CHANGING
MEDIA

CHANGING
PERCEPTIONS

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Media Development

VOL LXIV 3/2017

In the Next Issue

The 4/2017 issue of *Media Development* will return to a theme first brought to the attention of readers in 2010 - the right to memory. Articles will explore recent developments in the field, including how social media platforms are impacting public memory today.

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EDITORIAL

Great expectations have been placed on social media platforms as a panacea for the challenges facing societies worldwide. In particular, social media platforms are expected to strengthen open dialogue and public debate and to be sources of information and knowledge.

Social media are also expected to play a key role in holding decision-makers accountable in regard to equitable access to public resources and social services. Civil society organisations see them as a way to expand public spaces for citizens to participate in the way societies are run and to promote better governance.

Social media have a coordinating function, relaying often vital information in both normal and exceptional times. They may never be revolutionary in the sense that, without long-term ferment and sustained political and social organisation, they will not overthrow a repressive regime or free an oppressed people. But, as Ricky Storm Braskov notes:

"Social media are revolutionary in the sense that they facilitate, even fortify, a culture of networking. From the perspective of developing countries where communication and media are sparse and often non-existent, social and mobile media do have a massive potential in connecting people both within and to the outside world. It is a qualitative change and… in a complex modern society, where things that matter can happen anywhere and at any time, the capacities of people armed with the means of recording, rendering, and communicating their observations change people's relationship to the events that surround them."[1]

In many ways, this observation makes it all the more remarkable that the role of communications, mass media, and social media found scant place in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite much work having been done over several decades in the fields of communication for development (C4D), communication rights, and in relation to information and communication poverty and to "voice" (inclusion and participation in social, political, and economic processes), this is an astonishing oversight.

Much more emphasis on this vital domain might have been expected in the SDGs, since communication and the interplay of information and knowledge at all levels arguably underpin sustainable development. Among 17 goals, three make passing references:

SDG 5 *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* rather weakly says: "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women".

SDG 9 *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation* is stronger: "Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020"

And SDG17 *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development* escapes with: "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology".

Communication is curiously absent from SDG 1 *End Poverty in all its forms everywhere*, although it could have been front and centre. As a multi-dimensional and multi-layered process, communication for development and social change aims to empower individuals and communities to take actions to improve their lives. In this respect, C4D involves engaging with communities and listening to real people as they identify problems, propose solutions, and act upon them.

Communication is also difficult to pinpoint in SDG 16 *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build accountable and inclusive institutions*

at all levels. In a sense, SDG 16 lies at the heart of Agenda 2030 and yet only one of the target indicators relates to communication rights: "Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information".

Returning to the kind of political, social, and behavioural change that communication for development is expected to bring about, traditional mass media and social media can play distinct and sometimes overlapping roles. However, it would be wrong to suppose that either of them comprise neutral spaces. Both are constructed with a purpose, and that purpose is ideological. And behind the ideology of the social platform is the ideology of the content-provider, whether blogger, advertiser, or citizen-journalist.

Media systems contribute to and, to some extent, determine local, national, and global discourses. Ownership or control of the sector is essential for political leaders and corporations aiming to further their own interests. This is why the media are often the first targets of authoritarian leaders (as well as some leaders in democratic countries) when taking or consolidating power.

Independent media and journalists (who often put themselves at risk) serve to counter some of the excesses of governments by exposing misinformation, corruption, and misuse of national resources; by providing a platform for political debate and building consensus; by offering a source of factual information and balanced analysis. In doing so, they strengthen democratic processes and equitable economic development and give a powerful voice to people seeking to advance good governance and good citizenship.

The same could be said of social media if they were made subject to ethical safeguards around honesty and accountability. In this way, social and mobile media platforms could have a revolutionary impact in the field of communication for development – provided that they demonstrate reliability, transparency, and legitimacy. ∎

Note

1. Ricky Storm Braskov (2012). In Social Media in Development Cooperation published by ØRECOMM Centre for Communication and Glocal Change.

INGOs, public communications and the quest for legitimacy

Nina Kurlberg

In today's world, media cannot be overlooked. Such is their power that they can spread ideas and effect action across the globe almost instantaneously. Nevertheless, not all of the purposes for which the power of media is harnessed have outcomes that contribute towards the common good. Within the aid sector, for example, while media can rapidly raise awareness and funds for emergency relief or spread advance warning of hazardous weather conditions, they have at the same time propagated narratives and discourses that can harm development goals.

What role should media play within the aid sector? Can media help to bring about greater social justice? The argument I want to advance here is that if media are to be mechanisms by which greater social justice can be achieved, they must first embody socially just values. In other words, media must ensure that all have a voice and are represented truthfully and with respect for their dignity.

In this article, I focus specifically on media representations of development as evidenced in the sector's public communications. I argue that, in a world in which aid is often perceived to be a form of neo-colonialism solidifying and naturalising long-entrenched inequality and power asymmetries, the role of INGOs' public communications should be to present a challenge to narratives that perpetuate colonialism's legacy.

With the rise of social media in particular,

the challenge to these narratives from the global South is growing louder, and it is likely that INGOs will need to radically rethink the ways in which they operate and present themselves to the public in order to retain legitimacy in the world of tomorrow.

Images, messages and agency

Approved by the CONCORD General Assembly in 2007 – that is, the European consortium of relief and development INGOs – the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (the Code) champions such values as human dignity, respect, truthfulness, equality, fairness, solidarity, and justice (CONCORD Europa, 2006). It was created as a resource to help organisations develop and effectuate public communications strategies adhering to these values, for example, that are careful to represent situations and people within their wider contexts, respecting their dignity and avoiding stereotypes. Yet although the Code was signed by the membership bodies and national platforms of INGOs across Europe, it remains the exception rather than the norm that its values are embodied within the sector's public communications.

Admittedly, INGOs face a tension – noted within the Code itself – between seeking to act in compliance with these values whilst also seeking to portray the reality of poverty to generate response from the international community. Writing for BOND, the UK membership body for organisations working in international development, Lyndall Stein argues that the level of response generated by photographs such as that of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old who drowned as his family were fleeing Syria, present a challenge to those advocating against the use of images of the dead, or "dehumanizing images that might impact the dignity of those portrayed" (2015). She believes the sector has "a responsibility to bear witness… to the appalling experiences of people living with poverty, oppression and conflict" (ibid). Yet whilst I agree that dehumanizing photographs can move people to action, I would question whether that legitimises their use.

It is evident from her article that Stein is reacting to a trend within the aid sector towards "deliberate positivism" – where the strategy behind INGOs' public communications is to focus on how interventions have positively impacted beneficiaries (Scott, 2014: 149) – and of course, her wider point concerns the value and power of being truthful even if the truth is unpleasant. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to be truthful without compromising human dignity, and I would want to ask Stein who should be responsible for bearing witness and from whose perspective the truth should be told.

The Code states that its signatories will strive to "[e]nsure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves" (CONCORD Europa, 2006). This is important, not only because allowing people to speak for themselves respects their dignity, but also because it acknowledges the value of their perspectives. I find myself in agreement with Ian McClelland, who notes that whilst images evoking feelings of sympathy and pity move people to give, they are also damaging since they perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes. Instead, he writes, "[w]e need to emphasise the independence and agency of people in the South" (2015).

A question of funding vs. ethics

Whilst conducting research on online appeals launched after Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti in October in 2016, I was struck by the images and messages being conveyed. I saw photographs of young children standing alone amidst debris from buildings, seemingly parentless, with words such as "help" and "donate" written in large font beside them. I also came across numerous accounts in which nameless Haitians and "local partners" on the one hand, and named representatives of INGOs on the other, were characterised in widely divergent ways, following the stereotypical "victim" / "hero" narrative.

One story in particular stood out, recounting how several INGO workers successfully brought aid to an affected but difficult-to-access region of Haiti. They were only able to gain access to this area with the help of several locals that transported them on motorbikes, yet in the INGO's account its staff members were the named actors and those

portrayed as heroes, whereas the local actors remained nameless and barely featured.

I am well aware that in the wake of humanitarian disasters INGOs need to legitimise their work to generate funds quickly in a hugely competitive environment, and that appeals are, as such, a form of communication serving the dual purpose of reporting the need and demonstrating each INGO's unique positioning and ability to address it. Yet what messages do public communications of this nature convey? What values do they embody? What narratives do they perpetuate?

An INGO's legitimacy ultimately also depends upon its relationship with local actors and partners. In the case of humanitarian disasters, for example, there is a need for immediate response and the ability to access affected people and areas is essential; therefore, INGOs need to be able to show potential donors that they have connections to the "ground".

Interestingly, Bond's 2014 report *Change the Record* found that "[a]cross all media outlets and geographic regions [within the UK], two main actors dominated coverage – INGOs and donor governments." Findings from audience research on public perception within the UK corresponded with this, with these same actors being perceived as "those most responsible for tackling poverty and global development." Bond's main recommendation on this issue was that UK-based INGOs should "actively create more opportunities for other development actors to be seen and heard in the media and through other public communication channels" (Bond, 2014).

Keystone Accountability's 2013 *Development Partnerships Survey* brought to light a similar concern, but from the perspective of partner NGOs in the global South: 53% of partners interviewed did not feel that their partner INGO "put sufficient effort in promoting their work publicly." Also highlighted was a "certain dissatisfaction from partners with INGOs trying to claim too much credit for the work done" (Keystone, 2013).

Thus, there is a clear need within the sector for public communications that are truthful and that actively challenge prevailing false perceptions, thereby embodying social justice. Appeals

are arguably the most public aspect of INGOs' work and it is therefore crucial that INGOs reflect on how various development actors are characterised within these, particularly in relation to how they themselves are characterised. Reflection on the use of images of children is also needed since this feeds into the Northern supremacy / Southern inferiority narrative (Scott, 2014: 147).

Yet why do such public communications persist? As Martin Scott explains, underlying both "shock effect" approaches whose purpose is to elicit guilt and pity – such as those using the images of vulnerable children, for example – and more positive approaches, is the narrative that donors' money and interventions are the only way to solve the problems of those living in the global South. Such oversimplification of the issues surrounding poverty conveniently ignores both the legacy of colonialism and the "complicity of actors in the North in shaping poverty and global inequality" (ibid: 147-8).

New forms of media hold incredible potential for presenting the complexity of the issues surrounding aid, yet there is a distinct lack of will within the sector to do so (ibid: 159). McClelland notes that one of the challenges in addressing this concerns how to bridge the gap between short- and long-term thinking. It is most likely that these approaches persist because, as Scott points out, it is widely known within the aid sector that they are incredibly successful in generating funds; thus, "the financial benefits outweigh the ethical considerations" (ibid: 146).

A rising challenge to legitimacy
In the midst of the rise of new media and novel approaches to fundraising such as GoFundMe and Crowdfunder, the challenge to INGOs' legitimacy is slowly mounting and will only continue to do so. If they are to survive in this changing environment, INGOs will need to start paying attention to these trends and adapting not only the way in which they raise funds, but also the way in which they operate. Those in control of public communications within the sector are in a position of power, but with these shifts, power dynamics are also changing. The voices of those challenging

the modus operandi are getting louder. At a recent Bond conference, youth activist Aya Chebbi's message to the aid sector was that: "[w]e have our own voices. We just need you to listen." The takeaway message from the conference was that agency is the only way to restore human dignity, and that it is therefore "time for the development industry [to] hand over the microphone" (MacKenzie, 2016).

To give an example, INGOs can draw more upon national media and Southern civil society organisations' public communications. In response to current flooding in Sri Lanka during which over 200 people have been killed to date, the country's main news channel, Newsfirst, covered stories from rescue operations. Clips from these broadcasts were uploaded to its Facebook page, and one of the men involved in the operation, Cheevan Devavarathan Daniel, shared a clip in which he was featured on his own Facebook page. His words are powerful, yet preserve the dignity of those involved:

> "After nearly four days of being left marooned on 'islands' surrounded by flood waters, snakes & crocodiles... without any clean water or power, the people of Godagama are at breaking-point. Hearing families scream in the darkness to attract our attention was heartbreaking. We knew we could never reach everyone; we were just one boat. But the brave young Sri Lankans (most of whom were fishermen) I was with kept going back all through the night. They refused to stop. If not for this sense of community, duty and responsibility shown by the people themselves, heaven knows what would become of our beautiful island."[1]

Increasing the visibility of local development actors may threaten INGOs, but perhaps new ways of working together will emerge.

Concluding remarks

My argument here has been that if public communications within the aid sector are to play a role in bringing about social justice, they must first embody values that are socially just. Public communications matter because the ways in which people and situations are represented impact societal narratives on development. INGOs' public communications strategies can therefore work towards bringing about greater social justice by ensuring that they serve to challenge and transform prevailing narratives that are often unjust.

Sadly, short-term considerations tend to be given preference over longer-term thinking. Yet a shift is occurring within the charitable world in terms of both the causes to which people give and the ways in which funds are raised. This, together with the rise of social media, means that if INGOs hope to survive, they will need to start listening to the critique of global voices. ●

Note
1. https://www.facebook.com/chevaan?hc_ref=NEWSFEED [Accessed 30 May 2017].

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Do social media platforms encourage or stifle public debate?

Patrick M. Johnson

When first created, the internet and social media were thought to be places where the Habermasian idea of the public sphere (places in which rational debate and logic would win out in order to bring about true democratic reform) would finally be realized. However, time has shown this not to be the case and social media is often blamed for causing increased polarization, harassment, and flaming.

A common trope in all of these instances, however, is that it is people who are to blame and the networks themselves are viewed as somewhat neutral. In fact, when Facebook became the target of blame in the 2016 Presidential election in the United States, Zuckerberg denied that the site had any complicity in the spreading of fake news. Despite such negative aspects, however, there is much room for hope that these spaces could, if designed properly, work to foster intelligent, rational, and respectful dialogue that help shape the future of political discourse.

