

Media Development

4/2015

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Invisible Walls and Barriers



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El paradójico desarrollo
de la tecnología

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In the Next Issue

The 1/2016 issue of *Media Development* will look at communication rights in practice. How does understanding and applying communication rights help advance and strengthen development?

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“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” is the first line of a famous poem by Robert Frost published in 1914. In “Mending Wall”, the narrator, a New England farmer, contacts his neighbour to rebuild the stone wall between their two farms. As the men work, the narrator questions the purpose of a wall “where it is we do not need the wall”. Twice he points out that walls are generally disliked, despite his companion’s assertion that, “Good fences make good neighbors”.

The Great Wall of China, Hadrian’s Wall in England, the Berlin Wall, the concrete barrier between Israel and the West Bank, the wall on the US-Mexico border, and most recently the barbed wire fence between Hungary and Serbia are instances of physical barriers intended to contain, to keep in or out, and to prevent migration. Then there are the uncompromising barriers erected by the global economy in a world where, in developed and developing countries alike, the rich control 90% of the wealth.

There are more sinister and lethal “walls”. The longest continuous minefield on the planet is a militarized zone in Western Sahara running for 2,700 kilometres and dividing the Sahrawi people. In 1975, Spain ended more than 90 years of colonial rule of Western Sahara after decades of a violent Sahrawi independence movement. When the Spanish left, Morocco sent 350,000 settlers and 20,000 troops into the territory, starting a war that lasted 16 years.

Sahrawis fought under the flag of the Polisario Front, supported by Algeria and Libya. Morocco was backed by France and the United States. Tens of thousands of people died and more than 100,000 were displaced. As Morocco settled the Atlantic side, it built a wall down the middle of the territory to keep Sahrawis and the Polisario Front in the eastern desert. The wall consists of a series of sand berms (ridges) fortified with Moroccan soldiers and landmines. It is still there.

Less immediately obvious are the

social, cultural, and psychological barriers to better understanding between peoples and communities. Many of these impediments are directly related to communication – from linguistic barriers to media misrepresentations – demanding what the Latin American scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero calls the reconstruction of local meanings: listening “to everything that speaks, screams, curses, makes noise, blasphemes, at the same time as it inaugurates, invents, energizes, liberates, emancipates, creates.”¹

A simple definition of communication is precisely the creation and exchange of meaning in common. A more complex definition includes traditional media, social media, digital media and their associated industries. Communication is multi-layered and, in societies fashioned by media (where all is not as it seems), there are numerous obstacles and challenges.

The theme of this issue of *Media Development* is “Invisible Walls and Barriers” and its aim is to explore some of the political, social, cultural and technological impediments to freedom of expression in today’s world. Some barriers are more obvious than others. Indigenous people and their communities have been denied access to communications and excluded from discussion tables at international and national levels. The voices of refugees and migrant workers are not often heard by policy-makers. And in the world’s news media, women are often rendered invisible – which has been the focus of a 20-year-long study carried out by WACC’s Global Media Monitoring Project.

As with many countries in the global South, Afghanistan has suffered political trials and tribulations for a number of decades. But also embedded in Afghan society and culture are religious ideological barriers – as Mina Saboor reveals in her article in this issue of the journal. “Cases of media censorship and regulation become particularly complicated when religious scholars intervene in determining whether media content is Islamic or un-Islamic... Conservative groups advancing these notions tend to use religion as an ultimatum,” she writes.



The World Council of Churches' World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 20-26 September 2015, invited people to advocate for an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine.

Challenge to young people

And then there are young people who, in today's world, often face apparently insurmountable barriers and yet display astonishing resilience and creativity. Addressing an audience of young people in the Town Hall, Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 17 June 2013, President Barack Obama told the story of a wall that divided the city's Alexandra Park.

The barrier was erected in 1994 and is one of a number of so-called "peace walls" built within the city in attempt to prevent violence between Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist communities.

President Obama praised the initiative of a young woman named Sylvia, who campaigned among local communities to build a gate in the wall that would allow people free access. In September 2011, the campaign achieved its goal. Obama commented:

"A small bit of progress. But the fact that so far we've only got a gate open and the wall is still up means there's more work to do. And

that's the work of your generation... We'll need more of you, young people, who imagine the world as it should be; who knock down walls; who knock down barriers; who imagine something different and have the courage to make it happen. The courage to bring communities together, to make even the small impossibilities a shining example of what is possible."

As the articles in this issue of *Media Development* underline, traditional mass media and today's social media can play an important role in breaking down barriers and in creating better understanding between communities, societies, and nations. ■

Note

1 <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/enc09-academic-texts/item/679-staging-citizenship-performance-politics-and-cultural-rights>

Narratives of exclusion and the “other” in Spanish political communication

Karen B. Sanders

In the summer of 2015, distressing scenes of refugees and migrants from Syria, Afghanistan and a number of African nations began to dominate Europe’s headlines. The image of the drowned three year-old, Aylan Kurdi, lying face down in the Turkish sand, became the tragic icon of refugee suffering. Initially Germany and Croatia welcomed the migrants but as the numbers increased, political and public opinion grew more hostile. The Hungarian government set about erecting a physical barrier across its borders with Serbia, determined to prevent migrants entering their country.

The increasing numbers of migrant inflows are a feature of the post-colonial and Cold War Europe. These inflows have been accompanied by the growing strength of so-called “populist” right-wing political parties such as the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Danish People’s Party and Le Front National in France. Concern about immigration or outright hostility to it are integral to their political rhetoric.

Spain too has experienced significant increases in immigrant inflows in a relatively short period of time. From constituting 1.3% of the total population in 1996, immigrants constituted 12% of the total population of Spain by 2012, an influx of 5.7 million people in little over a decade. But

Spain appears to be an interesting outlier to the overall trend of the development of right-wing populism. Left-wing populism, which embraces migrants and refugees, appears to be more prevalent. However, the themes of exclusion and scapegoating may be just as present in Spanish populism as they are in more right-wing versions.

Immigration and politics in Spain

The beginning of the 2008 economic recession, leading to 27% Spanish unemployment in 2013, together with generally negative media representation of immigrants provided conditions that might have been supposed to lead to support for right-wing, anti-immigrant politics as seen in other European countries in similar circumstances. From 2000 onwards, immigration has consistently been listed as among the first five principal problems that most worry Spanish citizens and opinion poll data suggest that anti-immigrant attitudes are similar to those in other European countries.

Studies of media representations of immigrants showed that immigrants were seen on the whole as a problem for Spanish society, linking them to problems of crime and poverty. However, negative public attitudes did not translate into the development of or widespread support for populist radical right-wing (PPR) or extreme right-wing parties. Whereas in many European countries these parties have become the mouthpiece for the politics of disillusion and protest, in Spain populist right-wing parties have achieved no widespread electoral support, a singular status shared with Portugal.

Since Spain’s democratic transition between 1975 and 1982 after 36 years of General Franco’s dictatorship, the political landscape has been dominated by the centre-right Populist Party and the centre-left Socialist Party. A new party, Podemos [We Can], emerged from Spain’s *indignados* movement (“the outraged”) who in 2011 began a series of protest meetings calling for more participatory politics and the end of austerity policies.

First registered in March 2014, the party was founded in the midst of recession, corruption and the growth of Catalan demands for independ-

ence. Podemos positioned itself against the ruling “ruling class or caste” (*la casta*) who sought to defend their own narrow interests against those of the people. Their constant appeals to the people and repudiation of a corrupt elite prompted many commentators to suggest that Podemos exemplified a kind of left-wing populism, albeit one which did not share the right-wing’s exclusionary narrative.

What is populist political communication?

Populism is a highly contested political concept. In the European context it has been usually associated with the rise of radical right parties such as Le Pen’s Front National in France and the Flemish Block in Belgium. In Latin America, populism is associated with the development of left-wing political movements, led by charismatic politicians such as Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, who employ a Manichean discourse of “us/them”, “people/elite”, positioning themselves as “outsiders” who reject traditional political structures.

Two Belgian scholars, Jan Jagers and Stefaan Walgrave, have proposed a useful typology for the analysis of populism. They suggest that identifying with the people in language and style is the first necessary condition that determines whether a political actor is populist or not. They argue that appeals to the people constitute the “thin ideology” of populism and act as a “preselector” for determining whether “thick populism” exists.

Thick populism, according to Jagers and Walgrave, has one or both of two further characteristics. First, it has a clear anti-elitist narrative. Second, it defines the people as the “in-group” and another group (immigrants, ethnic minorities, religious communities) as an “out-group” which should be excluded from the polity and against which the people are defined.

The narrative of the “Other” in Podemos

Podemos was created, in the words of its founding manifesto, with the aim of “converting citizen indignation into social change”. During their 2014 European Parliamentary campaign that won them five seats and almost 8% of the Spanish vote, Podemos underlined in images and language the

“Others” as identified with the political establishment or “*la casta*” (the caste) and “Us”, identified as the people. The main Podemos electoral video for the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, for example, is deeply personal, contrasting the life stories of the candidates for the two mainstream parties with that of Podemos’ leader, Pablo Iglesias.

Iglesias tells his own story as one of a life of struggle and effort, engaged in the world of ordinary people in which he works hard to achieve what he has. This is compared to the privileged lives of his two main rivals who are depicted as being installed in power, provided with official cars and expensive meals, part of Spain’s ruling class. Leading members of the two mainstream parties are shown enjoying the good life with well-paid positions on company boards, complacent and willing to sell out the country and its people to Angela Merkel.

Iglesias, however, is represented as a normal citizen like you and me, taking a bus, doing his own washing, filling out a tax return. The out-group is the corrupt and elite political mainstream contrasted with the ordinary, decent Iglesias who is shown as one of us who encourages us to believe that together we can change society.

Podemos’ election rallies hammer home the themes of the campaign video: “our lives or their privileges”, “the old caste”, “traitors”, “rabble”, “thieves”, “rogues”, “shameless”. Iglesias states, “All of them have only one country, money, and they should be judged as enemies by the rest of the people” and “They’re not affected by cutbacks. They have scandalous salaries, private education for their children, private health; they don’t know what it is not to get to the end of the month because the wage is not enough; they don’t know what unemployment is.”

The phrase “they say” is used constantly to point to all those who are considered to be against the people: “They say that it’s not possible to stand up to Merkel; they say that it is normal to live in fear: they say that it’s not possible to do anything else but choose between them or them.”

Podemos’ narrative focuses relentlessly on the need to eradicate the corrupt system run by

“Them” so as to create a new fairer real democracy run by “Us”. In the words of Iglesias, “Whoever is for fiscal reform, the banning of revolving doors, for an audit of the debt so that the waste of the banks is paid for by the bankers, whoever agrees in telling Mrs Merkel that we don’t want to be a colony is with us.” The possibility of a new honest politics is emphasised and shown in actions as exemplified by the announcement at Podemos’ 2014 campaign launch that, if elected, they will not accept the full European deputy’s salary:

“Let’s show that there can be other kinds of politicians. While the Euro MPs are putting 8.000 euros in their pockets every month, we have committed to receiving 1.900 euros which is three times the Spanish minimum wage.”

Podemos champions the rights of immigrants, pledging to overturn the “Directive of shame” (Spain’s return policy) and end the deportation of immigrants. Mainstream parties are accused of acting like Europe in maintaining repressive laws against immigrants and of considering foreigners to be second-class citizens and often not even citizens. Traditional parties are said to blame immigrants for all society’s problems while Podemos aims to give a voice to immigrants.

In sum, Podemos uses a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people and pretends to speak in their name. It adopts an anti-elite rhetoric. Political, state, media and economic elites are blamed for society’s ills. They are considered to be all the same in their pursuit of private gain against public good. Here too we see in play the French theorist, René Girard’s scapegoating dynamic: at times of social and economic crisis, certain groups or individuals are blamed and stigmatized, thus discharging public outrage and restoring an uneasy peace.

Scapegoating is also at the heart of the third constitutive, horizontal dimension of populism which is the desire to exclude certain population categories such as immigrants from the pure group of the “people”. This last dimension is not present in Podemos’ political communication. Podemos positions immigrants as victims of the

elites, as part of the people exploited by the ruling class and as those who the elites wish to treat as second-class citizens, regard as scapegoats and exclude from the people.

Exclusion: the meeting point of populist politics

In conclusion, Spanish left-wing populism does not exhibit the straightforward exclusionary politics of the right, but there is a kind of reverse exclusionary dynamic at work: the elites are accused of attempting to exclude others such as immigrants and of seeking to hijack democracy itself for their own ends. This suggests that the notion of “exclusion” is always present in populist communication of whatever political stripe. Scapegoating too could also be considered to be a constitutive element of thick populism.

