for reporters across the country and community radio training initiatives that ensure rural issues help set the national agenda. As argued in the civil society critique of the Tunis Agenda, efforts to develop such media, in keeping with the approach JHR has taken, “should be an integral part of the public policy implementation of the goals of the Geneva Declaration, which refers to the promotion of diversity of media and media ownership.”17

In supporting such initiatives, policymakers can take steps to build capacity of diversity of media while ensuring access to media for all, and in particular access to information for women, the disabled, marginalized groups and those living in rural areas in countries that are close to the bottom of the Human Development Index. By espousing initiatives that include significant support for human resource development and training approaches across the gender and rural-urban divide, such as that exemplified by JHR’s work with rights media, WSIS deliberators and policy-makers have the opportunity to correct a final and major concern from the 2005 talks: that a strong emphasis on technology from the Tunis texts does not eclipse the human being as Without a thriving local journalism sector, there can be no effective democracy, and no clear means of communication between citizens and their governments.
the subject of communication and development.\textsuperscript{18}

As civil society representatives put it, our humanity “rests in our capacity to communicate with each other and to create community. It is in the respectful dialogue and sharing of values among peoples, in the plurality of their cultures and civilizations, that meaningful and accountable communication thrives.”\textsuperscript{19} However, in a media environment characterized by low pay, where corruption is rife and the payoff for practicing quality journalism is far from clear, the kinds of media environments in which media development organizations such as Journalists for Human Rights operate, it is only through rights-based, people-centric media development that the power of local media can be leveraged for this kind of social good. Hence the need to include strong language supporting such initiatives in all policy files determining action as a result of this coming round of talks. ■

Notes
12. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16 -19. Ibid.

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Neoliberal media and rural India’s communication divide

Saima Saeed

The year 1991 was a significant one for India, as it was in that year that the state adopted neoliberalism as the overarching political economic system with its defining logic of privatization of erstwhile state-owned and controlled sectors. This included systemic deregulation, depluming and curtailling many of its powers and letting the market prevail, displaying more than a reasonable share of willingness to open its markets to transnational companies by withdrawing most of the protections and subsidies it had been giving to its home enterprises until now. These elemental changes involved not just an increased flow of capital by globalization of markets but had far reaching ramifications on issues of greater import – like those pertaining to governance and public interest regulation, a redefinition of policy discourse, a growing cleavage and transformation of class structures, deepening of income disparities, among a host of others.

Argued from the standpoint of electronic broadcast media of radio and television in India, this article illustrates how the neoliberal shift sounded a death knell for first, the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) and second for public interest media policymaking and provisioning. The two have a deep impact on access to communication infrastructure and the quality of communication and informational media content doled out to the 72.2% of India’s over 1 billion population that lives in its 638,000 villages. This, more than 700 million strong rural base, scores a poor second when compared to the privileged attention that the middle and upper income groups claim.

No media giants want to produce programmes for the 41.6% of the total population that falls below the international poverty line of US$ 1.25 a day (to use a measure fixed by the World Bank in 2005 in its report “New Global Poverty Estimates – What it Means for India”). The only time that the per capita income made “good” news was when it crossed the Rupees 50,000 mark in 2010-11. Every newspaper worth its name rejoiced over this “growing prosperity” in India and some even predicted that it will cross Rupees 10 lakh by 2039. None spared a thought for the mounting rural and urban economic disparity which is a serious policy concern today.

Transnational media networks have induced into the Indian mediascape a sophisticated form of information capitalism that works on the exclusionary principle of addressing only the consumer base or what the market refers to as its “target group” instead of the entire citizenry, resulting in deep information gaps between the haves (those who can pay for the information they desire) and have-nots (who are denied access and choice of information as they are unable to afford it) even as the country has tremendously expanded its communication infrastructure network following the transition from analogue to digital platform. In all of this, ironically, what also got frittered away was the state’s sole argument and legitimating logic for introducing television in the 1970s, that of developmentalism and its commitment to communication for social change.

An articulation of communication for development presupposes a guarantee of communication rights and equitable access to information for all. The promise was soon lost with the entry of the global media conglomerates, waiting to get a share in the huge Indian market, with a swelling middle class that was bedazzled by unchecked commoditization even as it was beginning to be lost in the elation of its own increased spending capacity. Out of character with a more austere Indian culture, happiness could be bought off-the-shelf and mass me-
dia were the guru, broker and partisan promoter in this superficial ‘take-off’ of an India that appeared to be firmly on the path of economic progress. This euphoria of the 1990s, did not last for too long as the social, economic and cultural consequences of the neoliberal ideology, most notably, the result of adopting the Structural Adjustment Programs under the crushing World Bank and International Monetary Fund regime started to surface.

On the communication side, besides the rise of transnational networks, these sweeping changes led the media to becoming an arena not so much of a reflective public sphere but of the tussle between the state and the market whereby equal and free access to communication for all became more constricted after the initially hesitant but steadily and upfront adoption of neo-liberalism began to redefine the contours of the country’s political and social configurations.

**Withering away of public service remit**

Although modelled on the BBC and inspired by the Reithian ideal of using broadcasting in the service of the public to inform, educate and entertain, Doordarshan, the lone state broadcaster in less than a decade of its existence began to display its lack of institutional independence, will and vision even partly to fulfil this public service mandate. Under the oppressive burden of forced financial dependence on the government and administrative control of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry – a debate that raged from 1977 when the Verghese Committee was instituted to address the issue of media autonomy, until 1997, when such autonomy was finally legislated, albeit, in a diluted version in the form of Prasar Bharati Bill – Doordarshan became more than a willing puppet and an unapologetic mouth piece of successive governments that routinely used the Public Service Broadcaster as an instrument of propaganda, consensus-generation and towards politics of appeasement.

Most critics read in this state broadcasting model a reflection of the top-down centralized politics that was a predominant feature of the India of the 1980s and 1990s. Some scholars critiqued attempts to build a single national network using satellite to control the flow of information and knowledge among the people as a way of creating a certain discourse essential to perpetuating the politics of Hindu nationalism, particularly as made evident in the televised serialization of Hindu epics like *Rama-yana* and *Mahabharata* betraying the secular façade of the PSB.

If that was the predicament with content, then on the commercial side of it, slowly the PSB began to attract substantial advertising revenues. What stands out is that, although well aware of the dangers of how commercialization of media tends to negatively impact content, the state did not make any significant efforts at shielding Doordarshan from it.

The state remained a silent onlooker when Doordarshan started to accept advertising in the mid-1980s. With the success and massive viewership of *Hum Log* and other long-running soaps, Doordarshan’s advertising revenue soared and led to a surge in sponsored programming. Some studies, therefore, point to Doordarshan as an archetype of commercial broadcasting in India, a precursor of what followed after the entry of STAR TV in India.

Not just in the adoption of liberalization, the year 1991 was significant for Indian broadcasting for two other reasons – one, it was in that year that the monopoly of the sole state broadcaster, Doordarshan, ended and two, it was also in that year that transnational channels made their first forays into India with CNN’s (Cable News Network) coverage of Gulf War “live” available in rooms of select five star hotels in big metropolitans. Indian audiences got their first peek into the enticing world of foreign broadcasting, a far cry from the mundane and routine educational content of conservative state broadcasting.

When Rupert Murdoch, the Napoleon of global media empire stormed into the Indian skies with his pan-Asian network STAR (Satellite Television Asian Region), he earned the dubiously envious record of being the man behind the introduction of the first music television channel in India (Channel [V]); the first 24/7 news network (Star News); the first successful adaptation of an international game show (*Kaun Banega Crorepati?* – an Indian version of the British show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*) and the first reality TV series (*Lakme Fashion Show*) (see Thussu, 2007).