The point of this article is not to focus on the common discourses about the ways in which people behave online may lead to increased polarization and decreased activism or political involvement, but instead to examine the ways in which the network logics of the platform affect the types of engagement that are fostered in these environments. The lack of cross-party dialogue is troubling, but what is potentially even more discouraging is the fact that even within like-minded groups, true rational discourse rarely happens.

This essentially eliminates one of the biggest advantages of heterotopic spaces, the ability for groups to coalesce their views. Through looking at a case study of recent online debate in the case of the changes to the Philadelphia Gay Pride Flag, this article will examine the way that the platform design of Facebook limits the amount of true discourse that is able to occur including: the way discussion threads are displayed, the (lack-of) barriers to interacting, and the proliferation of "click-bait-y" titles.

As a quick background to what prompted these dialogues to begin to occur, in 2017 the Philadelphia Pride association in conjunction with city officials decided to add a black and a brown stripe to the iconic rainbow flag as part of their "More Color More Pride" campaign. The campaign was designed to draw attention to the historical lack of representation and inclusion of People of Color (POC) with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) community.

The main goal of this program, according to their website, was "to fuel this important conversation."[1] While this definitely acted as kindling for a discussion that occurred, I imagine it was not the one that the founders of the campaign had envisioned or hoped. Instead of rational, progressive, and collaborative discussions, what often resulted was a cyclical argument in which there was little progression in any viewpoints.

When entering into a lengthy conversation on Facebook, it is common to look like this (see Image 1 on following page). At first glance, this seems to be a fairly productive conversation. The initial post is discussing the fact that most of the individuals who had been vocally against the change to the flag were not people of colour (POC) and then in the discussion there are POC (or friends of) who are expressing their opinions. The issue, here, is the fact that this is what the average person would see before contributing to the conversation, which has already been in progress for a while (almost 12 hours and 28 posts to be exact).

When expanded out, it becomes clear that there already have been POC voicing their opinions and rebuttals to those opinions that have moved the conversation past the initial posting, with the principal poster even making some ad-

Josh McArthur
June 15 at 1:26am · ⚙

...ave yet to encounter a non-white gay who is upset about the brown and
...ack bars on the alternative pride flag-- aside from those who see it as
...ndery and a half-assed attempt at inclusion, which is the only argument
...ainst this flag that I see as in any way reasonable.

...iink about that, white gays. If the only people who agree with you are wh...
...ys, maybe you're on the wrong side of movements for diversity and
...clusion. Y'all are #whitelivesmatter.

Like   💬 Comment

🏳️‍🌈⭕⬤...and 42 others

...w 28 more comments

...You asked for a person of color that is against the additiona...
colors.
Like · Reply · June 15 at 10:56am

↳ ...eplied · 1 Reply

...As a queer POC, I love all of these conversations. Trust me...
our community will be different because of this flag controversy. I'm different
already. I've seen some people act exactly like right wingers, & that's terrifying.
Most queer POC just want change, and all these yt tears will be for something.
Like · Reply · ⭕ 3 · June 15 at 12:44pm · Edited

...The flag has never been a symbol that represented anything
close to my queer identity, but I've always supported it as a symbol that others
among us found strength in. If you can't allow for an evolution to make that

...justments to his phrasing to clarify his views and thoughts on this issue. Someone who was to engage with the conversation now is only required to view the posts that are publicly visible (which changes for each person based on their own friends on the site) and there is no requirement to actually engage in the entirety of the discussion.

It is here that immediacy seems to be prioritized over comprehension and thoroughness. What could be a major benefit of online discourse, namely that one does not need to engage immediately and can take the time to thoroughly understand what is being said, is completely gone and almost becomes burdensome (if even noticed at all). When one chooses to view previous posts, it does not go to the beginning, but rather expands the discussion to include a few more of the "most recent" posts. For a lengthy discussion that (on public forums) can be well into the 100s of posts, to scroll up to the top and read all of the posts becomes problematic and time consuming.

It is much easier to just post your opinion based on the information readily available to you, and then continue scrolling on.

Once you reply to a posting, other individuals have the ability to respond to you – and you become notified of these posts, as well as anyone else who posts within that thread, mostly. The one exception is that the notifications only occur when someone responds to the general post or to your specific post. If you write a response and someone responds to you in the general discussion thread you will not receive any notifications of people who respond directly to that new post. While most likely done in order to decrease notifications in a situation that can already become overwhelming, what ultimately happens is a fracturing of the conversation into many smaller conversations.

This drawback ultimately loses another advantage of large discussion threads in social media – which is the number of opinions that can enter in and ideally work out their differences together, much as Habermas had theorized would happen in the public sphere. Instead, the end result ends up replicating a conversation that would happen "in real life" in which only a small group of people can actually speak and engage at any time. This begins to limit opinions and the exchange of ideas that are essential to bringing about social change – especially for marginalized communities who are often easily excluded from certain conversations.

Another common way that discussions are shared through Facebook is through the sharing of articles, which came under much scrutiny during the 2016 United States Presidential Election because of the proliferation of "fake news" that was being shared. The focus of this article is not that, but rather the engagement that occurs with news stories, particularly in regard to two aspects. The first is the proliferation of "click-bate-y" titles, and the second (and more troublesome) is the fact that many people do not read the articles before commenting.

With the copious amount of news articles

being shared on social media, many news organizations are now finding themselves competing for attention more than ever in the past. Because of this (and the fast nature at which people scroll through Facebook), news outlets are forced to vie for the attention of their audience by promoting titles that are somewhat inflammatory in order to get individuals to view them. While these titles tend to be a bit more extreme than the articles themselves, another issue that results is that many times individuals will form (and share) their comments just based on the headline without the context of the article. This eliminates one of the other advantages of online discourse, which is the ability to be fully informed before forming and voicing your opinion.

At the same time that the articles about the Pride Flag were circulating, another article from the Huffington Post entitled, "An Open Letter

To Gay, White Men: No, You're Not Allowed To Have A Racial Preference" began to circulate. Towards the end of the article, the author concluded that one does not need to be attracted to everyone, but if the main (or sole) reason you are not attracted to someone is because of their race then it is racist.

The author, a queer POC, even predicts much of the resistance that the article will receive, such as "people like what they like" and it is similar to any other type of preference. Despite spelling out counterarguments to each of these (and many others) the comments in the discussion threads followed the very same logic that the author was disputing – without acknowledgement that these arguments had been addressed within the article.

It is true that Facebook was not designed specifically to be a space to foster intelligent, political discourse. However, it has morphed into the most popular social media site for individuals to get their news, with 44% of US adults stating that they get their news from Facebook.2 Because of the prevalence of the individuals who share and receive news through Facebook, it can no longer claim that the platform is "apolitical," nor can just attempting to weed out "fake news" be considered an appropriate solution. Through this article, I have attempted to demonstrate three ways in which the platform of Facebook and the network logics that are built into it actually shift, shape, and stifle truly open discourse – it is not just a problem with how individuals use the site.

There is likely a gain from having individuals scroll through their newsfeeds rapidly – the more posts a person looks at, the more advertisements they are likely to

At the risk of sounding like a bad person, I disagree. I'm willing to discuss rationally.
Like · Reply · 1 · June 23 at 11:25am

Disagree with what?
Like · Reply · June 23 at 11:32am

Disagree with the statement that it's "wrong" for people to have racial preferences when it comes to dating.
Like · Reply · June 23 at 11:33am · Edited

↳ View more replies

Write a reply...

I think about attraction as being like food preferences. Just because I like a certain flavor does not mean I am discriminating against all the others.
Like · Reply · 1 · June 23 at 5:20pm

Gay men are sexist for not being attracted to women. That's how this works right?
Like · Reply · 4 · June 23 at 5:37pm

Well, a POC wrote this article, so I am not going to debate or question his view on this. Especially that his tone and approach isn't from an angry place.

It's his experience and perception, and considering the deep and horrible racism STILL existing ... See More
Like · Reply · 1 · June 24 at 10:10am · Edited

I think that making dating choices based on appearance often comes from experience. What we're comfortable with and what we find exotic depends on what we've been exposed to, and the positive or negative experiences we've had from those interactions. Can decisions be based on racism? Absolutely. Are they always? Absolutely not.
Like · Reply · 2 · June 24 at 11:09am

see, which ultimately benefits Mark Zuckerberg's pocketbook. Facebook's mission statement is to "give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together". However, they are not doing this in a meaningful and productive way, but rather merely in a way that values quantity of interactions over quality.

Despite all of the negatives in these posts, there were people who were clearly begging for the kind of rich and powerful dialogue that I have been suggesting is possible (e.g. see the final comment in Image 2 on the previous page). This shows that there are people who wish to use these sites and venues to have fruitful conversations – especially when it is in a safe group in which you can work to refine your positions without always having to face stark opposition.

There are simple things that could be done to the platform as well in order to help promote and encourage these discussions. Just by switching around the order that comments are displayed and requiring a user to scroll to the end, Facebook could help to reduce the circularity of these discussions by promoting the notion that individuals should understand what is being debated.

Second, if Facebook were to provide an easier way to follow discussions that you are already part of, it would be easier to stay engaged and be exposed to new information and points of view – perhaps through a tab that allowed you to follow and stay engaged in all topics that you have posted on or "liked." Finally, Facebook could make it easier (or even mandatory) to read an article before commenting on it.

While these suggestions would not solve the issue of the tumultuous nature of online discourse, they would help to provide people with a tool that encouraged open and engaging discussion rather than one that is merely attempting to have the highest number of people engage with the highest number of posts. People want social change and social media have the potential to be an excellent platform to get these discussions started. But not the way the platforms are currently designed. ●

Notes
1. "More Color More Pride," accessed June 28, 2017, https://morecolormorepride.com/

2. Jeffrey Gottfied and Elisa Shearer, "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016," *Pew Research Center*, May 26, 2016, http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/

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Communication in tomorrow's Caribbean

Omar Archer

I love the Caribbean. I was born and grew up in the Bahamas, and now I have the privilege of living in Jamaica as a postgraduate student. From my assessment, Caribbean life and culture is dominated by orality. Even though social media and communication technology has influenced social life and cultural realities, Caribbean people still value the traditional idea of gathering and talking with friends and family.

I would say though that persons who value this way of living have found themselves to be very critical of developing societies, and developing cultural and communicative trends. For example, I often hear seniors ask younger persons and middle age persons why they take their cellular phones everywhere they go and why are they always on their phones. There is a disconnection from the trend of the more image-conscious millennial and the constant status updates on social media to the senior who just want to be hospitable and show love and enjoy the presence of others in community.

I think tomorrow's Caribbean must find a way of embracing and embodying both realities. We must rebound from the image and idea of being "third-world" and "developing" to actually become a more sustainable and developed region and if this is going to happen using all resources with respect to communication, media, technology, science and engineering.

Communication and transparency

The Caribbean is defined by tourism, hospitality, beaches, fun and a whole lot more. Often the danger of communication is its misrepresentation of the truth, in that it shows visitors and tourists the good parts of an island or destination to attract them but when these persons come to the islands they are disturbed by the levels of poverty, classism, greed and cruel politics. Tomorrow's Caribbean could attempt to practice more transparency and honesty with communicative branding and public relations so that visitors know what to expect when they arrive

Heard a representative from a regional chamber of commerce suggest that Caribbean people should be careful what sort of information they put out in the new age dominated by mass media and social media. The representative suggested that at the click of a button the world could know whatever it wants to know about a country and do whatever it wants with the information. Caribbean countries in their development stage have always been concerned about their identity and perception.

Islanders have ensured that stories that should be available to the public actually reach the public through airing videos recorded on their phones and tablets on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Caribbean youth and middle age persons are using social media as a platform to demonstrate their commitment to social, economic and environmental justice and raising awareness and justice consciousness of other youth and citizens within the country or region.

Making communication transparent means not relying on the elected government to provide us with all the truth. There are countless liberal and radical investigative journalists in the Caribbean doing their research on the difficult questions about the messiness of our region and the findings are refreshing and rewarding to our collective sense of knowledge and decision making. In the Caribbean, privacy is celebrated because public exposure can lead to disruption and removal from places of comfort and privilege.

Communication and respectability

Tomorrow's Caribbean will try to redefine and rethink the politics of respectability that has become a part of its identity. In the sharing of opinions,

ideas and other information preserving image and legacy are critical even if that means telling half-truths and lies. Respectability in the Caribbean means simply having manners and being courteous to persons you meet daily. With tourism as a leading industry in most Caribbean economies, it seems normal for those islanders with thriving with hotels and nice beaches to have kind, hospitable and caring attitudes generally, but specifically towards tourists and visitors. Often respectability politics does not hit home and impact locals and residents due to the fact that immeasurable value has been place on the tourist because of the dollar.

Caribbean citizens and residents in inner city communities sought to reframe and re-present the idea of tourism and instead use the model known as community tourism which allowed visiting tourists to stay in homes with Caribbean peoples and families and experience real island life. Community tourism allowed tourists to tour the inner cities of actual Caribbean countries rather than exclusively staying at hotels and beaches in areas at

a considerable distance from the inner city. Some islanders use a horse and carriage to take tourists on tours of the beautiful inner cities. Respectability in communication challenges marginalized groups to accept the model of how things are done as the way they will always be done.

Challenging the status quo and the elitist culture in the Caribbean is critical to experiencing the richness preserved within the islands. The beauty of the people, communities, and human production can be celebrated and appreciated when we learn to give people and their ideas the right platform to grow and mature. Respectability has always been a struggle in the Caribbean, especially with trade unions and worker's rights. It seems our beloved Caribbean is still recovering from the effects of colonialism and slavery which influences the way we treat citizens who are uneducated and poor and which translates into being undervalued and even disrespected.