Spain may differ from other parts of Europe in that it has not seen the development of radical right-wing populism, but its own brand of populism may have more in common with its neighbours than appears at first glance. Identity politics is replaced by anti-elite politics which espouses elements of a narrative that scapegoats undesirable groups; the theme of exclusion is turned on its head to make the people (and associated groups) the victims of exclusion by the outgroup that includes mainstream political parties, non-state educational and health institutions, Northern Europeans and Angela Merkel. In this way, the exclusive elite becomes the “Other”, responsible for all the country’s problems. ■

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Valuing dialogue and respect in research

Leonardo Custódio

One factor that motivates research in the intersections between communication and development is our willingness to contribute to social change. Buzzwords (Cornwall & Brock, 2005) such as “participation” and “empowerment” indicate scholarly intentions to contribute towards more just and egalitarian societies. It is certainly an admirable cause. However, what do we do if our actions in the field contradict our well-meaning intentions?

I started thinking about the contradictions in well-meaning research after an eye-opening experience early in my fieldwork. Since 2009, I have investigated the uses of media and journalism for activism among dwellers of low-income,

violence-ridden urban areas known as *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 2011, I started a series of yearly field trips (2011-14) to observe actions, talk to people and gather empirical materials for my study.

In the first field trip, I attended a debate about police violence in a favela. Journalists of a community newspaper had organized it. For the panel, they invited community leaders, university researchers and community media practitioners who lived in favelas. During the debate, they challenged policies and denounced police abuses. However, one of the panelists also included scholars and researchers in his criticism. He said:

“Academics have a problem: they are like demi-gods. The science of the academics is the only that suits. The knowledge of the academics is the only that suits. Therefore, I make a proposal for you who live in a favela: let us start questioning researchers who enter the favelas to do their research. Sometimes I feel like I am a rat in a lab where they research and study me. They conclude their theses, their studies and not even leave us the material that they produced. This is a shame.”¹

The community leader’s eloquent case



“World Cup for Whom?” Activists, artists, academics and dwellers collaborate in an artistic protest against the impacts of the FIFA World Cup in a favela in Nova Holanda, Rio de Janeiro, 2014. Photo: Author.

against researchers hit home. As I looked around the room, other favela-based activists nodded in support. Meanwhile, Brazilian and foreign researchers attending the event, including myself, fell silent in embarrassment.

Lack of follow up

Throughout my research process, I noticed the community leader was not alone in complaining about researchers. Other activists were also annoyed about the actions of “typical” academics. That is, light-skinned, middle- and upper-class Brazilians. Even though admitting that many researchers are good partners in their struggles, some people I interviewed claimed to be tired of talking to academics. The main reason is that they hardly ever hear from the researcher or about the study after the fieldwork is over.

Perhaps I was lucky for not being a typical researcher. Some people only agreed to talk to me because I am black and come from Magé, a small, low-income, working-class city in the Metropolitan Area of Rio de Janeiro. On one occasion, an activist tried to convince a reluctant other person to talk to me by saying, “This one is different. He is one of us. He is black from Baixada [the low-in-

come, working-class region where my town is].” It worked and I managed to talk to his fellow activist.

However, rather than feeling fortunate for being accepted, I felt concerned. Why did some of the people I met have such a low regard for researchers? Are we really contributing to social change or perpetuating inequalities? Why are we researching: for social change or our own career’s advancement? These questions kept haunting me for the rest of my research process. How must researchers deal with the contradictions between our ideals and our actions?

Questioning is certainly the first step, starting from the basic premises of development work and research. The notion of “development” itself is highly problematic. Some scholars have questioned the paternalistic methods combined with condescending and prejudicial attitudes that seem to predominate in international development work (Escobar, 1995; Manyozo, 2012). Outside academia, the thought-provoking and hilarious Kenyan-based mockumentary “The Samaritans”² uses real-life absurdities within the scene of international NGOs acting in the country to satirize their lack of accountability and ineffectiveness.³

Volunteer host at the community radio of favela Santa Marta, Rio, 2011. Two weeks later, the radio was shut down by the police for lacking a permit. Academics and activists have supported the radio’s struggle for the licence. Photo: Author.



Questioning social inequalities

Back in Rio de Janeiro, the criticism of favela activists to researchers did not reflect the geopolitical imbalance of international development work. As Edward Said has argued (Said, 1993: 269), colonialist attitudes can also be a domestic problem in stratified societies like Brazil. In favelas, most dwellers are blacks or mixed-race people descended from slaves or poor migrants from Brazil's northeast. Today, they are the under-citizens who suffer the most from neglecting, condescending and authoritarian policies and attitudes (Souza, 2005).

Unfortunately, we researchers do not seem to question our own positions in the social hierarchy as often as we should. Development work and research reflect social inequalities. Consequently, the resentment of subjects is a form of contestation. How should we deal with it? I believe there are two things we can do to tackle the contradictions between our well-meaning research goals and our actions: talk (among ourselves and with subjects) and respect subjects.

Talking to other researchers helps to identify problems and to seek solutions together. In different ways, we already do this especially regarding theory and methods. For instance, some scholars have raised the need for more innovative research that does not reflect the result-oriented mindset of donors (Thomas, 2015). Others have problematized the theoretical challenges after on-line-articulated mass protests arose in the Global South (Rodriguez, Ferron, & Shamas, 2014; Tufte, 2013). At the 2015 conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR, Montreal), scholars gathered in a panel entitled "The future of communication for development and social change: Scholarly perspectives" to reflect about the impasses in the field.

These conversations towards theoretical and methodological innovations are important to boost our sociological imagination (Mills, 2000), but they do not solve our attitudes towards research subjects. Some conversations face this problem more directly. At the same IAMCR conference, the roundtable "Activism and the academy: Communication scholars in action" gathered

scholars from around the world with similar dilemmas: balancing career and activism, improving activist-researcher cooperation, and dealing with lack of funding. However, meetings like these are often more therapeutic than effective in raising solutions.

Perhaps a more effective way to tackle the contradictions in our actions in the field is to include research subjects in the talks. This is, for example, the proposal of the Ørecomm Festival,⁴ an annual event which takes place simultaneously in Denmark and Sweden. The festival is a meeting of scholars and practitioners in the field of communication for development. Consequently, there is plenty of room for disagreements, mutual questionings and joint efforts for improving both development work and research.

Respect for people

However, opening spaces for dialogue is not enough. Most of our relationships with subjects happen in the field. It is on those occasions that I believe researchers need to enact respect towards the people in whose lives and actions we are interested. By respect, I do not merely mean treating people politely, but questioning our own position in the hierarchy of knowledge production.

Lack of dialogue is what made the community leader in Rio feel that academics are like demi-gods. He is right. We do act like demi-gods. In our research processes, most of us suddenly land in a certain place, ask many questions, observe people closely and then disappear. After that, we present our findings in our departments or in increasingly expensive conferences. Sometimes, researchers do return to the field and present results. Nevertheless, once the study is published, how could subjects object to, make suggestions or question our claims?

This is perhaps the root of what has seemed to me the fallacy of partnership and cooperation. The fallacy happens when researchers claim to cooperate with subjects, but do not realize they are the only ones recommending solutions. Inputs from subjects hardly ever have an impact on researchers' actions and writings. It is neither cooperation nor dialogue if only one side has to

reflect and change ideas and actions because of conversations.

Concerned about the risk of reproducing the top-down relationship with the people to whom I talked, I tried a different approach in my research. In my last field trip, I presented drafts to the subjects of my study. I wrote a summary in Portuguese of the ideas I wanted to develop in my thesis. In that summary, I also explained how I intended to use what I had learned from them.

Every time I met one of the subjects and showed them my raw analysis, I shivered. What if they thought my explanations did not match reality? What if they accused me of victimizing them or over-dramatizing their reality to shock and thus increase my readership? Some of them were university students. What would I do if they challenged the concepts I used? It was a nerve-racking process. For a few moments, I felt fragile.

Luckily, the results were positive. Some people had critical remarks. For instance, one questioned the term “media activism”. She considered the term too “gringo” and not suitable to explain their actions. However, she showed satisfaction with my use of “favela” as a prefix to it as an effort to make the context clear. Others were mostly pleased with my attitude of showing them unfinished material. They said they felt appreciated for having their evaluations taken into account.

Finally, the most pleasing feedback came as a proposal. One of the activists, a photographer and filmmaker, suggested we turned the results of my study into a script for a documentary. I am not sure whether we will do it or not. Nevertheless, it certainly felt that my research could contribute not only to the scholarly debates, but also to grassroots practices of communication for development and social change.

Overall, what I learned from this process is that the only way to prevent contradictions between what we wish and how we act as researchers is by valuing dialogue and respect with those people in whose lives we are interested. Not by pretending to listen or merely being polite, but to act in ways that are discomforting and challenging to ourselves. To act in ways that show we acknow-

ledge the social hierarchy in our relationship with subjects of our studies. To act in ways to open our research processes to inputs and evaluations from them.

In other words, we improve our relationships with subjects when we have respectful conversations. Not under the pretence of empowering them, but to reduce our power as researchers. In short, let us strive for truly mutual learning experiences in our research processes. ■

Notes

1. The speech by André Constantine, a community leader at Morro da Babilônia, can be seen here (in Portuguese): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8UnW9Ws07A>
2. <http://www.aidforaid.org/about.php>
3. <http://africasacountry.com/2014/02/kenyas-first-mockumentary-takes-on-the-ngo-world/>
4. The most recent edition of the Ørecomm Festival happened in September, 2014. See the page of the event here: <http://voiceandmatter.net/> (accessed September 29, 2015)

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Empresas comunales de comunicación: Un camino hacia la sostenibilidad

Loreto Bravo Muñoz

Generalmente cuando reflexionamos sobre la sostenibilidad de los medios comunitarios nos referimos a los mecanismos que tienen las radios comunitarias para mantenerse “a flote”, casi siempre pensamos en la dimensión económica por sobre la dimensión social, cultural, legal, política o tecnológica. Estas reflexiones más que entregar respuestas nos desatan otras interrogantes: ¿Cuál es el rol del Estado, organismos no gubernamentales, organismos internacionales y fundaciones con respecto a la sostenibilidad de los medios comunitarios? ¿Es la sostenibilidad económica el eje principal para garantizar la permanencia en el tiempo de un medio comunitario? ¿Existen modelos exitosos de sostenibilidad? ¿Cuáles?

Ya lo decía con claridad Alfonso Gumucio en su escrito “Arte de Equilibristas” (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001): “Son pocas las experiencias (de medios comunitarios) que han sobrevivido sin apoyo externo. Por supuesto, hay varios ángulos posibles para analizar la sostenibilidad, y sería un gran error reducir este análisis únicamente a factores económicos. Que una experiencia sea sostenible en términos económicos, o incluso haya logrado su autofinanciamiento, no garantiza que cumpla las funciones de servicio a su audiencia y de fortalecimiento de las voces comunitarias.”¹

Después de 15 años del texto de Gumucio, la disyuntiva de la sostenibilidad sigue siendo un asunto que ocupa a organismos internacionales como la UNESCO que este año 2015 organizó el seminario “Sostenibilidad de los Medios de Comunicación Comunitarios: Fortalecimiento de Políticas y Mecanismos de Financiación” en París, Francia el pasado 14 y 15 de Septiembre al que la organización Palabra Radio fue invitada a participar para presentar un estudio de caso de una práctica de sostenibilidad que tiene vida en Oaxaca, México. Es a partir de esta experiencia de participación en el seminario que queremos compartir algunas reflexiones.

Desequilibrios y limitaciones

El modelo multistakeholder consiste en que los múltiples actores interesados en abordar el tema de la sostenibilidad de los medios de comunicación comunitarios, participen en un pie de igualdad. Sin embargo, en el seminario hubo desequilibrio al observar que sólo el 24% de las personas participantes éramos mujeres, el 42% eran personas provenientes de Europa, 31% de Africa, 15% de Asia, al lado de un 6% provenientes de América Latina (cuna de la radio comunitaria). El 21% de las personas participantes representaban a los órganos reguladores de gobiernos, el 56% a organizaciones no gubernamentales, redes y fundaciones y sólo el 5% proveníamos de medios de comunicación comunitarios junto a un 2% del sector académico.

Otro elemento que llama la atención es que por medios de comunicación comunitarios sólo se habla de la radio comunitaria dejando fuera la amplia gama de iniciativas de comunicación que hoy conviven con la radio como el cine, los medios digitales, los medios impresos, la telefonía celular, etc.

Así mismo, el concepto de sostenibilidad se aborda de forma restringida priorizando la dimensión económica y legal por sobre las dimensiones tecnológica, cultural, social y política. No hay una visión integral de la sostenibilidad que permita la creación de políticas que apunten hacia la autonomía de los medios de comunicación comunitarios. Es decir que las comunidades que gestionan estos medios puedan tomar decisiones



sin intervención ajena a su visión y forma de vida.