From less than 50 sets in 1962 and a single TV channel until 1985, to a scenario three decades later that boasts of more than 500 satellite channels.
and 134 million households with television sets, of which over 103 million have access to Cable or Satellite TV (as per TAM Annual Universe Update – 2010), the unprecedented growth of TV in India faster than any other country in the world is fascinating. What followed this explosion of transnational media in the Indian skies were massive structural changes in ownership patterns, production and distribution of television programmes. This in turn changed the nature and scope of programming content not just for the domestic private media players like Zee Television that existed at the time but in the choice of programming of the PSB too, which was by now forced to part away with some more of its public service impetus and embrace the “success” formula of the global media networks.

The shift of emphasis from the national and the public service outlook (of Doordarshan’s national and regional services) to the global and market-driven attitude (of the transnational networks) is perhaps the most striking feature of the changed political economy of media in the 1990s. However, the quantitative growth did not necessarily convert to a corresponding qualitative enrichment of the televisual public sphere in terms of greater plurality and diversity of content, especially news, which impacts both the depth of debate that enters the public domain and level of political participation critical to a democracy already infested with sharp disparities of income, literacy and a growing hiatus in the urban-rural development, poor governance and rampant corruption.

Today, three broad tendencies standout in the Indian media marketplace – first, no real diversity and plurality of content (both vertical and horizontal) to service a country of over 1.21 billion with varied religions, castes and ethnic groups. Second, media, particularly television have come to be dominated by 24/7 entertainment programming genres and its variants designed solely to catch the eye in an advertising-driven mediascape. No wonder that the Indian advertising market which has been registering a double digit growth rate of 11% per annum in the last four years was estimated to be worth upwards of Indian Rupees 200 billion in 2010. TV and newspapers accounted for 82% of total ad spend while radio advertising was worth approximately Rupees 8.3 billion (2010) with average annual growth rate of 26% since 2007.

A third trend has been the consolidation of a two-tier compartmentalized media market, structured along class and language categories, in which the elite, erudite, urban, English-speaking “consumer-audiences” enjoy the privilege of choosing from an assortment of high standard content, rich in informational and niche programming as against the mass audiences that are offered standardized, entertainment-laden, cheaply produced programming reducing them to mute spectators, who over time turn to media merely for distraction and amusement significantly reducing both the extent of their participation in the “political public sphere” and the role of media as “oxygen of democracy”, public ombudsman and watchdog. It is this entertainment mantra that has earned the Media and Entertainment (M&E) industry in India heavy revenues to the tune of US$ 16.3 billion in 2010, expected to be in excess of US$ 25 billion in the next four years (according to an Ernst & Young report “Spotlight on India’s Entertainment Economy”).

Truncating public interest policymaking:
The case of radio broadcasting

If that has been the case with television, radio which was the older medium, born in 1920s in the colonial India of the Raj but which eventually became free from the foreign powers only to come under the bureaucratic manoeuvres of the State, progressively displayed a failure of public interest policymaking. Nowhere is this more evident than in the trajectory of the expansion of commercial radio, managed and abetted by the government, while it remained mysteriously loath to free the spectrum for Community Radio Stations (CRS). Added to this, is the distressing realization that the public service radio, All India Radio (AIR) as it came to be called, was never taken seriously by the same policymakers, though for a country like India, it was from the start an ideal medium being comparatively inexpensive, easy to afford and with illiteracy not becoming a barrier in the reception of messages.

However, radio died an immature death, first due to television making it a poor cousin which nobody turned to and later, as the government for reasons best known to itself, saw merit not in strengthening the AIR but in selling the spectrum, a public property and scarce natural resource, to private players. Consequently, commercial radio emerged in India
in the late 1990s with the first phase of licensing, followed by phase II of the licensing process in 2008 and phase III, which is in the offing.

The FM Phase-III policy is set to extend FM radio services to about 227 new cities to complement the already existing 86 cities. This will add up to over 800 new FM radio channels in nearly 300 cities. Moreover, the government has permitted foreign holding in these in the form of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Institutional Investors (FII) to go up from 20 to 26%.

Despite this expansion, it should come as no surprise that the rural listener remains a forgotten motif in all of this. Put simply, India has a tripartite radio market that comprises the Public Service Broadcaster, the AIR and its services, which is the radio counterpart of Doordarshan; the local, city-centric Frequency Modulation (FM) stations which remain concentrated in metros and big Class A cities and third, a recent phenomenon, Community Radio (CR) stations that have become more of a lip-service, to meet growing pressure from civil society groups that the government allow Community Media (CM) and make the spectrum available to all, especially, to the socially and economically marginalized sections of the population like minorities, dalits, tribal, women and rural constituencies who are neither served by the top-down centralized programming of AIR (despite its physical reach of 99.9% of the population) nor by the FM stations which in their content priorities are no different from the transnational networks and private TV channels operating in the market for profits.

Disturbing for the grassroots CM activists is the apprehension that despite its vast potential, Community Radio has in reality not taken off because fundamental issues of its sustainability and financing (while shielding CR from market pressures) remain unaddressed (see Saeed, 2009). The Community Radio policy 2006, not allowing for news to be aired on these stations and in its earlier more undemocratic version in 2002 that even barred NGOs from owning CR stations, shows the government’s primeval tendency to keep the spectrum and means of communication under its control. This is ironic, more so in a country in which the world’s most elaborately written Constitution guarantees the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression to all the citizens as implicitly stated in Article 19 (1) (a).

The unfinished project of “Communication for All”
So the project of “communication for all” remains unfinished in the face of competing discourses from, on the one hand, what appears to be a phenomenal growth of communication infrastructure across the length and breadth of this country but which remains marred by a deep urban-rural communication divide and, on the other, by communication capitalism that transforms the very character of a public good like media from a cultural right and a citizenship entitlement to a mere product selectively available to the consumers who can afford it. Thus, even if the Constitution guarantees “communication rights” to all the citizens and the State promises to provision this fundamental right, the media-market nexus in the changed political economy of communication has shown no such commitment, as is evident from the account above.

What is particularly alarming is that there are huge amounts of data on the Media and Entertainment (M&E) Industry, its net profits annually including year-wise projections for different sectors while there is virtually little or none to evaluate the reach, ownership pattern and access to communication assets and services, programming preferences and the level of informatization in the rural heartland. Media’s urban-centric bias devoting substantial time and space to an array of entertainment genres like lifestyle, cinema, fashion and sports is made conspicuous by its stark indifference to its rural audiences, who are often only reduced to simplistic case studies pacified by mere tokenism.

With more than 500 television channels of which over 80 are news channels, more than 100 million pay television households, the world’s largest print
industry consisting of 82,222 registered newspapers as of March 2011 (according to the Office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India) and 1,000 films produced annually, it appears that there is not enough information on public issues that really matter to the entire citizenry!

At the heart of this problem are causes that are easy to understand: concentration of media ownership and consequently a lack of diversity and plurality of programming, sensationalization, unabated trivialization of content and a division of the media for the rich and the poor. While internet could subvert this informational inequity, a low literacy level of just 65.38% (2001 Census) makes the digital divide intractable. Therefore, in India as in several other countries, while the ideas generated at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forums in December 2003 and November 2005 held tremendous sway, nonetheless that did not redress the systemic shortcomings that impede media’s role in both ushering in positive social change and furthering democratization, given the realities on the ground.

It is disheartening to note that in a news culture which goes “live” and “breaking” 24/7 at the slightest instance, there were hardly any news stories on 42% of children in India under the age of five suffering from malnourishment (this comes to one in three malnourished children worldwide), which the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, while releasing a report on the subject on 12 January 2012, described as a “national shame”. Similarly, this non-stop news “industry”, did not bother to devote even a modest amount of airtime or newspaper space to investigate the reasons behind India ranking high (among leading countries with hunger situations) on the Global Hunger Index (GHI) or care to underscore the dismal condition of the farmers, as made apparent in the alarming statistics released by the National Crime Records Bureau in December 2010 that as many as 17,368 farmers killed themselves in India in 2009.