We have more protest marches and union worker boycotts and parades now with great-

er numbers and solidarity than ever before. As a strongly religious region, people of faith in the Caribbean have also chosen to be at peace and let God fight their personal, collective, national and international battles. Caribbean people who refuse to protest and be engaged in advocacy work claimed that their faith in God would sustain them.

Communication and politics

Communications in the Caribbean is plagued with the disruptive influence of elected governments on how information is handled and disseminated. The spirit of objectivity, truth and justice is rarely identifiable at government owned broadcasting stations in the Caribbean. The inherent political activity is seen when the government places one of its loyal supporters as chairperson or executive director at the national station, who is authorized to do the government's bidding and to protect the political party's interest. It is suspicious when governments that offer subsidies, grants and other forms of support to non-government owned radio and television stations still have a degree of control and influence over these media houses.

The extent of such control has led to the removal of radio and television talk show hosts in the name of not losing much-needed state support. State-controlled resources in these tough economic times in the Caribbean have had significant influence on mass media. Media houses with wealth and consistently strong donors and support base are very open and critical about corrupt behaviour practice by the state and constantly challenge the state to sell their public broadcasting stations.

There are more Caribbean people on social media and using it as a digital networking and social platform today than ten years ago. We have seen the introduction of personal videos in which islanders share their views on local, regional and international issues on social media that receive hundreds of comments and thousands of actual views. Stories that local media houses refuse to air or publish people are taking to social media so that they can be digested by all concerned. The Caribbean as we know it is changing.

Social media has been so influential to Caribbean politics that politicians who wanted to be successful in their electoral races saw it as essential to create a profile page on Facebook or Twitter which would enable them to take questions from citizens, residents and others about their political plans and intentions. The openness and accessibility demonstrated in using social media encourage youth and middle age persons who were considered independent voters to vote for the politician they trusted and that trust began with responding to questions submitted on social media.

The political landscape across the entire region reflects a shift in political parties' time in office. It seems that the electorate for the past ten to twenty years are giving political parties one term to deliver on their promises and if they do not they are voted out. The point being made here by the electorate is that we want better and we want to see improvement and if you cannot give that to us we want you out so we can put new people in office. The justice message here is a call to accountability and productivity. For too long politicians have been elected and re-elected in regional governments but have remained unproductive and only looking after their own needs and ambitions.

Communication and culture

Our greatest challenge in the Caribbean is preserving our culture – art, music, fashion, craft, festivals etc. Preservation here refers to more than simply recognizing the connection of the cultural product to our human history but also to being watchful that our own culture is not engulfed by more dominant cultures impacting the region such as American, European, and Asian. Some Caribbean cultural scholars believe that we can embrace all these cultural influences and still keep and maintain a healthy and authentic view of what our own culture is as a people. The need for hybridity and diversity of cultural appreciation and production is essential as the region expands and welcomes new people, ideas, cultures and experiences.

The imperialistic and capitalistic concern with respect to culture is the assessment of its market-value and the using of culture for monetary benefits. Even if our cultural products are without

redeemable value we should still have great respect and pride for their inherent and much celebrated meaning and history.

A further concern with culture and cultural values is the possibility that the sad day could come when the historic creators of culture which were inner city peoples for the most part may be unable to enjoy and attend cultural events and activities due to high costs and associated registration fees. We see examples such as Carnival in Trinidad, Junkanoo in the Bahamas, and Reggae Festivals in Jamaica. The producers of culture must always have the liberty and freedom to participate in that cultural form in whichever way they chose and that should be the privilege and pleasure of being a citizen and a culture-producer.

Conclusion

The Caribbean island-nations are experiencing a tremendous amount of development and it is unfortunate that at times progress translates into exclusion, inequality and unfairness. Tomorrow's Caribbean must be a region striiving towards justice and equity daily regardless of which political party assumes office. Tomorrow's Caribbean must be committed to truth and objectivity, transparency and honesty, and respectability as ideal symbols of our ongoing and developing values based culture.

We must remember to celebrate those who helped to produce and create what we refer to as our culture. The producers and framers of culture must be recognized and honoured. Tomorrow's Caribbean must treat locals – citizens and residents – with the same value as tourists and visitors. Tomorrow's Caribbean will continue to embrace social media and networking platforms in order to have a global presence and reach as many people as possible in the world of social media communications. ●

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Gaga over Google: Democratization of information in capitalist communication

Jaime Lee Kirtz

Issues of human rights, gender equality, and democratic representation within communication and education technology industries are all examples of media specific social justice topics that have dominated world politics throughout the past century. However, emerging intersections between social justice, new media and new media technology complicate how we approach traditional issues of rights, representation, communication, education and the media industry.

A new way of thinking is imperative due to the integration and use of new media technology for communicative purposes in daily lives: cellular phones, born digital documents and instantaneous e-mails are now normalized and expected within educational institutions. This has occurred not only through technological changes, but through a social transformation whereby processes of social, political, economic and cultural trends become inseparable from the technology.[1]

These have culminated in what Manuel Castells calls "the information society", in which the labour of information processing or device production becomes a central economic mode of development, and the now-global products of "new information technology industries are information producing devices or information processing itself."[2]

The shifting parameters of the information society have launched public and academic inquiries into how new media technology and social justice now interact, and prompt questions regarding the social and political effects of media communication production and consumption, especially within academic/educational institutions. For example, one of the ways that the public and scholars have critiqued the content of traditional and new media is through reflection on representations of race in television, seen in numerous think pieces, newspaper articles, crowd funded projects and academic scholarship on programs like Blackish.

Further, the use of new media as a platform for social justice campaigns, such as with the #blacklivesmatter movement, demonstrates social justice engagement within the contextual impact of new media. While these critical approaches to the intersections of social justice issues and media are essential to understanding and using forms of media to engender social and political change, it is also important to interrogate new media and communication through considering the media technology as a social process itself. This includes examining the media technology as a medium or information processing device as well as its accessibility, required literacy, educational use, and its state of neutrality.

Google Books and centres of Information

One main new medium through which information is collected, processed and disseminated is through the Internet, specifically through search engines like Google. In 2013, Google search accounted for over 25% of web use globally; since then, speculators have argued that Google's use has only continued to grow, marking its central importance to both traditional and new forms of media today.[3] However, Google's popularity is not limited to just their search page, and Google has expanded its products to serve and influence numerous communicative forms and technologies, from maps to cell phones to data analytics.

Simply put, in the contemporary world, Google is the embodiment of modern communication. Thus, as we look to a future in which media industry companies like Google and its products are an integral part of communication, specifically within education, we need to question the role of corporations like Google in information access and democratization as well as the ways in which Google's initiatives reveal and simultaneously conceal how the public and media shape and are shaped by each other.

Changes to education technology, such as the integration of Google Books into primary library database searches, illustrates the social effect of access to information and knowledge. The impact of this social transformation is seen in the rise of professions, specifically computer and software engineering, and even the in the expansion of information based institutions like universities in Western culture. However, access to information and to these spaces or careers is often determined by socio-economic status and other cultural and political factors.

For example, STEM

field jobs, particularly those related to computer and software engineering have increased faster than almost all other sectors of employment in the United States over the past decade.[4] These jobs are often high paying, as for individuals with a high school diploma, STEM jobs have hourly pay wages that average 59% more than those in non-STEM jobs; for those with a bachelor's degree, the difference between STEM and non-STEM job hour wages is 26%.[5]

Furthermore, access to information is divided on a global scale. In a recent UN report, countries with the highest percentage of individuals with Internet access were mainly Western based countries such as Iceland (98.2%), Norway (96.8%), and Denmark (96.3%). However, countries with the lowest percentage of individuals accessing the Internet were centred in Africa, with rates as low as 2.2% in Niger.[6] Comparatively, countries with higher Internet access also had higher levels of STEM professionals produced.[7] Therefore, a key issue in contemporary social justice practices must be accessibility to or democratization of information, as access is a key determinate to future individual economic and social success.

Google Books and accessibility

Democratization of information, which is an argument for equal and unimpeded access to information on a global level, is a concept that is evident in the description on the Google Books website. Originally, Google Books co-founders envisioned "people everywhere being able to search through all of the world's books to find the ones they're looking for."[8] This desire to provide increased access to books, i.e. a form of democratization of information, is cited by the co-founders as a major driving force in the creation of Google itself.[9]

The call for "people everywhere" as well as the emphasis on "all the world's books" illustrates a conceptual application of the democratization of information to the real world. This is further delineated in the Google Books official blog, which states that they increasingly digitize more books "whether rare, common, popular or obscure" so that people everywhere will be able to "discover them on Google Book Search."[10]

However, as it currently exists today, Google Books does not provide access to all books in all locations. A reason for this inconsistency derives from filters in complex search algorithms which are determined in part by country specific regulations and also by commercial interests to restrict access to specific works. For example, when implementing Google Books in China, many complications and issues around censorship and accessibility arose, specifically from government opposition.[11] The Google Books search engine only includes works that are from Mainland China *and* have been approved by the Chinese government.[12]

Furthermore, the works are digitized through the publishers themselves, rather than through libraries and Google Books operations as in the United States.[13] Thus, issues of censorship reveal the problems with Google Books' claim of democratization of information through the ability of Google Books technology to acquiesce to specific government and commercial demands. The very existence of such filters illustrates non-neutrality within the media technology's design and points to elements of control, not democracy, within the forms of communication themselves, thus exemplifying a social process beyond simple technological materialization. This instance demonstrates the ways in which social justice issues emerge and contribute to media communication technology as social processes.

Understanding new media such as Google Books, as social and cultural processes, becomes even more important as Google and Google Books form partnerships with educational institutions like universities. For example, the primary source of knowledge and information in Western education is collected and preserved in institutionally held journal articles and books; in digital form these are usually hidden behind paywalls or credential verification and also require some form of digital literacy. From databases like JSTOR to e-books in Wiley Online and Google Books, these articles and books require a valid institutional login, such as a university email address.

Attending a university infers economic wealth as well as social mobility and thus those

without proper means to fund education cannot access these sources of knowledge and information. Thus the process and privilege of information and knowledge accrual derives from mobility and access, not just through having a computer, but from socio-economic means and through cultural awareness. Furthermore, higher education institutions vary in their levels of access to databases, journals and e-books. Harvard University recently decided to cancel subscriptions to journals as some publishing companies have increased subscription prices by "145% over the past six years, which far exceeds not only the consumer price index, but also the higher education and the library price indices."[14]

While Google Books attempts to circumvent these paywalls and price mark-ups, they also rely on libraries for the source materials themselves. The original incarnation of Google Books, once named the "Library Project", attempted to retrieve scanned works from various international educational libraries.[15] Much of its source material still pulls from higher education libraries and their databases of scanned works, and has inspired other digital collections such as the HathiTrust project.

Higher education libraries as the primary source of Google Books is problematic as those scanning or managing digitization projects decide the priority of books or journals. Therefore, not only does the medium and technology on which Google Books functions require levels of social, economic, and cultural wealth or capital, but the content source is not entirely neutral as well. As such, Google Books tends to provide access to certain kinds of books, and this itself undermines the principle of democratization of information.

Even within the current Google Books project, the process by which texts are selected and prioritized for scanning is hidden from current users. Thus, without transparency, the more nefarious aspects of media technology emerge and highlight the gaps in current questioning of media technologies that we must now ask.

Ownership, inclusion, and idolization
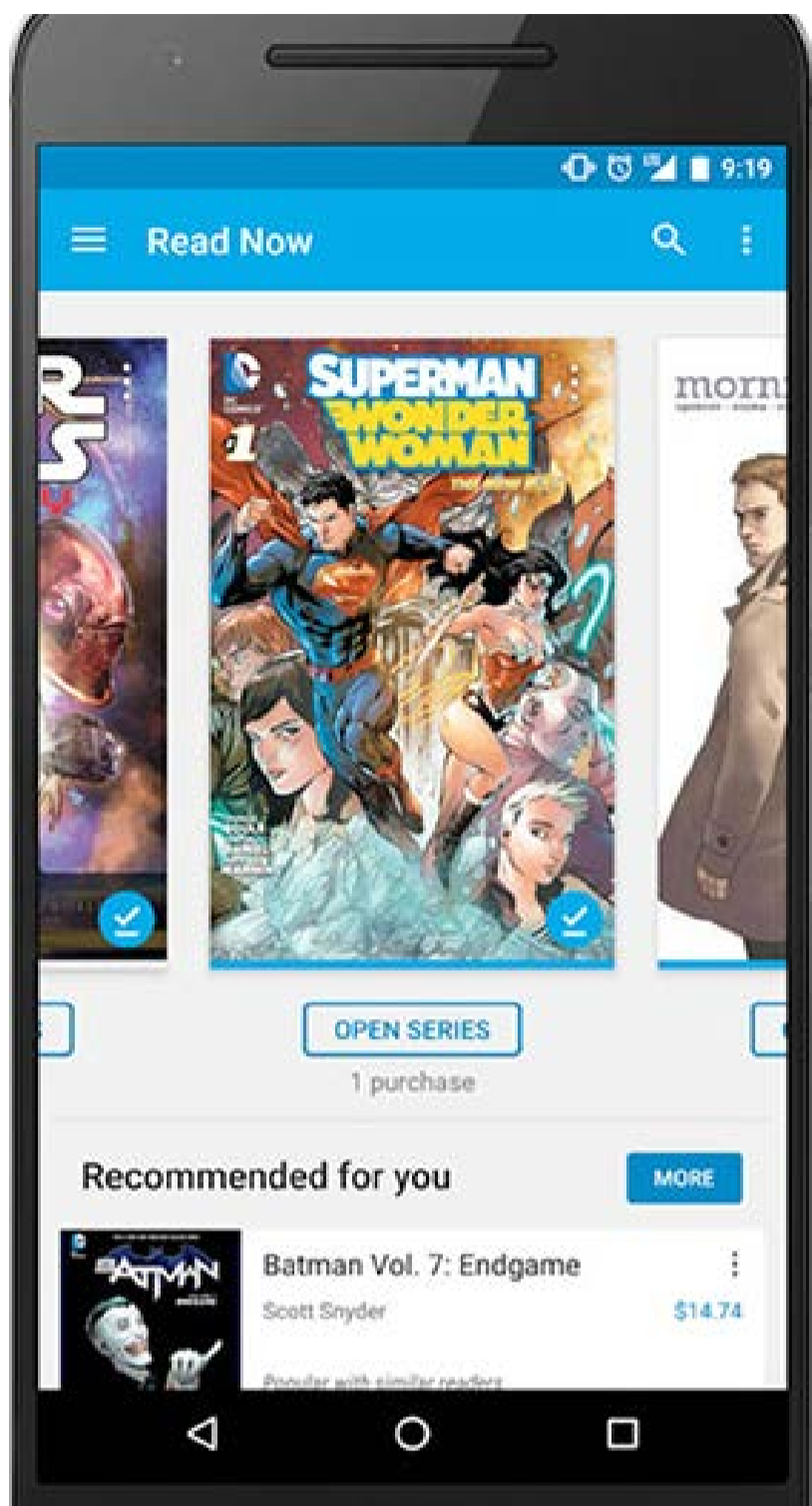Another problematic feature in current claims of

the democratization of information that the Google Books case study highlights, is related to the issue of copyright. After its initial phase, Google Books soon faced multiple lawsuits from publishers and the Author's Guild, citing violations of copyright law.[16] Throughout the lawsuits, settlements and appeals, Google has developed the scan and search function, which allows users to search texts for words and phrases but blocks access to the full text.[17]