Al contrario, luego de escuchar a varios de los representantes de los órganos reguladores de gobiernos, se puede observar que están ocupados en crear políticas que consideran que un medio de comunicación comunitario es sostenible sólo si tiene mecanismos para poder recibir el apoyo económico y legal de los gobiernos, las fundaciones u organizaciones de cooperación internacional. Por lo tanto, estas políticas, contrarias a construir independencia, lo que hacen es someter a las radios a la autoridad de estos órganos reguladores y de esta forma establecer control sobre los contenidos, con lo cual se limita la democracia de la palabra y el ejercicio de los derechos a la comunicación de las personas y los pueblos.

Se habla de sostenibilidad de los medios comunitarios desde una visión paternalista y clientelar. No hay una voluntad política real de crear condiciones para la autonomía de estos medios y mucho menos para fomentar su pluralismo y potencial. Son vistos como una amenaza y por eso se hace necesario controlarlos.

Esta forma de entender la sostenibilidad dependiente y controlada se opone a la experiencia que las comunidades están construyendo en diferentes partes del mundo, pero principalmente en el continente americano donde la sostenibilidad se construye desde la visión comunitaria, es decir, desde la sostenibilidad de la comunidad que gestiona el medio. La pregunta es ¿De qué manera ayuda el medio de comunicación comunitario a que la comunidad sea sostenible?

En nuestra experiencia de nueve años acompañando procesos de comunicación comunitaria en América Latina, hemos aprendido que la sostenibilidad de los medios comunitarios no radica en enfocar la atención en la sostenibilidad del propio medio, sino en comprender la sostenibilidad desde el marco comunitario. Esto es lo que hace sostenible al medio y confirma la premisa con la que trabajamos: el medio no es el fin en sí mismo, sino sólo un medio para alcanzar la sostenibilidad de la vida comunitaria.

Siguiendo con la idea que nos plantea Gumucio, la sostenibilidad va mucho más allá

que el autofinanciamiento, define desde la función esencial que tiene el medio de comunicación comunitario que es el de servir a la comunidad para fortalecer su vida en comunidad.

Una de las principales razones por las cuales los órganos reguladores están impedidos de ver la sostenibilidad de los medios comunitarios desde otra perspectiva que no sea la expuesta anteriormente, es porque los puestos de decisión dentro de estos órganos son puestos políticos acorde a los intereses del gobierno en turno, es decir, se trata de un puesto desde donde se hace carrera política porque permite demostrar la experiencia en el control de la disidencia, de la palabra del pueblo, de la visión crítica.

Otras dimensiones de la sostenibilidad

En el marco de la sostenibilidad de los medios de comunicación comunitarios, el fortalecimiento de la participación de las mujeres es fundamental porque aportamos un enfoque, un punto de vista, una opinión, una manera diferente de ver y vivir, sabemos que jugamos un rol y tenemos una posición como mujeres al interior de la familia, la comunidad, el sistema de organización local. Somos la mitad, somos el 50% de la población. Por eso comunicar como mujeres representa un camino para hacer escuchar nuestra voz donde los espacios de mujeres comunicadoras son esenciales para la sostenibilidad de los proyectos de comunicación comunitaria sin ser un mecanismo separatista como lo ven los hombres que sienten estos espacios como amenazas.

Así mismo el uso de Tecnologías Libres de Información y Comunicación (TLICs), es decir software libre y hardware libre es un aspecto importante de abordar para hablar de la sostenibilidad de los

medios de comunicación comunitarios, porque sienta sus bases en principios éticos y tecno-políticos acordes con los valores de la comunidad que lo desarrolla, permitiendo que estas tecnologías sean usadas, copiadas, estudiadas, modificadas y redistribuidas con la misma libertad. ¿Cómo vamos a hablar de sostenibilidad de medios de comunicación comunitarios si usamos tecnologías con patentes privativas que generan dependencia hacia las empresas desarrolladoras ajenas a la comunidad?

Un caso exitoso

En la Sierra Juárez de Oaxaca, dos comunidades zapotecas (Talea de Castro y Santa María Yaviche) tienen radio comunitaria y red de telefonía celular comunitaria y a partir de esta fusión de tecnologías



se crea un nuevo modelo de sostenibilidad de los medios. La radio administra la red de telefonía celular, permitiendo generar un ingreso económico que le ayuda a sostenerse. Además de crear nuevas formas de participación en la radio a través de la telefonía. Cabe mencionar que estas dos redes de telefonía celular comunitarias cuentan con un permiso legal para el uso de las frecuencias en la banda de 850Mhz. Las personas usuarias pagan una cuota fija mensual de \$40 pesos mexicanos, que equivale a \$2,5 dólares al mes por llamadas y mensajes ilimitados dentro de la localidad y localidades aledañas que participan del proyecto, permitiendo una reducción de costos de hasta el 97% y donde el gasto en telefonía móvil se queda circulando dentro de la comunidad.

Las llamadas nacionales e internacionales se hacen a través de conectar la red local a un servicio de Internet proporcionado por microempresas y el servicio de Voz por IP (VoIP) es proporcionado por un pequeño operador que se conecta a la red global de telefonía. De esta manera, cada persona usuaria de la red, a través de un esquema de prepago, adquiere crédito para las llamadas fuera de la localidad a muy bajo costo. Por ejemplo un minuto a Estados Unidos antes costaba \$15 pesos mexicanos y ahora cuesta \$0,20 centavos de peso mexicano por minuto.

Los bajos costos del servicio de Telefonía Celular Comunitaria han dado como resultado: un incremento de la comunicación, un ahorro potencial, un incremento en el acceso a la información y el fortalecimiento del tejido a nivel local. Pero este no ha sido el único logro, también ha generado un impacto en la política pública incidiendo en la asignación de frecuencias para *Uso Social*, lo que significa en la actualidad que en todo el país se puede replicar el modelo de manera legal.

En resumen, se trata de redes de Telefonía Celular Comunitaria operadas y administradas por las propias comunidades indígenas, que en su mayoría son de menos de 2,500 habitantes y que han sido marginadas debido a que las empresas concesionarias de estas frecuencias no tienen la obligación legal de ofrecer servicio a estas localidades.

Todo este trabajo ha sido posible gracias al

punto que han creado las organizaciones [Rhizomatica](#) y [Redes por la Diversidad, Equidad y Sustentabilidad](#) (REDES A.C.) entre las comunidades, que son usuarias potenciales de tecnologías de comunicación, los ingenieros y desarrolladores de proyectos tecnológicos con software y hardware libre y los espacios jurídicos.

Estas Empresas Comunes de Comunicación tienen su origen en el carácter comunal de los recursos como resultado de la tenencia comunal de la tierra. Este último aspecto, es fundamental para generar las condiciones de sostenibilidad de la vida comunitaria y, por lo tanto, de las Empresas Comunes de Comunicación, que refuerzan la autonomía de las localidades y contribuyen al alcance de los objetivos y visiones de vida de los pueblos originarios.

El derecho a la comunicación

En ese contexto, es que los pueblos originarios, amparados en el Artículo 2do Constitucional y el Convenio 169 de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT), ejercen su derecho a la comunicación, pues les reconoce como sujetos de derechos de acuerdo a sus sistemas normativos, e instituciones particulares con derechos sobre el territorio que habitan y de ser consultados sobre cualquier decisión que pueda afectarles.

El derecho a la Libertad de Expresión es el que permite establecer los tres derechos básicos en materia de comunicación que tiene todos los pueblos originarios en México:

- A adquirir, administrar y operar sus propios medios de comunicación
- A contar con cobertura de telecomunicación accesible y asequible
- A participar en medios no indígenas sin discriminación

Pero estos derechos básicos requieren de que el Estado en sus tres niveles de gobierno (municipal, estatal y federal) generen las condiciones para que los pueblos indígenas puedan hacerlo. Esto quiere decir, que el Estado debe establecer medidas regulatorias que reconozcan las formas de organización de estos pueblos y sus derechos fundamentales y medidas proactivas que faciliten su ejercicio. Por ejemplo el Estado debe asegurar

el acceso a espectro suficiente para la existencia de concesiones sociales de telefonía celular, radiodifusión y cualquier otro tipo de comunicación que puedan establecer estos pueblos.

En el caso de la radio FM, el actual artículo 90 de la Ley Federal de Telecomunicaciones y Radiodifusión (LFTR) obliga al Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones (IFT) a hacer una reserva del espectro del 10% de la banda de FM en la parte alta, para Concesiones Sociales. Además el Estado mexicano asumió en la Cumbre Mundial de la Sociedad de la Información, el compromiso de que la comunicación indígena es una prioridad. La ley establece que los requisitos para solicitar estas concesiones deben ser acordes a las formas de organización social y los derechos de los pueblos y comunidades indígenas.

Al mismo tiempo el IFT debe prestar asistencia técnica para facilitar el cumplimiento de estos requisitos y debe garantizar el acceso a los recursos permitiendo que los medios indígenas participen en igualdad de condiciones en los mercados, como por ejemplo, que se cumpla la obligación de que los concesionarios incorporen programación indígena esto a su vez provocaría una demanda de contenidos que generaría ingresos para los medios comunitarios que los produzcan, la difusión de información en lenguas indígenas, la creación de programas que otorguen apoyos y estímulos que les permitan existir a los medios comunitarios, generar una mejor provisión de conectividad, es decir, invertir en infraestructura y fondos para desarrollarla, como capacitación y fondos semilla, así como investigación en tecnología específica, creación de espacios de encuentro, recursos para eso y premios a contenidos de calidad. Aunque la ley prohíbe a la radiodifusión comunitaria e indígena la transmisión de publicidad comercial no impide que estos medios promuevan la economía local, los medios tradicionales de producción y la economía solidaria y social.

Conclusiones

Viendo el estado de la situación y a través de la experiencia de participar en el seminario UNESCO, puedo concluir que una de las principales barreras invisibles que tiene la sostenibilidad de los

medios comunitarios es la forma de entender la sostenibilidad como dimensiones fragmentadas y no como un todo integral, constituyéndose como un impedimento político puesto que se refiere a la voluntad de los gobiernos y organismos externos de plantear la sostenibilidad desde su multiplicidad de dimensiones interconectadas.

El rol de organismos internacionales como la UNESCO o la UIT es el de generar las condiciones para la construcción de un modelo multistakeholders en equilibrio donde los diferentes puntos de vista tengan un pie de igualdad.

En el caso de las fundaciones y organismos de la sociedad civil que apoyan con recursos a los medios de comunicación comunitarios les corresponde incorporar otras dimensiones de la sostenibilidad como es el crear fondos y programas para el fortalecimiento de la participación de las mujeres y otras minorías en la comunicación y fomentar el desarrollo de las tecnologías libres.

A las personas que hacemos los medios comunitarios no nos queda de otra que reforzar nuestro trabajo desde la dimensión cultural, social y política creando medios de comunicación no sólo como herramientas sino como espacios inclusivos de otras diversidades, en armonía con la madre tierra y amorosa con los niños y niñas y de esta forma fortalecer a la vida en comunidad.

El futuro de la radio comunitaria está en la incorporación de otras tecnologías y servicios a la comunidad como el internet, y telefonía celular.

La imposibilidad de ejercer el derecho a la comunicación obstaculiza la justicia política y social y no permite mejorar la situación de las personas y comunidades. ■

Nota

1. Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron, 2001, Fundación Rockefeller.

Loreto Alejandra Bravo Muñoz nació en Chile durante la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet y creció en el exilio en Nicaragua y Colombia. Ha vivido en México durante los últimos 18 años. Loreto tiene una licenciatura en Antropología de La Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia de México, un Postgrado en Comunicación Popular y Arte Comunitario de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México, y una especialización en Género y Comunicación de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Como fundadora de Palabra Radio, Loreto se ha dedicado desde 2006 a acompañar múltiples procesos de comunicación comunitaria en México y otros países de la región, así como a capacitar a grupos comunitarios en las áreas técnicas de la radiofrecuencia y de la difusión radiofónica.

Media barriers in Afghanistan

Mina Saboor

Afghanistan once housed tourists from around the world intrigued by the Silk Road stories, the poetic and mystic culture, the majestic landscape and the hospitable people. Their experience in Afghanistan was frequently captured through journalism and photojournalism of the early 1900s. However, Afghanistan's very own media culture was born during this same time with Seraj-ul-Akhbar being the country's first newspaper, published on 11 January 1906.