Worse still, 48 out of 348 suicide deaths every day in the country were of farmers. This comes to one farmer suicide every 30 minutes! But the media habitually choose to remain oblivious to this “other” India, save a section of the press like The Indian Express and The Hindu and a handful of prime-time television shows on leading channels like NDTV 24X7, CNN-IBN and Times Now. Unfortunately, this media coverage does not add to more than 5% of the burgeoning media sector that is only too busy celebrating the sunnier image of “India Shining”.

In the light of the contemporary media scenario the question of how we redress the “shortcomings” of indifferent market-driven media and complacent Public Service Broadcasting acquires renewed urgency. And what, one might ask, is a possible solution to this? A good place to begin is to not go to the “market” to seek an answer.

References

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Counting the cost of perpetual connection

Jared E. Alcántara

“Bill, you’ve connected over a billion people,” Jerry Seinfeld says to Bill Gates in a Microsoft commercial in 2008. “I can’t help wondering what’s next. A frog with an email? A goldfish with a website? Amoeba with a blog?” After Gates implies that Seinfeld is not far off the mark, the screen goes blank minus a two-word slogan: Perpetually Connected (Powers, 2010: 67). Bill Gates was right about at least one thing – people are becoming perpetually connected.

In September 2011, Facebook welcomed its 800 millionth user despite having 100 million users in 2008. Facebook averages five million new users per week. (Hempel, 2009: 1) In addition to Facebook’s meteoric rise, according to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of mobile phone users reached almost six billion worldwide at the end of 2011, a growth of 600 million in one year (www.itu.int). In the United States, 22% of children ages 6 to 9 own mobile phones (Mejia, 2011). The average teenager sends a remarkable 2,272 texts per month (Carr, 2010: 86). The recent rise of social media technologies has been remarkable.

What are social media technologies (SMTs)? They are media that allow users to be in constant contact through blogging, social networking, emailing, tweeting, and mobile phones. For good reasons, churches have seen potential in these media to foster community and enhance outreach. Moreover, SMTs have been put to good use as a tool of democratization, and social and political mobilization.

It would no doubt be useful to discuss the numerous ways churches and, to a greater degree, societies benefit from these media. However, in this article, I will focus on the costs of perpetual connection. I will ask: How does oversaturation in social media technology (SMT) adversely affect us? (As the article develops, it will become clear why oversaturation is the primary concern here rather than use.) After examining potential adverse effects, I will suggest three restorative practices that can foster critical thinking about and judicious use of SMTs.

Cost #1: “Multiphrenia”

Let me be clear: it is unfair to suggest that SMTs do not benefit their users. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter can be healthy avenues of self-expression, identity formation, and social action. For instance, sociologist Sherry Turkle points out that engagement with virtual and online communities can positively shape the way children conceive of themselves and think about the world (Turkle, 2005: 131ff). Teenage users, especially, covet opportunities to communicate with their peers honestly and openly in forums outside parental control. On a mobile phone, they can call or text whenever they deem it appropriate. On Facebook, they can change profiles, load photos, or update statuses, thus, allowing them to “tinker” with their identities (Wuthnow, 2007: 13-16, 134-36).

Despite these benefits, some researchers suggest that SMT oversaturation leads to identity fragmentation rather than formation. Psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen calls this splitting of identity “multiphrenia”, that is, a state of dividing oneself into a “multiplicity of self-investments” (Gergen, 1991: 73-74). Although users are free to try on multiple selves, Gergen argues, this freedom can cloud rather than clarify identity construction. Is not the user free to be anyone he or she wants to be online? Splitting oneself into so many constituent parts can deconstruct identity to such an extent that the user begins to conceive of the self as fragmented. Instead of seeing a coherent reflection as in a mirror, one sees only fragments.

Psychologist Kent L. Norman echoes Gergen’s concerns regarding identity fragmentation. When SMTs substitute for face-to-face interactions, Norman argues, a person’s uniqueness can get lost...
behind a medium that promotes distance, detachment, and disembodiment. He writes: “The self is embodied in a very analog body and its complexity exceeds by many orders of magnitude any conceivable digital model of it... The self is not only more than the sum of the parts; it is more than itself. It includes its relationships with others and with God himself” (Norman, 2006: 180).

When one stands behind the machine, as it were, only an obstructed view remains. The multiphrenetic behaviours of which Gergen and Norman warn are becoming more rather than less common in the world in which we live. Although SMTs are a useful means by which we try on virtual selves, they cannot define or delimit identity. Those who oversaturate themselves in these media arrive at our churches with thoroughly deconstructed concepts of themselves, who they are and are called to be. They are multiphrenetic.

Cost # 2: Exhaustion

Another strength of SMTs is that they successfully collapse barriers of time and space. Financial and geographical limitations are successfully mitigated. Children can talk to their grandparents on Bluetooth while riding in a mini-van. Business travelers can video chat for free from almost anywhere in the world on Skype or iChat. Twitter users can tweet their friends with instant updates about themselves and vice versa. At first glance, these benefits are extraordinary.

However, along with these benefits come costs to what some have called “hyperconnection” or “hyperpresence”. In an article published in the NY Times in June 2010, Matt Richtel contends that many Americans are suffering from “information overload” (Toffler, 1984).2

Recent research supports Richtel’s claim that the overload social media encourage leads to distraction, inattention, and loss of mental capacity. A University of California study discovered that those who constantly checked email at work reported significantly higher levels of stress than those who did not (Richtel, 2010). The “hyperconnected” often complain of high levels of mental exhaustion as a result of constantly being “on” as performers and participants. These trends toward information overload unveil a broader concern, namely, the significant mental costs exacted by failing to unplug.

In a recent article on mobile phone technology, Sherry Turkle describes a person who is unable to unplug as a “tethered self”. (Turkle, 2008: 121). Instead of technology being tethered to the person, the person becomes tethered to the technology. In Alone Together, Turkle interviewed a sixteen year-old boy named Sanjay who, during the interview, turned off his phone so that he could give her his full attention. After the hour-long interview, Sanjay turned the phone back on and looked back at Turkle with an embarrassed expression. In one hour, he had received over a hundred text messages! Feeling a lot of pressure to reply instantly to his girlfriend and to others waiting for him, Sanjay found a quiet place to reconnect. As Turkle exited the room, Sanjay said, “I can’t imagine doing this when I’m older. How long do I have to continue doing this?” (Turkle, 2011: 169-70).

There are still more reasons why hyperconnection may lead to exhaustion. First, one is no longer able to withdraw from the demands of the workplace. There is no space to rest because there is no place to unplug. In a 2008 commercial for AT&T’s Laptop Connect Card that takes place on a desert island, the commercial’s narrator, Bill Curtis, steps out from a small plane with a laptop in his hand and declares: “We’ve come to this island and you’ll never believe what we’ve found – the Internet. That means it can’t hide here either.” To the over-saturated performer, the not-so-subtle message is that work will follow you; you can be hyper-present even if you are stranded on a desert island.

Secondly, there are no filters to separate the newsworthy from the mundane. Although SMTs can be used for social and political mobilization such as was the case in Egypt, they can also be used to tell hundreds of friends that you ate a Subway sandwich for lunch or that flip flops are on sale at Old Navy. Chirstopher Chabris writes: “The near-continuous stream of new information pumped out by the Web also plays to our natural tendency to ‘vastly overvalue’ what happens to us right now” (Chabris as cited in Carr, 2010: 134).
As far back as 1845, at the advent of the trans-Atlantic cable, Henry David Thoreau predicted this tendency to overvalue the mundane. He writes: “We are in a great haste to tunnel under the Atlantic to bring the old world some weeks nearer the new. But perchance the first news that may leak into the broad, flapping American ear is that Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough” (Thoreau as cited in Postman, 1985: 65). Put simply, if everything is news, nothing is. To media-saturated worshippers, exhausted by information overload, stillness and silence are anathema. The Lord’s command in Ps. 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God,” is neither heeded nor practiced.