Currently, this is witnessed in the preview mode of Google Books and in the "missing" pages that users cannot see or gain access to. Behind this function, the algorithm reveals the embedded legal rulings and regulations of copyright law and fair use. The creation of these laws and their employment derives from earlier instances of institutional regulation of civil society, extending to the histories of previous centuries, specifically regarding divisions between the public and private, and notions of print.

Therefore information and information products like the communication technology of Google Books, underlines the difficult relationship between the public and private that determined and continues to determine access to information. Thus, the humanism behind the seemingly non-human technology of Google Books is revealed, just as its non-neutrality is also observed.

This illustrates not only the ways in which these social and cultural processes emerge but how they fetishize the information and means of communication. For example, a statement from Google Books in 2004 claimed that when establishing a partnership with the Bodleian library, "for the first time since Shakespeare was a working playwright, the dream of exponentially expanding the small circle of literary scholars with access to these books seems within reach." The zenith the corporation's claim reaches borders on hyperbole, and illustrates the problematic trope of information access fetishization as well as how the social justice nature of movements toward the democratization of information are undermined by capitalist culture.

As with Google Books, these media communication technologies are deified within our

contemporary moment and serve as examples of how social justice claims of democratization of information are manifested in contemporary communication technologies. The purpose and design of Google Books, as well as other media communication technologies, are instrumental in understanding how future forms of communication might develop and dominate.

Therefore, with each new media communication technology, we have to question these technologies not only to expose the humanism behind seemingly non-human technologies, but also the concealed biases, tendencies and social processes embedded within them. ●

Notes
1. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*.
2. Ibid., 67

3. Miller, "Google Spent $7.3 Billion on Its Data Centers in 2013." iv Langdon et al., "STEM: Good Jobs Now and for the Future."
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A road movie from Georgia to Palestine and home again: Interview with James M. Wall

Philip Lee

Dedicated to opposing Israeli oppression of the Palestinians and to awakening a passion for film in others, James M. Wall lives in tranquil yet busy retirement in a small town west of Chicago. In April 2017, Media Development's editor, Philip Lee, went to visit with him.

Ordained as a United Methodist minister, James M. Wall was a member of the North Georgia and the Northern Illinois Annual Conferences. Before entering religious journalism, he served as pastor of local churches in Illinois and Georgia, was a sports writer with two Atlanta, Georgia, newspapers, and during the Korean War served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

Editor of *The Christian Century* from 1972 to 1999, he was also Publisher of the magazine, and President of the Christian Century Foundation, the non-profit organization that publishes it. On his retirement, Wall became Senior Contributing Editor with a broad remit to cover social and religious issues.

Wall has taught as Adjunct Professor of Religion and Culture at the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California and has been a long-standing representative of the National Council of Churches advising the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) as a consultant to the industry's ratings appeals board.

PL: It strikes me that there are strong parallels between growing up in the "Jim Crow" south with its segrega-tion and discrimination and with the ongoing situation in the Middle East. How much of that background contributed to your awareness and understanding of the plight of Palestinians? And where did your passion for advocacy journalism originate?

I grew up in the American south. I was born in 1928 in a town of around 5,000, in Monroe, in the state of Georgia. My maternal grandfather, James McKendree Day, was born in the same county in 1860, one year before the start of the American Civil War. I share his full name here because it is the source of my name, James Mc-Kendree Wall. The name McKendree is from a great uncle, William McKendree, several generations removed, who was elected as the first native-born American Methodist bishop. My roots are deep in the church's history.[1]

My maternal grandfather, known as Jim Day, was five years old when the war ended in 1865. I knew him only in his final decade as an elderly, dignified man who suffered economically from the depression. He lost much of what he had

The young Jim Wall as a second lieutentant in the U.S. Air Force at the time of the Korean War (1950-53).

owned, including a large clothing store. He married twice, first, to my grandmother who died young, leaving to him and six older sisters the task of caring for one another. Jim's second wife was a younger woman who moved to town to work in a millenary shop. She had little to do with raising the seven children.

I point to the years 1860 and 1928, because they indicate that just as my childhood was spent in the Depression of 1929 through the start of World Wall II, Jim Day's childhood was spent in the years of the civil war and in the post war era. His early childhood unfolded in a time of slavery, while mine was spent in what I call "enforced formalized bigotry", the term I prefer to the more bland "segregation". Words matter. Races were indeed legally, and by enforced custom, segregated, forced to live apart and separated by a disparity of economic opportunity.

An "enforced formalized bigotry" was utilized by a societal organizing structure which relied on a poor working white class, and an even poorer working black class, to labour in an economy which began as agricultural and morphed slowly into industrialized. It was not until many years later that I found a term from Edward Said, that provides structure for the economically powerful to enforce this separation. The term is the "other". The "other" is different only according to norms the powerful choose to build and sustain its "way of life".

Childhood influences

The formalized bigotry that shaped my childhood grew from slavery into segregation. It was segregation, enforced separation, which formed the environment and the culture of my life. I do remember, however, moments that arrived which made me aware that bigotry was evil and unjust. These were small, and sometimes, large moments which I know now, of course, led me to see that "others" are not different from "us". "Others" are a construct built to benefit the few rather than the many.

The "others" for me, were what we now call African-Americans. In my childhood the n-word, was unacceptable to my family. Negro was acceptable, while coloured people was the more acceptable term. Now, in this telling, I find "black" as shorter and more descriptive than pejorative.

My mother, a huge influence on shaping my emotional life and intellectual curiosity, leaned heavily on black support to raise me. First, there was the constant presence of a black "cook", who did indeed cook our meals, but who also cleaned the house and washed the clothes. Our "cooks" also watched over me, reprimanding me when needed.

My mother was not interested in any of the household duties. Her life was centred in our local Methodist church where she played the piano for worship services. She also was a faithful visitor to those she called "shut-ins", a half-dozen or so elderly women she would visit regularly. She also visited the local jail, prayer booklets in hand.

The earliest moment I can recall that opened me to the evil and unjust impact of formalized bigotry was my first day of school. I was still five at the time, but turned six after two months in the first grade. On that first day of school, in 1933, I assumed that the older black child, probably ten or so, whom my mother relied on to look after me and play with me, would go with me to school. My mother had to tell me he could not do that because he went to a different school.

Who can say what impact that news had on me, but I remember it vividly. I believe, in retrospect, it was the start of an

Drinking fountain at the Halifax County Courthouse, North Carolina, in April 1938.

unsettling awareness that something was unfair about these two separate schools based on race. It was not long before I realized that "their" schools were clearly inferior.

I recall also my first job as a young teenager, where I was a ticket-taker for the local movie theater, the Cherokee, a nod to an American Indian tribe who once lived in the area. One of my tasks was to climb the outside stairs that led to the theatre's balcony and collect money for tickets for blacks to enter the balcony. I did this, no doubt, without debating it, but the fact that this is what I remember indicates to me I had an awareness that separate seating was wrong. I would also study the movie listings in the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution* – two newspapers which, incidentally, I later wrote for – and check to see which films the theatres in the black areas were scheduling. I wanted them to see the better films, but I doubt that they did.

The most traumatic event that pushed me into activist journalism came when I was a freshman at Georgia Tech, while working part-time as a copy boy for the *Atlanta Constitution*. I was 17 at the time. We received news that two couples, both black, had been "lynched", in my own home county, Walton, 45 miles from Atlanta.

Lynching, the murder of black people, had long been one way of enforcing citizen "justice", mobs of white people taking the law "into their own hands" with virtually no response from local law officials. By the time of the Walton County lynchings, the practice had declined, which is one reason those particular lynchings were so horrific and attracted such outside anger.

I immediately wrote a scathing editorial attack on the lynching. I had been editor of my junior high and high school newspapers and was already the sports editor of the Georgia Tech *Technique*, my college paper. So I was known in my home town of Monroe as a writer. I sent the editorial to the editor of a small paper in Monroe, a weekly owned and edited by "Pal" Caldwell, a local Methodist preacher. It was a heated and angry piece which concluded that the murderers should

Interviewing civil rights leader Dr Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago in 1967.

be arrested and punished by the death penalty, the only and last time I endorsed that penalty. The killers were never identified.

I don't really know why "Pal" Caldwell ran my piece. I recall it was intemperate and hastily written. It was also hugely embarrassing to my parents, especially to my father who was, at the time, the city clerk of Monroe. I do not, however, recall a single word from them about the editorial. Nor was there much response from townspeople.

The horror of that lynching was a turning point for me, a moment which then built slowly on a foundation of my parents' insistence on fairness and justice. Those were not words they would use, but they are words that describe them. I can't formulate any memory on how I proceeded next, but I did soon realize that the engineering degree at Georgia Tech was not for me.

After two years of struggling with classes I hated, and working for the Constitution, which I loved, I transferred to nearby Emory University's journalism school and also to a job at the *Atlanta Journal* sports department.

From sports to theology
My writing and my enthusiasm in my college years were focused on sports. After graduation in 1949, I spent an additional full year at the Journal. When the Korean War began in 1950, I joined the Air Force rather than be drafted. I received an

officer's commission because the armed services needed trained professionals, doctors, dentists, and fortunately for me journalists.

After two years of active duty, one year of which was spent at the Alaskan Command Headquarters, I returned to Emory University to enter the School of Theology. The sports editor who had given me so much encouragement as a writer, Ed Danforth, was disappointed I did not return to the *Journal*. He blamed my decision on my having "too many forced landings" on the tundra.

Theology School added to my understanding of religion and ministry. It also earned me an MA degree. A few years as a parish minister and I knew I needed something different. Offered a chance for graduate work in pastoral care at the University of Chicago, my wife Mary Eleanor and I moved to Chicago with our two sons, David and Robert. A third son, Richard, was born in Chicago.

Two years into a PhD program, my advisor told me I should settle for an MA and get busy with journalism. He told me, "you are a writer, now write". I did just that and worked first on the staff and then as editor of a Methodist magazine, *The Christian Advocate*, and then, in 1972, as editor of *The Christian Century,* for a total of 19 years.

The *Advocate* was run by the Methodist Publishing House so my desire to pursue advocacy journalism was muted there, though I did seize the opportunity to write about and teach courses in religion and film. At the *Century*, my board gave me great latitude to run both the business and the editing of that magazine.

PL: What should be the role of public journalism today? Is it facts and nothing but the facts, or should a moral voice hold sway in the form of "opinion journalism"?
The 1960s and 1970s were decades of church upheaval and societal unrest. My editorial responsibilities were balanced between building understanding and attacking injustice. My focus on Palestine and Israel may be pinpointed to a moment when I

travelled to the region for the first time under the sponsorship of the American Jewish Committee, which targeted me for Zionism as the editor and publisher of a magazine on the forefront of justice issues since 1884.

I insisted my magazine pay for my trip, though I allowed the AJC to arrange my travel and accommodations. I arrived in Tel Aviv in early November 1973, just after the Yom Kippur war. I have written several long reports on that visit for *Link* magazine and elsewhere. But to answer your question about the connection between my segregation childhood and my journalistic activism, I will say that it was on this trip that I saw the evil of the occupation coupled with the Zionist *hasbara* (propaganda) that allowed and continues to allow Israel to occupy and oppress the Palestinian people.

Jim Wall served as director of the 1976 and 1980 Carter/Mondale campaigns in Illinois. Photo with Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter in the backyard of their home in Plains, Georgia, after the election defeat of 1980.

One day, a missionary from the US took me away from my AJC minders and we spent a day traveling the Jericho Road from Jerusalem to Ramallah. I had a long visit with a Palestinian farmer whose source of water had been stolen by nearby Jewish farmers. I also met Palestinian leaders at Bir Zeit College. It was a life-changing day.

After that, public blindness to the evil and unjust occupation became a consuming passion for me. How can a society demand separate doors

for two different races in a movie theatre in Monroe, Georgia? How can Israel imprison an entire Palestinian population while claiming to be a faith-based democracy?