The Director of the Afghan Journalist Center, Ahmad Quraishi, notes this was the only issue published until the newspaper was revived in October 1911 by Mahmood Tarzai, "Father of Afghanistan Journalism". Media development continued with Radio Kabul's first broadcasting in 1925. The next major milestone was legislating for a Press Law within the Constitution of Afghanistan in July 1965, which provided the legal framework for freedom of the press.¹ Afghan journalism continued to develop and progress throughout this period of time. However, it is important to bear in mind that the geopolitical position of the country rarely permitted the practice of truly independent media.

The Taliban's occupation of the country in 1996 resulted in a complete halt to freedom of expression. The extremist regime lasting from 1996-2001 set out to wipe out the country's tolerant and vibrant culture and re-establish law and order under the pretext of religious decree. As part of its extremist rule one of the major undertakings by the Taliban was a widespread ban on journalism and photography. The few media sources were strictly controlled by the Taliban and became a

means to convey their radical perspective and legitimize their rule. Hence, media by definition became a propaganda tool for the Taliban.

In the post-Taliban regime, however, the prospects for the country changed dramatically as an international coalition formed to fight terrorists in Afghanistan and promised to establish peace, security, and democratic rule in the country. Schools were established, the infrastructure was rebuilt, a promising political regime was installed, and women's rights were championed once again.

On the media front, Afghanistan's former Minister of Culture and Information, Seyyed Makhdum Rahin, noted that the country went from 0 to 200 media outlets in the post-Taliban regime.² Producing and broadcasting with such a high number of television stations, radio stations, and newspapers is a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. The country re-legislated a Mass Media Law in 2009, seeking to ensure freedom of expression through the media, protection of journalists, and to regulate the activities of mass media.

This presents a promising future for free media in Afghanistan, except in practice Afghan media are still subject to geopolitical and socio-cultural conditions that set up barriers to freedom of expression.

Political barriers

Reporters sans Frontières' 2015 World Press Freedom Index ranks Afghanistan #122 out of 180 countries, increasing its rank by 6 from the 2014 results.³ But, taking into account the political context of the country, freedom of expression in practice has actually been in decline since 2013. The unique political structure formed by a President and a Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan and the continued presence of the Taliban at different levels of power have increased competition among the various leaders and factions to influence and gain public support. Influential power holders push their personal political agendas onto media personnel thus restricting the practice of free, democratic, and protected media in Afghanistan.

In a political environment such as Afghanistan's, media practitioners must work above and

beyond the call of duty in order to fulfill their professional obligations. To understand the political barriers, one must consider four main thresholds for media professionals: manoeuvring through powerful entities in Afghan society, juggling conflicting ideological directions among political and religious leaders, situating their work in obscure legal frameworks, and protecting themselves from security threats.

In terms of political meddling, there have been a number of cases that reveal political leaders' interference in media affairs. For instance, the Afghanistan Analyst Network, an independ-

ent non-profit research and analysis organization, identifies two active political leaders, Rashid Dostum and Burhanuddin Rabbani, known to sponsor private media channels that serve their distinct political agendas and leading the country to a "war of the media".⁴

Another example is of a noted photojournalist, Najibullah Musafer, whose capricious imprisonment in February 2015 for "copyright violation" is assumed to be related to his other bodies of work which likely offended an official in power.⁵ Media activists such as Fahim Dashti raise awareness and speak against limits to Afghan journalists' critical coverage of government officials and powerful figures, but the arbitrary justice system continues to be less favourable to civilian voices.

The number of journalists threatened, arrested, and who have experienced physical harm is increasing over the years. Nai, a media training and advocacy organisation also affiliated with the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, reports a 64% increase in violence against journalists in Afghanistan between 2013 and 2014. However, the government is slow to respond to the issue and to ensure the protection of journalists' rights. On the one hand this leads to negligence and a culture of crime and impunity for media dictators and on the other to self-censorship among journalists.

Intervention of religious scholars

Despite a degree of advancement through a legal framework such as the Mass Media Law of Afghanistan, enacted in accordance with Article 34 of the Constitution and Article 19 of the International Covenant of Human Rights, legal frameworks alone cannot guarantee protection for media professionals. In Afghanistan, the tenets and provisions of religious ideology hold sway over state laws as outlined in Article 3 of the Constitution: "No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan".

Cases of media censorship and regulation particularly become complicated when religious scholars intervene in determining whether media content is Islamic or un-Islamic. The Ulama

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A poster on the streets of Kabul campaigning against the capricious imprisonment of Najibullah Musaffer, a renowned photojournalist in Afghanistan. The left side of the poster reads “Why???” (Photo: Najibullah Musaffer).

Council’s decisions – the highest body of key Islamic leaders largely funded by the government – at times contradicts constitutional laws. Article 20 of the Mass Media Law states “private radio and television are obligated to observe the principles and provisions of the holy religion of Islam, and national, spiritual and moral values and the psychological security of the Afghan nation in their programming”. The problem here is that with a lack of clear definition of what constitutes Islamic or un-Islamic media content, the conservative groups advancing these notions tend to use religion as an ultimatum.

Barriers due to insecurity

Another tragic reality of journalism in Afghanistan is that media workers face a major barrier on the security front. While the assumption of risks involved in conflict zones is a given for journal-

ists and reporters around the world, the degree of risk continues to be relatively high for Afghan journalists. Human Rights Watch released a report in January 2015 documenting increased intimidation and violence towards Afghan journalists from both state and non-state actors and the government’s failure to investigate and prosecute those responsible. Taliban insurgency play a large part in creating a climate of fear and intimidation for journalists.

In December 2014, the Taliban released a statement warning journalists who support “Western values” to cease their work or face the consequence of targeted attacks – meanwhile a series of targeted attacks had already taken place throughout 2014.⁶ Despite improved security efforts, Afghanistan remains one of the most vulnerable and insecure countries, particularly for media workers who face harassment, intimidation, threats and

attacks on a regular basis.

The country's current socio-cultural environment bears no resemblance to earlier times. For instance, in 1921 Kabul published a women's magazine, *Irshad-e Naswan*, focusing on violence and other social and political issues related to women. In contrast, today's cultural and social conservatism contributes to limiting freedom of expression for women and minority groups in Afghanistan. There are two sides to socio-cultural conservatism as a barrier to media: the challenge for women to participate in media, and the challenge to cover sensitive social issues in media, i.e. religion, women's rights, sexuality, etc.

Afghan women are by and large segregated from the public sphere, but in recent years women are slowly reintegrating into society mainly through their participation in the workforce. However, few women choose to enter the field of journalism and media communications due to

limitations in mobility and women's increased vulnerability to threats and attacks, including sexual violence. On the other hand, because of gender segregation in Afghan society, male journalists do not have privileged and unlimited access to female dominated environments. As a result, women's participation and presence in the media is very limited.

Additionally, conservative ideology in patriarchal societies like Afghanistan attach a stigma to women appearing in the public eye. Whether taking on the role of a news reporter, television host, eyewitness or commentator, women are discouraged and given undesirable labels. All of this contributes to the barriers for women's access to and freedom of expression through the media.

Another crucial obstacle to media freedom in Afghanistan is scepticism towards Western influence in and through the media. Afghanistan's conservative-minded population and authorities

In October 2015, the Taliban designated journalists of the two biggest Afghani television networks, 1TV and Tolo, "enemy personnel" and their stations "military targets." Photo: 1TV Debate Live.



often target foreign donor-funded private media channels, namely Tolo TV and 1TV, demanding censorship or cancelation of programmes with “un-Islamic” content. Previous examples of media content deemed “un-Islamic” or “Westernized” include portraying women in an “undignified” manner and showcasing non-Muslim religious beliefs.

Hence, given social conservatism in Afghanistan, journalists are seen as a threat not only to political figures but also to the social order as they introduce new ideas and challenge preconceived notions that are dominant in society.

Communication is a right

Like any other country, the role of media in Afghanistan is very significant. In the 2014 presidential elections one in three Afghans (33.5%) stated media was their primary source (including TV, radio, and the Internet) to learn about the candidates and to decide on their vote.⁷ Civil society benefits from media as it provides a third dimension to public affairs hence it is critical to maintain the fragile gains in Afghanistan’s media development and freedom. The Asia Foundation reported 72.7% of Afghans express confidence in the media.⁸ However, considering the barriers and challenges for media, one questions to what extent does media freedom really exist?

Communication rights promote the individual freedom to express oneself, but they are also a valuable tool for greater political and social justice. Afghan media professionals are important agents in the peace and reconstruction of the country and they are the means to change Afghanistan’s representation in the international community.

One can only hope that the day will come when the obstacles to free media and communication are shattered – not the dreams of the young men and women seeking to rebuild their country and their future. ■

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Freedom of speech in crisis Europe

Katharine Sarikakis

“Media freedom and democracy are about people’s happiness” exclaims Gvozden Flego, a philosophy professor and member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) at a recent conference on Freedom of Expression. The discussion is intense and one of the most comprehensively organised conferences on the matter I have ever attended. The speakers raise structural, cultural and legal aspects of freedom of expression. The ultimate question of course always remains the same: What can we do?

It is not a coincidence that the Council of Europe decided to put so much energy and annoy some of its members by putting together this two-day event. Freedom of expression is not guaranteed or enjoyed in many parts of the world, but most surprisingly, or perhaps not, not even in European countries. A number of factors have coincided in creating the “perfect storm” that rages over the keyboards and screens of veteran journalists and young bloggers, from whistle-blowers to correspondents, from the editors of established media to photojournalists - right down to anyone who acts as a journalist, even if not full time.

Crises of many sorts are the cause and excuse for these ills: from the failure to protect journalists and their active persecution, to censoring and blocking access to the media, from the dismantling of public service media functions to forced closures, and from the precariousness of journalists to the rise of hate speech

in the media.

It would be a mistake to assume that the “financial crisis” in Europe is solely a crisis of the financial and economic organisation of markets or that it is concentrated in the “unruly” European South. What started as a global banking crisis mutated into a long-term problem not only in financial and market connected areas, but also across all aspects of social and political life.

In the South of Europe, institutions have undergone an intense process of dismantling their functions and outreach. On the one hand, lay-offs of public servants, the human resources of public services, results in the loss of intellectual capital and know-how. On the other hand, public spending has been severely cut resulting in an incapacitated sector that cannot cater for its citizens. This is particularly true for those sectors to which the most vulnerable social strata turn and on which they depend. Universal services, such as health, education and utilities (water, electricity) have been driven to functioning below par and ultimately are being offered to private investors at prices that resemble looting.



Graffiti in Athens. Photo: Author.

This political economic change affects the functions of the State, the function and legitimacy of further institutions, as distinct and varied as for example the police, public service media and the justice system. These institutional and social changes have a significant impact on citizens' rights and ultimately on the quality of democracy.

Austerity politics have created not only new vulnerable groups and driven the largest parts of the middle classes to poverty. They have also affected the quality of media and restricted freedom of speech, both in structural and material terms and in terms of the content of the media generated for public consumption.

Structural constraints on freedom of expression

Across most European countries, the proclaimed expectations of increased freedom of expression have not been fulfilled. Media ownership concentration has not been dealt with, despite intensified and repeated calls for Europe-wide legislation for over two decades. In the case of the hot potato of the European financial crisis, Greece, mainstream media are owned by a few industrialists, whose connections to politics are long standing.

On top of that, until recently, private media in the country never paid tax nor have they ever acquired proper broadcasting licenses. Market liberalisation that was heralded as the guarantor of freedom of expression has failed, especially if one considers the arguments made against public service media and even State media.

Most European countries suffer political interference in the running of public service media – but also suffer from a generalised malaise of the unholy interconnections and dependencies between the press and the business and political worlds. The complex connections between markets and political elites in Europe create a stranglehold over content, leading to problems of biased and one-sided reporting; especially reporting related to the causes of and narratives about the crisis.

Important to note is perhaps the fact that problems do not concern merely “new” democracies or countries conveniently characterised as

“corrupt” or unruly. Instead they dominate the media landscapes of countries such as the UK, Germany, Spain.

Major comparative studies of the legal status quo of the media in Europe, such as the one led by Psychogiopoulou (2014), demonstrate without a doubt the multiple, yet, worryingly similar ways in which control over the media is effectively applied through economic interests, financial control, governing positions, the regulation of specific functions of the media across nations.

Other recent studies investigated how the opinion leading press in Europe has reported the crisis and found little variation in the discussion of the causes of and possible solutions to the crisis, as well as an extremely limited debate about the impact of austerity policies. Moreover, studies found that the ways in which countries, and nations, such as Greece are reported in the press is xenophobic and stereotypical creating strong divisions between a “we” (of “good Europeans”) and “them” (of “bad Europeans”).