Cost #3: (Dis)connection from community
Another potential strength of SMTs is that they can foster community. In The Church of Facebook, Jesse Rice observes that social networking sites feel like “home” in a society where people feel displaced and homeless (Rice, 2009: 76ff). Like physical homes in past generations, Facebook can be a place where we keep cherished possessions (e.g., pictures, video, correspondence), find a sense of family, and feel secure. Not only do we feel at “home”, we feel closer to others despite time and space barriers. We can connect with a friend, reconnect with an old flame, or feel close to our family by scanning their “page”, albeit virtually.

Although SMTs can enhance community in some ways, they can also foster dis-connection. In a 2010 article for Time, Belinda Luscombe suggests we are becoming more disconnected than ever despite living in an age of “perpetual digital connectedness”. She cites a Duke University study that notes a three-fold increase (up to 25%) from 1985 to 2004 among Americans who claim there is no one with whom they can discuss important matters. Arguing for causality, not simply correlation, she notes the precipitous drop in empathy among the millennial generation, linking this trend to the rise of Internet technology, particularly social media.

“Instead of fostering real friendships off-line,” writes Luscombe, “email and social networking may take the place of them – and the distance inherent in screen-only interactions may breed feelings of isolation or a tendency to care less about other people. After all, if you don’t feel like dealing with a friend’s problem online, all you have to do is log off” (Luscombe, 2010). As Christine Rosen observes, “Friendship in these virtual spaces is thoroughly different from real-world friendship... [real friendship] can only flourish in the boundaries of privacy; the idea of public friendship is an oxymoron” (Rosen, 2009: 15ff).

Luscombe’s suggestion that SMTs are the lone culprit behind disconnectedness may be a bit reductionistic, but her insights are still important. Online community may seem more intimate than face-to-face friendships, but it is not. Maintaining friendships in a “virtual space” may seem to satisfy one’s thirst for community, but it is just as likely, if not more likely, to leave this desire unsatiated. Disconnectedness is often broadened rather than bridged. Herein lies the point: A person may have hundreds of friends on Facebook, but this does not have to mean that he or she has deep friendships. A person may come to church sporting an iPhone and “tweeting” constantly, but still be the loneliest person in the sanctuary. Perpetual connection is not the same as being in genuine Christian fellowship. Virtual community cannot replace true koinonia.

Cost #4: “They worship what their hands have made”
In 1964, media expert Marshall McLuhan made two insightful observations about technology by drawing on wisdom from the ancient world. His first source was the Narcissus myth in which the protagonist mistakes his own reflection in the water for another person. This reflection is so entrancing that he becomes “numb” to the biddings of the nymph Echo. The point is not that Narcissus falls in love with himself, but that he becomes enamoured with a reflection, an “extension” of himself.

The “gadget lover” consumed by technology, McLuhan argues, can fall into a similar trap. Technology is an extension of human capacities. As an extension, it leaves the user “numb” to its presence and effects. Although the “gadget” is only a “reflection,” one can easily become enamoured with it
just as Narcissus was. Why else would someone camp out in front of an Apple store three days before the latest iPhone is released?

McLuhan’s second observation comes from a surprising source: Psalm 115. Speaking of the dangers of worshipping idols, the psalmist writes: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of their hands... They that make them shall be like them; Yea, everyone that trusts in them.” McLuhan goes on to describe the dangerous parallels between immersion in technology and idol worship. “By continuously embracing technologies,” writes McLuhan, “we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions” (McLuhan, 1964: 41-46).

McLuhan is not the only person to suggest that the love of technology can foster idolatry. Kent L. Norman warns that the illusions SMTs encourage, the false illusions of “quasi niscience, quasi omnipotence, and quasi presence,” (all of which mimic the attributes of God), can distort one’s sense of reality. “While computers cannot make us gods,” Norman writes, “they seem to move us in that direction” (Norman, 2006: 173, 179).

Lest one be tempted to dismiss Norman’s warning as overstated, try playing the digital game Spore, a game in which players create a “metaverse” where “they control the development of a species from its beginnings as a unicellular organism, through development as an intelligent and social creature, to a fully evolved being capable of interstellar space exploration.” Does this pattern of creation, socialization, and evolution sound familiar? The creators of Spore refer to it as a “god game” (as cited in Woods and Patton, 2010: 55).

These concerns are not raised by Luddites seeking to impede technological progress. These are media specialists thinking critically about all the effects of SMTs upon society, positive and negative. They would prefer for machines to remain machines, and for people to use them wisely and judiciously. SMTs are not sinful nor will they ever be. I use Facebook with profit, and I own a mobile phone. However, is it not also the case that social media technologies, like money or possessions, can become idolatrous when those whose primary focus should be on God decide instead to worship “what their hands have made”?

As Ralph Waldo Emerson observes, “A person will worship something, have no doubt about that... That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and character. Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming” (Emerson as cited in Creasy Dean, 2010: 2). When people become enamoured with SMTs, is it possible that their misplaced affections can become idolatrous? In his book on idolatry, G.K. Beale writes, “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration” (Beale, 2008: 16). While these technologies can be and are quite good, they can also lead ruination when they are revered. Beale puts it more succinctly: “We become what we worship” (Beale, 2008: title).

Moving toward restorative preaching practices

Now, I will suggest three restorative responses designed to counteract the effects of SMT immersion. This is not exhaustive nor is it assumed that adhering to these practices is a general panacea for information overload. Rather, these are suggestions.

1. Moving Toward Authenticity. As was stated earlier, SMTs give adolescents opportunities to tinker with their identities. Although identity tinkering can facilitate the maturing process, there is growing concern that social networking sites like Facebook actually foster inauthenticity. You can be taller, thinner, better looking, and wittier. You can be whoever you want to be in the virtual world. This is to say virtually nothing about the growing number of studies that link these environments with narcissistic behaviour.

   In interviews for Alone Together, Turkle learned more about this authenticity gap. A college senior told her not to be fooled “by anyone you interview who tells you that his Facebook page is ‘the real me’. It’s like being in a play. You make a character.” A high school senior in New Jersey told Turkle he was quite savvy at “moulding” his Facebook page. He also told her that several girls in his class use...
“shrinking” software in order to seem skinnier online (Turkle, 2011: 183).

I have an acquaintance in the business community who, when she notes these discrepancies, puts three pieces of paper down on the desk when interviewing potential employees. The first piece is the person’s résumé, the second their MySpace profile, and the third their Facebook profile. Then, she asks: “Now, which person am I interviewing today?” In other words, she identifies the gap in integrity on the part of the prospective employee. To move toward authenticity means to recognize this gap and its dangers, to practice authenticity not only in real-life relationships, but also in virtual relationships. The fact that the digital world is “virtual” does not make it a place to practice inauthenticity.

2. Moving Toward “Disconnectopia.” Whether one is an adolescent or an adult, stillness and silence are critical practices for spiritual formation and even physical health. The important command — “Be still, and know that I am God” — is not only a timely word, but a crucial message that those who are hyperconnected must hear and heed. One example of a person who made the conscious choice to disconnect is William Powers.

In Hamlet’s Blackberry, Powers recounts the difficult but liberating process his family underwent when they chose to practice an “Internet Sabbath”. After observing the negative effects of hyperconnection on family life, he and his wife decided to turn off the modem in their house from Friday night to Sunday night. After the intense difficulties of the first few weekends, Powers writes: “As the weeks passed, these [grumblings] went from genuine annoyances to minor inconveniences to nonissues…There was an atmospheric change in our minds, a shift to a slower, less restless, more relaxed way of thinking. We could just be in one place, doing one particular thing and enjoy it” (Powers, 2010: 228-29).

Powers refers to this change as “Disconnectopia”. By stepping away from virtual spaces for a time, one can step toward the practice of koinonia with God, self, family, and neighbour. One can experience, if just for a little while, the benefits of disconnectopia. Occasional distance from SMTs fosters reflective and critical engagement with SMTs.

3. Moving Toward “Re-membering.” In Toni Morrison’s celebrated novel Beloved, the word rememory is a neologism that brings the reader along on Sethe’s (the lead character’s) journey of self-discovery. Through re-memory, that is, through reconstructing her identity in light of her troubled past, Sethe is able to see herself not just as a mother, but also as a human being.