The connection slowly became clear to me, though I confess that five years after that first trip I was criticized by a Palestinian writer who told me I was still hung up on giving "equal time" to Israelis (and their claim to need "security") and Palestinians. Starting with my first 1973 trip, I made a total of 20 trips to the region of western Asia, studying the situation and reporting my findings. My feelings of despair and anger have grown as Israel justifies its conduct, and repeats its lies to the world to justify its oppressive behaviour.

By the time I finished writing for the *Century* and started my own blog, I found myself racing against the clock of time to focus on the difference between the occupiers and the occupied and the abyss that separates justice from injustice.

As we talk, (April 13) the United States has just dropped its largest non-nuclear bomb, called the GBU-43, on an Islamic State hideout in eastern Afghanistan, a violent act that killed as many as 36 people. This was a massive lynching designed to "send a message" of power to "others". It was evil and it was immoral.

Speaking out against such actions remains a driving force for me, wherever and whenever that evil raises its ugly head. I am the grateful recipient of a passion for openness to others, a passion bequeathed to me by my parents, even as they remained locked into the patterns of a society mired in the absence of justice.

PL: My last question has to do with your passion for cinema. If you were to pick one film that has born the test of repeated viewing and still has "something to say", what would the film be and why?

Emily Dickinson left us a quote that I have always cherished. She was something of a recluse, surrounded, as she put it, by her "Kinsmen of the Shelf", the books that were crucial to her. Our topic here is films, and since DVDs perch on shelves around me, I consider them my kinsmen on the shelf.

If I must select one film to be my companion

on a desert island, after considerable pondering, with apologies to John Ford and the Coen brothers, I choose *The Straight Story.* I have a personal history with that film's director, David Lynch. I was in Hollywood for a meeting when a religious Los Angeles Film Critics group gave an award to Lynch for *The Straight Story* in 1999. I ended up sitting next to Lynch at lunch, and told him how much I liked the film. I also told him something I assumed he did not know.

I had written a film column in *The Christian Century*, in which I praised *Blue Velvet*, an earlier 1986 Lynch film. I called the film outstanding for its unvarnished portrait of sheer evil rooted in a small Middle Western community, a vision that was the polar opposite of *The Straight Story.* A Chicago columnist had one comment for that reading from a religious writer, "O Lordy". Lynch told me he had heard the strange news that a religious publication had praised *Blue Velvet.* He was glad to meet me.

I believe Lynch and I agree on one point: Evil and good coexist in human existence. In these two contrasting works of film art, *Blue Velvet* and *The Straight Story*, Lynch covered the extremes. It is *The Straight Story* side of Lynch that I choose for my single movie companion. Here is why.

The Straight Story is based on a true story which first surfaced in a news report about a 73-year-old man, Alvin Straight (*Richard Farnsworth)*, who attempts to drive a motorized lawn mower from Iowa to the Wisconsin home of his brother Lyle *(Harry Dean Stanton).* As the film opens, Alvin lives quietly with his adult daughter Rose *(Sissy Spacek)* in Laurens, Iowa. Life is slow there. One night a telephone caller tells Rose that Alvin's brother has had a stroke. As a storm rages outside, the look on Alvin's face as he hears Rose in the next room, announces that his life will no longer be quiet. There is a past to confront.

Lynch's close-up shot of Alvin, his face lit by lightning, captured my admiration early in the film. So also did the performance of Richard Farnsworth, as he interacted with his small-town retired buddies. Or when his daughter Rose takes Alvin to see a doctor. Alvin is a stubborn man, rejecting the doctor's advice at every turn.

After the visit to the doctor, where Alvin refuses to change his habits, Alvin tells his daughter he will travel to see his brother. Rose reminds him that his obstacles are great. He does not own a car and Rose does not drive. Still, Alvin prepares to begin his journey. This is a trip he must make alone. He and his brother are estranged. Now is the time to address that estrangement.

Lynch's script-writers withhold details. The nature of the brothers' disagreement has deep consequences, but nothing earth-shattering, just some vague conflict which led to ugly words within the family.

Alvin builds a trailer and attaches it to his motorized lawn mower. The smile that crosses his face as he leaves town on what he hopes will be a successful 370-mile trip, is the quiet smile of a man making up for lost time. He sleeps in his trailer and cooks simple meals close to the highway. One stop requires Alvin to camp for a few days while his mower is repaired by two bickering brothers. He sees them as mirror images of his own younger self and his brother.

Director Lynch filmed Alvin's journey along the same route the real Alvin Straight travelled in 1994. *The Chicago Tribune* said of *The Straight Story*, "this is the most compassionate movie Lynch has ever made". It is also that rare film, a serious adult story with touches of humour, rated G. Imagine that, a G-rated film in 1999 which is not just for children. That is one reason I want this side of Lynch and his mower-driving Alvin to stay with me.

As *Blue Velvet* attests, Lynch does have a sure grip on portraying evil. In contrast, with his cinematic palette, Lynch gives us Alvin Straight in a story which celebrates family, perseverance and love. The farmland and small town scenes, shot on location, undergirded by a solemn musical score, plus the love Alvin demonstrates for his daughter and, in a moment of reconciliation, for his journey to see his brother, all contribute to one of the finest works of cinematic art from the 20th century.

This is a film that is as steady as a rain storm in an Iowa night, or as uplifting as an early morning sunrise in Wisconsin. It sustains the viewer as it calls for whatever steps are needed to make amends for decisions made, or not made.

This is a film with moments that are to be cherished and embraced, like, for example, Alvin talking his way to buying a "grabber" device he likes in a store, or the scene where Alvin's neighbour lady rushes into his kitchen to find he has fallen to the floor. She grabs the telephone and shouts, "What's the number for 911?" That is a line I reach for when I need a lift.

I hereby officially take Rose and Alvin as my companions on my desert island. We will, together, enjoy the sunset and long for the rain. For companions, I prefer those friends who speak a G-rated language, while we converse together on a stage of middle-American farmland. ●

Note
1. William McKendree (July 6, 1757 – March 5, 1835) was the fourth Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the first Methodist bishop born in the United States. He was elected in 1808. Bishop McKendree never married. He died 5 March 1835 at the home of his brother, Dr. James McKendree, in Sumner County near Nashville. One of his last expressions was said to have been, "All is well."

Comunicación, derechos y desarrollo sostenible en Cuba

José Ramón Vidal Valdez

El modelo comunicativo imperante en el país necesita transformarse para que esté a la altura de las demandas actuales de la sociedad cubana. Ese modelo comunicativo se concreta, tanto en lo político como en lo jurídico, en el concepto del derecho a la comunicación, entendido este como el derecho a informar y ser informado, a hablar y ser escuchado, imprescindible para poder participar en las decisiones que conciernen a la colectividad.

Frecuentemente se escuchan, en escenarios diversos, quejas e insatisfacciones sobre el sistema de comunicación pública en Cuba. A veces se suscitan enconados debates sobre el tema desde imaginarios de prensa contrapuestos, pero existen también reflexiones más sosegadas, rigurosas e integrales, que se gestan, sobre todo, en el campo académico de la comunicación y la información y en el sector periodístico.

Estas reflexiones tratan de ubicar en contexto el sistema comunicativo y no solo de encontrar los orígenes históricos de sus rasgos peculiares, incluyendo sus fortalezas y debilidades, sino que intentan identificar, además, los retos que tiene ante sí, para el presente y futuro inmediato, y los posibles caminos para su mejoramiento.

El presente artículo pretende sintetizar algunas de las conclusiones más compartidas en el espacio académico de la información y la comunicación en Cuba –aunque, por supuesto, no unánimemente aceptadas–, acerca del sistema y el modelo comunicativo imperante en el país y las transformaciones que sería necesario realizar para que estén a la altura de las demandas actuales de la sociedad cubana.

Antecedentes

Las profundas transformaciones políticas, económicas y sociales desatadas por la Revolución Cubana impactaron también en la conformación del sistema de medios de comunicación que, en poco tiempo, pasaron a ser de medios comerciales a medios públicos.

Desde los primeros años de la pasada década del sesenta, la política editorial de los medios se subordinó por entero a la confrontación Revolución–contrarrevolución que, en el caso cubano, como se sabe, tiene un profundo matiz nacionalista, al ser ante todo la disputa entre Cuba y los Estados Unidos.

Cuba fue bloqueada económicamente (aún lo está), agredida por bandas terroristas y amenazada de intervención militar directa. Se desató una inmensa campaña diplomática y mediática con el propósito de aislarla del resto del mundo.

En ese contexto aparecen dos rasgos esenciales en el sistema comunicacional cubano: la propaganda en defensa de la Revolución, como función primera y esencial de los medios; y el secretismo, como mecanismo de defensa ante situaciones realmente excepcionales.

No obstante ello, durante la primera mitad de esa década, la prensa fue escenario de debates de sumo interés público acerca del proyecto socialista y acogió no pocos trabajos periodísticos críticos.

En la segunda mitad de los sesenta se produjo la integración de los diarios *Hoy* y *Revolución*, que eran los medios vinculados al Partido Socialista Popular y al Movimiento 26 de julio, como expresión en la prensa del proceso de unidad de las fuerzas políticas de la Revolución. Surgió así *Granma* como órgano oficial del Partido Comunista de Cuba. Semanas más tarde nacería *Juventud Rebelde*, con el subtítulo de órgano de la juventud cubana, bajo la supervisión de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas.

Según la apreciación del ya fallecido Julio García Luís, Premio Nacional de Periodismo„…" la reestructuración de la prensa diaria en 1965 no

Una calle en La Habana, capital cubana. Foto: M&M.

se revirtió de inmediato ni después, en un periodismo de mayor calidad al que ya se venía realizando".[1] Varios factores incidieron sobre este resultado, desde la experiencia profesional de los nuevos periodistas y directivos, muchos de ellos improvisados, hasta un mayor control sobre los medios desde el sistema político.

Pero no fue hasta la década del setenta que se entronizaron en el sistema de medios mecanismos de control directo a imagen y semejanza con el modelo soviético, como parte de un proceso mucho más general de acercamiento a la antigua URSS y al campo socialista europeo.

La autorregulación por convicción, sentido de responsabilidad y profesionalidad por parte de los periodistas y directivos de los medios no se consideró garantía suficiente para las estructuras del Partido y se intensificó la intromisión de su aparato auxiliar en la conducción cotidiana de la prensa.

Por supuesto, esto conspiró contra la profesionalidad y, fundamentalmente, contra el cumplimiento de las funciones diversas y complementarias de los medios en la sociedad. Se produjo entonces una hipertrofia de la función propagandística, con tintes apologéticos de la obra de la Revolución, en detrimento de la función informativa, de la crítica oportuna y necesaria para cualquier proyecto político y socioeconómico, y del uso de los medios como plataformas de participación democrática de la ciudadanía en los asuntos públicos.

Estos rasgos se mantienen en lo esencial como características del sistema de los medios en Cuba, pese al tiempo transcurrido y las transformaciones de la realidad nacional y del entorno internacional, incluido el comunicacional, que a todas luces está pidiendo un cambio.

El proceso de esos cambios se sabe será difícil porque debe sobreponerse a una cultura verticalista, que tiende más al control que a la autonomía, a la trasmisión más que a la participación

y el diálogo.

La insatisfacción con la labor de los medios

El funcionamiento del sistema de medios en Cuba deja insatisfecho tanto a gran parte de la ciudadanía, como a las propias instituciones públicas.

Desde la ciudadanía se pueden constatar esas insatisfacciones tanto en las opiniones que se expresan acerca de los medios de comunicación, como por la proliferación y credibilidad de rumores. Desde las instituciones se han realizado críticas y demandas a los medios y a los profesionales de la comunicación en múltiples espacios y momentos.

En particular, los congresos de la Unión de Periodistas de Cuba (UPEC) han sido momentos para el análisis crítico de los medios, especialmente en sus dos últimas ediciones.

Algunos de los problemas que provocan esas insatisfacciones son:
* Escasa autonomía de los medios para establecer sus agendas de contenidos, lo que provoca notables desfases entre las agendas mediáticas y las agendas públicas.
* Imposibilidad de acceder a toda la información necesaria desde las instituciones públicas, dado el carácter restrictivo y secretista con que actúan en lo comunicacional.
* Los medios de comunicación no solo están afectados por el secretismo y el sistema de regulación de sus contenidos, sino que padecen graves déficit financieros y materiales. Por ejemplo, una crítica situación con sus medios de transporte afecta la labor reporteril.
* El personal que labora en los medios, como en muchos otros sectores del país, recibe salarios insuficientes y ello lo obliga, en no pocos casos, a dedicar tiempo y esfuerzos en encontrar otras vías de ingresos.

Todo lo anterior ha impactado en una lenta e insuficiente apropiación de las transformaciones que han ocurrido a escala global en los sistemas comunicativos caracterizados por la irrupción de redes y soportes digitales diversos, que crean la posibilidad de democratizar la producción y el acceso a la información y a la producción cultural.

Esta apropiación no se limita solo a lograr la conectividad y el acceso a la tecnología informática, lo cual tiene un notable retraso en Cuba, sino también la necesaria reestructuración del sistema de gestión editorial y las culturas profesionales que se derivan de su asimilación.

A partir de estas insatisfacciones se ha intentado realizar algunos cambios regularizando las informaciones sobre el desempeño y los acuerdos de las instancias de gobierno, alentando trabajos periodísticos de corte crítico y la mayor presencia de voces de diferentes sectores sociales en la prensa. Las secciones de intercambio con los lectores se han fortalecido y constituyen una vía de participación y queja de la ciudadanía. Aparecen trabajos de opinión más diversos y plurales. Hay un incipiente desarrollo de la prensa digital. Se exige a los organismos del Estado una mejor organización de su gestión comunicativa.