This one-sided and often hostile coverage of the negotiations about how to best deal with the financial crisis has also been reproduced within the countries most affected, as their media often mirror the international press. Moreover, the coverage shows that the press has broadly reproduced the views of the political and financial elites and has spent little time on providing analysis that does not conform.

However, the crisis has not only been the object of journalism coverage. It has affected journalism in more profound ways: due to austerity measures, the precariousness of journalism and media workers' jobs and the professions is on the rise. A chain of changes in journalism practice as the outcome of a “changed” newsroom, which relies on technology and the prioritisation of profit, determines the quality of resources available for proper reporting and, ultimately, for the quality of communicative democracy. Labour conditions are characterised by casualization and temporality of contracts, withdrawal of protection of authorship, decrease in real salaries, increasing demands to produce content for multiple platforms.

In the meantime, in the majority of cases in-

creasingly producing “news” in bulk is demanded without additional and with reduced resources, while, responding to the “stories” as they develop is based on aggregators, news agencies and limited sources, leading to a homogenous storytelling of events.

The combination of these structural characteristics together with a lack of transparency and the connections to political and financial elites creates a toxic environment for journalists who aim to produce investigative – and therefore critical – journalism.

Finally, the era of overarching surveillance, after the Snowden and Wikileaks revelations, impose additional restrictions and constraints on freedom of expression. We cannot yet fully assess the range and depth of the impact of sur-

veillance processes on journalists’ work. To what extent does the securitisation of communication, translated in the very distinct practice of surveillance, endanger informants as well as journalists? To what extent, in their effort to avoid extensive risks, do media workers apply self-censorship and to what extent do such tactics result in a chilling effect across investigative media? What does it mean for the production of dissent media and grassroots media? Ultimately, what does surveillance mean for the participation of citizens in the public sphere and in democracy?

Citizen-driven media and communicative spaces

These structural constraints to the freedom of expression make for a depressing list, the impact of

which expands beyond the world of professional journalists to impact the freedom of expression and communicative liberties of citizens. The effects on the quality of democracy and the exercise of citizenship have yet to be assessed.

Nevertheless, one of the main observations in recent years has been a renewed need for citizen-driven media and communicative spaces, deriving from and assisted by social movements, such as Indignados, Occupy, anti-austerity and feminist movements, and social resistance movements in various geographies around the world. Particularly in spheres of acute crisis, whether political or financial, speech constraints are operationalized in ways including but not limited to legal frameworks.¹

Since 2009, when the global banking crisis “hit” Europe, Greece has been at the centre of debates in the public sphere, as the “crisis country”. With discourses about the crisis resembling an epidemic, a “sick” patient and, worse still, with discourses of moral wrongdoings that



Preparations for a world antifascist event outside the premises of ERT3 in Thessaloniki in 2014. Photo: Author.

brought upon the country the “punishment” of financial crisis, the international press has maintained almost in its entirety a homogenous narrative. It has focused on political and financial elites and omitted narratives from the perspectives of citizens and societies at large, not limited to those of Greece.

At the same time, a growing disconnect between society and the state, society and institutions, including the media, has characterised the last five years: distrust in institutions, as well as elite politics, including the political decisions of the European Union as a polity, has driven citizens to exploring ways of connection with each other, among social groups, across geographies and political convictions.

These forms of connectedness, from the so-called “social medical centres” run by medical and nonmedical volunteers to alternative in-kind credit economies, from open community run soup kitchens and self-organised environment protection and anti-gold (mining)² “squads”, to self-governed and employee run factories and Public Service Broadcaster³ radio and television stations, intensified processes of “doing” citizenship are seen throughout the South of Europe.

Random thoughts

My contention is that these acts of citizenship are integral and vital elements of a struggle by citizens to regain not only some control over the distribution of resources but also to regain a sense of dignity and autonomy by turning freedom of expression into lived experience.

Freedom of speech is connected to freedom of assembly, the right to dignity and right to privacy. Moreover, it is considered as a multilevel freedom interconnected to both the personal level of the individual and the structural level of institutional guarantees and institutionalised mediated forms of public speech. In the case of austerity Europe, the social contract between citizen and the State has been violated.

Moreover, through violations of human rights and the law, the State has ceased to recognise citizens as autonomous subjects and is denying them the conditions under which the exercise of citizen-

ship is meaningful – among which those under which freedom of expression can be enjoyed. Participation in the public sphere has been eroded because the material conditions enabling it have deteriorated: not merely through impoverishment⁴ and unemployment, but also through the shrinkage or demolition of public spaces, such as public service media, and the dismantling of public services.

It is imperative that societies engage fully with the pressing need to advocate for the protection of freedom of expression and the material and immaterial conditions that create enabling environments for a free press and free speech. A silent redefinition of freedom of speech has been taking place across too many fronts to list in detail, but they include structural constraints, and governance practices that are mirrored in the content output of media corporations. They are also reflected in the prohibitive stance of the State and its instruments in not tolerating public dissent, protest and non-conformist patterns of association and assembly. ■

Notes

1. See for example the so called ‘gag law’ Citizens Security Law in Spain, as well as the 2014 Amnesty International Report on the Greek Police
2. This refers to social movements against the privatisation of water, as well as against gold-mining in Northern Greece at the location of Skouries (<http://antigoldgr.org/en/>) among other acts of environmental exploitation and destruction.
3. The Greek Public Service Broadcaster ERT (*Elliniki Radiofonía Tileorasi*) (www.ert.gr) was shut down, unconstitutionally, as was never ratified by Parliament, by the then Samaras Government on June 11, 2013. ERT quickly became ERTOPEN (www.ertopen.com) run by its former employees, who continued broadcasting for 24 months until the reopening of ERT on June 11, 2015 under the SYRIZA government.
4. According to Eurostat (2014) more than 40% of Europeans cannot afford unexpected financial expenses and one in ten people are affected by severe material deprivation.

Reference

Psychogiopoulou (2014) <http://www.mediadem.eliamep.gr/new-publication-media-policies-revisited-the-challenge-for-media-freedom-and-independence/>

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La rendición de cuentas en Tabasco, una lucha más allá de la transparencia

José Manuel Arias Rodríguez y Hugo Ireta Guzman

El estado de Tabasco se ubica en el sureste mexicano, frente al Golfo de México. Fue el último estado de la República Mexicana en aprobar su Ley de Transparencia, dada la resistencia que tenía y sigue teniendo gobierno estatal para rendir cuentas a los ciudadanos.

La Asociación Ecológica Santo Tomás A.C. estuvo acompañando el proceso de la Ley de Transparencia porque consideraba plenamente que esta ley se convertiría en una herramienta para acabar con la corrupción y la impunidad, además que fortalecería la participación ciudadana en Tabasco. Es así que primero participó en acciones de promoción y difusión, junto a organizaciones nacionales, para que Tabasco contara con una Ley de Transparencia y después de una intensa lucha, se aprobó, en diciembre del año 2006, con lo que inició el fomento del uso social del derecho a la información en Tabasco.

A partir de entonces se integraron estudios de casos como el de Donativos y Donaciones de PEMEX a Tabasco, en la que se evidenció que la empresa petrolera del Estado Mexicano, no tiene un objetivo claro para el desarrollo de las comunidades con infraestructura petrolera y que los apoyos entregados obedecían a presiones de los gobiernos subnacionales para hacerse de recursos, los cuales ejercían sin informar sobre su uso. Este ejercicio ciudadano llevó a que la empresa nacional Petróleo Mexicanos modificara sus reglas de operación para la entrega de recursos a terceros. A nivel local, el gobierno estatal en una *felonía* desa-

pareció la entidad gubernamental que manejo esos recursos sin deslindar responsabilidades.

En un ejercicio posterior se dio seguimiento a los recursos que llegaron a nuestro estado después de las inundaciones del año 2007, que afectaron a más de la mitad de la población tabasqueña, en la que se recibieron recursos nacionales e internacionales, de origen público y privado. Siendo de interés de la organización conocer la aplicación de dichos recursos, por lo que se dio seguimiento a los recursos provenientes del Fondo Nacional de Desastres Naturales (FONDEN). De esta forma se logró saber que de los 7 mil millones de pesos que el gobierno federal destinó a Tabasco, solo se comprobó el ejercicio de 4.5 mil millones de pesos y de ello, cerca de mil millones de pesos, se destinó para nueva infraestructura por parte del Gobierno Local, lo que violentaba las reglas de operación. Esta situación se denunció ante los órganos de control a nivel estatal y federal sin resultado alguno.

Estas experiencias nos llevaron a dudar si verdaderamente la Ley de Transparencia podía ser una herramienta para el combate a la corrupción y contra la impunidad. Se continuaron con ejercicios ciudadanos que pudieran demostrar si nuestras dudas estaban fundamentadas ante una lógica permanente de corrupción e impunidad. Fue así como se realizó un monitoreo a los impactos del acuerdo intersecretarial 117 en la que la industria petrolera desplaza a miles de pescadores del Golfo México y los trata como potenciales terroristas, una situación que no se había documentado en Tabasco y que gracias al uso de la ley de transparencia logramos demostrar que el sector pesquero estaba siendo desplazado.

Así mismo se dio seguimiento al programa contra inundaciones denominado Plan Hídrico Integral de Tabasco (PHIT), programa que fue anunciado por el Gobierno Federal y Estatal como el fin de inundaciones catastróficas como la que se vivió en el año 2007, nuestra investigación logró demostrar que no existía y que solo se había engañado a la población tabasqueña cuando se nos dijo que estaba funcionando para evitar que Tabasco se inundara.



Obstrucciones oficiales

Con el derecho a la información se pudo dar seguimiento a la recomendación 61/2011 de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH), que fue emitida a raíz de las inundaciones del año 2010 en Tabasco, inundación que para muchos fue provocada (foto arriba: Santo Tomás). Tesis que comprobamos cuando logramos desclasificar las actas del Comité Técnico de manejo de las presas del río Grijalva y en la que se leía en una de las actas de septiembre del año 2010, palabras del gobernador del estado, el Químico Andrés Granier Melo, quien señalaba: *Me doy por enterado y solo pido se proteja la margen del río en su paso por el parque Tabasco y se desvíe las aguas río abajo, donde hay menor población*—de esa manera en Tabasco nacían tabasqueños de primera y de segunda, aprobándose la inundación de zonas bajas del municipio de Centro, donde viven comunidades indígenas chontales.

Como era de esperarse esta recomendación no fue aceptada por la instancia federal responsable, la Comisión Nacional del Agua (CONAGUA) y lo que parecía la antesala de un acto de justicia se convirtió en un acto vacío. Es de mencionar que esta queja ante la CNDH fue promovida por el entonces senador por Tabasco Arturo Núñez Jiménez.

A partir del año 2010 empezamos a dar seguimiento a los gastos que se hacían en la casa del gobernador, la Quinta Grijalva, sin embargo nos topamos con pared ante la opacidad que mantenía la Secretaría de Finanzas con la anuencia del entonces Gobernador del Estado. Ya que a cada solicitud de información realizada, la respuesta era una reserva de información para negar que la ciudadanía conociera el uso de nuestros recursos públicos. El extremo de esta situación fue cuando los entonces consejeros del órgano garante local, el Instituto Tabasqueño de Transparencia y Ac-

ceso a la Información Pública (ITAIP), decidieron renunciar ante la resistencia de esta secretaría estatal de informar a la ciudadanía.