The word “remember” comes from the French re-membre, or “to put back together” – the opposite of “dismember”, that is, dividing limb from limb.

Although it is true that identity deconstruction and fragmentation are caused by multiple factors in addition to oversaturation in SMTs, it is also true that the “multiphrenia” SMTs encourage can lead to more identity confusion rather than less. In a digital age, it is incumbent on church leaders and Christian educators to help people be re-membered, that is, to remind them who they truly are in Jesus Christ rather than who they seem to be or, worse yet, pretend to be. As one who teaches at a seminary and preaches to my congregation on Sundays, I believe in the power of re-membering. While preaching is certainly more than this, it is not less.

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on the adverse effects of SMTs because costs always accompany benefits and, on this issue in particular, many are talking about benefits; few are talking about costs. Especially in the evangelical subculture of which I am a part, the tendency among churches is to jump on the latest technological bandwagon, and to decide to think critically about where that bandwagon is headed somewhere down the road. Although I have focused on adverse effects of oversaturation, I am aware of the many benefits SMTs can offer those who use rather than immerse themselves in them. After all, I am a beneficiary. I use Facebook, send texts, Skype chat with my in-laws, and call people on my mobile phone.

I am also aware that an increasing number of churches are utilizing these media not only in their outreach and evangelism, but also in their sermons.
These questions are not in the church’s future, but in its present. Again, the issue is not that churches use them, but how, why, and to what ends, either positively or negatively. Like McLuhan, I am not a Luddite; rather, I am interested in how the use of media shapes the user. After all, in the words of the Jesuit priest John Culkin, McLuhan’s spiritual mentor: “We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us” (Carr, 2010: 210).

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Notes
1. Princeton sociologist Bob Wuthnow suggests that being a “tinkerer” or “bricoleur,” is a defining characteristic of young adults that are currently in their twenties and thirties, especially as it pertains to religion. The tinkerer sifts through ideas and practices from a variety of places and constructs a unique “bricolage” in order to engage in identity construction. See Robert Wuthnow, After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 13-16, 134-136.
2. The term “information overload” was originally coined by Alvin Toffler back in the 1970’s as a futurist warning about what could happen to human beings if they adopted connective technologies. The term has gained broader currency in the last two decades in discussions about psychological disorders, attention deficit traits, and productivity problems associated with processing vast amounts of digital information.

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How congregations use Facebook

John P. Ferré

New electronic technologies have always vexed religious groups, and today’s social media are no exception. Thoughtful observers accept the use of social media by individuals, as long as social media use is moderate and wholesome – or in the words of Jesse Rice, as long as hyperconnected users practice “intentionality, humility, and authenticity.”

Proponents such as Mark Stephenson, author of Web-Empowered Ministry, see social media as means of fostering relationships within congregations. He explains that social media promote conversations and help pastors understand their congregations better. “Online social networks are just too valuable to pass up,” Stephenson says.

In contrast, critics such as Pauline Hope Cheong, associate professor of human communication at Arizona State University, asks: “What does judicious stewardship mean in a mediated culture as new expenses and hours are added to maintain and sustain social media communication?”

To see whether congregations embrace web empowerment or favour more judicious stewardship, my students in Religion and Media last semester examined how local religious groups actually use social media. They researched Protestant and Catholic churches mostly, but they also looked at the social media use of synagogues and mosques.

Examining Facebook sites and interviewing site moderators for groups covering the spectrum from African Methodist Episcopalians and Baptists to Unitarians and Wiccans, they found that local congregations have three primary uses of social media: broadcasting, surveillance, and dialogue.

The most common use of social media by congregations is as digital newsletters. Facebook posts provide updates, notify church members of upcoming events and activities, or announce who is preaching this week. They also offer scripture passages and links to inspirational readings. These contributions come often enough from lay congregation members, but most church social media pages appear to be administered by the pastor or another member of the church staff.

Using social media to broadcast messages can be effective. Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in New Albany, Indiana uses Facebook “to advertise events and information about our church and school,” says Business and Communication Coordinator Amanda Hamilton. “We are able to get the message out quicker, share photos, links and events.” In this sense, social media serve as improved newsletters. “We get more info out there more frequently because it is so easy to make posts,” Hamilton says. “We hear from parishioners all the time who say they heard it on Facebook.”

In the first ten days of February 2012, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church had five items posted on its Facebook wall. The first was a link to 17 photos from a mass that celebrated young schoolchildren at the parish school. The second was a photo of a banner signed by all the school’s students, saying, “We will miss you, Mrs. Joni [the schools’ administrative secretary who moved to Denver].”

Third was a notice about the church’s three Ash Wednesday masses. Fourth was a parishioner’s comment, “Great Seminar on End of Life Care hosted by the Health Ministry Group!” Last was a link to a feature article in the Louisville Courier-Journal about the parish secretary. The posts were both organizational and personal; most had “likes” and a few had comments.

Surveillance

Besides providing an avenue for publicity, social media also allow church leaders to monitor their congregations. In Web-Empowered Ministry, Mark Stephenson encouraged pastors to “monitor what people post and check out their photos and other features. You can learn a great deal about people and can probably serve them better both individu-
ally and as a congregation.”

This purpose motivated Julie Richardson Brown, former Youth and Young Adult Minister at Beargrass Christian Church in Louisville, to become Facebook friends with a number of young people in her church. Brown says that her Facebook connections allowed her to post messages of encouragement on young people’s walls, to congratulate them on their accomplishments, and to invite young people she had not seen in a while to specific church activities.

Dialogue

Most congregations that use social media may think of them as electronic delivery systems for announcements and some may use social media for surveillance, but many exploit the potential of social media to foster a sense of community by using them to bridge face-to-face meetings. Louisville’s Immanuel Baptist Church, for instance, posts on its Facebook page numerous announcements as well as links for donations to missionary work. But members are just as active on the church’s Facebook page, posting prayer requests, questions, and encouragement on the wall.

Requests for help – babysitting, employment, home repair – are common. So are offers for donations. “Anyone need a free crib or two?” Stacey asked. “They are the drop down side which have been recalled,” she explained, inserting a link to a network TV news story. “However, they have been fine for four kids! We would have to have you come pick them up. FB me if interested!” (Within the hour, Brian responded, “Kendall and Tammy may need one. Calling them now to check.”)

Similarly, Hannah asked, “Any of you parents of babies need some rice cereal (or oatmeal or whole wheat)? I have some extra that I had already got for Lydia but she didn’t eat as much as I thought she would. Free to anyone who asks me. I’ll bring it on Sunday.” For congregations such as Immanuel Baptist, Facebook is a medium for sustaining relationships outside of the church building.

On active Facebook pages, congregational members post links to religious articles, comment on what others say, and respond to photographs and videos from church events. They make prayer requests and discuss what they are reading in common. Many Facebook pages do not reach this level of activity, though. Instead of responding to posts discursively, many readers simply press “Like,” an effortless way to offer positive acknowledgement.

Beyond lethargy

Some congregations seem to prefer the idea of social media to the practice of social media. Five of the six Episcopalian churches in Louisville have a Facebook page. A spot check in mid-January 2012 showed that most had a post within the last week, although one hadn’t had a post for nearly seven weeks. Similarly, three of the six Louisville-area Church of the Nazarene congregations have a Facebook page. One was active with daily updates, but the other two had been inactive for more than five weeks.

Understanding how congregations actually use social media will not settle debates between social media advocates and those who counsel caution, but it can help focus evaluations of the usefulness of social media for religious purposes. Learning the circumstances under which social media have proven themselves to be effective channels for broadcasting, surveillance, and dialogue can help congregations decide whether to divert money and time into this communications ministry.

After all, discovering what motivates some congregations to use social media fruitfully and others to allow their social media to fall into disuse can help congregations understand their own communication patterns and needs.