Pero estos cambios no son suficientes. En realidad, desde hace décadas las máximas instancias de dirección del Partido han intentado ampliar la función crítica de la prensa y mejorar su labor informativa. Pero una y otra resolución termina por evaluarse como no cumplida porque, en realidad, en ningún caso se ha hecho una reflexión profunda y radical sobre el modelo comunicativo y las relaciones entre las instituciones del sistema político y los medios de comunicación, lo que ha implicado tratar de obtener nuevos resultados con viejos métodos y se sabe que eso no es posible.

Diversos documentos y pronunciamientos realizados en los últimos años establecen el propósito de perfeccionar los mecanismos de participación ciudadana en los asuntos públicos, pero como ha expresado en su tesis doctoral la destacada periodista Rosa Mirian Elizalde:

"No hay participación sin comunicación, por más que se declaren ambas como objetivos estratégicos. Las fallas del Sistema comunicacional pueden comprometer el ejercicio colegiado del poder político e impedir formas permanentes de control social que favorezcan la participación popular y tengan un papel activo en la lucha por la defensa de los derechos culturales de la nación".[2]

Los grandes retos actuales del sistema comunicativo cubano

La sociedad cubana está en momentos de dinamización de cambios y de crecimiento de su diversidad, lo que plantea nuevos y más complejos retos al sistema comunicacional.

Algunos de estos retos se derivan de la aparición de un sector no estatal de la economía y la ampliación del cooperativismo en diversos sectores. Esta diversidad de formas de propiedad hace emerger nuevos actores sociales que requieren tanto acceso a los medios como al control de estos sobre sus actuaciones.

También se han venido produciendo cambios institucionales, en los órganos de gobierno y en el sector empresarial, dirigidos a diferenciar adecuadamente las funciones de unos y otros, que incluyen una mayor autonomía a las empresas de propiedad social; el fortalecimiento de las regulaciones jurídicas y del derecho; y nuevas formas de planificar y dirigir la economía con procedimientos y políticas económicas y no solo con regulaciones administrativas. Estas transformaciones en el modelo de gestión económica requieren tratamientos diferenciados a las instituciones, desde lo comunicacional, y de informaciones amplias y de profundidad que contribuyan a crear conocimientos que favorezcan la comprensión y el apoyo a estos cambios.

También los medios –y la ciudadanía a través de estos– deben tener la posibilidad de observar críticamente sus impactos en la sociedad y, en particular, en la vida cotidiana de las personas para alertar sobre posibles deformaciones en su aplicación o la necesidad de producir ajustes a tiempo para que se reviertan francamente en beneficio de la economía y la sociedad cubanas.

Otros elementos insoslayables que requieren tratamiento permanente e inteligente en los medios de comunicación son las consecuencias

La prensa tiene gran importancia para la gente cubana.

que genera la imposibilidad de la economía de remontar, definitivamente, las secuelas materiales de la profunda crisis de los años noventa y, por supuesto, algo mucho más complicado, sus efectos subjetivos motivados por el proceso de empobrecimiento que se ha vivido y el consecuente deterioro de la credibilidad de las instituciones.

Los efectos de la crisis no están motivados solo por los duros años de aguda secases de productos de todo tipo y la disminución del salario real, sino por la ruptura brutal de la visión de futuro y los planes de vida de las personas y las familias. La sensación de que las reglas del juego cambiaron, que ahora todo está lleno de incertidumbres luego de haber vivido un periodo de seguridad y, sobre todo, de promesas que parecían alcanzables, deteriora el compromiso con el proyecto social y altera el cumplimiento de las normas sociales de civilidad y convivencia.

Estos asuntos tienen algún reflejo en la agenda mediática pero más desde un discurso moralizante, que desde el análisis de causa más profundo de estas conductas, que permita generar una reflexión colectiva que contribuya a corregir sus efectos perniciosos.

Otro componente de los cambios que se han originado en la sociedad cubana es la emergencia pública de expresiones culturales y espirituales generadas desde identidades diversas, de género,

creencias religiosas, orientación sexual, color de la piel o generacionales que, como nunca antes, pugnan por su presencia y reconocimiento en el espacio comunicacional. La política cultural y la relacionada con las creencias religiosas, abiertas y garantes de los derechos culturales, han contribuido en mucho a diversificar en los medios las miradas sobre esta diversidad creciente, pero no dejan de ser un reto permanente a la sensibilidad, creatividad y profundidad del trabajo periodístico.

El sistema comunicativo cubano tiene ante sí, además, los desafíos que entraña para lo comunicativo el restablecimiento de relaciones diplomáticas con Estados Unidos, que no diluye sino que transforma las disputas históricas entre ambos países y produce un tránsito del enfrentamiento frontal en los escenarios económicos y políticos hacia una confrontación, fundamentalmente en el orden simbólico y cultural. Ello sitúa la actualización y perfeccionamiento de las políticas comunicacionales como una prioridad insoslayable.

Hay, además, demandas que se derivan del proceso de relevo de la generación histórica que hizo la Revolución, hacia una nueva generación de dirigentes que tiene que basarse más en la legitimidad de las instituciones y las leyes y la capacidad para generar consensos. Es decir, una nueva forma de gobernar que, inevitablemente, tiene que implicar una manera diferente de comunicarse con la ciudadanía.

Afrontar con éxito estos retos requerirá de cambios conceptuales y prácticos de profundidad en lo relacionado con todo el sistema de comunicación social y su relación con el sistema político.

Referentes necesarios

Hay desarrollo teórico y propuestas provenientes de las luchas populares sobre la democratización de la comunicación que pueden ayudar a repensar las políticas y las regulaciones del sistema comunicativo en Cuba, lo que excede al sistema de medios e incluye a todos los actores involucrados en los procesos de comunicación a escala social e institucional.

Uno de los conceptos que debe constituir punto de partida en esas reflexiones es el de *derecho a la comunicación.* La idea de que era necesario for-

mular un nuevo derecho humano a la comunicación fue esbozada por primera ocasión por Jean D'Arcy,[3] en el seno de la UNESCO. Este autor consideraba que el derecho a la comunicación tendría que ser, necesariamente, más amplio que los derechos de opinión, expresión e información, que fueron reconocidos en la Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos de 1948, la cual resultaba insuficiente como paraguas normativo para orientar la regulación del fenómeno de la comunicación en un contexto de acelerado desarrollo de las tecnologías de la información y comunicación (TIC) y de una creciente concentración a nivel mundial de los medios de comunicación masiva en empresas transnacionales de la información y la industria cultural.

En 1973, los países No Alineados plantearon en el seno de la UNESCO la idea de establecer un Nuevo Orden Mundial de la Información y la Comunicación (NOMIC) como correlato en el campo cultural de las propuestas en favor de un Nuevo Orden Económico Internacional

En particular, la propuesta del NOMIC provocó fuertes confrontaciones en los escenarios internacionales entre los países que denunciaban la profunda asimetría que existía en los flujos internacionales de información y comunicación, y los países industrializados de Occidente, que argumentaban que las pretensiones de establecer políticas y legislaciones que regularan esas relaciones eran un atentado al libre flujo de información y a la libertad de expresión, lo que era violatorio de diferentes cartas y acuerdos internacionales.

Como parte de esas disputas se constituyó por la UNESCO una comisión de expertos que evaluaría el ordenamiento internacional de la información y la comunicación; esa comisión fue identificada por el nombre de su presidente Seán MacBride. Como resultado de su trabajo se presentó un informe resumen que tiene como título "Un solo mundo, voces múltiples".

Su aporte al debate internacional sobre la comunicación fue trascendental, en tanto describía y denunciaba los desequilibrios en la producción y circulación de información y abordaba el tratamiento del derecho a la comunicación como

una necesidad política, aunque aún sin forma jurídica precisa. En efecto, a manera de recomendaciones, se formularon orientaciones jurídicas para que los Estados regulen las nuevas relaciones provenientes de la actividad comunicacional y, especialmente, mediática.

En síntesis, según estas recomendaciones, eran necesarias disposiciones para consolidar el ejercicio de los derechos tradicionalmente relacionados con la comunicación (opinión, expresión e información), así como de los demás derechos humanos relacionados con estos. Pero también se proponía a los Estados intervenir para asegurar el acceso democrático a la información y a los medios de comunicación por parte de los individuos y de los colectivos sociales; evitar la concentración de la propiedad de los medios, así como el monopolio de la producción de información; y asegurar la posibilidad de libre elección de los individuos frente a la amplia gama de información ofertada.

Luego de adoptarse por mayoría las resoluciones para hacer avanzar el Nuevo Orden Mundial de la Información y la Comunicación en correspondencia con las conclusiones del informe Mac Bride, los Estados Unidos y el Reino Unido comunicaron su decisión de retirarse de esta organización, argumentando que el NOMIC constituía un atentado a la libertad de información. Le atribuyeron un sesgo estatista y acusaron a las autoridades de la UNESCO de propiciar en los países del Sur la creación de estructuras comunicacionales de inspiración socialista.

En la confluencia de las pasadas décadas de los ochenta y noventa, el predominio casi absoluto de la ideología neoliberal como discurso e imaginario únicos hizo retroceder muchas de las conquistas logradas tras años y décadas de lucha. La propuesta de un nuevo orden mundial de la información y la comunicación fue una de esas conquistas postergadas.

Las políticas neoliberales aceleraron los procesos de concentración de la propiedad y desataron una ola de privatizaciones que debilitó en grado sumo los servicios públicos de información y comunicación y de las telecomunicaciones. Se agudizaron aquellos rasgos del orden mundial de la información y la comunicación que la comisión MacBride había definido como inaceptables.4

Comenzó a prevalecer otro paradigma en el análisis de los problemas internacionales vinculados a la información y la comunicación. Un ejemplo de este nuevo paradigma lo constituye la Convocatoria de la ONU a la Cumbre Mundial de la Información (Ginebra 2003-Túnez 2005), cuya organización se encargó a la Unión Internacional de Telecomunicaciones (UIT) y no a la UNESCO, como hubiese sido razonable, lo que llevó a omitir el debate en términos de derechos por un enfoque centrado en la forma de regular las relaciones comerciales y tecnológicas que generan el uso de las TIC en la globalización del mercado.

En contraposición a esas tendencias, los movimientos sociales y fuerzas progresistas resaltaron la relación que existe entre el derecho a comunicar y aquellos que garantizan la participación pública y el conocimiento y defensa de todos los derechos humanos.

La comunicación es concebida como un derecho de todos y todas, que implica el acceso y la participación en procesos individuales y colectivos de construcción del conocimiento pero, también, de participación de los ciudadanos en los procesos de toma de decisión relacionados con los asuntos concernientes a sus vidas.

Se retoma la idea de establecer políticas de comunicación e información y las legislaciones correspondientes que den garantías al pleno ejercicio del derecho a la comunicación.

Los empeños por democratizar la comunicación durante décadas han dejado un sedimento de ideas, conceptos y prácticas que hoy día, tras un largo y accidentado derrotero, conforman un modelo alternativo, tanto al imaginario liberal de prensa, como al modelo imperante en las experiencias socialistas del siglo XX. Esto tiene una gran importancia para Cuba, que decidida a perfeccionar su modelo de desarrollo económico y social de orientación socialista debe actualizar su propio modelo comunicativo y las políticas y el marco jurídico que lo organice y regule.

Otro referente insoslayable está relacionado con la centralidad que tiene la comunicación en los planes de desarrollo económico y social. La jer-

arquía de la información y el conocimiento como factores en el desarrollo ha ido creciendo. Se evidencia en la actualidad un uso intensivo de la información y un valor creciente del conocimiento como factores diferenciadores y condicionantes del desarrollo.

No es que el capital no sea importante pero no basta, hay que saber seleccionar, procesar y emplear eficazmente los altos volúmenes de información; generar los conocimientos indispensables que garanticen la producción de bienes y servicios con la calidad requerida en las nuevas condiciones socio–técnicas y asimilar las nuevas áreas de desarrollo científico y tecnológico que han emergido a partir de la llamada "revolución digital" y su confluencia con diversas demandas sociales.

El factor que realmente establece la diferencia es la posibilidad de contar con una masa crítica de personas altamente calificadas en el manejo de la información, en la generación de conocimientos y en su capacidad innovadora para aplicarlos eficazmente en la actividad productiva o de servicios correspondiente.

Pero la calificación de las personas no se logra hoy solo con excelentes centros educacionales. Estos, claro, son indispensables pero si los profesores, los estudiantes y los egresados no están conectados a los flujos mundiales de información, se descalifican rápidamente. La velocidad de generación de nuevos conocimientos es enorme y se realiza no solo en los grandes centros de investigación, sino que se construye, valida y socializa a través de las redes digitales.

Las nuevas tecnologías invaden la vida cotidiana y son utilizadas por miles de millones de personas. Desde las computadoras personales hasta el teléfono móvil, las tarjetas digitales, los comandos del televisor o de otros electrodomésticos para poner solo algunos ejemplos de la cotidianidad, requieren conocimientos nuevos que deben ser aprehendidos masivamente.

Este factor indica la necesidad de contar con políticas y legislaciones en comunicación actualizadas, que contribuyan a aprovechar al máximo posible las oportunidades que surgen tanto en los procesos de desarrollo socioeconómico, como en el perfeccionamiento de los mecanismos de participación ciudadana.

Las relaciones entre la política y la comunicación exceden hoy día la antigua lógica de ver a la comunicación social, y en particular a los medios, como meros instrumentos. La comunicación es hoy un eje esencial en cualquier proyecto político, como lo es también con respecto a cualquier proyecto de desarrollo socioeconómico. Por lo que las relaciones entre ambos sistemas solo pueden ser comprendidas en una lógica de mediación recíproca que obliga a garantizar la autonomía de ambos sistemas y no la subordinación del comunicativo ante el político a ultranza.