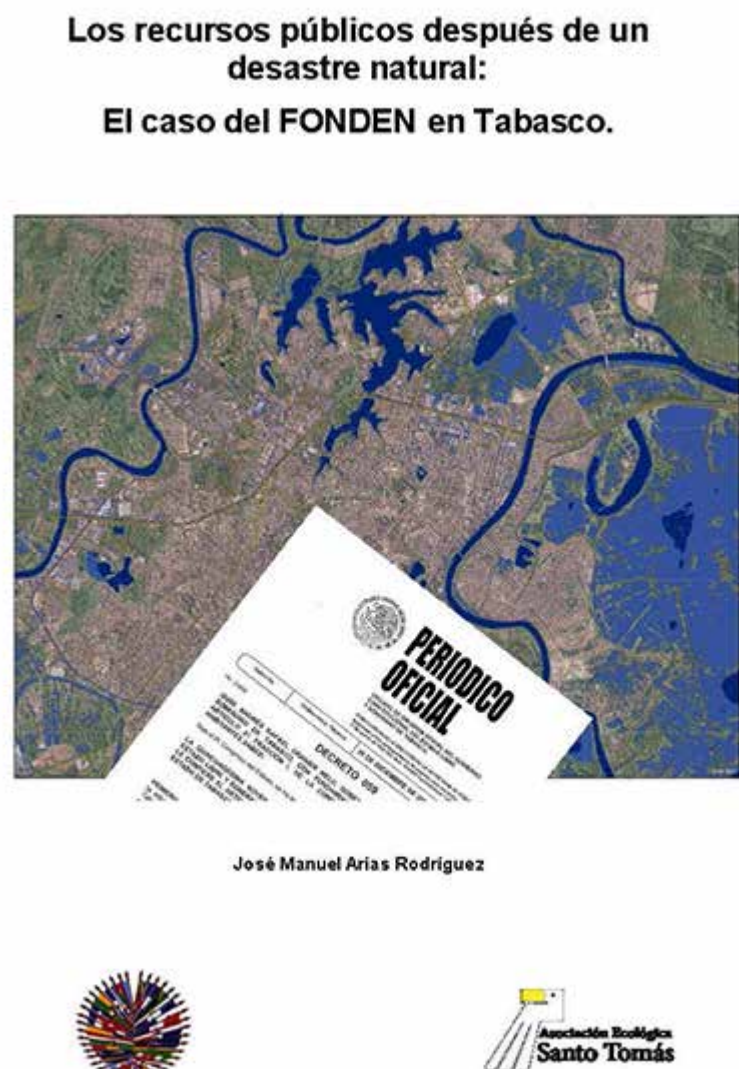
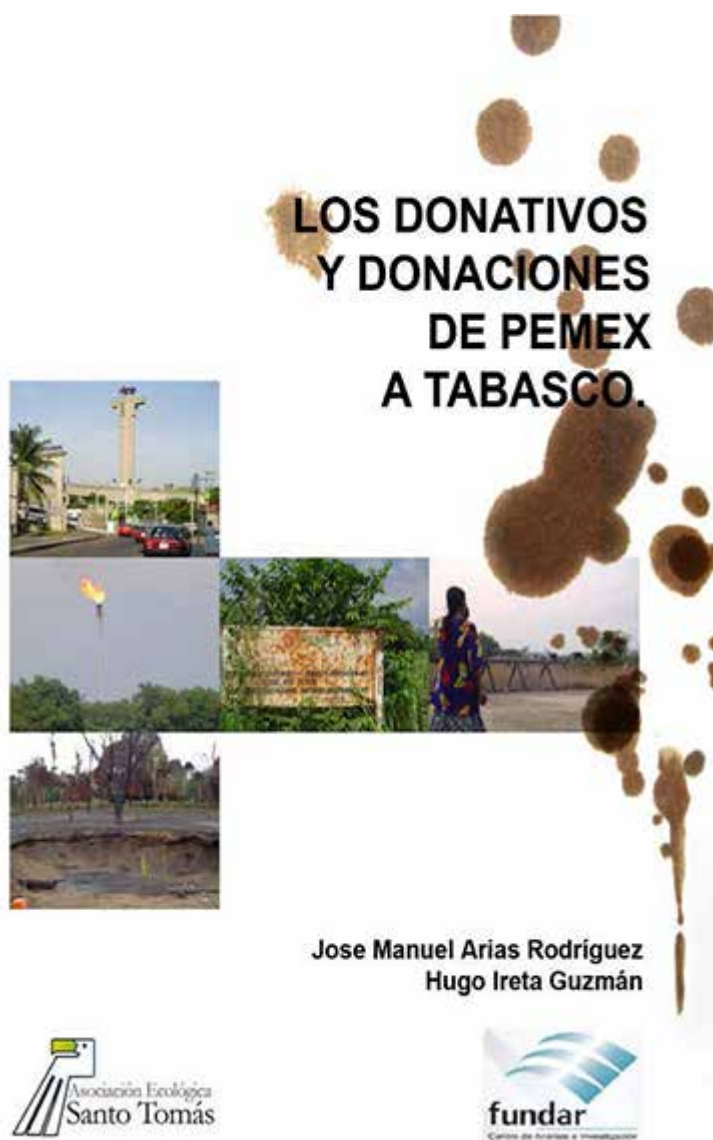
Con la llegada de nuevos consejeros al órgano garante, se continuó la realización de solicitudes de información, con la esperanza de que estos nuevos consejeros pudieran disuadir al gobierno estatal de la importancia de acatar los resolutiveos emitidos por ellos.

Sin embargo esto no fue así y durante seis meses los nuevos consejeros llevaron poca actividad, por lo que un grupo de ciudadanos y ciudadanas, entre ellos el equipo de investigación de Santo Tomás, hicieron público un manifiesto en la que señalaban que ya no aceptarían una negativa más por parte de los consejeros de ITAIP ante la solicitudes de información y que en caso de existir recurriríamos a la Suprema Corte de Justicia de la

Nación para que ella enmendara el trabajo que el pleno del ITAIP se negaba a hacer. Coincidencia o incidencia, los consejeros empezaron dar resolutiveos a favor de los solicitantes.

En noviembre del año 2012, el ITAIP resuelve a nuestro favor las solicitudes de acceso directo a los comprobantes fiscales que amparaban el uso de los recursos destinados a la Quinta Grijalva, resolutiveos que llegaban a menos de un mes de que se terminara el sexenio de gobierno y que llegara el primer gobernante emanado de una coalición de partidos de izquierda, encabezadas por el ex senador Arturo Núñez Jiménez.

El equipo de investigación de la organización analizó si valía la pena acceder a las oficinas de la Secretaria de Finanzas y revisar comprobantes, ya que el gobierno monitoreado estaba por irse y llegaría después de 80 años, un gobierno de



Portadas de documentos con resultados de monitoreo de políticas públicas en Tabasco. Estos y otros documentos se pueden descargar [aquí](#).

izquierda que, en ese entonces considerábamos, tenía una tarea histórica de empezar a sentar las bases para el desarrollo de Tabasco. Sin embargo el resultado de los análisis internos de la organización apuntaba a que el nuevo gobierno llegaría y no emprendería acciones para deslindar responsabilidades ante el brutal saqueo del que fue objeto el estado de Tabasco y que vivió su momento clímax en diciembre del año 2012 cuando los hospitales locales dejaron de recibir enfermos ante la falta de equipo y medicamentos para dar atención.

El equipo de investigación de Santo Tomás decidió que lo mejor era entrar a la Secretaria de Finanzas y comprobar que existía documentación que probaba el saqueo del estado. Po lo que en los primeros días de enero del año 2013 se revisaron

Abajo, los autores, de camisa azul uno y de camisa blanca el otro, presentando resultados de investigaciones. (Foto: Santo Tomás).

cajas y cajas de facturas de los gastos de la Quinta Grijalva. Se comprobaba la vida de reyes que se daban en la casa del gobernador y ejemplificaba la forma en que se usaban los recursos públicos en Tabasco. Un círculo vicioso en la que participaba el ejecutivo estatal, el legislativo local y cada año había nuevos ricos en Tabasco.

Los resultados de nuestra investigación se hicieron público a finales del mes de enero, con repercusión mediática a nivel nacional e internacional. Nuestro mensaje para el nuevo gobierno era claro. *No aceptaríamos que a mediados del mes de febrero nos dijeran que habían llegado, revisado y no encontraron información para saber qué había pasado en Tabasco, ya que sí un equipo ciudadano sin conocimiento técnico y sin los recursos materiales que tiene el Estado logro conocer el uso de recursos en una dependencia, ellos podían llegar hasta el último extremo y saber que paso con nuestros recursos, pero sobre todo, debían deslindar responsabilidades.*

Es de comentar que nuestros resultados



fueron presentados como pruebas de solicitud de fiscalización ante el Congreso del Estado y sirvieron para reprobación la cuenta pública del poder ejecutivo del año 2012.

Nuestros análisis se dieron por ciertos cuando a mediados del mes de febrero el gobierno estatal anunció que entre la documentación encontrada de la anterior administración estaba un acta notariada que daba cuenta del robo de toda la información contable que fue subida a un camión que posteriormente fue robado. Nuestros peores escenarios, con el nuevo gobierno, se empezaban a materializar.

Nuestro trabajo en derecho a la información continuó en el año 2013 y nos ayudó a encontrar dos casos de discrecionalidad en cuanto al manejo de recursos públicos. En uno de ellos se entregaba de manera anual más de 20 millones de pesos mexicanos a un equipo de béisbol que no informaba del uso de dichos recursos, recursos que eran superiores a la destinada a la Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos, por ejemplo. Sobre mencionar que este equipo de béisbol recibía recursos privados y son a quienes se sigue beneficiando.

El otro caso fue el de los recursos públicos entregados a una Asociación Civil que esta integrado por cuatro entes gubernamentales, el Centro de Cambio Global y Sustentabilidad en el Sureste, el cual sin ningún fundamento jurídico recibió más de 50 millones de pesos durante el año 2013, producto de compromisos contraídos por funcionarios estatales durante el año 2012 y que la actual administración estaba dando cumplimiento sin cuestionar siquiera que la frente de esta Asociación Civil estuviera una funcionaria de la anterior administración.

Ambas situaciones fueron notificadas al Gobernador Arturo Núñez quien incluso en el caso del equipo de béisbol respondió por escrito que nuestro informe lo había enviado al secretario de Finanzas para que tomara cartas en el asunto. Se consideró que en el 2014 estas situaciones escandalosas se corregirían, lo que no sucedió. De estos dos casos se logró que el órgano garante los declarara sujetos obligados de la Ley de Transparencia y actualmente tienen que informar a la sociedad sobre el uso de los recursos que se les entre-

ga. Son más transparentes, aunque no dejan de ser productos de la discrecionalidad gubernamental.

Actualmente seguimos revisando los informes financieros que el Poder ejecutivo publica por obligación legal, denunciando públicamente, en algunos medios y en redes sociales las subejercicios en áreas tan sensibles como Salud, Educación y Seguridad Pública o el incremento preocupante de recursos a publicidad oficial. Estamos participando en agendas nacionales de transparencia en la industria extractiva y somos referentes del derecho a la información en el sureste mexicano.

A casi diez años de haber empezado a caminar por el derecho a la información en Tabasco, sabemos que la transparencia por sí sola se puede llegar a convertir en un acto de cinismo o que la rendición de cuentas no es posible sin verdaderos contrapesos que sancionen las malas prácticas en cuanto al uso de nuestros recursos públicos.

El derecho a la información es importante y es un pilar fundamental para el trabajo ciudadano en la construcción de una mejor sociedad sin embargo no es lo único. Falta mucho camino por recorrer para consolidar la democracia en el sureste mexicano y en México en general. Pero ahí estaremos. ■

La [Asociación Ecológica Santo Tomás A.C.](#), es una organización de la sociedad civil, que fue constituida legalmente en enero de 1995, a iniciativa de un grupo de hombres y mujeres de diferentes perfiles, defensores de los recursos naturales e interesados en el desarrollo y mejoramiento del sector productivo en Tabasco a raíz de los impactos de la actividad petrolera en Tabasco. Empezando con trabajos de capacitación a diferentes sectores productivos de la costa tabasqueña. Dado una serie de reestructuraciones ha enfocado sus acciones en cuatro proyectos y a partir del año 2005 la incidencia en políticas públicas y la transparencia y acceso a la información se han impregnado en todas las acciones de la organización. Misión: Contribuir junto con otros actores, en la construcción de una sociedad más justa en el Estado de Tabasco, México. Contacto: coordinacion@aestomas.org

Defining the borders of legitimate and illegitimate discourse

Sahar Vardi

When criticizing Israeli policies, one is often reminded that “Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East”. There are many who argue about that definition of a democracy in the light of Israel’s control of millions of Palestinians under military law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, with no right to vote for the government that effectively controls them. However, the following article focuses on the more democratic sides of Israel that this statement is based on – the way Israel treats its Jewish citizens (as opposed to the Palestinians).

As an activist protesting government policies, I must be aware of my rather wide operating field. As opposed to Palestinian activists (both in the West Bank and inside Israel), Israeli-Jewish activists have very rarely been imprisoned for longer than a few days, and those who spent more than six months in prisons for different forms of protest, can probably be counted on two hands.

Inside the borders of Israel, Jewish-Israeli protestors being severely injured from police brutality is also a very rare occurrence. Not that police do not use any violence against protesting Jewish-Israeli activists: batons, stun grenades, water cannons, paper spray and at times tear gas have all been used, some more regularly than others. And yet, relatively, we must admit the rather high level of freedom of expression that we are able to take

advantage of.

In the summer of 2014, during the Israeli attack on Gaza that resulted in the killing of more than 2,200 Palestinians, over 500 of them children, the ever-shrinking Israeli left organized protests that received police permission, and at times included police protection for the protestors, responding to the violent attacks of right-wing Israelis against the protestors. Israeli non-profits criticizing Israeli policies are still recognized and receive the same tax exemptions other non-profits do.