Notes


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Le journalisme : Un métier à haut risque en RDC

Néhémie Kavutwa


Dans son rapport annuel rendu public le 28 décembre 2011 sur l’état de la presse en RDC, Journalistes en danger (JED) une ONG de défense et de promotion de la liberté de la presse dresse un tableau plus sombre et demande au pouvoir en place de stopper l’escalade de la pression qui s’abat sur la presse.

Les chiffres de 2011 sont sans appel : meurtre en juin d’un journaliste à Kirumba au Nord Kivu, 42 arrestations, 57 cas des menaces et d’agressions, 43 cas de censures et entraves à la circulation de l’information ainsi que 17 cas de pressions sur les médias. Ces escalades de la répression qui a frappé la presse congolaise l’année dernière s’est singulièrement intensifiée aux alentours du 28 novembre 2011, jour du vote des élections couplées de présidentielles et législatives.

Les atteintes à la liberté de la presse sont perpétrées en dépit du pluralisme médiatique rendu public en 1990 et de la constitution qui garantit les droits et libertés fondamentaux dont la liberté de la presse et d’opinion. JED en appelle aux plus hautes autorités du pays et demande des mesures d’urgence pour sauver la liberté de la presse.

En rétrospective, d’autres cas recensés et documentés d’atteintes à la liberté de la presse dont les assassinats ont été répertoriés les années antérieures : en 2009, on a enregistré 75 cas contre 110 de violation de droits de la presse. L’Agence National de renseignement (ANR) particulièrement des services en provinces paraît comme le service le plus répressif avec 26 cas sur 75. Kinshasa est la ville la plus médiatisée et la plus répressive avec 28 cas sur le total observé.

La province du Sud Kivu, à l’Est est la plus dangereuse pour les journalistes avec deux tués. En 2007, 163 cas d’atteintes à la liberté de la presse ont été observés. Les points sombres pour cette année sont marqués par deux journalistes assassinés, soit 1,23%, 64 journalistes privés de liberté, mis dans les prisons et aux cachots, 37 agressions et 38 chaînes de radio et télévision, privés dont les signaux ont été coupés.


Responsabilités partagées

Est-il que ces escalades de violation de droits de la presse peuvent tirer leur origine, d’une part, du gouvernement qui autorise le fonctionnement des médias sans son accompagnement, c’est-à-dire outre des dispositions légales et réglementaires devrait s’assurer du respect strict de la part des médias, des textes légaux qui les régissent ? Et d’autre part, le manque de médias de faire preuve de responsabilité dans les contenus qu’ils diffusent, toute liberté ayant pour corolaire la responsabilité dans le chef de celui qui l’exerce.

Nous n’hésiterons pas de pointer du doigt certains confrères qui, par manque de respect au code de déontologie, font naufrage par rapport...
aux règles de jeu du métier versant ainsi dans l’amateurisme : la diffamation, l’exhibitionnisme, le coupage et que sais-je encore. Les responsabilités sont presque partagées vue les dérapages de certains médias. Dans ce cas d’espèce, cette responsabilité et ce souci d’équité sont cadrés par des codes de déontologies qu’adopte la profession.

Outre des dispositions contenues dans l’éthique et code déontologique congolais, ainsi que la loi en vigueur sur la presse, l’Etat congolais a fixé un cadre réglementaire spécifique imposant des contraintes particulières aux médias. Il s’agit du conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel et communication (CSAC), anciennement haute autorité des médias. La HAM est issue de l’accord global et inclusif signé à prétorial en décembre 2002, avec mission de garantir la neutralité et l’équité des médias publics, de réguler le secteur des médias publics et privés.

Cette institution n’a pas été à mesure de faire la régulation des médias avec impartialité lors des élections de 28 Novembre 2011. C’est la raison pour laquelle JED exige sa dissolution. Désarçonné et fragilisé suite à des multiples facteurs notamment l’insuffisance de moyens humains, matériels et financiers et surtout son partage du même bâtiment avec la RTNC (Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise) média public, n’a pas garanti le droit à accès équitable des candidats et des partis politiques dans les médias publics en période de propagande électorale aux présidentielles du 28 novembre 2011.

D’où les dérapages des certains médias contribuant à l’accroissement des violences contre les journalistes et certains médias faisant preuve d’un langage incendiaire. Ce qui prouve en suffisance un fonctionnement des médias congolais à leur stade embryonnaire sur le chemin de la démocratie.

Organisations du secteur des médias

Une autre défaillance remarquée est celle des organisations issues de la profession. Celles-ci visaient à leurs créations la régulation à leur niveau et de prévenir ou mieux réduire les risques des dérapages dans la carrière journaliste. Notamment l’Union Nationale de la Presse du Congo (UNPC) jouant le rôle de fédérer les entreprises de presses opérationnelles en RD Congo. Celle-ci n’a même pas autorité aux journalistes et par conséquent ne peut plus décider à cause de son inertie. Pour sa part, l’observatoire des médias congolais (OMEC), dont la vision est d’instance d’autorégulation ne joue aucunement son rôle. Pour ne citer que celles là, n’apportent aucune contribution tendant à sauver la liberté de la presse à la dérive en RD Congo.

Outre ces organisations, il y a également celles non gouvernementales actives dans le domaine des médias. Nous en dénombrons une affaire de sept organisations, mais une seule est très manifeste en l’occurrence, JED, qui s’évertue dans la défense de la liberté de la presse et dont les actions sont palpables. JED hausse le ton face aux abus observés de droits de la presse, raison pour laquelle, l’opinion internationale est informée de ce qui se passe en RD Congo.

Les actions combinées de ces organisations pourraient rabaisser la courbe de violence de droit de la liberté de la presse et réduiraient ainsi les crimes commis aux journalistes et à leurs organes de presse.

En définitive, il appert de souligner sans ambages que le journalisme est un métier à la fois exaltant et aux risques multidimensionnels selon qu’il est exercé dans les normes d’éthique ou pas. Considérant le journalisme comme un champ de tension et où la vérité doit être dite, nous pensons qu’il faut, d’une part, le respect des règles d’éthique de l’information pour permettre aux journalistes de savoir dire la vérité. D’autre part, il faut les garantir par les autorités publiques de la liberté de l’expression.

Communication as peace in the Caribbean

Maximiliano Dueñas Guzmán

The notion that humans are naturally violent is widely accepted in most contemporary cultures. One formulation of this belief is implicit in a quote by Robert McNamara, a leading figure of U.S. hegemony in the last century: “War is so complex it’s beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend. Our judgment, our understanding, are not adequate. And we kill people unnecessarily” (quoted in Morris, 2003). According to this view, if humans were only able to decipher the complexity of war, then their “violent nature” could be channelled effectively, and, consequently, they would only kill people when “necessary”.

In the following reflection, I argue that a more sensible starting point is the affirmation that humans have the capacity for both violence and peace and that, therefore, the challenge is to clarify and strengthen the art of peace. The global dialogue that preceded, framed and followed WACC’s fourth international congress, held in 2008, has solidified my conviction regarding the multiple linkages between communication and peace. In particular, it has stimulated my interest in the praxis of communication as peace. As a contribution to the perspective of communication as peace, in this paper I trace the following steps: a brief exploration of the relationships between communication and peace; an evaluation of some conceptions of peace throughout history; an examination of how WACC’s Principles of Communication articulate with conceptions of communication as peace; and, in an attempt to make this reflection relevant to collective praxis, I conclude with a number of suggestions regarding the conception of communication as peace and its relationship to the challenges faced for the cultivation of peace in the Caribbean.

Returning to McNamara’s quote, I believe its main error is in its postulation of the intricacies of war as a point of departure. The starting point should be the complexity of peace, not the complexity of war. Humanity has developed a copious amount of knowledge and technology dedicated to violence and armed conflict. Knowledge and instruments for the development and preservation of peace pale in comparison to the intellectual and technological arsenals of war. Consequently, it is peace that has eluded our human capacities. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the complexity of peace is its prevalent definition in negative terms, as non-violence or as the absence of war.