Las nuevas circunstancias tecnológicas y culturales amplían, además, los contenidos tradicionales de las políticas de comunicación que ahora deben incluir, de manera coherente e integrada, las políticas relacionadas con la instalación y apropiación de las tecnologías de información y comunicación digitales y las transformaciones culturales indispensables para poder hacer un uso provechoso de estas.

La llamada política de informatización de la sociedad tiene que estar integrada a una política pública de comunicación, de tal forma que se vea en toda su integralidad las trasformaciones en curso a nivel global y sus implicaciones para el país.

Para ello es necesario situar a este proceso en un marco que rebase, aunque por supuesto incluya, la óptica de la seguridad nacional y se abra a las perspectivas de entender las redes digitales y su uso como infraestructuras básicas para el desarrollo, como un asunto vinculado al derecho a la comunicación, al funcionamiento democrático y transparente de las instituciones públicas y como un proceso generador de bienestar y mejoramiento de la calidad de vida. Sin embargo, aún no se observan con claridad los lazos entre esa política y las transformaciones indispensables en el sistema de comunicación social.

Como se observa, hoy día las políticas de comunicación deben hablar tanto de política e ideología como de economía y desarrollo. La manera de concebir el modelo y el sistema comunicativo y sus regulaciones serán condicionantes importantes en el funcionamiento del sistema político y en la consecución de los planes de desar-

rollo económico y social.

Posibles caminos

La solución a las demandas sociales al sistema comunicativo cubano no puede salir de un modelo comunicativo centrado en el control y la información vertical, que resulte omiso en temas de alto interés social y escaso en espacios públicos de análisis y debate.

Lo más conveniente parece ser lograr un modelo comunicativo que favorezca el diálogo fluido a escala social, institucional y comunitaria.

Ese modelo comunicativo se concreta, tanto en lo político como en lo jurídico, en el concepto del derecho a la comunicación, entendido este como el derecho a informar y ser informado, a hablar y ser escuchado, imprescindible para poder participar en las decisiones que conciernen a la colectividad.

Para ello sería necesario avanzar en:

* *La transparencia de las instituciones públicas.* Garantizar la realización del principio de que la información pública es un bien público. Sin una información oportuna, diáfana y profunda, no es posible lograr una participación calificada de las personas en los asuntos políticos y sociales; sin una transparencia pública de la labor de funcionarios y órganos de gobierno, no es posible el más mínimo control ciudadano sobre su gestión, lo que resulta indispensable en la lucha contra la corrupción y por el desarrollo de una verdadera cultura de participación. Sería deseable una legislación que obligue a las instituciones públicas a hacer visible, permanentemente, un conjunto de datos y de brindar a cualquier ciudadano la información que este reclame. Particulares facilidades deben tener los periodistas a la necesaria interlocución que aclare, amplíe y ayude a interpretar dichas informaciones.

Como no es posible una transparencia total, ciertas informaciones quedarán clasificadas. La ley debería regular cuáles requisitos debe cumplir una información para entrar en esa categoría, quiénes son los funcionarios autorizados a clasificar, cómo pueden impugnarse sus decisiones y a quiénes rinden cuenta del uso de esta prerrogativa. Es de-

cir, no puede quedar a la discreción de cualquier funcionario la clasificación como secreta, confidencial o restringida de una información pública. Sería necesario, también, dejar establecido un sistema de sanciones para los funcionarios que violen lo establecido en dicha regulación jurídica.

Una política pública de comunicación: Que consagre el principio anterior y que dote a los medios de comunicación de mayores posibilidades para conformar su agenda, no solo a partir de indicaciones de las instituciones de Partido y Gobierno, sino con una lectura responsable y comprometida, ante la ciudadanía, de la agenda pública. Esta política, además, debe facilitar y respaldar la labor de los periodistas y contribuir a que los medios de comunicación –que en Cuba, por precepto constitucional, son de propiedad estatal o social– puedan cumplir de manera esencialmente autorregulada y equilibradamente sus diversas funciones sociales.

* *Legislaciones en comunicación.* Que den fuerza legal a la política pública sobre comunicación social y establezcan las atribuciones, responsabilidades y límites de los diferentes actores que intervienen en el proceso de comunicación pública.

* *Actualización del modelo de gestión económica.* Este es uno de los asuntos más complejos a resolver y para el cual es necesario ser más innovadores. Es bastante consensuado en el medio académico y en el sector periodístico que no debe modificarse el sistema de propiedad sobre los medios, pero que sí es posible ensayar formas diferentes de gestión. Hoy día los medios hacen muchas funciones publicitarias (anuncios y menciones promocionales, campañas de bien público y publirreportajes) que, en la generalidad de los casos, no se cobran. Establecer el pago por los espacios publicitarios por parte de las empresas cooperativas y organismos gubernamentales puede ser una decisión que contribuya a mejorar la sostenibilidad financiera de los medios que, además, deben continuar recibiendo las contribuciones presupuestarias posibles del Estado o de las instituciones sociales o políticas a las que pertenecen.

* *Actualización del sistema de gestión editorial de*

los medios y de sus rutinas productivas. Esto incluye la necesidad de repensar los conceptos y valores noticias con que se está operando y, en general, continuar fortaleciendo la cultura profesional de periodistas, editores y directivos de los medios para que puedan estar a la altura de los reclamos y desafíos de hoy. Una gestión editorial contemporánea requiere de un mayor y sistemático diálogo entre los medios y sus públicos, por lo que cualquier avance en la gestión editorial pasa por la creación de los mecanismos correspondientes a esa vital función. La prolongación de políticas que han quedado obsoletas desde hace tiempo han afectado la profesionalidad de los medios cubanos, por lo que es preciso incrementar y actualizar el ejercicio profesional del periodismo y la comunicación en general, para hacer viable la aplicación de nuevas políticas y legislaciones.

* *En el nivel de la comunicación institucional y local* sería necesario también hacer transformaciones que contribuyan al mejor aprovechamiento de los recursos existentes en función del desarrollo, lo que supone incentivar una comunicación dialógica y no centrada en la difusión.

Para ello hay que habilitar sistemas de comunicación institucional y local y estrategias comunicacionales que incentiven la participación y el diálogo, lo que repercutiría en el aprovechamiento de la experiencia y los conocimientos colectivos e incrementaría la motivación y el sentido de pertenencia de las personas a esas instituciones y a los programas de desarrollo local.

Lo anterior supone que cada institución tenga una estrategia que le permita aprovechar las tecnologías digitales al máximo, teniendo en cuenta los requerimientos de seguridad indispensables, pero poniendo el énfasis en los beneficios para no quedar inmovilizados por los riesgos.

Este es un elemento central en la protección y ampliación de los conocimientos y la experticia de las y los profesionales cubanos que, salidos de las aulas universitarias con un nivel de actualidad aceptable en sus respectivos campos de actividad, quedan desconectados de los flujos mundiales de intercambio y socialización de saberes porque las instituciones donde trabajan no han creado las condiciones ni tienen las políticas más inteligentes para estimular el crecimiento continuo de sus conocimientos, que pasa hoy, entre otros factores, por la presencia activa en las redes digitales.

En resumen, hay un consenso acerca de que el modelo y el sistema comunicativo cubano deben ser modificados, pero aún está pendiente lograr un consenso acerca de la naturaleza y alcance de ese cambio que debe incluir el modelo de comunicación que necesita el país, las políticas y legislaciones necesarias, los medios de comunicación (tradicionales o interactivos) que se deben ir conformando o transformando, el tipo de labor periodística y la comunicación institucional y, en los espacios locales y comunitarios que respondan adecuadamente, en las actuales circunstancias, a las finalidades del país. Para lograr ese consenso se requiere de un amplio debate público.

No es este un asunto privativo de personas expertas y entendidas sino que debe incluir a los más variados sectores sociales para incorporar las necesidades y aspiraciones más amplias posibles y, a la vez, generar conciencia y cultura sobre el derecho a la comunicación y las maneras de ejercerlo, tanto entre los profesionales de la comunicación y los directivos de las instituciones, como en la ciudadanía. ●

Fuente: Inter Press Service en Cuba, 29 Abril, 2017. Republicado con permiso.

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The INTERNET is a public good

Article 19

ARTICLE 19 delivered the following statement at the 35th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) on 14 June 2017.

One year ago, the UN Human Rights Council reaffirmed that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online."

States are falling far short of the commitments contained in HRC res 32/13, documented as a "global crisis" by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, in his last report to the General Assembly.

From impunity for the killings of bloggers to laws criminalising legitimate dissent on social media, basic human rights principles are being disregarded to impose greater controls over the information we see and share online, including through pressure on private sector actors.

The Special Rapporteur's report to this session addresses an important normative gap in terms of States' obligations vis-à-vis digital access providers, and the responsibilities of access providers themselves.

We join the Special Rapporteur in condemning States that shutdown the Internet through pressure on companies, in particular during election campaigns and crackdowns on protest - against their commitments in Resolution 32/13.

ARTICLE 19 believes that the Internet is a public good, and that any limitations on the right to freedom of expression online must be provided for by law, pursue a legitimate aim, and be both necessary and proportionate.

We share the Special Rapporteur's concerns that digital access providers are routinely deputised for governments' unlawful surveillance efforts: vague laws require retention of user data and disclosure, weaken encryption or enable direct access to networks, often on the basis of spurious or sweeping national security justifications, and without judicial authorisation or oversight. The failure of States to protect net neutrality, prioritising profit over equitable access, is a particular threat to the rights of economically disadvantaged groups.

Net Neutrality

"Net Neutrality" refers to the concept of an "open Internet" whereby end-users can access the lawful content, applications, services and devices of their choice. Policymakers around the world are considering whether and how to ensure that the Internet remains "open" and Internet access service providers do not improperly block or degrade content sent over their networks.

We call on digital access providers to take on board the Special Rapporteur's recommendations and resist government censorship and surveillance efforts. Incorporating human rights safeguards by design, challenging government requests for information that violate human rights, maximising transparency, and ensuring remedies, are the minimum we expect, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

We call on the HRC to set clear and detailed human rights standards to respond to these concerns, building upon the foundations of resolution 33/2. Today, ARTICLE 19 will launch at a side event our "getting connected" policy on freedom of expression, telcos and ISPs, which we hope States will find useful in this exercise.

This Council must also place greater priority on addressing violations of freedom of expression online, ensuring accountability. States that fail to meet their HRC commitments on digital rights must be called out, and changes to law and practice demanded. This is essential for the guarantee that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online" becomes more than words just written on paper.

ARTICLE 19's full statement welcoming the report of the Special Rapporteur is available here.

New media and citizen participation in Jamaica

Floyd Morris

In the early 1990s, the media industry in Jamaica was liberalized, thus causing a tremendous expansion of the media landscape in Jamaica. This was followed by the liberalization of the telecommunications sector in 1999, which paved the way for the development of new media in the country. Citizens have increased their participation in this public sphere of new media and have been expressing their views on a number of subjects. New media are replacing traditional means of communication for political organizations and governments, raising a number of questions.

Since the 1990s, there has been a radical transformation in the global media landscape (Dahlgren, 2000). The advancement of modern technologies has metamorphosised the media environment allowing an increasing number of ordinary citizens to gain access to the media and to their political leaders (Blumler & Cavanagh, 1999). The advent of the Internet has facilitated the development of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Text Messaging and other forms of instant communication. In this new environment citizens are more demanding in their claims for their rights to be heard and greater accountability and transparency from their leaders (Graber, 2011).

The new media are very interactive. Communicating with individuals through the use of the Internet and cellular technology, and in this context, through podcast, Facebook, Twitter, blogging, e-mails etc., are all features of the new means of communicating. It is instant, unregulated and more importantly, it extends to individuals in remote parts of the globe (Dahlgren, 2005). The new media basically revolutionise how citizens communicate with each other (Forbes, 2012) and this has profound implications for political communications. Accordingly, it is important to contextualise the applicability of the internet in political communication. Indications as to what some of these new media entail and how they were developed is needed.

The new media environment

The new media environment is formed of a number of platforms that have been developed through the Internet. These include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc., which are nothing more (and nothing less) than new tools for an older, democratic function: the distribution of information across networks, communicative action between citizens, and the creating of shared meaning (Novendstern, 2011).

Novendstern was participating in a discussion on events taking place in Egypt and their quest for democracy. The use of Facebook was a major source of accessing and disseminating information to the Egyptians as they pressed for greater political and economic freedom. The role of the social media network was so powerful in the Egyptian uprising that the government made several attempts to disrupt connectivity. This prompted appeals from President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the Egyptian authorities not to meddle with the rights of citizens to freedom of expression and information.

The use of Facebook in the transformation of democracies and the reformation of autocratic regimes across the world has been hailed by President Obama as a novel American innovation. In his State of the Union address, Obama cited social media, in particular Facebook, as a part of the universal right to the freedom of expression and access to information (Obama, 2011). The transformative effects of Facebook are evident in the shaping of democracy in the modern political context.

Twitter is another form of new media that has been impacting positively on modern democracy. Twitter was created in March 2006 by Jack

Dorsey as a means of sending short, instant messages to followers. It is estimated that Twitter has over 200 million users a month with approximately 65 million followers a day.

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging website which allows its users to send and receive messages called tweets. Tweets are text-based posts comprised of up to 140 characters highlighted on the user's profile page. Individuals have been using this new means of communication to promote products and causes. Progressive politicians in democracies across the world have been using Twitter as a means of keeping in contact with their constituents. This was one of the means by which President Obama kept in touch with his supporters in the 2008 and 2012 elections and was able to mobilize a large cadre of young people.

YouTube is another media phenomenon that has been impacting the development of democracy across the world. It was developed by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim in February 2005. YouTube is a video sharing website that provides both amateur and professional video recordings to clients across the world. Indeed, the invention of YouTube has triggered a novelty on the Internet. Individuals can watch videos of what is taking place across the globe from their computers or cell phones. Similarly, individuals can use a digital video recording machine or a simple cellular phone, to upload video recordings from their communities.