In addition, international organizations that call for a boycott of products made in Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian lands, still receive working visas and operating permission from the Israeli authorities that are well aware of their work. All of these are of course basic rights of civil society, and I do not mean to say we should be grateful to the state for these – they are our rights, not privileges – and yet, it’s important to recognize that to an extent, they are preserved.

Anti-democratic initiatives

In recent years we have seen a growing crack-down on this provision of the right to freedom of expression. To name some of the developments in the past few years: The law cutting funding from institutions that will commemorate the Nakba,¹ the NGO bill that aims to tax left-leaning non-profits up to 40% on donations from foreign state entities, the anti-boycott law that will allow civil suits to be brought against those who call for a boycott of Israeli and settlement products, and the public demand from European governments to stop funding certain Israeli non-profits due to their political positions criticizing the Israeli occupation.

In most cases, these initiatives start with the presenting of an extremely undemocratic bill that will severely hurt the human rights community in Israel, either by criminalizing it or more commonly by cutting its sources of funding. The different democratic mechanisms then go into play: the legal advisor for the government protests against bills that are rephrased, the opposition and some more moderate members of government warn



Palestine, Bethlehem, Aida refugee camp (2007). Children from the Alrowad cultural center inside the camp are dancing the traditional Arabic dabke dance in front of the Israeli Separation Wall which bisects this part of the city. (Photo: severinelaville).

plication of the law.

But these specifics of the law – the need to prove that the individual sued caused financial damage and that the link between the call for boycott and the damage has to be direct – all of these do not come across headlines. What does come across is the popular name of the law: the boycott law. What comes across are politicians saying that it is now illegal to call for a boycott. What comes across is the clear message from Israeli parliamentarians that boycotting should be illegal – that some political stand points are not legitimate. What comes across is what the Supreme Court judges wrote in their verdict and was quoted in the headlines of popular media: “Freedom of expression is not absolute”.

The same process happened with what is called the “NGO bill” which started by forbidding foreign state funding for human rights organizations in Israel, was modified to increase taxation and to include a far more narrow definition of NGOs that would be affected: only those calling for armed resistance against Israel, the extermination of Israel, a boycott against Israel, refusal to serve in the military or calling for prosecution of Israelis in international courts as war criminals.

This bill has not yet become law, and by the time it does we can assume it will change many more times. Its final version will probably have very little affect on the work of those human rights organizations that do have the support of much of the international community. But once again, what comes across in the headlines is that human rights organizations are illegitimate; that calling for a war against Israel is the same as calling Israelis to refuse to serve in the military; that calling for a boycott of settlement products is the same as calling for the annihilation of the State of Israel.

This can be seen throughout Israeli political and public discourse. Pre-military academies in-

that this bill is a slippery slope and dangerous to Israeli democracy, and eventually the Israeli supreme court, if needed, removes a few of the more problematic components of the bill. And so the final product is a law with very little consequences on the human rights community or at all, and Israel once again gets to show how democratic it is. But these bills have a much wider affect than the legal one.

If we take the Anti-Boycott law as an example, the law was first submitted as a law to criminalize those calling for a boycott against Israel, and very shortly became a tort law to allow anyone, whether they were or were not affected by a boycott, to sue those calling for such a boycott. This was modified to allow only those affected by the boycott to sue, and finally the Supreme Court also introduced the need to prove damages in order to sue, and recommended a very strict ap-

viting Contentious Objectors to speak to their cadets to strengthen the notion that refusal is treason; the use of Palestinian members of the Israeli Knesset as an example of the pluralism of Israeli society that allows even “enemies” to be part of parliament (as if they weren’t elected representatives as the rest of their colleagues). In such ways, Israeli society defines what is legitimate, by giving a voice and a space to what is not legitimate, and labelling it as such, and not by eliminating it all together.

And so on the one hand Israel is still, to its Jewish citizens, a democracy, allowing freedom of expression, licensing protests, and limiting the power of legislation by the Supreme Court to allow freedom of expression. And on the other hand, while doing this, Israeli politics have managed to define very clearly what are and what are not legitimate views. You can protest and scream and shout as loud as you want, but if the opinions you voice are critical of the government in a way that they really do see as a threat, you can be sure that your opinion will be expelled from the realm of legitimate.

And so there is no need to restrict freedom of expression. All one needs to do is to restrict the way in which that expression is received. We can allow all opinions to be heard, as long as we know that some opinions must be heard in order to be deemed wrong. ■

Note

The Arabic term for the catastrophe of 1948 when hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed and 700,000 Palestinians became refugees during the 1948 war that resulted in the creation of the state of Israel.

Sahar Vardi is the Israel program coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee and a board member of the Human Rights Defenders Fund.

Indigenous community media aid reconciliation in Canada

Lorenzo Vargas

Born in 1948 in Barton Lake in northwestern Ontario, Bill was only seven years old when he was taken away by Canadian government officials and sent to Residential School.

“In Barton Lake, I grew up speaking only Ojibwe and learning from my elders to respect my culture and the natural resources that allowed us to keep our way of life. Fishing and hunting were sacred experiences, so we learned to respect the water, the land, and the animals.”

“One day, when I was about 7 or 8, I went bird hunting with one of my friends. We got up really early because the best time to hunt birds is early in the morning, at about 7 a.m. We were in the middle of the forest when we began to hear a humming sound we had never heard before, so we ran to the harbour to see what all the noise was about. There was a small yellow plane that had just landed on the water. I don’t remember exactly how it happened, but somebody took me from the lake shore and threw me inside the plane. They started the plane and all of a sudden we were in the air. I was very frightened. That was the first time I was on an airplane. We didn’t have any communication channels back then, so my mother had no way of knowing what had happened to me.”

“After some time we landed in a town where people had pale skin, spoke a different language, and where they had all these big machines I had never seen before – trains and trucks. They put me into a car and we drove a few minutes until they brought me to a large building where there were other children. After a while they told me the place was called a Residential School.”

Bill would spend 15 years of his life in this Residential School in Sioux Lookout.

“I was one of the survivors. During my time in that school I felt like I was always in the dark. I never felt love and I was always very lonely. I was hit many times just because I wanted to speak my language – I was only allowed to speak in English. They even changed my name from Billiby, my name in Cre-Oji, to Bill or Robert. This was initially very confusing for me because my family and elders back in Barton Lake had always placed so much value on speaking Cree-Oji and on preserving our culture. And of course, at the time we had no radio or newspapers or any form of media in our language it was all in English.”

Today, Bill is one of the main broadcasters of [Wawatay Radio Network](#), a community communication network serving more than 20,000 people in English, Oji-Cree, and Cree in the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation territory and in the Treaty 3 and Superior Robinson areas. Bill has worked with Wawatay for more than 30 years and he specializes in producing news programs, though his favourite broadcasts are of the local hockey games, when he has a chance to comment on the intricacies of his favourite sport. Bill is informally known as the “Voice of the North” in Northwestern Ontario.

WACC had an opportunity to learn from Bill’s experience at a seminar on [multilingual community media](#) organized in Montreal in partnership with AMARC in July of 2015.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report

After more than 6 years of work, the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#), established in 2008 to examine the legacy of Canada’s residential school system, released its [final report](#) in June of 2015.

The Commission concluded that the residential school system amounted to [cultural genocide](#), and provided numerous recommendations in the areas of child welfare, education, health, the justice system, among others. It also called for a process of reconciliation, and for the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous](#)

[People](#) to become the framework for such process.

Importantly, the Commission highlighted the role that media can play in a reconciliation process. Recommendation # 84 calls for the Canadian government to “restore CBC funding so that the public broadcaster can play a role in reconciliation and is able to reflect the diversity of Aboriginal communities”. Recommendation # 85 calls on the [Aboriginal People’s Television Network](#) (APTN) to “support reconciliation through Aboriginal programming and through programs that connect Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal Canadians”. Lastly, Recommendation # 86 calls for Canadian media schools and Journalism schools to highlight aboriginal culture in curriculum.

Other recommendations put forth by the Commission have an important communication dimension. For instance, Recommendations # 13 and 14 highlight the importance of Aboriginal language rights as fundamental parts of Canadian society. These recommendations also call for policies that recognize the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal communities and for funding that allows for the preservation and revitalization of Aboriginal languages.¹

Role of community media in reconciliation

Media in general could play a pivotal role in the process of reconciliation the Commission is calling for. Media outlets could shed light on key issues, engage previously disengaged audiences, and give visibility to people whose voices are rarely heard.

However, it is community media groups such as Wawatay that could make the most difference in moving Canada towards true reconciliation and the establishment of new bonds of trust. Community media – that is, media outlets that are managed and operated by local citizens or community-based groups and that produce local media content – could provide much-needed dialogue platforms for reconciliation to happen from the ground up.

Community media outlets could provide spaces for both aboriginal and non-aboriginals to voice their views, listen to each other, discuss the Commission’s recommendations, demand accountability on the part of decision-makers, and

highlight local reconciliation experiences. Community media could also play an important role in the preservation of indigenous languages, as in Bill's case.

In this light, support for indigenous community media outlets in Canada should be a part of the work to make the Commission's recommendations a reality. Even if community media are not explicitly mentioned in the Commission's Calls to Action, the fact is that community-based indigenous media have a lot to offer to promote dialogue and achieve respect, trust, and, ultimately, reconciliation.

From a communication rights perspective, media are key to the rights of aboriginal peoples the world over. For decades, WACC has been working with indigenous community media organizations to defend their communication rights. Many of the things WACC has learned are summarized in this [document](#).

Challenges for the future

Organizations such as Wawatay Radio Network will face a number of challenges in the near future. A lot have to do with access to sustainable funding. There is also a need to bring younger generations of indigenous Canadians, who in many cases face important social challenges, into the management of these kinds of community media groups.

Nevertheless, community media outlets have a key role to play in an eventual reconciliation process in Canada. Not including them would be a missed opportunity. ■

Note

1. http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Originally from Colombia, Lorenzo Vargas has worked as a media producer, communications consultant, teacher, researcher and facilitator with organizations in the non-profit and education sector in Toronto, Montreal, and southern Brazil. He holds an Honours BA in International Development from York University, and an MA in Communication Studies from McGill University, where he studied the relationship between media production, active citizenship, and peacebuilding among youth in Latin America, with a special focus on Colombia. He currently sits on the Board of the Canadian Association of Latin American and Caribbean Studies.

El paradójico desarrollo de la tecnología

Carlos A. Valle

Los Estados están jugando un papel decisivo ya sea oponiéndose, propulsando o dirigiendo la innovación tecnológica. Por eso, en buena medida, la tecnología expresa la capacidad de una sociedad para propulsar el dominio tecnológico mediante las instituciones de la sociedad, incluido el Estado. Es importante recordar que la revolución tecnológica se originó y difundió, intencionalmente, en un período histórico de reestructuración global del capitalismo, y la revolución tecnológica fue una herramienta esencial.

Tomemos, como ejemplo, la carrera armamentista. Ésta se convierte en un incentivo al desarrollo tecnológico en casi todas las áreas del quehacer humano. Después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial se ha producido la mayor producción de armas nucleares junto al desarrollo del misil balístico intercontinental. A la vez, la guerra fría aceleró en EEUU y en la ex-URSS, la producción de bombas atómicas con capacidad para destruir la humanidad. La carrera espacial no solo ha estado restringida a ser un medio de comunicación sino como posible arma efectiva. SIPRI (Instituto Internacional de Investigaciones para la Paz) indicaba en 2009 que ocho Estados poseían más de 23000 armas nucleares y alertaba que “Se está prestando cada vez más atención a la manipulación de las fuerzas geofísicas o ambientales con propósitos hostiles.”

Por otra parte, no puede ignorarse que, paradójicamente, muchos de los avances científicos, producidos durante el siglo XX, que han servido para mejorar las condiciones de vida

de las personas, fueron desarrollados de la mano de la industria bélica. Se habla del incentivo de la II Guerra Mundial para la investigación científica. Tanto en Alemania como en Inglaterra centros a nivel nacional se hicieron cargo de esta tarea. El uso masivo de la penicilina, la obtención y viabilidad del plasma y el uso de una droga sintética llamada Atrabine relacionada con la malaria, fueron algunas de las muchas cosas que estimularon a los países en guerra a invertir sus recursos y el uso de sus científicos.

Esta es buena parte de la realidad que enmarca el acelerado desarrollo tecnológico experimentado en las últimas décadas, especialmente el relacionado con la tecnología electrónica en el campo de la información y la medicina. Así se puede entender el enorme impulso dado al desarrollo de la tecnología y el enorme presupuesto que, por ejemplo, los Estados Unidos de América, Francia, Gran Bretaña y la ex-URSS, le dedicaron a partir de la Guerra Fría.