Once one accepts peace as the foremost challenge, one can easily reformulate McNamara’s second assertion: the issue of peace is defined by our judgment, our understanding. And if one accepts this second assertion, then the construction of peace occurs through communication. This is so if one recognizes that individuals make judgments and develop understandings as part of a society and not as isolated entities. In other words, all judgments and understandings are social products, not individual constructs. As collective “objects” or constructions, judgments and understandings are produced through communication. Consequently, communication is essential for the construction of new judgments and new understandings that can sustain peace.

The past president of WACC, Musimbi Kanyoro, quotes Nelson Mandela’s autobiography to express a similar thought:

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite” (Kanyoro, 2008: 4).
Once one accepts peace instead of war as the necessary starting point of any reflection on the relationship between humans and violence, one can begin to transcend McNamara’s logic of war. Therefore, a necessary reformulation or transcendence of his thinking would be the following:

“Peace is so complex that it has historically proven to be beyond the ability of human minds to comprehend it. Our judgment, our understandings are not yet adequate for its sustained development. Consequently, we continue to kill people unnecessarily and continue to justify the use of violence in every aspect of our lives.”

**Ancient and contemporary conceptions of peace**

One of the tasks suggested by this new perspective (this transcendence) is the search for historical understandings of peace. A full exploration of the historical transformations of the concept of peace is beyond the scope of this reflection. Here I just want to illustrate significant continuities between its conception in antiquity and current understandings of the term. In the 5th century BCE, Me-Ti, a Chinese philosopher described the possibility of a new social order based on the elimination of class differences and an emphasis on the ethical dimensions of the common good. This new social order based on the development of brotherly love among all people would make war unnecessary (Florin, 2007).

A century later, Meng-Tse, another Chinese philosopher, argued that people were naturally kind and generous and that this natural inclination led to collective solidarity. In his vision, democracy was linked to a social development in which peace would be defined as the highest social goal (ibid.).

Many of the significant and intricate continuities (and discontinuities) between ancient and contemporary conceptions of peace may be gleaned from the work of Karl Jaspers, particularly from his notion of the Axial Age. According to Jaspers (1949/1953), the Axial Age, the period from 800 to 200 BCE was crucial for humanity because in different parts of the world – what today are China, India, Iran and Greece – the ideals of equality, democracy and compassion were being simultaneously gestated. During this age began what he in an earlier work (1941/1975) called “the historicity of our souls”, a historicity that would subsequently be overshadowed by the rise of a culture based on individualism and materialism. Writing in the midst of World War II, he argued that in order to re-establish links with this historicity, humans had to cultivate communication:

“The community of masses of human beings has produced an order of life in regulated channels which connects individuals in a technically functioning organisation, but not inwardly from the historicity of their souls. The emptiness caused by dissatisfaction with mere achievement and the helplessness that results when the channels of relation break down have brought forth a loneliness of soul such as never existed before, a loneliness that hides itself, that seeks relief in vain in the erotic or the irrational until it leads eventually to a deep comprehension of the importance of establishing communication between man and man” (Jaspers, 1941, emphasis in original).

Today, in the midst of a frenzy of subtle and crude terrorisms, the religious historian Karen Armstrong uses Karl Jasper’s notion of the Axial age to promote inter religious and inter ideological dialogues based on a conception of compassion as the primary building block. In her perspective, compassion is the main legacy of the Axial Age and the privileged space of affinity for the world’s “religious, ethical and spiritual traditions” (Armstrong, 2011: 25).

Implicitly, in her view, this commitment to compassion engenders a communicative challenge, for it compels us to place the other in the center of our concerns instead of our ego. In turn, this perspective of the other as central to our modes of thinking and feeling should be based on communicative practices “to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect” (ibid.).

Fortunately, this view is not limited to a few ro-
mantic souls. Ample social sectors committed to peace continue to emphasize this ancient connection between peace and social justice. The UN's General Assembly, for example, has defined a culture of peace as consisting of ways of thinking and acting based on principles of “freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations” (United Nations General Assembly, 1999).

And in order to implement this view, the UN General Assembly defined eight areas for action:
1) education for a culture of peace;
2) sustainable economic and social development;
3) human rights;
4) equality between women and men;
5) democratic participation;
6) tolerance and solidarity;
7) participatory communication and free flow of information; and
8) international peace and security (ibid.).

**WACC’s Christian Principles of communication and peace**

The links established by the UN’s General Assembly between peace development, social justice, equality and communication are also prevalent in WACC’s conception of communication, as is evident from its recent areas of work, which coincide to a great degree with the eight areas listed above. Moreover, I think it is useful to look at WACC’s foundation, at its Christian Principles of Communication (waccglobal.org/en/about-wacc/principles.html) to see how the conceptualizations of communication contained therein, manifest an ecumenical articulation of Christianity, with communication and the development of peace.

In the first principle, *Christians communicate from a Christian perspective*, WACC members assert that all Christian “communication is an act of
worship”. Communication is thus interpreted as hearing, living and witnessing the Gospel’s Good News, the coming of God’s Kingdom. This understanding of communication also calls for the recognition of the need to constantly reinterpret the Gospel “from the perspectives of the poor and oppressed” (ibid.).

In the second principle of communication, Christian communication creates community, WACC members call for an understanding of community that transcends religious, national and ideological barriers among people. Central to this call is the focus on the dissolution of barriers of “race, sex, class, nation, power and wealth” (ibid).

In the third communication principle, Christian communicators promote participation, WACC members recognize communication as a universal human right and emphasize its practice as an interaction through which people interact to share meanings that enable the establishment and construction of social relationships.

In this principle, communication is recognized as a universal human right because every human needs to communicate in order to define herself/himself as an individual and as a member of a family, a community, a country, a planet and a cosmos.

In the fourth communication principle, Christians strive to use communication as a liberation process, WACC members assert that we cannot truly communicate with others if we regard them as inferior.

In the fifth communication principle, Christian communicators support and develop cultures, WACC members assert that individual and collective dignity can only be achieved through a communication that nurtures cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, ethnic and gender diversity. This nurturing is recognition of “the richness of God’s image in all its diversity”.

In the sixth and final principle, Christians are prophetic in their communication, WACC members assert their commitment to communicating so as to reveal and criticize those who benefit from political and economic power, including corporate owners of mass media.

The Caribbean as a zone of undeclared war
How is the above reflection particularly relevant to the Caribbean? A summary look at the contemporary Caribbean confirms a view that many of us hold: that we live in a zone of undeclared war. A comprehensive study of violence in the region was commissioned by the World Bank and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). This 2007 study concluded that “murder rates in the Caribbean are higher than in any other region of the world, and assault rates are significantly above the world average”.

Other significant findings of the study are that: The region is a transit point between countries that produce cocaine and those who consume it.

- Young adults are a large sector of the perpetrators and victims of violent crimes in the region.
- Emigration and return migration add to the complexity of violence in the region.
- A significant rate of women and girls in the region are victims of violence. Of the ten countries that reported the highest rape rates in the world, three are in the Caribbean.

These are some of the areas in which those in the Caribbean who are committed to a perspective of peace as communication can begin to plant the seeds of an understanding of communication as the generation of peace: regional cooperation among governments and civil society organizations in order to address the use of the Caribbean as a highway for illegal drug traffic; the continual strengthening of a culture of violence among Caribbean youth; migration, outward and inward, and the ways it transforms our cultures; and, violence against women.

Conclusion
To close the circle of thought that I have attempted to present in this reflection, I am proposing that a more useful response to the challenges of violence and war is to begin by focusing on the complexities of peace rather than on the complexities of war. Many well intentioned people, such as McNamara in the late 20th century, insist on the latter perspective. The usefulness of thinking about the
challenges to peace is that it soon leads us to reflect on the ways we communicate; on the conceptions, methods and tools we use to communicate so as to generate peace and justice in our immediate, national and global surroundings.