This is how the world was able to witness some of the uprisings and protests for greater democracy across the world. In 2009 for example, the world witnessed the death of a pro-democracy advocate Neda Agha-Soltan in Iran. Dying in full view of the world, the video went on to win the Polk Award, one of the most prestigious awards for journalism (Chick, 2010). It is clear that over the past 20 years, the world has witnessed a revolution in the media landscape and this has profound implications for democracy.

Through the liberalisation of the telecommunications industry, the Internet has become more accessible to citizens across the globe. The availability of the Internet to citizens has provided a rich opportunity for them to discuss political matters in the public sphere.

According to Peter Dahlgren, the public sphere has three constitutive dimensions: structures, representation, and interaction:

"The structural dimension has to do with the formal institutional features. This includes media organisations, their political economy, ownership, control, regulation, and issues of their financing, as well as the legal frameworks defining the freedoms of and constraints on communication" (Dahlgren, 2005, p.149).

These three dimensions provide an analytical starting point for examining the public sphere of any given society or analysing the contribution of any communication technology. In this context, it would be pertinent to examine the Jamaican experience, since the advent of new media to assess its impact on the public sphere and democracy. Prior to engaging in such discussion, it would be wise to examine the fourth wave of democracy gathering momentum worldwide.

The fourth wave of democracy
Huntington (1993) published a major academic work entitled *The Third Wave* in which he argued that the new wave of democracy in the 20th century had its genesis in the Portugal Revolution of 1974. Huntington argued this was accelerated with assistance from the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the change in U.S. foreign policy from support for regimes loyal to the West to an emphasis on civil and political rights. Huntington suggested that this contributed to over 60 countries in Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America, adapting to democratic tendencies.

What is conspicuously absent from Huntington's list of contributing factors in this rush for democracy was the prominent use of the media and modern technology. The pervasiveness of the Internet and other forms of new media were absent at the time of this wave of democracy. But traditional media were present and played a pivotal role in the transformation and expansion of worldwide democracy. Huntington noted this

third wave of democracy went through certain processes:

* Transformation – a top down (elite-controlled) change from within government (as postulated by theoreticians of the modernisation theory some 30 years ago).
* Transplacement – Negotiated reform of regime and government.
* Replacement – Regime break down (rupture) and the collapse of authoritarianism (Huntington, 1993).

Fast forward into the 21st century and there are glaring similarities with the emerging fourth wave of democracy. Identical processes noted by Huntington are recurring in this fourth wave. Transformation, transplacement and replacement have all been incorporated in this new wave. Thus far, with the aid of new media, citizens are rebelling against their governments, intensifying their demands for greater transparency, accountability, and advocating for a greater stake in the economic base of their society.

New media and Jamaica

In 2017, I completed a doctoral thesis at the University of the West Indies. In my thesis, the research sought to analyse the effectiveness of governmental communication on citizens of Jamaica, with particular focus on the period 1972 to 2006. This era included the leadership of Michael Manley, Edward Seaga and P.J. Patterson as heads of the Jamaican government. During this period, traditional media were the dominant means of communicating with citizens. As a matter of fact, new media only became part of the political landscape in the 2002 election but, even then, it was never a major feature since the telecommunication industry had recently been liberalised (Gordon, 2013).

The introduction of websites by the two major political parties came in the 2002 election. This provided voters with information on candidates and the manifestos of the political organisations. By the time Jamaica reached the 2007 election, major transformations had taken place through the use of new media by the political parties. Facebook, blogs, Twitter, text messaging and chat rooms have since become a standard feature of political campaigns. For example, in the 2007 national election, the political parties sent several "mass" text messages to registered voters in constituencies across the island. This was made possible because by 2007, close to two million Jamaicans had access to cellular phones (PIOJ, 2008). Simultaneously, a number of party officials could be seen and heard in chat rooms, espousing the various achievements and policies of their political parties.

In the 2016 election, political leaders and their parties were deeply involved in the full utilization of new media. They could be seen and heard on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and any other social media platform on which their messages could be transmitted to citizens. More Jamaicans are using these social media platforms as access to the Internet increases (Forbes, 2016).

On all media websites there are links to Facebook and Twitter. Thousands of Jamaicans have since logged on to both. Forbes estimates that over one million Jamaicans are on Facebook (Forbes, 2016). They have been contributing to the dialectics taking place in the public sphere. For example, the public enquiry of the Manatt, Phelps and Phillips (MPP) Affairs in 2010 saw many Jamaicans expressing their opinions during the deliberations. These could be observed on the websites of the two major newspapers, *The Gleaner* and the *Jamaica Observer* ("Dudus-Manatt Commission of Enquiry-Deception and Contradictions," 2011). As time evolved, more and more Jamaicans have become attached to new media (Forbes, 2016). The operators of telephone services in the country have all been recording tremendous sales in varied devices which allow for instant messaging to take place. One of the major cellular providers, Digicel indicated that it had over 70,000 subscribers to Blackberry.

A survey conducted by a team led by Hopeton Dunn of the UWI revealed that approximately 94% of Jamaicans had access to cellular phones. This same survey revealed that 24% of Jamaicans had a computer and approximately 16% had Internet access at their homes (Dunn, 2011). The situation is more encouraging in relation to individuals

as opposed to households since 42% of individuals indicate access to the Internet either at home or outside.

The low levels of access to the Internet and ownership of computers by Jamaicans are largely attributed to the issue of cost. It therefore means that policy makers have to implement programmes and policies which will contribute to greater access to the Internet and ownership of computers by Jamaicans which will result in citizens exploiting more of the offerings of new media and the global economic environment. This is even more important for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities (Geddes, 2015). Dunn's study showed less than 1% of the respondents with a disability had access to the Internet (Dunn, 2011).

Some of the initiatives that should be implemented to facilitate access and citizens' integration with the technology are to:
* Remove all duties and taxes on computers which will result in a significant reduction in the cost.
* Provide further improvements to the regulatory environment which will see greater broadband access to the Internet by citizens.
* Expedite the installation of computers and Internet services in all government operated schools across the island, by removing all bureaucratic impediments to the Universal Access Fund which was established to provide greater access of the Internet to Jamaicans. If these policy and programmatic initiatives are not executed in the near future, only the elites of the society will be able to continue exploiting the offerings of new media and the global economic landscape.

Notwithstanding the low levels of access to the Internet by households in Jamaica, since 2002 the island has seen an expansion in the use of new media by government to transmit information to citizens, as well as communicate policies and programming. Through the various ministries of government, websites have been established to provide information and to solicit information from citizens for the respective ministries. The Jamaica Information Service (JIS) has its own website that provides critical information to the public. The Parliament of Jamaica has now established its own website and citizens can access important information on a variety of legislation being passed by the Parliament.

It is clear that there has been a significant transformation in the media landscape in Jamaica. More citizens have access to cell phones and this allows them greater access to the Internet (PIOJ, 2013). With increased access to the Internet, there is increased capacity for citizens accessing the different social networking sites to participate in discourses relating to societal issues. They are no longer dependent on groups or branches to disseminate information relating to politics in their communities. Furthermore, all the traditional media houses in Jamaica have new media options for their clients to keep in constant contact.

At the governmental level, the ministries and agencies have been adopting a similar approach, making serious attempts to keep in touch with citizens. These options and services were unavailable to policy makers prior to 2002. The ability of governments in Jamaica to continuously respond to the needs of its citizens, through effective communication, has now been greatly enhanced. As to whether this availability is contributing to improvement in governance and democracy remains to be seen.

Very little research, if any, has been done on this area of Jamaican political life. Therefore it is impossible to state definitively the extent of the effects of new media on the quality of democracy in Jamaica. The state of democracy has been of major concern as citizens have been avoiding the political process (Munroe, 1999). Over 50% of the population expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of democracy in the country during the late 1980s and 1990s (Powell & colleagues, 2007). However, to date, Jamaica has not experienced the sort of mass protest that has taken place in the Middle East, despite people's dissatisfaction with the quality of democratic governance. Is it that citizens have found new means of expressing and ventilating their dissatisfactions through new media? Dunn (2012) pointed to dominant use of the Internet in Jamaica by citizens below the age of 34. Interestingly enough, this is the cohort that

dominates the approximately 40% of Jamaicans who are frustrated with the political process (Anderson, 2015).

Conclusion

To sum up, the dialectics about the poor health of democracy in Jamaica and the globe, intensified during the 1990s, at about the same time that the Internet was rapidly leading a media revolution. Scholars and observers optimistically connected the two phenomena. The proliferation of the media, in particular the Internet, would assist in remedying the challenges confronting democracies across the globe (Anderson & Cornfield, 2003). The Internet has made it possible for individuals to communicate more effectively with each other through the proliferation of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Information on virtually every sphere of life is readily available and accessible through these sources. Governments have become a part of this development and have been establishing a plethora of social media facilities to communicate with citizens (Dahlgren, 2002).

This is true of Jamaica as governments now realise that if they are to curtail the growing tide of citizen apathy and frustration with the political process, new media must play a leading role. However, no one can definitively state the extent to which they have contributed to an improvement or decline in democracy in the country. The situation demonstrates a gap in the phenomenon and grounds for further research. ●

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On the screen

Oberhausen (Germany) 2017

At the 63rd International Short Film Days (11-16 May 2017), the Ecumenical Jury appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS awarded its Prize of € 1500, donated by the Catholic Film Work and the Protestant Church of Oberhausen, to *Seeds* directed by Philippa Ndisi-Hermann (Kenya, 2016).

Motivation: Water gives and receives, surrounds and releases, reflecting life and love, memory and the future – the primal principle. The turtle carries its eggs from the sea to the land and withdraws back into the sea. The eggs are there together and yet each is alone. "Each egg a globe, each globe a world, each world a universe." We live together, says the father. We live in each other, says the mother.

This wonderful work talks about the small things that are the seed and primary force of the whole, about the love of father and mother. This artistic treasure is poetic, gentle and metaphorical, a poem of words about child and mother, a poem of images about the sea, land and sand.

Its dialogues of voices with each other and words with images are outstanding; the photos make the audience pause and feel the stillness of the primary principle, the film sequences surround their own movement in the school of fish and the closeness of the family.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to *The Separate System* directed by Katie Davies (Great Britain, 2017).

Motivation: Doing one's duty, running errands, the system of military service, every day and office life and family must be managed. Soldiers take responsibility for others; when their relationships fail, however, they are left alone: the detained former soldiers are sentenced and locked away. They know for what but not why. Because their punishment therefore stands for society's flight into perplexity, the latter severs all ties with the people in question.

This film gives a voice to these soldiers, talks about its impressive subject in rough recordings and harmonious, precisely filmed images. The hand-written notes that serve as breaks condense the detainees' misery, work with the visual level to make their appeals of rage and loss directly to us, the community.

That meaning has become empty becomes emblematic at the end of this powerful and relevant work. Liverpool FC, their club, emerges as the great unifier of this community – but its familiar hymn, "You'll never walk alone" which is thus implied reinforces the ambiguity of the former soldiers' situation. Their lives are embedded in a close and separate system of society.

Furthermore, the Ecumenical Jury attributes a *recommendation* to the church film distribution companies Katholisches Filmwerk (kfw) and Matthias-Film to buy the non-commercial distribution rights of a film from the Competition for children and Youth Films. It is awarded to *Gos leat don?* (Where are you?) directed by Egil Pedersen, Norway, 2017.

Motivation: This film hits reality without big words, by combining images and music instead and operating between short film and music video. Its captivating sound design does not anticipate anything, but interacts, drives ahead, or at another time follows the images and the story in order to transcend reality. Aesthetics and "punch" of this short film music video ask questions beyond the generation limits and therefore stand out in the youth film competition as well as in the international.

It calls for being radical enough to create better root foundations: from what is preserved in ancient cultures such as the Sami from which the film originates, and from what is beyond the limited options of our self - in order to reach spirituality on the other side of the aesthetic-mystical.

Members of the Ecumenical Jury at Oberhausen 2017: Alexander Bothe, Germany; Simone Liedtke, Germany (President of the Jury); Tom Alesch, Luxembourg; Roland Kauffmann, France.

Zlín (Czech Republic) 2017

At the 57th International Film Festival for Children and Youth Zlín (May 26 – June 3, 2017) the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to *Half Ticket* directed by Samit Kakkad (India, 2016).

Motivation: This film tells the story of two young brothers struggling to make a living in the Mumbai slum and still find beauty and joy in life without losing their dignity. The story seen through the eyes of the children unfolds as a fable with visual poignancy in beautifully shot scenes which are laden with metaphorical imagery and contemporary issues, an intriguing soundtrack and touching characters.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to *Railway Children (still below)* directed by Prithvi Konanur (India, 2016). *Motivation:* The story of twelve years old Raju who escaped from home and tries to survive on the railroad tracks of Bangalore in the midst of violence, sexual abuse, corruption and drugs. Prithvi Konanur depicts Raju's life in a realistic, uncompromising style but all the same hope lingers within the dreariness – because there are people who care and Raju knows how to stand up for himself.

Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic) 2017

At the 52nd International Film Festival Karlovy Vary June 30 – July 8, 2017, the Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize to the film *The Cakemaker* directed by Ofir Raul Graizer (Israel, Germany, 2017).

Motivation: With a gentle approach, the film portrays a journey towards acceptance and the pursuit of love. The unique bond formed between the characters strengthens a healing process that brings them a new life. It allows the viewer to connect to the most important of human values, something that overcomes all prejudices: love.

Summary: After the death of his lover, Thomas heads to Israel – the birthplace of the man he adored. Despite prejudice at his German origins he becomes the pastry chef at a local café owned by the widow of the deceased Oran. Yet she hardly suspects that the unnamed sorrow that connects her to the stranger is for one and the same man. ●