Las guerras no se acabaron después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, por el contrario, porque el mundo ha sido testigo de más de cien conflagraciones a distintos niveles, en muy diversas regiones y por diversos motivos, ya sea en luchas por la independencia, como por conflictos entre países vecinos o causados por directas invasiones de grupo poderosos. SIPRI nos indica que los gastos militares para 2012 entre los principales países fueron: EEUU está a la cabeza con 680.000 millones, que representa el 39% del gasto mundial. El segundo lugar lo ocupa China (166.000 millones), seguido por Rusia (90.700 millones), Reino Unido (60.800 millones) y Japón (59.300 millones). El sexto en la lista es Francia (58.900).

Al mismo tiempo, las grandes empresas están abocadas a la industria armamentista, que abarca la fabricación de armas y equipos militares. Según SIPRI este es uno de los sectores que más ha crecido en los últimos años. Se calcula que, por ejemplo en 2011, las cien mayores empresas de armamento han percibido casi 500 mil millones de dólares, que les ha permitido superar la crisis financiera de 2008.

Herbert I. Schiller, sociólogo y crítico de medios, hablando del caso de los EEUU, que tam-

bién puede aplicarse a otros países, concluye que:

“En cierta medida la Guerra Fría fue la mejor cosa que le pudo suceder a la investigación. El aprovechamiento del dinero, los talentos y los medios sobreabundaron a todo lo sucedido en años anteriores... por décadas (un ejército) de expertos del gobierno, de la universidad y de la industria abrieron el terreno que dio al Occidente su deslumbrante arista militar... Desde 1955, el gobierno ha gastado más de un billón de dólares en investigación y desarrollo de armas nucleares y otros armamentos.”
(Information Inequality)

Esta información busca entender el complejo marco en el cual está asentado el desarrollo tecnológico, y de qué manera su progreso involucra un avance teñido de peligros para el desarrollo y la vida de la humanidad. El entusiasmo que despiertan los avances científicos debe ser leído teniendo en cuenta la necesidad de comprender cómo puede afectar a los pueblos y de qué manera estos avances fortalecen a los países más necesitados y refuerzan su dependencia.

Tecnología y política

Aquí hay que rescatar que Langdon Winner, conocido por sus trabajos sobre ciencia, tecnología y sociedad, ha planteado la pregunta sobre si los objetos técnicos tienen cualidades políticas. Winner está tratando de dar el salto de no mirar a la tecnología como un hecho aislado sino sus repercusiones en la sociedad. Por eso entiende que lo importante no es tanto la tecnología en sí misma como el sistema económico y social en el cual la tecnología está inmersa. Al hacerlo no le está restando importancia a los objetos tecnológicos como si no carecieran de importancia. Porque la “tecnología” es una forma de construir orden. A través de sus estructuras tecnológicas, las sociedades determinan, en gran parte, cómo han de trabajar las personas que integran cada sociedad, cómo se han comunicar y viajar, etcétera.

Por su parte, Lewis Mumford, historiador, sociólogo, filósofo de la tecnología creía que en la historia de Occidente existen dos tradiciones

respecto de la tecnología, una autoritaria y otra democrática. Según él, la experiencia demuestra que cuanto más una sociedad se basa en un sofisticado sistema tecnológico más tiende a funcionar con un régimen de control altamente jerárquico. Este control, ¿es necesariamente inherente a la tecnología? La respuesta más frecuente es que así “tiene que ser”. No se puede dejar el control de la tecnología en manos inexpertas. Así se argumenta, por ejemplo, en el mundo de la economía. Uno está sujeto a “las leyes del mercado”. Estas “leyes”, que parecen haber caído del cielo, son las que determinan las acciones sin ninguna consideración sobre su incidencia en la vida de la gente.

Siguiendo este razonamiento Landgon Winner nos hace ver qué argumentos se esgrimen para defender una postura pragmática que busca dejar fuera todo tipo de injerencia política o social:

“Es característico de sociedades basadas en grandes sistemas tecnológicos complejos que, las razones morales que no sean de necesidad práctica, son consideradas mayormente obsoletas, “idealistas” e irrelevantes. Cualquier reclamo que uno quisiera hacer en nombre de la libertad, la justicia, o la igualdad puede ser inmediatamente neutralizada si se lo confronta con argumentos como: ‘Bien, pero esa no es la manera para hacer funcionar un ferrocarril’ (o una laminadora de acero, o una aerolínea, o un sistema de comunicación, y así por el estilo)... En muchos casos, decir que algunas tecnologías son intrínsecamente políticas es decir que ciertas muy aceptadas razones de necesidad práctica –especialmente la necesidad de mantener sistemas tecnológicos críticos como entidades trabajando sin problemas- han tendido a eclipsar otras clases de razonamiento moral y político.”

¿Cómo se manifiesta esta realidad en el mundo actual? Las diferencias entre las grandes potencias y los países del Tercer Mundo en el campo de la ciencia y la tecnología son cada vez más amplias. Más del 90 por ciento de las investigaciones científicas se llevan a cabo en un puñado de naciones. La enorme brecha tecnológica se

convierte en una poderosa fuente de dependencia. Según Rodrigo Borja: “No en vano el dominio de la tecnología produjo dos revoluciones industriales: la de las grandes máquinas, que se inició en el siglo XIX, y la revolución electrónica de nuestros días. Ambas diseñaron, en épocas distintas, sus respectivos órdenes económicos internacionales.”

Los cambios que estamos experimentando en el mundo actual exceden en mucho los paralelismos que podrían hacerse entre la revolución industrial y la tecnológica. La realidad es mucho más compleja y de dimensiones sin límites. Recordamos una vez más a Piscitelli: “La revolución teórica de la cibernética y la teoría general de los sistemas consistió, antes que en ningún otro subproducto tecnológico, en permitir entrever que el hombre y sus máquinas están en estrecha continuidad y que los mismos principios que ayudan a explicar las funciones del cerebro humano también explican –o al menos buscan hacerlo- las funciones de una máquina pensante.”

¿Cómo es posible que la tecnología, una creación del ser humano, llegue a determinar la vida del ser humano? ¿Hasta dónde la dignidad del ser humano peligra en este diabólico juego donde las reglas están establecidas de antemano y se han tornado inamovibles? ¿De qué manera la comunicación en el mundo moderno puede quedar prisionera de este juego dominado por el determinismo? ¿Quedará la creación y la cultura sujeta a estos propósitos? ¿Qué es necesario hacer para que el desarrollo tecnológico sea una herramienta al servicio del desarrollo de los pueblos? ¿Cómo podrán las mayorías enmudecidas y sumergidas ejercer su derecho a la vida y a la dignidad, a hacer oír su voz y lograr su propio desarrollo? ■

Carlos A. Valle fue Secretario General de la WACC 1986-2001. Ex Presidente del organismo evangélico del filme, INTERFILM, y autor de *Comunicación es evento* (1988), *Comunicación: modelo para armar* (1990), y *Communication and Mission: In the Labyrinth of Globalisation* (2002). Actualmente colabora con ISEDET, Buenos Aires, enseñando cursos de comunicación y escribiendo artículos para diversas publicaciones.

On the screen...

Yerevan (Armenia) 2015

At the 12th Golden Apricot International Film Festival held in Yerevan, Armenia, 12-19 July 2015 the Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize to the feature film in the section "Armenian Panorama" *Moskvich My Love* (still, below) directed by Aram Shabazyan (Armenia, 2014).

Jury Motivation: A well crafted film suffused with humour that sensitively explores a human journey through the loss of dreams to a new beginning by recognizing that one is loved.

Synopsis: Hamo, an old farmer, lives with his wife in a remote village in the mountains of Armenia. The money their son sends them from Russia just allows them to survive. But Hamo

nourishes a dream of acquiring a Moskvich, the most beautiful car in the world, the one promised by Soviet power and that he never had. The Soviet Union is gone, but Hamos' dream remains. He learns that there is one for sale in a nearby village...

In addition, the Ecumenical Jury awarded a Commendation to the film *Sivas* directed by Kaan Müjdeci (Turkey/Germany, 2014) in the section "Across Borders". Motivation: For its questioning how a young boy can grow up in a brutal adult world and an invitation for a change to love and solidarity with the whole of creation.

Synopsis: 11-year-old Aslan saves an injured Kangal sheepdog named Sivas, a fighting dog left for dead after losing a brutal match. He then tries to use Sivas to impress his classmates, in particular the girl he likes, and even sets up an amateur fight



with another boy's dog.

Members of the 2015 Jury: For SIGNIS: Jean-Jacques Cunnac (France); for INTERFILM: Jochen Gollin (Germany); for the Armenian Apostolic Church Fr Ruben Zargaryan (Etchmiadzin, Armenia).

Venice (2015) Italy

At the 72nd Mostra internazionale d'arte cinematografica, the INTERFILM Award for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue went to *Wednesday, May 9* directed by Vahid Jalilvand (Iran, 2015). The film tells the story of Jalal, who wants to overcome his own pain by donating money to a needy person.

In a dramatically convincing manner, the film interweaves the fate of three people living in the city of Teheran in the present day. The dense pictures show the conflicts and suffering of characters who try to face their sorrow with charity.

With its pleading for compassion, charity and altruism against the background of an Islamic culture, the film demonstrates the universality of human values and encourages interreligious dialogue to start with ethical questions, not with dogmatics.

The jury noted the complex talent of Vahid Jalilvand, the good screenwriting and the impressive acting. The members of the INTERFILM

Jury 2015 were: Brigitte Affolter (Switzerland); Dr. Jörg Herrmann (Germany, Jury President); and Thanat Pagliani (Italy).

Locarno (Switzerland) 2015

At the 68th Locarno Film Festival (2-12 August 2015), the Ecumenical Jury awarded its prize to *Ma Dar Behesht* (Paradise) (still, below) directed by Sina Ataeian Dena (Iran/Germany, 2015). The prize is endowed with 20.000 CHF, donated by the Evangelical Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland, and bound to the distribution of the film in Switzerland.

Jury motivation: A strong and courageous Iranian film about the daily life of Hanieh, a young female teacher working in a primary school in Teheran's southern suburbs. Thanks to spare moments of freedom one can experience a sense of hope despite the oppressive conditions Iranian women have to endure.

In addition the jury awarded two Commendations. To *Jiguemeun Matgo Geuttaeneun Tweullida* (Right Now, Wrong Then) directed by Hong Sang-soo (South Korea, 2015). Motivation: A film about love, honesty, integrity and the courage to go beyond social barriers. With tender humour it shows how small variations open up wider possibilities.

And to *Bella e Perduta* (Lost and Beautiful) directed by Pietro Marcello (Italy, 2015). Motivation: A prophetic tale about a true story about respect and care for our "common house". Not only a political statement, but also a poetic experience.

The members of the 2015 Ecumenical Jury were Martin E. Bernal Alonso (Argentina), Gaëlle Courtens (Italy), Franz Xaver Hiestand SJ (Switzerland), Ola Sigurdson (Sweden), Thomas Wipf (Switzerland), and Catherine Wong (President, Hong Kong).



Montreal (2015) Canada

At the Montreal World Film Festival 2015 the Ecumenical Jury awarded its prize to *The Midnight Orchestra* (*L'Orchestre de minuit*) (still, below) directed by Jérôme Cohen Olivar (Morocco, 2015).

The film takes on the difficult topic of Jewish/Muslim relationships, with all its complexities, in an engaging and creative story that smashes common stereotypes with humour and compassion. A strong script with great characterizations allows the viewer to see beyond the impasses that often pass for the status quo to a new world where the Midnight Orchestra composed of all peoples will play a tune of common humanity.

The Jury awarded two Commendations. *Un instante en la Habana* (Havana Moment) directed by Guillermo Iván (USA/Cuba/Mexico/Colombia, 2015) tells the story of two brothers separated for 23 years when their mother flees Cuba

for the United States with the younger boy. The film shows us how pardon and reconciliation are possible when the American brother returns to Cuba and the two discover the best of each other, despite how much separates them.

The jury wants to acknowledge the considerable and multiple talents of Guillermo Iván, the film's director, writer and co-star. The jurors noted in particular the sensitivity and authenticity of his interpretation of someone affected by a degenerative illness.

Doroga na Berlin (The Road to Berlin) directed by Sergei Popov (Russia, 2015) is a story of the horror of war and how it offers no simple answer. Yet in the midst of it, one young soldier retains his humanity in situations that are morally ambiguous. The strong script and directing tell of how trust and loyalty develop between a guard and his prisoner. A war film that gives hope.

Members of the 2015 Ecumenical Jury: Lise D. Garneau (Canada), Kristine Greenaway (Canada), Dinh Khoi Vu (Vietnam), and Burton Buller (USA). ■