In short, the usefulness of thinking/acting as if communication were peace is that it continually leads one to explore the many ways in which each one of us contributes to or detracts from definitions of humanity based on compassionate solidarity. Ultimately, if we want to live by the precept that communication is peace, we must acknowledge that communication is humanity.

EDITOR'S NOTE: WACC’s Christian Principles of Communication were drawn up in 1986. In a lengthy process during 2011-12, WACC revised and updated its approach to reflect contemporary realities. In a spirit of inclusiveness and openness to dialogue, it created a new document, Communication for All: Sharing WACC’s Principles, affirming the centrality of communication – including mass, community and social media – in strengthening human dignity and in promoting democratic values and social justice.

NOTES
1. McNamara was an emblematic figure of the United States’ power elite during the 20th century: president of the Ford Company, Secretary of Defense amidst the war on Vietnam and subsequently president of the World Bank in a period in which the number of poor grew by 200 million worldwide (Weiner, 2009). In the last decades of his life, he exhibited great remorse regarding war, a repentance captured in the documentary Fog of War and in his memoirs In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam.
2. This perspective is amply elaborated by authors as diverse as Mead (1934), Poster (2007), Schutz (1967) and Apel (1998).

REFERENCES

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ON THE SCREEN...

VENICE (ITALY) 2011

The 1st INTERFILM Jury at the Venice Film Festival (31 August to 10 September 2011) chose the film *Girimunho / Swirl* (Brazil, Spain, Germany, 2011) directed by Helvécio Marins Jr. and Clarissa Campolina as winner of the INTERFILM Award for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue 2011.

The film tells the story of Bastu, an 81 years old woman living in a little Brazilian village, who has to deal with the death of her husband. It is based on real events in a village lost in the *sertão* of northern Minas Gerais State, where the directors got to know the people and became fascinated by the place and by the character of the old woman.

The death of her husband, Feliciano, leaves Bastu in the sole company of her grand-daughter, Branca, who is thinking of going to study in the city. Bastu, with her magical way of seeing life and the world, setting dream and reality on the same plane, fills the story with her presence and offers advice and opinions throughout the film.

The directors have commented: “In Girimunho time seems to stop in spite of its constant movement. In the midst of the *sertão* landscape, oniric occurrences populate the imagination of its people and blend with the prosaic situations in our characters’ lives. Our desire is to portray the *sertão* in a subjective and profound way, taking reality as the beginning of everything. These characters are real people living in São Romão. Their stories are part of their memories; their homes are the film locations, without being interfered with by art, because everything was already there, ready to be filmed, entirely maintaining the authenticity. The people that inspired us to make this film played themselves.”

The citation of the Ecumenical Jury observed, “By choosing a character who is wise, humorous, sensitive, and independent, the film offers a message which integrates life and death, individuality and social relationships. Through a delicate cinematography of lights and shadows, music and sound, the film adopts a liberating perspective which shows religious practices and beliefs as essential dimensions of life.”

The Ecumenical Jury consisted of Elisabetta Rietbet (Italy), Susanne W. Yngvesson (Sweden), and Karsten Visarius (Germany), President.

WARSZAWA (POLAND) 2011

At the 27th Warsaw Film Festival (7-16 October 2011) the 2nd Ecumenical Jury of SIGNIS and INTERFILM awarded its Prize to the film *Wymyk / Courage* directed by Greg Zglinski, (Poland, 2011). In an excellent and sophisticated cinematographic language *Courage* deals with the issue of moral courage and the sense of guilt. It appeals for more personal responsibility.

The film is set in today’s Poland and the drama can be perceived as a kind of Abel and Cain story. Two brothers, of different characters and sensibilities, are forced to take over the direction of an Internet distribution company when their father falls ill.

The Jury also awarded a Commendation to *Crulic - drumul spre dincolo / Crulic - The Path to Beyond* directed by Anca Damian (Romania/Poland, 2011). *Crulic* is based on a true story about a Romanian emigrant to Poland called Crulic, who is accused of having robbed a Polish judge. This animated feature-length documentary, which uses mixed animation techniques, enounces the often discriminatory attitude of authorities towards foreign migrants. It gives a voice to a man who died in an inhuman way, without being heard and who was deprived of his most elementary human rights.

And a Commendation to *Matière Grise / Grey Matter* directed by Kivu Ruhorahoza, (Australia/Rwanda, 2011). *Matière Grise* reflects on the suffering of those who as children survived the Rwandan genocide. It denounces the mechanisms in which hatred and intolerance are created by media and eventually dehumanize human beings. This feature film shows, how it is important for small countries and their filmmakers to tell their own stories and to reflect on issues that they value the most.
Leipzig (Germany) 2011

At the 54th International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Films held 17-23 October 2011 the Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize endowed with Euros 2000 by VCH-Hotels Germany GmbH – in the “Verband Christlicher Hoteliers e.V.” (www.vch.de) including the Hotel Michaelis in Leipzig – to the film Work Hard – Play Hard directed by Carmen Losmann (Germany, 2011).

The citation read: “With a sober camera the film shows a mirror-image of today’s working world in which people degrade into a pure resource, in a denaturized space. Taking manager training courses and assessment centres as examples, we can see on which cleverly devised methods executives and organization consultants fall back to optimize the achievement potential of their workforce. In this process, people as unique and feeling individuals will be left behind. Carmen Losmann has succeeded in making an impressive film as far as both content and artistic value are concerned. It confronts us with the uncomfortable question, how we are going to deal with such a world and how we want to continue living in it.”

The Members of the Ecumenical Jury 2011 were Vesna Andonovic, Mamer (Luxembourg), Thomas Bohne, Leipzig (Germany) – President, Margrit Frölich, Frankfurt a/M (Germany), and Arne Kristophersen, Brondby (Denmark).

Berlin (Germany) 2012

The Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded prizes at the Berlinale in the International Competition, the Panorama and the International Forum of Young Cinema. The Panorama and the Forum prize carry a prize money of €2500 each, donated by the Catholic Film Work in Germany and the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany).

The award winner in the International Competition was Cesare deve morire (Caesar Must Die) directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (Italy, 2011).

In the world of prison life the power of freedom through art superbly is manifested by inmates of maximum security re-enacting Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. Their gripping discoveries of character similarities arouse compassion for the human condition.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to Rebelle (War Witch) directed by Kim Nguyen (Canada, 2012). The horror of a young girl’s life when taken from her village by rebels to be trained as a child soldier is depicted by scenes of Congo warfare softened by the sweet innocence of a youthful love. Komona, the girl and war witch, escapes this existence to provide a message of redeeming hope.

In the Panorama section, the Jury gave its prize to Die Wand (The Wall) directed by Julian Roman Pölsler (Austria/Germany, 2011). The film tells the story of a woman mysteriously trapped inside transparent walls near an alpine cabin which shut her off from human companionship and require physical labour to survive. The film’s original and atmospheric cinematography accompanies an intense solo performance by Martina Gedeck. Through her care for animals and a solitary immersion in nature she moves beyond chaotic self-preoccupation towards a liberating though sober understanding of love as a unifying and humanizing power.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to Parada (The Parade) directed by Srdjan Dragojevic (Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, 2011). With effective use of comedy, this energetic film considers the challenges of mounting a gay pride parade in Belgrade. The certainty of extreme violence in response leads to an unexpected and touching alliance between former ethnic foes and gay activists.

The Ecumenical Award in the Forum went to La Demora (The Delay) directed by Rogrido Plá (Uruquay, Mexico and France, 2012). The film expresses compassion for demented elderly people caught in the overburdened care of family. When a daughter abandons her dependant father, his steadfast wait for her return draws a community of heartfelt hope. Through a superb dramatic performance one observes the painful condition of family responsibility.

The members of the Ecumenical Jury were: Cynthia Chambers, USA; Alyda Faber, Canada; Rolf-Rüdiger Hamacher, Germany; Mikael Larsson, Sweden; Angelika Obert – President, Germany; and Edgar Rubio, Mexico.